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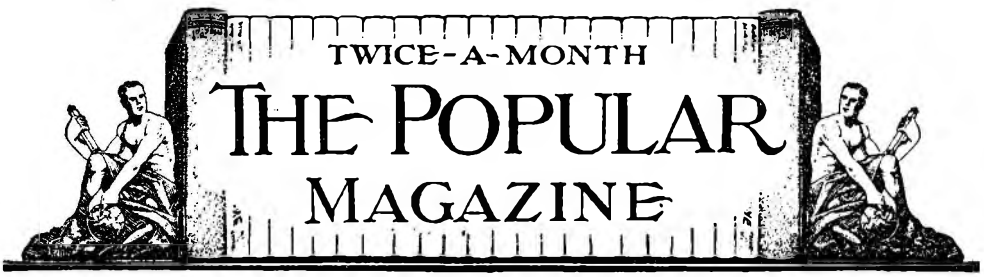

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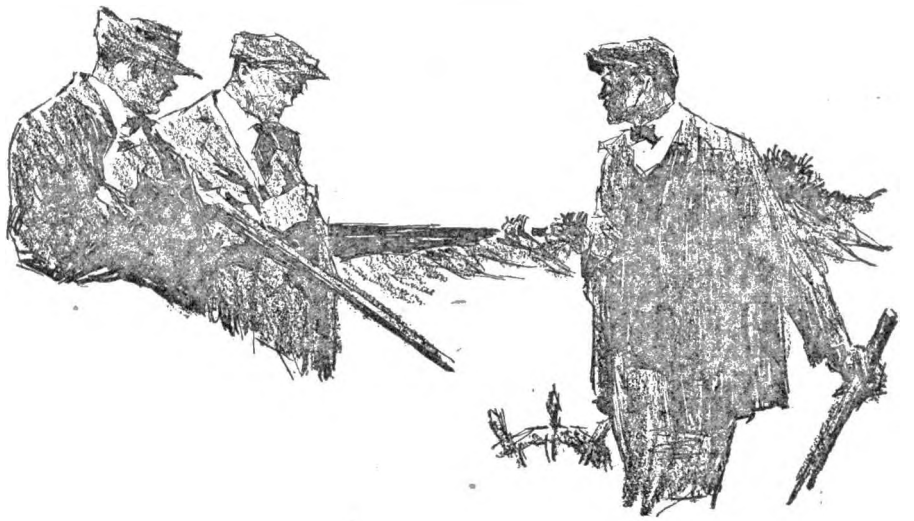


Anybody's Money

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "A Man of Principle," "In the Matter of Nathaniel Somerduyck," Etc.

Most stories of treasure hunting begin with the appearance of an ancient mariner who, on his deathbed, confides to his youthful benefactor, with his blessing, a sere and wrinkled parchment purporting to be the geographic record of burial of an ancient booty on some lost and distant island. This story, although it is of a treasure hunt, doesn't open in that fashion. There is no ancient mariner and the treasure is distinctly an up-to-date product of the mint. The map isn't done on parchment, albeit it resembles treasure maps in general in that it is extremely difficult to decipher. In spite of these unorthodoxies, Mr. McMorrow's story of a modern hunt for a modern treasure is quite the best story of its kind we have read in a long while. We haven't enjoyed the thrill of seeking pirate gold so much since the last time we shut ourselves up with "Treasure Island" for a week-end companion.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

"STRANGER, isn't he?" said I to Jeff Thum, indicating the tall man with the satchel who was approaching us along Apple Lake Road. We were sitting on our porch after supper. Jeff is my old hired man who has remained with me on Pequan Farm in upper Westchester County since my father died. The hour was after eight, the month was June and it was already dark in our valley, though the treetops on the western ridge were still outlined against a bright sky.

"Going through to Spencer's, I guess," grunted Jeff.

The wayfarer was a big man but he was

leaning away from the satchel as if leg weary. He stopped before our house and eyed it; I walked out to him.

"Hey, young fellow," he called, "where could a good guy flop around here? Is this here joint a hotel?"

"No. Where are you going?"

"Search me," he said. "I thought I was going to a hotel but I must have missed my step. Ain't there no hotel around here nowheres? I got dough."

"You must have lost your way," I said. "There's no hotel on this road. There's the Prospect House in the village, but you're a long way from it now. You ought to have kept to the State Road and you would have come to the village. It's two miles over to Spencer's ahead of you, on Apple Lake, but I don't know if the Spencer House is open for the summer yet. If I were you, I'd turn back to the village and try the Prospect House."

"If you were me, I would do it, young fellow," he said plaintively, "because then you would be lugging this ball and chain. Say, what is the idea of building rocks in the middle of this blamed road for people to fall over? I hope to tell you I've done enough time with this grip, hauling it around these vacant lots. What is the matter with me taking a flop in your house until to-morrow? I got dough, and you can name your price. Come on, young fellow, you got me hooked; what is it worth to flop?"

And with that he put his arm about my shoulders in a very friendly way. Jeff had caught the drift of our talk and he carried out the lantern and held it up without speaking. The traveler stood inspection well. He was a tall and strongly built man. of about thirty, smartly dressed; his gait had been slouching, but it had not been the awkward and high-stepping gait of a farm hand nor yet the prowling and tireless gait of a tramp; this man was no frequenter of remote country roads. He was obviously weary, and there was something attractive at first view in the bold and confident way he looked back at us through the glare of the lantern. Jeff grunted indeterminately but turned back and climbed the grassy path to our door without vetoing the traveler's bid for bed and shelter.

"You may stay here overnight, if you wish," I said. "It will not cost you anything; we are not running a hotel."

"That's white of you, buddy," he said relievedly. "But I got lots of jack, so you don't need to take pity on me."

He put his burden down on the porch—it was a cheap dress-suit case of imitation alligator skin—and fell into a chair with a loud sigh. He drew out a silver cigarette case, snapped it open and tendered it to me. "Have a pill?" he said. "How about you, old-timer? Don't smoke, hey?" He lit a cigarette, and inhaled the smoke gratifiedly; he blew it from his lungs loudly, through pursed lips, and stretched luxuriously.

"Don't let me keep you home," he said courteously. "Go on out if you want to. Lock the door and you'll find me here on the porch when you get back."

"We're not going out," I said.

"Ain't anywheres much to go, hey? Nothing around here but property. Say, I didn't know there was so much property in the world. This is the first house I seen in the last ten or fifteen blocks. Say, what's all that hollering going on over there? It sounds like New Year's Eve on the North River, and I kept moping along looking for the people, but I didn't get no nearer to them. What's up? Election?"

"You don't mean the frogs over in the swamp, do you?" I asked wonderingly.

"Frogs! Frogs, my eye! What are you giving me? Say, they ought to keep that road lit up; it's as much as a man's life is worth to walk along there in the dark; you never can tell what will light out of the bushes and take a hold of you. There was some kind of a wild cat up in a tree and he had eyes that shone like a plumber's torch, and he was trailing me and hollering. *'Whoo! Whoo-oo!'* Like that. I'd have plugged him in another minute, and give him something to holler about, when I see your house. My name is Tynan."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Tynan," I said. "Come, and I will show you your room."

"Any time will do," he said. "I'm in no sweat to see it. Well, all right. In here? This is where I flop, hey?"

He wandered about the chamber, muttering polite remarks, but looking sharply to the doors and windows. He puzzled over the absence of locks and shades. I set the lantern on a table in the room; he asked me to carry it outside.

"A man is a sucker that goes around in a lighted room with the shades up," he explained simply. "Somebody will plug him

through a window, and that's my advice to you. You keep off with that light and I will just open these windows and pull in these shutters; my idea of a nice flop is to have only one hole to my burrow and then to pull it in after me."

"Good night," I said. "Pleasant dreams."

"Going out?"

"This is our bedtime," I explained laughingly.

"Go away. On the level? Well, that's all right too. Good night, buddy." He closed the door carefully. I heard him stumbling about in the dark, with softly muttered oaths, and then I heard him dragging the bureau to the door and propping it against it. Mr. Tynan evidently was a very timid person. I went to bed and to sleep without thinking more about him; ours was a milk farm and I had to be up and about very early.

He was at breakfast, stowing away bacon and eggs, when I came in from the barn the following morning. "Sit down and make yourself at home," he said hospitably from a full mouth, pulling out a chair beside him. "Shoo the cow over this way, Jeff!" Jeff pushed the can of evaporated milk toward me.

"I been scouting around," announced Mr. Tynan, "and this joint looks to me to be the cat's whiskers. Say, I like it, on the level. I sat on that piazza for a whole hour and I didn't see nothing but a mad dog running this way and that way, and yelping over the lots. Hunting, was he? Go 'way. Smart mutt. I'll say this road don't need no traffic cop. Quiet, I call it. Say, I'd like to park here for a few days, if you'll make me a rate."

"You mean to board here? We don't take boarders, Mr. Tynan."

"You'll never begin younger," he said. "I'm looking for a nice quiet place to park my hat for a few days and I'm willing to be stuck up. I like you gents and I like your chow, and I guess I can get used to your menagerie. I'm from N'Yawk, but I'm a regular hound for the country. I got lots of jack and I wouldn't be no trouble to you, and you'll find me a regular fellow. I'll come when I'm called. I got strict orders to stay out in the country and this place looks like my ticket."

"Doctor's orders?" I asked, considering his pink face and bright, hard-blue eyes.

"Same thing. I'm out in the country for the good of my health, believe me. How would fifteen berries a week hit you?"

I looked at Jeff. Fifteen dollars per week would be very welcome in the then state of our finances. A milk farm is not the road to riches even when it is within fifty miles of New York City and we had no money to spare. My father had died in the preceding winter, necessitating my return from the Agricultural College, and I was weary of grinding away at the milk. It is my experience in milk farming that it must be done on a large scale in order to pay; and when one has a big pay roll to meet his milk check is overmortgaged. Jeff and I weren't more than making ends meet.

"I'll help you to chase the blamed cows," put in Mr. Tynan as a make weight.

"Twenty dollars," said Jeff, and dove for shame into his coffee mug.

"You're on," said Mr. Tynan instantly. "You guessed it to a jit!" And he slapped his big white hand on the table, depositing on the oilcloth a shining twenty-dollar gold piece.

"What's that?" said Jeff, blinking.

"What does it look like—a beer check?" cried Mr. Tynan facetiously. "Try your best tooth on it, old-timer!" His manner was aggressive but not intentionally offensive; he smiled amicably at Jeff while he spoke. He was a strange creature to us; he exhaled an atmosphere of roaring streets, jostling crowds, of places where even a very mild man would have to shout and to shoulder to get along. Not that Mr. Tynan could have been a very mild person anywhere; I mean to say that he was not surly.

"We'll be glad to have you, Mr. Tynan," I said.

"Mr. Tynan, my eye," he said. "My name is just plain Tynan! 'Happy' Tynan, that's me. Yourn is Joe, ain't it, Temple? All right, Joe, my old tomato—pass the grease and let me get back some of that twenty fish!"

"Lots of shooting in this country," I said suggestively.

"Go away," he said. "Who is there to shoot? Say, I'll bet there hasn't been a shooting around here since Christopher Columbus let off his blunderbuss."

"Small game, I mean."

"Them's the worst kind," he said, shaking his head wisely. "I have seen more killings over small games than over big ones. Oh, you mean little boids and pigeons"

and all that. Well, I will look over my gat. I am never a fellow to shoot first, but the next time that wild galliwampus gets up a tree and hollers, *'Whoo-whoo!'* at me, I will give him something that will mean, *'Him-him!'* "

I entered his room suddenly after breakfast. He was sitting on his bed polishing a heavy automatic, and, for the first time in my nineteen years I looked into the eye of a pistol lifted with hostile intent. His head jerked about as the gun rose and I do not think I ever saw a man's face change so quickly and so unpleasantly. His light eyebrows straightened into a line, and his thick lips were retracted and his complexion lost all its color. His features relaxed almost instantly and he breathed deeply.

"Say, Joe," he said, chuckling, "you give me a turn. I guess I must have been thinking of something. Don't walk up to me like that, Joe. I ain't been feeling right lately and I'm as jumpy as an alley rabbit."

"What do you carry the pistol for?" I asked.

"Oh, just a habit, Joe. Just a habit I got, Joe, my old tomato."

"If you're thinking of shooting," I said, "there's a .30-30 on the chimney breast; but you can't shoot anything with it at this time of the year. If you come around in October we'll find you some gunning; I saw a deer down in Hagenbow's orchard yesterday."

"Go away!" he said interestedly. "A deer, Joe? Running loose?"

"Of course it was loose."

He was astonished at the notion of a deer running loose and plied me with questions. He came out from the room, and took down the rifle, and squinted along it. "I guess I will go and shoot that deer for lunch," he said. "Jeff can cook it."

"But I've just told you that you can't shoot deer at this time of the year. Not with that rifle, at any rate."

"Say, Joe," he said, after inspecting the rifle again, "I may be a hick from the big stone pile but I know something about guns. I don't see no time lock on this baby. It will shoot now as well as afterward."

I told him something about the game laws of the State; my information was all news to him. I never met a man who was so ignorant of ordinary things; and still he had a sort of shrewdness and intelligence. He put up the gun. When I left the house he was sitting against the house wall, playing a concertina. He played the instrument catchily, palming it and squeezing it and vamping cleverly; his blue eyes were fixed unwinkingly on Apple Road where it issued from our wood lot. I thought at the time that he was simply entranced by music but I know now that his vigilance was unrelenting. He waved the instrument at me.

"So long, Joe, my old tomato!" he shouted. "Don't let the cows bite you!"

CHAPTER II.

Happy Tynan stayed with us for two months, and I must say that he was no trouble. We discovered shortly that he had an uncertain temper and that he would fly into a fury on trifling provocation; we forgave him his outbursts because we did not think there was any harm in a person who was normally so amiable. Happy himself was apologetic afterward. We decided too that the man was an extraordinarily gifted liar; he told us, with a sunny smile and in a matter-of-fact way, of robberies in which he had participated, of men shot down in the street, of beating and crippling men for pay. The tales impressed us as absurd; Happy's style of recital confirmed this impression. Obviously he felt no remorse or compunction, rather an unaffected pride. New York was a bizarre place, according to Happy, a place where a man could pursue a lurid career of crime with tranquillity and public respect. I had been in New York and knew it to be as tame and orderly as our village. We decided that Happy was a visionary. His favorite literature, I noticed, was detective stories, and tales of the wild and woolly West that never was, stories of battle and murder and sudden death. He believed that these yarns were true and would quote instances from them and from his own experience with telltale impartiality. He had the mind of a sophisticated boy. He had a dozen of these stories in his valise and would sit with his back against the house wall and pore over them, moving his lips over the hard words but not failing to raise his eyes intermittently and look at the road.

With tools he was all thumbs; he did not seem to know any trade; none of his stories showed him in relation to any useful employment. But he had plenty of money,

paying us always in gold pieces. He was dandified about his dress, but washed himself only at long intervals; he would spend hours paring and scraping at his finger nails when his hands were atrociously dirty. With a week's growth of beard on his face he would fuss over the tying of his necktie; he wore always a stiff collar and mourned because he could not shine his shoes. He was a powerful and agile fellow and I took more stock in his artless anecdotes of street fights and barroom brawls after I had seen him thrash Ben Willett's farm hand. This man —a big and surly fellow—used to take down the bars of our pasture behind the wood lot and let his cows in; he said that the cows pushed the bars over but one morning I saw him removing them and I exclaimed about it to our paying guest. Happy put his concertina on the window ledge, pulled up his trousers, and stalked down to the pasture; I saw the end of the fight. I saw Happy hit Ben Willett's man a final blow—such a blow as no man would look to encounter outside the prize ring—tumbling him on his back. I shouted; Happy turned, being interrupted, as it seemed to me, in the act of kicking the prostrate man in the head. And then he bolted for the rail fence. I was angry with him and mortified but I lost my heat when I saw that he had been genuinely frightened—by an approaching cow. Ben Willett took it in good part; he had himself been threatened by his hand and had kept him on only for want of a better.

Happy's favorite perch during the day was in the cleft of a huge rock in the middle of the swamp, a glacial boulder of some fifty tons that we call the Treaty Rock—I don't know why. The swamp on Pequan Farm is of about sixty acres; there is no water in it but it is kept marshy by the wooded hills which pitch toward it. There is six foot of black earth in the swamp and it could have produced wonderful root crops, but the cost of ditching and draining it was at that time prohibitive. Happy spent many hours each day in his rock fortress; he could endure endless idleness. I presume he dozed the time away; he slept poorly at night. I never saw him dozing; I always found him on the alert when I approached him across the flat marsh. He did not leave the farm during the two months he was with us. He received no mail and sent none.

He lost much of his nervousness as time went by; one could finally approach him unheralded without being snapped at. He loved to talk, rambling discursive conversations in which he displayed his incredible ignorance. He had several old wounds, bullet marks, and knew a few words of French; I think he had been in France with the army; his French phrases were not such as are printed in books. He said he had been in the war, and told me about it; but this again caused me to doubt him; as his New York was no one else's New York, so his war was his private war; his tales did not coincide with what I had read. His tales represented the American forces as an army of freebooters, thinking only of loot, given to ferocity and to panic, caring nothing for the higher purposes of the war, obscene, killing prisoners, robbing dead men with impartiality; he wore a handsome gold ring which he said he had cut from a dead man's hand; when telling of his experiences at the front he would turn this ring about and gloat over it, seeming to be assured that his winning of the ring justified the war. He was unconvincing and yet there were realistic touches in his narratives. When telling of the troopship he ventured to draw a map, and then he showed that he thought France was in South America. That one could be so untaught and still be of native shrewdness puzzled me; I decided that he had gotten his history and geography from his novels. And still, there were the bullet wounds. I had quite a library in the house, having been always fond of reading, but he did not care for my sort of books; he browsed through them to please me, and fell asleep over them. When I indignantly challenged some particular whopper he would hold silent and would look away over the green-gray swamp with a smile glinting in his hard eyes. Then he would laugh gaspingly and huskily and would clap me on the back.

"Joe, my old tomato," he would cry, "you're a bright kid, but you ain't been nowheres and you ain't seen nothing! You're all right, Joe!"

And he would burst into a French song, wriggling and snapping his fingers. He often sang one beginning, *"Ma mère est à Paris"*—I do not warrant the French—whose refrain was *"Oo-la-la, Oo-la-la, Oo-la, Oo-la, Oo-la-la."* The next verse mentioned Napoleon and Josephine, with no evident

reverence. Rendering this song would always put him in great good humor and he would get out his concertina and go to squeezing and thumping it through some jazz melody. But at odd intervals he had spells of moroseness, when I could not recognize the old carefree Happy; he would lounge about with his face blackened by thought and would smoke cigarettes interminably and with no appearance of gratification. We let him alone at such times and he recovered. I would see him next prodding a resting cow with a sharp stick through a fence, trying to goad the gentle beast into a charge, or digging earnestly at a woodchuck's burrow to get at and kill an animal of which he knew practically nothing except that it was alive and could be killed; I encouraged him to dig for woodchucks. There was a deep vein of cruelty in him for all his ready jollity.

On my return from the village he always questioned me minutely as to whom I had seen and to whom I had talked; he had me describe all strangers, their appearance, their apparent errand. And then he would look at me with a mute query in his eyes and I would say casually that they had not inquired for Happy. As I tell it, it would seem that we were shielding a desperate rascal, and that we should have been warned; but one could not think so who knew our laughter-loving guest; one could not think so who heard him talk with touching sentiment of his mother who was dead. I could not think so, at any rate; and I supposed that I understood men and the world, having read much. I could not be mistaken in reading a man who was so simple as to believe that France was in South America and that our milch cows were dangerous beasts of prey.

I am almost positive that it was in early September—Jeff insists that it was still in August, but the event is connected somehow in my mind with Labor Day—that "The Merchant" appeared at Pequan Farm. I should say that I first saw him on the Saturday before Labor Day.

I was clearing out the basin of an old spring in a hollow about three hundred yards from the house. Our well was getting low, as it often did in times of drought, and I had a notion that there was sufficient force in the flow of this old spring to enable me to pipe the water up to our buildings and thus get a gravity system. I was always studying to save labor, whereas Jeff's idea was to work harder. I had thrown out three feet of black mud and humus and was about to attack the rock face with a cold chisel when I was hailed from the lane behind me. "I beg your pardon, sir," called some one. "Can you tell me if this is Pequan Farm?"

I turned and saw a stranger standing in the cow lane; he must have seen me from Apple Road which was a few yards away. He was a little man, but broad-shouldered and deep-chested; I remarked the great length of his arms as he stood with his hands resting on the top rail; there was something poised and buoyant about his stance, something acrobatic, as though with a slight tightening of his long and heavy fingers on the top rail he could have vaulted it effortlessly. He wore a suit of green tweed, belted in smartly at the waist, a stiff straw hat with a green silk ribbon, and polished low brown shoes. He was smiling at me politely and his high voice had been carefully modulated. He had a broad white face, thick and straw-colored eyebrows, and small eyes of a pale blue. The insignificance of his features and the lack of distinctive coloring in his face gave it an eerie aspect at first glance; here, with the afternoon sun shining on him, it was still like a face seen by moonlight, nor did the ingratiating smile which shimmered on it now serve to make it at all attractive. I disliked the man, knowing nothing about him; one takes such sudden prejudices, for or against, and very often they mean nothing, but they may mean a great deal, too.

"This is Pequan Farm," I said.

"Thank you, sir," said the little man, beaming gratefully as though I had done him a considerable service. "And may I ask you where I can see Mr. Joseph Temple, the proprietor of this farm?"

"I am Temple."

"I am lucky to have found you so quickly, sir," he smirked. "You have a very good friend of mine stopping with you —a Mr. Tynan. I suppose he is somewhere in the immediate neighborhood? Will you be good enough to tell me where I can see my friend Tynan?"

"He's around," I said. Happy was then in his room at the house and I was about to send the little man to him when the prejudice I have mentioned made me hesitate; Happy was wary of strangers, with reason

or without. "Wait here and I'll tell him that you wish to see him."

"Don't bother, sir," he said, smiling more broadly. "Just tell me where he is and I'll pop in on him and surprise him. Won't Happy be surprised! We're real old chums and I'll bet he hasn't a notion that I'm within a hundred miles." And he chuckled delightedly and with an effect of appealing to me to help him rig Happy for this amiable little joke.

"Perhaps he wouldn't want to be surprised," I said, and was at once put out with myself for having put my thought so bluntly. "Wait here!"

I threw the chisel on the grass and walked toward the house. The little man watched me going, permitted me to get twenty yards away, and then followed me. I looked back at him once and then halted. "I said for you to wait here until I've told Happy that you've come," I said sharply.

He walked on toward me with his hands in his jacket pockets and an apologetic smile on his broad face; I was frowning at him as he came up; and then a thrill went through me, for I saw that he was clutching something in his pocket. The cloth was distended and the ridge raised in it was pointing at me. He was smiling, and I saw no change of feature, but suddenly the amiability had gone from his face; he stepped up to me, and thrust me roughly in the stomach with the thing he clutched in his side pocket.

"And now, young fellow," he said, in a voice as dismal as the whine of a buzz saw, "lead me straight to my friend Happy or I'll blow your insides out."

CHAPTER III.

I had no doubt that he meant it; his pale-blue eyes, holding mine, were so cold and still. I turned about and walked slowly toward the house. I do not know what I should have done if I had been aware of the nature of the relation between our summer boarder and this brisk little man in green; perhaps I should still have led him tamely to this house, feeling myself justified in standing aloof from the quarrels of such people; perhaps I should have been foolish enough to have resisted him. It is a wise man who can say what action he will take when under the imminent threat of death. No matter how suddenly the threat is presented, one moves immediately at such moments, as though his course of action were dictated by long and balanced thought. One moves automatically, by impulse, and sees later that he has played the coward or the hero. I turned as though on a hinge and started again for the house.

Happy was lying on his bed, playing his concertina and staring at the ceiling. He had not been so neglectful of his surroundings when he first came to us. The little man waved me aside and stood in the doorway to our living room; balancing himself neatly, he seemed to be enjoying the squeaking music and remained silent until Happy had played the piece through to the end—I think the tune was that of "The Sidewalks of New York." Happy had a liking for such old-time tunes. "Ataboy, Happy," said the little man gratulatingly.

Happy's hands stopped and his face went still; he continued staring at the ceiling during an interval that was probably not more than several seconds, and then he turned his head and he was staring at the little man in the doorway.

"Hello, Happy," said the little man, grinning cheerfully. "Surprised, are you? Didn't think I could dig you up, did you? Well, here we are. What's the matter, Happy—don't you know your old side kick The Merchant? As you were, Happy—don't move!"

With the last words I had heard again that tone reminiscent of the whistle of a hard-driven circular saw.

"Well, well," said The Merchant, walking into the room and seating himself on the bed at Happy's knees; his left hand rested carelessly on his knee but his right hand was still in his pocket. "Here's old Happy laying off on his bunk and blowing out music as merry as pay day, and me thinking him dead and buried! And 'High Jack' thinking him dead and buried, and 'Dope,' and 'All Stretch,' and 'One-two' swearing he's dead but not buried since he saw him go down in the big salt water. And is Happy dead? Not a bit of it. Is he buried? Not at all—and won't be neither, not so long as he don't forget to come clean with his pal The Merchant."

"Are you—alone?" said Happy hoarsely.

"Alone is no word for it," said The Merchant. "I feel lonesomer than Rockefeller's first dime ever did. I'm just pining to see a buddy. I haven't spoken to one of

the group since yesterday, and then I told him I was off for Chicago. We're all alone, Happy. Now what's the good word? Is it fifty-fifty? Go on and tell me your adventures since you went sailing off in the *Sweet Marie* and left us all high and dry on the Frenchman's boat in the fog. You didn't fall overboard and get drowned like One-two said, did you? It was Norman that fell overboard and got drowned, and good riddance to him for a double-crossing rat. It was Norman that came into the beach feet first and was planted in style down there on Ghost Island. He's had the laugh on us, Norman, lying snug down there under his cute little stone while we went hunting for him through hell and high water. *'Home is the sailor, home from the sea,'* it says on the stone, and not a word to tip off the sailor's name. And they all think the sailor is old Happy Tynan; and they can keep on thinking so until they're blue in the face. Can't they, Happy?"

"What do you want?" said Happy, whose color had returned.

"A square shake," said The Merchant. "Fifty-fifty, and only us two in on the split."

"Fifty-fifty it is, and a square shake," said Happy, looking with expressionless face at the foot of the bed. "You got me, Merchant. Give me your mitt."

He put out his hand and The Merchant took it with his left.

I could not follow closely what happened then, things moved so quickly. It is my impression that Happy wrenched the little man's hand with terrific force, throwing him from his feet; I do know that the pistol in The Merchant's pocket was fired almost simultaneously and that the bullet tore through Happy's pillow. And then The Merchant had torn his hand free and had sprung back like a cat and was yanking at the weapon which had become engaged in the cloth. He had freed it, he was holding it in his hand when Happy kicked his arm. The pistol flew across the room toward me; I snatched it up, seeing that murder was about to be done. Happy plunged at The Merchant, sending a balled fist whizzing ahead of him; the little man fell without being struck, seized Happy about the knees and heaved him over his head. Happy fell all asprawl. In the interval before he regained his feet The Merchant darted about, making false starts, starting again, hunting —as I suppose—for the vanished pistol. The room was full of an inarticulate snarling. And then the little man had bolted from the house; he passed the window like a flash; I never saw a man run so fast, but then I had never seen a man trying to outrun a bullet.

Happy bounded to his feet, but nearly fell again as one of his ankles gave way; he cried out involuntarily with the pain of it, but hobbled in a circle, looking for the weapon which I was holding behind me. And then he went across the living room, lurching and stumbling and hopping, and tore down the rifle from its hooks on the chimney breast. He hopped out of the house, leveled the gun down Apple Road, lowered it, and went to hopping and scrambling toward the swamp. He knew that Apple Road swung in after passing through our wood lot and skirted the lower end of the swamp; he made slow work of crossing the soft and hummocky ground but he finally reached the isolated boulder. He crouched on the slope of the stone, leveled the gun again, and fired; I heard the explosions of the .30-30 and the high thin whistle of the two bullets. I did not see The Merchant on this far section of Apple Road.

I was not tempted to interfere further in the affair of these two sweet gentlemen, and there was no way to do so effectively. I stood on my own doorstep and watched Happy plunging across the swamp toward Apple Road. He gained the highway and lurched off out of sight behind the trees. But, once he was gone, I was eaten up by curiosity; putting common sense behind me —which should have told me to telephone the police and let them attend to their own business—I set off running across the swamp.

I found Happy sitting on a stone wall nursing his left foot in his hand; the ankle had been sprained and it was not a pretty sight now after his terrific exertions; it was slate-colored and as big as his calf; he had slit the sock from it with his penknife and was cutting at the shoe.

"Bad job, Joe," he said, looking at me with as plaintive and guileless a stare as though he had turned his ankle while running on an errand of mercy.

"Where's that man you were shooting at?" I asked sternly.

"Ah, that's the very question, Joe, my old tomato," he said nodding earnestly. "I'd give a grand to know where he is now, and I'd tell you. I'm afraid I missed him, Joe. I'm a wow with a gat, but this here gadget don't mean nothing to me. When I pull that trigger I ain't got no more opinion as to where the pill is going than anybody else. Say, Buffalo Bill wouldn't pay me coffee money! If scalps were a thousand dollars apiece I couldn't hit the Statue of Liberty and earn a nickel. Take it away, Joe. It don't mean nothing to me."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Blow!" he said.

"I think I ought to call the police."

"The police? What's that you said, Joe?"

"You don't think I'm going to have murder committed on my property, do you?" I said indignantly.

He wrinkled his face in an effort to comprehend my point of view. "Say, Joe," he said grievedly, "you wouldn't go and call no police if I bumped The Merchant off? You don't mean that, Joe. You wouldn't be a rat, would you? No-o! Quit your kidding and help me over to the house, and then you can take me down to the station in your rattler."

I gave him a hand up, being willing to assist him as the price of getting rid of him and his visitors. He was a heavy man and could not touch his left foot to the ground without wincing with pain; we made slow work of it along Apple Road but I knew that it would be useless to attempt to cross the rough and soft ground of the swamp. As his helplessness without me was borne in on him, he began to make me large promises.

"Joe, my old tomato," he said, gripping my shoulder, "you stick by me now and you'll wear diamonds. I'll make you filthy rich, Joe. You know me, and you know I'm a square shooter. I never double crossed a pal in my life, Joe—that's the kind I am. A square shake and a long roll—that's me."

"Watch your step here," I said, paying little heed to his talk.

"Right you are, Joe. Say, Joe, I'll give you what I wouldn't give that dock rat, and that's an even split. I wouldn't do it for The Merchant, and I know The Merchant and palled with him for many a day, but I'll do it for you, Joe. I've taken an awful fancy to you, Joe, and you know it. I can make you rich, and was going to, Merchant or no Merchant. I can put my hand on more of those yellow jackets than you ever seen or heard of, Joe, and we'll go and gather them together. Nobody knows where they are but me, Joe; nobody in the whole blamed world."

His breath was whistling through his teeth from the effort to walk but he did not give over talking. I wanted him to stop and rest, but he would not, and struggled on while the sweat stood out in big beads on his forehead. We came at last to the house again; he lay over on the bank before our door and told me to hurry in and bring out his satchel. "And my gat, Joe!" he called after me solicitously. "My gat from under my pillow! Shake a leg, Joe. my old tomato! We ain't got a minute to spare—they're stepping on it somewheres right now and they'll be here any minute!"

I ran into the house, seized his satchel and his pistol, and hurried out to him with them; then I ran to the barn to get the buggy. I had it before the door and was helping him into it when suddenly he threw off my arm and stood alone, unmindful of his pain.

"What in the devil's hell-fire am I thinking of!" he cried. "We can't go yet. I can't go without it. Give me a hand down!"

He laid hold of me as brusquely as if I had been a wooden crutch, spun me around, and went to hobbling toward the swamp. I could not imagine what he missed, unless it was something he had left on the road beyond the marsh. I suggested that we could pick it up on the way or that I could run and fetch it, whatever it was.

"No you don't!" he said, glaring at me evilly. "I wouldn't trust my own brother, and me like this. You'd cut and run and leave me. I'll go myself. Help me down here!"

"But they'll catch us," I urged, not knowing who our pursuers might be but sensing his uneasiness. "If we go now we can drive across the cow lane to the hill road along the ridge and get down to the station without crossing Apple Road."

"If they catch me they'll catch hell, and I can tell them that," he snarled. "Push along there!"

I helped him as best I could but we had not made more than fifty yards into the swamp when I heard the drumming of an

automobile. The vehicle went rocketing along Apple Road at the far end of the swamp and then disappeared into the covert of our wood lot. From the reckless speed at which it was traveling I knew that it would be upon us in a moment.

"Get back again!" screamed Happy. "Back to the road! Run, kid—run! Call your cops and get 'em here or it's all off!"

He gave me a powerful shove, the exertion causing him to sit down abruptly; I leaped back for the road obediently and bolted across it and to the nouse. As I tore up the path I caught with the tail of my eye a glimpse of the automobile shooting from the woods and sailing along Apple Road with the speed of a projectile on the wing. I do not know how many men it carried, but it seemed to be crowded; two men were crouching on its running boards. Happy's friends evidently had a great respect for him and were coming in overwhelming force. While I was in the kitchen cranking frenziedly for a connection the roaring of the automobile ceased; I heard a shouting in the road, followed by a crackling of pistol shots.

I got through to the police station at last and succeeded in conveying to an unsympathetic constable an approximate idea of the hectic condition of affairs on Pequan Farm; it would have been strange if he had easily credited the existence of such a welter of lawlessness in our remote and quiet Westchester countryside. The shooting ceased while I was still yelling my message into the receiver; I heard men calling to one another across a distance; the party had diffused itself among our buildings. I heard a mention of the house.

This aroused me to my ticklish situation. An hour before and I should have walked to the yard, to face these people, with confidence in the reign of law and the inevitable cowing of riot and disorder, but I felt now that the law was far away and that these ruffians cared nothing for its threats. I was unarmed and had seen something of the quality of these people; here was a feud of criminals which Happy had initiated, and I would look to my own safety. I am not apologizing—I am a farmer and a law-abiding citizen and not a desperado. I looked about me for cover.

I found it in the big drying oven in the side of our kitchen chimney; the door to the oven was inside our kitchen closet and the door was flush with the opening and was not readily distinguishable from the closet wall. I crept into this brick inclosure and drew the door to; we were using an oil stove in the kitchen during the hot weather and I was in no danger of being baked alive.

I heard them stamping about the house. The sounds came dully to me but I thought I heard the high and querulous tones of The Merchant, whereupon I congratulated myself heartfully on my invisibility; The Merchant must have seen in me a friend and confederate of Happy Tynan. I heard the crash of glass and the splintering of wood; then they seemed to retreat from the house, but I lay close hid until I heard the engine of the automobile start and gather volume and gradually die away.

I came from the closet with all due caution to see that I was not stepping into a trap. But I apparently had been a side issue and an afterthought; their main business had been with Happy Tynan, and—with a skipped heartbeat—I saw through the broken window what convinced me that their business was attended to. Happy was lying on his back on the farther slope of the ditch beside the road. In the short space that they had bent their thoughts on me they had almost wrecked the house; most of the windows were broken, the panels of doors had been kicked in and they had toppled over the big dresser in the living room, throwing it down on its glass face and shattering it. Flames were licking up the sides of a stack of newspapers and old periodicals in the corner; I stamped them out and thanked my lucky stars that they had not located the container of kerosene on the back porch.

The buggy still waited beside the stepping-stone; old Chester gazed mildly at me from between the shafts; Happy's luggage was gone. Our unfortunate boarder was beyond mortal help; he lay with his still blue eyes reflecting the sky. Whatever of passion had rioted within him when he received his death shot was gone from his face—whatever of virulent hatred and wild rage; his face was peaceful and composed, with only such a slight contraction of the brow as might be caused by thought or by negligible pain. I loosened his fingers from his pistol and raised his arm, wondering passingly at its weight and bulk. He was a ruffian who had come to his appointed end, an outlaw for whom had struck the in-

evitable hour, but a sob rose in my throat; I saw in him at the moment only the merry and carefree fellow who was wont to amuse us with squeaking music, to sing to us yelping songs, to astonish us with lurid yarns. Four shots from his automatic had been fired; I trusted that they had found their marks in the scoundrels—dead or alive—who were speeding away now; with vengeful hope I recalled his boast that he was "a wow with his gat."

The hour was half past four and the sun was still far from the western ridge; at half past one that day, when the sun had already passed its zenith and was descending toward the night, the little man in the green suit had descried me at the spring and had come to me down the cow lane which led from Apple Road.

CHAPTER IV.

I told my story at the inquest but I doubt if it meant much to those who heard it. A number of people had seen the murder car on its meteoric flight but had not remarked it especially nor tried to catch its number; thirty-five to forty miles per hour is the ordinary gait of hundreds of cars every day on the adjoining State Road and forty to fifty miles does not attract much more than a boding head shake. A trap had indeed been laid for the whizzing car by Constables Haven and Begridge—two local limbs who enforce our speed regulations and make a good thing out of their percentage of the fines in collaboration with a local justice of the peace. Haven had secretly timed the car over a measured mile and Begridge had presented himself in the road beyond and had raised a calm and majestic hand to call the car to a halt. He admitted grumpily that he had not taken the car's number, having been distracted at the propitious moment by the necessity of jumping for his life and by the bewildering singing of bullets fired from the vehicle.

A verdict was returned over Happy Tynan's remains of death at the hands of parties unknown.

It was about a week later, and I think it was on Sunday morning toward noon, that the Armenian—I remember him telling me at one time that he was such—called on us. Jeff and I were sitting on the porch and I am reasonably sure that we were discussing the sermon. These trifling circumstances come back to one when items of real importance have grown hazy. But at any rate we were idling on the porch toward midday when a large yellow automobile came slowly and jouncily toward us along Apple Road, and came to a pause with a final squeak of springs and emitted the Armenian. The automobile was a closed car of a high-powered type. The Armenian was a tall and bony man in the middle thirties, with high cheek bones, an olive skin and large and glancing brown eyes.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. I cannot say that he had a perceptible accent; it was more his careful enunciation and the spacing of the syllables that told us he was a foreigner. He was ostentatiously polite but I thought I caught a note of mockery in his manner; he disregarded too pointedly the fact that he was an extremely well-dressed gentleman who had just alighted from a very expensive car, and that we were—to all appearances, at any rate—two country yokels. "Is this place Pequan Farm?"

He came up, took a chair without quite waiting for the invitation, and passed a silk handkerchief leisurely about the sweatband of his Panama. He was rather too much dressed; he wore five diamond rings of which the stones were large and sparkling, a diamond stick pin, a diamond-set tie clasp, and diamond-incrusted cuff links. He consulted his watch; it was a thin-model platinum affair and it was set with diamonds too. When he had mopped his hat to his satisfaction he drew out a gold card case and presented me with an engraved card. And from this I learned that our visitor who so radiated prosperity was a Mr. Abdullah Sarookian. He spoke always in a loud and level voice.

"I read in the newspaper," he said, "of the very sad death of my brother-in-law in this neighborhood last week, and I have come to hear what you can tell me that I may tell my unhappy sister."

"Your brother-in-law?"

"Mr. Tynan—yes. The poor fellow, he is dead, and we will not say anything about him. He was—what shall I say?—he was a man of the world! Yes, he was a man of the world. I am not a man of the world; I am a business man, in the warehouse business on Washington Street in New York City. Perhaps you have heard the name? Here is that card and here are letters." He

handed me several, as though establishing a case, a business card and a number of old letters addressed to him at Washington Street. And then he drew from his breast pocket a photograph which showed Happy Tynan sitting in a rather unconvincing automobile with his arm around a young lady. Happy and the young lady were grinning companionably; on the base of the picture, scribbled across the address of the photographer on Surf Walk in Coney Island, was the facetious message, "Here's looking at you."

"I have come to take charge of my unfortunate brother-in-law's effects," he announced blandly.

"I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Sarookian," I said, "that there's nothing here belonging to him." And I told him about the death of Happy Tynan. He listened with close attention, holding me with his bulging brown eyes.

"This man you call The Merchant," he said. "What did he look like?"

I described The Merchant. "And," said he, nodding, "was there a very tall man with pimply face and blond hair and eyes like this"—he pinched his eyebrow and his cheek together until his prominent eye was only a slit—"whom the other men called High Jack?"

"High Jack!" I repeated. "I heard that name."

"And then," he said, reflecting, "there was a very stout man, a ver-ry stout man, who was an Italian or a Greek, and who was called All Stretch. And a thin and good-looking man, but humped over, with a very white face and he was called Dope."

"I am sure I heard both of those names," I said.

"They are the same gang," he said. "They are the good-for-nothing fellows who led my poor brother-in-law astray. And now they have murdered him. Ah, well, I feared he would come to some such end; that is what comes of playing with fire, Mr. Temple. Ah, yes. It is too bad. Do not be surprised that I speak well of him; he was my own dear brother-in-law, and blood is thicker than water, is it not so?"

"I am not at all surprised," I said. "I liked Happy, too, in some ways. We had gotten to be very friendly."

"Ah, yes," he breathed, surveying me thoughtfully. "You were friendly with him, eh? I do not need to tell you that such a friendship might prove dangerous to you, Mr. Temple."

"In what way?" I said aggressively.

"They are very dangerous fellows," he said. "They would not stop at anything; not a man of them but has had a hand in at least one murder. You do not have such men here in the country and you do not understand what they are. But I understand what they are, and I can handle them. Do not hesitate to confide in me, Mr. Temple."

"But I have nothing to confide in you," I protested.

"Let me guess," he said, smiling shrewdly. "My brother-in-law had a great deal of money, did he not?"

"He seemed to have plenty of gold."

"Gold! Aha. That is the whole story. That is why they killed him. He had the gold and they knew it. He quarreled with them and they killed him. You do not need to tell me this; I know all about it. And now, where is the gold?"

"I have not the least idea—if he had any great sum."

"But you said you were his friend," he said, almost in a bullying way. "You had better be honest with me, for this money is not yours! I prefer to deal privately with you, but you must not forget that this is a matter for the police."

"I have nothing to fear from the police, Mr. Sarookian," I said indignantly. "I've told you that I don't know what you're driving at and you needn't threaten me."

"Oh, I am not threatening you," he said soothingly. "I merely wish you to understand your peculiar position, your very dangerous position. You want the help of some one who understands how to manage. I do not expect to have your information for nothing; I will do the handsome thing by you. I can tell you that I know perfectly well that the gold has not been recovered; I have these rascals under observation and they are still in New York, and they have not come into a great sum of money."

"If you know where they are, Mr. Sarookian," I said smartly, "you should inform the police."

"Ah, but then again it is not precisely a police matter, not in every way. There are some details which must be managed privately. I shall call in the police at the proper moment, but I do not care to frighten them, and you know how such scoundrels

are when under arrest; they hold their tongues."

He was silent for a space, seemingly conscious of having made a slip and considering how to repair it. Then he shrugged his shoulders and replaced his hat on his head and rose to go.

"Think it over, young man," he said. "When you have decided that you need my help you may let me know; you have my card. Unless you are a born fool you must realize now that you are in a delicate position and that any rash move is liable to cost you your life. When you are ready to talk to me you will find that I shall make very handsome terms. I know much more than you think, but I keep my information to myself until you are ready to talk."

He sauntered down to his car, entered it, slammed the door, started the engine, and went crawling away over Apple Road. I put his card behind the clock on the chimney shelf and went out to the barn to the cows.

CHAPTER V.

You may think that the events I have narrated would have aroused in me a permanent curiosity so that my mind would dwell on them to the neglect of the humdrum round of duties on Pequan Farm; but it was not so. They were so foreign to my experience that they seemed in a very short time remote and incredible, as though I had dreamed them. Matters of immediate moment occupied my mind, the thousand and one details of farm life. Pequan Farm is a place of two hundred acres, uphill and down dale; except for a few hours on Sunday—hours which we could very well have used in working, if we had a mind to—hardly a minute of daylight was my own until the dead of winter; and when one has worked all day he is heavy in mind and body with the lamplight. And if I had an idle moment my thoughts turned to the project which Mr. Suyden had broached to me, to create a lake on Pequan Farm. Mr. Suyden is my neighbor on Apple Road, and he is not a farmer, but a gentleman sportsman; his place is fenced and posted as a game preserve. He had suggested that the swamp, on which he had a frontage—— But more of that and of Mr. Suyden in a moment—another incident recurs to me that has a bearing on this narrative, although it meant nothing to me at the time.

Jeff was getting whisky somewhere. Jeff was one of the old school, steady as a clock when working but addicted to an occasional spree. And speaking of drinking, the credit for bringing prohibition about belongs to the farmers and not to the industrial workers; but there is no truth in what I have heard city fellows say and heatedly maintain: that the farmers passed a law to take away the city people's liquor because they couldn't get it for themselves. There was always plenty of whisky to be had in our section; I know that. But drinking in the country is one thing, and may be quite another in the city. No glamour of music and lights and jollity and fancy drinks and dancing surrounds it here; it is just plain swilling of bad whisky in some dirty little groggery. When a hand in a factory gets drunk and cannot go to work he is not much loss, and others fill in for him, but when a farm hand gets drunk there is no one to do his work. I suppose a drunken man will not be allowed to lie in the city street; he will be carried home or to shelter by some one; but if a poor fellow staggers out and falls into an open field or a ditch he may very well freeze to death. I have argued this thing with city chaps and I shall not argue it more here; at any rate Jeff was fond of his liquor and I was watchful to see that he didn't get it, but, in the fall of that year, he was getting it somewhere and was looking altogether too contented and mellow.

I had rented ten acres of poor land from Bemis, whose place is near the State Road, for pasturage for some beef cattle I was raising on speculation, and Jeff and I were driving the cattle to it this day. Larigan's stone house—a very nice house—stands on the State Road corner, and I saw a man open the back door and cross to the barn. Larigan lets his house to city people for the summer, but we had had the first frost a week before and I was surprised to see the house still tenanted. "Who's that in Larigan's house?" I asked Jeff.

"Don't know," said Jeff promptly.

But in the evening, when I was returning from the village, I saw Jeff as I turned into Apple Road; he was coming out of Larigan's house. I called to him and he came out to the buggy, and I saw very soon that he was a bit tipsy.

"And now who's in Larigan's house?" I asked.

"He's an actor from New York," said Jeff. "And a durned fine man in every way. Yes, sirree, they don't make them any better than Mr. Madden."

"And they don't make any better booze than his, either," I suggested.

"Booze!" repeated Jeff insultedly, but pushing over into his own side. "Booze?"

"Booze," I said. "You keep out of Larigan's house." And I said no more about it, though I wondered why Mr. Madden was entertaining my hired man. Jeff was not a sociable person when sober, not at all an interesting conversationalist nor such a companion as would be eagerly sought by the gentleman who had just ushered him out of Larigan's house. Mr. Madden—if it was Mr. Madden—was smartly gotten up in a golfing costume with tufted woolen stockings and low shoes of yellow buckskin. He was a very sick man or he was from the city; he was pale as paper, very thin, and hollow-chested. I thought I had seen him before and decided that it must have been during the summer and around Larigan's house. Several actors had had the house for the summer and had had some noisy festivities over the week-end.

That is all there is to the incident, and it meant, as I have said, nothing to me at the time. Now, as to Mr. Suyden and the projected lake. Mr. Suyden has no standing water on his land; lakes and ponds in private ownership are scarce in our section, which is within the watershed of the New York City water supply. Possibly you know that New York City draws its water from one hundred and fifty miles away through the Catskill Aqueduct; practically all bodies of standing water within the region of the aqueduct belong to the city. The nearest water of any size roundabout us that could be used for bathing or fishing or ice cutting and so on was Apple Lake. Mr. Suyden thought that my sixty acres of swamp could be turned into a lake which he could stock with fish for his own sport, and which would give me accessible water for all purposes of mine. The swamp drained toward the city lands and he had taken the matter up with the city authorities, and had been told that they would not object provided that the overflow was lost somehow in the ground. The idea appealed to me, so long as Mr. Suyden was to find the money for it, and I borrowed a transit and used some hours during the winter—when the leaves were off—in taking levels. I'm no surveyor, but I'm quick in picking a trick up, and Mr. Suyden gave me a book.

I used the big glacial boulder as a monument and that is how I came to find Happy Tynan's map. Some people down on Ghost Island are still talking about Captain Kidd's gold, and that is why I am telling you this thing just as it happened, so that you can form your own opinion. I found Happy's map while surveying for the proposed lake —surveying, I call it, though old Mr. Petersen had another name for it since I declined his offer to survey the swamp for five dollars per acre and rented his transit for the winter for five dollars instead.

There was a cleft in the rock—I judge that it had been split by a tree growing on it—and in the cleft, while planting a stake, I turned up a cigarette tin. The brand of cigarettes was Three Sphinxes, and I picked the tin up, thinking of the unfortunate fellow whose choice had been this brand. The tin was bound round with cord; I cut the cord in idle curiosity and found a folded sheet of paper. The paper was India paper and was about four inches long by two and a half wide and I think it was the flyleaf of a pocket Bible; on one side of it was written in ink, "Wishing you the Spirit's guidance in the reading of this book, Sincerely, Henry F. C. Gilderman." On this side, too. were four Christian names and entries of various figures after them; I puzzled considerably over these names and entries later, but without making anything pertinent out of them, and I think now that the whole notation, which was in pencil and made by a person of small literacy, constituted the score of some game. On the other side of the sheet was the map I have mentioned.

The place to which the map referred was not identified; that very important item Happy had kept to himself; he had made the map for his own guidance and had probably made it on the spot, finding the old score card and Bible leaf in his pocket. He had indicated his bearing points by making crosses in pencil; the pencil had been an indelible pencil and the writing was blue and blurred with wet but was decipherable. Beside a cross at the head of the sheet he had written *Lite,* and midway below it was another cross denominated *Tree, One Arm.* On the right margin of the sheet was the word *Tore* with accompanying cross, and

then toward the center was *Flag Pole.* There were, to be sure, a great many other marks on the little sheet, so that the ones I have mentioned did not at all stand out; one word which occurred five times was *Hill,* so that the locality intended to be described seemed surrounded by hills. I have no doubt but that Happy Tynan made the map and that he did not rest until he had so amply noted his surroundings that he could put down no more. And, after all was done, the place was quite unfindable through the map alone; it might have been across the adjoining ridge to Pequan Farm or it might have been in Africa.

I thought so lightly of this paper at the time that I thrust it into my pocket and went on with my planting of the stake and my awkward surveying. Happy had had a peculiar passion for the accumulation of small odds and ends of worthless trash and I was not inclined to look with serious attention upon anything belonging to him when its value and office were not obvious. He used to carry in his pocket a piece of gilded tin which bore the name and seal of the King of the Belgians, but which had certainly been cut from a tin of asparagus by some joker. He had a round pebble with a hole in it which was his luck stone, and a Turkish coin which had undoubtedly been struck within the last decade, but which bore the date *1318;* he thought this copper coin was of immense value and that it was struck in the fourteenth century of the Christian era; he refused my explanation that Turkish time was not our time. He could always produce from his pockets something new to impress me with; his possessions reminded me of the curious collection which we had found under the eaves at one time, a collection made by some industrious but indiscriminating old rat. So that this slip of paper had been secreted by Happy condemned it sufficiently and I thrust it into my pocket without weighing it or pondering its meaning.

In the evening I went to Mr. Suyden's house for his help in working out my calculations. Mr. Suyden has about six hundred acres which he has stocked with pheasant and partridge and hares and such small game and he spends much of the fall and winter in hunting them with a .22 long and his shotgun. Six hundred acres may appear like a small preserve to any one who does not know our country, which is so cut up with wooded hillsides and ridges and hollows and marshes as to make tramping over six hundred acres a very fair day's work. The country wears, to any stranger, an aspect of surprising remoteness, which was probably the feature of it which appealed strongly to Happy Tynan when he trudged into it from the Lord knows where. Mr. Suyden is a gentleman of sixty-three years, and he has fished and shot all over America, and now, when he is retired from business and rich enough to follow his fancy, he chooses to sit down on his country place within an hour and a half of New York City by the State Road. He has always been an excellent neighbor; my .30-30 is a present from Mr. Suyden, given me when I complained to him of how the deer were attacking my small grove of apples; we are permitted to shoot deer out of season if we bring the carcass to the warden at Pequangonk. He was in the library of his remodeled farmhouse, and we pitched into our calculations as to the cubic contents of the proposed lake; he had had a man stationed at the outlet from the swamp during the previous year to calculate the flow of the brook, we having to contend with the fact that standing water in our section loses by evaporation in time of drought about three inches per month. Excuse these details; I shall try to keep them out, but my head is full of them. And—I do not know in what connection, but probably to fill a gap in our talk—I showed him Happy Tynan's map.

CHAPTER VI.

Excitement appeared in his face almost instantly. He stared at me, puffed hard at his pipe, frowned at the map and then stared at me again. He had grasped the meaning of the thing at once; so that you may not think me too utterly dense let me say that the writing on the paper was not really a map, although I have spoken of it so; it was rather the description of a map and was to any person not on the alert a mere jumble of words. He knocked out his pipe and filled and lit it again before speaking.

"Didn't you tell me that your summer boarder was murdered because of some information he had concerning a hidden treasure?"

"That was my idea."

"And an Armenian fellow called on you

and offered to whack up with you if you could put him onto Happy's secret?"

"Exactly."

"Heavens above, man!" he cried, slapping the slip of Bible paper, "what do you call this?"

"B-but——" I stammered, comprehending. And I reached out and took the paper and held it to the shaded electric lamp—Mr. Suyden has a storage-battery system, charged by a gas engine.

"Why, there's the story as plain as print!" he said. "Why else would this Happy Tynan have hidden this thing so carefully? His bad conscience drove him to it. I have no doubt that he foresaw the possibility that he should die a sudden and violent death, and he wouldn't carry this thing on his person, nor would he leave it in the house or in his luggage where his old companions would look for it. Or even if they had no notion of its existence, and would not look for it, he made sure that it was not where they could run across it. I dare say that the hidden treasure, if treasure it is, would never be found without the help of this writing; and you pass it over to me as if I was to light my pipe with it!

"And where was this Happy heading for," he cried again before I could speak, "when he was shot down by his old pals? Right for that rock out in the swamp! And this is what he was going for, and would have had it and been off if he hadn't been crippled."

"I think you're right," I said lamely.

"I know cursed well I'm right," he said confidently. Mr. Suyden is a very sanguine person in spite of his age; he is a big and strapping man who can throw a sack of potatoes onto his shoulder. He rumpled his thick white hair with his big brown hand and got up and strode about the chamber; the color was heightened in his gaunt brown face. He is a born hunter, and his instinct for the chase was aroused: his blue eyes were bright with joyous anticipation.

"If there is a treasure," I said, mistrusting the romantic sound of the word, "it is almost certainly stolen."

"Hang it, Joe, boy, don't be so cold-nosed," he said. "I never heard of a treasure yet that wasn't stolen, did you? People aren't burying money in the ground without a very good reason, not while there are plenty of banks to pay them four per cent and take good care of it. Sure thing, there's a taint on the money! Blood on it, like as not. But findings keepings, Joe, and that's good law, and don't you forget it. Unless the real owner of the money turns up, and he's got a mighty small chance to identify his property. What would you do if you found a ten-dollar bill out there on Apple Road?"

"Keep it unless I found out who owned it."

"And you'd be mighty careful to see that you didn't hand it over to anybody else. Well, Joe, that's just what we'll do with Happy Tynan's cache. Anybody that gets it away from us is going to prove to us it is theirs, and fair enough. There's an old Latin saying, Joe—*Pecunia non olet*—money never smells bad, and that's good horse sense. What do you say, Joe—shall we let this gang of robbers and murderers do a good deed with their loot and build us a nice lake on Pequan Farm?"

"It would be a lot more fun than chaperoning cows for the next ten years to get the price," I said.

"Then the treasure hunt is on," he said, pouring himself out a glass of port. "Are you with me, Joe? No? Well, here's good fortune! And now we'll go into executive session to devise ways and means."

"We might start out by guessing where this country is," I suggested, looking at the precious slip of paper.

"Not a tip on it, is there?" said Mr. Suyden, taking it from me and throwing himself down into the easy-chair in which he had been reading the newspaper when I entered. "Might be almost anywhere. I have it—didn't you hear one of those scoundrels mention boats and the ocean? This place must be near the ocean—seashore somewhere, I'll gamble. It stands to reason. And then there's that word *Lite*—that should be l-i-g-h-t, or I miss my guess, and light means a lighthouse! He wouldn't be reckoning by a bonfire, or by a lamp in a window, would he? A lighthouse is almost always referred to as 'the light.' So there we are; it's somewhere around a lighthouse. And now *Tore*—what the devil is Tore? It wouldn't be the name of a place, would it? Wait a bit and we'll get out the atlas."

We stewed over the thing for an hour or two but got nowhere. Then I mentioned Sarookian the Armenian, and his offer to take charge of the affair.

"That fellow is hand in glove with the

gang, and I'll bet on it," said Mr. Suyden. "I'm afraid we'll bring the whole crew down on our necks if we breathe a word of this to any one of whom we are not dead sure, and that will mean some lively times. We'd better let sleeping dogs lie, though I'd not be at all averse to taking them on and teaching them a lesson in good behavior if they interfered with us, the swine. They'd find it a different matter from waging a private feud with their own sort. I'd rather dub along without Mr. Sarookian, if we can. You know I have the *Baracuda* lying over in the Kitchawouk, just off the Hudson, and there's a craft that's good for a trip anywheres this side of Cuba. This is not the season for pleasure cruising, but then we're in no hurry."

I went home that night in an elated state; I think that I am, as a rule, rather cool-headed and practical and not a person to go off half cocked, but Mr. Suyden's enthusiasm was contagious; he had been all over and had seen everything and I was naturally responsive to him. I have read as little sensational fiction as has anybody who has read much; I like mathematics and scientific subjects, and blood-and-thunder stories never carried conviction to me. I never cared for them and it would be a strange thing if one of these thrillers which had always impressed me as visionary and time wasting were to be enacted in my own life. I was taught a rigid sense of responsibility in money matters by my father, was reared to a conviction that one should expect nothing except as pay for hard work, and bred to a sense of civic duty and the obligation upon every one to obey the law and to preserve order. I was the reverse of happy-go-lucky, and did no daydreaming. And here I was projected into a hunt for hidden treasure—into a struggle with outlaws—and was seriously given to envisage the prospect that I should gain a big sum of money without working for it. And I did indeed find the prospect exceedingly enticing; my mind glowed and the familiar features of Pequan Farm took on somehow a strange aspect. The shadowy fence posts looked on me with the evil faces of robbers and the dark and mysterious masses of our old trees by the roadside defined themselves like the billowing sails of ships; as I passed the cow lane I looked down it nervously, trying to descry the spot where first I had seen The Merchant.

I could not compose my mind to rest, and I walked up and down our narrow porch until I heard Jeff approaching, singing. I was glad of some one to talk to, and waived a natural inquiry as to what he was doing abroad at such a late hour as ten o'clock; I think now that he had some liquor in him but I didn't remark on it at the time, being in too good humor. I told him what had passed between Mr. Suyden and me; Jeff and my father were boys together, and it did not occur to me that it was unwise to intrust him with the story, unwise in view of the fact that he tells everything he knows when he is drinking. But, indeed, on this evening I was like a person under the influence of liquor myself, and the more abandonedly for that I had been nearly a teetotaler as regards the sort of romance with which I was now so full. I had cause to regret my indiscretion, however natural and pardonable it may have been.

At a later conference with Mr. Suyden—about the treasure hunt and not about the proposed lake, that workaday matter being relegated to the background by common consent—we decided to send for the Armenian, promising ourselves to keep our own hand well covered while we drew him out. Patently, we needed more light. So we sat down and composed a letter and sent it off to the address in Washington Street. He appeared on the day following.

CHAPTER VII.

"You ask me what I know of these gunmen," said Mr. Sarookian, crossing his legs and looking with an air of candor at Mr. Suyden. I was sitting to one side in Mr. Suyden's library and was well content not to have to match wits and chop words with our suave and sophisticated visitor.

"I have told you that I am in the warehouse business on Washington Street. I store goods for dealers, principally dry goods, and it was in this connection that I had to do with The Merchant—I do not know his real name. He came to me under the name of Pringle but I know that he used many other names. I know that now; when I dealt with him I supposed he was an honest man, and I have no other sort of customer to my knowledge. He stored goods with me—boxes and bales. Their contents was not my affair.

"I know now however that the man is

a river pirate and a notorious rascal. He is engaged in the business of stealing along the river fronts and in the harbor, with an occasional robbery by violence; I call this way of living a business, because he conducted it as such, storing his goods and merchandising them like an honest business man. You gentlemen have probably no idea of the degree to which robbery and honest business are mingled in New York; these fellows do not steal silks and woolens and every sort of merchandise without having secret outlets through regular trade channels; you have probably attended so-called 'Fire Sales' and other bargain sales and have bought goods without knowing that they were stolen. I can tell you of one chain of stores in the city which handles nothing but stolen goods; naturally you do not understand these matters, but I understand them."

He drew on Mr. Suyden's good cigar and blew the smoke out in a leisurely way. "Get ahead with the story and don't dwell on this," said Mr. Suyden gruffly, resenting the other's assumption of an air of superiority. "Do not labor to convince us that you know more than an honest man should."

"We are coming to it," said the Armenian, unruffled. "But you have not yet answered my suggestion that we discuss the division of this money. I have offered to pay you the sum of five thousand dollars as your share."

"And your offer's been refused," said Mr. Suyden. "If we go into this thing the money shall be divided into three equal parts, provided that it is our money to divide. If that does not please you, you are welcome to take it all, when you have found it."

"You ask too much," said Mr. Sarookian with a warning frown.

"Then we have nothing left to talk about," said Mr. Suyden.

The Armenian's eyes narrowed in reflection; he looked aside at the blazing log fire for the space of a minute, pursing his thick red lips and blowing through them softly. I should have given a piece of my proposed share to know what thoughts were occupying his subtle mind at this time.

"Very good!" he said with sudden geniality, gesturing flashingly with his hairy and bejeweled hand. "I am a business man, and if I can find a profit I am not pigheaded enough to refuse to let the other side take a bigger one, however unjust and unfair that is. We shall split the money three ways in the best of good faith! I shall tell you everything I know about this business, in strict confidence, and keeping back nothing, and I shall expect you to act the same. Is it a bargain?"

"You'll find us as fair as you are," said Mr. Suyden.

"Well, then. In January of last year, the French schooner *Lion d'Or* put into New York harbor; better to say, it was boarded by a United States revenue cutter and brought in for investigation, it having lain off the Hook for several days and being suspected of smuggling liquor; when it was picked up it was well within the three-mile limit. Nothing contraband was found aboard, and the ship's papers were in order, but, its actions being adjudged suspicious, the master was closely questioned, with whatever of threats and promises are usually made in such a case. And he talked.

"We are concerned with the story told by the French captain to explain his presence within the three-mile limit. He was very much frightened and he was foolish enough to admit that he had had on board a consignment of opium which was to be smuggled into this country, and that he had been lying off the Hook waiting for his consignee. That, while lying so on the previous night, he had been boarded by a gang of robbers whom he had mistaken for his customer and whom he had permitted to come alongside. These fellows had killed one of his crew, had taken possession of his ship, and had searched out and found his opium. You will see that this looks exceedingly like as if the scoundrels knew what they had come for; it was not the ordinary case of highjacking a rum ship, because no liquor was aboard and these fellows did not look for any. At all events, he said that they transferred the opium to their launch and were about to leave him when who should appear but his consignee for the opium. The time was approaching daybreak but a heavy sea fog lay on the water. The robbers decoyed the newcomers on board—set on them and killed them in the resulting struggle, tumbled them overboard and turned their boat adrift, but not before the gold which was to pay for the opium had been put aboard the French ship."

Sarookian told this tale of robbery and violence in his usual level and equable tone,

nodding at us amiably to see that we followed it.

"The gold also was transferred to the robbers' boat, which was, you are to note, not an ordinary craft but what is known as a sea sled. A sea sled is a boat shaped like a scow, so that it rises up on top of the water when hard driven; it is capable of tremendous speed but is not seaworthy and cannot live in rough water. The water this night was extremely calm, which is probably the circumstance to which he owed the robbers' visit. The boat was of a large size for its type and was capable of carrying a dozen men, in the opinion of the French captain. The captain was forward with his men when he saw that a quarrel had arisen among the robbers. He heard shouting and pistol shots and then he saw the sea sled drawing away from the ship and gathering speed as it slipped into the fog. Two of the robbers, who were assisting in stowing the opium and now the gold, had started the engine and were making a dash to get off with the entire loot."

We listened eagerly, beginning to perceive the point of the tale.

"The five men who remained aboard compelled the captain to navigate his ship to a point inside the Hook, when they had a boat lowered and jumped into it and rowed away in the fog toward the Staten Island shore. That is the last he saw of them; he was then hailed by the revenue cutter and taken in charge."

"And this gold——" said Mr. Suyden.

"Precisely," smiled the Armenian. "And this opium, eh? Do not overlook that."

"We are not interested in the opium," said Mr. Suyden.

"So much the better," said the Armenian. "We shall have less difficulty in dividing. I shall take the opium for my share."

"When it has paid duty," said Mr. Suyden. "We do not propose to have any part in opium smuggling."

"Naturally," said Sarookian. "I trust that you do not take me for a drug dealer. The opium shall be my share when it has paid duty. As I am taking what you do not want, and am waiving my claim upon the gold, I shall expect that any duty to be paid shall be paid out of the gold. This matter will readily adjust itself when you have carefully considered it. We are speaking as business men."

This adroit penalizing of us for our prejudices against illicit drug dealing did not escape Mr. Suyden, but he passed it with a contraction of the brow.

"It is strange that the story of the *Lion d'Or* did not appear in the newspapers," he said.

"It was properly a police matter," said Sarookian, "and police authorities do not seek publicity, except for their own ends; they prefer to suppress news and to issue communiqués. It may also be said that the affair of the *Lion d'Or* was not properly juridicable by American courts; the *Lion d'Or* was a French ship, and the crimes of which the captain told were done on the high seas. Only with the attempt to smuggle opium were the American authorities concerned. If these considerations do not appeal to you, then I do not know why the newspapers did not get the story. Perhaps it was hushed up; I have heard of such cases."

"Where did you learn of it?"

"That is my affair," said Sarookian. "It is not in point. I have told you the story; it is for you to believe, if you please, that I have come twice to your very interesting country simply to tell you a cock-and-bull story."

"Whose money was it?"

"Ah!" breathed the Armenian, opening his mouth wide in a meaningful gesture. "That is immensely important to us, is it not? Yes, it is not. Unless you think there will be a rush of claimants to prove title to the opium and the money?"

For all his wish to conciliate us, he could not forbear gibing at us and exhibiting his cleverness; and this set me against him and made me think he was not such a clever fellow at last. It seems to me—although I have formed the opinion more from reading than from observation—that men of real ability must be simple and straightforward because of their self-knowledge and confidence. A fellow who is on the alert to show his smartness is trying to play a part and values himself very little and he should know best.

"You do not know whose money it was?" asked Mr. Suyden directly.

"I do not. It will be ours unless some one proves a better title."

"That is true," said Mr. Suyden, hearing his own thought echoed. "But, have you told us all you know of the matter—or all you have guessed?"

"I have done no guessing," said the Armenian.

"Well, was there anything further? Was anything heard again of the——"

"The *Sweet Marie,*" I put in.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Sarookian, turning to look at me. "That was The Merchant's boat! Where did you chance to hear that name?"

"Perhaps we know a thing or two also," I said, with an affectation of cunning at which Mr. Suyden smiled covertly.

"Ah, yes," said Sarookian, studying me. "You know a thing or two, eh?"

His manner grew reserved and he lost much of his jauntiness; he resumed, under our questioning, but he seemed to watch his words more closely. "The *Sweet Marie* was found abandoned and sunk at the stern, with only the bow out of water," he said somewhat sulkily. "There was neither money nor opium on board, I am sure of that."

"And Norman's body drifted ashore and was buried on Ghost Island," I put in again, unable to resist the temptation to air my knowledge. And indeed this excerpt from The Merchant's conversation had lain in my head without my being aware of it, and had turned up in my recollection only on my mentioning the *Sweet Marie.*

"You did not tell me of that," said Mr. Suyden surprisedly. "Do you know if there is a lighthouse on Ghost Island?"

"There is," said Sarookian.

"Then that's where the money is!" exclaimed Mr. Suyden delightedly.

"That is precisely what I was going to tell you," said Sarookian. "There is not a reasonable doubt of it. I was just about to say that the *Sweet Marie* was found off Ghost Island. I was just about to tell you that, upon my word. Everybody knows that the stuff is buried somewhere on Ghost Island. But where? Ah, that is the hard thing to say!"

"I do not remember this Ghost Island," said Mr. Suyden, going for the atlas. "It is about New York somewhere, is it? And near Long Island? Let's see—here is Goetszche Island—could that be it?"

"That is it," said Sarookian, bending over the chart. "It is called Ghost Island now, commonly so called."

"And a big improvement on the name of some ancient Dutchman," said Mr. Suyden appreciatively. "Ghost Island, eh? A very fine name for a place of buried treasure. Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, no!" said Sarookian, with such unnecessary vehemence that I was quite sure his mind had answered, "Oh, yes!" "But I know of the place. It lies about seventy-five miles down along the south shore and it is really a part of the Great South Beach. See there how it lies on the map. It is five or six miles long and a half mile wide, and is a waste of sand dunes, with a few shacks around the light. There is a detachment of the United States coast guard there. In the winter the bay behind it is frozen over and then they have no communication with the mainland. If the stuff is buried there, you will need exact directions to locate it, as you will understand when you see the place. But perhaps our young friend has also precise directions."

I did not answer this, being still mortified at my sudden recollection of the name of the place. "That will appear at the proper time," said Mr. Suyden, pinch hitting for me.

"You are not playing fair with me," said Sarookian. "All cards were to be put upon the table."

"There was no such agreement," retorted Mr. Suyden. He swung around in his chair and looked directly into our visitor's eyes and spoke to him with sportsmanlike bluntness. "To be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Sarookian," he said, "we are going to play safe with you. You may be as honest as the sun, but you are a stranger to us and we do not propose to subject you to too much temptation. No offense, sir. There are some very hard customers bent on laying their nasty fingers on this money, and there has been some very black work done on account of it, and we are going to watch our step. What you have told us has earned you a share in our enterprise, and that must content you, and we are not going to burden your mind with too many statistics. You will find us the right sort, and if you have any doubt in your mind at any time or want any information you are welcome to ask questions, and you'll get a straight answer or be told that it's none of your business. I believe in plain speaking, sir, and I don't object to it."

"Not at all, sir," said the Armenian blandly. "You shall keep your information to yourself; and then if somebody snaps the prize out of your fingers you may look to

blame yourself and not me, since you have not trusted me."

I did not like the ring of that; it seemed to me that a threat was lurking in it; but Mr. Suyden, who had reddened while speaking, now nodded shortly and passed the Armenian's words as an acceptance of the terms.

"We will go together," said Sarookian.

"How else?" said Mr. Suyden bluffly. And he got out the decanter of port. It was black dark outside, and snow was blowing, and Mr. Suyden insisted on putting the Armenian up for the night. When I left them they were yarning sociably before the log fire, swapping stories and gossip and ideas on a hundred things, for all the world like two men who had no thought but in common and could speak out freely. They knew how to do things; they could enjoy each other's society while keeping their private affairs and opinions to themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Suyden had had some notion of running down to Bermuda that fall, but he had postponed it from time to time until the cold weather had come; and meanwhile his *Baracuda* had been left in the water of the Kitchawouk under its shed. The Kitchawouk is only a creek when compared with the Hudson into which it empties, but it is still a fair-sized river when considered by itself, and a pretty deep and swift one as it drains the ranges of low mountains below Poughkeepsie; it had not frozen over that winter, which was exceptionally open and mild—the mildest since 1918-1919. The little vessel was therefore available to us. It is a motor boat, some forty-six feet over all, of the raised-deck type, equipped for cruising, and a dry and able craft for its inches.

It was decided that we should set forth at once, weather permitting. Sarookian urged, what was very true, that the place we were bound for would be entirely deserted at this season—except for the immediate neighborhood of the lighthouse—and that we should be able to prosecute our search without interference; we should very likely encounter campers and roving parties of one sort or other if we delayed for fine weather in the late spring. Mr. Suyden and I were easily convinced; if we demurred at all it was so that our council should be of two minds and have arguments pro and con thoughtfully thrashed out. I was myself feverishly impatient to put Happy's map to the test.

We calculated the total distance from the Kitchawouk to Ghost Island to be one hundred and thirty-five miles. The *Baracuda* was good for eighteen miles per hour in fairly smooth water, so that the trip we contemplated was not more than a day's run if all went well; but we decided to make two bites of it, and run down to New York before making the proper start on our little voyage; there was no necessity for such haste as should cause us to arrive at Ghost Island in one day and oblige us to chance an anchorage in the darkness and in the uncertain weather of the season. We started on the nineteenth of January, which was my twentieth birthday, choosing the day for luck. In half an hour's time the *Baracuda* was chugging smoothly down the Hudson toward New York.

There were five of us aboard—Mr. Suyden, myself, Mr. Sarookian, Harvey Woodhead and Lloyd Stevens, the latter two being respectively the captain and the crew of the little ship. Mr. Suyden was an experienced boatman and I was capable of spinning a flywheel or wielding a sweep if of nothing more technical, though the two watermen were quite able to manage without us. It was warm and comfortable in the cabin, which was heated adequately by the engine housed in beside the steps leading down from the cockpit, and we three lounged about on the long seats and watched the shores through the round windows high up in the cabin walls. Harvey had the wheel above our heads, and Lloyd sat on the steps and listened solicitously to the drumming of the four-cylinder gas engine; these two men had been with Mr. Suyden for several years; they were typical down Easters—sallow and lean and muscular and soft-spoken and boyish.

We had enough food aboard for a two weeks' cruise, and Harvey was a good cook, granted keen appetite and powerful digestion in his guests. His galley was forward and was equipped with a good three-burner oil stove. We had half a case of Scotch for medicinal purposes and three cases of ginger ale for jollifications. We had plenty of blankets and tobacco for cold evenings. Our armory consisted of two rifles and two shotguns belonging to Mr. Suyden—he hoped to see some geese, and didn't want to miss a

chance of sport—my .30-30, and a pearl-handled revolver of Sarookian's—the sort of dangerous weapon that people shoot themselves in the hand with and die from lock-jaw. I may say here that Sarookian proved to be a highly incompetent person when definitely separated from his city pavements. We learned that we could count on him for nothing beyond an entertaining flow of conversation.

About three hours after starting we passed Spuyten Duyvil, which is a creek around the northerly end of Manhattan Island connecting the East River with the Hudson, and then we were speeding along past Washington Heights. At that time I had seen very little of the big city and I asked a great many questions, and Sarookian undertook to answer them; but as I wanted to know about the history of the place and to have pointed out to me various historic spots of which I had read he soon proved to be more ignorant than I was myself, for he was not only unable to point out these places of historic interest but he had also never heard of the happenings themselves. He pooh-poohed the idea that a battle had ever been fought on Washington Heights; taking my saying so as a sample of rustic innocence, he politely masked a laugh. He reminded me at times forcibly of Happy Tynan, though he was a superior type and possessed none of Happy's artless good humor. Mr. Suyden promised me that I should see something of the city that evening.

We made a landing at the Ninety-sixth Street dock on the river front toward six o'clock and in the growing darkness. Mr. Suyden, Sarookian and I climbed the hill to West End Avenue and so to Broadway; I have identified these places since, you understand. We were going to dine at a Broadway restaurant and then to a theater for the evening, and my anticipation was keen. When we got to Broadway, where there is a subway station at this point, we found ourselves in a great press of people so that I had difficulty in making my way, although Mr. Suyden and Mr. Sarookian walked steadily and untroubledly ahead, talking calmly and colliding with nobody, just as though they were strolling down Apple Road at Pequan Farm. I was forever apologizing and running after them and dodging, and it seemed that the more trouble I made to avoid people the more of them I walked into. I got the hang of the thing after a bit and could keep up with them and spare at least half an eye for the brightly lit store fronts, and I even managed to stop for a moment here and there and have a hasty look at something exposed for sale and still catch up with my companions. So that I soon flattered myself that I should be as good a traveler as they with a few hours' experience and that I should not cause people to glare at me for stepping on them with my country feet.

We had walked some four or five hundred yards—as far, say, as from the Treaty Rock to the old spring at home—when a man who was standing at the curb beckoned to me peremptorily and I stepped aside to know what he wanted of me. He had a black dress-suit case suspended from his shoulders by straps and had a number of handsome fountain pens in the case, and he had some little jewelry cases in his hand.

"Free, gratis and for nothing," he said when he had my attention, "I give you this beautiful diamond stick pin." And he showed me the stick pin, snapped the little case shut and put it into a paper bag. "I also give you," said he, "this beautiful set of diamond cuff links which you will pay five dollars for in any jewelry store." And the cuff links went into the bag. "And here is a genuine leaf-silver cigarette case of a retail value of five dollars; and here, my friend, is the genuine bona-fide Waterboy founting pen such as retails in your high-class stores for the sum of five dollars alone! One, two, three, four—all this superb merchandise, of a fair retail value of twenty dollars, I give you for the sum of twenty-five cents, five nickels, two dimes and a nickel; if you haven't got five nickels, or two dimes and a nickel, twenty-five pennies will do!"

I did not know how he could do it, and, supposing he considerably overstated the values of his wares, they were still very cheap, and I thought I would buy the assortment for Jeff. So I gave the man a dollar. He was making change when he suddenly shut the case and hurried off. I thought he intended to defraud me, and I took after him, when he looked around and beckoned to me to come along, and then I saw that a policeman had pressed through the crowd and was staring very threateningly at the retreating vender. I hurried after him, but so did the policeman, and I

could not make speed enough against the tide of people to catch up before he whisked around a corner. A dollar is a dollar, and while I had retained fast hold of the bag containing my purchases and while perhaps they were worth more than a dollar in themselves, I was hotly resolved to hold the fellow to his bargain and I forgot for the time Mr. Suyden and Mr. Sarookian. So I soon found myself standing at the curb at another point beside the policeman, and we were both watching the vender scuttling across Broadway in the thick of the roaring traffic and at the imminent peril of his life. I gave over a project to follow him, perceiving at once that I could not hope to dodge the crowd of automobiles and cabs and trucks which were whizzing down the street. And when I turned about, I saw nothing of Mr. Suyden or Mr. Sarookian and had no notion as to how I should rejoin them. I knew enough not to ask passers-by; I am not a city man in any real sense, but I do not wish you to think that I am countrified.

A taxicab came slowly along the curb; the driver perceived my predicament and called to me while he reached back and opened the door to his cab. "Ninety-sixth Street dock, sir?"

I shook my head, refusing. I had heard of the extortionate fares of city taxicabs, and I was nobody's fool if I was from the country. Thereupon the driver said very obligingly, "Jump in, buddy. I'm going down there anyway and it won't cost you anything!" This was a bargain that pleased me better; I should give him something for his kindness but I should not be robbed. I got into the cab. I had decided to return to the *Baracuda* and consult Harvey or Lloyd, who would probably know where Mr. Suyden was going to dine. It was the wisest decision under the circumstances, you will allow.

The cab wheeled out into the traffic and set off swiftly southward. I have a sense of direction, as any countryman must have, and I perceived that he was going southward whereas we had come from the north, and I spoke to him about it. He said something about the street being a one-way street and about having to go around the block to get a ticket—something to that effect. He went southward, turned, went onward, turned again, went ahead some distance, and at last I found that we were descending a steep hill toward the river. We rolled out upon the dock at the end of the street, stopping beside a launch at the dock side. The cab stopped and I got out, and handed the driver a quarter of a dollar, and stepped onto the roof of the launch. I jumped down into the cockpit, but was immediately puzzled, for the launch did not look like the *Baracuda*, even in the poor light. Then I heard voices below, and the door to the cabin opened, and I stepped forward to explain my intrusion and mistake; I could not very well bolt from the vessel like a detected thief.

Thereupon some one, possibly the cab driver, drove into me from behind with such force that I was hurled from my feet and made to pitch down the steps into the cabin. I shouted alarmedly, but I doubt if I made much noise, and I do not think that I raised my voice in more than an energetic grunt immediately thereafter, although I had ample reason; to emit a real yell requires a little forethought and preparation —one must fill one's lungs, inhaling thoroughly and then exhaling vigorously and purposefully; I have read of the terrific volume of sound which a person produces when given a deathblow, but I do not believe in it; a person may give a tremendous shout if he sees the blow coming but he will not do much more than gasp if stricken unawares.

What I am driving at is the fact that I was struck with a hail of hard fists and harder substances when I plunged into this cabin. I was hit over the eye, I was hit behind the ear, and I was smashed along the jaw by something that I now believe was a bottle. The experience was highly disagreeable but was not painful. Such of you as have been knocked out will agree that you suffered no real pain—I did not, at any rate. My jaw tingled as though given an electric shock and I felt a sensation of sudden brightness; if you think one cannot feel brightness, but must see it, you have probably not been knocked out; I felt it. I fell forward on my knees and covered my face with my forearms; at any rate I was on my knees and thought I was covering my face from further attack and I do not know to what degree my assumption of this pacific posture was voluntary. I wished to cover up until matters adjusted themselves; my mind in its bewilderment concurred heartily in the motions of my body. I am

inclined to believe that my arms were not really across my face, but were probably propping me up from the cabin floor; I have a memory of being struck again in the face while I was down.

I am telling you the story of these events as they happened, and if you think that I am making myself out to be a great coward I must accept your contempt. Perhaps, if you were suddenly jumped by a gang of men and were swiftly and mercilessly beaten, you would react instantly and begin to hit back; I have seen that sort of hero in moving pictures and have read of him in stories, but, since my own experience, I have come to doubt him, I have come to think that such an imperturbable fellow must be of tougher and more callous material than ordinary mortal clay. I cannot help it; I could make myself out to be a terrific fighter and an iron man and lie about it but I don't propose to do it. I didn't hit a blow; I didn't double a fist; I was on the floor and covered up, and if I wasn't there voluntarily it wasn't my fault; I wanted to be that way and all fury and thirst for vengeance were palsied in me. They came later.

The stunning impacts of fists and bottles upon me ceased and I gathered my scattered wits. I found myself lying in a corner of the cabin. Five men were in the cabin and they were paying no heed to me. They disregarded me as calmly as if I had been a piece of luggage flung into a corner. I felt no inclination to leap upon them like a tiger and pay them out and I am sure they did not expect such action of me. They took it for granted that I was temporarily in low spirits, and I was. For the time being I had no fight in me, and they knew it. I was all for peace and quiet and arbitration and I think I tried to dissimulate even from myself the fact that the background of my mind was black with a torturing lust for murder.

A trim man in blue serge who was standing with his back to me was manipulating a long iron lever, yanking it forward and back; I heard the engine start.

"Let's go!" he cried in a jolly falsetto, turning around. I saw that he was The Merchant. I know something of gas engines—not much, but something—and I noticed even then with admiration the smooth running of this one, as smooth running as a Swiss watch. I felt that we were moving through the water at a fast clip, growing ever faster.

CHAPTER IX.

The boat ran for about fifteen minutes, and then I felt that its speed was slackening, though the engine hummed as steadily as ever. Three of the men left the cabin and went on deck and then I felt the boat bumping on one side and knew that we were making a berth. I was ordered from the cabin and obeyed tractably; I was rapidly regaining my pugnacity but I was desirous of suppressing all signs of it. I clambered up to the cockpit of the boat, and to a float, and then up a roped-in way to a house. I saw that I was on the Jersey side of the river; I had seen a ferryboat, shining with hundreds of lights like a merry-go-round, crossing the water toward the high and far-flung lights of New York. The ruffians who had captured me guessed the extent of my recovery with remarkable acumen; they were watching me again, and bulldozing me, and giving me to understand that I could have another mauling if I wanted it.

I was hustled into the house and heard a door sliding creakingly into place behind me; I had seen nothing of the Jersey shore, not thinking to look for it until the house had cut off my view. I stood for a moment in darkness in the grasp of my captors, and then several electric lights were switched on. I was in a room about twenty-five feet wide by a possible fifty; it had been a dance hall or an assembly chamber. The place, I learned later, had been the clubhouse of a boating association before it fell into the hands of these river thieves. If there had been windows in the room at one time they were now boarded up for privacy or for warmth; the air was damp and cold and one of the men was engaged in building a fire in a cylindrical wood stove. The other four men—there were six of them now—had taken folding stools from a pile beside a wall and were settling themselves comfortably about a long wooden table at the farther end of the chamber. I was led forward by the sixth fellow, and thrown up against the table, to stand there; they maintained their overawing tactics. The man who had immediate charge of me was very stout but was amazingly nimble and strong; they called him All Stretch, or more briefly Stretch.

"Who was that guy who was with you and Sarookian on Broadway?" asked The Merchant from his seat behind the table. He spoke in a conversational tone and even smiled at me encouragingly.

"Mr. Suyden," I said. "A neighbor of mine up in Westchester."

"Where were you going?"

"To dinner and a play."

This perfectly honest answer didn't please All Stretch, and he struck me with the heel of his palm, nearly knocking me over, and leaped after me to punch me.

"Lay off that," said The Merchant irritably. "He knows what he'll get. Let him talk first. Lay off, I say! Now, young fellow. You remember seeing me up in the country?"

"Yes."

"You seemed to be a pal of Happy Tynan—and you know what Happy got for his trouble. It's up to you to say whether you get the same dose or not. Did Happy tell you anything about how rich he was?"

"Yes, he said he had quite a lot of money."

"So he did—only he couldn't spend it. Now, young fellow, where is that money?"

"If you let me talk," I said desperately, "I'll tell you what I know about it, and there's no use in hitting me around."

"Well—go on."

I proceeded then to tell them the story I have told you, the story of the finding of the map and of our conference with Sarookian; I saw no point in varying it and was keenly alive to the danger of doing so; these men were better advised as to most of my story than I was, though their eyes gleamed with interest.

"And where is Happy's map now?" asked a man with a dead-white face who sat beside The Merchant and who was called Dope. I had been watching this man with puzzlement and when he spoke it came to me where I had seen him before: he was the Mr. Madden who had lived in Larigan's house and who had been so generous with his whisky. Things put themselves together in my mind; I was myself largely to blame for my fix, in that I had not warned my man Jeff against talking.

"It's on board the *Baracuda* at the wharf over in New York," I said. "It's in a closet in the front of the boat, up next to the ice box. There's a space behind the ice box where one of the men is sitting with a rifle, and we always call out to him before opening the cabin door."

All of which was moonshine, but I had gotten back to thinking in the course of my uninterrupted narrative of the finding of the map and other details. I knew that the map was in Mr. Suyden's pocket, but I did not wish to endanger his life, and I hoped that these fellows would think it necessary to bring me back to the city if they contemplated an attack on the *Baracuda*. I should have a chance for my life then; and I was convinced that it was in extreme danger now.

"Could you find the stuff without the map?" demanded High Jack, looking at me through his puffy eyesockets. He was a long and lanky fellow who had been sitting on the back of his neck and "eating" cigarette after cigarette. He was pink-faced and blond and I think he was of Scandinavian blood. All of them, unless I am mistaken, were American born and city bred.

"I might," I said. "I'd be willing to try."

"That's the way to talk," said The Merchant, beaming at me. "You train along with us, young fellow, and you'll get yours like one of the group! All we want you to do is to come clean with us."

"Absolutely," said All Stretch, clapping me on the shoulder when I thought he was going to cuff me again. "You give us a square shake, buddy, and you'll get your cut."

"That's us," chimed in High Jack, with twinkling eyes. "We might be a little rough with a bloke that we think is out to gyp us, but we're white, kid. We're white!"

And in a moment they were all laughing and joking and flinging remarks to and fro to add to the good feeling, and I saw that the Merchant was not at all pleased and that he did not value much their assistance in playing me for a fool. He got up and left them and walked up an open stairs to an upper floor, and I heard him walking about overhead. He returned and called to All Stretch to bring me. I marched ahead of my guard and was guided by the light of a pocket flash to a low and sloping closet under the eaves. The door was shut on me and locked and I was left in black darkness. I heard them descending the stair again.

I think that I had been searched while on the boat; I went through my pockets now hoping to find a match, but they were empty. I found that I could lie on the

board floor and could sit up at only one end of the closet.

I spent all night in this place and part of the next day in this close confinement. I did not know at the time how long I was confined; at the end of a period which might have been an hour I thought that I had been there for at least a full day; but when the door opened again I was surprised to see daylight. No doubt I had dozed and woke and dozed again without ever knowing that I had closed my eyes I remember putting my hand to my eyes to see if they were open. Moving about bewilderedly at one time, I struck my head smartly against the roof, and at once I heard some one walking and grumbling outside my door and I was told in forcible language to keep still.

But eventually I heard the grating of a key in the lock and the door was thrown open and I saw the blinding light of day seeping in through the cracks in the shutter that closed a window opposite. I had a splitting headache.

"Come out!" called Dope, who was standing behind the door and peering over it at me. "Downstairs you go—forward, march!"

I crawled out and headed for the stairs; he walked after me. When I got downstairs I saw the man called One-two; he was waiting in a doorway behind the table. "Hurry up!" he shouted.

A taxicab was standing in a road outside that ran along the river bank; I do not know if this was the cab whose driver had decoyed me down to the gang's boat but I think it was. I caught a glimpse of smoking factory chimneys and saw traffic passing on the road.

"Now, fellow," admonished Dope, lifting into view from his overcoat pocket the handle of an automatic pistol, "there's your medicine if you don't behave. Just let one belch out of you while you're in this cab and I'll plug you. I'll plug you if we're passing through a police parade and the mayor is saluting us. Don't do me any favors. Holler, if you like. If you holler, holler loud, because it's your last holler. Get in the boat."

"Where are you going?" One-two asked of him.

"New York."

"The hell you are. He said only one was to come."

"That's me," said Dope, climbing in after me.

One-two followed grumblingly; the driver paid us no attention. I have no doubt but that he was one of the gang, but I understand that his complicity was not established when he was apprehended later. I think he was the man who picked me up on Broadway, but I could not swear to this. I sat snugged in between the gangsters while the cab rolled down the river road.

We waited in a line of cars for the ferry to take us in. I was sorely tempted to cry out to the citizens who strolled by on the sidewalk almost within arm's reach; and when the ferry official leaned out of his little house and looked into the cab to count us I opened my mouth gaspingly, but was conscious at once of the muzzle of the pistol pressing into my side, and I did no more than gasp. At least I was going to New York, where I would be nearer my friends; I was resolved to make a break for freedom sooner or later, but I was willing to postpone it. Our cab was driven to the center of the boat where it was one of a line on either side of which were walls; there was no direct communication between the space allotted to cars and that set apart for passengers; I would wait until we were in the city. The opportunity I looked for would be afforded when we were stalled in a traffic jam in one of the crowded avenues. Meanwhile I tried to learn the precise position of the weapon in Dope's pocket.

As the cab wheeled slowly off the boat and out into New York I noticed a man in a dirty and disreputable military uniform who was jumping on the steps of the passing cars and offering something for sale; he was carrying on his business inside the ferryhouse and I suppose the policeman directing traffic in the street did not see him. This fellow jumped on the running board of our cab in turn, and knocked on the closed window and peered in at us impudently while he shouted, "Help the soldier boys! Buy a copy—fifty cents!"

He hung there for several seconds, peering in at us; then he leaped down and vanished. "What in hell is coming off?" snarled Dope with evident uneasiness. "See that guy?"

"Thought I seen him before," muttered One-two.

We drove out of the ferryhouse. We were passing under dripping Riverside Drive

—which is carried overhead on a viaduct at this place—when the thing happened to us which Dope's prescience of danger had warned him of. A man with cap pulled down tight over his skull had gotten somehow upon the seat alongside the driver; when I first saw him he was leaning through the window in front of us and was presenting a pistol at us. I became aware at the same time that another fellow was tugging at the door beside One-two. "Stick 'em up!" snarled the fellow in the window before us.

I felt Dope's hand yank at his weapon. I turned on him at the same moment and snatched at the pistol as it came out; it was fired but I had deflected the path of the bullet. And then the pistol which was thrust through the window went off with a roar like a three-inch shell—so it seemed to me—and I shrank back involuntarily from the leaping flame of its muzzle. The close interior of the cab was acrid with smoke; I saw One-two's hands thrusting up toward the padded roof; the door opened at last and a hand reached in and caught my arm and pulled.

"Hurry up!" shouted my rescuer.

I clambered across the quiescent One-two, sprang to the street and ran with the two men. Another taxicab was moving slowly beside the far curb. The street at this point climbs a very steep hill to the level of the viaduct, and there is little traffic on it, almost all of the cars from the ferry taking the level way across town. We piled into the cab, which apparently was awaiting us, and it went at once zooming up the steep hill. It shot out onto the Drive and mingled in the stream of pleasure cars that was rolling along beside Grant's Tomb. The ambush could not have been better planned; we were out and away in a twinkling and it is unlikely that the idlers leaning over the high viaduct recognized as pistol shots the two reports in the street one hundred and fifty feet below. The artfulness of the thing was not evident to me at the time, as I did not know the city; I did not even guess that the fellow in the ancient military suit was a confederate. I was not curious as to method nor was I finding fault with the thing in itself; I had resolutely contemplated the possibility that I should be obliged to kill in order to win free. And yet, as the deed was done, it was murder; Dope was dead when I looked out and saw the stately bulk of Grant's Tomb flitting by; certainly no part of the blood guilt was mine.

My rescuers conversed in whispers but did not address me until we had turned into Broadway and had rolled quite a distance down that thoroughfare. Then the cab came to a stop and one of the men threw open the door and pointed down a hill.

"Ninety-sixt', bo," he said. "Beat it for the boat! Tell the big motzer that we bumped a guy off. And keep your face shut."

I was standing on the sidewalk and the cab was sliding away from me. It disappeared down Broadway and I turned toward the river. I hurried down the hill and out upon the dock and saw the *Baracuda* still in her berth. Mr. Suyden was sitting in a deck chair.

"Heavens above, Joe!" he cried, jumping up and gazing at me in mingled joy and astonishment. "What have you been doing to your face? You look as if you had been run through a wringer."

I guess I was a sight. One of my eyes was closed, I had a large blue lump on the jaw, and I was streaked with sweat and blood.

CHAPTER X.

Against Sarookian's earnest plea, Mr. Suyden stubbornly refused to start for Ghost Island until we had reported to the authorities. He said, what was obvious, that we had knowledge of the commission of a serious crime and that it was our duty to lay our information in the proper quarters. Sarookian was angry with him, but he was not to be moved from his stand and I went with him to the district attorney's office down on Centre Street.

I was anxious to oblige Sarookian, for I learned that I owed my rescue to him, and thus, probably, my life. Through knowledge that he possessed or through a shrewd guess he had learned the identity of my captors. With suspicious ease—suspicious in a reputable business man—he had gotten in touch with men of the same villainous stamp as The Merchant and his gang, and had sent them after me. They were gang enemies of the river thieves and they had no scruples to overcome. They traced me down to The Merchant's boat, and, knowing of the den on the Jersey side of the river, they thought that I had been taken there. They had

assured themselves somehow that The Merchant and his vessel had left the boathouse, and they had then called the place on the telephone—it had a telephone and other modern conveniences—and had ordered, in the name of The Merchant, that I should be brought across the river. It may surprise you, as it surprised me, that these gangs of rascals should be quite familiar with each other's haunts and deeds and should be deadly enemies and should yet refuse to deliver each other into the hands of the police. But that is their way; they conduct all of their affairs outside the law and call upon its aid in no event whatsoever. This solitary and lamentable point of honor, this universal and invincible refusal to have anything to do with the law, of their own motion, is the bulwark of the people of the underworld.

Mr. Suyden demanded of Sarookian to tell him why he had not called upon the police.

"In the first place," retorted the Armenian, "the police did not know of this place across the river, no more than did I, else they would have raided it. In the second place, some of the police officials are in the pay of criminals—you are a fool if you do not know that. The gang might have been warned of the raid. And in the third place and finally this matter is none of the police's business!"

Sarookian pondered deeply when assured that whether he liked it or not we should go to the district attorney.

"Very well," he said, accepting. "Now what shall you tell this district attorney?"

"The truth!" I said.

"Precisely," he said, smiling pleasedly. "Joe, you are a rascal, or you would not know enough to tell the truth. I always tell the truth. The truth is always the best lie. A fool tells lies and is not believed; a wise man tells the truth and is not believed. Aha! You see? You shall tell this district attorney the truth. You shall tell him all that he wishes to know about what happened on Pequan Farm and about your hunt for hidden gold. But you shall not mention me. When you are asked concerning me—and only then, as you need not volunteer information—you will answer that you do not know. I tell you now that my name is Hopkinson and that everything I have told you heretofore is lies. My name is not Sarookian but Hopkinson; there was no opium. I had no part in bringing Joe back. And so forth."

"But perhaps you have really been lying to us," said Mr. Suyden.

"Aha!" breathed the Armenian, opening his mouth wide in his characteristic gesture. "Now you have the right idea. You will say, with a clear conscience, 'We do not know. He said his name was Hopkinson.' And so forth. You will not volunteer information, eh? You shall tell all you know at a later time, agreeing now only to return and testify. The district attorney will not smell opium in this case; the matter of the *Lion d'Or* came before the United States district attorney and not before the State official to whom you are going. Without being given the least sniff of *yen shee* he will understand why the gang set on our young friend; when you have described the fellow who shot the man in the cab he will readily take it for granted that it was an ordinary gang feud. Come, Suyden, you are not a child. You are known. You will promise to return with this young man on demand, and request that your pleasure trip be not interrupted, and that will be the end of it. Answer questions only and you will have no difficulty. Go."

And indeed we encountered small difficulty. The assistant district attorney to whom we talked was almost perfunctory in his manner. The dead man had been recognized as a notorious gangster, a wretch of whom the city was well rid, and no one was shedding tears for him or wailing for vengeance. His slayer would find his way quickly to jail if he was apprehended, but the city would not be turned upside down to find him. "It's a case of 'dog eat dog,'" said the official. "I think," he added humorously, "that I'd be glad to see an open season declared on all gangsters if it would result in having them slaughter one another wholesale! You're a material witness, young man, and I suppose I should clap you into the House of Detention, but I'm not going to do it. You're released on Mr. Suyden's cognizance; if we need you we'll send for you. Good day, gentlemen." And that was all there was to it for the time being.

It seemed to me that the New York authorities were well aware that many of the inhabitants—perhaps many hundreds—were professional criminals, living on the proceeds of crimes, and as useless and dangerous to the body politic as so many beasts of

prey; but the authorities tolerated the presence of these people in the city. This is, I suppose, the case in every great city; but it puzzled me. I know that if any men in our section chose crime as a way of life they would quickly choose another place to live or we should know the reason why. I am not one who thinks that the country is necessarily a more virtuous place than the city; out of my reading I have about concluded that people are the same flesh and blood all over. It must be that city people tolerate criminals in their midst because there is no universal feeling of responsibility for enforcing the laws; all work is specialized in the city and the city man is inclined to mind his own business and leave the handling of outlaws to the paid and expert police. And there again you come to the question as to how far people ought to mind their own business, and you have to draw the line between selfish neglect of the public good and sheer officious meddling in other people's concerns. I think there are many professional meddlers in this country who are public nuisances and Paul Prys, but a city man is just as bad when he closes his eyes to everything.

However, if I am to air my opinions, we'll never get done, and I beg your pardon.

We were relieved in mind on one point at least as the result of the episode of my kidnaping and rescue: Sarookian was not secretly working with The Merchant's band. This was something; we had had our doubts of the plausible and devious-minded gentleman. Four days after leaving the Kitchawouk we made an early-morning start for Ghost Island, going down the river with the swift tide; by nine o'clock we had come out of New York Bay and were headed into the east, running close beside a shore that was covered with monstrous and incredible structures; I was told that this nightmare land was the famous Coney Island, the playground of New York's teeming millions.

The day was bright and mild although one had to be muffled up well to be comfortable in the steady rush of wind produced by the *Baracuda's* progress. The sea was somewhat choppy here and an occasional sheet of icy spray lifted over the bow; Mr. Suyden said that the rough water was the result of the cross currents setting into New York Bay and that we should have smooth going in the open ocean. I was greatly excited; I had never been to sea before. The others laughed indulgently when I spoke of our little excursion along the shore as a sea trip. The engines had not been opened up full, in deference to the broken water, but we were making some thirteen miles per hour when we passed Rockaway Point. And we had only sixty-five miles to go in order to reach Ghost Island. Captain Harvey said that we could run nearly the entire distance "inside"—meaning in sheltered water —but he did not advise running inside while the ocean was so calm. He said that we should have to go slowly in the narrow channels, if only for the inevitable ice, and he feared that the tide would leave us and oblige us to pick our way in shallow water before we reached Smith's Point—fifty miles farther on—where we should have to take again to the open sea for the small balance of our trip. So we drove ahead for a quick voyage, and we found the going much smoother when we were away from the influence of New York Bay. We were in the steamer track and I was so interested in studying the vessels passing us that I refused to leave the deck to go below and sample one of Captain Harvey's famous meals. Lloyd left the wheel and went below in my stead, and there I was in charge of our little ship, holding the wheel and spinning it like a rare old salt, and picking up the glasses occasionally to study our path with conscientious care. I admit that I didn't know what I was looking at much of the time, that I couldn't have told shallow water from the deep blue sea, and that I should very likely have plunged head-on into some barnacled old walrus of a log without being advised of its lurking presence until we struck it. But the feeling was just the same as if I had been to sea half my life, and perhaps a great deal more so. As it was, I was first to see the Ghost Island light.

"Sail ho!" I yelled, thinking I was looking at the mast of a ship. But they gave me full credit for my discovery, and Captain Harvey said he would not have seen it of himself and would have sailed right by it. I rather doubt that; but he said it. And I've always noticed that people who understand their jobs thoroughly don't put on any lugs and are ready to give an outsider credit when it's due.

Sarookian came up and took the glasses; I let him have them, there being nothing more to see that amounted to shucks, and

Captain Harvey watched him attentively. Sarookian said he saw something and Captain Harvey glanced in the indicated direction and immediately altered the course of the *Baracuda*.

"What's up?" shouted Mr. Suyden from below.

"Looks like a dory," the captain called back. Suyden and Lloyd came up and we waited interestedly while the *Baracuda* sped toward the distant object. Perhaps you know how interestedly travelers at sea watch passing ships and even small things floating in the water.

"It's a boat, sure enough," said Mr. Suyden after ten minutes. "Seabright dory—power in it."

It was a motor boat about twenty-eight feet long and it was rising and falling idly on the water; after giving three excited shouts I learned to control my tongue and stop informing the others that the motor boat had sunk when it had only vanished in the trough of the waves. It was an open boat and there were three men in it. We ran close to it and Mr. Suyden hailed it and asked if help was needed. They stood up and waved and shouted back to us but we couldn't understand them.

"What are they saying?" grumbled Mr. Suyden.

"I can't make head or tail of it," admitted Captain Harvey. And he shouted at them in turn. They gesticulated furiously but that didn't tell us anything.

"I think I understand them," said Sarookian, who was quite a linguist. And he cried out to them in a strange language.

"Aha—they're Greeks," he explained when they had answered. He interchanged with them a number of unintelligible shouts, while we waited impatiently, and then he interpreted.

"They say 'Yes,' " he said.

"It must be an awful long word in Greek," muttered Captain Harvey. The *Baracuda* had lost headway and now he sent it forward again while Lloyd stood on the rear overhang with a coil of rope. He flung it and the men in the dory caught it and snubbed it onto their boat's nose. They swung in behind us and we continued on for the inlet to Quahaug Bay which lies between Ghost Island and the Long Island mainland.

"They went out to catch codfish," said Sarookian, "and their engine broke down. They said they came from Barlow. Where's that?"

"Barlow's fishing station, eleven miles across Quahaug Bay," said Captain Harvey, nodding in the direction. "What are we going to do with these men, now that we got 'em?"

"We'll make our own anchorage," said Mr. Suyden. "Then they can get busy and patch up their engine. If they can't get it running we'll have to tow them over to Barlow's."

"They'd better get it done quick then," grumbled Captain Harvey. "I'm not going to trust the *Baracuda* crossing Quahaug Bay in the darkness and at this season. It's full of bars and I'd like to pile up on one with the tide going down."

"Is there danger?" asked Sarookian alertly.

"Not much danger of losing your life, sir," said Captain Harvey with his down-East twang. "But I'm yellow all through and I can't stop worrying just because my life is safe. Don't want to spring the planking of the *Baracuda* either."

In coming through the inlet we had passed within a hundred yards of the lighthouse; we had seen several men in a dark-blue uniform in the open space between two long, low wooden structures, and these men, we took it, were members of the United States coast guard service. We were now behind Ghost Island; we could barely hear the rumbling of the surf across the half mile of sand spit. Ghost Island was hardly more than a sand spit; there were a few pine trees scattered here and there—quite a grove, in one place—and most of the rest of the surface was huge sand dunes covered with long and waving salt grass. A ridge of dune ran parallel with the beach on the ocean side and was about fifteen feet in height; on our side the shore sloped gradually for quite a distance and until it reached the isolated dunes which featured the interior of the island; some of these dunes were thirty or forty feet high, vast sand heaps clothed with the gray-green grass. The island was, as I have said, about five miles long and a half mile wide, but I understood readily now the importance that Happy Tynan had attached to his crude chart; a person might wander for weeks or even indefinitely among these monotonously similar hills and not find again a spot that he had once left. Not that it was possible to lose one's way on the

place; one had only to climb the nearest hill to see again the wide expanse of Quahaug Bay and the sea.

We anchored near the eastern end of the island, which lay east and west; another small island, of some three or four acres in area, lay out in the bay to the north; we should have its shelter if a heavy blow from the north sprang up during the night. We were anxious to put the map to a trial but —what with this and that—it was half past four before we were ready, and then the sun was getting low and red. We decided to wait until the next day. Mr. Suyden and I went ashore in the sharpie to try to get a shot at some duck; rows of these birds were winging in from the sea to pass the night in the shallows of the bay; they were passing quite low over the dunes and came all from one direction as though they were drifting down an invisible channel in the air; we headed for a high dune in the line of flight. We were not the only sportsmen abroad; a small black sloop was anchored out in the bay and a bayman aboard it was amusing himself by firing a rifle at the lines of ducks in the sky. Captain Harvey had gone aboard the Greeks' boat to have a look at their engine.

We got nothing. I had some fun shooting but did not make a hit; Mr. Suyden, who is not enthusiastic about black duck, saved his fire for a possible goose, but none of them came within range although we saw a few. He noted where they alighted in the bay and planned to go out and "shine" them; it seems that they can be located in the darkness by the noise they make and if one approaches them carefully then and turns a strong light on them they will not fly away. He remembered with an effort, and with evident regret, that we had a more important hunt on hand, and could not afford to spend all night in paddling about the bay after geese. We returned to the sharpie and to the *Baracuda*.

"Three shoemakers," said Captain Harvey, nodding toward the Greeks' dory. "Nothing wrong with their kicker at all. Gas line turned off! When their engine stopped outside, as any engine will, they all went to fixing it; and one of them, experimenting, must have turned off the gas. They were taking off the cylinder head to look inside when I showed them what was wrong. Engine runs like an eight-day clock now."

"They're not going back across the bay to-night, evidently," said Mr. Suyden. "Have they got grub and blankets?"

"Yes, sir. They'll be comfortable enough under that spray hood and I looked to see that they had grub and blankets enough. Didn't want them in here. Regular grease-balls, they are. Never saw blacker-looking white men. Ain't they colored fellows?"

"Greeks," said Sarookian.

"Greeks, hey? Well, sir, if that is a sample of Greek beauty Ben Turpin would cut an awful dash in that country. Three colored fellows, I call them."

CHAPTER XI.

When I saw the three fishermen the next day they were not bad looking by any means, and they were certainly white men, though they were so far removed from Captain Harvey's Anglo-Saxon standard of pulchritude as to explain his violent prejudice. They were low-set roly-poly men, with heavy and olive-skinned faces, curly black hair and dark-brown eyes. And I saw them at their worst, for they were huddled under a sand bank on the shore and had blankets wrapped around them, and were gazing forlornly at the nose of their dory; the rest of the dory was under water; it had sunk during the night.

"Now how in Sam Hill did they do that?" muttered Captain Harvey disgustedly. "Wasn't enough of a wind last night to sink a peanut shell."

"Better give them some breakfast," suggested Mr. Suyden. "Let them come in here and dry off."

"When the breakfast is darned good and ready, sir," grumbled Captain Harvey, going below again to his cooking. "This gentleman had better tell them to build themselves a fire; no sense in them getting dry seeing that they got to get into the water again and haul that dory ashore and bail her out. What kind of people did you say they were, sir? Greeks, eh? Must remember that."

His dislike of the three dark men in blankets tickled Sarookian who seemed to have a fund of ill will toward the Greek nation. But his attitude toward these three specimens was impartial and even kindly; he saw that they were fed and went over and talked to them and seemed to be cheering them up. He was a hard man to make

out. The three fellows hauled their craft into shallow water, and went to bailing it; they were unlikely to leave us that day, as their engine would be the worse for its immersion.

Except for ourselves, and this Greek colony, and the black sloop lying out in the bay, the neighborhood of Ghost Island was deserted. Quahaug Bay is just a vast shallow, with square miles of barely submerged sand flats and a few winding channels of deep water; its southern shores have no permanent population. Captain Harvey said that the black sloop was the home of some water tramp; many shiftless watermen live on their boats the year round doing as little honest work as possible; the open winter, he suggested, had kept this tramp in the North.

After a big breakfast of bacon and eggs and coffee we started on our treasure hunt. Mr. Suyden and I took our rifles and a shovel apiece, Sarookian put his pearl-handled gimcrack in his hip pocket and reloaded his cigarette case; we three formed the landing party. I imagine that we took the rifles out of a sense of the fitness of things only; obviously we had the island to ourselves for our purposes. We trailed off among the dunes toward the ocean side to gain the summit of the sand ridge along that front and to survey our position from there. The day was clear and bright and colder than it had been for some weeks.

"My idea of what happened," said Sarookian, when he had struggled up the slipping white sand of the northern side of the ridge, "is that the *Sweet Marie,* with Happy Tynan, came ashore hereabouts; drifted in and stranded, probably. He saw that he couldn't get off again through the surf, so he carried the gold and the opium across that beach and back into the dunes and planted it, and then made his way over to Long Island somehow. The breakers down there filled the *Sweet Marie* up and then a shift in the wind or tide sent her drifting off again."

"There's the light, fast enough," said Mr. Suyden, sheltering the chart from the strong breeze. "Now, then, the place we are looking for was surrounded by hills, meaning dunes, so it must be back there in the island. "Where's the one-armed tree?"

We studied the landscape, seeing many isolated pines, several of which could have been called one-armed.

"Tore," read Mr. Suyden.

"Tower!" I exclaimed. "I wonder if he wasn't referring to that water tank, or whatever it is, over there on the Long Island shore? But how could he see it through a fog?"

"Fog might have lifted at the time. If he meant to write Tower, he couldn't have intended anything here on Ghost Island. Let's see—here is *Gate*—what could that be? Then here is *Cherry tree,* and *Wheel,* and—we could find this thing quicker if we didn't have so many directions. I don't believe there are any cherry trees here."

"Yes, there are," I said. "We passed some low cherry trees just now."

"Oh—beach plums! Well, that's Happy's cherry tree for us. He meant some bush of beach plums. Not much information in that. Now, maybe you can locate this *Flagpole.*"

We stewed over that without getting anywhere. There was a flagpole away down by the lighthouse—the stars and stripes was flying from it and could be plainly distinguished through the glass—but its location did not correspond with the note on the map. We never did find that flagpole and I think now that there never was one. Mr. Suyden has suggested that there may have been a small sailboat on the northern shore of the island and that Happy mistook its bare mast for a flagstaff; the presence of such a vessel would explain how Happy got away from the island without being seen by the people about the lighthouse.

We straggled along the ridge, trying to puzzle out the features of the map and stopping to consider the heights and declivities of the island, but being always rebuffed by the sameness of the terrain. So we came to the grave of the gangster named Norman; it was on this ridge overlooking the sea and was fenced in with low posts of driftwood. It had no headstone but was marked by a gray-painted board, and on this board was lettered the line from Stevenson's epitaph which I had heard The Merchant quote, and the date "January 16, 1922." So far as I know the unknown who was buried there may not have been the gangster; The Merchant may have known whereof he spoke.

The grave was well toward the middle of the island's shore line; we had plodded so far and had seen nothing to fix our attention with any hopefulness, though the map

gave us plenty of landmarks. We could understand that many of the objects noted by Happy had vanished under the drifting sand; even now an extra strong gust of wind drove gritty particles into our faces. But we were discouraged by our not locating the more prominent marks—the flagpole especially, if I remember. A flagpole would not be drifted over. We doubted now that Happy and the *Sweet Marie* had ever come ashore on Ghost Island. There was Fire Island with its lighthouse thirty miles to the west of our position; Norman's body—if it was Norman's body—might have drifted ashore on Ghost Island while Happy made his landfall many miles away. The finding of the *Sweet Marie* in the open sea off Ghost Island was also questionable proof that it had ever come ashore there. Our formerly acute distrust of Sarookian had been pretty well dissipated before this time and we now permitted him to inspect the map freely. He could be a likable fellow when he chose to exert himself to that end. It was he who pointed out to us now the slenderness of our case and urged that we run down to Fire Island.

"See how strongly the current sets to the east," he said, pointing at the tumbling surf. "It must be running at the rate of two or three miles per hour!"

This appealed to me, but Mr. Suyden said that the current was caused by the tide and that it would be running to the westward shortly, which disposed of the idea of a steady drift from Fire Island. I left them there arguing the matter and wandered back among the dunes. And so I came upon the one-armed pine. It was in a hollow, so that it was not to be seen until one almost came upon it. It was a scrub pine, stunted and ragged; a number of its limbs had been cut away—possibly by Happy himself—and only one, sticking out at an angle, was left. I climbed a sand hill and shouted and waved to them, and they came.

"Here we have one line, at any rate!" cried Mr. Suyden joyfully as he looked at the slim lighthouse which could be seen over the top of the little tree. "If we line something up with the tower over there on Long Island, we will have located the spot!"

We started again toward the eastern end of the island, going in a straight line over hill and hollow and keeping the tree and the lighthouse in a straight line behind us. And at last we found a wide-spreading old beach plum that was approximately in the position indicated on the map. We were now in one of the numerous hollows amid the hills and we tried every which way through the sand and the long grass and the poison ivy. Working so, crisscrossing the hollow, we came upon the wheel by stepping on it where it lay under a sheet of sand. And, as this wheel was in the center of the map and had lines drawn from it in all directions, we had pitched upon it as the place where the treasure was hid; and now, having found it, and pulled it free, we sat down to gloat over it and to steady ourselves with a smoke. It was the wheel of a small boat, and was less than two feet in diameter to the ends of the spokes; perhaps it had been the wheel of the *Sweet Marie*. And then the three of us jumped for the shovels.

And we hadn't thrown more than a foot of sand toward the tops of the dunes when our shovels grated on wood. We tore away at the slipping sand, shouting and laughing, and then we were knocking our heads together and were down on our knee bones and clawing at the boxes below us, every man for himself. I got hold of a round wooden box shaped like a hat box but smaller, and I hauled this thing out of the sand and went to tearing at its tight joints with my bare nails. Then I threw it down and pounded it with the edge of my shovel, and cracked its ribs and caved it in. It was lined with sheet metal, and I have still a scar on my wrist where I slashed it that day. But I wrenched it open at last. And found no gold for my trouble, but only a coconut—that's what I thought it was—a heavy, round, brown, crusty thing with a gash from the shovel across it, and smelling for all the world like the bowl of a crusty old tobacco pipe. I threw this miserable prize into the sand and plunged back at the hole.

One of the others had given over the attempt to free the object he had seized, for I saw that they were both laboring to open a single small wooden box. The box was about a foot long and a foot wide and two inches deep, with a rope handle in one of its narrow sides and it seemed to be very heavy. The box was locked and would no doubt have taxed a locksmith's ingenuity, what with the sand and the green rust, but a shovel soon cut its Gordian knot. We smashed it open, and saw that it was full of little paper cylinders; we all grabbed at once, always with mutual good will and in a

spirit of helpfulness; and there we had each in his hands a chunky little rouleau of gold coins, good United States minted twenty-dollar gold pieces, fifteen of them to the packet and sixty-four packets to the box. And, as we continued to tear them open in stubborn incredulity, we were finally compelled to believe that we had before us a sum of nearly twenty thousand dollars! And we could see the surfaces of other boxes in the hole.

"Leave the other four there and I'll run back and get the men to carry them," said Sarookian with snapping eyes. "They weigh a hundred pounds apiece and we can't carry them ourselves." And then his glance fell on the "coconut" which I had discarded; he leaped for it.

"The opium!" he cried delightedly. "It's the opium! We've got it—we've got all of it."

He was unable to contain himself, but went about capering and yelling; and finally he pulled out his toy revolver and blazed away into the air, emptying it with the abandon of a drunken sailor and a simple delight in the noise. We shouted and capered a bit with him too, and thought him a fine and whole-souled fellow; but Mr. Suyden drew the line at pistol shooting, seeing that such foolishness, however excusable, would be likely to draw curious strangers. And we would not be ready to receive inquiries until we had our prize stowed aboard the *Baracuda*. Sarookian accepted the rebuke and went to running and stumbling and falling over the sand hills in the direction of the *Baracuda* to fetch Harvey and Lloyd. We had approved his quick suggestion; there were five of the gold chests, as he had said, and there were more than two hundred pounds weight of the boxes containing "coconuts."

"He trusts us, that's sure," said Mr. Suyden, eying the boxes.

CHAPTER XII.

We lay there contentedly beside our find for over two hours; the time passed as painlessly as though we had had a shot of the opium. And then Mr. Suyden consulted his watch and exclaimed over the flight of time. "Whatever can be keeping him?" he said anxiously. "You'd better start back that way and hurry him on. We want to get this stuff aboard to-night, so tell Harvey to bring the *Baracuda* up this way. One of us has got to stay around here and guard this."

I started out over the hills toward the point where we had landed; it was about two miles away and would be the better part of an hour's steady plodding. I avoided climbing the tiring hills and finally decided to go over to the bay shore where the going was level. I came out upon the level land and hurried ahead over it. I had progressed perhaps a hundred yards when my sense of a strangeness in the aspect of things finally awoke me to the fact that the *Baracuda* was gone from its anchorage.

I saw the Greeks' boat riding lightly at its cable, and the silent black sloop still lay out in the bay, but our vessel was nowhere.

I decided to push on. I was too far from Mr. Suyden to shout to him and there was no point in communicating with him until I had something definite to tell him. I could at least find out from the Greeks the direction in which Captain Harvey had gone; I saw several boats moving near the distant Long Island shore and was unwilling to credit that the *Baracuda* could be one of them. I saw one of the Greeks busied in the boat, bending over the engine, which was running; another was tending the fire on the shore and seemed to be cooking. I made fast time in my uneasiness and finally came within earshot of the fellow at the fire and shouted at him. The Greek in the boat straightened up and called to his comrade, pointing at me; the latter waved a hand understandingly and went on with his work at the fire.

"Baracuda!" I shouted. "Boat! Where boat?"

He stood up and looked at me and suddenly I discovered a new source of uneasiness in the fact that I was unarmed. I had left my rifle beside Mr. Suyden's in the hollow of the hills. And then I saw Sarookian; he was sitting on the sand a hundred yards back in the island, and before him, as though conversing with him at ease, lay the third Greek. The fellow to whom I had shouted shrugged his shoulders with an amiable grin and pointed to Sarookian. I hurried angrily in that direction to demand what our Armenian meant by taking his ease at such a time.

"What's the idea?" I demanded. "Where's the *Baracuda?*"

"Hey!" called roughly the man behind me.

I turned and saw that he was sitting up and that he was pointing a businesslike revolver at me. He motioned peremptorily with his hand.

"He says 'Sit down,'" interpreted Sarookian.

Well, I sat down. There was nothing else to do. "What the devil's this?" I gasped.

"I don't know," said Sarookian disgustedly. "You know as much as I do. You know just what happened to me. I walked in here, asked for the *Baracuda,* was marched back here and told to sit down."

"But what can these men be thinking of?" I asked with a sinking feeling.

"Just what we're thinking of, if you ask me," he said, with an irrepressible grin. "About gold and opium!"

"But—how——"

"Don't ask me. We've been fools. These fellows are part of the gang of river pirates, that's sure. I don't believe their boat was broken down at all. I think they sunk it last night on purpose. They simply wanted to get in touch with us and to have an excuse to stay right by us and watch us. Looks bad for us, Joe."

"You don't think they're likely to murder us, do you?"

"Well, Joe," he said glumly, "I've thought that out. It wouldn't be good business for them to kill us right now before they have got their hands on the stuff they're after. If we keep quiet and do just as we're told our lives are safe enough for the present. Beyond that——"

He lifted his shoulders and let them fall. We lay on the sand at the foot of a small hill. Our guard was fifteen yards away, and his revolver was resting on his thigh. It would have been madness to attempt to rush him and equally mad to attempt a break for freedom.

The motor in the boat was running very sweetly now. The Greek pulled the boat in toward the shore and stepped off into shallow water. He waded in to the land and joined the cook at the fire; they both strolled toward us and sat down beside our guard and engaged in an animated talk. They addressed an occasional question to Sarookian, which he very promptly answered in their tongue. Then he stood up in obedience to an order.

"They want me to show them where the stuff is, Joe," he said apologetically.

"But you won't do it!" I cried hotly.

"I'd better. They'll find it anyhow. And maybe I can keep Suyden from being shot. Besides——"

The Greek with the visible gun stepped over and punched Sarookian in the ribs with it, and then gestured with it. Sarookian turned quite pale. "He says he'll shoot me, Joe," he mumbled. "He will too. I'd better go with them, Joe."

I thought the worse of him for it but still I could hardly blame him; that gun was a very strong argument and I did not doubt that the man would shoot without hesitation. Two of them started off with the Armenian. They stopped fifty yards away and talked to him, and then they all returned. I was ordered to my feet and we all started for the boat and clambered into it. Sarookian and I sat in the bow while our captors remained behind the engine. One of them whirled the flywheel, choked the air and retarded the spark expertly, and we were off. It occurred to me that that man knew something about a gas engine too; he was no shoemaker. Sarookian was right. We had been fooled into accepting the company of our enemies.

It was a fast little craft, not as fast as the *Baracuda,* but capable, I judged, of making fifteen miles. In a very few minutes we were opposite the place where I had come out on the shore, and then the bow was turned in and the power shut off; the nose of the boat grounded gently and I threw the anchor in response to an energetic gesture. With continuing complaisance Sarookian and I jumped into the water and waded ashore, followed by the three dark men. We started over the hills with Sarookian leading.

We found Mr. Suyden beside the treasure. He looked up at us with a grimace of relief. "About time!" he called. "But, say, where are——"

Our rifles still lay with their barrels resting on a stick of driftwood. A Greek stepped between the guns and Mr. Suyden, and then he was looking at the shining barrels of three revolvers. He stood perfectly still, frowning.

"Very well," he said. "Don't be nervous. Don't shoot unless you mean it."

One of the Greeks had a hatchet. He thrust his pistol into his belt and went off

to the pine tree and set to hacking at it. Mr. Suyden and I sat down on the sand; Sarookian and another Greek went to work excavating with the shovels; the three dark men centered their efforts on Sarookian, with whom they could talk. They ordered him about sternly and he did his best for them, although he was evidently unused to physical labor. Even in this cold weather he was shortly in a lather of sweat but he toiled on under their threatening gestures. He was very much afraid of them.

"Say, Joe," said Mr. Suyden, "did you ever study Greek?"

"No," I said. "I studied some Latin in school, but no Greek."

"I studied Greek in college. Passed examinations in it, that is to say—with the help of a 'trot' and a cramming coach. Forgotten it pretty completely now and I suppose I could hardly rattle off the alphabet, though I belong to a Greek-letter society or two. My Greek was two thousand years old when I was in college, and it's older now, but I always understood that some of it was legal tender in that country even today. I remember reading somewhere about an English scholar who made a speech in ancient Greek to the people in Athens not so long ago, and the people understood him. Seems that the rule doesn't work both ways."

"How's that?"

"Well, I can't seem to understand a word of these fellows' lingo. I guess it must be the accent; but it's all Greek to me, as the saying goes. I remember that *basileus* means king, and *ichtheus* means fish, and a few words like that, but they're not saying any of my words."

"You might ask them if they caught any kingfish while they were waiting for us outside," I suggested.

He chuckled; but I could see that he was only superficially in a joking humor. He was eying the Greek who was guarding us and was measuring the distance to our rifles. I hoped that he would not attempt anything rash, while I resolved to get very busy if he did. We should certainly be dodging bullets upon our first overt move, and still it was unthinkable that we should stand by while a fortune was lifted from under our noses. I would work a lifetime at the milk and earn less than was to have been my share in those five chests of gold which had now been lifted out onto the sand.

The Greek with the hatchet had now returned from the mutilated tree, bringing with him several stout sticks. He thrust one of these sticks through a rope handle on a chest, and motioned to Mr. Suyden and me to lift it up.

"I like his cheek," growled Mr. Suyden.

"I think we'd better do as we're told," I said. "We'll have a better chance later on, when they grow careless. Sooner or later one of us should get a chance to make a bolt with a rifle, and then things will look very different. In fact, if one of us gets away it may save the lives of the three of us, since they'd not risk murdering the others while one man was at large to appear against them. And if one of us had a rifle off among these dunes——"

Without a qualm, and even with desire, I contemplated the act of shooting these robbers down, although I had never pointed a gun at a human being in my life. While talking I had gotten up, and was going to the chest; Mr. Suyden followed me slowly. We lifted the improvised handles and started toward the boat, followed by our guard. Sarookian came after, sighing and groaning under the weight of one of the handles to another chest.

We carried the five chests down to the waterside and then carried down the twenty small boxes of opium. We had spoken to Sarookian and told him to watch his chance to break away, but the chance was not presented to any of us; on the second trip one of the guards picked up the rifles and kept them thereafter on his shoulders, putting his pistol away. They did not relax their vigilance for a moment. So that it was our sad fortune to see the entire treasure heaped by the waterside like pieces of ballast while we had not seen the remotest chance of success in a fight. The Greeks stood again in consultation, pointing at us occasionally; a disagreeable thrill went through me when I realized that they were considering what they should do with us.

"They speak of taking one of us with them," said Sarookian tremblingly.

"That doesn't look as if we're going to be murdered, anyway," I said.

"They're afraid we'll alarm the coast guards at the light, and that they may be fired on; that's why they want one of us aboard the boat. What will happen to the one of us who is aboard the boat is another matter."

"His chance won't be very brilliant in any event," said Mr. Suyden with tightened lips. "It looks to me as if the time has come to start something. Let's jump the next one of them that comes near us—what do you say?"

"Just a moment," said Sarookian affrightedly. "They are calling me."

He went down to the boat. The three Greeks were at the edge of the tide and Mr. Suyden and I were standing about fifty feet back on the shore. It was still about a hundred feet from us to the nearest sand hill. Sarookian returned to us, followed by the man who carried the rifles; this fellow stood twenty feet from us, on the alert, with one of the rifles presented and covering us.

"Good-by, boys," said Sarookian tremulously. "They want me on the boat."

"Don't go!" ordered Mr. Suyden roughly. "Here's our man now. Let's jump him! One of us may get shot, but the others will get the guns and then we'll see who'll take the stakes. If you go on that boat you're a dead man. Come—are you ready?"

"Don't do it, fellows," said Sarookian generously. "I'll go. I can talk to them and maybe I can do something with them. It's better one man should go than have the three of us killed here. I know I have a very bad chance, fellows, but it's up to me and I'm going to do the right thing. No, Suyden, I won't have you shot down in trying to save my life. I'll play the part of a man among men, fellows. Good-by, boys—good-by!"

He turned his head abruptly aside as though to hide an unmanly emotion and then he strode toward the boat.

Well, it was mean of me, but I must say that I thought he was theatrical about his leave-taking. It was the kind of parting you read about and I'm distrustful of men who act in the ways you read about. And yet I suppose a poor fellow confronted with a big situation might hark back to his reading to carry it off effectively; I don't know. I've seen some loud-mouthed bullies who were brave men and tough customers, and I've seen some quiet-spoken men who were twice as quiet when danger appeared; I'm one of that sort myself. I like peace and safety and I keep on liking it even when I could swap it for a riot. I'm not mild and pacific just to fool the neighbors, and I don't hanker to rear up on my hind legs and breathe defiance; it's natural with me. I watched Sarookian striding manfully down to the boat and I told myself that he had been holding out on us and that he was a desperate fellow under the skin; but I didn't quite believe it and was accordingly ashamed of myself and feeling mean and low-down.

One of the Greeks had waded into the water to lift the boat's nose in farther; Sarookian turned and waved to us with a gallant smile; the Greek with the rifles walked slowly toward the water, looking cautiously back at us. And then the moving scene was abruptly interrupted.

CHAPTER XIII.

Bl-l-l-l-ing!

Sarookian fell down, and I thought he was shot. The Greek on the shore fell on one knee, got up, fell again, and struggled away in the direction of the light, jumping and falling. The man in the water went over the side of the boat like an eel and vanished. The fellow nearest to us dropped the two rifles and pelted away into the dunes. We turned instantly and saw wisps of smoke drifting along the face of a dune to our right. With a common impulse Mr. Suyden and I jumped for the rifles, snatched them up and skedaddled into the hills.

"What was it?" I gasped after a short hard run and when we were behind thirty feet of solid white sand.

"Didn't you see those fellows coming down the hill?" asked Mr. Suyden.

"I didn't wait to watch," I said, chuckling nervously. "The noise of those guns started me off like a whip on the back!"

We crawled up to the crest of the dune. Half a dozen men were crossing the open ground, proceeding toward the boat. They were clad in sweaters and yellow oilskins and rubber boots, and not in the height of metropolitan style as I had seen them last, but I knew them. I knew the broad-shouldered little man, dapper even in his rough garb, whom I saw now kicking Sarookian in the ribs to urge him to rise; he was The Merchant, and these others were his gang of river thieves whom I had seen last in the boathouse on the Jersey shore.

"Well, I'm blessed," said Mr. Suyden when I had told him. "Then who are the three bold bandits who took so rapidly to the woods? One of them was hit by that

volley, Joe; see him nursing his leg over there?"

The Merchant waded out into the water, pistol in hand; we saw him reach down into the boat and bring up the third Greek by the collar. The strength of the little ruffian was amazing; he hauled his limp captive over the gunwale and threw him down into the water with a great splash, handling him as if he were stuffed with feathers. The Greek went down on his back, and scrambled up dripping, and waded ashore and took his place with Sarookian; the latter was holding his hands so high that his white cuffs sprang out of his sleeves. This was unfortunate for him; one of the gang caught the gleam of the studs and the finger rings and punched him in the stomach to make him lower his hands; and then this thrifty fellow, missing nothing, proceeded to strip Sarookian of his jewelry, pulling the diamond pin from his cravat, tearing the studs from his shirt. Sarookian was working at his fingers, but was evidently too slow to suit the gangster; the fellow struck him in the face with his fist, and followed him as he reeled back. He stripped the glittering Armenian down to the status of a fifteen-dollar-per-week clerk; through the curtain of salt grass we watched this by-play and also the procedure of the principal actors. The Merchant had clambered aboard the boat and was bending over the engine; he started it, and instantly shut it off; I saw his hand going out to the switch. His men ashore were examining the chests and boxes.

"If they start to run, Joe," growled Mr. Suyden, "shoot them down like rats. It's not a nice job but there's nothing else to do with their sort. We're going to take a hand in this business now."

"Isn't that the *Baracuda?*" I asked eagerly, nudging him and pointing down toward the lighthouse.

"No-o," he said doubtfully. "Looks like a big rowboat. I think I can see oars moving there, Joe. Let's hope it's coming up this way." The sun was in our eyes and we could not see at all distinctly the small object moving away off on the shining water. "Keep them covered, Joe, and shoot without thinking twice!"

He fired his rifle over the heads of the gangsters; I saw the bullet skip and ricochet and disappear in the bay; that is to say I saw the spurting water. Then he stood up and shouted to them.

"Drop your guns and stand where you are!"

They turned about and stared at him. They did not drop their pistols and they did not run. They spoke in growling tones to one another; I saw The Merchant laugh. He got out of the boat slowly and splashed ashore; they stood in a close knot, talking and eying us. "By George, I'll shoot one of them down in cold blood if they insist on it!" exclaimed Mr. Suyden. But I don't believe he would have done so; we were at this disadvantage in dealing with these fellows—that we would not kill except in the last extremity. Possibly they counted on our chicken-heartedness in this respect.

Matters were deadlocked for about ten minutes; we had made our demand for surrender and they had disregarded it; but neither did they move to attack us or to touch the chests by the water's edge. They stood there watching us; I saw cigarettes passing about among them.

"It will be dark in an hour," I said. "We must do something before then."

"That may be what they are waiting for," said Mr. Suyden soberly. "They can afford to wait, if this thing is to be decided in the dark. Too bad we haven't got the heart to shoot them down where they stand."

We debated, while they watched us calmly. We were soon apprised that they were not waiting for darkness. I heard a rustle and the soft hiss of sliding sand somewhere behind us, and I turned quickly. Mr. Suyden turned also but instantly swung about again to face the clump of gangsters by the water. They had seen his start.

"They're spreading apart a bit," he said. 'Watch sharp back there, Joe!"

I saw a small bush on the crest of a neighboring dune bow down suddenly as if it had been pulled from below; and again there was that rustling and rolling. I leveled my .30-30 at this bush; it was not more than sixty feet away and I can hit a copper cent five out of six at this distance and without an arm rest. Then I saw the sand sliding down the nearer side of the dune and a man's legs came into view; the fellow had slid back while crawling up the sloping sand. He was a big man and he recovered himself now only after floundering about. And now he lay there on his side in plain view while he struggled to right himself on the unstable surface.

"Lie still!" I shouted, still unwilling to shoot.

He braced his elbow beneath him and faced me. It was the ruffian known as All Stretch. His big face was wrinkled into an unpleasant grimace, partly the result, I suppose, of the sinister emotion that inspired him, and partly the effect of his having to look toward the sinking sun. I caught the gleam of his narrowed eyes; and then he had fired at me; the bullet whistled past my head, followed instantly by the report of the pistol. I fired.

I think it was one of the most horrible moments of my life when I saw this big fellow throw his arms out to clutch the sand as though he felt he was falling, and I knew that I had killed him. I knew that he was a dead man the instant I pressed the trigger; I was aiming right at his eyes. He slid several feet down the side of the dune and lay there on his face. The hair moved on my head as I looked at him; I have searched my conscience since and have not been able to find that I could have done otherwise, but I cannot rid myself of a lingering sense of guilt. It is a terrible thing to kill a man; I guess I would make a very poor soldier.

"Joe!" shouted Mr. Suyden as he tumbled down beside me. I heard his rifle go off, once, twice and again, as steadily as if he were shooting at a mark. He says that the gangsters rushed us, starting at the crack of All Stretch's pistol, and that their bullets were singing about us like bees. I didn't hear them fire a shot; I don't know how long I lay on my elbows with my rifle barrel resting on the sand, staring down at the body of All Stretch. Perhaps it was only for an instant, an instant of eternity; then I roused myself and twisted about to help Mr. Suyden. I got upon one knee to clear my sights of the grass and for steadiness of aim, and sought a target.

Two of the gangsters were down but the other four were coming on and they were very close now. Well ahead of the other three ran The Merchant. He was coming with the speed of a rabbit dog and the rabbit in sight; he was at the foot of the dune and was darting up it as though its uneasy surface was hard ground when I got the muzzle down on him and fired. I could see his broad pale face and the two little eyes as hard and unwinking as two blue buttons; they were fastened on me as I shot. He wrenched to one side, like a crow jumping aside in the air when he sees the hunter ambushed below him; he ducked his body down from the waist and leaped aside, the sand gave way, he fell and tumbled down the slope. I was sure I had hit him. He fell against the legs of one of his followers who stumbled over him. And then the two of them were up and pelting away at right angles to their former rush. The other two stopped and then ran off into the dunes. Perhaps ten seconds after All Stretch had fired at me the gangsters were gone from sight, except for the two who were twisting out there before us and except for All Stretch himself, who would move no more.

Sarookian and the Greek had stood idly by the water while the fight was on; when I glanced at them I gained the impression that they were close-huddled, as if each was trying to stand behind the other. We scanned the waving summits and ragged sides of the dunes. We supposed the fight had just begun; the odds were still in favor of the gangsters; four of them, armed and able-bodied, were somewhere about us and perhaps All Stretch had not been the only straggler who had not yet shown himself when we looked over and saw the six men coming down to the attack on the Greeks. We had brought them up all standing and they would not be in a hurry to rush us again; they had learned the difference between our shooting and the sort they were used to brave in gang fights. We would be shot at now from cover. And so we crouched, watching the grasses, trying to distinguish between their constant rippling under the wind and before the approach of a creeping foe. But then I chanced to look aside at the bay, and I shouted.

"A boat!"

"Coast guard!" exclaimed Mr. Suyden joyfully.

With divided attention we watched the big cutter coming in; there were all of a dozen men aboard it in the familiar uniform, and they were bending to the sweeps with a will. I learned later that they had been out on a practice row when attracted by the shooting. For some reason the reports of the guns had traveled much more clearly over the water than over the island; the men at the lighthouse had heard nothing.

"And I guess there goes The Merchant," I said, pointing to a small boat far down

the shore which was being pulled rapidly toward the black sloop. While we watched we saw four small figures pile over the side of the sloop and then we saw the sail going up. The sloop swung slowly around as the jib took the breeze, and then bowed over under the pressure on the mainsail. She started down toward us, keeping well offshore and heeling over and making incredible speed; her speed was explained when I saw that she was using power as well as sail. She swept by, a pretty sight under the sunset across the wide bay, and headed over for Barlow's. We saw a spurt of fire aboard her and a solitary report followed; the missile hit the coast guards' cutter but did no damage at that distance. And then she drew away, driving ahead with a high wave curling up under her bowsprit, and was shortly diminishing toward the shadowy Long Island shore. We went down to meet the coast guards.

While we were explaining to them we saw the *Baracuda* coming. "Just a moment," said the officer. And he shouted at Sarookian and the Greek.

"Get out of that boat again! Nobody leaves here until you all go over and appear before the authorities at Riverhead and get a clean bill of health. All that you're telling me may be quite true, but you're not going to leave a mess like this behind you. Come—get out and line up here!"

The body of All Stretch was carried down to the waterside. The two other gangsters were badly hit; they died the next day in the Southside Hospital. I think we were spared trouble by their deaths; they refused to make a statement of any kind, saying only that they would take care of the people who had shot them. They were venomous rascals but I was glad that it was not I who had shot them. Mr. Suyden refused to worry about them after they had been put aboard the Greeks' launch and started for the attention of the medical officer down by the lighthouse and I have never heard him express any compunction. His mind is quite tranquil about them, and I know that he is right.

Captain Harvey's mouth opened when he saw what had gone on. "What in thunder did you mean by running away?" demanded Mr. Suyden sharply.

"Running away, sir?" Captain Harvey's face flushed and his blue eyes brightened as he met his employer's glance fairly. "I didn't do any running away. Never did yet. You mean going over to Barlow's just to-day? Why, I went there to send your message."

"My message?"

"Yes—that telegram that Mr. Sarookian here told me to send from Barlow's. Couldn't get back any earlier, sir, less'n I wanted to pile the boat up on some bar. And Mr. Sarookian said there wasn't any hurry."

"What is this, Sarookian?"

"You see," said Sarookian, leisurely massaging a cigarette and putting it carefully into his mouth, "I had a very important message to send. Very important, Suyden. Matter of important business that I'd forgotten about until the time when I was returning here and leaving you out there in the dunes. I wanted to wire and I thought it would be perfectly all right to send the *Baracuda* over to Barlow's. I probably said that the message was yours; I had to get the boat started at once if it was to be back here by dark."

"Why didn't you tell me about this since?"

"Well," said Sarookian, blowing on his cigarette and then looking up with a bright smile, "it was a stupid thing to do, wasn't it? We couldn't have gotten in trouble if the *Baracuda* was here. The whole mess was caused by sending the boat away and encouraging these Greeks to attack us. Naturally, I was ashamed to tell you about it, Suyden, hoping that everything would turn out all right and then I could explain."

"You have a lot of explaining to do yet!" cried Mr. Suyden hotly. "If there is any monkey business between you and these three Greeks you'll hear from me!"

"Greeks?" said the officer, who had been an interested auditor. "You said Greeks?"

"If they are Greeks."

"I'll settle that right away," said the officer. And he called to one of the men who stood by the cutter. "Hey, Steve! Come over here! This man is a Greek, Mr. Suyden. Talk to this fellow, Steve, and tell us if he's a Greek."

The coast guard addressed himself to the captive; the latter, who, I suppose, had not understood our talk, answered the coast guard, but haltingly and with evident difficulty of understanding. They spoke together for a minute, and then the coast guard turned away from him.

"He not Greek," he said contemptuously. "No, he not Greek. He have few words of Greek, but he—I do' know for sure but I think he Syrian. Or, what. He not Greek, sorr—no, sorr!"

"What does he know," sniffed Sarookian. And he addressed the coast guard. The man's face lighted up and he laughed.

"He Greek!" he said, pointing at Sarookian. "This gentleman talk the real Greek. Yes, sorr!"

"And that's where he's wrong again," said Sarcokian in his precise and unaccented English. "I am not a Greek either."

It was growing quite dark. The officer agreed that we should sleep aboard the *Baracuda* that night, but he took the two "Greeks" back to the barracks with him on our complaint. He left a detail of four men with us to guard us. Three of them stayed on board the vessel and the fourth mounted post beside the boxes and chests on the shore. We were to be brought across the bay in the morning; until then, we were under arrest.

CHAPTER XIV.

The third Oriental was picked up by the coast guards on the following day and he and his two compatriots were turned over to the authorities of Suffolk County. If I have called these cowardly rascals Greeks, it was on Sarookian's say-so, and I trust that any member of the great and historic Greek nation who chances to read this tale will understand now that I have not intended to offend him in his national pride; because of my reading, I have the highest respect for the Hellenic people, whose history is the early history of white men's civilization, philosophy and art. And I would not wager a plugged nickel that Mr. Abdullah Sarookian was an Armenian; that too rested on his own statement, which was a very insecure foundation. You will appreciate that I cannot follow the reaction of every reader's mind to my narrative; I would have you read with charity and patience, holding your objections patiently in view of the fact that I cannot answer them as they occur to you; I shall be glad to answer any letters addressed to me at Pequan Farm and to put myself right.

The black sloop was found in Bass Creek, in the salt meadow behind Barlow's fishing station. Elmer Widdell, the owner and the man who had sailed it to and from Ghost Island, was in a highly nervous state when the constables called upon him and demanded to know why his erstwhile respectable and workaday ship had turned pirate. He said that seven men had engaged him for a shooting trip to Ghost Island and he had taken them. He said that the men—who were The Merchant and his river pirates—told him they were to meet friends on the island, this when he commented on the absence of shotguns. They had gone below into his cabin and started a crap game even before he pulled out of Bass Creek; and this crap game ran day and night until they left him to go ashore for the attack on the three Orientals. He had endeavored to interest them in shooting duck, and they had told him to get to perdition with his God-blessed ducks, and that if he bothered them any further they would shoot him.

"Told me to go shoot the ducks myself if I had anything agin' 'em, and they weren't taking no part in my quarrels with God-blessed poultry, durn their green faces," said Elmer. "Most foolish-talking men I ever met in all my living days. And such language! Well, sir, I'm a follower of the Lord, and I hope and trust I don't never have to listen again to the sort of language they spoke to me and to one another. I wouldn't have put up with it but for that they called one another the same names. Yes, sir, seven walking devils; and the worst of them was the little fellow that you'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth when he first spoke to me. Offered to open me with a hatchet, later, he did, and looked like he'd 'a' done it. Scum—that's what they were."

The Merchant and his three followers went straight from the sloop to the high-powered car which they had stored in Ben Hewlett's garage, and the last that was seen of them they were roaring down the South Country Road in the direction of Patchogue. Some fifty miles beyond Patchogue lies the New York City line.

We were taken over to Riverhead, which is the county seat of Suffolk County, and there we were held subject to the direction of the Federal attorney for the eastern district of New York—this because the presence of the opium suggested smuggling and an offense against the Federal laws. His office is in Brooklyn, which is a part of New

York City on the other side of the East River. I shall save myself much trouble—and probably save you much misinformation—by not going into the legal details; I am not a lawyer, and I have always tried to keep out of court, and I should only discredit myself if I tried to talk about matters that I do not understand. But I remember very well our interview with this United States district attorney.

Mr. Suyden and I were alone with him; Mr. Suyden had quickly established his identity and standing as a responsible citizen, so that our detention was only a formality; we had been admitted to bail in Riverhead when Mr. Suyden got busy on the telephone. And now our interview with the official was more like a consultation of friends than it was like the inquisition of suspected criminals. The district attorney—a heavily built, harsh-faced man of middle age—questioned us in great detail about our dealings with Sarookian.

"I'm afraid he'll slip away from us again," he said disappointedly. "When I heard of this matter I thought that we were going to be able to substantiate the allegations in his previous indictment."

"Indictment?"

"Yes. Didn't you know that your friend Sarookian has an indictment pending against him right now? But, no—you couldn't have known that or you wouldn't have gone ahead with him. He was indicted for an attempt to smuggle narcotics—in connection with that *Lion d'Or* case."

"He told us about the voyage of the *Lion d'Or,* but not about the indictment."

"Naturally. He didn't tell you either that he was a business associate of this gang leader who is called The Merchant. Yes, Sarookian's warehouse on Washington Street held forty thousand dollars' worth of stolen goods when we raided it. We couldn't fasten guilty knowledge on him—on the surface, it was an ordinary bailment and any warehouse man may shelter stolen goods unawares—but we had no doubt in our own minds that he was a receiver. There is that connection between Sarookian and the piratical attack on the *Lion d'Or;* Sarookian was indicted on the testimony of the French captain, but The Merchant evidently learned through Sarookian, somehow, of the coming of the opium. I do not think that Sarookian engineered the attack on the *Lion d'Or*—it doesn't seem likely since the gold was sent, though those double-action devices are just in Sarookian's line, and it is not impossible that he was bent on pulling the wool over the eyes of the Frenchman—I think that the piracy was an idea of The Merchant's; possibly he learned of the shipment through the treachery of one of Sarookian's employees. And, by the way, one of those three fellows who highjacked you down on Ghost Island has been identified as an employee of Sarookian."

"Ah—we suspected this."

"When dealing with a fellow like this Sarookian, Mr. Suyden, you may suspect all the while, and then you won't be suspicious enough by half. He's a trickster through and through. I believe that the gold you found on Ghost Island was Sarookian's. He will explain his knowledge of it by saying that he learned of it through his indictment. You see? We had to make a hole to get at him and he slips out through the hole."

"You say that the gold *'was'* his? Then it is his now, is it not?"

"You shall see," said the district attorney with a sardonic smile. "We may not succeed in fastening on him the attempt to smuggle the opium but he won't get off without leaving some of his skin behind him! He can't have it both ways."

He gave an order and our comrade of the treasure quest was brought in to the room. Sarookian was calm, assured, even debonair. He bid the district attorney good day and nodded to us amiably.

"It is as the great Shakespeare says," he said, smiling mockingly at the district attorney. "'When do we three meet again? In lightning, storm and rain!' Our legal friend here is obligingly supplying the bad weather. Good morning, sir. Good morning, Mr. Suyden, and my friend Joe."

"Stand up," said the district attorney sharply. "That's better. Sarookian, was that gold yours that was found down on Ghost Island together with the opium?"

"Oh, no! No, indeed."

"You don't make any claim on the gold and opium?"

"Except through having found it, sir. You will recall that you were good enough to tell me the very interesting story of its loss. I believe that you supplied my lawyer with detailed information in the shape of a bill of particulars. You will find that you did me a great injustice in stating that I knew anything of the *Lion d'Or*—and I

may tell you now that Captain Loisier has retracted his story and is ready to testify that it was extracted from him by police violence—but I could not believe that you had fabricated the story out of whole cloth with design to injure me. I believed that you were a man of honor, sir. Therefore, having been informed that a great sum in gold was somewheres about, I set myself to find it, as any citizen might."

"I'll have that statement put in the form of an affidavit," said the official.

"I do not see the necessity of that," said Sarookian.

"You need not swear to it, if you don't wish to. But I propose to hold you to the position you've taken. You'll sign that affidavit or you'll not be admitted to bail until your trial. And that won't be hurried forward."

"As you please," said Sarookian, shrugging his shoulders. "What harm to swear to it?—it is the truth. You may prepare your affidavit."

"And so far as your claim through finding the gold is concerned," went on the official with evident enjoyment, "Mr. Suyden here tells me that your share was to be the opium. You are aware that that has been confiscated. Beyond that, you undoubtedly conspired to rob these men of their shares and you forfeited all claim on their consideration."

"All of which works out very sweetly for my honorable friends here," said Sarookian. "May I ask what is your attitude toward the gold?"

"The gold," said the district attorney, "was anybody's money! It belongs to the finders, subject to the making of previous title by somebody else. If you or anybody else cares to come forward and claim the gold by previous title the claim will be passed on. You will note that you will be called on to explain the presence of the opium, and you may try, if you will, to disconnect that gold and opium from the property that was taken from the *Lion d'Or*. There is something to exercise your astute wits upon. Any cock-and-bull story won't do; these men have the gold now and I advise them that they own it and are entitled to question any claim by another."

"Is this your attitude, Suyden?" asked Sarookian.

"Well, Sarookian," said Mr. Suyden reasonably, "I don't see what other position I can take. If this money is yours, say so! I don't want anything that doesn't belong to me. If you tell me it is yours, I must inform the district attorney here—what else can you expect? I am not going to conceal knowledge of a crime."

"That is to say," said Sarookian in a flat tone, "it is your duty, as an honorable man, to keep this gold. You are obliged in honor to threaten with jail anybody who attempts to take it from you. This is a very neat solution."

"You may have a third of the gold, as one of the finders," said Mr. Suyden, reddening angrily.

"And I order you to tell me if he takes it," put in the district attorney grimly. "I'll make it hot for him."

"Ah!" breathed Sarookian, opening wide his mouth. "I perceive that I am in the hands of my friends."

The indictment against Sarookian eventually was quashed on the district attorney's motion because of the weakness of the case against him. He could not have been convicted. We have not seen him since that day in the district attorney's office. No one else appeared to claim the gold and it was turned over to us. The sum of it was exactly one hundred thousand dollars.

Before our house on Pequan Farm there is now a lake of sixty acres; the summit of the huge glacial rock just breaks the surface. I am not milk farming any more; I have put down five thousand apple trees; our country is peculiarly suited to fruit growing. Jeff has not taken kindly as yet to the change; he does not think there is enough work in fruit culture to justify large returns; he is of the old school and does not feel he is earning his money unless his brow is plentifully bedewed with honest sweat. However, I have promised to put in a cider mill for the windfalls and warty fruit and he is more reconciled. I fear that he is looking forward to plenty of applejack. He has his own method of distilling, and no bother with a still: he leaves a barrel of cider outside until it freezes solid and then he knocks the barrel apart and chops away the frozen liquid, and draws off a couple of quarts of ninety proof; the alcohol all goes to the middle when the cider freezes. I shall have to keep an eye on my barrels or I shall lose an odd one, and then have to go down and ransom Jeff from the village lockup.

We retained a detective agency to locate Happy Tynan's people, thinking to do something for them, but no one dependent on him or related to him could be found. Possibly his name was an assumed one. Mr. Suyden and I divided the money. We put it to work and I have no doubt that we can make restitution if the publication of this narrative should induce the rightful owner to come forward with proof of his claim. We are open-minded but we are not advertising for false claimants.

I do not think we need fear that the river pirates will revisit Pequan Farm. If I grasped the psychology of those gentlemen their attitude is a businesslike one, and they have no liking for hard knocks, and that is all they'll get from us. The treasure is banked and permanently beyond their reach.

I was over to Bergman's nursery this summer in my car—I've put in a flivver—and I was lying on the roadside under the car to try and find out what ailed it that it wouldn't go when I heard a heavy machine stop beside me. A polite voice addressed me—a high and deferential and carefully modulated voice—and at the sound of it I clutched the monkey wrench in a firm but limber grip and wriggled out and to my feet.

It was The Merchant. He was looking out of the window of a sedan; he was dressed in a black-and-white check suit, a red necktie and a soft straw hat—quite an elegant person. I am sure that he knew me, though the pale-blue eyes did not flicker. "Pardon me, sir," he had called in his slightly nasal voice, "but can you tell me if this road will take me through Tarrytown?"

"Turn to the left at the next fork," I said.

"Thank you, sir," he said. And the big sedan slid smoothly away and vanished down the road. He did not look back. I had been genuinely nervous, knowing the man's desperate character; but evidently he considered the account closed, and had written off the affair of the *Lion d'Or* as a dead loss.

I beat some sense into my flivver and headed back for Pequan Farm.

Don't miss "Locoed," a complete Western novel by Courtney Ryley Cooper, in the next number, February 7th.

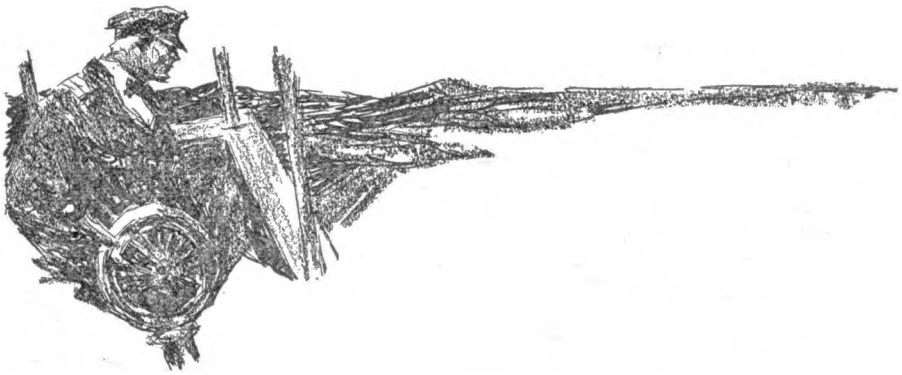
RED TAPE, BARBED

THE newcomer to Washington who tries to have things done by the executive departments of the government is up against a tremendous, tough and titanic undertaking. Compared to it the colossus of Rhodes, the labyrinth of Theseus and the labors of Hercules are the very fluff and froth of a life devoted to languor, luxury and ease. All of which can be proved by inquiry addressed to Mr. C. B. Weaver, citizen of Wisconsin and eighty-one-year-old veteran of the war between the States.

Mr. Weaver went to Washington the latter part of last May to transact a little business with the treasury department. As soon as he was inside the portals of that august building he ran into the mazes of red tape. One chief of division, professing himself ignorant of the matter in hand, sent him to another chief. That official, being questioned by the old soldier, sent him to another floor of the building. "And that's the way it went," said Mr. Weaver later. "Nobody seemed to know anything and nobody said anything but 'Keep on walking.' I guess I covered a mile for each year of my life along those hard marble corridors. I found out what red tape was—with a vengeance."

Finally he journeyed into the office of Mr. Richard R. McMahon, solicitor of the treasury, and right there his troubles ceased. Mr. McMahon fixed up the veteran's papers, put the business through and told him that he could return to his Wisconsin home with the knowledge that everything was all right. But that was not all. The solicitor, accompanying his visitor to the elevator, told him: "It's an honor to serve a patriot like you. Give me your blessing. We may never meet again."

"At that," Mr. Weaver, one of the few survivors of Bragg's "iron brigade," narrated in describing the incident, "I was about to break down, but he put his hand on my shoulder and cheered me up. Before I start back to Wisconsin to-night I'm going to write to President Harding and thank him for having appointed to office a man who makes the stranger to Washington forget that there is such a thing as red tape barbed."



Conquest

By Oswald Wildridge

Author of "The Back Number," and other stories.

Another exceptionally fine story of the sea by Mr. Wildridge. The author in his last tale told vividly of a sailing vessel and of a master who feared nothing. In "Conquest" Mr. Wildridge reverses his literary scheme and treats of steam navigation and of a master who feared everything. A thoughtful, penetrating, and withal swiftly dramatic piece of work, the kind of story that makes the appearance of each new POPULAR a distinct event in the fiction-magazine field.—THE EDITOR.

BEYOND the fact that both belonged to the sea the *Nan-Ling* and her captain had next to nothing in common. They sailed in company, were tremendously dependent each on the other, and yet there was no contact; taking externals at their face value they were as unlike as the grub and the butterfly or any other brace of opposites that fancy may suggest. In this, of course, they offended all the canons of the confraternity of quidnuncs who have made a study of the men who go down to the sea in ships. "As the husband is the wife is," they quote at you, only they substitute "captain" for "husband," and "ship" for "wife," and insist that herein lies one of the iron rules. Baldly stated, the *Nan-Ling* was a marine slattern, and, according to the law of environment, as well as a great mass of precedents, Dixon Gray should have been a down-at-heel shellback, all his brass binding tarnished or lost, his garments frowzy, and his habits as indifferent as his dress; but only a glance was required to show that in none of these conditions did theory square with fact. Whatever grace the ship may have flaunted in the days of her youth, by the time that Gray took her in hand she had fallen away to the level of a time-worn, battered old tramp, sailing under the Chinese flag, and owned by a set of men solely intent on squeezing every possible penny out of her as long as cheap patching would keep her afloat. And to this end everything about her equipment was utilitarian; not an ounce of superfluous ornament did she carry. All her paint had a protective object and nothing more; one coat was expected to last the life of two, and her storeroom was one of the barest afloat.

From truck to keelson the *Nan-Ling* was dealt with on the same parsimonious plan, all skimping and scraping. Even the dock wallopers of a dozen ports reproached her with nicknames of their own coining; she was a blot on the sea, to her captain an out-and-out obscenity—a thing of shame and

offense. But she served his purpose and therefore he pretended to laugh at her degradation. At all events, she had at least one redemptive quality. On the outer front of her chart house she carried a brass plate which gave all the credit for her building to a certain firm on the Clyde, and probably by that fact alone is this chronicle made possible. But for the sterling workmanship which framed her shell and fashioned her engines she must assuredly have gone to the bottom of the China Sea when Dixon Gray applied his terrific test.

Still, she was everything that I have said—a disreputable drab, while her captain was one of the marine aristocrats, young, clean and well-groomed, scrupulously exact in his dress without being a dandy, and in respect to his manners written down by some of the landsfolk as "a perfect gentleman." Even when he surrendered his command of the *Argonaut* he carried that part of his character with him. He was also accompanied by the haunting secret which drove him to that momentous change.

As captain of the *Argonaut* there was no mistaking his pride of position, though all the time there was that other side; and in all the strange tangle perhaps the most perplexing circumstance is the fact that no one ever suspected him. But then the man himself was such an unusual blend. "Mind, I'm not a weak man, Mac," he said to Alec Macdonald one day after the chief engineer had penetrated his secret, and, in so doing, established a new link in their friendship. "I won't have that. I'm not what you might call a weak man with a redeeming grain of strength. It's just the reverse with me. In many respects I'm strong—a strong man with a constitutional flaw." And he was right, the signs of strength being so flagrant, so positive that the baser metal was concealed; they made his shield and buckler, covered him as a garment, and so he was held up as the perfect type, everything that a sailor ought to be. As he walked through the streets of great ports women paid him homage, silent but undisguised; and men, watching him on the bridge of his ship, erect, alert, confident, also rendered him the tribute of envy or admiration according as they themselves were framed. It was only that company of fellow seafarers with whom when ashore he gathered in the captain's parlor at Dougal's Ship Chandlery in Silver Alley at Liverpool who were conscious of contradictory circumstance; for here his personality was limned against a merciless background, here he had to stand the test of contrast. He was one of them, it is true, but—different. That was the mark of the man—difference. They exhaled the positive tang of the sea in every movement, in themselves, in their tongue—while Dixon Gray with his subdued speech, his reflective manner, his shrinking exclusiveness, suggested rather the library, the study or the desk. And yet not a man among them ever doubted his seamanship, his possession of all those abounding qualities that make up a lord of the merchant service, nor did they suspect the skeleton in the cupboard.

Strictly speaking there were two Dixon Grays—the man as he was known at Dougal's and the man Macdonald discovered on that fog-swamped night at sea when his soul was laid bare. So complete indeed was his disguise that his very weakness was hailed as a sign of strength. At sea they christened him "Captain Dead Slow" because of his passion for caution, and his reputation spreading to the land he received that supreme commendation, "A safe man with a ship."

He had his narrow escapes, of course; that was inevitable. There was, for example, that night when Andrew Dougal found bim alone in the captains' parlor staring in gloomy abstraction at the wall, his fingers beating a tattoo on his chair arm.

"Something wrong, captain?" he was asked, and although he denied the suggestion his negative was lacking in conviction.

"At least, nothing that matters," he hastily added. "Got my orders, that's all."

"And you don't like them?"

"I don't. North Atlantic. Cargo of heavy goods for Montreal. After that, trust to luck."

Dougal raised his eyebrows. "North Atlantic," he said. "Bit of a change for you, isn't it? Your beat's mostly been East Indies and Pacific, eh?"

Ignoring the question, the captain of the *Argonaut* broke into invective against the realm into which he was now to venture. "North Atlantic," he fumed. "At this season too. One of the hells of the sea. Fog and ice, and again fog. Leagues of it. Got to sneak through blindfold for hours at a stretch—days. Siren screaming like a lost soul all the time. No comfort, and eternal

risk." Then, twisting about, he found Dougal's questioning eyes riveted on his face, whereupon he turned his outburst into a run of forced laughter. "Bit of a pampered kid, eh, Dougal?" he said. "You see what comes of too much sunny sky and warm sea. Spoils a man for the higher latitudes."

"I've not known so many sailormen to get spoiled that way," Dougal protested. "It stands to reason. Always on the go, knocking about east, west, north and south, they get seasoned. Till they can stand any blessed thing. No, it isn't that what ails you. Now with women it's different. Tied up in one place they've no chance. As I was saying only the other day to Stephen Dane, that——"

Whatever the saying he had no chance of repeating it. An explosive exclamation snapped him up and there was Gray out of his chair, half across the table, and clamoring as though the matter were one of life or death.

"Here, I say. What's that? Dane? What Dane? Who are you talking about?"

"Sakes, man. What a fluster you get into. You're worse than a tin kettle. I've only one Dane down in my log," the chandler tartly returned, offense glooming in the background. "Only one. The trader from the China Sea. Who else should I mean? He's no stranger here. Knew him long before you got into your brass binding. Didn't he come with the rest in his younger days when he followed the sea? He was master of one of Kendal's barks, *Salesbury*, till he took us all aback by going into trade and making an exile of himself. Did it on his wife's account. She was delicate, doctors ordered her out of England, and Dane was bent on standing by. He's the man I mean. The man who's given his own name to the place he lives in, though you'll not find it on the map. Dane of Dane's Island."

That was all. Nothing in this to drive a well-balanced man to his feet and plunge him into a quiver of excitement. But Dougal clearly foresaw that there was more to come.

"Dane—in England!" Gray began again. Apparently the last place in which he would have looked for him. He hung on to this for a spell and then by a manifest effort forced his next question: "There was a girl—wasn't there?—on the island. Did he—happen to say anything—about her?"

"No," Dougal told him, a flicker of a knowing smile in his eyes, "the old man had nothing to say about Margaret. There was no need. Not when she'd the chance of saying it all for herself. You seem to be mighty interested in the lassie."

But the shaft made no impression. Gray was too intent upon his quest to be touched by raillery and the revelation merely quickened his pursuit. One might have heard a pin drop during the seconds he stood there frowning down on the table, and then he slipped back into his chair and impatiently bade the chandler have done with riddles. "You mean she was here with him? Is that it?"

"Yesterday," he was told. "Now they're off to Stephen's old home in Yorkshire. He's a real East Coaster, born and bred at Staithes. And this is a great time for him. Don't think he's had a furlough since the lassie was born. He's stuck it out there all along, kept slaving away, piling up gear for her. And he only sees her between whiles. Margaret spends a lot more of her time in England than on that God-forsaken island. Stephen won't have her there. That's what him and me were talking about. The hard way those hot countries treat our womenfolks. Though I'm thinking," he dryly added, "that mebbe you know more about Margaret Dane than I can tell you. The thing I can't reckon up is what sort of a wind it was that blew you into Dane's Island. Right off your course, isn't it?"

"Not when you've a condenser leaking badly," Gray curtly answered. "And a ship smashed up by a full gale. We put in for shelter while we made our repairs."

"Um!" The grizzled face again relaxed. "You never know how one thing's going to lead to another. It isn't every man who can thank a faulty condenser for an introduction to a bonny lass."

But the sally drew no response—only a questioning stare. Gray's thoughts were leagues away. "Yorkshire," he was thinking, "Yorkshire." He pulled out his watch and held it in his palm. Yorkshire. Not so far away; only a few hours' travel. And Margaret was there. It was scarcely believable. Day by day, every day, he had pictured her at the other end of the world. Remote. Unattainable. And here she was, almost within call. Cut away from him by a mere handful of night hours. To-morrow. As near as that. An he would, the morning might restore her to him.

But—there it was again. Those infernal "buts." Always confounding his plans, robbing his dreams. But—what if the welcome were like the parting? He might find the morrow like that last night he spent on Dane's Island, the night that would forever be rising up against him. Out of the past the voice he hungered for cried its message of dismissal. "I think I'll go indoors now, Captain Gray. Good night." Nothing much in that. But for him it was everything. "Good night." Finality.

Thrusting his watch back into its pocket he hurriedly rose, found Dougal's eyes bent on him in searching scrutiny, and broke into a shaky laugh. "Didn't I tell you," he said, "that I'm only a pampered kid? And it's time I was getting under way."

Outside in the narrow gullet of Silver Alley he halted irresolutely, but only for a few seconds, and having made up his mind he set off to the docks and his ship. That was the only place, his one refuge where he could be alone with those slumbering memories into which the name of a girl had breathed the breath of life.

Going aboard he curtly returned the salute tendered by the astonished watchman. "It's all right," he explained, "I'm sleeping aboard to-night;" then hurried to his cabin, lit the lamp, dropped into his chair and, his teeth tightly clenched on a cold pipe, let himself drift away into the past, right back to those tumultuous days on the isle to which he steered his harassed ship for refuge and found that he had entered a realm of enchanted romance.

To-day was as real as yesterday. That row from the anchorage to the timber jetty on the edge of Dane's land-locked lagoon, and the flutter of a white skirt hard by the trader's store! The symbol, of which he thought nothing at all. Why should he? Women were nothing to him, never had been; he could not recall the name of one who had quickened his pulse by a single beat. Besides, he had serious business afoot. There was his ship, the only thing that counted. That flutter of white did not even stir his curiosity. "That'll be the trader's daughter," he thought. "The girl that Warren of the *Storm King* was raving about at Canton." And then he forgot all about her until he had crossed the clearing between the jetty and the line of buildings, and came upon her seated in a deck chair in front of the store. And at once all the rest went, his ship, his errand, himself. He was conscious of nothing else in the world except this white-robed slip of a girl, with the friendly smile, the wayward hair and those eyes whose luster even case-hardened shellbacks trading at the isle have likened to the shine of stars. She was like one of the tropic flowers. And as natural. Therein he discovered the real secret of her charm. Being no squire of dames he fell into confusion the moment he felt himself under the appraising battery of her eyes, became as awkward and self-consious as a schoolboy, but before he had time to pass along to the store she set him at his ease. Without laying herself open to any accusation of boldness, too. She was saved from that by something he had never been able to define. There was all that subtle power of the incomprehensible, quality he would never have looked for in such a setting. To get the real glow of contrast you had only to pit her against the other women of the isle; and also against her father, that fever-bitten, sun-baked islander, all skin and bone, with a face like parchment, dull, deep-stained ivory parchment, and as hard as nails in driving a bargain. It was almost impossible to imagine the remotest kinship between them, let alone that this girl should be his daughter. They were like Gray himself and the *Nan-Ling:* they had nothing in common. And Stephen Dane not only knew it but was proud of the circumstance, proud of what his slavish labor and his planning had achieved.

"You're puzzled, aren't you?" he asked that night as they lingered over their pipes outside the store and listened to the girl at her piano. "Can't quite make her out, eh? But it's plain enough. I've saved her from the island. That's all. You know what these places do for our women. Turn them old before their time. Rob them of all their freshness. And I made up my mind that if it cost me every penny, an' I'd to slave to the very last minute of my time, she should never come to that. And I've won. I'd the luck to have a sister in England, one that could be trusted, and she's been nearly as much as a mother could have been to my lassie. Margaret has spent most of her time in the old country, had a fine schooling along with other girls, and only come out here between whiles for long holidays with me, and you see what's happened, Captain Gray. She's a mixture of her own country and this, the best of both."

From this he drifted off into gossipy recollections of his own past, and then the commercial instinct asserting itself he adroitly worked his way round to matters of trade. But Gray's responses offered no encouragement, his thoughts were entirely with that unseen player in her dainty sitting room over the store, and he was chafing against the power that kept him from her side.

Whether Dane suspected what had happened to him he neither knew nor cared. Even now, brooding in his cabin over those hectic hours he was no wiser on that point. But Margaret understood; he was convinced that right from the beginning she must have realized the completeness of her conquest and of his surrender. He made no attempt at concealment; every hour he could tear away from the *Chaldean* during the week required for the repairs he devoted to her and —those mornings when they walked through the forest aisles before the world grew heated like a furnace, those wonderful nights under the starlit canopy—she must have read in his eyes the story that his lips never openly declared.

That was his condemnation, the reproach that now seared with its scorching fires. That he should have wooed and then sailed away without telling her of his love. Instead he confessed his weakness, held up the flaw in his character for her inspection. That was the worst of a nature such as the one he was cursed with. Always impelling a man to his own hurt. But—what else could he have done and kept his self-respect? She had a right to know. And love was compelled to be cruel sometimes. But it was terrible. Even now, sitting there alone, when the thing had been worn to a mere memory, it still had power to make him writhe. A sense of self-loathing swept over him. And yet, before it was spent, he was trifling with excuse.

"What else could I have done?" He cried the challenge aloud and glared into the dun shadows on the far side of the cabin as though in quest of an answer. Marry with that secret specter haunting him? Swear to cherish and protect and endow with all he had—when his chief possession was a constitutional flaw? Profess to seat her on a throne—and then drag her down? Have men and women point malicious fingers at her, scorn her as the wife of a coward? It was not to be thought of. His love was not mean enough for that. And so he told her everything, was merciless in his own indictment, did his utmost to show himself to her through his own eyes—and then came away. Had never seen her since. Never had the chance.

Blighting silence had fallen upon them as he had finished, a sense of isolation. Gray felt himself cut away from every other being in the world except the girl who stood by his side in the screen of the wood, the moon-washed waters of the lagoon outspread before them, and then, as though from some unfathomed depth there came the sound of a sigh and a tremulous voice—"I think that I will go inside now, Captain Gray," she said. "Good night." And that was the end. When he went to settle with her father in the morning he had neither sight nor sound of her. Only, as he conned the ship out of the harbor—well, he could not be sure—the store was a longish way off and what he saw might only be the glare of the sunlight on the window.

The end of a dream, one of those visions which began with a dower of color and finished in pitiless gloom. Now he was back to the solid realities and he knew that the present and the future were as hopeless as the dream. Chilled and stiff he dragged himself wearily out of the chair, extinguished the light and groped through the darkness to his bunk. "Yorkshire," he fumed. "What's the use? There's nothing for me there. There's nothing changed. I'm just the same."

Three weeks later the *Argonaut* steamed down Liverpool Bay on the top of the morning tide, the eastern sky a web of hammered gold edged with crinkled waves of pink and pearl, and rippling lines of delicate green. But far away by the desolate seas of the Grand Banks the fog already lay in wait, massed battalions of it drawn across the track, a dense sight-destroying pack, a thing to sap the vitality of giants. With such a man as Dixon Gray upon the bridge, however, there was no room for doubt about the handling of the menace. As the vanguard swirled clammily about the ship, turning a world of sunshine into a realm of impenetrable gloom, the finger of the engine-room dial swung round to half speed, barely was the sun thrust back into oblivion than the finger marked dead slow, and with the passing of the light the ship lifted up her clamorous voice. *"Br-a-ay*—Br-a-ay—Br-a-ay," she wailed—shrank into sullen si-

lence, and then *"Br-a-ay"* again. That was the beginning of it, the first atom of ninety-six exaggerated hours, four solid days of sightless groping. For most of the men, of course, there was nothing new in it, nothing daunting; this was merely one of the casual adventures, unpleasant and dangerous, but not more so than many of the possibilities they had shipped for, and not one suspected that the captain in any wise differed from themselves. But when they were nearing the end of the third day Macdonald put on his thinking cap.

II.

About Captain Gray's seamanship criticism had no chance of a hostile word. It was in strict conformity with the loftiest professional code. From the first moment of their blind pilgrimage, that appalling crawl through the core of a trackless world, he remained upon the bridge, hour after hour, day after day, never leaving it except to pass by a few paces into his chart room for a cup of steaming coffee and a snack. Not even to sit down on the edge of the settee; merely to gulp his hot drink and then bolt out again into that hateful vacuity. As a rule he had the place to himself; but somewhere about the seventy-fifth hour, when he loomed through the doorway again, haggard and pinched, his eyes red-rimmed by fog and lack of sleep, he almost stumbled over the chief, who for a brief spell had left his engines to the second, and was here stretched out in a chair, puffing placidly at his pipe. Not a word passed between them, not a nod—nothing but a glance—until Gray again lurched back toward the door, when Macdonald rose and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Laddie," he said, "this'll no' do. You'll have to ca' canny or you'll break. Just drop yourself down on that chair and shut your eyes for a wee spell—five minutes—ten. Haven't you got Peers on the breedge? And isn't he a good man—almost as reliable as yourself? Now, then—five minutes."

But Gray wrenched himself free. In a shrill staccato he rasped out something about five minutes being a long time—a tremendous time; long enough for a ship to go down in; time enough to turn him into a dead man. That was how he put it. Himself. Not a word about anybody else. There might not have been another man in the world. His vision traveled away to the sombrous patch framed by the gap of the open door and rested there—that gap which seemed to lead to nowhere; and then out of the waste there fluttered a tremulous blare on the port bow; a second, thinned by distance, on the starboard beam; for a third, the wheezy stuttering of a hand-worked horn on a windjammer's poop.

"D'ye hear them, Mac?" he demanded. "All round. And not one to be seen. They'll do me yet. Bound to—some time. Death! Disaster! Mebbe it's here now—close aboard—out there in the fog. Nobody knows." His feet scraped wearily along the deck, the gap darkened and the chief was alone, staring out through the opening, his pipe in his fingers, his brows wrinkled in a frown.

"Sakes," he muttered, "but it looks bad! Dinna like it—not a bit. I've seen the signs before, and—I'm hoping I'm wrong."

Bracing himself aslant in the doorway, his figure vaguely silhouetted in a dull splash of yellowish lamplight, he watched for a while the working of the drama, if in a region where sight was paralyzed men could be said to watch at all. With all the great arcana of the sea concealed the sense of motion was almost lost, for the ship was making little more than steerageway; and but for the heave of crank and thrust of rod, the muffled rumble of revolving blades, he might have fancied her swinging to an anchor in some safely sheltered haven. That was part of it, but only part. The illusion was destroyed by sound, a riot of discord: overhead the siren dolorously wailed; somewhere out there, close at hand, a seething swirl and clang proclaimed the passing of another ship; and at last the deep-toned bellow of an ocean packet, far away but swiftly advancing, drew Macdonald to the rail where he craned far over, peering anxiously into the sodden cloud. "The doddering fool!" he muttered. "Smashing away at the full—through this murk. And we're going dead slow." The *Argonaut's* measured call swelled to a frantic scream, and so the two ships blustered at each other—the one defiant, hectoring, clamoring for a clear course; the other pleading, begging for a few spare feet of open track. Whether the appeal was being regarded it was impossible to tell; all that was certain was that two blind ships were rushing toward each other through visionless space; that Alec Mac-

donald watched and waited; that Dixon Gray, from the corner of the bridge, silent, motionless, shrouded in a dun pall, watched and waited too. If his shout counted for anything it was Mac who saw the thing first —a blur of light, a veiled menacing eye that balefully glared at them out of the void. Almost in the same instant he saw Gray hurl himself at the telegraph lever, heard his cry to the helmsman—"Starboard, man! starboard! Hard over!"—felt the sheer and bound of the ship as the engines crashed into speed; and then his ears were filled with a tumult of sound and a luminous flood enveloped him as the hurrying mail boat swept by.

"A close call that!" Macdonald grimly muttered. "Fearful close! A wee bit closer would have put my pipe out," and, so far as he was concerned, that was all; but his comrades, being cast in a different mold, shook their impotent fists at the phantom as she trailed away through the fog and in half a dozen tongues were still cursing her when she vanished from their ken. But this was not the end. A handful of the crew still lingered in the waist, denouncing the folly of captains who drove their ships full speed through such a "mush" as this, when, just athwart their course, the darkness ominously deepened, thickened to a monstrous blot which seemed for the space of seconds to hang there, a ragged mass without outline, and then become a pyramid of bellying sails and creaking cordage, and a hull so close that any of them could have tossed a biscuit aboard.

"Think I'll bear a hand below," Macdonald gasped as the windjammer drifted away. "There's over muckle diversion up here for a quiet body. I can see now that there's something to be said for the ostrich burying its head instead of looking facts in the face." And so he proceeded to "bury his head" amid the flashing turmoil of his engines. It happened, however, that he was again in the chart room in the hour of their release when the *Argonaut* crawled out into a new world wherein sight was restored, a world with the shine of stars above and the spacious freedom of the seas ahead, astern and all around. Nor was the fact of his presence there an accident; it was part of a shrewd and kindly plan, the plan of a man intent on standing by with his help if help should be required. As for Gray's confession, there was nothing voluntary about it; he never intended to speak—we have his word for that—but he was overwrought, his will weakened by his tremendous vigil, by want of food and sleep, by that appalling strain, and no doubt Macdonald's sympathy completed his conquest. Most likely the spectacle of the burly chief kneeling by his feet, unlacing his boots, applied the finishing stroke. At any rate, whatever the prompting, the captain suddenly laid a hand on the other man's shoulder and blundered into self-revelation.

"I—I'm done, Mac," he wearily declared. "Going to end it this time. Been thinking it out, and I won't carry on any more. Can't. Couldn't stand another turn. I'm no sailorman. Never meant for the sea. And—I—I'll go ashore and stay there."

"You'll go into your bunk, my laddie," the chief retorted; "though I'm fearing you'll have to go in your boots, forby you'll let me cut them off—your feet's that swelled. And it's a pity, for they're a grand pair. But boots or no boots you're going to have the bonniest sleep you've had since your mother rocked you in your cradle. And I don't blame you wanting to stay ashore. A ship like the *Argonaut's* a fearful responsibeelity for one man, but you conned her through it fine, and we're all that much the more in your debt."

"The ship! As if I cared about the ship," the captain petulantly snapped. "I —I—never thought about her. And I didn't think about you. Nor the men. Nor anything. I—thought only of myself. Not another soul. That's how it always is. I—I —was afraid—I——"

"And I'm afraid that if you don't get them forty winks you'll be haverin' a lot mair rubbish," Macdonald broke in. "But here's steward with a cup of coffee, and we'll have no more talk."

III.

"Tell the mate to call me in an hour." That was Dixon Gray's last command, drowsily delivered as he clambered into his berth; but a kindly conspiracy made the order a thing of no account and the clock was allowed to work half around before he again mounted to the bridge, the deep-graved lines of weariness washed out, externally himself again. To the crew he was just as usual, the Old Man they had always known, calm and self-confident; but Mac-

donald detected a new atmosphere, an element of greater reserve, a strain about his manner and his speech.

And, applying a certain interpretation to the signs, the chief kept to his own quarters as much as circumstance would permit. "I'll give him time and it'll blow over," he decided.

But in this he was foiled, for when night again settled on the sea the steward called him to action. "If you're at liberty, Mr. Macdonald, the captain'd like you to step along to the cabin." A refusal rose swiftly to his lips, and as swiftly he saw the futility of resistance and so capitulated.

That the meeting was far removed from the ordinary was shown by the captain's reception of him. He fussed about as though his chief engineer were a rare visitor whose call insisted on ceremony. A chair had to be picked for him, a comfortable one; and then there was the tobacco jar and the matches, a cigar if his preference ran that way, the whisky and the soda siphon, all of which Macdonald suffered in silence for the reason that observation and deduction had told him more already than the other man bargained for. But once the ice was broken all the captain's hesitation vanished. He was rather afraid that he had been giving himself away in the fog and after it, that was how he began, but so far as talk went he was still in a bit of a fog, had wakened with quite a hazy impression of what he had said. How could a man's brain carry anything after such a crucifixion? And so he would be very much obliged if Mac would tell him exactly what it was that passed between them, all of it, plainly and honestly, as between friends. On that word "friend" he laid great stress. It offered the keynote to his move. Only with a well-tried friend could he have acted thus. He was desperately in earnest, too, and refused to be put off when Macdonald would have lightly dismissed the matter as "just the sort o' stuff t' be expected frae a man who'd been full three days on a mushy bridge." His hands gripping his chair arms, Gray thrust himself forward, his face hardening, and demanded the truth, every word. He was up against facts and fate now, he explained, and he meant to go through with it whatever the cost to himself might be.

Grumbling that he had a better use for his time than to spend it in storing up all the silly talk that was teemed into his ears Macdonald made a show of surrender and offered a preposterously free rendering of the captain's enigmatical outburst; but halfway through Gray pulled him up. "That'll do, Mac," he said, a flicker of a smile breaking up the hard lines. "I'm not calling you a liar; I'll just say that in this case you're a poor hand at telling the truth. So you can stow the rest. I fancy I can make a pretty good shot at it. No, don't bother; I want to do the talking now. And by way of a start I'm going to tell you about something that happened to me when I was a kid."

It concerned a servant maid, this adventure in the days of his youth, the girl being one whom the gods had endowed with imagination and the gift of tongues. As a teller of tales she might possibly have had her equal but surely there were none to excel. She was just the one to captivate a child's fancy, and so, at every opportunity, he would steal away to the kitchen o' nights and, books and games forgotten, he would sit there spellbound while Susanna led him through the glory-tinted realm of romance. If only she had been content with the fairies and the elves! But one never-to-be-forgotten night she turned to ghosts and out of her flimsy shades she conjured an unspeakable horror. Talk about making your flesh creep! She did more. She froze the marrow in his bones, chilled his heart, turned his blood to water. Not that he was conscious of any terror—he felt nothing but the thrill and the terrible fascination, so long as he had Susanna for company, and reveled in her awful host. But when the hour of bedtime came, and bidding good night to his father and mother he faced the darkness and the loneliness of the world beyond the stairs, he found himself beset.

The moment he rounded the bend in the landing, and the black corridor gloomed ahead, the specters swept out from all their horrid lairs. Not singly but in battalions. A legion of them. Grisly skeletons. Shadowy, filmy, immaterial wraiths. Things with flaming eyes. Things with claws. A hideous horde of monstrosities. Imagination filled his bedroom with them. They surged along behind, floated all around. He was hemmed in. He dared not go forward, they barred his way of escape. And so he cowered down on the stairs, squeezed himself up into a corner with his back to the wall, so that he might at any rate have an outlook on his right hand and his left; and

there he sat for an hour, two hours, sat until his father discovered him, a pitiful scrap of terror, sick and perishing with cold, shivering through dread of something that was not there. And that might stand for a faithful picture of his life. Thus had he gone through all its stages—shadowed by fear, overwhelmed by it. His years had been peopled by ghosts. He had come to recognize himself as Mr. Much Afraid. Of course he knew that fear and heroism were not necessarily conflicting terms; perhaps the most valiant souls were those of timid men who refused to surrender to themselves. But he wasn't one of that sort. He was all for himself. Never was his terror generous enough to include another being. The rest were outsiders. And that was how it was with him in the fog. He didn't care a straw about the ship, and as for the men aboard he never gave them a thought. Up there on the bridge, through all those hours of agony, his seamanship, his skill and experience, his endurance, were focused on one skimpy atom of fact—himself, his own safety.

On this note he halted, the halfway line. He had not yet finished, the avowal must be crowned by the decision, but his case was too grave for him to run the risk of being misunderstood. "You see it, don't you, Mac?" he demanded. "The sort of man I am? Where I stand?" But the chief engineer refused to commit himself.

"Oh, go on," he growled. "Let's have the rest. I'm more concerned at present with what I cannot see. For one thing, I can't understand how a lad built on such reckless lines should have come to follow the sea."

"You may take that as another example of weakness," Gray bitterly replied. "It was part of the blunder. I hadn't seen the ghosts then. I can snap my fingers at any danger when it's out of sight, be the bravest of the brave before the battle. Besides, I was only a lad when I made my choice, a lad bewitched. I saw the world through tinted glasses. Like so many others I was steeped in Robinson Crusoe, and all that gallant crowd. Life was romance with a capital R. All glamour and glory. Sailoring meant cruising in sunny seas most of the time, seeing strange lands and wonderful people, and being a very fine fellow. If I'd only known! What a life it's been. What a life! And when my eyes were opened I hadn't the moral courage to own up and back out. Fear again. This time I was afraid of the whispering tongue and the pointing finger. Afraid of what folks might say. Afraid of being found out, stripped of my shoddy disguise. That was at the end of the first voyage. When I came home again the chance had gone, my father was dead, and there was very little money for my mother, let alone any to waste on starting me afresh. So I—I—just stuck it. Chose a dog's life. Worse!"

His confession, it will readily be seen, left a good many gaps, and Macdonald pounced upon them, one after another. But Gray had no mercy on himself and countered him at every turn, insisting that the portrait was faithful—none of its tones too high. Why, even that great master stroke, his transfer from sail to steam, was inspired by a spirit of cowardly subservience to the First Law. He knew how people had praised him for his acumen, his foresight, making him out to be one of the seers whose vision had foreseen the coming decline of the windjammer and the triumph of the steam-driven craft; but it wasn't that at all. He took to steam simply because he perceived that the steamer in its development was going to be the safer craft. Thinking of his own skin again. Ambition indeed! Self-preservation was his only law.

Afterward, when time for reflection was given him, time for analytical dissection, Macdonald was astonished beyond measure by the paradox with which he was confronted. Above everything else did it seem to him that Gray's physical cowardice was much less remarkable than the moral courage of his self-exposure. Even granting the truth of his indictment, the man, without knowing it, was superb. It was hardly conceivable that it was himself he was attacking; that it was he, Dixon Gray, who was the prisoner at the bar, himself at once the accuser and the judge. He was so resolute also in his verdict. Without mercy. Fatalistic too. He had made up his mind that one of these days he would go too far. Nothing could shake that conviction. There would be disaster. Even if he kept his life his name would go. He would betray his real self, be held up to the derision of the world as one of those who put life before character, before everything.

"Do you know, Mac," he said, lowering his voice impressively, "that when that packet hurled herself out of the fog I could

have screamed? Like one of those foreigners who are always the first to start a panic. And I shall do it one of these days. You'll see. It's one of the awful things that paralyzes me—that unborn ultimate scream with which I shall proclaim myself at last for what I am."

And so he had resolved on action while there was still time. Self-respect had vanished long ago, but he would go on posing; if he couldn't have the substance he would have the shadow. And when this voyage came to an end he was going to leave the sea. Didn't know what he would do. He would have to turn to something for a living. That was imperative. Perhaps he would buy a farm. Though even on the land he supposed he would find more ghosts to scare him. Still, he must risk it. Anything was better than the life he was leading. To leave the sea he was determined and no amount of talk would turn him from that purpose.

"Unless you find a cure for your complaint in the meantime," the chief dryly suggested, giving his words such a twist that Gray was compelled to ask what he was driving at.

"Naething that I'm going to tell," Macdonald stubbornly responded. "I've been mightily interested in what you've told me, and you have my sympathy, but at present I haven't got a satisfying grip of your case, and I'd rather reserve my judgment than pronounce a verdict I'd have to reverse. I'm no' keen on second thoughts. When I tackle a job I like to finish it. At present, so far as I can see, your case is not so hopeless as you seem to fancy, and with a bit o' luck you'll find a cure. Only, I'm no' prescribing. There's some cures that can only be found by looking for, and some you'll never find with seeking. They come unbidden, in their own time and way. You'll have to bide."

And beyond that cryptic saying he refused to go. Only, as he was leaving the cabin, he turned about and, with a sagacious nod of the head, reminded the young captain that much might happen between the beginning and the end of a voyage. "You can never tell," he added. "I've seen more than one life twisted upside down in a quarter of an hour." Over his shoulder he fired a final warning. "The sea has a powerful grip, laddie. I'm not sure about her letting you go."

IV.

Of the power of its grip the sea, in its own inexorable fashion, proceeded to give convincing proof. His cargo discharged at Montreal, Captain Gray was ordered to take his ship in ballast to New York, where a freight for the Bermudas awaited him. Thence he went back to the Hudson, and now, instead of loading for one of the home ports, he was sent off on the long trail to the Pacific. But in spite of the delay, through all the dragging hours he kept faith with himself. So far from weakening under the sapping attack of time, as Macdonald secretly hoped, his resolution steadily hardened—was firmer at the end than the beginning. The cruise became stamped as The Voyage of the Last Things. When the *Argonaut* steamed out of Valparaiso harbor he rejoiced that at length he had struck the homeward track; at the end of that tremendous beat round the Horn, as the black headland dropped astern, repellent as ever, a grim symbol of challenge to all seafarers, he confided to the chief his sense of gratitude that Cape Stiff had no more bad dreams to give him; when they rounded the Northwest Lightship into the Mersey he breathed deeply and murmured his thanksgiving: "The river. The finish. A sailor no more. Done with the sea forever—and the terror—and the risk." And so when the ship was comfortably tucked away in dock and the crew had been paid off he professed to be greatly amused by the thought that if ever he trusted himself to the sea again it would be as a passenger.

"You mean to bide by your fool's notion, then?" Macdonald demanded, almost fiercely, whereupon Gray took an envelope from his locker and held it up. "There it is, signed and sealed. My resignation. I'm going to the owners now. In an hour I'll be adrift."

"Then," Macdonald declared, "I'm taking back what I said aboot finding a cure for—your complaint. There won't be any cure when you've handed in your ticket. You'll be a hopeless case."

For the first time in their comradeship they ceased to be friendly. All the softer lines in Macdonald's face grew hard, his eyes flashed a flood of stinging words. Half a dozen of those words released would probably have hurled them apart, kept them apart forever, but in time Macdonald recognized the explosive peril of speech and not

one of them escaped. "I'll bide till you're ready and we'll go ashore in company," he said, and nothing more. Together then, a little later, they passed down the gangway; in silence they threaded the twisting path of the wharves, and when they reached the gates they faced about and Macdonald held out his hand. "Here's good-by and good luck," he said; "and if ever you're in need of a friend either with advice or the helping hand, you'll not need to think twice about where to look for him."

"In spite of the fact that I'm a——"

"Because of the fact," Macdonald gravely corrected, "that I've found you a likable lad, even though you have got one very foolish weakness which you might outgrow if you'd give yourself a chance. Till we docked the boat I'd hopes, but I must confess that your bit paper has knocked them all into kingdom come."

Thus, on the flags in front of the grimy customhouse they parted, Macdonald bearing away for the station with his sister's home in Aberdeenshire as his ultimate goal, and Dixon Gray for the office in Water Street, where an hour's wordy contest left the head of the firm bewildered and disappointed, and Gray a free man.

He had yet to learn, however, that freedom was not power. Indeed, by degrees he painfully discovered that life had a large stock of surprises in store, and one of these it presented ten months later when it set the feet of the captain and the engineer upon converging tracks, and once more threw them up against each other at Liverpool hard by the gates of Wapping Dock. Looking neither to the right hand nor the left, his thoughts apparently in the clouds, Gray would have passed through without seeing his old comrade, but the heavy clap of a hand on the shoulder brought him sharply round and there was Alec Macdonald again, his face aglow, the shine in his eyes proclaiming his joy. And Gray also declared himself glad, delighted beyond measure, though even a child would have detected the fact that his assurances were tainted by an element of restraint which suggested that the meeting was not altogether to his liking. But Macdonald's friendship was too real to be lightly spurned, too rich also for such a mood to live for longer than a hasty moment, and in a trice they were shaking hands for the second time over the chance that had cast them together again.

"You'll observe that I've resumed the livery, Mac," said the captain, calling attention to his sea togs, and in response to the chief's question he nodded his head.

Yes, that was it—he had returned to the sea. Not because he had found its call too powerful for resistance, but because the land had rejected his overtures. It would not have him. He had been defeated—badly. He had learned that it was one thing to plan a new start in life and quite another thing to carry the purpose into effect. Though he ought to have known. There was nothing he was cut out for now except looking after a ship. The sea had made him one of its slaves. He had knocked at all sorts of doors and found every one locked. Nobody wanted him. How could they?—an untrained man. Why should they want him—with labor so plentiful and berths so few? He had left no stone unturned, no door untried—all manner of trades and professions—but he could not point to a single job that he was fit to take up. And so he had come back to the sea and the life from which he had fled.

"And the firm's given you another ship." Macdonald took that for granted. "Of course, they'd be mighty glad. They always set a lot of store by you. But, man, why didn't they let you have the old *Argonaut?* Yon's an awful skipper that's sailing her now."

"The firm!" Gray laughed bitterly. "They had found they could do without me. They saw no reason to doubt that I was still a very fine fish, but they had discovered others in the sea equally good."

"Do you mean to tell me that they turned you down?" Macdonald flared.

"I mean to tell you that they regretted there were no vacancies, but they would put my name on their waiting list. Only the awkward part is that your name on a list won't give you a square meal, nor find you in togs and shoe leather, nor make a bed for you to sleep in; and so, after waiting longer than I had any fancy for, I've taken the only thing that offered. A wretched old tub. She's been lying over at Birkenhead for months—been condemned—crow's-feet painted on her hull by the Board of Trade. And, seeing that she's not equal to the lowest British standard, she's found salvation under a foreign flag. Used to be known as the *Sea Pearl*, and now she's the *Nan-Ling*. I'm fitting her out for the China Sea. What

d'you say to having a look at the brute? I've five minutes' business here and then I'm going across the river."

Here, then, is the record of Gray's return to the sea, or at any rate the skeleton of the story. The bones he clothed with flesh on the passage out, for it happened that a week after their meeting Macdonald entered the cabin of the "brute," and, placing his bag on the table, proceeded with mock solemnity to introduce himself.

"I've come aboard, sir. Ma name's Alexander Macdonald, an' I'm from Aberdeenshire. There's my ticket if you want to see it, and I'm the new engineer."

A moment of bewildered silence, and then Gray broke into a storm of protest. "You mustn't think of it, Mac. You mustn't do it. Giving up the *Argonaut* for this lump of bagwash. And all for——"

By way of indicating that he had come aboard to stay Macdonald calmly hung up his hat and coat. "Don't fash yourself," he said. "I've seen worse boats than this. And I wanted a change. Yon skipper of the *Argonaut*—he's an awful man." An hour later, down in the gloomy depths of the engine room, grimly surveying the machinery which now lay in his keeping, he repeated the first clause of his verdict. "Aye, aye, I've seen worse ships, though I don't call to mind where; and I've forgot their names. But she's a most interesting craft and I can see some grand possibeelities in the trip. There's even a chance of the skipper finding a cure for his old complaint."

V.

Having made one profession of faith in the potentialities of the great god Chance aboard the *Argonaut* as she worried over the waste of the Grand Banks, and a second in the engine room of the *Nan-Ling* at Birkenhead, Macdonald, so far as I am aware, paid no further court to the deity until that night, as the ship lumbered across the Bay of Bengal, when he called upon the stars to bear witness that "the skipper had still got his chance." After which he prayed that "the laddie might be kept from playing the fool." He was clearly well pleased, if not with himself, at any rate with the circumstance which had turned his yarning to that fragment of volcanic rock and sand and matted jungle which lies within a circle whose line might touch Luzon at the top and the Banda Straits at the bottom, with Saigon and Gilolo on opposite sides, and is known to the sailors of the Eastern seas as Dane's Island. And the springs of memory having thus been touched, Gray, in the fullness of his confidence, had told him the story of Margaret Dane.

This brings me then to that sinister day when the *Nan-Ling*, her hatches battened down, a fair head of steam showing in her gauges, lay to an anchor in the harbor at Swatow, awaiting the order of release. But her captain showed no fancy for the open sea, and while his crew of nondescripts hid themselves away from the throttling heat he spent quite half his time in front of the barometer in his cabin. And he was frowning at the portentous proclamation on the dial when Macdonald descended upon him.

"I'm thinking," the chief engineer said, "that if we're not likely to get under way I'll clean myself up and have a spell ashore. There's a man I'd like to see."

"I'm staying where I am," Gray sullenly snapped. "Look at the glass. Did you ever see such a drop? And still falling. Three sixteenths in an hour. Who'd leave a safe harbor in face of that—especially in these waters? Just fancy pitching yourself into a cyclonic storm in Formosa Straits. Sheer madness. Besides," as though defending himself against attack, "I'm not the only one. There are half a dozen skippers who won't face what's coming any more than me."

"Oh, that's all right," Macdonald airily replied. "I'm not setting myself up in the seat of judgment. You're the skipper and you ought to know. And it's no business of mine."

"Of course not," Gray snapped. "As you say, I'm the skipper and I've to make my own laws. Though I suppose that whatever I do will be wrong. That's the way of the sea—it's gross unfairness. I'm wasting time by sheltering in port, and if I take the ship out and lose her I'll stand a jolly good chance of having my ticket canceled—providing I don't get lost myself into the bargain."

"Ah, well," drawled Macdonald as he turned away, "it's your toss. And, of course, if it's the ship you're thinking about ——" He checked his speech as he saw the blood rush swiftly into Gray's face, but whether the thrust were intended or not, the words had sped upon their shattering

course and he made no attempt to divert them. As for his stay ashore it lasted only an hour, and he explained his speedy return as dictated by expediency rather than by choice. "There's no telling when the blow'll begin," he said, "and I thought I'd better get aboard while I could."

Grumbling about the sweltering discomfort of everything he stretched himself out on the settee and lay for a quarter of an hour with his eyes closed, while Gray lounged back in his chair, his body limp and resistless, overwhelmed by the atmospheric oppression, the furnace heat, the breathlessness, his brain dominated by an odd medley of thoughts. At that moment, indeed, thought was the only force with any virility; for the rest life seemed to have become suspended; it was just as though in all the world there was nothing but a tremendous silence. And so he abandoned himself willingly to a spell of brooding inertia and when at last the calm was disturbed by a dull booming, something familiar and close at hand, he did nothing more than glance indifferently at Macdonald and wonder why he should have thought it worth while to worry himself with talk. About a couple of junks too—two preposterous Chinese junks. As if they could have the slightest interest for anybody aboard the *Nan-Ling*. It was so utterly unlike old Mac to give way to such fancies, but no doubt this maddening heat had upset him, knocked him off his balance. The first fact picked out by Gray's drowsy listening was that Macdonald suspected something fishy about the junks. Not that he knew anything for certain—nothing beyond a few scraps of gossip he had pieced together, odds and ends picked up here and there while ashore and more since his return. He was afraid that without intent he had been playing the eavesdropper, and probably there was nothing in the business, nothing to worry about. Though he couldn't get away from the yarn Ah Fang had been spinning to him. But for that he would have put the whole rigmarole down for an empty Oriental fable. And even Ah Fang wasn't above suspicion. Anyhow, granting that everything was true, it was most unlikely that the junks would ever get through the blow that was coming on. And he hoped they wouldn't, for he would be desperately sorry if anything happened to old man Dane.

"Dane!" The name was charged with volcanic power. At one stroke all Dixon Gray's lethargy was shattered, the man converted to a palpitating note of interrogation. "Dane!" he repeated, bolt upright now in his chair. "What have your blessed junks got to do with him? What's the riddle, anyhow?"

"It's beyond me," Macdonald gloomily confessed. "Mebbe what I've been hearing was all nonsensical balderdash, that being the case with most of the havers you hear; but all the same it fits in pretty well with some of the queer doings in these parts. As I've told you, I only picked up a few bits of shaking, the interpretation thereof being that these two junks are piratical craft and are skippered by Mister Chung Won. And I needn't remind you of the manner of man he is. Sort of first-class devil. Terror of the seas. Anything else you like, so long as you put plenty of hot stuff in. As for the port he's bound for and the plan he's working by, I'll fetch Ah Fang, and you can have it yourself at firsthand. I've no doubt that a crown counsel'd be able to pick his evidence to pieces, but it's the most that seems to be available."

A swift glance as he left the cabin showed him that in the space of a few seconds the captain's face had turned a dusky tinge, that his eyes were ablaze with the fires of incredulity and horror; but Macdonald paid no further heed, and was soon back again with the Chinese, who proved anything but a docile witness, and was chiefly animated by a panicky sense of concern for his own safety.

"Me Klistian. Me velly good Chinaman. Klistian Chinaman," he nervously protested when Macdonald bade him "tip his yarn about Chung Won and his junks." His eyes darting from one man to the other, fingers nervously twisting and twining, he sought refuge in a profession of complete ignorance. "Me no catchee catchee anything. Men talkee talkee. Ah Fang listen. That all. No savvy."

"And what was it you heard when you listened?" Gray demanded. "Come, out with it. You'll not get hurt for the truth, but—if you lie!"

The pause was charged with terrific threat and Ah Fang knew it. Still washing his hands with invisible soap, his eyes never at rest, he plunged into a rambling, tangled tale. "Men talkee talkee at Kling's. Say Chung Won velly bad man, him pilate, shoot

an' chop chop with long piecee knife. Take women away. Always take women. Chung Won muchee muchee chief. Him going to Dane Island to kill Mista Dane. Men say Dane velly lich. Plenty heap money. Big box. Heap money bellied. Pilate take allee money and killee people, but not killee women. Pilate plenty big fellow. Him strong. Muchee muchee pilate." Ah Fang spread out his fingers fanwise and shook his head dolorously. "Him kill and burn. No more store. No Dane. Allee same gone."

At the end of a cross-examination, on which even the attorney general might have plumed himself, the Chinese glided silently away, and Macdonald pronounced a counsel of despair.

"If the beggar's telling the truth, and the junks weather the storm, it's all up with Dane. You heard what he said—they've been gone two days. A grand start. So there's nothing to be done that I can see. By rights the old man ought to be warned, but there isn't a gunboat within sixty miles and the island doesn't run to a telegraph wire. So I s'pose he'll just have to take his chance. The wonder is that they haven't tried it on long before. He's no right to have pitched his camp on such a howling wilderness of a God-forsaken spot."

That this was intended for his final word Macdonald showed by the way he settled in the corner of the settee, evidently prepared to take his ease. But it was the last moment of idleness he was destined to know for many crowded hours. For a few seconds Gray made no sound—simply stood there brooding, staring through the port without seeing anything, the hard molding of his face, his whole bearing that of a man grappling with a crisis of magnitude. And then suddenly he became galvanized into passionate activity. "What's your steam pressure, Mac?" he sharply demanded, and was told that there could be a full head in an hour.

"Then in half an hour I'll get the anchor," he announced. "And I'll want you to shake your old box of tricks up for all they're worth," he added.

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"That we're going to sea."

Bewilderment stamped on his face, Macdonald slowly rose. "But," he ventured, "look at the glass," and found that he had fired a mine.

"Damn the glass!" Gray hotly cried. "There are worse things at sea than bad weather. Man alive, what do you take me for? Think of those junks. If they should reach Dane's Island first. All that it means!"

Two hours later the *Nan-Ling* was shouldering her way heavily through a sullen sea, while her captain paced the bridge and the mate yapped fretfully against the scheme of things. "If the old tub stands this she'll stand anything. That glass. Five sixteenths, sir. In an hour. Never saw such a rapid drop before. Though that isn't all. There's this," and his hand waved a half circle. "You can almost taste it; it's so devilish thick."

The gesture was eloquently expressive. It embraced all that Gray was seeing and feeling. That profound calm, the flatness of the sea, its tremendous flatness, without a ripple or a curl, without anything except its feeble labored lift, no life in it, its very movement suggesting impotence rather than energy. For it was so unlike the sea. That was the disconcerting truth—its unlikeness. There was its color too, patches dull as the skin of a mummy, vast flakes of lusterless brass; the sky that seemed to have lost its height and in the deadness of its tones was like the sea; the windlessness, the sticky silence, the heavy air that scorched as the breath of Tophet.

Again and again the mate lifted up his voice in querulous complaint but it is doubtful whether Gray heard a word of it. All his thought, his watchfulness, were concentrated on that menacing immensity and its allied powers not yet revealed; and he was watching with the grim, resolute purpose of one bent on wresting from the foe his secret, compelling him to expose his hand, his design and his resources. And in the end he had his reward. When Nature changed her expression, like a woman passing from sullen brooding to the fierce passion of uncontrollable wrath, his eyes were on her face and he knew that the hour of trial was at hand. Into the bronze a purple tinge subtly crept, the edge of the horizon deepened to a dingy umber, and Gray turned to the mate with a string of orders.

"Better have the decks cleared," he said. "All loose stuff stowed away. Extra lashings on everything. Lifelines rigged up. Then come back here and stand by for what's coming."

VI.

For himself, or about himself, as he waited on the bridge of the *Nan-Ling* for the impending onslaught, Dixon Gray had no thought. Nor had he any taste for an excursion into the realm of self-analysis. His attention was surrendered absolutely to his ship and his mission. Was the steamer equal to the call that was about to be made upon her? Would he reach the island in time? Beyond these two problems there was none other that mattered. Even in that terrific hour when the tempest leaped upon them out of the ocean night's black throat, and he clung to the bridge rail alone, lost in abysmal gloom, solid walls of water sheering athwart his course, he had no other thought—simply to hold on and accomplish the task he had taken up. Once, about halfway through the night, just as he had left the shelter of the wheelhouse for the tremendous tumult outside, he felt his arm tightly gripped, and the voice of Macdonald clamored by his ear, many of his words picked from his lips by the wind and swept away. "Eh man, captain, is it you? What? This—wind—throttles everything. Thought —see—how getting along. It's awful below. How—up here?"

Sharp and confident came the response: "First rate, Mac. Nothing to worry about. Worse to come—lot worse, but—old boat facing it finely so far and——" The crash of another comber on the deck applied a full point to his statement and the two men clung to each other in the darkness until the flood had swirled away. "That's what—like up here," Gray grimly bellowed. "And—nothing to what we're steaming to meet. Cyclone, you know—circular—may run through the edge—or—hit it—center."

"All right." The chief relaxed his grip. "Drive her through it. I'll no mind—fetch t'other side. Seen enough up here to satisfy me. Away back—drier shop."

He had seen enough to satisfy. Though Gray caught the words he missed their double meaning; fancied that Macdonald spoke only of the storm. And he had greater work to do than spread himself out in idle chatter. He was the captain—the man on whom everything depended, success or disaster, life or death. He was supremely conscious of the fact, conscious in a way which marked the moment out from any other. Many times before had he realized his power, but always as a burdensome yoke. Now it gave him a sense of exaltation; he was proud of it, gloried in his responsibility. There was much to be done out here in the raging waste of the China Sea and he was the man to do it. He did not think all this or any of it, rather did he feel it, his kingship. For once he was sure of himself. Whatever doubt oppressed him was of the ship. He knew her age, her frailties, her decrepitude; knew that he must drive her to the limit of her endurance, demand as much from her as from a ship of the highest register.

That this phase of the tempest was but the prelude to the real onslaught he was assured. Experience, coupled with his study of the law of storms, afforded no loophole for comforting doubt. Nor was he tricked by the manner of the attack. Some men would have said that nature had descended to a bluff, the sort of thing to fool a novice; but the moment Gray was sure of the fact, that brief slackening in the wind's persistence, he clambered up the slant of the bridge with a warning for the mate.

"Look alive, Marquis," he cried, making a trumpet of his hands, "this isn't the beginning of the end. It's the beginning of the start. The real thing now."

That was all. His counsel of caution. His message delivered he sidled away again; and Marquis, peering into the tenebrous environment, picked him out vaguely etched against the background of the night, fronting the storm, watching it, waiting for the advance of its reserve battalions. For every man aboard the night thenceforward was one of appalling isolation. They ceased to be a community, were converted into separate units; there was nothing they could be said to share except their peril. To the two on the bridge, the captain and his mate, all communication was denied; they might have been miles apart, were not really conscious of each other's presence; neither had any assurance of the other's survival. Even in the wheelhouse and down in the engine room the men were sundered entities, working only in unison by instinct and long training; while the crew, penned in their quarters, were in still worse case. For the others at least there was work to do, while these had laid upon them the nerve-racking task of waiting. They were held in the toils of the unseen and the unknown. Their world had lost its stability, its certainties; there was little left except that frantic tumult of motion, the pitch and roll of the

ship, the straining of the hull as she rose, its grinding quiver when she dived and the bared propeller, wrenched from the sea and thrust aloft, broke into a maddened race; and to all these again there was added the smothered crash as fragments of the ship were torn adrift by wind and sea—as if their home, their refuge, was being battered and rent asunder.

Disruption, annihilation piecemeal, this seemed to be the destiny of the *Nan-Ling*, the menace which impelled her captain to grope for the engine-room tube and hurl a disjointed message down its metallic throat. "How—doing—Mac? Bad. Very. Sounds as though ship—going—pieces. If only we could see! Everything—breaking adrift. But go ahead—Dane's Island. You know those pirates. Can't think—stand that."

This was his dominant thought, the master passion that inspired him. The defeat of a malevolent design. That was how it stood with him in those ebonized hours of blindness, and his will remained unaltered when vision was restored by the dawn and he saw what the wind and sea had done to his ship. As all the concealed outlines emerged from absolute nothingness into blurred reality he was amazed that any craft could have suffered such havoc and yet remained afloat. The *Nan-Ling* was unrecognizable. Above the water line nothing looked to be the same. She had lost her identity. Twenty-four hours ago he would have asserted his power to pick her out among a hundred craft, but now she was a stranger. Yesterday she was one of the shabby genteels and now she was a gutter-snipe. Forward, the starboard rail from the fo'c's'le head to the waist had vanished, and to balance this a length on the port quarter was missing, only some spiky jags suggesting that there had ever been a rail at all. Of the boats, the davits had nothing to show except a few trails of rope streaming out to leeward, but the extra lashings of the whaleboat he had kept in chocks on the deck had luckily held. The stanchions might have been pin wire, so little resistance had they exercised; and the deck was almost bare.

Nor was there any token of this being the end. The dawn had merely given them vision without safety or the promise of it. The world was still filled with passion—a roistering distraction of crashing seas and ravening wind; and as for the *Nan-Ling*, all he could claim with certitude was that so far she had not failed him. But by noon he detected a weakening in the assault, and when night again infolded them he knew that he had beaten at least one of the foes for which he had risked so much. But only one. The secret of the junks and their crews was still hidden, and the *Nan-Ling* having survived one test, he now subjected her to another. She had proved her strength and now she must give him speed. Through the storm he had concentrated all his skill and energy on the conquest of his elemental foe, now he focused everything on the subjugation of space. He lived not for the voyage but for the goal. All other interests, desires, duties, he barred outside, right to the very end of the hazardous enterprise.

His landfall was in itself a tribute to Gray's seamanship, a thing of magnificent exactitude. There was no beating about in search of bearings. Two hours before midnight the cry of "Land ho!" rang confidently out, and there, dead ahead, the tip of the island's jagged peak lay darkly etched on the rim of the immense plain.

Low down and far away it presented itself at first only to the keen vision of the unseen watcher posted up aloft, but a quarter of an hour's steaming brought it within the range of those on deck, of the men strung out along the splintered rail, the captain watching in a fever of impatience from the bridge with Macdonald, whom the cry had summoned from his engines, alongside. And at once a confused murmur threw a new note into the ship's rumbling chorus.

"We were making for it," said Lanty Sanderson afterward, "as true as a bullet from a gun."

After his own fashion Macdonald tried to say the same thing in a different way but he might as well have addressed himself to one of the timber heads. For Gray was lost in a realm of his own. Making their approach thus by night the island loomed vaguely across the steel-blue water flood, a place of unreality, in one sense an absolute negation. That peak declared nothing. Whatever life there might be was gathered about its roots. Even for the full revelation the light of day was required, but somehow Dixon Gray never thought of that as in sphinxlike rigidity he stood there searching the ebonized mass as it slowly ascended from the sea and in its progression wiped

out a far-spread constellation of lower stars.

Swiftly too the spirit of the captain took possession of the crew. On every man the brooding sense of mystery laid its spell; the insurgent power of the unknown oppressed them, and moved by a common impulse they hung upon the rail, every nerve tautly strained, every tongue muted.

Not a whisper until the island foothills tossed the sullen signal abroad and a ghastly suspicion drove them to a jabber of speech.

On the bridge the captain kept his vigil now with fists tightly clenched and the glare of horror in his eyes; Macdonald's jaws were working convulsively and the moisture dripped unheeded from his chin; the helmsman no longer toyed with the spokes of the wheel nor marked the compass card. For Dane's Island had lost the slumberous passivity which rested so austerely on the higher peak; on the heights the monotony of night, but down below a fulvous mystery, at first an ethereal glow like the tremulous trail of the dawn and then, over the crest of the clifflike spur that screened the settlement on the seaward side a wave of subdued light fitfully flowed. In itself there was nothing repellent, quite the reverse, a decorative design in a somber setting; but linked with the name of that Chinese pirate whom Macdonald had depicted as "a first-class devil" and "a terror of the sea" it was frightfully charged. Too frightful to be whispered as long as the position of the *Nan-Ling* gave hope a chance. Once let them round the point and then—and then —suspicion flamed into assurance; his voice pitched to a scream one man spoke for the rest:

"My God! It's true. They've fired the place."

Instantly the cry was followed by an imperative command:

"Silence down there. Not another word."

After which Dixon Gray swung round to the telegraph and jammed down the lever. The propeller ceased its ponderous beat and only by the way she had gathered did the ship drive on into the bay.

As a rule the clang of the engine-room bell off the harbor mouth signalizes the end of the journey, but when Gray thrust that lever down there was no element of finality in the action nor yet in his purpose. This was merely a pause. Though that passionate cry, "They've fired the place," might ring as a bitter confession of defeat, he found it nothing more than the proclamation of an appalling discovery. A discovery that dominated the future as much as the past, for it swept all the ground from under his feet, shattered every nebulous plan he had formulated and compelled him to shape anew. His primary need now was time for thought. It was for this that he had stopped his ship.

All through the storm and the tense hours that followed Gray had been bracing himself for the call which the end of the journey might bring, that hour wherein judgment must count for as much as courage, perhaps more. And he believed that he had formulated a scheme to fit every likely contingency. But imagination had utterly failed him. Fire. This was the one devastating power he had never envisaged, the link which rendered the whole chain impotent. Now he seemed to be looking into an immense void. Against this elemental force every other peril he had contemplated was contemptibly dwarfed. Yet the symbol that daunted also encouraged. It suggested that at least he was not too late. But—his handful of men—what could he do?

Only once since they sighted the land had he moved from the corner of the bridge, and here he still remained, fingers fiercely clenched on the rail, shoulders squared, head erect, staring with unblinking steadiness at that glow which from their new angle lay beyond the jungle belt. And all he had to deal with lay clearly outspread. The lie of the land, the perils that beset his approach to the hidden harbor, the inadequacy of his equipment, the untried mettle of his men. Prudence of course bade him wait for the dawn, but this was no time for waiting. The interpretation of that glow he must have before the sun returned. But how? A wicked place, Dane's harbor in the dark. Inaccessible without a pilot. First of all, projecting well out into the bay came two long spits of land, brush-covered almost to the water's edge, just like a pair of natural breakwaters. As for crossing the bar, that was a trifle. There was still the long gullet beyond to navigate, narrow, overhung all the way by thick jungle and none too straight. A place that half a dozen armed men might hold. And Chung Won was not such a fool as to have left it unguarded while he was about his murderous work. Even supposing they forced the passage and

entered the lagoonlike harbor there would still be the landing of the men. A handful against a hundred, possibly two hundred, ferocious devils, bred to fighting, fired by evil passion and the lust of loot.

At no period in his career can Gray's brain have worked at such prodigious speed as during that brief space taken by the *Nan-Ling* in passing from the open sea to the roadstead. Before she ceased to make way, abandoned her glide to a gentle lift and roll, he had experienced one of those mental miracles which only an extreme emergency can work, had gathered in a succession of revealing flashes the magnitude of his task. Now, grasping it all, he was tempted to slue the *Nan-Ling* about, head for the passage, and venture everything on a single hazard. A thousand-to-one chance. No doubt about that. But they came off sometimes. Audacity. That was the thing that paid. Some forgotten tags of philosophy leaped to life, his brain throbbed with them, reminders that accomplishment lay chiefly with the men who took risks. Yielding to the impulse he turned about, his hand again sought the telegraph lever, another second and the finger would have swung across to "Full Speed," but as swiftly as it was born the temptation passed. He saw that success depended on stealth, that surprise represented his only chance. And the first thing to be done was to get ashore with all the men that could be spared. And guns. Thank Heaven there were enough guns to go round.

Glancing over the rail he discovered the crew massed just forward of the bridge, heads thrown back, every eye riveted on himself, and then he made his first call.

"Mac," he said, "I wish you'd go below and tell the firemen to stop their racket. However they keep the fires going they must do it without noise."

His next command was for Marquis. "Mister Mate, see that all lights are put out. Take the side lights in, haul down the masthead lamps, have all ports closed, not a gleam anywhere, nor a match struck. Those devils ashore have eyes like fell cats and there may be a hundred on the watch.

"Oh," as the mate moved away, "keep the men where they are. But no noise. Sound travels far on a night like this."

Searching his face when he again mounted to the bridge the chief, although he had no light but that of the stars, found something which seemed to please him well. "Man," he said, "I don't know what you're up to, but whatever it is I'm standing by. And there's my hand on it."

A tight grip was all that Gray had time for. He was occupied now in reckoning up his crew. An unlikely lot. That was what he had always thought them. Dock wallopers. Packet rats. Poor stuff. Only good enough for rough work aboard a ship like the *Nan-Ling*. And yet there was an indefinable something in their faces that heartened him. Whatever the call they were not shrinking from it. And almost as soon as he spoke he knew what the response would be.

"Look here, my lads," he said. "This is a big job. I'm going ashore. There are women in peril. That's enough. We've got to try and save them. At once too. Mustn't wait for daylight. Our best chance of getting ashore is in the dark. Mustn't let them know we're here. Surprise. That's the word. Our only chance. I want eighteen of you to go with me. If you will. If you won't I'm going alone. Eighteen's all we can spare. That only leaves ten to work the ship, but if every man pulls his best they can do it. His best and a bit over. It's always the bit over that wins. But before I ask any man to volunteer you must know what's to be done—what's to be faced."

The rumble of a deep voice broke into his speech. One of the men moved forward, held up his hand appealingly. "Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said, "but never mind that. There's no call. We're signing on for this trip without knowing what's ahead. Leastways, you're not going by yourself. I'm bearing company."

"An' me."

"Same here."

"I'm coming too."

They were all of one mind, swayed by the same instinct. In their eagerness they forgot the demand for silence, shuffled impetuously forward, broke into a deep-toned clamor, and so were rewarded with a storm of abuse. Though profoundly moved, proud of his crew for the first time since they shipped with him, Gray was controlled by the tyranny of time. He had none to spare for emotion or heroics. Only to give his orders, pick his men and be gone.

They would land in the whaleboat. A long pull and a tight pack, but there was

no other way. He would steer for a point half a mile east of the harbor, and once ashore they would push through that belt of jungle and so come upon the settlement from the northerly side. One whistle would be the signal to loose off their guns. Their tongues as well. Shout like blue blazes. Make the noise of a hundred men if they could. Two blasts on the whistle and they would leave cover and charge. After that it must be every man for himself. And that was all—except special instructions to the mate and the chief. No time now for chewing the rag. Only—once more—it might be a tremendous thing they were in for. Hard fighting. No quarter. Perhaps death for some, perhaps for all. Now he would come down and make his pick.

And then the boats. And the guns. And that hurried council on the bridge while the ship was steaming toward the land in which the captain disclosed to Macdonald and Marquis the part he had planned for them in the enterprise. "You'll be working more in the dark than me," he said, "but that can't be helped. One hour after we leave you will steam up athwart the harbor entrance; an hour and a half and you—get to work. After that you exercise your own judgment. If I don't come back, Marquis, you take command and return to Swatow. Now we'll heave to. The shore shouldn't be more than a couple of miles away."

Landing on a gently shelving strip of beach they drew the boat up the sand and Gray gathered the men about him for their final orders. At first they must keep well together; nearing their goal they must spread themselves out—at least fifty paces—tread like cats—keep their fire till he gave the signal. And now—go ahead.

Save for the dull crunching of their feet in the sand their advance was soundless, all the myriad voices of the night were still. Not so much as the rustle of a leaf came floating from that black forest toward which they moved, nor the sleepy chirp of startled bird, the nocturnal chatter of prowling beast. All life indeed appeared to have been scared away. It was just as though nature had ceased to breathe. An aisle of death and the dead. Before they passed from the open, Gray, straining his ears for the slightest sound, had abandoned all but the flimsiest shred of hope, and passion blending with despondency impelled him to a terrible vow of vengeance.

And then just as they reached the forest fringe the isle became articulate, the crack of a rifle volleyed through the void, another and another, a gasping sort of cry, a muffled shrilling of voices, a dull thud, the spatter of an irregular fusillade. Though they knew it not each man quickened his steps.

Nor was this the only change. Even the forest was different. He had looked for inky darkness, a blind march through a closely netted tangle of brush and clinging creeper, but far ahead the immense blank was softly suffused in light, and half the difficulty of the advance was dispelled, though the danger of discovery was enhanced. The deeper their penetration, moreover, the stronger grew the glow. Gray noted with satisfaction that none of the men were taking unnecessary risks, that all were spreading themselves and accepting the chance of cover afforded by the tree trunks.

Halfway through they topped the slight rise in the land and no longer did their adventure pulsate with interrogation. At least half of the mystery was made plain. Though vision was still broken by the close packing of the trees and the dense undergrowth they could see that part of the settlement was in flame. A couple of houses in the center were still burning, and it was the fitful glare of these which had signaled to them out at sea and illumined their uncertain path on land. Nothing more than this at first, no detail, only a chaotic impression, the ruin of accomplished warfare. No sign of life either, no movement. So far as it was revealed the clearing was deserted, but the crackle of the guns still rang in their ears, and thus warned they made their advance with still greater caution. And at last, as the forest began to thin away their vision gathered power and they learned at least in part what had befallen Stephen Dane and his vanished company.

A charred and smoldering pile by the near end of the clearing was all that remained of Trantor's bungalow—Trantor the easy-going mystery man, who had pitched his camp on the island for reasons which no one had ever been able to fathom. The missionary's house adjoining reminded Gray of one of those reeking pyres he had seen on the banks of the Ganges. The little tin church was a distorted lump of scrap. Yet for these he had nothing at the moment but a roving glance. Every thought and aspiration was centered in that next block, the

only building in the isle of any pretension to real solidity. Dane's store. Margaret's home. And when he saw that it was still intact, its overhead balcony packed with boxes, sacks, all sorts of odds and ends for defense, its windows shuttered, his heart lifted exultingly.

"We're not too late!" he gasped. "We're not too late. There's still a chance!"

Though he came within an ace of regretting it. Overjoyed by his discovery he parted for a spell with all that subtlety and prudence he had practiced so well up to this stage and was plunging along, heading for supreme disaster, when a movement on the ground in front of the store arrested him. There were men there. Chinese. Some dead. And others wounded. Through the bushes he saw that one had wriggled up on to hands and knees and was trying to crawl away, whereupon he turned to his men and held up his hands. "Down, my lads, down," he hissed, himself dropping into the thick brush and was relieved to see the others follow his lead. And then he proceeded to fill up the gaps in his survey.

The surprise planned by the pirates had failed, so much was quite clear. And so he reckoned that Dane had been enabled to draw some of his companions into the store and garrison the place, which, built as it was plumb against a solid cliff and flanked by other buildings, could only be assailed from the front. The defenders had taken heavy toll, too. Out in the open lay the proof, twenty blue-robed Orientals, some huddled in a heap just where the bullets had brought them down, others with limbs ridiculously outspread, that creature creeping away, toppling over, creeping again, sidewise like a crab all the time, and two or three others, their limbs convulsively twitching. But not another living being anywhere in sight. Yet he was convinced they were there. Not far off. Most likely at that very moment hundreds of malevolent eyes were watching with all his own intentness. Watching Dane's store toward which the pirates were burning their way. For this he felt sure was their design. Foiled in their first direct attack they were now outflanking the garrison by destroying one after another the intervening buildings. But where could they be hiding? He must have that mystery cleared up before he budged another yard. It would be crass folly to expose his crew to an invisible foe. Where could they be? Not long was he destined to wait for an answer.

Right ahead in the black gloom on the far side of the harbor jetty a gleam seemed to spring from nowhere, then another and another, dancing, wayward flares, separate points, a myriad, which grew and kept on growing and spreading out until they made that distant patch of beach a sea of seething flame. Only a little while ago he had called this place the Isle of Death, now he saw it as the Isle of Fire. And its sound became more terrifying than its silence. For while the waves of that flaming sea were still flowing a voice screamed a command, the earth spouted men, a shrieking, maddened horde. And every man carried a flaming torch.

Sharply deploying by the end of the jetty the mob charged across the open; the guns concealed behind Dane's barricade spat viciously, five of the pig-tailed furies leaped grotesquely, pitched head forward and were trampled under foot by their comrades. And Dixon Gray made the first of his two mistakes. Believing that they meant to rush the store and fire it at close quarters he held his fire too long. If it were possible he meant that every one of his eighteen rifles should get its man. And while he waited that commanding voice again shrilled above the pandemonium. The rush stopped, the blazing brands surged backward, and then a mighty heave sent them curling through the air, an incandescent avalanche. Many of them fell short, many went sailing wide, many others were extinguished by the impact, but scores found the building and a huge cascade of sparks flared aloft.

From every loophole the guns again hurled their bullets, but the little garrison, blinded by smoke and fire, had lost their target; a woman screamed, Dane's balcony broke into flame, the pirates turned about and were making at a trot for their cover when: "Now lads, let 'em have it," Gray bellowed, and the crackle of musketry responded; a dozen of the Chinese twisted in their tracks, tossed their arms and fell, while panic routed the rest and they madly fled, filling the night with howls of terror.

Then Gray made his second mistake. He fell to the lure of a flying foe. His whistle screamed its double call: whooping like schoolboys his men dashed from their shelter to the open. His blood was up; for the first time in his life he thrilled to the lust

of battle, a blind fury possessed him as he led the way hotfoot toward the belt of trees on the farther side. Close behind him came his men, some of them swinging their rifles aloft, roaring, laughing, cheering, careless of death, yet with death rioting in their hearts. And they were three parts of the way across before Gray realized the folly of it all, the barrenness. His prey had escaped him. Before him there was nothing but the black mass of trees; on his right the steely waters of the lagoon, dappled with the twinkling lights of stars, its surface broken only by the blunt projection of the jetty and a couple of junks moored hard by the end. Deeply chagrined he called a halt and stared sharply about, uncertain of his next move. On his left there were the blazing houses, behind him Dane's store, its defenders feverishly working now to save it from the same fate, hurling from the balcony all those sacks and packages which the torches had fired. Disappointment touched him with its chilly finger; after that landing, the march, the assault on the store, the call to heroism, success had been too easily won. Anyhow, Chung Won and his cutthroats had vanished, fear yapping at their heels, and those rasping discords of the jungle bore witness to the wildness of their flight. And now for the store.

"We'd better be bearing a hand with that fire, boys," he briskly cried. But the man by his side dropped across his feet, an arrow in his side. Another man started to run, whirled round like a top, and also went down. He heard a voice that sounded a long way off crying something about "those devils coming back;" heard also close at hand the tearing crackle of the brush, realized that the enemy had discovered the weakness of his force. There was only one thing to be done.

"Make for the store, my lads," he bellowed. But he was too late. Like bees from a hive the pirates were already swarming out of the woods and sweeping on to a new attack. Ever since he came ashore he seemed to have been seeing trees and flames; now there was nothing but a host of yellow faces, slitlike eyes, malevolent, glaring with hatred and relentless purpose. Fighters too, masters of the art and well led. The leadership was proved by that swing to the right which in a trice cut off Gray's retreat upon the store.

So this was the end. His life was to finish with failure. Just what it had been all along. Something attempted—nothing done. A few seconds—and—Margaret again would be at the mercy of those fiends. The thought maddened him anew, inspired a last despairing purpose. "Come along, boys, we'll do it yet," he cried, and flung out his hand toward the store. But it was no use. The mob was upon them, the fire of his guns died away, they were at it hand to hand, daggers flashed, fists swung about like flails, bones cracked, men grunted, squealed, cursed. No time for shooting now.

Gripping his rifle by the barrel Gray swung it lustily above his head. Crack—and a man went down, his skull smashed like an eggshell. Crack—another. "One. Two." Gray grimly began his counting. "Three." And then he caught the glint of steel. He flung his gun away and gripped the hand with the dagger, but a set of clawlike fingers settled on his throat and—*swish!*

Like a blazing serpent a rocket shot up hissingly from the sea, curved in across the jungle tops, seemed to hang for a few seconds right overhead, then broke into a crackling cascade of many-colored stars. Swift in pursuit another followed and another and still more, cutting zigzag trails, weaving a crisscross web of luminous threads, embroidering the heavens with a new constellation. And while they flashed their glories up aloft they scattered terror on the earth below. Paralysis fell upon the hands that plied the daggers. Gray felt the strangle hold of those murderous fingers on his throat relax their hold. A scream of terror burst from a hundred throats. A shout of triumph fluttered from a dozen. Next the beat of frantic feet and after that a gust of hysterical laughter and the voice of Pat Murphy as with extended finger he marked the flight: "Holy Moses, look at the show! The cutthroat divils. And only a handful of ship rockets!"

Rockets. Gray picked up the word and turned it over wonderingly. He wanted nothing with rockets; all he wanted was that damned chink, the pressure of whose fingers yet lingered on his throat—wanted to smash him, to crush the life from his body. His brain a welter of confusion, he groped out blindly for his quarry. Another of those fiery messengers soared aloft, and another; again he heard the cheering of

men, caught the sobbing cry of grateful women, and now he remembered. Those rockets. He had clean forgotten them. Part of his own plan too, the part left to Macdonald and the mate. They had to make for the harbor, cruise as close inshore as they thought safe, keep their eyes skinned and ears wide open. If it came to a fight they could not miss hearing some of its sounds. "And when you do," he had commanded, "I want you to blaze off with the ship's rockets as fast as ever you can fire them."

Not that he expected very much from the trick, but chinks were a jumpy lot and easily scared. With the *Nan-Ling* out of sight imagination would have a rare chance; they might even mistake the old tub for a gunboat. Anyhow there would be no harm done. And now he himself was overwhelmed with astonishment.

"The rockets," he stammered. "The rockets. I'd clean forgot them. Good old Macdonald. And good old Marquis. They've saved us. And Margaret, too. Just in time."

Margaret! Once more thought swung away on a new track. Overhead those meteoric allies still curled and crackled and tossed their stars abroad, the forest was a discordant tumult of crazy men, the waters of the lagoon were churned to fury by the mighty strokes of demented villainy swimming off to the junks, and with all this there was the sputter of flames, the spasmodic rattle of gunfire and the exultant shouting of those from whom the menace of death had passed. Yet in none of these things did Dixon Gray find any share. With his fellows he had parted company, was again a being detached, living in a world exclusively his own. One for which Margaret Dane held the key. By the light of the dying fires he closely surveyed her home, every inch of its wide front, its balcony, its roof and every window, but found nothing to answer the longing in his heart. And then he discovered a great throng of people pouring from its door, all that harried company to whom it had given such solid shelter; saw too that the last of the embers which had threatened it were now almost beaten out, broke into a run across the little battlefield, littered with its dead and wounded, found a man whose figure seemed familiar bearing down upon him, and the next moment Stephen Dane, weary-eyed, face blackened, was gripping him by the hand and choking over his thanks.

"Yes, yes," Gray muttered, staring away over the trader's shoulder. "That's all right. Talk by 'n' by. What about—what about Mar——"

"All the folk?" Dane cut in. "We've come through very well. Only lost seven. You see, we had warning. There was a big storm—perhaps it crossed your track—and I reckon it upset their plans. Anyhow, I suspected as soon as they came to an anchor. Gave me time to gather everybody together."

"Of course." Gray's voice was utterly toneless, his eyes firmly focused on that excited throng. "Of course. But how about——"

"Oh, we've managed a lot better than you'd think," Dane broke in again. "Tight packing, to be sure. But it's astonishing what a lot of folk you can stow away in little room. But I'll tell you all about it by 'n' by. No time now. Heaps to be done. Thank Heaven that we're here to do it. It's a rare stroke of luck, captain, that you chanced to come along this way."

"Chance, indeed!" Gray thought resentfully, as Stephen Dane hurried back to his companions, most of whom were manifestly reluctant as yet to venture far from the refuge of the store's open portal. But the sting at once lost all its power when another figure detached itself from that indefinite throng, and here was Margaret herself with hand outstretched to greet him, her garments soiled and torn, her face pitifully strained, the burnish of the fire glow in the hair coiled loosely about her head, a deep wonder glowing in her eyes.

"You!" she breathed very softly, as their hands met in a tight clasp. "You!" Yet not so softly that he could not hear. "Oh, but this is wonderful, to think that it should be you!"

A wave of emotion shook him. "Thank God. You are safe. Thank God," he murmured. His gravity, the intense earnestness of his tone, impressed her deeply. No woman could hear a man speak thus about her without being moved. For a moment, while Gray kept her hand, she held him with her eyes, and then she rained her questions on him. "Tell me why you are here. Is it chance? Or—did you come on purpose? Tell me."

After the manner of those who dwell in

Eastern lands did she address him, one accustomed to command and also to obedient service—but there was supplication also, an eagerness she made no attempt to suppress or disguise. "It is all so strange. That it should be you who have saved us."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell," he stammered. "Just pure luck. I was at Swatow and heard of Chung Won and his gang. They had planned a raid. Here—on the store. Your father's money, and you. It has been a torture, a crucifixion, the thought that I might be too late. All through the storm."

"The storm," she repeated. "That terrible storm. And you—you fought your way through that—for me! And then you fought again—these—for me."

She hung upon the words as though well pleased by the power that lay behind. This was her hour of discovery, the revelation of a stupendous fact. "For me." Very gently, dealing only with herself, she breathed those thrilling words again, and something else which Gray failed to hear, for at this instant a lusty cry of "The junks!" crashed across the clearing, and in silence they watched the two pirate craft which had so strangely brought them together put out once more to sea, their sweeps frantically plied by men who fled from the death their own hands had come to scatter.

Confidence being thus restored, the isle plunged back into its interrupted life and Dixon Gray prepared to bear a hand, but not yet would Margaret Dane let him go. "Please," she pleaded, laying a persuasive hand on his arm. "You must tell me more." And led the way across the clearing to the screen of the woodland fringe, away from all the activity and the prying of curious eyes.

"Now," she began again. "You came to save me. Tell me about it. Everything."

"There's nothing much to tell," he answered, bent on making light of his exploit "We were at Swatow when the gang put out to sea. 'Sandy' Macdonald—he's my chief engineer—and more, my best friend—got wind of what they were up to and wormed the rest out of one of our Chinamen. And we followed. That is all."

"All!" Her lips tossed the word back to him, rejected its assurance. "As if it could be. It is only a fragment. You have not even begun the tale. All this—the plot, its betrayal, your choice, the storm, your voyage, your march through the forest—a story big enough for a book and you crowd it into a dozen words. But then you never did talk well about yourself, Captain Gray, and I'm thinking I shall have to ask this Sandy Macdonald for the rest."

"There is no rest," he insisted. "And Mac is not a reliable witness. Not always. Sometimes he can be the soul of caution, but he has his enthusiasms, and his zeal outruns his discretion. I have given you the facts. There is nothing in it but this—I was lying to an anchor waiting for the storm to break and spend itself when Macdonald heard, and as there was no warship we could warn we came ourselves. There's nothing more to tell. Now you must let me go. There is much work to do. I must be off and at it."

His suggestion of departure she ignored. Almost did it seem that she had forgotten the man, every atom of her interest dominated by his revelation. For against her woman's wit his reticence was powerless, it concealed nothing that really mattered; while for other weapons she had her share in the life of the East, her deep acquaintance with sailormen and the ways of the sea.

"All this for me," she half whispered, a blend of wonder that was almost awe, and assuredly the spirit of joy in her voice. Then she laid a hand on his arm. "You challenged death. Risked your life—everything. You, who—told me once upon a time that you—you—would never ask any woman to take your name because it was the name of a—coward. Do you remember that night? All you told me about yourself, the portrait you painted? I have never forgotten it, not a word. And that was the name you chose—coward. That and Mr. Much Afraid. And yet you have done this thing—for me."

"There has been much joy in the service," he told her, forcing himself to a stiffness of speech and yet for all his strength and grip not quite succeeding. "And now I must bear a hand here and then get back to my ship."

But still she held him. "To think of it!" she said. "All that it means. You will not need to be distressed any longer about your name, nor the—the woman to be ashamed of it. You were wrong, you see. You are not Mr. Much Afraid. You are a brave man, Captain Gray."

"A brave man!" he repeated, not yet comprehending the import of her testimony, all that it involved, its fullness and its promise. He had merely a dim impression that life had somehow changed with him, that he himself was different; but his perspective was all out of focus—formless and intangible. Her eyes strangely ashine the girl stepped back into the deeper shadows and watched him, her fingers tightly interlocked, a passionate intensity in her gaze. It was just as though she commanded him to see himself as she beheld him—the valiant knight and not the craven. Once when she moved Gray thrust out a hand to stay the flight he fancied that she meant; and then at the end of it all—that extremity of silent waiting—she saw the strain fade from his face, knew that the hour of illumination had dawned, and the next moment found herself clasped in his arms.

"My dear," he cried. "I see it all now! It is a new man who has landed on your isle to-night. See what a miracle you have wrought!"

But she refused to accept his tribute, his praise.

"There is no miracle," she protested. "Nothing but just the old, old story. The tale as old as the hills. You will find it in the Book. In the day of your fear you only had yourself. But then Love came, and Love casteth out fear."

VII.

Coming back to his ship as the dawn was flooding the peaks with its glories of pearl, of rose and emerald, the captain of the *Nan-Ling* found her slowly beating about the harbor mouth, and no sooner did he get within hailing distance than Macdonald made a trumpet of his hands and fired a salvo of questions, while Marquis kept the wheel and the crew clustered by the rail expectantly and punctuated the captain's scrappy revelation with boisterous shouts.

"Did you land in time?" Macdonald demanded.

"Only just. Not an hour to spare," he was told.

"And did you see our fireworks?"

"You made a fine show."

"And is the lassie all right?"

"She's waiting to thank you for those rockets."

"And the lads?"

Hardly for a king's ransom could Dixon Gray have answered that question by speech. All that he could bring himself to was the holding up of one hand with fingers outspread, but it was enough to tell the others that five of their comrades would not come back.

By this time the boat was dropping alongside and Gray was preparing to spring for the ladder when Macdonald spoke again.

"Bide a wee. Before you come aboard you might pull forrad and see what our stem looks like."

"The stem," Gray repeated. "Why—what——"

"Oh, it's Marquis here," the chief dryly volunteered. "That rocket business didn't satisfy him. He wanted more fingers than one in the pie. And so, when Mister Chung Won and his fleet put out Marquis turned the old tub into a first-class cruiser. A sharp turn of the wheel and full speed ahead—and the trick was done."

"D'ye mean to tell me——"

"That for one half of those devils their pirate days are over. Only one junk got away. The *Nan-Ling* rammed the other. You ought to find her marks on our stem. And I fancy she's strained a plate or two by the water we've pumped out."

An hour later down in the cabin the chief pronounced an emphatic benediction on the judgment of Margaret Dane.

"Man, but that's a bonny way of putting it," he declared when Gray told him what the girl had said. And then he turned it over. "'Love casteth out fear,'" and kept on repeating the words as though loath to let them go. "D'ye know," he said at last, "I can see that this is the very thought I've had at the back of my own mind all the time, only I was too slow in the uptake to dress it out in proper words. She's got the gift of vision, has this lassie of yours, and the power of speech as well. 'Love casteth out fear.' A full interpretation in four very modest words. And now we'd better turn to, for——"

But the captain waved the suggestion aside.

"Look, here, Mac," he demanded, "was this the cure you had in mind that night aboard the *Argonaut?*"

"It was, my son," Macdonald answered. "You see, I'm not saying that you've lived a selfish life, but you were fearful self-centered. You'd neither kith nor kin to fend

for nor take thought about, nor any other responsibeelity to steel you to high endeavor. And it isn't good for a man to have his vision turned in upon himself. It narrows him, helps to make him little and keep him so. And in some cases it breeds fear. In a general way—mind, I'm not saying it's always so, but in a general way—bravery has its beginning in taking thought for others. A hen by herself wad run away from a rat, but if she's got a brood of chickens she'll stand up to an elephant. And that I reckon is how it was with yourself. You were aye thinking about Dixon Gray, and the saving of your own skin grew to be your first law. Even so you might have won through without raising any ghosts, only you'd been fitted with a high-pressure imagination, one of extra-driving power, and right from the beginning you'd a mighty poor chance of escape. The rest of your history can be packed in little room—the gods have been good to you; they've led you by a long trail to this bit island, and they've given you something to live for and fight for. Likewise, they've given you a better law. Self-preservation's very poor stuff."

"Endorsed in Blank," a fine short story by William Hamilton Osborne, in the next issue.

MR. CUMMINS IS ACCOMMODATED

WHEN Albert Baird Cummins first took his seat in the upper house of Congress as a senator from Iowa he felt lonesome. Although he had been in the Iowa legislature and governor of his State the sagacious gloom that lengthened the senatorial faces around him sent his heart into his boots, made him sad and homesick. The statesmen were too busy to gossip with him. He sat neglected.

Striving to hide his greenness he took up the copy of the Senate calendar which lay on his desk and saw that the postal-savings-bank bill was listed under the head of "unfinished business" for that day. Just as he was absorbing this information Senator Winthrop Murray Crane of Massachusetts, then the gumshoe artist and citizen fix-it of the august chamber, came up and introduced himself to the Iowan.

"I see, senator," Cummins confided to him, "that our unfinished business to-day is the postal-savings-bank bill. I'm strongly opposed to some of its provisions. Frankly, I can't let that measure go to a vote without voicing my objections to it. However, I'm a new man here; I've just taken the oath; and I know it's bad form for a greenhorn to jump up and deliver a speech in the Senate the first day he arrives. Can't you help me? Can't you have consideration of the bill put off until a later date?"

"That's a hard job," confessed Crane in his famous whisper, "but I'll see what I can do, just because I like you. Wait here."

Cummins spent an hour in painful suspense, after which Crane reappeared. "It's all right," he said, the drooping ends of his melancholy mustache tickling the Iowan's ear. "I took it up with Senator Aldrich, and he's so anxious to have harmony and, particularly, to have you work with us in all things that after considerable difficulty he's arranged to postpone action on the bill."

Cummins expressed his gratitude in moving terms and settled down to the business of composing a few fiery remarks against the legislative provisions of which he disapproved. But the bill was not called up for action that week. It was not called up that month. It was not called up that session. When Cummins finally investigated the matter he discovered that the postal-savings-bank bill had been made the permanent unfinished business of the Senate as a means of choking off bills to which the leaders were opposed. It was two years later when it was finally brought to a vote.

NOTHING NEW HERE

THE charge made by Representative Upshaw last December that congressmen were indulging in moonshine in their offices, surprised nobody. Congressmen have been indulging in moonshine on the floor of the House of Representatives for years.

The Wages of Simm

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Peter's Pan," "After the Ball Was Over," Etc.

The giddy magnate of the Edgemont Tigers sees more stars than Hennessy ever put on a bottle—and is checked like a hat.

MONEY, the wise old proverbs tell us, is the root of all evil and nearly everybody you meet is more or less interested in roots. Money is what puts time-tables in the pockets of bank tellers, silver threads among the gold and fleets off the three-mile limit. Money is what puts a show over on Broadway and a bim over *any* place. It's been responsible for more wrecks than the Atlantic and another thing that can be charged up against it is a party who answered to the name of Edgar Simm. Edgar was thick, Edgar was dumb and Edgar lived on laughter, but Edgar knew a thing or two about the diversion called baseball and even more about money. For a fact, a cash register could have learned a trick or two from him and it's even money that if Shakespeare could have had ten or fifteen minutes' conversation with Edgar, Shylock would have been labeled Simm in the celebrated play in which that money hound appeared. All in all, this hay-tossing marvel from the tall grass of Texas created as much of a stir as Paul Jones when that party decided to follow the sea as a calling.

If you've got thirty minutes you don't know what to do with listen to the scenario of it.

It was toward the middle of March when Mr. Ottie Scandrel, the well-known boulevardier, spat wearer and owner and manager of the Edgemont Tigers, the pennant-winning ball nine of the Central New Jersey League, threw a clean collar and a half a dozen safety-razor blades in his grip and headed for no less than White Springs, Texas. The jump-off was the rendezvous where the various members of the club were to meet for purposes of organization and the ironing out of winter wrinkles. Ottie was no more anxious to meet them than a society girl is to write a dance down with Eddie Wales.

For a fact.

It so happened that leather pushing had pushed considerable currency into my Bronnix gym and that the family veterinarian after looking over the plumbing and eaves-

dropping at my chest had suggested that a regulation vacation far from the fight-mad crowd would do me more good than a certified check for a million pistoles. Thus it happened that when Ottie and luggage climbed aboard a rattler with doors at either end instead of in the middle I was treading on his rubber heels. There's a saying, you know, about nobody knowing what's going to happen next and there's a lot of truth in the remark. As I followed the popular Mr. Scandrel aboard I had no more idea of what the future held than an ordinary resident of Moscow, Russia.

Twenty minutes after the engineer said, "Let's go," I didn't know whether or not I was going to enjoy the excursion half as much as I was first certain I *wouldn't!*

Ottie, with the prospect of Texas staring him in the eye, was like a moth coming out of a fur coat after a three months' dizzy nap. The world's greatest baseball genius —in his own opinion—was zestful and jestful. He played the entire schedule for the new season through verbally, won the league flag twice for his team and twenty-eight dollars in real money from a hardware salesman who apparently had an idea that two-handed pinochle was something played with sticks. If he had been trained to do card tricks Ottie couldn't have handled the pasteboards better, no fooling.

He shed a bitter tear or two when the hardware salesman kissed him good-by in West Virginia and roamed through the smoker like a famished lynx looking for prospective victims of the hearts-spades-clubs-diamonds disease. Eligible young gentlemen, however, began falling off the tram at various stations. The next time I saw my boy friend he had a baffled look in his navy-blue eyes.

"Where have you been—hunting?"

The most conceited specimen south of Mason's Dixon line nodded, sighed and took the cushions.

"Yeah—shooting. I just now lost six-fifty to the dark cloud who makes up my berth. We were rolling them in the washroom and seven was the only number outside of eleven that he knew. Well, I'm not fretting. Six-fifty from twenty-eight leaves a little profit, Joe."

"I understand," I murmured, "that by this time to-morrow we'll be in the State of Texas. The ticket puncher said we tie up in White Springs at eleven bells. Don't say anything to anybody, but he got this straight from the engineer out front."

Ottie looked interested.

"Honest? The sooner the quicker—as far as I'm concerned. I'm as anxious to get back into the only game as a duck for a puddle. Give me your attention, Joe. I'm handling the team a little different this year and I'll break it so you can see what you think—not that you know anything."

I might have been listening yet if an interruption hadn't occurred two hours later.

This was furnished by a young lady who got on the train at an ambush known as Wanita Junction. Really, the skirt was a sweet eyeful with enough looks to supply musical comedy with a dozen choruses. She was nineteen summers with a springtime or two thrown in for good measure, had a face that was her fortune, permanent wavy brown hair and eyes to match that were as thrilling as dime novels. For the rest, her lips were as red as a garden full of roses, her complexion was more than perfect, she looked Fifth Avenue from the top of her smart little straw hat to the dainty heels on her little suède slippers and was delicious in every sense of the word.

Ottie took one look, three more and opened his mouth.

"Sweet tomato!" he hollered. "If that gal comes from the sunny South then Robert E. Lee was born and brung up in Vermont. Positively, Times Square must be the next stop!"

Lady Beautiful took a seat across the aisle from us, parked her brown leather suit case, took off a pair of dainty gloves and looked out to see if there was any scenery present. Ottie, always more of a Romeo than Juliet's well-known suitor, immediately began to pull his cuffs down and his socks up.

"Behave yourself!" I admonished. "This isn't Broadway."

The words were like a drink of water to a confirmed drunkard.

"Ain't she the real McCoy?" Scandrel mumbled. "I wonder who she bothers with?"

"Not with you," I cut in coldly. "Sit down and remember where you are."

Ottie made me a present of a sneer.

"Get away with that guff. The adorable sex take to me like whooping cough to children. I'll give you even money for all the scratch you're wearing that to-night at din-

ner that wren will be sharing a steak with us strangled in onions. Yes or no?"

I shook my head and Ottie climbed to his feet.

"Get in order," I went on, making a final plea. "She's minding her business—you mind yours."

"And you mind yours!" he snarled. "Where do you get off to tell me what to do? Hold tight now and watch how it's being done this year."

With that he buttoned the only button on his form-fitting suit, brushed a speck of dust away and crossed the aisle. There's a rumor that fate is kind to fools, tanks and children. While Ottie was dolling for the occasion Miss Venus was trying to do what millions of others have often vainly attempted. She was trying to get the window beside her open and this was a situation made to order for the Lothario of Edgemont.

"Some little difficulty?" he said with a smirk as the girl looked up. "Allow me. I was in the window business for years."

"Were you really?" the broad cooed in a voice like a pipe organ. "Why did you leave it?"

Ottie grinned.

"She moved away! Ha-ha! These here car windows give me a pane. I'll open this one if I have to borrow dynamite."

"I dislike bothering you," the girl lisped. "Hadn't you better call the conductor?"

"Him?" Ottie's contempt made him show his teeth—all four of them. "That party couldn't open a can of corn if his brother was in the can-opener business. Just a minute now——"

With that he seized the sash, put everything into the grip, crouched and then straightened up with a heave of his shoulders. There came a sound similar to the crash of falling furniture, then the tinkle of breaking glass and Ottie, the picture of dumfounded amazement, stood staring at the section of the window he had pried out of the frame and was holding in both hands.

Three quarters of the car turned around to help themselves to a look.

"Good gracious!" the girl exclaimed. "You've broken it!"

As red as a hall carpet, Scandrel lost his silly look and laughed.

"Ha-ha! This is certainly comical and no mistake. The boy that built this here train must have nailed it together with glue. Joe," he hollered over his shoulder, "did you get this? Here's a sash for your Sunday suit!"

He would probably have said a lot more if the conductor who prowled the coach hadn't loomed up at the same minute.

"What's all this?" that individual inquired in a disagreeable tone. "I'm the proper person to be notified if the windows don't work easily. This looks to me like malicious mischief. I want to know who's going to pay for this?"

"I'll tell you one person who ain't—*me!*" Ottie bellowed. "What are you trying to do—put the car in stitches with your comedy? Here's what's left of the window. Open your face again and I'll punch you like a ticket, I surely will!"

The audience giggled, the conductor decided to make the best of a bad bargain and withdrew, leaving my boy friend the undisputed master of the situation—and no more pleased with himself than a screen star with a barrelful of mash communications.

"I simply can't sit here now with all that dust blowing in on me," the girl cooed.

"Not a chance in the world!" Scandrel made haste to assure her. "You park across the aisle. My friend, Joe O'Grady, will be only too glad to exchange seats with you. Joe loves dust—he used to be a miner. And before I forget it let's split an introduction two ways. I guess you've heard of me. I'm Scandrel, the owner of a ball team that's rehearsing down in White Springs. Next to Georgie Cohan I'm the most popular person along the Rialto."

"White Springs?" the double for Aphrodite murmured. "I was born and brought up in the Springs. My father was mayor for two terms. I'm Lucille Randolph, you know."

"I didn't but I'm glad to!" Ottie yelped. "Keep going. Tell me all about yourself."

I expected indignation but was fooled again. Lucille Randolph promptly did his bidding and I caught an earful of information on the wing. I learned that she was half past twenty-one, that she had been week-ending at Wanita Junction, educated at Houston, had visited little old Manhattan Island twice and had seen the "Follies" once. By the time the dinner call was bandied back and forth she and Scandrel were as friendly as Paul and Virginia.

"The pride of Texas, Joe!" he muttered when the porter stretched the curtains the

same night. "Ziegfeld never as much as seen a looker like this number. She's sweet and pretty and if her old man was formerly the mayor of the Springs it's safe to say he's got the kisses in quantity. I look forward to many's the pleasant dinner I'll get invited to over at Lucille's house while I'm in town. Soft, what?"

As it turned out it was extremely hard —for Ottie.

The following morning the locomotive coaxed us into the brick station of White Springs. We had a glimpse of Mademoiselle Randolph alighting but were unable to join her because Ottie was shy one suit case. A hasty search failed to dig up the absent piece of luggage, which was a brown leather grip that contained his spats, cigar coupons and three photographs of himself surrounded by the Edgemont Tigers.

"Somebody swiped my damper!" he yelled when further searching failed and the conductor, attracted by the noise, hove in sight. "I'll put in a claim that will reduce this company to bankruptcy, I surely will! I——"

The ticket chopper tapped him on the shoulder.

"One minute. Was your suit case initialed O. S. and did it have corners?"

"Four of them! Where is it at?"

"I'm just coming to that," the other went on. "I was about to say that the young lady you were sitting with yesterday afternoon just got off with a suit case of that description. And unless the two of you want to be dropped at Miami you had better do likewise!"

Woof!

The platform of the station showed no more sign of the attractive Lucille Randolph than the Volstead act does of any amendments. Ottie leaned up against one of its pillars and dashed some moisture from his manly brow.

"A crook—can you beat it?" he moaned. "I didn't count my fingers after we shook hands so I won't be surprised if there's a couple missing. I ought to have known better. All that song and dance about her old gent being the former mayor of this ticket was to throw me off the track. I knew a swell-looking gal like her never came from no one-horse livery stable like this. She's a poke picker from Forty-second Street traveling around and giving the hay-tossers the work. Come on, let's take a hack and find out what kind of place we're camping at."

There were two of them on the left side of the depot—both of the same make. We picked out the stronger, tossed our baggage into the cabin and followed it aboard. The skipper of the ark emerged from his day-dream and looked startled.

"Er—where are you boys bound for?"

"The chief of police by rights," Ottie answered, "only I don't want to make him laugh himself to death. Give this cart its head and drop us at the Hotel de Blah."

White Springs, in a glance and a half, proved to be a bigger hamlet than Shakespeare ever wrote about. We saw Main Street, two movie dives, a regular bank and at least a dozen stores. These Ottie took in, curling a lip.

"How does it look?"

"Worse than that, Joe. I hope that Crooked Annie don't use them pictures of me to make believe I'm her husband. I don't care so much about the bag. But what man likes to have his photos running around the country?"

"Particularly," I murmured when we came in sight of the hostelry that was our destination, "one with a face like yours!"

Scandrel gave me a sharp look but was undecided whether I was throwing him a compliment or an insult.

The next morning Ottie was as busy as three one-arm paper hangers sharing a five-foot ladder. The majority of the Edgemont Tigers were already on the scene but that wasn't the half of it. What created *beaucoup* sensation was the number of rookies, recruits and the flower of Texan youth who were all set to win fame and fortune on the diamond—if they could lean on Manager Scandrel's ear long enough to sing their own praises. These boys were as plentiful as flies in a restaurant without screens. They jammed the lobby of the De Blah, they filled up the corridors, they hung around the front porch and they walked endlessly up and down Main Street. Trying to put them off was as senseless as endeavoring to stall an agent of a gas company calling around to disconnect the juice. Ottie pasted a notice in the lobby that stated all applicants would be tried out in time. The crowd looked, listened and read and then decided there was no time like the present. By the time the owner of the Tigers had leased a local ball ground and had his pill pounders

out for morning exercise his temper was worn ragged and his disposition was shot to pieces.

"It's them rurals," he moaned when we sat together on the players' bench in the warm Texas sunshine and watched Dawson trying to get the kinks out of his left arm. "Every place I go I get one or two of the rustics up my back. For a fact, the most remarkable pitcher the world has ever looked at—he told me so himself—was hid under my cot at the hotel last night. I was just getting my dogs off when he crawled out and began to spread his stuff. I had to flatten him and throw him out so I could get some sleep."

"That," I pointed out, "is fame."

"Then give me disgrace! If these mockies who are pestering me are real ball players then I'm a soprano, no fooling. Half of them look as if they just dropped the plow the minute they heard I was in town. And the other half look as if they ought to be swept into a dustpan and put out with the trash. I never seen nothing like it."

He continued to air his feelings while the regulars warmed up. A local ball scribe from a Newark daily, present to give the fans in the old country the low-down on "Who's Through In Baseball" passed us the cream of the morning; a few local citizens anxious to see what it was all about wandered in and a photographer pressed the button on his camera a half a dozen times. But even *that* didn't cheer Scandrel up any. He was sitting in a trance when "Babe" Benton, Edgemont's big catcher and heavy stickman, joined us some twenty minutes later.

"I'm as stiff as a crutch, boss. I thought that coaling the furnace at the house all winter would keep me limber but I'm as tight as a rusty piano string. By the way, what was all that noise in your room up at the hotel last night, chief? I woke up and thought it was a fire."

"It was—I fired some ignoramus out in the hall. He started to give me an argument so I give him a smack on the jaw. He took the carpet and I turned into the bunk to sleep it off. If these here undiscovered champs don't leave me be the embalmers in this burg will be rolling in wealth."

"That reminds me," Benton went on. "While waiting for you to come down from the Big Town, boss, I got kind of friendly with a jobbie who was parked up at the hotel. His name is Edgar Simm and he was always running errands for me and the like—if I'd give him a dime for his trouble. He claims to be something of a twirler and carries newspaper clippings around to prove it. Er—I sort of promised that I'd use my influence with you so you could listen to what he had to say. He's a silly dub and for all he knows Spanish Mackerel is the Governor of Madrid, but I felt kind of sorry for him. Will you let him walk around and gab with you?"

Ottie stretched and yawned.

"Sure—if he's a friend of yours. When this here panic is over I've got to sign some slab men anyway."

The big catcher used his number twelves to stand on.

"Well, I'm going back to town to put in an order for a gallon of liniment. The chances are I'll run across Edgar on the way. He's been doing errands for a nickel a throw and cleaning up big—while waiting for you. If I see him I'll snap him back. Right?"

The best-dressed man in Edgemont nodded and Benton blew out on a breeze. We got rid of another half hour by watching the jewelers perform on the diamond. Some of the work was crude, a lot of it was coarse and nearly all of it suggested that the team as a whole wasn't entirely out of the tar flakes as yet. Ottie, however, as pleased with himself as a show girl with a set of sables, basked in the million-dollar sunshine and nudged me every time one of his employees beat a bunt to first or lined out a long cruiser.

"The only life—I've tried them all!" he yawned. "Leave Jack Kearns and the rest of them stick to the box fighters. I'll take baseball every day in the week including Monday. I think——"

He stopped speaking suddenly, straightened up, looked at me and then across at the players' entrance that was to the left of the bleachers. I let my gaze follow his and saw a sufficiency.

Oh, my dear!

Into the grounds shambled a young gentleman who looked like something that had walked out of a comic strip when the cartoonist had his back turned. He wasn't tall, he wasn't small, but he had a pair of arms on him that almost reached to his ankles, hair as red as rouge, a nineteen twenty-four crop of freckles and a silly smile

that went from the tip of one ear to the tip of the other.

In addition to this he featured a suit of clothes that undoubtedly had been stitched by one of Noah's favorite tailors—a thrifty one who was more economical than a stenographer on a twelve-bill salary. From a distance the material looked like green burlap and from the length of the trousers it was hard to say whether they were intended to be knickerbockers or not. The hem of his coat was halfway up his spine, he wore a collar big enough for a horse, a piece of neckwear that had probably been in the family for years and carried a black-felt castor in one of his grabs.

Stylish was hardly the word.

"My aunt!" Ottie guffawed. "Get this, Joe. I wonder what side show *he* stepped out of."

Before I could reply Master Weird shuffled up. He passed his tipper from his left hand to his right and let his smile turn to laughter. Ottie lamped the lid and dropped fifteen cents into it.

"Now be on your way," he ordered. "I never encourage beggars when there's plenty of jobs down on the dear old farm."

The human cartoon pocketed the change and laughed harder.

"I ain't no beggar," he explained, "The name is Simm—Edgar Simm. I just now met Mr. Benton and he said I'd find you here. I——"

Ottie interrupted him by leaping to his feet.

"One minute!" he roared. "I've seen you before! You're the mock turtle that was under my pad last night in the hotel!"

If he had told Simm a funny story the young man couldn't have laughed harder.

"Ain't it so? And you threw me out just as I was telling you how much stuff I've got on the pill——"

"You'll have more stuff on the end of your chin than you know what to do with! I clouted you last night and I see that I'll have to do the same thing again this morning. Honest, the way you bother me is something fierce."

Simm took this with another stitch of laughter.

"Mr. Benton," he went on, "told me that you'd try me. I've played amateur ball in Houston and the folks there told me then I ought to go up to New York and see a man by the name of McGraw. Then I heard you were coming down here and I figured what was the use of spending carfare when I could ride the rods up from Houston for nothing and see you. Mr. Benton said——"

Ottie looked at me, shook his head and turned to Simm.

"The boys that make plasters could learn a trick or two off you, Foolish. I ain't in the habit of letting anybody talk me into anything and you affect me the same as neuritis but I suppose I'll have to listen to you out—if only to get rid of you. Come on, help yourself to the cake and get it done with."

Edgar Simm needed no second invitation. He promptly hurled himself into autobiography which he punctuated with peals of laughter and let us know the worst. In five minutes we had more dope on him than his own parents. He confessed to being a native son who had quit the majority of his jobs because he couldn't make money fast enough. According to Edgar employers were without intelligence and at least nine out of ten business houses were run all wrong. He gave us a list of enterprises he had been connected with, touched at some length upon his baseball career in Houston and concluded by giving us his age, weight, the size of his shirt, his religion and only snapped out of it when he shoved a fistful of clippings into Ottie's hand.

"Read them!" he begged.

"Apple sauce for that stuff!" Ottie grunted. "I ain't interested in none of them chorus-girl clippings. Help yourself to a glove and let's see you perform. It ain't the capers in the papers that burns me up. I want to see with my own eyes. Cool your dogs out in the box."

Getting as much attention from the Tigers as a snowstorm in Hades, Simm borrowed a glove, shed his burlap jumper and took himself out to the platform. Ottie gave a few directions, sent in a substitute catcher to cover the platter and selected a point where we both could observe the degree of stuff—if any—Simm had bragged about.

Dawson selected a willow and then the fun began.

From the very first one delivered, a pair of horn-rimmed cheaters were not necessary to perceive that Edgar Simm was the old-fashioned Bacardi in a regulation bottle. It might have been the length of his arms or it might have been the peculiar way the

pill left his hand but the fact remained that he was a combination of Jack Scott and John Watson—a smart, cool and clever pitcher whose big asset was speed and a sinker ball.

He dealt three in a row and Dawson retired, baffled.

"Sweet mamma!" the southpaw hollered. "If I had that freak's speed me and Ruth would be working for the same team. Tell me something, where did this here party hail from?"

"All he's got is speed," Ottie retorted coldly.

"Yeah—and all Washington had was a sword!" Dawson replied. "Take it from me the boy is there. If he can stand up under fire there's no telling how far he'll go."

"Maybe," I suggested, "it's merely a flash in the pan."

It wasn't.

For the next twenty minutes or so Simm did the same thing over again, the only difference being that as he got warmed up he began to increase his speed until the pellet, diving into the catcher's mitt, sounded like a machine gun. About a dozen of the regulars and rookies stood up to bat but, during the demonstrating session, first base might have been in Glasgow for all anybody saw of it!

And when Simm joined us at the players' bench he was as untroubled as a Wall Street money king writing a check to pay a three-dollar laundry bill.

"How much are the wages?" was his first question.

Scandrel passed me a wink.

"Right away the pennies. Listen, don't be like that. I might start you at a thousand a year and I might give you twelve hundred—if I decide to put you under contract and let you play with my team. As it is I'll think you over. You've got speed and a little control but how do I know they wouldn't tear you up like paper when you get in a regular game? You bush boys shape swell down here in the weeds. Come around at the hotel to-night and I'll let you know one way or the other."

"About seven o'clock?" Simm inquired.

"Eight—after you've ate!" Scandrel snarled. "And try and bring a little sense with you while you're at it!"

That evening at the Hotel de Blah dinner was three quarters completed when one of the little bell hops of the hovel stuck his head in.

"Mistuh Scandrel! Mistuh Scandrel!"

Ottie pushed back his plate and did a standing broad jump out of his chair.

"Right here, Rastus. What is it—a long-distance buzz on the chicory?"

The bell hop rolled his eyes.

"No suh. Dey's a party in the lobby what wants to see yo', suh. Doan' ah git no tip?" he whined, when Ottie breezed for the door.

"Sure—here's one. Leave the spotted cubes be and you'll have a bank account some day. Come on, Joe," he said to me. "This must be that dizzy Edgar Simm. I'll need you around when I'm talking money with Codfish."

But it wasn't young Master Simm who was waiting.

The minute we stepped into the lobby Scandrel stopped as suddenly as if he had been stabbed between the shoulders. There was a reason. This reason was seated on one of the lounges opposite and answered to the name of Miss Lucille Randolph. She was twice as prepossessing as usual and, at her feet, was Ottie's brown valise with the four corners and his initials on it.

"Can you even approach this for nerve?" he yelped. "Stick here and watch her, Joe, while I run out for a cop! I'll——"

He was interrupted by the girl who stood, picked up the grip, came across and handed it to him with a demure smile.

"I'm very sorry if I had you paged and taken from your supper, Mr. Scandrel. I've come to rectify a dreadful and embarrassing mistake. Yesterday morning, upon leaving the train, I took your grip under the impression that it was mine. Can you ever forgive me?"

Trying to get his eyes back in place again and his mouth shut Ottie gaped witlessly at the young lady and the couple of grand worth of hock rocks the young lady had sprinkled about on her pretty fingers.

"Er—yes. Quite so," he managed to stutter at last.

"And so," Miss Randolph continued, "I want to try and make amends. Won't you and Mr. McShady——"

"O'Grady," I cut in.

"Won't you both come to dinner next Thursday night? I want you to meet my dad—who's terribly interested in baseball—and my mother. Thank you for forgiving

me. We dine at eight. Just tell any of the taxi men to take you to the Villa and you'll arrive safely."

With that she staggered us both with another smile, nodded and vanished.

"Didn't I tell you that I'd be calling around and putting on the nosebag at her house?" Scandrel hollered. "I knew no jane with thrilling eyes like hers could be a crook. And did you lamp the ice? I guess her old gent wasn't mayor for nothing, hey?"

Eight o'clock and Edgar Simm happened together. The young man who had given the demonstration that morning was turned out in brown burlap that looked as if it might have been worn by Cain and then cut down for Abel before he secured it. He laughed as he joined us and he laughed as he sat down but his eyes glittered like a couple of rapiers.

"Here's what I'll do," he began. "This here yearly salary stuff ain't all it's cracked up to be. If I'm under a year's contract and get hurted that won't be fair to you because you'll have to pay me just the same. The right way to manage a ball team is to pay the players regular weekly wages—when they're working—and protect yourself."

"You're out of your mind!" Ottie snapped. "What do you mean—wages?"

Simm licked his lips hungrily.

"The only way I'll work for you is on a sliding scale——"

"Sliding scale?" Ottie bellowed. "Do you think I'm running a rink?"

"Like this," Simm explained. "As long as your team is down here I'll work for twenty fish a week. Then when you go North, for the first month I get fifty bucks a week. After that I get a ten-dollar raise each week if I win three games for you. That's a sliding scale and it's the only way I'll work. I figured it out myself."

Ottie turned it over in his mind.

"Ten bucks a week raise for winning three games. That don't listen so terrible. You might be dumb but you've got some intelligence after all. Leave me think this over now and don't be rushing me. I ain't got no adding machine in my vest pocket. Come on in the writing room and we'll figure it out."

"But we'll have to make it snappy. I got a date for a quarter of nine," Simm explained.

"With a doll, I suppose."

The other shook his head.

"No. Some man down at Whalen's Pool Parlor promised me a dollar and a half if I'd go up to his house and tell his wife he had to go over to the hospital to see a sick friend who got stricken with wood-alcohol poisoning. And a dollar and a half is a dollar and a half!"

Laugh that off.

An agreement was drawn up between them and a week later the Tigers were beginning to become thoroughly familiar with the new boxman. Simm and the team mixed the same as oil and water. The first night he was admitted into the family circle he stepped into a crap game with two postage stamps and a cigar coupon, cleaned up nine dollars in twenty minutes and then rushed out to deliver a rain stick some woman had left at the hotel after a sudden shower. When he came back and confessed he had earned seventy-five cents by the errand the gang down from New Jersey began to ride him.

"That's the idea," Babe Benton chuckled "Save up the nickels. You'll need them for that fur coat you've got to get."

"What fur coat?" Simm demanded.

Benton looked at the others and shook his head.

"Honest, you're so dumb that I bet you think local fame is a train that stops at every station. Get wise to yourself. The summer is the coldest time of the year up in Edgemont."

Edgar looked around but failed to discover a smile anywhere. He scratched his head and buttoned up his burlap coat.

"Are you kidding me? I never heard nothing in public school about it being chilly in Jersey during the hot months."

"Then they learned you wrong," Con Dawson cut in. "Last July I was out to the barn back of the ball grounds and I seen them building fires under the cows."

"What for?" Edgar asked.

"To keep them from giving ice cream! You'd better get that fuzzy coat and get it quick!"

Meanwhile the Tigers began to regain some of their usual form. Keeping them at it daily brought back the cayenne, they started hitting hard and often and showed a commendable tightness that had nothing to do with liquor or money. Scandrel signed a new shortstop and a pair of fielders and with Simm and the rest of the hurling brigade in excellent shape started looking

around for the first pick-up game his troupe could take on.

He got it a couple of days later with a steam-fitting nine who played on Saturday afternoons only in that dear Wanita Junction.

"Don't make no mistake," he confided to me when the match had been arranged. "These babies know all about plumbing and so they figure it a pipe. They're the same crowd that run the White Sox ragged last year and give McGraw's boys a terrible beating the year before. We play here in town and split the gate two ways—seventy for us and thirty for them. And we'll have to step a few to cop."

With that he took a book from his inside pocket, threw it open and began to read with the greatest of interest.

"What's that—something by Dumas?"

The big buffoon smirked.

"No, it's a treatise on silverware. Thursday night the two of us are going up to the lovely Lucille's for chow and I ain't taking no chances. This here pamphlet puts you in the know and describes a fork in such a way that there ain't no possible chance of mistaking it for a spoon. For a fact, there's a thrill in every line. For instance right here it tells how nobody with manners would think of putting their feet on the table. And on page forty-nine there's all about after-dinner speaking and tips on how to be a noted wit——"

"That ought to be a cinch for you," I said. "Look at the start you've got now."

He bit like a rainbow trout.

"What do you mean—start?"

"You're a half-wit now!"

"Yeah—well, if I want to throw a speech and put the party in stitches, I can do it—the same as I do everything else. Don't forget that. And by the way, that reminds me. Lucille forgot what your last name was so she give me this here invitation to give you."

On Thursday night Manager Scandrel was an egg enough to doll himself up like Easter. He broke out an evening suit imported from London. One look at it was enough to tell anybody why the clothing had been deported. It had more tricks to it than an East Side lawyer and, in it, Ottie looked ready to step into burlesque and do a turn. His waistcoat was the latest wrinkle in pale-gray silk and had a few, his pups gleamed like electric lights, he carried a walking stick, chamois gloves and had a geranium in his buttonhole. Positively, once he stepped down into the lobby and somebody passed the word half of the village workers and shirkers lined up outside the De Blah to watch him air out.

"It's twenty after seven now, Joe," was his greeting. "And better early than never. We don't want to take no chances on missing the horse d'oovers—yes, I learned about them things in the book. All set? Then let's go."

We issued forth to climb into the village hack ordered and got three cheers from the crowd. Ottie took them with a smirk and a bow. On the level, the conceited optimist had an idea the rustics had him tabbed as a hero—in dress, if nothing else.

"This is a pretty proud moment for you, isn't it?" I murmured. "I'll bet the boys and girls here will never see another soup and fish like yours if they live to be a hundred and eighty."

"Be yourself!" he yawned, lying back on the upholstery and blowing cigarette smoke at the driver.

The hack took us for a mile and a half and three-fifty. We discovered the Villa Randolph was not one of but *the* show place of White Springs. It was built in the center of a park and had an acre of ground for every Frenchman in Paris. And when we went up on a porch twice as wide as the deck of a battleship, three servants almost had a fist fight to see who would let us in first.

"Nothing but!" Scandrel chirped, once we were under the roof and giving the class a tumble. "My hat, James. My cane, James. My gloves, James. And listen, Jimmy—if you put a dent in that tipper I'll lay you like an asphalt boulevard."

"Quite so, sir," the butler replied. "Kindly walk this way."

"How can I," Scandrel barked, "when I'm not knock-kneed? Tie that and page the family."

We were nodded into a room that was a steal from the Ritz and introduced to the inmates by the beautiful Lucille who was swell dressed in an evening gown that had been smuggled out of the Rue de la Paix. The first one we were led up to was the lady of the house, Mrs. Randolph, who gave us the best of the evening in a voice as chilly as the top of the Himalayas. It was a cinch to see she was as pleased with us

as she would have been had she found a horse in the parlor.

Hiram Randolph, the former mayor of White Springs, was a small, gray-haired boy with a Johnny Walker complexion and a habit of snapping at a fur-bearing upper lip. He lied politely by stating that he was overcome by delight and stepped back so that we could be conducted over to the windows where a silly-looking young gentleman who seemed on the verge of tears was propped up between a divan and a table. This specimen was tall and thin, had a set of clothes on large enough for two or three others and bore a resemblance to a wire-haired fox terrier.

"This," the ravishing Lucille announced, "is Mr. Launcelot St. Clair. Lonnie, I want you to meet Mr. Scandrel and his friend Mr. McBrady."

"Really, I'm chawmed!" St. Clair moaned.

It might have been the book or it might have been Mother Randolph's look but the fact remained that Scandrel made no mistakes during dinner. He ate much and said little until the Mocha and Java was served in the lounge room. Then Hiram Randolph drew us aside and opened up on the subject of the great national pastime.

"What White Springs needs and must have," the ex-mayor stated, "is a ball team of its own. I'm a rabid fan and I know that a professional outfit backed by plenty of money and handled in sterling fashion would be more of a benefit to the Springs than all its boosters, Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce. I understand your team is playing Saturday and I'm considerably interested in seeing how high local enthusiasm runs. If it's one tenth of what I imagine it will be I shall put the matter of a team up to the chairman of the board at our next meeting."

He was running to high finance when his wife gave a signal and the butler, the butler's first assistant and the first assistant's assistant rushed in with two card tables. At the sight of them Ottie stood and rubbed his hands.

"The spotted pasteboards, hey? I'm with you until day breaks us up. How about a little poker with a twenty-cent limit?"

Hiram Randolph looked interested but the first lady of the surrounding land dished a glance that had a hundred pounds of ice attached.

"We are playing bridge," she stated. "If you are unfamiliar with the technique of the game, Launcelot will teach you."

"Leave Lucille do that!" Scandrel yelped. "I could learn better with her."

The agony lasted until after eleven bells and cost us, in round numbers, seventeen rupees each. Ottie, when freedom came, was too far gone to make any comments. He got his headpiece and tottered out.

"And not a word or a chance to hold hands with Lucille! If this is pleasure let me suffer! Come on, Joe, let's walk it off!"

We swung down the lane but hadn't taken more than a dozen steps before the silly St. Clair joined us.

"Walking back to town, men? I think I'll join you. There is safety in numbers and one never knows when some uncouth thug might be secreted behind a bush or a tree. While we ramble along I'll give you a little lecture on bridge and some common mistakes that can be avoided."

"Don't bother," Ottie croaked.

Shutting the gilded youth up, however, was like trying to keep a tourist away from Montmartre.

"It's really not the slightest trouble. To begin with, when the bid is no trumps——"

"Don't bother!" Scandrel hissed. "When I say don't bother I mean don't put yourself to no inconvenience!"

We reached the entrance gates of the Villa and passed out.

"You led the ace twice," St. Clair continued, "when a smaller card of the same suit would have sufficed. In a case like that——"

"Listen," Ottie bawled. "I wish I could go into a jail with a thousand cells and find you sick in each one of them—you silly mock orange! I'll lead you an ace now. Trump this if you're able!"

Before I could interfere he whirled around and stuck a short-arm jab across that was aimed for the point of Launcelot's jaw. It was too dark to see exactly what happened but my boy friend missed by the width of the Mediterranean. And in the next split second St. Clair, mumbling something about uncouth rowdies, stepped in and did his stuff. It was probably a luck punch that put Dempsey through the ropes at the Polo Grounds and it was probably the same brand that tipped Ottie over and dropped him under the hedge—out like a light!

"You will bear witness," St. Clair said.

wiping his hands on a silken kerchief, "that I parried his blow and struck in self-defense!"

The game on Saturday drew like a race riot. With Edgar Simm laughing them over on the mound and the Tigers pepped up like a tamale the visitors from Wanita Junction never had a look-in from the time the umpire cried, "Play ball!"

Simm faced a conglomeration of first-class players, second-class players, third raters and pitched like "Dutch" Ruether in a pinch. He allowed only three widely spaced singles and had the stands with him to a man. After the third frame, when the steam-fitting warriors scored a lone run without a hit, no one from the Junction got beyond first base and only four journeyed that far. Simm's control was pretty to look at and only matched by the Tiger's batting.

In this respect Benton glittered like a star. He was the first one from Edgemont to drop a homer in the starboard quarter, and got two blows in the next two innings—a sizzling triple and a double earned from a smack that bounded against the center-field wall. All in all, the Tigers collected fourteen hits, bunched them, and by playing fast and intelligently pulled ten runs out of the fire to plenty of applause and the echoes of Edgar's melodious laughter.

"Some twirler!" Ottie murmured when the curtain was rung down. "I guess I displayed intense dumbness when I gave in to him and his wages. Let's go down to the clubhouse and see how he comes out of the showers. He sure pitched them wicked and that's no apple sauce. If he don't go to pieces before we get home I'll be wearing diamond pajamas yet!"

At the clubhouse the mirthful Mr. Simm proved to be in the act of leaving.

"What's your hurry?" I asked. "Didn't you take a shower?"

Edgar grinned.

"What for—to-night's Saturday night, ain't it? Er—will you please pardon me. I just got a word that the former mayor of this here town wants to meet me outside and congratulate me. And why not? There's no telling that maybe some day he'll have an errand or two I can fill. Olive oil. I'll be up at the hotel for dinner—I positively will."

"You don't have to tell me that," Ottie anwered.

In the next few days Scandrel tried vainly to get the rapturous Miss Randolph to nibble at his invitations—those that concerned motoring, dining and the theater. The pride of the Villa, however, was not to be won so easily. Ottie called—on the telephone and in person—but so far as luck was concerned he might have been in Italy trying to reserve a table for the crown princess.

"I don't understand it," he groaned, on an afternoon when Edgar Simm pitched five innings of hitless ball against a team up from Houston and then called it a day by allowing only one blow during the progress of each of the remaining frames. "Coming down on the train Lucille was as friendly as the Salvation Army but now I couldn't date her up any better than I'm doing if she was under lock and key. Honest, I'm fit to be tied. Think of all that beauty going to waste and me with a car and an appetite. I'll bet thirty lire the old lady give her a steer. The momma took to me like a sore throat."

He went on to moan about the injustice of it when the telephone cutey handling the big board gave him the eye and snapped her fingers.

"A call for you, Mr. Scandrel. Take it in booth number one."

Ottie followed the instructions and came out a half an hour later snickering.

"If this ain't fate then I don't know the difference between my wrist and my knee!" he hollered. "Lucille wants the two of us up to-night. She's throwing a big party with all the trimmings. I knew I'd make her in the long run. For a fact, I guess I got a fetching way about me with the gals, hey?"

"You'd better drop in at some barber shop," I suggested. "You'll never look like a blade unless you use the razor!"

"Don't worry none about that. She'll be calling me Piano and think I'm grand!" he guffawed.

We reached the Villa Randolph the same evening shortly after eight, met the same three butlers and watched them push each other around before we were shunted off into the same compartment we had nestled in the previous evening. The difference this time was that the room was empty.

"This is what I call sweet," was Ottie's comment. "Listen, I ain't got no secrets from you, Joe. In the language of real estate I like this Lucille dame lots. And her old lady can't last forever. So don't be

surprised if I bust out and ask her to prove that two can live as cheap as one!"

If he had only known then.

He was hardly through speaking when the portières fluttered and in stalked Hiram Randolph, washing his hands with invisible water.

"So you came to our little celebration, gentlemen? My daughter is giving *her* party and I am giving *mine*. A sort of combination affair as it were. I know you'll be interested when I tell you that White Springs will be represented shortly by a baseball club of its own. I'm the financial backer of it and in this connection I might say I am sparing no expense in the matter of securing worthy representatives. I have invited, among others to-night, the phenomenal Mr. Simm and——"

"One minute!" Scandrel snarled. "What do you mean—the phenomenal Mr. Simm? That baby's under contract to me! Try and get him!"

Hiram Randolph smiled like a good-natured eagle.

"That is exactly what I intend doing. I seldom desire a thing and fail to get it. Mr. Simm has told me all about his playing agreement with you, the fact he works on a weekly wage basis, is a free agent and can leave at any time. He'll be here at nine and——"

Ottie hauled out his ticker.

"Like heck he will! I'll head him off and beat you to it—you conceited bandit! This is one time brains beats out money! Come on, Joe—let's show this party that there's one thing he can't get away with!"

Twenty minutes later we were rapping on the door of the hotel bedroom of Edgar Simm. He opened it and we fell in together.

"Stop where you are!" Scandrel bawled. "Me and you are going to sign a regular contract and sign it here and now! You don't move a step out of this room until it's done! Summon ink, pens and paper——"

The double for "Solemn John" Watson picked up the coat of the dress suit he had dropped, brushed it off and gaped witlessly.

"I don't think I can stay," he mumbled. "I'm going to a party some people by the name of Randolph are giving. The daughter of the guy that owns the layout is announcing her engagement to a gil by the name of St. Clair who used to teach boxing at Dallas University."

Ottie turned as pale as cream but stood up to it gamely.

"That don't alter the case none! You'll sign with me and then you——"

Edgar Simm shook his head.

"Ain't it funny? I was going to break the news to you in the morning. I'm through with baseball. There's not enough money in it. I'm quitting the game for good. An old pal of mine down in Houston is going up to New York Thursday and he tells me he can get me a job where I can make all kinds of money quicker than I can out in the box."

"What's the job—counterfeiting?" Ottie snapped.

Simm put on the dress coat and looked in the mirror.

"No," he explained with a light laugh. "This buddy of mine tells me he can get me the job of hat-check boy in the coatroom of one of them big kafes up on Broadway!"

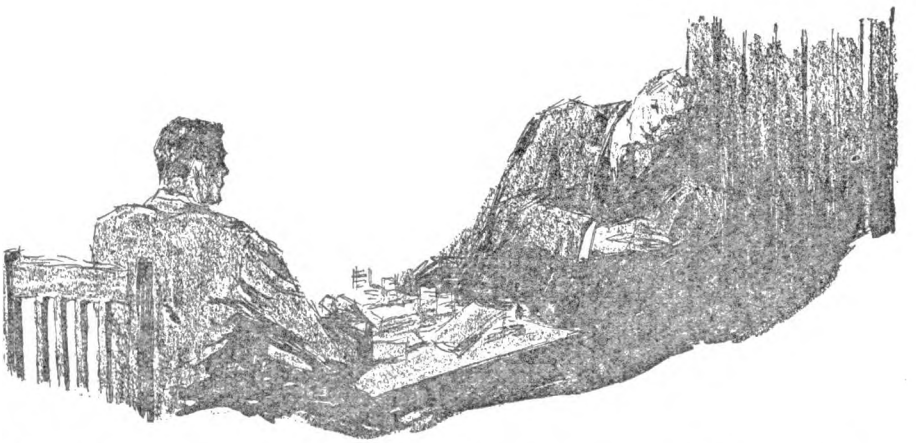
C'est tout!

You will find another story by Mr. Montanye in the next issue.

ARE WE LIVING BEYOND OUR MEANS?

THAT the American people, collectively, are living beyond their means, and are running heavily into debt for unproductive purposes is the statement made by the Mechanics and Metals National Bank of New York City in a letter to its clients.

The national government is not borrowing extensively but minor political subdivisions—States, counties, cities and towns—are running heavily into debt to finance the construction of schools, streets, public buildings, bridges, fountains, stadiums and monuments. Improvements of this character, while of undoubted value to the public welfare, produce no revenue and the bond issues floated to secure the funds must be redeemed from future taxes. Borrowing for purposes such as these, according to the bank's statement, at present amounts to more than a hundred million dollars a month.



The Run of the Cards

By Percival Wilde

Author of "The Symbol," "The Tale of the Three Kings," Etc.

Bill Parmelee gets some instruction in poker—and dispenses a little himself.

AS this story has to do with card cheating the scene should be laid in the West. Literary tradition insists that every card game commenced on the other side of the Mississippi must culminate in a display of bowie knives and six-shooters, and must not end until one of the players—preferably the bad man—is made ready for the ministrations of the undertaker by a neatly drilled perforation, caliber .45, in the neighborhood of the heart.

But life, as so often, disagrees with literary tradition. A card game in Oregon, California—or even in Texas—may be a tame affair, conducted strictly according to Hoyle; while a similar game in Massachusetts, New York, or Connecticut may provide the sharper with an opportunity to profit by his cunning. And the Easterner takes such episodes with appropriate calm. If he has been victimized—and knows it, which is rare—he reflects that he has been unwise to play with persons whose ancestors did not come over with his in the *Mayflower,* and he resolves to commit no more such errors. To this praiseworthy resolution the average Easterner may stick for a month; the exceptional Easterner for a year; to break it only when some particularly impressive individual invites him into another and an even more disastrous game. Then more resolutions—and more broken resolutions.

When Bill Parmelee, professional gambler and card sharp, after drifting about the country for six checkered years, drifted back to the home in the East from which he had begun his wanderings, he had immediately been given an opportunity to demonstrate his skill. His father, Puritan and card player—inconsistent, with the inconsistency of life—had invited him to hazard everything upon a game of poker, had boldly suggested that they settle, by the luck of the cards, the all-important question of whether Bill remained or whether he continued upon his wanderings. Bill had accepted the proposal gleefully, had, for a few brief minutes, gloated in the vision of how adroitly he would manipulate the cards, had rejoiced in the prospect of taking advantage of every trick in his remarkably complete assortment.

Then, to his utter astonishment, he had found himself quite unable to cheat. The sight of the hickory switch facing him at the fireplace had overpowered him with the memories of childhood. Looking at it, some force superior to himself had mastered him, had compelled him, for the first time in many years, to play a scrupulously honest game. Bill was only twenty-four—and childhood was not so far behind. The

switch, ridiculously puny, ridiculously slight, had seemed to gaze at him warningly, had commanded, "Play fair!"—and Bill had obeyed.

He had played poker which would have been a disgrace to a beginner—an honest beginner—and had been wiped out in short order; and then his incomprehensible father, glowing with pride in the son whose background was such that he could not cheat against him, had opened his arms and had invited Bill to remain. That invitation had been accepted. With the same intense energy that had characterized his life as a gambler Bill plunged into the myriad of details connected with the management of a farm. He had wasted six years in mastering every device known to the card sharp, but he was young, and, to his utter surprise, he found himself taking an amazing interest in Holsteins and Jerseys, in pure-bred Durocs, in Leghorns and Brahmas and Orpingtons. His acquaintances of the road, gentlemen who lived upon their wits, would have laughed at him. But Bill, settling down close to the soil for the first time, found himself curiously, incomprehensibly happy.

He was conscious, after a month, that he had not touched a card—and had not missed them. Rising with the sun, busy until dark, he found the diversions to which he had been accustomed oddly unattractive when evening came. It was so much more satisfactory to crank up the little roadster, to roll gently—as gently as it would allow him—through the clean-smelling country, to compare notes with neighboring farmers, to bow to old-time friends, occasionally to celebrate wildly by taking in the movies.

It had taken Bill Parmelee six years to find himself; but that he had done so there could be no possible doubt. He might never again have touched a card; never again have taken part in a game of chance, had it not been for Tony Claghorn, Tony's pretty wife, and a sleek individual who, for the time being, passed under the name of Sutliffe.

II.

Tony Claghorn was an otherwise sane young man who believed implicitly in the laws of chance. If the run of the cards was bad to-day, it might be expected to be good to-morrow—odds two to one—and if, by some mischance, to-morrow brought disappointment, then the day after to-morrow was morally sure to make up for it—odds four to one. Mathematics, high, low, and middling, certified to the correctness of his theory, and Tony backed it unhesitatingly by doubling his bets on the second day and quadrupling them on the third day. To be strictly consistent he should have continued doubling them on each succeeding occasion: it was eight to one that he would win on the fourth day, and sixteen to one that he would win on the fifth day. But three consecutive sessions never failed to exhaust Tony's available cash.

On the first of every month a fat check came tumbling into Tony's bank. It financed him until eleven p. m. on the evening of the third. At eleven-one Tony's mathematical investigations usually came to a temporary end.

For twenty-seven days thereafter he lived on his credit, which was excellent, and paid off the accumulated bills on the first of the following month. But the surplus, which was often considerable, had an expectation of life of something under seventy-two hours. At the end of that time, for Tony, it had ceased to exist.

Mrs. Tony Claghorn was a very charming person who might have been more useful to her husband had she not loved him so much. For her, Tony was right—even if he was wrong. Solemnly Tony would explain to her just why he could not lose; or why, in spite of his rosy predictions, he had lost after all. And Mrs. Claghorn, thrilling at the sight of her strong, handsome husband, rejoicing in the thought that he was hers—all hers—would murmur, "Yes, dear," at appropriate intervals, would nod her pretty head, and would decide that last year's dress, made over, might do for the present season.

"Pulled a bone last night," Tony would admit. "When he stood pat I should have known he had a full house. I had no right to call him."

Thereupon Mrs. Claghorn, having understood only the first phrase, would wonder how her clever husband could do such a thing and would overflow with sympathy. "Never mind, Tony," she would assure him, "you'll make up for it to-night."

"You bet!" Tony would declare, and would wander in, stripped clean, around midnight, to explain that things had gone wrong once again.

Had Mrs. Claghorn loved her husband less she might have insisted that her occasional needs take precedence over the insatiable poker game. But the thought never entered her head. It would mean opposing Tony, and that was quite beyond her.

She reflected sometimes that in the days before Tony had met the clever Mr. Sutliffe the cards had not been so uniformly disastrous. He had played at the club, had won and had lost, but had usually finished the month with a small balance on the right side of the ledger. Poker had been a diversion: not an obsession. Then Mr. Sutliffe had come into the picture and almost at once everything had changed. Pursing her small mouth, wrinkling her innocent forehead, Mrs. Claghorn gazed blankly at the wall and wondered. Most of all she wondered why Mr. Sutliffe, who, by his own modest confession, was many times a millionaire, found it worth his while to play cards with Tony Claghorn.

Many times a millionaire: to be precise, eight times. Sutliffe, as he was never tired of recounting, had owned a small patch of land in Texas. "Just a little patch," he would explain; "three or four thousand acres—hardly knew I had it. And then—what do you think?—one day they started drilling on it, and zip! the biggest well this side of kingdom come blew the derrick to smithereens and ruined all the grain for miles around. Yes siree sir! Since then," the millionaire would conclude modestly, "I've just been drawing royalties, and salting 'em away against a rainy day. How much? Oh, maybe eight millions—maybe nine." He would smile gently: "I can't tell you within half a million what I'm worth."

A successful man, Sutliffe, a singularly successful man. Six months ago he had been telling a very similar story to a group of acquaintances in Chicago. He had owned a little patch of land in Colorado—"just a little patch, coupla thousand acres. And then—what do you think?—one day a fellow sunk a shaft in it, and zip! if he didn't open up the biggest gold mine this side of kingdom come! Yes siree sir! Why, you could just walk into that mine and pick up nuggets with both hands. Since then," and again the modest smile would creep over his shrewd countenance, "I've just been drawing royalties, and salting 'em away against a rainy day. Eight millions—maybe nine."

Success had followed the remarkable man throughout his life. Out of the mail-order business he had made eight millions—maybe nine; and out of an invention which the government had bought from him with great secrecy; and out of a little flyer in the stock market, when he had cornered United States Steel; but it must have been his modesty which prevented him from recounting more than one story to a single group of listeners. Whatever he had touched had turned to money. What more natural that when he turned to cards the winning combinations came to him with almost monotonous regularity? What more logical that with remarkable judgment he should sense the presence of four aces in an opponent's hand and decline to bet on four kings?

Sometimes he mentioned that he had spent a winter down South. His address had been the Federal prison at Atlanta, though he did not allude to that detail. Sometimes he referred to his summer up North. Once again, he was vague concerning his whereabouts. He was a poor boy who had risen to the top of the ladder. Indeed, some months before falling in with Claghorn he had been reduced to the expedient of pawning his few valuables. By a remarkable coincidence they had reappeared on his person shortly after he and Tony had commenced their mathematical investigations.

The Claghorns had decided to spend the summer at a little hotel in the Berkshires. Rather than be separated from his newly found friends Mr. Sutliffe had volunteered to spend a few days each month—by preference, the first, second, and third—with them.

III.

Bill Parmelee, clothed in overalls, leaned on the fence and gazed at the dusty road. It had not rained in some weeks; the sun was merciless overhead, and Bill, half closing his eyes, could see waves of heated air writhing upward in quivering layers. The fields were parched and dry. The earth was hot underfoot.

"If this keeps up," reflected Bill, "potatoes will be high next winter."

A heavy sedan whizzed around the turn of the road, climbed the hill with cut-out wide open, and vanished out of sight around another turn. A column of dust, twenty feet high and so dense that Bill could not see the other side of the road through it

rose from the ground over which it had passed.

Bill inhaled, suffocated, and shook his fist at the departed car. "They ought to jail fellows like you!" he declared. Then, gazing into the cloud, he saw a smaller car, a roadster, wriggling valiantly through it. From side to side of the road it slued, as if suddenly blinded, and Bill, remembering the two-foot ditch, cried out a warning. Even as he called he knew he was too late. The car, careening dizzily, swung to the side of the road, two wheels went over with a thump, and the bumper fetched up with a crash against a telegraph pole.

Bill raced to the rescue. The car, perilously inclined, had not turned over, and in the driver's seat a young woman, pale, but with compressed lips, was already cranking the stalled engine and shifting the gears into reverse.

Bill flung open the door. "Get out!" he commanded the lone occupant.

"I'm going to."

"I mean, get out of the car!"

"Not till I get it back on the road." She let in the clutch with a jerk.

The car teetered dangerously for a second, a rear wheel spun convulsively, and the engine stalled a second time.

"That was a close squeak!" ejaculated Bill.

In silence the woman driver placed her foot on the starting pedal again.

"You'll kill yourself!" Bill warned.

"Not if I know it."

There are times when actions speak louder than words; when brute force is more effective than argument. Bill reached quietly into the car and shut off the ignition.

"How dare you?" demanded the young woman. Her protest ended in a shrill squeak as a powerful arm gripped her about the waist and lifted her bodily to the road. "How dare you?" she repeated. Then, suddenly, she became limp and collapsed into the strong arms which held her.

Bill smiled down into her face. "Nerve! Grit! Spunk! You've sure got plenty! But this here's a man-sized job!" He half lifted, half supported the quivering girl to the side of the road, made her comfortable against the fence, and noted that the color which had ebbed so swiftly in her cheeks was beginning to return.

Young Mrs. Claghorn attempted to stand. "I'm all right," she insisted. "I got into this mess and I'm going to get out of it."

"Sure you're all right," agreed Bill, "only you're going to watch the show from a ringside seat. Stay outside of the ropes."

He fetched planks and a shovel, enlisted the assistance of two or three farm hands, and cautiously backing the car inch by inch, brought it back to the road again. He opened the door with a flourish, and descended. "She's not hurt a bit. Your bumper saved you. Now, if you want to, you can drive on again."

Pretty Mrs. Claghorn did want to—did want to very much—but her nerves had been strained to the breaking point. She seated herself at the wheel, placed her hand upon the lever, and broke down altogether. "I—I just can't," she stammered. "Won't you—won't you do it?"

Bill Parmelee gravely occupied the seat as she slid into that adjoining. With equal gravity he let in the gears and piloted the car over the brow of the hill. The young woman, he had noticed, wore a wedding ring. That reassured him. Had her left hand been unadorned Bill might not have risen to the emergency with such self-possession. She was pretty; she was charming; she was attractive, and the courage which she had just displayed did not lessen her appeal. But she was married and Bill was safe. "Where to?" he inquired.

"Anywheres; oh, anywheres, till I pull myself together a little bit."

For over a mile they followed the winding road in silence, threading in and out between the gently rounded hills that encompassed them on all sides. Bill knew every inch of the country, and loved it. It was hot, but the heat was whisked away with the motion of the car. Suddenly he was conscious that his companion was speaking.

"I think we ought to introduce ourselves," she was saying. "I am Mrs. Claghorn—Mrs. Anthony Claghorn. My husband and I are stopping at the hotel."

Bill nodded. "My name is Parmelee—Bill Parmelee," he vouchsafed.

"I haven't thanked you yet," said the girl.

"It isn't necessary."

"But I do thank you," she insisted. "I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't been there, Mr. Parmelee. It was insane for me to try to back out, and it was wonderful for you not to let me."

"Now, now——" interrupted Bill.

"It's the first time—the very first time—that such a thing has happened to me. I've been driving for years and years, ever since I was a child, and never once, before to-day, have I been in real trouble."

Bill grinned. "Never is a long time," he asseverated. "Now I remember once, out West, sitting at a roulette table, and watching the ball drop into the red sixteen times in succession. But the black came on the seventeenth spin. It was bound to come sooner or later."

"Oh, have you played roulette?" inquired Mrs. Claghorn with sudden interest.

"A little," admitted the ex-gambler with a grin. "I remember a faro game," he went on reflectively, "where the bank won for half an hour without a break."

"So you've played faro also?"

"A little of everything," admitted Bill.

"Poker too?"

"Poker most of all."

Had the two met in orthodox fashion their conversation would certainly have consisted of small talk. To one of her own set young Mrs. Claghorn could not have unburdened herself as to this raw-boned, lanky farmer. But there was something in Bill's frank blue eyes, something in his quiet, attentive manner, that emboldened her to continue. She had met him by accident. In all probability she would never meet him again. She told him the whole unhappy story as frankly as if she had been talking to the grass-covered hills.

Only once did Bill interrupt her. "This man Sutliffe," he inquired, "what do you know about him?"

"He's a millionaire; many times a millionaire. He's worth eight millions—maybe nine."

The words sounded oddly familiar. "Eight millions—maybe nine," repeated Bill thoughtfully. Then the gates of memory opened. "I know now!" he ejaculated. "He made it out of gold—a gold mine in Colorado."

"No," corrected Mrs. Claghorn, "out of oil—an oil well in Texas."

"Oh!"

"He owned a few thousand acres—worthless, everybody thought—and then they struck oil. Since then he's been living on his royalties."

Bill smiled. "I think I place him now," he said.

"Have you met him?"

"No. But I've heard a lot about him." He swung the roadster around a final curve and headed toward the hotel. "If I understand you correctly he'll be up to-morrow—the first of the month—for a little poker."

"Yes."

Bill gazed thoughtfully into the distance. "If your husband would take it kindly, I'd like to watch that game a little while."

"I think it could be arranged."

"I might learn something," soliloquized the man who had lived on his knowledge of the cards for six years, "with two such fine players. I could hardly fail to pick up some good tips."

"Don't play, though," warned Mrs. Claghorn, a little frightened at the eagerness with which the simple farmer had invited himself into the game; "the stakes are very high—and you might lose more than you can afford."

"It's very kind of you to tell me!" admitted Bill. "If I should play I'll try not to lose."

"That's what my husband always says," lamented Mrs. Claghorn.

Bill smiled brightly. "Maybe," he ventured, "maybe—if I do play—I'll have beginner's luck."

IV.

Poker, according to its definition, is a card game which may be played by a variable number of persons. It may be played by two or it may be played by half a dozen. But as Tony Claghorn and his parasite, Sutliffe, played the national game, it was two-handed, no matter how many were seated about the table. The others might have been described as among those present; they had little to say about the game.

Tony qualified as a liberal—a more than liberal player. If his hand were good he would support it as a good hand deserved. If it were middling he would support it even better, displaying unlimited confidence in the draw, and in his supposed ability to bluff his opponents. If his hand were poor he was not one to lay it down and wait for a new deal. His cheerful disposition required him to string along; to discard everything but a lone ace—for some deep, unfathomable reason aces seem to hypnotize certain players—and to draw four cards in the hope that they might contain pairs or even triplets.

Searing. and Mackenzie, and Trainor, who, along with Sutliffe, made up the game at the hotel, were not slow in learning Tony's weakness. They attempted to profit by it. Theoretically they should have called every bluff, and should have won in the long run. Practically their own hands did not always justify calling. As the size of the pots increased, so did their nervousness, and Tony, whatever his other shortcomings, was never visibly nervous. Searing and Mackenzie and Trainor observed the careless assurance with which he pushed his chips into the pot; observed, hesitated, and were lost.

A fine poker player is a dangerous antagonist. A bad player, well supplied with cash, and tempted to bet high by one other person in the game, is often even more dangerous. Tony fell into this latter category. Betting extravagantly, it was always expensive to call him; and just often enough to make it still more expensive his bluff turned out to be no bluff at all.

Upon such latter occasions, Sutliffe, invariably, was not among those contributing. Smiling gently, he would decline to draw to his cards; would watch the play and would congratulate Tony upon its conclusion. But upon other occasions Sutliffe showed himself a player of boundless enterprise. Tony might feel inclined to bet high. Sutliffe would encourage him to do so. Then, after the other players had dropped, and when the battle had narrowed down into a combat between the two, Sutliffe's hand, on the call, proved just good enough to take the pot. If the oil millionaire, reflected Bill Parmelee, a close observer at the game, did not possess second sight he was endowed with something quite as satisfactory. It was camouflage poker, decided Bill: Tony, not Sutliffe, was the spectacular player. Tony, not Sutliffe, drew the fire of the opposition. Yet Sutliffe was the big winner and the only winner.

After an hour Tony had consumed his stack and was halfway through a second. Searing and Mackenzie and Trainor, losing slowly but steadily, changing their tactics, and changing back again, prayed for a change of luck—and prayed in vain.

With lofty condescension Sutliffe turned to Bill Parmelee, a lone spectator at the opposite side of the table. "Learning anything, Mr. Parmelee?" he inquired affably.

"Lots," admitted Bill. He nodded emphatically. "Lots," he repeated.

"For instance?" encouraged Sutliffe.

Bill smiled. He might have commented on the uncanny judgment which Sutliffe had displayed a few minutes earlier when he had declined to draw to three queens. But as Sutliffe had carefully shuffled his hand into the discard and as Bill was supposed to be unaware of its contents he felt it wise not to allude to that episode. He contented himself with a safer remark. "I'm learning that you're a very good player," he said.

The possessor of eight millions—maybe nine—bowed his gratification. "It's all in the run of the cards," he deprecated.

"Yes; I've noticed that they've been running nicely—for you."

Sutliffe shrugged his shoulders. "The game's still young. My luck may not hold." He waved a nicely manicured hand, adorned with a heavy gold ring. "How would you like to come in, Mr. Parmelee?"

Bill rose with obvious dismay. "Not tonight," he pleaded, "I've got to be up early to-morrow morning. I've got chores to do."

"We won't keep you long," urged Sutliffe. Despite the other's countrified clothes; despite his unpromising exterior, something whispered to the oil millionaire that money—real money—might be in the offing. Claghorn was the principal victim: but as many others as offered themselves were welcome. "We'll try to give you action," he promised.

"I've had enough action just sitting here and watching," declared Bill. "I never knew that the game had so many fine points." He glanced at his nickel-plated watch. "It's after nine. I guess I'll be going." He circled the table and shook hands with grave formality. When he came to Sutliffe he was particularly cordial. He inclosed the millionaire's hand in both of his own. "I'm immensely obliged to you; immensely!"

"Then perhaps you'll play to-morrow?"

"Oh, to-morrow's Sunday."

"Then Monday night?"

Bill's frank blue eyes gazed into Sutliffe's. "It's a date," he promised.

On the veranda he found Mrs. Claghorn gazing pensively at the moon and patiently awaiting reports from the front. "Through already?" she inquired in surprise.

"Bedtime," explained Bill.

Mrs. Claghorn laughed. "Then you're not broke?"

"Not even bent. I didn't play. I was just getting the lay of the land."

"And what did you find out?"

Bill's level glance met hers. "All that I wanted to." Once more he offered his hand. "I think I'll be saying good night."

Had the light been brighter Mrs. Claghorn might have detected a minute, freshly made scratch across the ex-gambler's palm. As it was, she shook his hand cordially, and was surprised, some minutes later, to find a drop of blood adhering to her fingers.

V.

In a country town—particularly in a New England country town—news travels swiftly. On Sunday morning, at ten o'clock, Sutliffe casually asked the hotel clerk if he knew one Bill Parmelee. At eleven o'clock the information that he had done so reached Bill. En route the news had passed from the clerk to a bell boy, to the postmaster, to his wife, to a farm-hand and thus to its destination. It completed the circuit in fifty-eight minutes, elapsed time.

At three, the same afternoon, Sutliffe returned to the clerk with a fresh series of questions. "This Parmelee," he ventured, "how long have you known him?"

"Ever since we were boys together."

"What's he do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is he a farm hand or does he own his own farm?"

"He works for his father, a mile down the road." Properly encouraged, the clerk volunteered the information that Parmelee, senior, was affluent, even rich.

Sutliffe grunted "Um," and walked away.

This conversation, unexpurgated, was relayed to Bill in one hour and fourteen minutes. He smiled but made no comment.

On Monday, after an exceptionally successful session with Tony Claghorn the evening before, Sutliffe returned to the attack. "Look here," he asked the clerk, after preparing the ground by the gift of a cigar, "how big a check would you cash for Bill Parmelee?"

The clerk could not conceal his surprise. "Has he asked you to cash any?" he countered.

"No; no," explained the multimillionaire patiently, "I'm just asking."

The clerk scratched his head. "Well," he hazarded, "I'd cash his check for a hundred."

"Would you cash it for five hundred?"

"If I had that much money in the safe, yes."

"For a thousand?"

"Yes."

"For ten thousand?"

"What would he want with ten thousand?"

"I'm just supposing."

The clerk laughed. "I don't know what you're getting at, Mr. Sutliffe, but I'd cash Bill Parmelee's check for more money than I ever hope to own."

Sutliffe smiled. "That's exactly what I wanted to know," he admitted.

This conversation reached Bill in record-breaking time, for the clerk, puzzled, immediately telephoned his friend and supplied him with full details. "Bill," he asked in bewilderment, "do you know what to make of it?"

"Yes," said Parmelee.

"Then for Heaven's sake let me into the secret!"

Bill laughed. "Did you ever sell a hog to the butcher?"

"No."

"If you had," said Bill cryptically, "you'd know that the first question the butcher asks is 'What does he weigh?'"

He chuckled as he cranked up the roadster, and made his way to the hotel in the evening. It was clear to him that Sutliffe, a true artist, did not propose to waste his skill on small game. With admirable foresight he had satisfied himself that Bill, his prospective victim, was good for enough to make a display of his talents worth while.

Bill threw back his head and laughed aloud. Then the laugh vanished as another thought flashed upon him. Sutliffe's elaborate preparations could mean only one thing: Claghorn had been cleaned out twenty-four hours ahead of schedule.

Mrs. Claghorn's greeting verified his suspicions. "As a special favor to me," she begged, "don't play to-night."

"Why not?"

"If Tony can't beat Mr. Sutliffe, you can't."

"But I thought that Tony—Mr. Claghorn—could beat him."

"Tony thought so too," assented Mrs. Claghorn sadly. "He changed his mind last night—around midnight. If he had changed it one minute earlier—but what's the use of talking? To-night Tony is going to be a spectator."

Bill gazed at Tony's pretty young wife and felt a sudden hatred for Sutliffe overmastering him. "Ma'am," he assured her, "don't worry about me. I can take care of myself."

"But if I ask you not to as a special favor——"

Bill took her little hand in both of his. "To-night," he promised, "I'm going to do you a bigger favor than you have any idea of."

VI.

The game, with Tony sitting helpfully behind Bill's chair, began slowly. "I haven't played in some time," Bill confessed truthfully. "I'm going to take it easy." He did so.

It required only a few deals for Tony to decide that Bill was a novice. Like himself, Bill was willing to come in on a pair of fives. Like himself, Bill was hypnotized by a lone ace. But unlike himself, a single white chip seemed to satisfy the farmer's gambling propensities.

In a whisper, Tony protested.

Bill smiled. "You've got to remember," he whispered back, "there may be better hands out than mine."

"They may only be bluffing!" foamed Tony.

"Just wait. I'll try some bluffing too."

He was as good as his word. On the next deal he staked five whites on a four-flush and lost ignominiously. "You see?" he pointed out ruefully; "it doesn't always work."

"I didn't tell you to bet on a four-flush!" hissed Tony.

"No," admitted Bill, "but you didn't tell me what to bet on."

"I'll tell you next time," Tony promised. He prodded Bill vigorously when a deal brought him three kings, and when the subsequent draw made them part of a full house. To his horror, Bill promptly called the only other player who had not dropped, and raked in a small pot.

Tony foamed at the mouth. "I didn't tell you to call!" he whispered.

"What's the difference? I won."

"But you should have raised him first! You should have let him call you! You could have made the pot ten times as big!"

Bill scratched his head in perplexity. "I don't see it," he admitted.

"Don't see a full house with kings up?"

"The other fellow might have been aces up."

"But he wasn't!"

Bill turned innocent orbs upon his counselor. "Now, how under the sun was I to know that?" he demanded He indicated his stack of chips, neither larger nor smaller than it had been an hour earlier. "I haven't lost anything—you can look for yourself. Honest, I don't see anything wrong with my game."

"There's not a thing wrong with it!" boomed Sutliffe from the other side of the table. "All you need is more confidence."

"You see?" challenged Bill.

Sutliffe leaned forward ingratiatingly. "Since you're winning," he ventured, "how about raising the limit a little? It'll give you a chance to win faster."

"Limit?" echoed Bill; "limit? I didn't know there was a limit."

Sutliffe laughed. "There isn't any from now on, if you say so." He gazed questioningly about the table. Searing and Mackenzie and Trainor, the hopeful trio, agreed cordially. Poker such as Bill was demonstrating had not come to their notice previously. They might profit by it. They need hardly fear a loss.

A second hour of the Parmelee brand of poker brought Tony to the verge of hysterics. Bill turned calmly to his mentor. "I'm not doing badly," he commented. "Look: I've got two more white chips than I started with." During the hour he had actually gathered in two pots.

"Not doing badly!" foamed Tony. "Not doing badly! Why, you should have won everything in sight! I've never seen such a run of cards in my life and you're just murdering them! That's what you're doing: you're murdering them! If I'd ever had such cards I'd have cleaned up! Nobody on earth could have stopped me! And what are you doing? In two hours you've won two white chips!"

"More confidence," adjured Sutliffe from the other side of the table, "more confidence, Mr. Parmelee!"

Searing and Mackenzie and Trainor, the hopeful trio, smiled. For the first session in three they were nearly even.

Bill hung his head like a whipped dog. "Sorry," he murmured, "real sorry. I'll try and do better." He dealt the cards slowly, inspected his hand, and for the first time a gleam of enthusiasm flickered in his eyes.

Searing had opened. The rest of the trio had come in. Sutliffe had followed suit. Bill gravely pushed a whole stack of chips toward the center of the table.

Tony gazed at him aghast. "Do you know what you're doing?" he challenged.

"Yes."

"You're raising before the draw."

"Yes."

"You're advertising that you've got a good hand. Nobody will come in."

Indeed, the trio had already dropped. But Sutliffe smiled from across the table. "I'm coming in," he announced; "I'm even raising him back."

Bill turned triumphantly to his adviser. "You see?" he crowed; "it's my turn now and I'm going to raise him some more."

"Let me see your hand!" snapped Tony. The pot contained over a thousand dollars, and the sweat stood out on his forehead.

Bill deliberately spread his cards face down on the table, and placed both hands over them. "I'd rather not," he pleaded.

"I insist!"

Bill's jaw stiffened. "That's not in the rules!" he retorted. "Anybody that sees this hand has got to pay good money to do it!"

"Good for you!" boomed Sutliffe. "And now, just to show you what I think of it, I'm going to do a little raising myself." With one hand he pushed his remaining chips into the pot and with the other he extracted a bulky wallet from an inside pocket. He picked out a thousand-dollar bill, and added it to the collection. "There you are, Mr. Parmelee," he challenged.

Bill gazed about helplessly. "I don't carry thousand-dollar bills in my clothes," he confessed, "but I'd like to make that pot a little bigger."

"How about a check?" suggested Sutliffe.

"Good idea!" assented Bill. He drew a neat check book from a hip pocket.

In desperation Tony seized him by the shoulder. "Parmelee!" he begged, "Parmelee, don't make a fool of yourself! Stop before it's too late! You haven't gone crazy, have you?"

"I'm afraid I have," smiled Bill.

What followed always impressed Tony as partaking of the character of a nightmare. Bill drew checks—while Sutliffe exhausted the wallet. It had contained but a single thousand-dollar bill; it disgorged bills of smaller denomination, and topped the heap with the checks which Tony had written on previous evenings.

Mackenzie felt moved to protest. "Look here, Sutliffe," he remonstrated, "this isn't right! Parmelee doesn't know the first thing about the game——"

"He's twenty-one, isn't he?" interrupted Sutliffe.

"I'm twenty-four!" corrected Bill

"Exactly. He's of age and he knows what he's doing."

Bill flashed him a look of gratitude "You bet I know what I'm doing!" He gazed at the pile in the center of the table and poised his pen over a blank check. "Any more raising, Mr. Sutliffe?"

The millionaire shook the empty wallet. "I'm through," he declared, "I haven't got another cent on me."

Bill smiled at him brightly. "If that's so," he said, "I'll call."

Sutliffe laughed loudly. "You can't call! We haven't drawn yet!"

Bill nodded. "You're right," he admitted. He took up the pack gravely. "How many?"

"Just one." With appropriate solemnity he discarded a single card.

Slowly Bill passed the uppermost card to his opponent. "I'll stand pat," he announced.

"You must have a pretty good hand," taunted Sutliffe.

"I think so."

"But mine is going to be just the least little bit better!" Smilingly he took up the card which Bill had passed him. Smilingly he glanced at it. Then the smile vanished, his lips paled, a greenish hue crept into his cheeks, and his eyes protruded. He gazed at the card as if he could not believe his vision, gazed, gasped, seemed in an instant to shrink and become suddenly a smaller man.

"Well?" murmured Bill.

"What have you got?" gasped Sutliffe.

In silence Bill displayed his cards: three queens, a jack, and a deuce.

Sutliffe gazed at them, tore his own cards across, and stumbled from the room.

"Which means," said Bill, "I win."

VII.

It was Tony who regained the use of his tongue first. "You mean to say," he sputtered, "you mean to say you bet like that on three queens?"

Bill smiled. "Look what he bet on."

From the floor they collected three jacks, a queen, and a ten-spot.

"What did he discard?" gasped Mackenzie.

"An ace." Bill turned the card face upward on the table.

Searing seized his head in both hands. "I've played poker, man and boy, for thirty years, but this gets me. Triplets! Nothing but triplets! And look at the pot they staked on it! Lunatics, both of 'em! Lunatics! I can understand how Parmelee did it—but Sutliffe!"

Bill raked in the pot and began to separate it into neat piles. "Suppose you call in Mrs. Claghorn," he suggested. "I'll explain."

But Tony's pretty wife did not need to be called. She burst excitedly in the door. "What's gone wrong?" she demanded, "I just saw Mr. Sutliffe running out of the hotel. He didn't wait for his hat or coat. He was headed for the station."

Bill laughed aloud. "Nothing's gone wrong," he assured her. "Sutliffe's gone broke—that's all."

"But he was worth eight millions!" This from Tony.

"Eight millions my eye! There's his eight millions on the table! Sutliffe's a card sharp —just as I used to be."

"What?"

"'Eight millions—maybe nine'—that's how I knew the man. He's got more names than the Prince of Wales, and he changes his name every six months, but his story is always the same: in gold, in oil, in the mail-order business he's always made eight millions—maybe nine. But his real business is gambling. Why, he was working Kansas City when I was working St. Joe."

Trainor swallowed two or three times. "But I don't understand it yet," he admitted.

"It was easy," said Bill. "It took me only a few minutes to find out that he was using marked cards."

"But we always started with a fresh deck!"

"It didn't take him long to mark them." From his finger he drew a seal ring, armed with a minute needle point. "Look at this: he was wearing one like it. I made sure of that when I scratched my palm shaking hands with him two nights ago. All you do is prick the corner of the card and you can read the back as easily as you can read the face. He didn't bother with the suits, and he didn't mark anything smaller than a ten-spot, but look at the picture cards—just look! This is an ace. Do you see where he put the mark? This is a king. This is a queen. This is a ten. Get it?"

Mackenzie's deep voice boomed through the silence. "Damnable! Utterly damnable!"

"But how could you beat such a game?" demanded Trainor.

"I gave him a dose of his own medicine. I had to string him along for two hours till I was ready for the killing. I couldn't do it more than once: the second time he'd be on to it. So I waited for my chance and then I dealt him this hand."

"Dealt him?" echoed Searing; "dealt him?"

"Just a little legerdemain," admitted Bill. "I put up the cards while he was arguing with Claghorn. I dealt him three jacks, a queen, and an ace. I dealt myself three queens, a jack, and a deuce."

"But what in time made him bet on three jacks?"

"Well," drawled Bill, "when I spread my cards face down on the table he read the three queens all right. He knew I couldn't draw four, because he had the fourth in his own hand."

"But three queens are enough. Three queens beat three jacks!"

"They don't beat four jacks! The card on top of the deck—Sutliffe knew it was coming to him on the draw, and he looked at the back before he bet—was a ten-spot, only I gave it an extra prick and promoted it to be a jack. Sutliffe was expecting four jacks—nothing less."

Again Mackenzie's deep voice punctuated the silence. "The fourth jack was in your hand."

"Just to be safe."

"Why didn't he read that?"

Bill smiled. "You know," he admitted, "I had a sneaking suspicion he would, so I gave it two extra pricks and promoted it to be a king." He extracted his own checks from the gigantic pot and waved his hand toward the exceedingly substantial remains of it. "He collected this from you fellows. I don't want a cent of it. Take back what you lost. If there's any left over I guess Mrs. Claghorn will know what to do with it."

VIII.

Said Mrs. Claghorn: "I haven't understood a word you said, but I think you're just wonderful!"

Said Tony: "And to think that I tried to teach you to play!"

Said Searing: "Look here: suppose Sutliffe had discarded the ace and the queen?"

"It would have told everybody that he had bet sky high on nothing more than three of a kind. He didn't dare do that."

"But suppose," persisted Searing. "Suppose he had done what a straight player would have done: discarded and drawn two. He might have licked you! He might have drawn a full house!"

"He would have drawn a full house," corrected Bill. "I gave him his chance. Only a crook wouldn't take it." Gently he turned over the card which rested on what remained of the deck.

It was another ten-spot.

Another story of Mr. Wilde's card series in the next number.

EVERY MAN HIS OWN TRAINER

HOW often sounds the wail of the poor "white-collar worker," couched in terms something like this: "This job is killing me; hunched over a desk all day; no exercise at all! If I only had the time and the means to take up golf!"

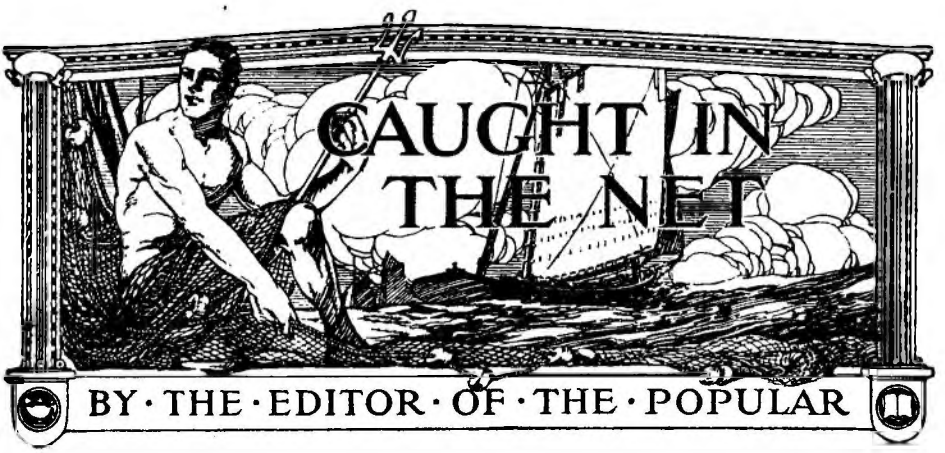
Everybody hears something like that almost every day—at least, everybody who has the misfortune to live in the city. Almost everybody has formulated some such plaint himself. Yet by taking a little thought to the matter anybody may discover that most of the physical benefits of golf are ready to every man's hand—without the attendant golfing drawbacks of club dues, greens fees, and huge demands upon the player's time. There are two advantages golf has to offer that are not easily counterfeited—fresh air and fun. But, even in the city, a few open windows make a passable substitute for the limpid ozone of the tree-bordered fairway, and, as for fun, we are not here concerned with fun but with physical betterment.

What mode of exercise does golf offer that is not within reach of the city-dwelling nongolfer? It provides a long walk. What prevents the city man from an hour's brisk walk in the morning, between breakfast and office, and another hour's homeward jaunt on old mare Shanks between office and supper? Golf gives the arms and the trunk muscles of the body occasional play in the swinging of the club. What prevents the nongolfer from duplicating the exercise the golf club gives each morning and evening at the foot of his bed—for a total time expenditure of perhaps fifteen minutes?

The man who is candid with himself knows the answer. In most cases the answer is "indolence." Minus the better air of the country and the nerve sedative of fun that go with golf, the man who puts in ten minutes of exercise daily in his home and two hours of walking between home and office gets all the benefits of golfing. If he complains that he has not the time and money to get exercise he must be a busier man than the President of the United States and too poor to buy shoes for his feet.

How many city dwellers who complain that a hard fate is forcing their muscles to atrophy will ride to the second floor of an office building rather than negotiate the stairs on foot, or will board a street car to travel five short blocks, or will hire a man to stoke their furnace when they might save the expense and gain the exercise by doing it themselves? How many sires of young hopefuls prefer to sit in an easy-chair and amuse the children with stories to getting down on the floor and playing horse with them—to the greater delight of the youngsters and the infinite physical betterment of the sires?

This generation appears hopelessly addicted to "the easiest way." The motto of the hour seems to be, "Never walk when you can ride." Golf is an admirable game. It is good fun, clean sport, fine exercise. The man who yearns to play golf is yearning in the right direction, certainly. But while he is waiting for better circumstances to come along and grant his heart's desire he ought to be getting in shape to play the game. Unless his situation is extreme he can get his exercise without a golf course, a set of clubs, and a caddy. Indolence, not malignant fate, is the trouble if his muscles go flabby and the fat piles up around his heart.



EXCELLENT DEMOCRACY

COLLEGE professors are a queer race. They know so many facts and their heads ars so full of wise theories that they have some difficulty, it would appear, in achieving unencumbered thought. They do not see things in the light of common sense as we ordinary mortals frequently see them. A dim, academic effulgence seems to dazzle their eyes and cloud their perspective. Their vision is warped away from the practical, also, by the peculiarity of their trade. Their business is the teaching of perfection, or rather, the teaching of whatever they conceive to be perfection. Whereas we average people are merely concerned with earning as good a living as our talents afford.

Thus it comes hard to us to sympathize with the reasoning of a distinguished scholar and teacher who recently resurrected the ancient theme that democracy and excellence are incompatible. It is just like a college professor to believe that and to get all excited about it. But the average man won't believe it and won't get excited about it. The average man is likely to be a pretty wise fellow in his own ignorant way. He knows by experience that, no matter what political system pertains, you can't keep a good man down—not in the long run.

Having the panorama of history to show us what has happened in earlier times and under various political régimes, we in America are fairly well content with our own way of running government and viewing life. Democracy has its disadvantages. But when we contemplate the blights that monarchy and oligarchy and bolshevism have laid on other people we rise vigorously from our seats and vote "Aye!" for American democracy, with all its faults.

It seems to us that the only kind of political and moral system that is calculated to impede the attainment of excellence is a system which withholds the rewards of work well done. It may be true that in this country the equal-opportunity idea has flooded the universities with mediocre young men and women who absorb, without digesting, the widely dissipated energies of their teachers. But the American theory is that you can't make a man out of a worm, anyhow, and that you don't need to teach a good man how to be good. He will be good in any case. And being good he will strive for excellence without any urging. Because if there is one thing this democracy of ours is noted for it is the quality of rewarding achievement on its merits, without any reference to who the rewardee's ancestors may have been or what the "Social Register" says about him. As long as our democracy does that we do not think excellence stands in any danger.

THE DOGS' RED-LETTER DAY

ALL the dogs that we met on the streets that day seemed a little cocky. They walked with a swagger; their tails were elevated proudly. We decided to ask Mike the Airedale, who lives at our expense, about it.

That night, late, we did ask him. Mike the Airedale isn't a talkative companion. Usually his conversation is confined to pantomime of tail and eyes and gruff demands for food and the opening of doors. But sometimes, when the fire has burned down and we should have been in bed long ago, he talks to us. That night we caught him in the right mood. He was stretched out on his side on the two best sofa cushions in the house, legs extended stiff as four ramrods, and regarded us lazily out of the one eye that he had energy enough to keep open.

"What's got into all you dogs to-day?" we demanded. "What are you so cocky about?"

Mike the Airedale stretched his legs the ultimate half inch, curled his toes and yawned widely. "Don't you read the papers?" he wanted to know. "Well, come to think of it, I *did* take yours to-night. No, I didn't tear it up. I haven't torn up a paper for—well, for days. I wanted to read something in it. Gyp from the coal yard told me about it." Mike the Airedale respects Gyp for his knowledge of life and being a real aristocrat doesn't regard scornfully Gyp's somewhat mixed ancestry; Mike can't forget that one of his forbears was a champion of England but he has proved his essential democracy by nipping a landlord and an ash man with complete impartiality and equal relish. "Here, I'll get the paper for you. Read it yourself."

He returned shortly with a damaged evening paper in his mouth and indicated an item on the front page with his cold moist nose. We read:

> Recognizing that man's most loyal friend, the dog, is the original and in some respects the most reliable burglar alarm, the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company of Baltimore has announced a reduction of from five to ten per cent on residence risks where a dog is kept.

"You see?" said Mike the Airedale when he saw that the paragraph had been read. "I've been earning my living for the last five years and never knew it. I wouldn't be surprised if you owed me money. But I'll let that pass if you'll do a little better on the grub. I'm getting darn good and sick of these dog biscuits and I'd like to have chopped beef every day instead of——"

He was interrupted by the clock striking two. We looked up suddenly. The paper was on the floor; the ashes from the evening's last pipe on our chest. Mike was back on the cushions sleeping noisily.

"Hey!" we shouted. "Where did you learn to——"

"Woof!" said Mike the Airedale explosively, getting up suddenly and indulging in a couple of his daily dozen. Then he started sleepily for his bed.

No, we weren't dreaming. The extract from the paper proves that we weren't.

FASTER AND FASTER

MILE by mile the speed of the airplane increases. An officer of the navy, piloting a single-seat racer at Mitchel Field, Long Island, recently set up a new world's record over one lap of a closed-circuit course. He flew at the rate of two hundred and seventy-four miles an hour—nearly five miles a minute!

Considering this performance from a sentimental standpoint the patriotic layman is gratified. America has beaten the world again. But looking at the achievement with practical eyes the average citizen is likely to ask, "Who wants to travel that fast?" Not he, certainly.

What, then, is the utility of all this striving after dizzy speed by air? Why expend money and risk lives to build a type of airplane which will serve no practical purpose? Easy enough. In order to build airplanes which *will* serve a practical purpose. Every time a record-breaking job is performed its authors learn one or

two or a dozen things which will be later applied to raise the general average in the particular field involved. When you have overcome the difficulties that stand in the way of constructing a skyscraper it is child's play to build a ten-story warehouse.

Record-breaking airplanes are of no direct or immediate good to anybody. America could worry along quite happily though never an air speed record came to exalt her fame. But the fast airplane has its purpose. It teaches aviation engineers how to make stancher planes and more dependable engines. The man who can devise a mechanism that will operate and hang together at the fantastic speed of five miles a minute will not find any difficulty in solving the problems of something reasonable like a hundred miles an hour.

And, of course, that isn't all the story. It must be considered that what seems fantastic speed to-day may very well be the average rate of to-morrow. To our ancestors the suggestion of a practical mode of travel which should attain the velocity of a mile a minute would have sounded like black magic. To us, a mile a minute doesn't sound in the least exciting. It is something more than probable that our grandchildren, commuting, perchance between Chicago and St. Louis on the Midwest Aërial Limited, will discuss with practical skepticism, as the earth slips by beneath them at a five-hundred-mile clip, the latest aërial record of a thousand miles an hour. "What earthly good is such recklessness to us?" they will say. "Nobody wants to travel that fast!"

WHAT'S YOUR SMOKE—AND WHY?

WHY not a character-reading system based on tobacco taste? We are told that our faces are the maps of our souls. Palmists assure us that the lines of our hands betray us as clearly as though our secret thoughts were written there in full confession. Psychologists ask us foolish questions and analyze our dreams; then introduce us to ourselves. A Swedish manicurist says she can tell a villain from a saint by the shape of the finger nails. Our true nature is revealed to astrologers by the stars of the firmament; which seems like carrying the thing pretty far. And some astute advertiser once said, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are."

But nobody, thus far, has advanced the seemingly obvious theory that there must be a revealing relation between our minds and our tobacco. This field certainly merits exploration, not to say exploitation. There is just as much difference between the tobaccos men smoke as there is between the men who smoke them. If the curve of a finger nail is significant, shall the brand of a cigar be overlooked?

It must mean something when a man prefers a five-cent Pittsburgh stogy to a mellow half-dollar perfecto from Havana. And what are the essential spiritual differences between pipe fanciers, cigar connoisseurs and cigarette fiends? Then there is the man who does not smoke at all. There may be something seriously the matter with him. And yet Roosevelt never smoked. And the man who chews. What of him?

Consider the limitless possibilities for character research that tobacco affords. Does the man who favors a fine blend of Turkish and Egyptian weeds for his cigarettes possess a highly refined and complex nature? How does he differ from the chap who prefers straight Virginia? What is the twist of character that makes some misguided fellows take to villainous Louisiana perique, with its corrosive bite and its acrid flavor? Possibly they are of a solitary cast of soul and take this method to drive unwelcome companions away. What fine shades of individuality are indicated by the strong brands, the mild brands, the mixed brands? Is a pipe the mark of a kind heart and an honest mind? Does a cigarette betray inherent weakness? Can you read ambition in the shape and color of a corona? Here is alluring bait for contemplation.

One thing is pretty certain. The kind of weed a man packs in his humidor ought to prove at least as much about his disposition as the kind of nose he wears on his face. Which is a whole lot—if you want to believe the character analyst.

POPULAR TOPICS

ALL signs point to a scrappy New Year. Whatever else 1924 may be it will not be dull. The first interesting set-to is being provided by the frantic efforts of the statesmen of most of the rest of the world to make Germany behave like the heroine of a problem play and pay, and pay, and pay. This is proving to be about as easy as getting a snapshot of Suzanne Lenglen with both feet on the ground. The next divertisement will be the Olympic Games in Paris, which, judging by past performances, will not leave behind them a bit more bitter feeling than did Sherman's trip to the seashore. By the time the United States has won the games and the rest of the universe has lost its temper the nominees for the Great American Presidental Sweepstakes will be taking their training gallops and Mr. Dempsey will be ready to renew with Señor Firpo their debate on the respective merits of Anglo-Saxon and Latin culture and civilization.

THIS year we are going to take a really intelligent interest in national politics and learn the difference between a majority and a plurality.

Well—do you?

A NEWSPAPER headline informs us that "Love Strikes Some Dumb." Lots of others don't have to be struck by love to be dumb.

PROMOTERS of professional sporting events—especially heavyweight championship fights—who charge unduly high prices for seats would do well to turn to Proverbs XVII:19: "He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction."

A REPORT of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace says that over two hundred miles of shelves would be required to file those documents of the World War that are worth preserving as historical source material.

Readers of the future will find the first hundred miles the hardest.

A CHICAGO man who visited the Lincoln Park public links laughed loudly at golfers who dubbed their drives. Instantly he became as popular as Jack Johnson would be at a Klan Konklave and was chased by a mob of infuriated players armed with brassys and irons. To save his life a policeman arrested him. The judge before whom he appeared barred him forever from the public links.

We agree with the judge that a golf course is no place for a man with a sense of humor.

A GERMAN chemist who has made a study of naphtha explosions says that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by an oil well that caught fire when it was struck by lightning.

They aren't the only oil towns that have gone to glory on a gusher.

DOCTOR ROBERTS of Montreal, addressing, in Hartford, Connecticut, a conference of men considering entering the ministry, said that the singing of hymns such as "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder, I'll Be There" and "There Will Be Glory for Me" has caused an increase in the number of suicides.

Some people certainly are impatient.

AFTER his rough trip across the Atlantic, Papyrus can appreciate a stable life this winter.

GETTING down toward the bottom of the page.
Just a half inch left.
Too bad we're not one of these fellows who can take it or leave it alone.
Yes, we have no more banan—
alities.

Bill Stuart—Fighting Man

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Country of Strong Men," "A Dozen Eggs," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

As far as anybody inimical to the interests of "Old Bill" Stuart knew, Andy McKellar had succeeded to title in the mine-and-land properties relinquished by Predie & Thompson when that astute partnership turned its very real troubles and its very questionable assets over to the receiver in bankruptcy. Messieurs Wills and Orme, of Sitkum, were as badly fooled in this respect as the next man. They thought Andy McKellar was their meat. If they had known that the real *pièce de resistance* was Old Bill Stuart himself they might have made their play for exploitation of the late P. & T. assets with more circumspection. Sharp gentlemen looking for financial meat usually kept their teeth off Old Bill. He was known to be a tough morsel. "Young Bill" was a slice off the same gristly haunch. His reputation wasn't as wide as that of his crusty sire, but his jaw was as square and his fist as large, or larger. He could birl a log and shake a peavey with the wickedest. He could find his way where the trees knew not the blazing ax. He could fight, he could shoot, and he had a Dog. The dog should be noted with a capital D. Young Bill thought no more of his canine partner than he did of his left leg! The first that Graeme Campbell saw of this capable pair was on the stern-wheeler that bore her upriver toward the roof of the world, where Sitkum lay, and her uncle, Dan Gardner, awaited her. Bill Stuart, the object of her passing interest, was bound for Sitkum like herself. But there the similarity of their objectives ceased. For she was going in quest of peace and quiet, while he was running up the trail of trouble as fast as he could read the sign along the way. Old Bill desired to know the why of a certain letter from a man named Walsh. He also wanted to know what was what about his land agent, the beforementioned Wills, and how-come a man named Orme was offering good money for a reputedly low-grade mining property. Young Bill was on his way to find out. But Graeme knew nothing of these matters. And she would have felt small concern about them had she known. Later she developed a decided interest. Bill himself she found quite the most interesting object on the boat. She considered particularly fetching the efficient manner in which he knocked Captain O'Halloran clean out of the wheelhouse and took the entire steamer to the rescue of his dog. She wondered what had befallen him after he had run the vessel into the bank, leaped ashore, and disappeared with the dripping dog into the wilderness. He reappeared on her horizon two days later. The setting was a road just outside Sitkum. And the circumstances were dramatic.

(A Six-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VII.

BILL STUART slept in Walsh's bunk till late in the afternoon. Then he announced his intention of going on to Sitkum. It was agreed that when they met it should be as strangers, both for the benefit of Stuart's investigations and for the further reason that he might, posing as an entire stranger, pick up some information which might be useful to Walsh in the latter's official capacity. He left his rifle with Walsh, and some memoranda, the contents of which he knew by heart. Then, shouldering his pack, he headed for Sitkum.

As he passed a log shack by a little creek he observed in the dust of the trail leading to it the prints of neat, small shoes. Presumably they had been made by the girl of the boat, old Gardner's niece. City girl, by all the signs. Good looking. Not exactly pretty, but clean-run. Staying in town, Walsh had said, under the impression that the old man was in the hills. Later on he might make her acquaintance. The devil of it was that if she remembered the episode of the boat she would think him a roughneck. And she would remember it. Well, it didn't matter.

The road dipped down to a bushy bottom, with here and there an opening. As he plodded in this stretch Stuart became aware of confused noises behind him and with the instinct of the woodsman paused to identify them. There was little difficulty in doing so. Somebody was driving stock. Then on the road behind him appeared a red steer attended by two mounted Indians, a man and a woman.

Evidently steer and riders had given each other a lively time. The ponies' coats were sweat-darkened. Foam dropped ropy from the steer's mouth. He shambled along, rumbling to himself, swinging his head, which was adorned with a pair of peculiarly long and sharp horns, from side to side. He had been driven many miles that hot afternoon since he had been cut out from his bunch, all his efforts to break away to the friendly seclusion of brushy coulees frustrated by the riders who clung to his flanks no matter how rough the going he selected for their undoing. They always hazed him back to the detested road, which he seemed to know led to the killing corral. Now he was sullen, his eyes partially glazed, tired, thirsty, but with strength quite unimpaired. As he came closer Stuart's experience recognized his state of mind. He was "on the prod," ready to vent his sullen fury on anything animate, as ugly tempered a bit of beef as ever ran on the hoof. To a steer in that condition a man on foot comes as a boon.

Stuart gave him all the road promptly, without hesitation or false shame. He stepped aside in the direction of three small cottonwoods big enough to climb if necessary; and he did so just in time, for as soon as the brute caught sight of him he came for him like a flash.

Bill Stuart sprinted for the trees, Fitz bounding beside him. As his master caught a limb and went up with a swift agility that bore testimony to excellent condition as well as former work on the rings, the great dog whirled to confront the lowering horns; but seeing that his idol was safe changed his mind, leaped aside and in again with a vicious slash at a hind leg. The red tornado passed beneath the trees and finding himself off the road and again in the shelter of brush made a final bid for freedom. After him pelted the Indians, the woman as they passed firing a volley of curses at Stuart in the tree.

Somewhat ruffled he descended and regained the road. He reflected that it was lucky for him that he was not a cripple or a pilgrim—and that he could climb. Incidentally he hoped that the steer would give the coppery queen a rough ride. On the whole, remembering her words, his sympathies were with the steer.

"If it had seen somebody who didn't savvy that the brute was bad, or a child or a woman, there might have been an accident," he reflected. "That girl, now—but of course she's in Sitkum long ago."

Listening to the sounds which indicated the course of the pursuit he rounded a turn and in a straight stretch ahead, where the brush parted in an opening of a couple of acres, he saw the girl in question. She was standing still and he could tell that steer and pursuers, though hidden by the brush, were not far from her.

He shouted and broke into a run. As he neared her he put all the power of his lungs into the tops'l-yard-ahoy bellow and highly colored warning which she had heard. Then the steer broke from the brush and the girl turned and ran.

Stuart knew that there was no time to get his automatic from his pack. He slipped the burden and ran as a sprinter runs to breast the tape in a close finish. But in a dozen strides he realized that it was useless. He could not reach the girl before the maddened animal; nor could he by shout or gesture divert the brute's fury to himself.

But as he cursed in an agony of helplessness, without slackening his pace, he heard a deep-chested roar beside him; a great, grizzled body running belly to ground shot past him like a loosed projectile, and he knew that there was at least hope. Fitz, who had been investigating some attractive

scent in the brush had emerged from it, sized up the situation for himself and was to the rescue. Behind, outdistanced but running hard, Bill yelled encouragement in a voice that cracked with strain and excitement.

"Go to it Fitz!" he croaked. "Take him! Tear him up! Oh, by the glory, tear him up!"

Save for that one deep, fighting bellow the great dog's rush was silent. He saw before him the living thing that a few minutes before had threatened his master; and he hurtled across the opening to meet the half ton of crazed fury, one hundred pounds of bone and muscle and sinew driven by a fighting heart that knew no quiver of fear, launching himself not at his master's command but because somehow he divined the desire of his master which was his supreme law.

This horned brute had once threatened his master, and now had the audacity to appear again. This time he should not escape; this time it was to the death. And so Fitz ran low and silent,. his eyes burning green with the killing light of the forgotten killers whose heir he was.

Running as she had never run before, fear lending her momentary strength and speed, the girl was halfway across the opening. But behind her the beating hoofs were very near. She felt her breath leaving her, her legs becoming leaden, her blood pounding in her ears. "Run!" she seemed to hear a far-away voice calling, "for God's sake keep running!" Summoning the last of her fading strength she made a few yards more—and then she was done. She could run no farther. This was the end. And so, as her ancestors in far-away Lorne and Argyll had faced death dirk and claymore in hand, barehanded, she turned to face it.

She heard what was neither snarl nor bark—a deep, harsh roar, malignant, forbidding, heart shaking in utter ferocity—and a grizzled, animate projectile seemed to launch itself through space, not at her but at the horned demon that was almost upon her. Wide-eyed, scarcely believing, she beheld the great red shape turn completely over and crash down at her feet in a flurry of kicking limbs, while to it a great dog clung and slashed and ripped and tore.

The dog, running almost at right angles to the steer's course, in his final leap had caught the beast's nose, his weight and momentum dragging it down, throwing the head to one side. Down came the steer, his full weight, driven by his speed, on his neck which, thus crooked, snapped. His limbs flurried convulsively. With a lightning twist of the body Fitz avoided the crushing weight, tearing away half the creature's muzzle as he turned. Immediately he went for the throat, ferocity incarnate.

It was not a pleasant sight, and Graeme, sagging back from it unaware that the steer was practically dead, found herself caught up, lifted and carried as if she had been a child against a chest heaving in an endeavor to catch air.

"All right, keep quiet," said Bill Stuart in a voice decidedly breathless. "I think the brute's all in. But take no chances." He set her down, steadying her with an arm which seemed to be of the texture of a hickory limb. "Show's over," he said. "Steer broke his neck, I think. Fitz! Here, boy."

The great dog which had ceased worrying his victim but was standing guard obeyed doubtfully. He came slowly, with backward glances, the fighting fires still smoldering in his eyes. His grim muzzle and great chest were splashed and streaked with the steer's foam and blood. He limped a little, as from a strained shoulder. But he held his head high and walked with pride. A victorious warrior, Fitz, leaving the stricken field!

Graeme Campbell recognized man and dog. "I—I——" she began. To her lips, shaken as she was, came the phrase of conventionality. "Thank you so much." Realizing its utter inadequacy, its idiocy under the circumstances, she flushed angrily at herself. Bill Stuart recovered his wind with a final deep breath.

"Don't speak of it. A privilege, I assure you."

The girl stared at him. This was not the language she expected from a man packing his blankets. Her flush deepened.

"Please!" she said. "I didn't mean that idiotic phrase. It said itself. But I don't know what to say. I—I can't think—yet."

"Well, well, that's all right," he soothed her. Her eyes, upturned to his, put him in mind of something, and now he knew what it was. They were the wonderful blue of a little lake he knew, nestling in the hills, where the trout took the fly well. "No thanks coming to me. Fitz did it all and

the old rascal's so proud of himself that it hurts. He thinks he's broken a record—as well as a steer's neck. At least I think its neck is broken—anyway it's dead, which is the main thing."

He was talking principally to allow her time to regain her composure. But the two Indians, whom apparently the steer had eluded in the brush, now appeared on the road and seeing the body of the animal and the two figures beside it rode up. Briefly they inspected the animal, exchanged a few words, and turned to the whites, scowling.

"Moosmoos him go mimoluse," the buck asserted. "You shootum!"

"Hallo," Stuart negatived. "I didn't shoot him." He told them what had happened.

"Your kamooks killum moosmoos, all same you killum," the buck decided, thus succinctly announcing a general legal principle. "You killum, you pay for um."

"I do, do I?" said Stuart, eying the claimant with little favor. "Trying to work a little holdup," he explained. "They say my dog killed the brute and I'm responsible. Must think I'm a pilgrim." And to the Indian: "How much that moosmoos worth?"

"Hundred dolla," the owner asserted promptly; a reply which marked him as a man of enterprise, a steer on the hoof at that time and place being worth around thirty dollars.

"A hundred dollars," Stuart repeated reflectively. "What's your name? Is this woman your klootchman?"

"Me Isadore," the buck replied. "This woman him my klootchman. Him name Mathilde."

"All right," said Stuart, and suddenly his tone changed. "What the devil do you mean," he demanded sternly, "by letting that steer chase a white woman? Don't you know how to ride? Can't you use a rope? You ought to be in jail—in the skookum house. And you talk about being *paid*!"

This direct attack had its effect on the buck; but the woman promptly organized a counteroffensive.

"You dam' big bluff!" she said in her whining drawl. "Your dog killum moosmoos. You pay or me killum dog!"

Stuart, glancing swiftly at Isadore, saw that apparently he was unarmed; but the woman carried a small rifle in a scabbard between her leg and the saddle. Presumably the weapon was of .22 caliber, such as many squaws carry in and out of season to kill such small game as they may chance upon. As she spoke she drew the gun, revealing a neat, late-model, slide-action repeater. Considered as an arm it was in the infant class by modern standards; but a bullet from it accurately placed would kill a dog or a deer as certainly as a .450 express. Indeed its ballistics are superior to those of the old pea rifle with which our pioneering ancestors killed anything and everything from squirrels to redskins.

Stuart did not hesitate. The woman might be bluffing but where his dog was concerned he would not take a chance. He forestalled her intention, whatever it might be, by springing forward, grasping the muzzle of the little gun and by a quick wrench trying to wrest it from her.

But the squaw's bronzed fingers retained their grip of stock and frame. She slid the safety and, as Stuart wrenched again, pressed the trigger. The venomous little gun spat almost in his ear but the bullet struck the ground behind him. Abandoning half measures he caught the gun with both hands and with an up-and-over twist broke her hold. Instantly with a whirl of hissing oaths she jumped her pony at him, slashing at him with her quirt. He struck the pony across the nose with the gun barrel. It reared, whirled on its hind legs, and refusing to face the music again under a heavy quirting, began to pitch.

Meantime Isadore, coming to his woman's aid, made a manful attempt to ride Stuart down. But a great, grizzled body launched itself through the air, struck his pony's withers and clawed desperately for a foothold. Great fangs in a blood-smeared mouth yawned in his face and slashed at his fending arm. The dog fell off, taking most of the Indian's sleeve with him, and crouched for a fresh spring. He was halted by his master's sharp command. Yet he did not relax. He held his posture, hung on a hair trigger, grumbling in his throat. He seemed to say, "Let me at him. This time I'll pull him down."

The girl stood bewildered by this rush of events in which words passed swiftly into action so swift that it blurred before her understanding like a speeded film. It seemed unreal, impossible that she was actually witnessing such things, and herself a part of them. She heard the quick *slack-*

sluck of the little rifle's action as Stuart ripped the slide back and forward, pumping a fresh shell home.

"You keep back with that pony," he commanded, "or your kuitan go mimoluse, too. Fitz, quit it. Come here." And to Graeme, "It's all right, Miss Campbell. The rough stuff is over." And he added with candid admiration, "By George, that klootch can ride."

There was no doubt about it. Graeme witnessed her first exhibition of real riding. The pony, a big white-eyed pinto, was putting his wicked heart into the work; his head cached, his ears flattened, his back humped like an indignant cat's. His rider was taking her bumps and pouring the braided leather into him with equal zeal. With a final lacing she straightened him up and joined her husband. Their speech—the masculine low, clucked gutturals, the woman's equally low, whining sibilants—was unintelligible to Graeme.

"What are they saying?" she asked.

"That stuff's too deep for me; but I think he's getting his for being too slow when she pulled the gun."

"What will they do now?"

"Nothing they can do. Cuss a little, I suppose. Better stick your fingers in your ears. That copper queen has an unexpur gated vocabulary. She's the worst of the two. The buck only thinks he's bad. She *is*."

The Indians halted their ponies at half a dozen paces.

"You give me my gun!" the woman demanded, and added a modest request to the deity concerning Stuart's soul.

Stuart shook his head. "No. S'pose you go to the big store to-morrow, you get it there." For which precaution he received a bitter and comprehensive cursing.

"Me kill you!" the buck threatened hardily. "S'pose you no pay for moosmoos, me shoot mika kamooks, me shoot you!"

Stuart eyed them for a moment, his mouth hardening. Then he picked up a chip of dry wood the size of his palm. He flung it high in the air and pitched the little rifle to his shoulder. Three spatting reports followed. At each the chip jumped and gyrated, fragments splintered from it. He dropped the little weapon into the hollow of his arm and eyed the Indians coldly. "It'll pay you two," he told them deliberately," to let me and my kamooks alone. Especially the kamooks." In half a dozen swift strides he reached the buck's stirrup and spoke to him in a low, menacing voice which did not reach the girl's ears. "Think you're bad, do you?" he said, "you low-down, cultus, dirty thief, you think you're a bad Indian. You have the nerve to threaten a white man. Folks must be easy in here. You scum!" His right hand swept up and struck the Indian's cheek with a resounding smack. "Get down off your pony and fight a white man, you that talk so big!" he challenged.

But Isadore did not accept this urgent invitation. Instead he backed his pony precipitately. At a safe distance he shook his fist, volleying threats. Then with his woman he turned and rode off the ground. Stuart watched them go and turned to the girl.

"I had to do that," he said. "It looked like a grand-stand play but I had to make it. This is the second time I've pulled a bunch of rough stuff in your presence, but really it isn't my fault."

"Oh, 'rough stuff!'" She threw out her hands in protest. "You saved my life. It sounds like a stage line, doesn't it? But you *did*."

"Fitz did. He's modest, Miss Campbell, so just let it go. And now do you feel like going on? You were going toward Sitkum, I think."

"You know my name; but I don't know yours. It isn't—Fitzpatrick?"

"Nothing so distinguished. My surname is Stuart, given name William, common name Bill."

"And how did you know my name, Mr. Stuart?"

"We were on the boat together."

"And at Mr. Walsh's—at least your dog was there."

"I didn't know you had seen the dog," Stuart admitted. "I had to walk after I left the boat and Walsh was kind enough to give me breakfast. Seems like a fine fellow."

"Are you trying to give me the impression that you don't know Mr. Walsh?"

Stuart was taken aback. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't care whether you know him or not. Were you in his house?"

"Yes."

"Did you see a rooster or a parrot?"

"A rooster or—no, I didn't."

"Is Mr. Walsh a ventriloquist?"

"A—uh—I don't think I get you."

"It doesn't matter."

Stuart, who had not overheard her conversation with Walsh, was puzzled. But he puzzled her. His garb was rough, serviceable, and he was carrying his blankets. But his speech, though bristling with slang and strange idiom, was that of her own order. She now remembered that he had been carrying a rifle when he left the boat. But until he had taken possession of the squaw's he had had none. She deduced correctly that he had left it at Walsh's.

But a light buckboard drawn by a team of buckskins overtook them. They drew aside to let it pass. The driver was a big man who appeared to be fat. The other was Wills. As he recognized the girl he spoke to the driver, who turned his head. His eyes, gray, hard, blank as a fog, took in Stuart from top to toe and then shifted to his dog. For a long moment he stared and then he faced front again. Wills raised his hat to the girl, bestowed on Stuart a scrutiny as hard and keen as his companion's. The rig went on.

"May I ask," said Stuart, "the name of the gentleman who appeared to know you?"

"That is Mr. Wills. We were fellow passengers on the boat."

"I saw him with you on the upper deck. Do you know the other man?"

"Not at all."

But they were on the outskirts of town and his companion halted before a whitewashed log house.

"This is where I live—for the present. Later I shall be at home in the log house you passed on this side of Mr. Walsh's. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Stuart, but please believe that I'm very, very grateful."

"Hear that, Fitz?" The grim warrior cocked his head to one side and lolled out a long, red tongue. "He says it was a great pleasure to him, Miss Campbell. He had the time of his life, and—hi! Look out! Fitz! Steady!"

For suddenly the girl had dropped to her knees, thrown her arms around the dog's great, muscle-bulging neck and was murmuring in his ear. The brown hair with the coppery tints mingled with the harsh, grizzled scalp, the soft cheek lay close against the grim-fanged mouth. Stuart snapped a second warning command but it was unnecessary. The dog's tail beat to and fro and he lolled out his tongue again. The girl looked up at Stuart.

"I believe he understands."

"Very likely," Stuart admitted. "But you nearly stopped my heart action. For Heaven's sake don't take such chances with strange dogs in this man's country. They aren't pets. As to Fitz—do you know there are not three other people in the world who could get away with what you have just done?"

"Really? Then it means we are friends. Good-by and thank you—both—again."

Stuart and his canine companion turned toward the main quarter of the town. He addressed the dog. "Old sport," he said, "if I can rustle you a fat, juicy steak in this burg it's yours. There's a real girl! And you, darn you, had all the luck! Not that I'm jealous—it was coming to you." His thoughts took a practical turn. "Tie in, Fitz, beside me. This town has all the earmarks of a one-man, three-dog dump; and though probably you'd consider a free-for-all as merely topping off a perfect day we don't want anything to start. We've had too darn much publicity as it is. Our present job is to live it down."

CHAPTER VIII.

As to the publicity Stuart was correct. Ordinarily the arrival of a stranger packing his blankets would have attracted no attenion; but the story of the episode on the steamer had spread and Stuart to his disgust found himself identified and an object of interest. He found however that it had given him a certain status, for O'Halloran had a reputation as a fighting man. It appeared, too, that he had expressed his intention of beating up his assailant at the first opportunity.

Stuart was not greatly perturbed by the reported bellicose intentions of the mariner but he made a mental note of them, prudently deciding to keep out of his way at such times as the boat lay at Sitkum. After supper he strolled forth to see what he could see, and halfway down the street came face to face with the red-headed, bibulous gentleman of the boat. Fitz identified him with a low growl. The man stopped, eying the pair. He was now sober. He planted himself squarely before Stuart.

"Ain't you the guy that was on the boat yesterday?"

"Yes," Bill Stuart replied shortly. He had no friendly feeling toward the man whose actions had caused him a good deal of inconvenience and undesirable publicity.

"Thought so," the other returned with satisfaction. "I was pretty drunk, and I got drunker, but I remember all right. I remember you took a punch at me."

"Well, what about it?" Stuart demanded sharply. "It was coming to you. And I'll tell you something else, just between friends: If you don't like the job as it stands I'll be tickled to death to do it over again."

The other eyed him coolly. "Why," he said, "you must be one of these fightin' fools we hear about. Is that all you do? Don't you never take no other exercise?"

"Don't worry about how I stir my liver up," Bill told him grimly. "I didn't *see* you kick my dog overboard, but I know darn well you did. A rotten dirty trick! Yesterday I hadn't time for more than one punch at you but to-day I've got all the time there is. I'm not doing a thing, get me?"

"I don't start work for a day or two myself," the other returned, unruffled. "As you say, I done a rotten dirty trick; only bein' drunk it didn't look that way at the time, or else I didn't take time to think. I just done it and I don't blame you for bein' sore. So we'll just walk around back of these stables. Then you can shut up your dog—because I sure ain't goin' to mix it with you with him loose—and we can scrap it out quiet and peaceable."

But this frank admission and cool acceptance of the situation had smoothed out much of Stuart's irritation. There was a whimsical devil in the red-headed man's level if somewhat bloodshot blue eye that he found himself liking. And he realized the utter folly of the situation brought about by his own too-hasty words.

"We won't scrap," he said.

"Why not?" the other demanded.

"Well," said Stuart, "I suppose I'm taking backwater."

"You're a liar," the red-headed man told him with unexpected perception. "A minute ago you was achin' to take a birl out of me. You think you can lick me, and maybe you can. It's awful hard for me to make up my mind to scrap, and I might not do it again. Here," he went on in aggrieved tones, "you've got me all keyed up and you won't play no tune. What in hell do you mean by it?"

"When a man says he's sorry, that's good enough for me," said Stuart. "I was wrong myself yesterday in taking a punch at you —the way you were. I guess I didn't take time to think, either."

"Scrap's off," said the other. "Shake!" He took Stuart's ready hand in a grip that left no doubt of the quality of his muscles. "My name's Joe Hoobin. Mostly they call me 'Red.' When I get drinking I'm a dam' fool. Most folks is, but I'm dam'der'n most. I'm worse'n a fightin' drunk—I'm one of these darn clingin', friendly ones that want to paw you over and breathe in your face. I got no more notion I ain't pop'lar than a muddy pup. If somebody'd take and hit me on the head with an ax one of them times I wouldn't blame him. Maybe some time somebody will. Well, how about a little drink now, to show there's no hard feelin's?"

Stuart declined this cement of friendship, rather, it appeared, to Red Hoobin's relief.

"Just wanted to be sociable," he explained. "I've had enough myself the past week or so to do me for a while. Come along over to my shack and have a smoke."

Mr. Hoobin dwelt in a small log house on the outskirts of town. He seemed typical of a class which Stuart knew well—the drifters, the lone males of the West; lacking ties or responsibilities, with no definite ambitions, living for the present alone. It appeared in the course of conversation that he had been a lumberjack, a miner, a ranch hand and half a dozen other things. Now he was a teamster. He owned his own team, of which he spoke in terms of affection. His outlook on life was humorously philosophic, slightly cynical. When Stuart, in keeping with his assumed character, spoke of obtaining work he promptly offered to get him a job.

"I'm taking a contract to clear a piece of land in a week or two," he said, "and I can give you a job with me if that'll be any good to you."

Stuart found his bluff called. He did not want a job but he thought it better to accept. He could always quit; and he could say meantime that he had secured work.

"That will suit me first rate. I want to look around and see what's in this country. It looks good to me."

"She's a man's country," said Red.

"She's like the old-timer said about Texas —all right for men and cows but hell on women and horses."

"In a new country there's always the chance to make a stake."

"And the chance to lose one, if you've got it. What was you thinking of, special?"

"Nothing special. I thought I might take up a piece of land."

"Homestead? Not much good stuff left."

"Buy. Do you know where there is any good land, cheap?"

"Depends on what you call 'cheap.' You can't get land for a dollar an acre no more. There's some pretty fair land down on Cat Creek, though."

"Who owns it?" Stuart asked, for this was the location of the syndicate's lands.

"Wills has the handling of it."

Stuart was anxious to get all the information he could as to Wills but he disliked to ask direct questions. "He was on the boat yesterday, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"I saw him this afternoon behind a team of buckskins. Big, fat man driving."

"That'd be Orme," Red decided.

"The mining man?"

Red glanced at him swiftly. "Who told you Orme was a minin' man?"

"Isn't he?"

"Well, I guess he has a claim or two. Most folks here have."

"What's the matter with them?"

"Nothing the matter with the claims, only nobody has any money to develop. If we had, there's no roads much to haul ore on. Most claims are to hell and gone in the hills, high up. And then when anybody with money comes along every darn fool owner begins to talk about fifty thousand cash for his prospect hole, and the buyer take all the risk. That kills every deal. So we got our claims and we're liable to keep 'em till we get some sense."

"Is there a producing mine here?"

"Nary one."

"I heard some ore had been shipped from here."

"One or two little ore shipments ain't a producer."

"Ever hear of the 'Dolly Gray Group?'"

Red shot him another swift glance. "Sure."

"That shipped once, didn't it?"

"Might have."

"Not being worked now?"

"No."

"How about placer mining?"

"Nobody never found real pay. Them old-timers that come in, time of the Wild Horse and Cariboo gold rushes, combed all these creeks pretty fine, but they never found nothin' worth while. Nope, you won't make wages placerin'."

When Stuart rose to go Hoobin made an unexpected suggestion. "You see this lay-out I got," he said. "She ain't much, but if you want to spread your blankets in the extra bunk you're welcome. It's a darn sight quieter sleepin' than the bull pen at the hotel."

"That's mighty good of you," Stuart acknowledged. "I've a notion to take you up, if you mean it."

"Go on up and get your blankets now."

"To-morrow. I've got my sleeping for to-night."

"All right," said Red. "It's none of my business," he said after a pause, "but if you play cards at all I wouldn't sit into no game here for a while, unless I was organized to lose."

In almost every small Western town there is a device ready rigged for the undoing of the too-trustful wayfarer, a fact of which Bill Stuart was quite aware.

"Is the game here a deadfall?" he asked.

"Well, she's a home-town game."

"I get you. I'm off it till I get acquainted. To-morrow I'll bring my blankets. And thanks."

Red regarded Fitz speculatively.

"That dog of yours remembers me, and I don't blame him. Still, I'd like to be friends with him."

"When he sees us together a few times he'll be all right. He doesn't like to be handled, but there's nothing vicious about him. He's a gentleman done up in a dog's hide."

"I've seen a lot of dogs done up in gentleman's hides," said Red, "and yellow dogs at that. I'll take your word he ain't vicious, but to me he looks like a scrapper."

"He can scrap if he has to, but he never looks for it."

"He won't need to around here. Lots of brutes ready to pile onto a strange dog. Wills has got a real bad one. Mean. He'll come near tacklin' a man. I'm tellin' you, so's you can look out. I wouldn't want to see your dog tore up."

"Fitz takes some tearing."

"This ain't no ord'nary dog. On his hind legs he stands about as high as a man. Quick as a cat, too. I've seen him throw a sixty-pound dog into the air the way a terrier would a rat. Sorter blue-coated, he is."

"Dane," Stuart decided. "Bad enough when they are bad. I'll look out for him. I can keep my dog in close."

"If he wants to pile him, that won't make no difference. He's gettin' so's he don't care much for a man."

"If he piles Fitz, when I'm keeping him in, we'll see if he cares for me."

"Nobody likes to see his dog tore up," said Red, "but if it was me I wouldn't tackle that brute with nothin' less than an ax—and I'd rather have a gun. I wouldn't do it with a club or a rock."

The next day Stuart established himself in Hoobin's shack. Then he began to look around, to get acquainted, by no means a difficult matter. The hotel was a rallying point, a rendezvous, a clearing house of local gossip, a club. There for the first time he met Orme.

Orme was big and apparently fat. But in spite of his bulk he moved with the shambling ease and lurching lightness of a great bear. Stuart noticed when he shook hands that Orme's big soft fingers closed upon his with the inexorable firmness of a padded vise. He possessed a jovial offhand manner, real or affected; but though he laughed readily his eyes, fog gray, never smiled. They remained steady, expressionless, bleak.

McCool, spoken of by Walsh, Stuart did not see. Nor did he meet Wills, though he saw him from time to time. On one of these occasions Wills was riding, accompanied by his dog. The animal, a huge Dane, apparently was in its prime, evidently tremendously powerful, graceful, agile as one of the great felines as it trotted beside the horse. Stuart, looking at it, shook his head. A vicious dog of that size was to be avoided for Fitz's sake. But Hoobin told him that when not with its master the dog was chained up.

"And that's about the surest way to make a dog bad if he's got a mean streak at all," Stuart commented.

"Every time," Red agreed. "No animal likes to be shut up or chained up, no more'n we would. And it ain't necessary. With kindness and a club you can learn an animal about anything you want to."

"That sounds like a good educational combination," Stuart grinned.

"Well, you know what I mean if you know anything about trainin' animals, and I guess you do," Red returned. "Now and then you get one with so much savvy he don't need lickin'; and now and then you get one so wrong-headed he don't savvy kindness; but them's exceptions. The main thing with an animal is to treat him fair. Punish him when he's bad, right at the time, quick and sharp but not too heavy; but when he makes good give him a little pettin' and praise. They like it, same as folks. And talk to 'em a lot. You show me a man that talks to his team same as if they was his friends and I'll show you a team that will pull their hearts out for him if he puts it up to 'em. Same with a dog. I've heard you talk to yours and I'll bet you'll say he savvies."

Stuart had felt some misgivings as to his host's bibulous habits but to his relief Red seemed to be settled firmly if possibly temporarily upon that vehicle euphemistically termed "the wagon." One night he alluded to this.

"I'm through," Mr. Hoobin declared virtuously. "There ain't nothin' in fightin' the booze, and if any one says I don't know you can call him a liar. You never win once—not one round. While your money lasts you're a prince; but when you've blew it you're a bum. Now, if I'd salted my dough for the last ten years instead of crowdin' it on the barkeep I'd have had enough to buy me a house and things."

"You've got a house," Stuart pointed out to this ancient truism.

"I got a shack. I mean a real house with paper on the walls and things in it like carpets and chairs you can lean back into, and china plates to eat off of. And a sideboard," he concluded daringly.

"Yes," said Stuart.

"And a little garden where I could grow things to eat," Red went on with a certain wistful timidity, "and—and maybe some flowers."

"I guess that flower thing settles it," said Stuart.

"Huh!" said Mr. Hoobin. "Whacha mean?"

"You've got a girl," Stuart deduced.

"Aw, go to hell!" Mr. Hoobin protested, turning a rich, ripe scarlet.

"Don't hurry me and we'll make a party

of it," Stuart grinned. "May as well come clean, Red. Who is she?"

"Since you know so darn much," Red admitted with a certain relief in the confidence, "I don't mind tellin' you. Her name is Miss Fay McIlree."

"And when is the wedding?"

"Not settled yet. There's several things to be settled first. Fay's away now, but when she comes back I want you to meet her. Her mother's a widow and a mighty fine woman. Strong as a bear. She throwed me out on my ear once when I come around with a drink or two too much in me, and like to broke my neck. Ever since then me and her's been great friends. She savvies how it is with a man, for Tom McIlree was a rip-roarin' devil when he got started, they say. Now this last time, when you saw me on the boat, I'd been out to lose two teeth that was botherin' me. I didn't mean to get drunk. I thought I'd just take two or three—sorter take off my shoes and socks and paddle along the shore—but the first thing I knew my clothes was wet; and then I thought I'd take 'em off and see how darn deep I could dive. But this is the last."

"Stay with that and you'll be all right," said Stuart. "Do you think you can get me a saddle horse, Red?"

"What kind of a saddle horse?"

"One with good wind and good feet and no very bad habits. Doesn't have to be fast. I'd rather have him easy gaited and a good walker. One I can pack if I have to. One that's wise to a rope and won't tie himself up and burn himself with it."

"You're sure that's all?" Red queried with mild irony. "Don't you want one that will climb a ladder and drink out of a bottle and rap what o'clock it is with his fore-feet?"

"There are lots of cayuses that fill my bill."

"Only as a rule they ain't for sale. But I believe I know where I can get you one. He was Tom Brant's stock horse, and he'd follow and come to a whistle. Sure-footed and steady. Tom used to shoot deer from the saddle."

"Why is he selling him?" Stuart asked suspiciously.

"Tom's quit ridin'," Red explained. "Uses wings now—or we'll say he does. If he was alive you bet he wouldn't sell that Jim pony of his."

He secured the pony, which turned out to be a big, rangy sorrel with a good forehead and honest eyes. Stuart rode him once and paid a high price without haggling. Then he bought a modest outfit and a small supply of grub and departed to investigate for himself the syndicate's lands.

CHAPTER IX.

On the afternoon of her second day in Sitkum, Graeme made the acquaintance of her uncle, who by dint of persistent application had got down to the bed rock of his complexion. He was slightly nervous at the prospect of meeting a relative, a peril which he had avoided successfully for some thirty years; but he lied manfully, explaining that he had been out of town on a short trip and so had not received her letter.

"If you can put up with me and my shack I'll be tickled to death," he said. "There's room for two. It'll take a little fixin' up to suit your notion; but you go as far as you like. My bank roll's behind you."

"That's dear of you; but we may as well have an understanding at the start. I pay my own way."

"Not much you won't, not with me," said Mr. Gardner in offense. "We don't do it like that, not in the West. Don't talk no foolishness about payin' for things while you're in my camp, or you and me won't git along for a cent."

Graeme found the cabin more roomy than she had anticipated. It was reasonably clean. There was a living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen. The former was cluttered with masculine possessions, the lares et penates of the lone male of the Old West.

Thus a hand-worn but meticulously oiled and spotless rifle hung on pegs from which also depended a gun belt with the black butt of a six-shooter projecting from a frayed old holster. In a corner lay a riding saddle and a couple of packsaddles. There was an ax with a sheathed bit, a gold pan, a prospector's pick, lash ropes, a couple of steel traps, old papers, old pipes, cards, a litter of tools and odds and ends. But Gardner considered that the room was in apple-pie order.

But when she came to investigate the room that was to be hers Graeme was amazed to see a single bed with box springs and mattress of superlative quality, all brand-new. Gardner cackled at her sur-

prise. "Didn't expect to sleep comfortable, hey?"

"But where did you get such things—here?"

"You don't want to get the notion that stores in the West don't carry a good stock. In the old days, when everything had to be freighted, you couldn't stick a store on an order of anything from a cartridge to a grand pianner. They didn't carry no poor, cheap goods, neither. The West always did want the best and was willin' to pay for it."

"But you bought this for me. You must let me——"

Gardner's brows drew down fiercely. He held up a sinewy, gnarled hand. "Young woman, I'm liable to buy whatever I take a notion to, and you nor no other female ain't goin' to reg'late my expenditures a little bit. That goes every time, for every darn thing around this shack, and you make a note of it right now and forgit them absurd notions about payin'."

He offered to have a Chinese dig up a patch of ground if she wanted to grow a few flowers.

"I love them," she said, "but I'm afraid I don't know much about them."

"Nor me," her relative admitted, "so we'll pass it as a losin' hand. I ain't used to tame flowers much. But wild ones!—I've rode a hundred miles on carpets of 'em, with the wild bees hummin', and grass and trees, and little lakes with fish swarmin' in 'em, and deer and elk grazin' in bunches 'most as tame as dairy cows."

"How glorious!" she exclaimed. "I shall never see anything like that."

"No, you come too late. I only saw the last of them days myself. Still, I saw them. I've seen parts of the West like she used to be in the days of the old beaver men. I've seen them, too—the last of the old longhairs, old men then, older'n I be now, and heard 'em talk about old times."

"You knew these men?" she queried with intense interest.

"Not to say knew 'em. I was just a boy. They didn't pay no attention to me. But I've seen them and heard them talk."

"What wonderful experiences they must have had!"

"Some of 'em was ungodly liars, of course. But there wasn't nobody to check up their yarns and it wasn't considered polite nor healthy to tell one of them old wolves he was lyin'. The old-timers, the buckskin men, the longhairs, run wild as any Injun. They had squaws and they took scalps and they painted when they went to war."

Suddenly in the girl's eyes her relative was invested with a halo of romance. In her early girlhood she had drunk deeply of the waters of American frontier history. Boone, Kenton, Wetzel; the two Carsons, Bridger; California Joe, Hickok, Garrett—these were living men to her. "You knew the old frontiersmen?" she asked wistfully. Gardner smiled.

"I've knowed a heap of folks in the West. I s'pose they was what you'd call 'frontiersmen.' The country wasn't settled much, then."

"Some day you must tell me about them."

"Why, they was just like other folks—good and bad. Usual, the bad ones didn't last long."

"You mean 'bad men'—such as I've read of."

"I don't know what you've read. But I meant killers—hard people. When a man got that rep'tation he could go leave his measure for a harp. Them killers never gave an even break if they could help it, and sooner or later the break went against 'em."

"You've seen men killed?"

Gardner did not answer directly. "Killin's was common them days. There wasn't no law, much. But I don't know that the law that was backed up by a six-shooter and a rope wasn't better'n most of what we have now. It sure was a lot quicker. One thing about Judge Colt and Judge Lynch—there wasn't no appeal from their decisions."

In a few days she began to feel at home. She took short walks, slept a great deal, and rejoiced to feel her strength returning.

Then one day Gardner came home with a bay mare, whose widely set soft eyes and honest forehead were prima-facie evidence of gentle disposition. This was to be her saddle pony. Uncle and niece almost quarreled as to her price, the former steadfastly refusing reimbursement, or even to tell her what he had paid.

"How many times do I have to tell you such questions ain't asked in this man's country?" he bellowed fiercely. "All you got to do with this here mare is to ride her. Cost? That ain't none of your business. I've got a light saddle already. And

I've seen the time when if you bought a saddle you'd git a pony throwed in."

Graeme had never ridden but the mare was easy of gait and perfectly gentled. The possession of the animal enlarged her sphere of action. She was no longer restricted to short walks in the immediate vicinity of the house.

During the period of making acquaintance Graeme found her relative an oddity. His speech was strange, ungrammatical, abounding in odd idiom. Recalling his sister, her great-aunt, a gentle lady of correct speech and deportment, she found it difficult to realize that this was her brother. He totally disregarded and likely had forgotten the forms of expression of his youth. At first this jarred on her but soon she became used to it. In most things he was easy-going, broadly tolerant, disposed to allow everybody the liberty of judgment he claimed for himself. Now and then she caught him regarding her as if she were a new species to him, which was very close to the fact; but what his opinion of her was she had no means of knowing.

One night, when she had felt his eyes upon her for some time, she asked the direct question: "Well, Uncle Dan, what do you think of me?"

Gardner, not at all discomposed, smoked in silence for some seconds. "You and me," he said at last, "are goin' to git along easy as two pups in a basket."

"Of course we are."

"No 'of course' about it. We're kin, but lots of kin make good strangers. Then you're a young lady and I'm a durn old mountain rat."

"Nonsense, Uncle Dan."

"We may's well talk straight. I've forgot your kind of speech. I was brung up right till I broke lose, when I was sixteen. That's pretty close to sixty years ago, and ever since then I've been talkin' like the men I've lived with—the men that was my friends and my partners. Most of them have made the big ford by now. I'm a sort of a hold over and it's good to have some one young around. Then you staked me when I was sick. I ain't forgot that."

"It was nothing at all. You repaid it a dozen times. I was going to speak about that. I have the money yet——"

"You ain't goin' to speak, hear me! You staked me and that give you an equal share in what I got, according to minin' law and custom. That's the old way. Now, if you like, we'll be partners this summer when I go into the hills."

"You'll do all the work and give me half the profits."

"Maybe there won't be no profits. But I got a reason for wantin' a partner. You grubstake me and that makes you one. We'll sign a reg'lar paper so there won't be no doubt about it."

"Would it be possible for me to go with you?"

"Into the hills? Well, you'd find it rough."

"The question is whether I'd be a bother to you."

"Not if you didn't get wanderin' off and get lost. If you feel strong enough and want to go, time I get ready, no reason why you can't. And now I may's well tell you why I come in here."

"'Why?' You came to prospect, didn't you?"

Before replying Gardner loaded his pipe with care and lit it. "Yes," he said, "I come to prospect—forty years ago."

"Forty years ago!" she exclaimed.

He nodded. "Pretty close to that. Want to hear about it?"

"Oh, do tell me!"

"All right," said Gardner. "I feel like talkin' to-night." He smoked silently for some moments. "How it happened," he began, "was that I was too late for a gold rush there was on the Wild Horse. When I got there the creek was all staked. Well, I figured like a lot more did that there was other creeks, so I bought me an outfit and kept goin'.

"You savvy there wasn't no roads them days, nor bridges. Elk trails and Injun trails was all there was, and you had to ford what water you come to. Nor there wasn't nobody you could ask questions of. You just struck out for yourself.

"It was early in the spring, so the snow hadn't started out of the mountains and the creeks was low. Now and then I'd run onto some place where somebody had camped—fellers like me, lookin' for what they could find—but I didn't see nobody. I mooched along alone, campin' where I felt like it and sizin' the country up, goin' a ways up the creeks I come to and pannin' along the bars, but mostly I kept goin' lookin' for something big. The only string on me was not to go so far I couldn't get

out before it froze up, for it wasn't no country to be caught in without a winter outfit. So I kept on and one evenin' I come to where Sitkum is now, and I camped down at the foot of the gulch and I rested there a few days.

"You ain't never been out that way, but I can tell you doin' nothin' all same Injun grows on you after a while. You don't know what day of the week or month it is and you don't care. If you take a notion to go and do anything you go and do it; and if you ain't got the notion you don't do it. And far's I ever could see you get along just as well.

"So when I got rested up and loafed out I went on, and a few miles farther I come to a real big creek. They call it the Old Bull now, and that's the old Injun name for it, but then I didn't know it had a name. Big creeks like them mostly lead up to a pass or to good huntin' country, and if there's Injuns around that means some sort of a trail. I didn't see no trail on the near side so I forded low down where she spreads out into bars near the mouth, and went up a ways, and sure enough I struck one. Mebbe you don't savvy Injun trails—not likely you do. Well, an Injun don't never go over or through—he always goes round. He'd rather ride half a mile round than get off his pony and heave a log or a rock out of a trail, and he never cuts out nothin' with an ax. Time don't matter to him because he's got all there is, and he's never due no place till he gets there. So his trails ain't much, and this was one of them. Times it'd be in the water and times it'd be half a mile up a hill. Still, it was the only one there was.

"As I went up I kept doin' a little pannin' here and there, and I got some fine stuff—what we call 'flour'—but nothin' worth while. You savvy, I s'pose, that the finer gold is the farther it works downstream as a rule, while the coarser stuff sticks among the gravel higher up. Anyway it showed that there might be gold somewhere, so I kept on up.

"By and by the creek forked and I spit on a chip and took the right-hand fork. By that time I was a good many miles up and into a country alive with game and fur. That was how it was them days when you struck a place that hadn't been butchered up by the fur hunters. It looked to be a great range for bears and there was lots of 'em—big ol' rusty boys that it paid to be polite with. Still I couldn't pan nothin' worth while; and then one day I found a piece of float so rich it made my eyes bung out."

"Float?" Graeme queried.

"That's what we call any bit of mineral-bearin' rock that ain't in place. Rock just kickin' around loose on the ground—that's float. Well, this bit of float had slugs of gold like flattened buckshot and stringers of gold all through it. It was so durn rich it scared me. I says to myself, 'Holy Moses, Dan, here's something like the showin's they claimed for them lost mines. And a helluva—excuse me—country to find it in, too.'

"You savvy I'd been lookin' for placer stuff, but here was quartz. Now, placer ground is poor man's ground because all you need is water and a pan; but with quartz you need a stamp mill and a lot of other things. Away off from everywhere like this was then, you couldn't get machinery in, nor you couldn't pack the ore out and make it pay. However, if you got gold you can most always do something with it, so I started to find out where this float come from.

"You wouldn't think a chunk of rock can move much, but it can. Mebbe it's just rolled downhill to where you find it; but mebbe it ain't. Mebbe an old glacier tore it loose a million years ago and packed it along in its belly an inch a year over a couple of divides; mebbe an earthquake split it off to start with and then swallowed up the ledge; mebbe she just fell off and rolled down and high water and slides and so on carried her along for miles and then a creek changed its course and went some other way and you can't tell a thing about it. Float has had hundreds of thousands of years to move around in. There it is, and there you are, and there's a few hundred square miles of scenery, mostly on edge, for you to git action on. You bet, startin' out to trace float is as chancey a proposition as there is. I hunted hard but I didn't find no ledge.

"All this time I hadn't seen nobody, not even an Injun. I told you there was lots of bears. Well, one day I was out a couple of miles from camp when not far off I heard a rifle shot and a sorter coughin' beller. That last is a grizzly's war yelp and when you hear it addressed to you, you

can make up your mind that bear is out to get you or die tryin'. When I got to the doin's, which was as soon as I could, there was a whalin', old Tom grizzly shakin' up an Injun like a puppy does an old moccasin. I was packin' my rifle that day, not for bears but for meat. Them days I was shootin' a Sharp's single-shot buff'lo gun, and when I turned her loose the big slug lifted half the bear's skull off.

"The Injun was tore up some, but he was lucky to be alive. I packed him in to my camp and fixed him up the best I could, and he laid around a week before he was able to travel. He was on a hunt by himself, his tepee bein' away off down in the valley mebbe fifty miles. He wasn't huntin' bear but he had pretty near stepped on this one, which tackled him, and when he'd had one shot with the old trade muzzle loader he had he was through. I ain't got much use for Injuns as a rule but this one seemed like good people and he was grateful to me. I asked him about gold but he didn't know of any. Injuns, them days, didn't know much about gold. I showed him the float, pointin' out the gold in it, and asked him if he had ever seen any rock like that, but he hadn't. He took his time sizin' it up and I knew if he ever come across gold quartz he'd sure know it. When he was well enough to travel he went home and that was the last I saw of him.

"Well, I put in the summer and fall on this creek, but I didn't find no pay dirt nor no ledge. Then it began to get frosty, nights, and the first snows settled on top of the ranges, and every new fall was lower down. By that time I was livin' on straight meat and most out of everything, includin' clothes and ammunition. It wasn't no country to be catched in that way, so I stampeded out ahead of winter.

"I intended to come back in a year or two, but I didn't. I went on down into Washington and Idaho, and wound up in New Mexico. I never did come back till this time. But I kept thinkin' about that float and makin' plans to give her another whirl some day; but always something else come up, and I put it off and the years went by. Then a couple of years ago I made a little strike. It wasn't the first one but I didn't blow this like I done the others. It isn't so much but it's enough to keep me the rest of my life if I don't live too long, and I don't reckon I will. No, it ain't that I'm feelin' sick. Far's I know I'm healthy as an old turtle; but there's no use tryin' to dodge the fact that there's more'n seventy snows behind me, so I'm workin' down to'rds the big ford. Then I notice I'm thinkin' a good bit of old times, and mebbe I'm like an old Kiowa named White Beaver, that I used to know. 'Pretty soon,' says this White Beaver, 'I am goin' to hit out for the Land of Spirits.' He don't say it just in them words, but that's his meaning. 'I see,' he says when I ask him how he knows, 'the tepee fires of my youth shinin' and around them the faces of the young men as they were when I was young. Life,' he goes on, calm as a frozen lake, 'is a trail in a circle. When the traveler on that trail nears its end he sees the things which were at the beginning more clearly. Then the ends meet. We come from the Great Lodge, and to it we return at last.' That's what this old Injun says, and he surely called the turn for himself, for he didn't live a year longer. I don't say his system is a sure winner but all the same I figured it was time I took another look for that ledge if I was ever going to; so I pulled up stakes where I was and come in here.

"It seemed funny comin' back after about forty years. There was good roads where there wasn't even pack trails, and bridges where I'd splashed through with wet leggings. Ranches, too. It sure made a country look different. Course I didn't tell nobody my business, nor that I'd ever been here before. I got this shack for my headquarters camp and a saddle pony and pack horse and started up my old creek.

"Things didn't look as I remembered 'em. There was a road part way and some of the timber had been logged off. When I got up higher there'd been fires and slides. Still there was the same old peaks and the same creek, and after huntin' around a while I found one of my old camps beside a little spring creek where the water tumbled over a blue-lookin' rock just like it used to do. When I'd made camp I cleared away some moss and dirt and there was the rocks blackened by my old fires forty years ago. It gave me a curious feelin' settin' there that night, like I hadn't no business to be there—like I'd sneaked back into a house I'd used to live in and which didn't belong to me no more.

"I put in last summer lookin' around and I found what I found before—just nothin'.

In the fall I quit and holed up here for the winter. And then a funny thing happened.

"One day in the winter I was goin' to the tradin' company's store, and outside of it is a sleigh with an old buck sittin' in it. He sorter turned his head as he heard my step, so I give him 'Blaho-wya, tillikum,' and then 'Kee-sookee-ookh' in his own tongue, just to be polite. He answers and I stop for a minute to chin with him. I thought he was listenin' to me mighty close and all the time he was sorter shakin' his head. 'Who are you?' he says, and his voice sorter shakes, too. 'You speak with the voice of a white man who saved my life many snows ago.'

"What do you think of that? It's the same Injun that was mauled by the bear. There we was after forty years, two old hold overs. But he's in harder luck than me, because he's blind, though to look at his eyes you wouldn't notice it at first. He's got a Christian name, Isaac—his Injun name meant 'elk standin' on a hill'—and he's a grandfather. His folks look after him pretty well and outside of not bein' able to see he's got no kick comin'.

"Now and then along through the winter his people would bring him to my shack and leave us alone for half a day or so. He'd learned to speak pretty good English mixed with Chinook, and we got along all right. We'd sit and smoke and talk about the old days when there was plenty of meat and not so darn many people and Injuns followed their own customs. He couldn't see no more; but to make up for it he remembered everything he used to see, like how the sun would dapple through the leaves onto the surface of water, and how the mists rose in the mornings from the little lakes, and the purple hazes of the hills. He don't complain a bit but all the same I know he feels it's pretty tough bein' blind.

"One day when we've been chinnin' a while he asks me if I've ever found where that bit of float come from. He'd remembered that all them years and he was the only man besides myself that had ever seen it. 'If I could see,' he says when I told him my luck, 'I could take you to where there is stone like that showing in the side of a hill.' Then he went on to tell me he'd found this showin' two or three years after I'd met him and noticed it because it was like what I'd showed him. But gold them days didn't mean nothin' to an Injun. After a while they found out they could buy from the traders with it, but the gold they saw used that way was placer, so Isaac didn't understand what this rock was, though he knew I'd been after it. I didn't come back and he sorter forgot the whole thing. Now, when I do come back, he's blind and can't take me to where he found it. But the main thing is that he did find it. It's there somewheres, and when I do find it we'll be rich till you can't rest." And the old prospector, his eyes shining with the eternal hope of his kind, beamed upon his niece.

She had listened absorbedly to this odyssey of ancient wanderings which filled but a small portion of the old adventurer's years; but common sense fought against building castles upon such a foundation.

"Isn't it possible that the old Indian may have been mistaken?" she commented. "I mean what he found may not have been gold-bearing rock."

"It ain't likely. He took particular notice of that float when he was lyin' up in my camp and an Injun's eye comes pretty close to photographin' whatever it wants to. You show an Injun anything once, like a route map drawed in the dirt or the snow, and he'll study over it for a long time. Then he'll rub it out; but when he does that he's got it. So when Isaac says he saw rock like my float I'll gamble he did. He told me where he had found it, as well as he could, but it was a long time ago and landmarks change. Then, when he run onto it he was coming in from another way from where my camps was, and that would make a big difference to me in understandin' how to get to it. I thought the whole thing over, and a couple of months ago me and him went out for a little trip; and while we was out we seen the best eye sharp there is in the whole durn West. But it was no good. Isaac's sight is gone for keeps. So it's a case of doin' the best I can alone, on what instructions he can give me. And now I'll just show you that bit of float I've been talkin' about."

"You have it still," she exclaimed, "after all these years!"

"You bet I have. And the reason is that when I stampeded out ahead of the winter, like I told you about, I cached the float by that old camp. Them days a rich ore sample wasn't a good thing to carry. When I

come back last year there she was. Except me and the Injun, you'll be the first person that's ever seen her."

Going to his room he returned with a small object wrapped in sacking. He unwrapped it. Graeme saw a bit of quartz of irregular shape, studded and shot and veined with yellow metal. He put it in her hands and she was astonished at its weight.

"Take it to the light," he said. "It's worth lookin' at."

As she examined the ore she tried to visualize its finding—to see the man of forty years ago picking it up, holding it in his hands. She tried to imagine his sensations. That it was enormously rich there was no doubt. But rich float which could not be traced is the commonest of prospectors' tales, rivaling the yarns of lost mines. However, she had not heard these stories. For the first time she held in her hands gold as it came from the treasure house of nature. She had begun by being slightly skeptical. She had not the optimism without which there would be few prospectors. But she had imagination. Now, holding the gold-studded fragment in her hands, she began to feel a little of its glamour; to feel the pull of it, the lure which had brought Dan Gardner back after forty years.

CHAPTER X.

Stuart's inspection of the syndicate's land holdings, which he conducted very privately and cautiously, consumed several days. When at the end of that time he returned to Sitkum he had verified Walsh's statements as to the prices settlers had paid for the land. He saw that the land itself was good and, given any stream of settlement, would be valuable. It had been too cheaply priced. If Wills had been able to purchase it at one dollar and a half all around he would have made a very profitable investment. There was considerable very good timber and a quantity of tie timber. Altogether it was a valuable asset which in time promised to recoup the syndicate.

But any extensive settlement, he perceived, must depend on a comprehensive irrigation scheme beyond the means of the individual settler. It was the ordinary problem of irrigation districts. There was ample water but it must be brought to the land. Bill Stuart knew that his father and associates had never considered this phase. They were out to unload as best they could rather than to spend more money. Hence he had been surprised to find near the upstream portion of the block certain stakes which could be nothing but a ditch survey. He had followed them to the creek. Somebody had run a line to find the easiest way to obtain water in quantity, and its approximate cost. The stakes were comparatively new. Hence the bankrupt firm had not been responsible for the survey. Neither had the syndicate. He reached the conclusion that Wills had had it made, to be sure that he had a good irrigable proposition before he made his offer. But that offer had been turned down. Then on the face of it Wills had evolved a neat method of getting an illegitimate rake-off.

What was done could not be undone. Obviously the thing to do was to raise the price of the lands. But if Wills had been swindling his principals, as seemed likely, Stuart wanted to get him with the goods. The way to do that was to frame a purchase. He could, he thought, do that quite easily. And so the day after he returned to Sitkum he presented himself at Wills' office and proceeded to give a very good imitation of a man looking for a small ranch.

As he stated his requirements he felt a peculiar quality in the gaze of Wills' prominent, hard-blue eyes. They narrowed very slightly. The man's face was expressionless. It was so expressionless that Stuart was reminded of a poker player who skins his hand very carefully.

"Have you picked out the land you want?" Wills asked.

Stuart was prepared for that. He had picked out a quarter section. He pointed it out on a plan which Wills spread on his desk. The plan bore numerous pencil markings presumably intelligible to Wills, but Stuart could make nothing of them.

As Stuart pointed out his choice Wills' eyes were blank, introspective, as those of one who seeks to forecast the ultimate results of a move in a game or the play of a card. Then he seemed to reach a decision. He told Stuart that that particular quarter was sold, or practically sold. Had he a second choice?

Stuart had not. That was the quarter he wanted, that or none at all. Again Wills seemed to hesitate.

"It is possible," he said, "that you may be able to get it. The man who bought

it may be willing to turn it over—to take something on his bargain."

"What did he pay for it?" Stuart asked.

"That's his affair, I think."

"If I've got to make him an offer I ought to know what he paid," Stuart argued. "If you know what he wants, that's different."

"I think he'd take ten dollars an acre."

"That's pretty steep," Stuart objected. "I heard land was cheap in here. I heard I could get all I wanted for about five dollars."

"I'll sell you a thousand acres at five dollars," Wills offered readily.

"Good land?"

"Land. If you pick out choice quarters you have to pay more, of course."

"Who owns this quarter?"

"A man named Lawrence."

"What Lawrence?"

"George J. Lawrence. He lives in Seattle."

"George J. Lawrence!" Stuart repeated with every appearance of astonished recognition. "Old George J., of Seattle. Well I'll be goldarned!"

The bluff took Wills utterly aback. "Do you mean that you know him?"

"Know him!" Stuart exclaimed mendaciously, enjoying the effect of his bomb, "well, I should say I do. I used to work for him. I'll write him about this land. I'll bet I can get it under ten dollars."

But Wills recovered from his momentary astonishment.

"You used to work for Mr. Lawrence! What kind of work? What does your Lawrence look like?"

One answer was as good as another. Stuart replied without hesitation: "I was logging for him. Look like? He's about fifty, turning gray, with red hair and a beard. That's Lawrence, isn't it?"

"Not quite," Wills smiled. "This man is at least fifteen years younger and he isn't interested in logging. Your Lawrence probably would tell you he knew nothing about land here."

Since Stuart's "Lawrence" was quite as fictitious as he suspected Wills' of being he was forced to agree.

"Must be two of the same name. You say your man holds this land at ten dollars?"

"I said I thought you might get it for that."

Stuart considered for a moment.

"Look here," he said, as one who has come to a decision, "will you take sixteen hundred cash down, right now, and give me a receipt and a guarantee of a deed from the owner?"

Wills' eyes narrowed again.

"Do you carry that much money in your pocket?" he asked. "It's not very safe."

"I've never been rolled yet," Stuart returned. "How about it? Money talks." He reached in his pocket as if to produce a roll of bills. But Wills shook his head.

"I'm not authorized to accept money for Mr. Lawrence, and I can't guarantee anything. I can tell him you offer ten dollars and see what he says. Shall I do that?"

"Yes—if you're sure he won't take less."

"I'm sure of that. He may want more."

"He won't get it. Ten is the limit, and you can say so."

"You'll be around here for a while, will you?"

"Yes. I may take a job for a while, and soon as the snow gets off I'm going up to the hills, but I'll be back. If we can get this fixed up in time I'll do some clearing this summer."

The business interview was over. Wills relaxed. He offered Stuart a cigar, lit one himself. He said he had seen him on the boat. Stuart grinned.

"Everybody has me spotted for the guy that ran her into the bank. I heard the captain was laying for me."

"And I've heard that you are keeping out of his way."

The innuendo slid harmlessly from Stuart. He grinned.

"I sure am. I duck all the trouble I can. Any man who wants to beat me up has to be able to catch me—and I'm a darn good runner."

In Wills' experience the man who frankly admitted a desire to avoid trouble usually was the man best able to take care of it when unavoidable. He took an appraising look at the compact, muscular figure of his visitor. From the man his gaze shifted to Fitz, who lay at his master's feet.

"You seem to think a good deal of that dog of yours," he suggested.

"We're partners."

"Fighting dog?"

"He'll fight if he has to. But he's like his boss—he don't like it."

"That's too bad," said Wills, "because I have a dog I'd like to bet could lick him."

"Nothing doing," said Stuart emphatically. "Fitz ain't a fighting dog. He's just a big, kind, old mush." And he mutely begged the grim warrior's pardon by an affectionate pull of the ears.

"And yet I hear he pulled down a steer."

It was Stuart's turn to be surprised. "How did you hear that?"

"Miss Campbell told me. And then the Indians had their story, which differed materially from hers."

"I'll bet it would," Stuart nodded.

"They wanted to have you arrested for killing their steer and for stealing the squaw's gun."

"I like their nerve!" Stuart exclaimed indignantly. "First their darn' steer puts me up a tree and then he comes near killing a white woman—would, only for the dog. Then they want to hold me up for a hundred bucks, and when I won't come across with that the klootch is going to shoot my dog. Then they want to have me pinched. Nerve? Well, I guess!"

Wills changed the subject.

"What did you do after you left the boat?"

"Walked. Got out of the sloughs after a while and struck the road."

"Anybody come along to give you a lift?"

"Nobody at all."

"Have any grub along?"

"Nary grub."

"Where did you stop for supper?"

"Didn't see any place to stop, so I kept going."

"Surely you didn't walk all night?"

"No, I had a good sleep in a nice dry gulch."

"And you didn't meet anybody on the road?" The question was apparently careless but Wills' eyes bored sharply. Stuart shook his head.

"Nobody at all."

"It was late in the afternoon of the next day when I passed you close to town," Wills pointed out. "You're not a very fast walker—for a hungry man."

He had detected the flaw in Stuart's story. It would not have taken a hungry man twenty-four hours to walk as many miles, even if he had slept for a couple of hours in a gulch. Stuart met the suggestion with apparent frankness.

"Why," he explained, "in the morning I struck a shack a couple of miles out of town and the man that owned it gave me some grub. Treated me white. Wouldn't take a cent for it, either."

"Whose shack was that?"

"Belongs to a man named Walsh. Gave me a slam-up meal and wouldn't let me pay for it. So of course I turned in and helped him with a few little jobs he had on hand, just to play even. That took till about noon. Then he gave me another meal and I had a sleep. That's how I didn't hit town before."

"Do you know Walsh?"

"I'm a stranger here. Don't know anybody."

He waited for further questions but Wills asked none. Stuart rose. "Well, I'll be gettin' along. You write Lawrence and I'll drop in again. If you want me, I'm livin' with Red Hoobin."

When he had gone Wills for some time sat motionless. Two furrows between his eyes attested puzzled thought. He was seated thus when the fat man, Orme, entered.

"Hello, Charlie," he said. "Didn't I see that Stuart come out of here a while ago?"

Wills told the fat man the ostensible purpose of Stuart's call.

"I don't know what to make of that fellow," he concluded. "I asked him a lot of questions and he answered straight enough, too. He says he didn't see anybody on the road. Said he had breakfast at Walsh's."

"Does he know Walsh?"

"He claims to be a stranger. It sounds all right."

"Maybe it does," said the fat man, frowning, "but all the same I don't like it a little bit. Still, he hasn't seen Walsh since he hit town—I'm sure of that. Did you ask him if his dog was a scrapper?"

"He says it isn't a fighter—jus' a 'kind, old mush.' Those were his words."

"He's a liar," Orme deduced promptly. "The dog pulled down that steer and tore the whole nose off it. The dog's a fighter if I ever saw one. If he's lyin' about one thing he's lyin' about the rest."

"Did you pump Red Hoobin?"

"He never saw Stuart before that mix-up on the boat. He felt sort of mean about bootin' the dog overboard and when he ran into Stuart here he took a notion to him. That's what he says, and I guess it's so. Stuart told Red he was a logger, but he was thinking of doing some prospecting or buying a little land and going to ranching."

"That hangs together with his actions."

"Maybe it does, but I don't like it. Now, here: What kind of a rifle was he packin' when he quit the boat?"

"I don't know. I think it was some sort of a box magazine, lever action."

"But it was a real gun. Now where was it when we passed him on the road just outside town?"

"He was carrying a gun."

"He was carrying Mathilde's little .22," Orme pointed out. "That's all the gun he had. And he hadn't a rifle when the steer tackled the girl, or he'd have used it. What did he do with his own?"

"He left it at Walsh's," Wills deduced at once.

"That's what I think. If he didn't know Walsh, would he leave his gun with him rather than pack it a couple of miles more?"

"No," Wills admitted.

"No," said Orme. "So he knows Walsh. He lied about that. He lied about the dog. He's lyin' when he claims he didn't see anything on the road. He lied when he told you he knew Lawrence. And when he tells you he wants to buy land he's lyin' too. Or else there's something crooked behind it."

"He offered to pay cash if I would give him a receipt and a guarantee of a deed."

"Cash?" Orme queried alertly. "Has he that big a roll? Did he flash it?"

"I didn't see the money; but if he didn't have it he made a good bluff. I don't know what to make of him. If he's connected with Walsh I don't see how he knows anything about the land; and if he's interested in the land I don't see his connection with Walsh."

"All the same," said Orme confidently, "I'll bet there *is* a connection."

Wills drummed his desk meditatively with his fingers. "I believe," he said, "that we can force his hand a little—if he has that roll with him. If he lost it—or most of it—he wouldn't be in a position to buy land, assuming that he does want to buy, and is what he claims to be."

"It looks that way," Orme nodded with a grim smile.

"If it was his own stake he'd be broke," Wills reasoned further. "But if by any chance it wasn't his own—if, say, it was expense money—he'd have to account for it."

"And besides," the fat man grinned, "we can use it ourselves."

CHAPTER XI.

When he left Wills' office Stuart felt that he had cleared up at least one point. So that was how they worked it! "George J. Lawrence" of Seattle, alias Charles Wills of Sitkum City, holding land at ten dollars; putting five of it in his pocket and conscientiously sending the other five to the syndicate's representative, Andy McKellar. Smooth enough, too. No doubt there was a phony agreement of sale to Lawrence if anybody wanted to see it. As soon as a real purchaser came along Wills would procure a deed to Lawrence, who would in turn transfer to the purchaser.

All in order, all O. K., everything airtight. Wills could go into court and admit the whole transaction—save one thing—with a smile. And that one thing—that Lawrence was purely a fictitious person—would be very hard to prove. He might, for that matter, be able to produce a straw man actually bearing that name. It was going to be hard to get the goods on Wills but Stuart decided to do it if he could. He decided to see the thing through, to make Wills take every step in what he believed to be a fraudulent transaction. Then he would have the goods on him. But to do that it was necessary to allow him to continue to handle the lands for a time, instead of at once following the obvious protective method of replacing him with another agent and raising land prices.

But Wills had asked him a number of questions concerning his movements after he had left the steamer. What was behind them? Had they something to do with what he had seen that night? He thought so. And had that something to do with Walsh? Wills had asked if he knew Walsh. Wills himself, Stuart now knew, had left the steamer before it reached Sitkum. Where and why? Next day he had been driven the rest of the way by Orme. What had he been doing in the meantime?

But there was no apparent connection between the two. Stuart was now on casually friendly terms with the fat man. He had even played poker with him once or twice and had watched other games in which Orme had been a player, but these had been quite innocuous. Red Hoobin's warning seemed unnecessary. As to Orme's personal habits, he drank a good deal but his potations had no visible effect. To all appearances he remained cold sober.

Turning these matters over in his mind Stuart heard his name called. Turning, he saw Graeme Campbell on a small bay mare. He had not seen her since the episode of the steer. Now she seemed a different girl, stronger, in better health. Little tendrils of red-brown hair blew against cheeks which already were taking the healthy tan of sun and wind. She threw out a buckskin-clad hand in a gesture of arrest and greeting.

"At last! I've been looking for you for a week!"

Stuart explained that he had been out of town.

"But now you are back. When you save a girl's life it is your duty to call on her at least once."

"Why describe it as a duty?"

Her eyes twinkled at him.

"But if you mean that it's a pleasure, it comes under the heading of deferred ones, doesn't it?"

Bright, Stuart decided; quick on the uptake. Didn't have to spell out a meaning for this girl. You could talk to her.

"May I have the pleasure of doing my duty this evening?"

"I was afraid I'd have to ask you again. Come early. And bring Fitz. Good-by."

As she rode on he noted that she was not entirely at home in the saddle. She had not learned to relax. When he had seen her before she had been shaken, badly frightened, and no wonder. Now she had recovered her poise. Yes, she was a girl one could talk to. That was something in a dump like Sitkum. And her eyes—well, they were the exact color of that little lake. He wondered how she was fitting into what were obviously new surroundings, how she was getting along with her old reprobate of an uncle.

But when he appeared at that gentleman's abode early that evening its owner was not visible. Stuart was rather relieved. In his experience old-timers of Gardner's kidney yarned interminably. Most of them had the same stock stories. They bored him.

The evening was warm, almost sultry. The sun was going down behind the western ranges whose summits glistened with great snow fields crusted by sunny days and nights of sharp frosts in those high altitudes, polished by the winds, melting but slowly. To the girl these mountain sunsets —the slow march of the line of shadow of the western hills across the intervening valley and up the faces of the eastern ranges, blotting out the green and gold of the last of the day, the deep, mysterious purples, the strange, shifting lights—were a novelty, a never-ending joy. Stuart, accustomed to them, caught a little of her enthusiasm.

"It's so vast!" she said. "I suppose it's an old story to you. But to me the mountains bring a sensation of space, of great distance. I don't know how to describe it. I look at the peaks and somehow I seem to be *on* them. If there is such a thing as soaring mentally I believe I do it."

"Because you have imagination, and the hills are new to you. I grew up in them, more or less, but I can understand your feeling."

She was silent for a moment, watching the sunset.

"Please tell me something about yourself," she requested abruptly.

"As an amendment please set me an example."

"Oh, but there's nothing interesting about me."

"Nor about me. There are all sorts of things I'd like to know about you. You don't belong here. Where do you belong? What do you do when you do anything—or do you? It seems to me that you have been ill. All these things and a dozen more, equally none of my business."

She laughed. "Well, I suppose I must set you an example." She paused for a moment as if to arrange her thoughts. "Dear Sir:"—she began in the slurring accents of one who relies heavily on the intelligence and patience of the stenographer—"In reply your 'nquiries of recent date, beg to state person you mention is honest workin' girl who by ind'stry, appl'cation 'n' 'xceptionally bright mind now occupies respons'ble sec'tarial p'sition which she fills to our entire sat'sfaction. Stop. Paragraph. Last winter she developed severe case of—um—see what she developed case of, Miss Jones, 'n' fill in—developed severe case of blank, 'n' physicians prescribed summer's complete rest in mountains. Stop. Understand spendin' period restful recuperation your vicinity with great-uncle 'n' only survivin' relative well-known minin' man, Mr. Samuel Farmer—no, that's wrong; cut out 'Samuel,' cut out 'Farmer;' name is Daniel Gardner. Stop. Any courtesies you may show Miss Campbell—'n' so on. Conclude.

Trustin' this information may be of service to you, yours truly, Greening Howe & Band. Lemme have all my letters soon as you can, Miss Jones. I gotta tee off—um—that is I gotta conference at four-thirty."

Bill Stuart grinned. He was reminded strongly of old Bill's methods of dictation. But the signature was that of a financial firm of the highest standing. "The signature is genuine?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I have been with them ever since I was thrown on my own resources and a cold world. It was not ever thus. Once I was a pampered che-ild. Alas! Well, now, about you?"

"I will tell you," said Bill Stuart in Ancient Mariner tones, "the simple story of my life from youth to age. I am the son of healthy but comparatively honest parents, whose positive health and comparative honesty I have inherited. It is my only inheritance, my said parents being still alive and kicking at almost everything. You ought to hear them, and perhaps you will some day. When I arrived at the estate of manhood after various youthful escapades of no importance save as showing that I was hard to kill I followed my father's example and became a logger—what you call a lumberjack, a timber beast, a tie hack, a peavey booster. Up to a few weeks ago I had a job with a logging outfit. But the boss fired me and I came in here to look around. That is my history to date. Pardon the superfluity of detail, which matches your own."

"But I want some more details. Is it permitted to ask why the heartless boss fired you?"

"He thought somebody needed my services more than he did."

"Oh, if I shouldn't have asked——"

"No, no, it's all right. It was really a matter between the boss and his son and myself."

"Not his daughter?"

"Providence didn't consider him fit to have a daughter. All it gave him was a son. I could get along with the old man all right; but the boy——" and truthful Bill Stuart shrugged his muscular shoulders.

"He presumed on the fact that he was the Old Man's son?" she speculated. "He was an unbearable young snob?"

"Oh, he wasn't a snob, exactly," Bill replied. "In fact he had some very good points. He never said anything behind my back, I'll hand him that much."

"But why couldn't you get along with him?"

"Well, you see——" Bill Stuart's usually ready mind failed to function. Instead he found himself thinking of her eyes.

"There was a girl!" she decided. "You were rivals. Aha! Romance at last."

"Bad guess," Bill roused himself. "The pup hadn't any girl, and I hadn't either, worse luck."

"So that I can't find even the least bit of heart interest?"

"Not to-day. Call around later and we may have something for you."

"That sounds like old times—when I was looking for a job. Well, now that you are here what do you intend to do?"

"I've been looking at some land—for a ranch. After a while I'm going into the hills to look for a mine."

"For a lost mine?"

"Not a bit like it. I may be young and innocent but no one can start me looking for lost mines."

"You don't believe in them?"

"Not to the extent of looking for them. I did all my buried-treasure hunting with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn and old John Silver."

"My uncle thinks that the celebrated lost mines actually did exist."

"He would," Stuart nodded. "All the old-timers believe in these ghost mines."

"When he comes in I'll get him to tell you about them. I'll get him to tell you some stories about old days in the West."

"You mean well," said Bill with resignation, "but if it's all the same to you I wish you wouldn't. The old, old Western story for me has lost its kick. I regret to say it leaves me cold."

"But these aren't old stories—at least to me. And they're true. Oh, you needn't smile! They're the real thing."

"They all have a basis of truth," Stuart agreed wearily. "They all happened somewhere, some time, to somebody. You get the same yarns, with a different locale and personnel, everywhere you go. They have the nerve to tell 'em in the first person, too. Really, the true story ought to be barred."

"But," she protested in disappointment mingled with indignation, "aren't you interested in stories of actual events, of real men, of real happenings in the West before it was fenced, broken, and tamed by the plow? Can't you see these men of forty

and fifty and sixty years ago coming into a country practically unknown and unmapped, without roads or trails, full of hostile tribes? Can't you see them by their lonely fires at night? Can't you see them day after day, with rifle and pack horse, going deeper and deeper into an unknown land; blazing the way for us to follow; to build roads and railways on their old trails, to found cities on their lonely camps? Can't you see the romance of it? Can't you?"

She leaned toward him, her face flushed, her eyes shining, as she herself looked upon the visions her words had called up. And Bill Stuart, who was the spiritual heir of the men whom she glorified, whose blood was that of the pioneers and who from boyhood had had one secret regret, that he had not been born in the days when there was a real wilderness and a real frontier, looked into her eyes and saw these visions—and another which brought the blood to his tanned cheeks and quickened the beat of his heart which was ordinarily as even as a perfectly tuned engine.

This girl, he realized suddenly, belonged. The yarns of old Dan Gardner, moth-eaten, moss-grown, to be heard from any old rum hound for the price of a couple of drinks, were to her as revelations. He regretted that he had belittled them, brushed ever so little of the bloom from the fruit of Romance dear to this girl's heart. And he made frank confession.

"If you want to know," he replied, "I've seen these men in my daydreams ever since I was a little boy playing with a wooden gun. I've hunted with them and camped with them; and fought Indians and killed buffalo; and wintered with them in the mountain valleys among the beaver lodges and the elk bands. See them? You just bet that I can. But I didn't know that you could. Salutations, sister in the true faith!"

She nodded, half laughing, half soberly, her eyes shining.

"Brother, I greet you! Of course you didn't recognize me. But I've blown the horn for you when you've been playing in the little clearing with your rifle strapped to the plow beam. I've stood beside you, loading your long Deckards and your eight-square Hawkens while you fired through the loopholes of the stockade. I've sat in the creaking old prairie schooners in seas of brown grasses all parched and dry, and seen far—so very far away—the faint line like a haze just above the horizon that was the Rockies, that seemed to hang there day after day and week after week, and never grew nearer. Yes! and I've lain in the bottom of that wagon, covering my babies with my body, in my ears the trampling roll of the hoofs of the war ponies, and the powder smoke in my nostrils, and the hiss and slish and r-rip of the arrows through the canvas just above me. You needn't"—she looked at him defiantly—"you needn't think you boys had a monopoly of the West!"

"Bully for you!" cried Bill. "Where did you get 'em—the good old dime novels, I mean?"

"It doesn't have to be dime novels. These things are history."

"Come clean!" he commanded. "You never lived on that frontier fairyland by history. No historian yet ever stirred the imagination of boy or girl. Historians have no pep, their stuff has no kick. You read dime novels, and you know you did; and I dare you to look me in the face and deny it."

"Well, then, I did," she confessed. "I read heaps of them. I used to get them from the bad little boys. I could always get anything from bad boys."

"I believe you," said Stuart with so much conviction that she flushed slightly. "'Them was the days.' I read those stories by the ton myself and tried my darnedest to do all the heroes' stunts."

"Was that how you learned to shoot—to hit chips in the air?"

"I think so. All my heroes were dead shots, of course. That was one thing I got out of it. Not a very useful accomplishment. It's really a shame that the days of hostile Indians and bad men are over. My sole talent is wasted."

"And to think that I, with the soul of a frontier woman, should spend my days in a mausoleum of concrete and steel in an atmosphere of stocks and bonds and debentures!" she mourned. "A few weeks of freedom—and then back to the financial mines!"

Stuart's eyes rested on her face, a little flushed with her former enthusiasm, turned to the purple of the western ranges and the glory of the departed sun above them, tinted by the dying light, framed in the red-brown of her hair. He saw that though she spoke in mock tragedy her eyes were shadowed, wistful, drinking in the vastness and beauty

of the hills as a traveler in the desert might drink full when chance offered. It was a shame—a darn' shame. Here was a girl that belonged in the open, in the good sun and wind. It was too bad that she had to earn a living. Somebody should be glad to do that for her. What were the men she knew thinking of? But what was he thinking of himself? He almost jumped as the sudden idea struck him. A wife! Holy Moses! he wasn't thinking of getting married. But if he were, that was just the sort of a girl he would like. What a companion she would be! How he should enjoy showing her country that he knew—lakes, rivers, hills. What times they would have in the glorious summers! And in the long nights of winter, before a wood fire—but he came out of these dangerous dreams with a snap. The girl was addressing him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was —er—thinking what tough luck it was."

"Oh, that!" She threw out her hands in a gesture he was beginning to find familiar. "I was talking nonsense. I didn't mean it. But I said that I wondered if you were really a lumberjack."

"I was until I was fired."

"But you don't talk like one."

"You mean I don't talk as you think one should talk—as they talk in the stories?"

"Well——"

"You see," Bill explained with engaging candor, "I determined to succeed, to rise above my surroundings. In the long nights in the logging camps when my fellow workers were engaged in terrific battles with fists and spiked boots—which are the common evening pastimes of shanty lads, as every reader of fiction knows—I held aloof. By the dim light of a smoky lantern I sought that knowledge which is power—theoretically—via the correspondence-school route. I learned how to talk by mail. I mean I learned by mail how to talk. I developed that keen, alert look that marks out the young fellow with ambition. I was ready to hold down any salary. But as I have already told you, it didn't work. I got fired. Discouraging, of course; but I am still the captain of my soul, the——"

"Did you ever hear of Ananias?"

Stuart considered gravely.

"It seems a little irrelevant, but you must mean the fellow who married that Sapphira girl some years ago and got into trouble about his income tax. It's true he made a name for himself, but I never could see him as a real artist as compared with some I have known. Here in the boundless West the outlook broadens, the imagination soars beyond——"

"Obviously!"

Stuart grinned. "All the same, lady, coming down to facts I assure you that I am able to hold down a job in any camp. I was working for a logging outfit till I got fired. That's the literal truth."

"You mean that you were actually using an ax, or a saw, or whatever they roll logs with?"

"I can use ax, saw, or cant hook. I have done so. But when I was fired I was a cruiser. That is, I looked over standing timber, estimated its run, and reported on it with reference to possible logging operations."

"Then a cruiser is a timber prospector."

"Just that."

"Have you ever done any prospecting for minerals?"

"Very little. Not as a business."

"But you've known prospectors?"

"Dozens."

"Suppose that a prospector finds a rich piece of float: what are his chances of finding the lode it came from?"

"Well, that's a hard question. If the immediate vicinity of the find doesn't disclose mineral in place when thoroughly prospected, it is largely a matter of luck. In fact the older and more hard-boiled a prospector is the more he swings to the pure-luck theory all along the line."

"So that you wouldn't waste time on a long search—even if the float were very rich?"

"The prospecting microbe is a bad one," he replied. "When a prospector gets the notion that there is rich ground somewhere in a district, he's gone. He'll chase it till he dies. You'll find them in every district that has had a mineral boom once—men who are hanging on in hope that the busted camp will come back."

"And does it?"

"Not very often. But it is always possible."

"My uncle," she said slowly, "thinks that there is gold here."

He shook his head.

"I'm told that nobody ever has found it in paying quantities. Has he anything to go on? Never mind," he added hastily as

she hesitated. "That is a question I shouldn't have asked. Don't answer it, please."

"I can tell you this much," she said. "Years ago he found very rich float and he has hopes of finding the mineral body."

"He found the float some years ago, you say?"

"I said 'years ago.' Forty years ago."

"Forty years! You don't mean he has been trying to trace the float ever since?"

"No. He found it then, but he left the country and didn't come back till last year. But he is convinced that there is a body of rich ore somewhere."

Stuart shook his head. "The poor old bird! Chasing a will-o'-the-wisp of his youth. Batty. Old prospectors sometimes develop a loose shingle like that." He made no comment but the girl divined his thought.

"You don't think he will find it?"

"Very doubtful I should say," Stuart returned frankly. "Besides, forty years plays tricks with a man's memory. The float may not have been what he now thinks it is."

"But I've seen it. It's wonderfully rich." She hesitated a moment. "I'll show it to you."

"Better not. Your uncle might not like it. From what you say I infer that he has kept it a secret."

"So he has. But I've told you so much now that it won't make any difference. Wait!"

When he saw the ore Stuart was astonished. He had suspected some mistake. But this was a sample to drive a man crazy. As he turned it in his hand the dog, which had been lying at his feet, raised his head and rose.

"Somebody coming," said Stuart. "Better put this away."

She drew the sacking about the ore but even as she did so Wills appeared in the partly open doorway. He peered at Stuart, frowned slightly as he identified him.

"Come in," the girl invited. "You know Mr. Stuart, don't you—Mr. Wills?"

"We met this morning," said Wills. Stuart mumbled something unintelligible. The girl looked at him in surprise. His face seemed to have lost something. The features were unchanged, but the fire of fine intelligence seemed to have been quenched. His eyes no longer met hers. He seemed suddenly diffident, tongue-tied. His pronunciation, even his voice were subtly altered. Now he approximated in manner and speech to her idea of a man of the logging camps.

"Well, I guess I'll be gettin' along," he observed awkwardly.

"Won't you wait till my uncle comes back?"

"I'll run in some other time when he's home." He rose, twisting his hat in his hands, seemingly embarrassed by the simple ceremony of taking leave. "Yeah, that's what I'll do. Some other time, tell him. Well—good night, ma'am."

"Do come again soon."

"I—uh—well, maybe," he stammered.

She accompanied him to the door and a little way down the path to the gate. "What do you mean by it?" she asked.

"By what?"

"You know quite well. It's as if you were acting a part."

"The part of a lumberjack. Don't mention it to Wills, please. Just let it ride. Tell you some time. And about that ore; I wouldn't show it to anybody else. Make some excuse if you have to, but put it back now, before your uncle comes home. It is covered. Leave it that way. Good night."

Puzzled, she returned to Wills, who was seated as she had left him. The ore still was in the sacking, as it had been. Apparently he had not noticed it at all. She picked it up, murmuring something about untidiness. and took it from the room. She could understand the desirability of keeping the ore secret and rather regretted that she had shown it to Stuart. His advice was good and understandable. But why should he play a part in the presence of Wills? She found no answer to that.

CHAPTER XII.

Stuart took the road in the direction of Sitkum; but as soon as he was out of sight of the house he turned back, made a detour, struck the highway again beyond the house and went on to Walsh's, finding its owner reading in his bunk. He had not seen him since his arrival in Sitkum. Now he told him the result of his investigations.

"You were right about a land graft," he concluded; "but it is going to be hard to get him with the goods. He's suspicious of me, and darned if I know why. He asked

an unholy lot of questions about my doings after I left the boat. I said I hadn't seen anything or anybody on the road that night, but I'm afraid he knows I'm lying. But how does he know it?"

"Dog," said Walsh briefly.

"What d' y' mean, dog?"

"Your dog had a scrap with them ranch dogs and licked them. Nobody saw it but they know it must have been another dog because it couldn't have been anything else. A bear would have smashed them up; a wolf would have slashed them to pieces; and a lion would have treed. So that's it, of course."

"Wills did ask if Fitz was a scrapper."

"Of course you said he was."

"No," Stuart admitted regretfully. "I said he wasn't a fighter at all."

"I'm s'prised at you, Billy," Walsh reproved him. "Don't you know it's wrong to lie when you can't get away with it?"

"Solid ivory," Stuart accused himself. "I didn't see it at the time. But if Wills is so much interested and knows so much it follows that he's connected with the outfit I saw that night. What's the hock card to that, anyway? I thought you knew more about it than you admitted."

"Maybe I held out on you a little. I wasn't sure then and I ain't sure now. It's only a guess. But the guess is that that outfit was packin' beaver skins."

"And beaver are protected. Illegal traffic?"

"Sure. Protection don't mean nothing to an Injun—nor to some whites. I've done my best to stop trappin' them, but I ain't been able to, and I've been watched so darn close that I ain't been able to catch nobody at it. One man is sure up against it on my job. Beaver bein' protected, the sale of their skins is illegal, and so's their transportation. Steamers and railways won't handle 'em. It's illegal to ship 'em and it's darn risky to take a chance on shippin' 'em as something else. That's the way it is here. But across in Alberta beaver ain't protected, and skins can be sold. There's been a devil of a lot of beaver taken this last winter. So that's how I figure this outfit. They was takin' a load of pelts out through the pass back of Cole's."

"The men I saw that night were not Indians."

"No. The Injuns trapped the beaver but some white men bought up the skins. The Injuns had to take what they were offered because they couldn't sell to anybody else. They got about a dollar a skin. Somebody will make money on the deal."

"Suspect anybody?"

"Suspectin' don't do no good. I know that two Injuns—that Isadore you seen and his brother-in-law Jerome—was collectin' skins from the others. I can't prove it, because the Injun that told me would deny it in court. He'd be afraid of Jerome."

"Couldn't you arrest the pair and bluff it out of them? I stacked up Isadore for a mouthy bird, with no real nerve. I suppose this Jerome Indian is in about the same class."

"No, he ain't," said Walsh positively. "You seen his sister Mathilde. She's bad med'cine and her brother is the same breed. He's a real bad Injun and he wouldn't scare for a cent. Nor Isadore wouldn't, because he'd be a darn sight more afraid of Jerome than he would be of jail. Them two have it in for me; but so far all they've done is to try to scare me a little."

"How?"

"Well, last fall I was ridin' along a trail down by the bottom of a steep rock hill; and somebody on top of it sprinkled lead all round me. He was playin' it safe, because I couldn't have got to where he was without ridin' about a mile."

"What did you do?"

"Didn't do nothin'. After about three shots I figured they wasn't meant to go center; so I stopped, hung my hat on my saddle horn and filled up my pipe. When I got her lit I went on."

"You had nerve."

"Nerve, nothin'. Don't I tell you they wasn't shootin' *at* me. I was afraid I'd get hit by accident if I moved around. And then, of course, it don't pay to let an Injun think that anything he can do worries you a little bit. You want to act like you've got it on him every way, just because you're a white man. And so you have. I figure it was one of them two bucks or the klootch that did the shootin'. They never repeated on it but now they've taken to followin' around. Everywhere I go there's one of 'em. I don't savvy the play, unless they think it will get my goat after a while. Maybe it will, too, but in a way they ain't lookin' for."

"If you want any help," Bill offered, "just let me know. I'd be tickled to death

to handle Isadore. Haven't seen the brother-in-law, but I'd like to."

"I need help," said Walsh, "not so much on account of them as on the job gen'rally. This district is too big for one man to make even a bluff at handlin' right. I've got authority to get assistance any time I want it in any special case, but I ain't never used it, not knowin' just who to get."

"You can get me. Of course I have to do the work I came to do. But I have all summer. I'll let go all holds to help you any time you want me."

"That's mighty good of you, Billy. It suits me fine. I was sort of hopin' you might come in, and I don't know anybody I'd as soon have. I'll let you know when I need you. Maybe after a while we can fix up a good trip. If you're here in season I can show you where to get your bag limit on big game."

"I'm not as strong for big-game hunting as I used to be," Stuart admitted with some regret.

"How's that?"

"It's too much of a cinch play from my standpoint," Bill Stuart explained. "Under ordinary hunting conditions, at ordinary ranges, I know to within a couple of inches where my bullet is going, and I know just what it is going to do. Its practical effect is to turn a splendid living organism into meat—meat that I don't need. I don't mind killing for meat when I want it, but for the sake of heads as trophies it's a relic of barbarism. Game heads are rather worse than human heads or scalps, because the animal never had a chance. 'Matching your cunning and woodcraft against the animal's'! Pilgrim piffle, alleged-sporting-magazine bunk! What happens is that the guide steers his pilgrim to within a hundred yards of a sleeping or feeding animal that's about as suspicious and cunning as a dairy cow, and the only chance the poor devil has is of buck fever in the pilgrim. Why, even a grizzly hasn't a chance even in the odd case where he fights, because the guide downs him when the pilgrim gets rattled. No, Ed, shooting big game has lost most of its kick for me. But I'd like a nice long loafing trip with you."

"I'm feeling about like you do," Walsh admitted. "You know, Billy, when I think of all the animals and birds and fish there was when I was a kid, and then of what few there is now, it seems a darn shame. I've done my share toward makin' them scarce, too, but them days nobody ever thought they could get scarce. The country was just one big breedin' ground. And now there ain't one head of game where there used to be a thousand, and there's hundreds of men huntin' where there used to be one; and they're turnin' out better guns all the time; and gasoline is takin' men huntin' and fishin' where they'd never go without it account of the time and hard work.

"Game ain't goin' to stand them things. It can't. Twenty years from now, unless we take care of what we ain't been darn fools enough to kill off just to see it drop out of the air or kick on the ground, we won't have no game at all. There won't be no more warnin' than we got right now, neither. It'll be like the buff'lo—when there was hundreds of hide outfits started out on the hunt same as they'd been doin' for years. And they found there wasn't no more buff'lo left to hunt. They was gone—wiped out!—and just white bones all over the plains from the Big Muddy to the Rockies. All gone! and their hides stacked like cordwood by the steamer landin's. And then even the hides was gone, and by gosh! there was more live elephants in America than there was live American buff'lo. The rest of the game will go just like that unless we take a tumble and not wait for a house to fall onto us."

Walsh spoke earnestly, with deep feeling. He had seen the things whereof he spoke. He had seen the buffalo and the passenger pigeon go; the great and once apparently inexhaustible supply of game dwindle almost to the vanishing point. Strict conservation of its survivors he knew to be the only alternative to ultimate and not-far-off extinction.

Though it was late when Stuart returned to Sitkum there was a noisy crowd at the hotel. As he passed he was hailed by Orme. With him was a stranger to Stuart, a small, spare, dark, quick-moving man, apparently as active and restless as a terrier.

"Shake hands with Jerry McCool," said Orme.

Stuart shook hands. So this was McCool. The fingers that wrapped themselves around his were long, thin and surprisingly powerful. McCool's face was lean and hard and save for an odd trick of twitching heavy eyebrows as expressionless and masklike as Orme's.

"We'll have a little drink," Orme suggested.

Stuart took beer, the other two, rye. Stuart noticed that the bottle set before them, though an ordinary one, had a ring of paper pasted around its neck.

"Have something on me," he said. "Rye for me this time, Harry." But the barkeep whisked the ringed bottle away and substituted another; from which Stuart deduced that the former had contained cold tea or brown sugar and water—an ancient device of the insider who, for his own purposes, wishes to take drink for drink and yet remain sober. Hence the quick substitution when he had asked for rye. It followed, then, that Orme and McCool wished to remain cold sober just then. The former ordinarily drank whisky straight, without camouflage. Then there must be a hen on somewhere. Bill Stuart had cut his wisdom teeth long ago.

The reason became more apparent when McCool, who had disappeared for a few minutes, announced that some of the boys wished to start a game. Orme demurred. He wanted to go to bed. McCool insisted. There were only himself and two others, Hedberg and Larsen. Orme gave in. McCool asked if Stuart played.

"He plays a darn good game," Orme answered for him, "but I'll bet he's like me—wants to get some sleep."

Neat enough, Stuart thought. A very fair approach. He was curious to see how they worked the good "old thing" in Sitkum, even if he had to pay a few dollars for the knowledge. He said: "I'm not very sleepy. I don't mind playing for an hour—in a friendly game."

McCool led the way to a rear room. There Stuart met Hedberg and Larsen, who had just finished cutting a quantity of ties on contract. There is money in tie making when the timber stands well, for specialists who are willing to work long hours at high speed. The two were such men. They made money fast when they worked and when they were idle they spent it rather faster.

Hedberg was a colossus, hairy, blond bearded; Larsen, though smaller, was not a small man. Both had been drinking, though they were not yet intoxicated.

On the theory that every boy should know how to swim, old Bill Stuart had taught his son the rudiments of the game at an early age. Later, on various occasions, the latter had bought and paid for experience, for a logging or mining pay roll draws tinhorns as fresh meat draws flies. And so Bill Stuart was perfectly conversant with a number of points not to be found in Hoyle or kindred works. Now, in a short time, he became convinced of two things: First, that the game was crooked; and, second, that the two tie hacks and himself had been selected to give the party. He could not have told just how he reached this conclusion, but having reached it he was keenly alert to detect the exact modus operandi of the deadfall.

It seemed to operate upon conventional lines. Drinks came frequently. The barkeep who brought them always handed Orme and McCool their glasses—which meant that they were sticking closely to cold tea or the like. But Hedberg and Larsen reached the stage in which the quick analysis and cool judgment necessary to successful poker is replaced by optimism and a pugnacious disinclination to lay down a hand with any possibilities whatever.

Then came a collision between two hands held by Orme and McCool. They bet heavily, using currency instead of chips, disregarding all limits. Finally McCool called. He had three queens; but Orme had a full, jacks on treys.

Stuart smiled inwardly. Very nice, very well done. First, a precedent of heavy betting in real money had been established; and, second, the show-down proved that Orme and McCool were rash betters, willing to back ordinary hands as if they were extraordinary. Hedberg and Larsen who had won at first were now behind, as was he, himself. Presumably, then, any of them would welcome the gift of a really good hand and play it for all or more than it was worth. And so he watched every deal, every movement of Orme and McCool. Never for an instant did his eyes, sheltered by his tilted hat brim, stray from the cards when they were in the hands of the dealer.

Then he saw it. The barkeep appeared with a round of drinks ordered by McCool. It was the latter's deal. Holding the deck undealt in his left hand, with his right he threw a bill carelessly at the tray. It fell to the floor and McCool and the barkeep both stooped to recover it. McCool came up, the deck still grasped in his left hand, and immediately began to deal. Stuart re-

membered that Orme had absented himself briefly a few minutes before. He knew that the bartender had slipped McCool a cold deck under cover of the tray.

Apparently the deal had been kind to Hedberg and Larsen. They made it expensive to come in. McCool dropped. Orme paid his way. So did Stuart, who took two cards.

The scene between Orme and McCool was reënacted in earnest by Hedberg and Larsen. They wanted action uncramped by limit. Orme objected. This crazy thing of throwing the betting wide open made him tired. But if they thought they could scare him out they were all wrong. He would stay with them and they could lift the roof if they liked. Stuart grinned and pitched his hand in.

"Go as far as you like," he said. "I'm out."

He caught a glance of surprise and suspicion from Orme's cold gray eyes. McCool, out of it also, his eyes narrowed down to slits, was regarding him, quick distrust breaking through his mask.

Stuart lit a cigar and leaned back. He was no philanthropist and he had no intention of denouncing McCool. It was not up to him to protect anybody but himself.

Hedberg and Larsen produced rolls of currency and proceeded to bet their heads off. And Orme trailed along, seeing every raise till the betting showed signs of faltering. Then he tilted it a hundred at a crack.

By this time the table was covered with currency. A dim suspicion that all was not right seemed to cross the mind of Hedberg; but a glance at his hand apparently reassured him. It was Larsen who, at the limits of his roll, finally called with a jack-high diamond flush; Hedberg had four queens; but Orme, without a word, laid down the four bullets and began to sweep in the stakes.

But the giant Hedberg leaped to his feet, almost capsizing the table, sending chips and money in a cascade. With a bellow of blasphemy he thrust his bearded, inflamed face almost into Orme's clean-shaven, cold, impassive one. "That deal was crooked!" he charged menacingly.

Orme's face did not change its expression —or lack of it. "I played what I got," he said calmly. "I didn't deal."

But Jerry McCool, as if the words were a cue, leaped into speech and action. He jumped up, deluging Hedberg with indignant denial and abuse, gesticulating. What was he beefing about? Lose and squeal! But he, McCool wouldn't be called a crook. His diatribe trailed into blasphemous obscenity so bitter, so utterly virulent that Hedberg, dazed momentarily, hesitated. In that moment Orme swept the money in.

"He didn't mean that you were crooked, Jerry," he said blandly. "They're both gentlemen, and too good sports to be poor losers. They'll win it all back before we quit. Quit chewin' the rag and let's play. Your deal, Larsen."

And he almost got away with it. Larsen actually picked up the cards; but Hedberg recovered from his temporary daze.

"A skin game, a crooked deal!" he vociferated. "You ban dam' crukes, all. Larsen and me, we en't ban sucker. We want our money back."

"Now, now," Orme chided calmly, "keep your shirt on. McCool's square, he's straight. You know that."

"I say he ban cruked as hal!" Hedberg roared, "and so ban you. We want that money back and we want it now."

"You don't get it," said Orme with cold finality.

Hedberg shoved the table violently against him. He crashed backward to the floor, chair and all. But McCool, agile as a cat, leaped forward. As he sprang he drew a blackjack. He went for Hedberg slashing with the wicked little weapon through the giant fending arms. He drove him backward and found his mark. Hedberg went down like a sack of oats. McCool turned on Larsen who was just coming into action. But Orme recovered himself with an activity positively marvelous for his weight.

"Let him alone," he cried. "It was Hedberg made the trouble."

"I'd like to bash his block in," McCool snarled viciously, "and I will if he makes one bad move." But nevertheless he desisted. Red-eyed as a weasel he turned on Stuart who, at the beginning of hostilities, had shoved back his chair and left a clear field. "You, guy, you got any kick coming?" he demanded truculently, swinging his weapon menacingly.

"Do you hear me making any?" Stuart returned coldly.

McCool scowled at him, his eyebrows twitching. Orme bent over Hedberg who

was showing signs of returning consciousness.

"He'll be all right. There's no fight left in him."

This prediction proved correct. The giant's fighting gauge had dropped to a cold-boiler level. He and Larsen left the room, rumbling threats to which Orme paid no attention at all.

"Some fellows lose like that," he said to Stuart. "Well, we can have a quiet little game without them."

"Not for me," said Stuart. "I don't feel lucky to-night."

"You mean anything by that?" McCool challenged promptly and truculently. Stuart eyed him levelly.

"What are you looking for, anyway?" he demanded in a tone that matched McCool's. "You heard what I said. If you don't want to let it go at that, start something and see where you come out."

But Orme interposed. Jerry was just sore at the two tie hacks. They were crazy and half drunk. They shouldn't have played with them at all. Stuart merely smiled politely. Orme spoke of his own hand. He had two aces on the deal and caught two others in the draw. Then, of course, he played them. He didn't want their money, but of course when they claimed that the game was crooked he couldn't give it back, which would have been tantamount to an admission of their charge.

"You dropped out," he said to Stuart, "after the draw. Did you draw to anything special?"

"Not a thing," Stuart replied. "If I had caught two spades I'd have had a flush. Now I'm going to hit my blankets. Good night."

Behind him he left a heavy silence, broken after an interval by McCool. "He's a liar," he told Orme. "What he has before the draw is three kings—diamond, spade, club. On the draw he catches the heart king and the spade ten. Four kings, that's his hand. And he laid it down!"

"He was wise to it being a cold hand."

"Then why didn't he make a holler? Was he scared?"

"Not the way I've got him sized up," Orme frowned. "He hadn't lost much and he just wasn't throwing in with those tie hacks. I wish, now, we'd left them out of it. That rough stuff of yours won't do any good."

"Only for that rough stuff Hedberg would have jumped on you with his feet while you were down, and you'd have pulled a gun from the floor and blown a hole in him," McCool told him. "You'd have had to. You make me sick."

"We were after Stuart," Orme regretted, "and we didn't get to him. Now he won't sit in again."

"The only sure-fire way to get a guy's roll is to slug him for it," said McCool. "All I know about this bird is what you've been telling me, but I don't like him around here. Where do we get off at if we let him nose around?"

"Give him rope and he'll show his hand."

"You're all wrong. He'll see your hand, like he did to-night. I'd force the play. I'd make him darn glad to pull out of here and keep goin' if he's just a blanket stiff like he claims to be. But I know darn well he ain't. He don't fool me a little bit. Didn't you say O'Halloran wants a chance at him?"

"Yes; but Stuart dodges him."

"It can be fixed so he can't dodge. The cap can beat him to a whisper—put him out of business for a couple of weeks. Treat him rough and he'll move on if he's on the level. If he don't we'll know he ain't. Then there's that cur he's got. Thinks a lot of him, don't he?"

"I guess so."

McCool uttered an eternal truth. "The way to get a guy's goat is to get his dog," he said.

To be continued in the next issue, February 7th.

THE CAR THAT RATTLED

"SOMEBODY," remarked Jones, "said your car rattled. Does it rattle?"

"Does she rattle!" retorted Smith. "She sounds like a tin gallon bucket going down three flights of stairs with four rusty nails in it! She sounds like an aged Arkansan's false teeth in the height of the chills-and-ague season! She sounds like a skeleton with hydrophobia and the palsy having a chill on a tin roof!"

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

II.—GETTING THE RIGHT JOB.

TWO weeks ago at the solicitation of the editor of THE POPULAR, I wrote, or rather dictated, the first of these talks with men. The editor wants me to continue talking, thinking that what I have to say may be of use and service to men younger than myself. If it is to be of any value I must remain unknown. That is not my name at the top of the page, nor is my appearance even faintly indicated by the picture the artist has drawn. Were I known I should not be able to talk frankly and freely. Those I mentioned might be identified and I would be forced to spare the feelings of one man and to hold sacred the confidences of another. I have had my own experiences, but the stories of other men who have talked to me without reserve seem much more valuable. They are men of all fashions and degrees, from janitors to big real-estate operators, from hospital attendants to famous specialists, from elevator boys to the presidents of great corporations. Something of what I have learned from them I am trying to pass on to you.

The general subject suggested by the editor is the art of getting on in life. To put that in other words, it is the art of getting the most out of life. To say it once again—and this time in the truest, most accurate fashion—it is the art of putting the most and the best of oneself into life. The instinct that leads a man to do the best that is in him for others as well as himself, rather than the instinct of acquisitiveness and possession, is the guide to success and happiness. Two weeks ago I talked about the art of keeping fit, for to be well in health is the foundation stone. Next in importance is getting to work as soon as possible at the right thing.

FOR most young men this means getting a job. If a man is earning his own living, still better if he is pulling more than his own weight in the boat and helping some one else to live, and at the same time doing something that suits him and is of some use in the world, he already is marching out on the high-road to success. How far he is to go depends somewhat on chance, a little more on his own character and ability, but most of all on the use that his conscious will makes of his chances and gifts. And so, to start with, let us set about getting a job.

THE first two positions I landed came to me through family influence. At the start I was too fortunate for my own good. I was placed in a position which should have gone to a man older than myself, if not in years at least in maturity. By maturity I mean a gravity of character, a sense of proportion, an imaginative understanding of what counted and what my work meant for the concern that was paying me.

I carried the mental attitude of a backward schoolboy. The pay envelope and the time off were the big things with me. It seems strange, but I can recall as I look back now that it never once occurred to me to be curious as to how the people who paid me made their money. I did not know whether they were making or losing money. I thought that if I did my work I would be promoted in the natural course of things, and so gave myself no concern about it. On matters that meant really nothing to my future I was intelligent enough, but as regards my chance in life I was asleep. Fortunately for me a crash in the business forced the concern to cut out a lot of deadwood. In the kindest and most considerate way in the world the head of my department told me that while my diligence and attention to duty were everything that could be desired I was not fitted by nature for the work I was doing. He assured me that I was too much of a gentleman for that sort of work. I knew that he was lying and yet I was a little grateful to him for the lie. He told me too that some time I would want to thank him for letting me go. I have thanked him since.

IT is easier to land a position now than it was in those days. I used to walk the streets, looking at the busy people bound on their mysterious errands. Every one was occupied, every one had some business and position save myself alone. I was a stray bit of mechanism left out of the machine and unable to find my way back.

It was not the feeling of poverty, it was the feeling of being an outsider, of not belonging anywhere that hurt. I was so inept, so bashful, so generally stupid that I had a hard time of it. The hard times, it is well to remember, are the best times in the end. It is when a man is being hurt that he learns. Some of us need more hurting than others.

I got my second job through family influence. This time I did a little better as I found out something I could do, but my mental attitude was wrong. It was the attitude of a schoolboy. I had no grasp of the business as a whole. I still looked forward too much to Sunday, and not enough to Monday morning. After eighteen months I was walking about the streets again, watching the busy people who belonged to the big machine and wondering why there was no place in the world for me.

I got my third position all by myself. I had no especial aptitude for the work, but thanks to a stinging call-down at the end of the first week I grasped the idea that the firm was in the business to make money and that I was expected to cooperate. I had a gang of from ten to twenty laborers under me. I got the pay roll at noon on Saturdays, and the first Saturday and the first Monday were a dead loss. But after I got it through my head that more work from the men would mean better business for the firm and for myself, I found things going better. I did not drive the men unduly. They were happier working hard than half idling. I got the work out of them and made a record. I could have stayed there for the rest of my life if I had wanted to. It was not that I was especially fitted for the work, but I finally had developed enough imagination to see where I stood and what I meant. I was seeing the world for the first time.

IT took me eight months to land my next job. This position was of my own choice, not that of my family or of necessity. It was a business in which I knew I could be of some special value, for which I had a taste and of which I had a general idea. I got the position through a friend, not a family friend, but one I had made myself. It cost him nothing. All he had to do was to say that he thought I was all right. This is the proper and just use to make of a friend. To ask a friend to make a sacrifice for you weakens your own fiber and position. This

last position paid, at the beginning, twenty dollars a week. I turned down another chance at thirty-five to take it, but I think my judgment was sound. Anyway, I have never had to hunt for a position since.

There are two sorts of men, the opportunist and the man of settled purpose. The opportunist tries to turn every chance to his own advantage. He is selling oil stock one week and teaching school the next. The thoroughbred man of purpose will devote his whole life and sacrifice himself and his family to perfect an invention or to compose a grand opera. Very few of us have the gifts to follow this path.

The ideal is a proper combination of the two, an underlying substratum of rocky purpose with a topsoil of ingenious opportunism. Twenty-five years ago, in a big Eastern city, I knew two boys who had come up from the South. They told me their ambitions. One wanted to get a dress suit, join a fashionable dancing class and marry some nice rich girl. He told me it could be done easily, although I doubted him. The other had made up his mind to be a corporation lawyer.

Let's call the first one Crane, for that is not his name. I helped him buy his dress suit and he joined the dancing class. In two years he was married to an heiress. In three he went to Congress. In five he disappeared from public life and has not been heard of since. He dozes away all his afternoons in a quiet club.

The other man—let's call him Myers, for that is not his name—had set himself a task that was apparently hopeless, as he had neither friends nor connections. Through sheer stubbornness he got a fifteen-dollar-a-week job on a lesser newspaper and in his capacity of reporter haunted the criminal courts and made friends with the district attorney. The district attorney finally appointed him indictment clerk at a salary of twenty-five a week. For three years he studied law at nights and was finally made a deputy-assistant district attorney. He was assigned to try the least important cases. There was no limelight for him, no big murder case, no prosecution of malefactors of great wealth. His work was to convict thieves who stole bales of goods from warehouses and freight cars. This brought him into close connection with the representatives of express and insurance companies. Myers was able to turn his position to his own service. In a short time he was out for himself, representing an express company. Then he was member of a firm and then of another more famous firm. He is now a corporation lawyer. Another friend of mine, an older man, was given up as a hopeless invalid and sent out West at the age of twenty. He was a little fellow physically, in poor health and without means. Yet he landed a job with a cattle outfit, learned to ride and became a cow-puncher, learned to save and bought some stock, finally winding up as the owner of a big ranch. He sold his ranch out at the top of the market and went East again. Five years' life of enjoyment in town changed him from a hard-riding athlete to an old gentleman with high blood pressure. He died of a stroke.

GREEN, another friend of mine, was in a business that offered no future to him. There was another concern that he thought might offer him a future, but he knew no one connected with it and had no means of getting an introduction. Once a week or so he called at the offices of this firm, always to be told that there was nothing doing. He had noticed often a gentleman who sometimes came out of the offices and went down in the elevator with him and who seemed to have some regular business there. Green took him for an outside man of some sort.

After his eighth rebuff Green spoke to this gentleman, who happened to be traveling down in the big office building at the same time.

"Have you any idea," he said, "how a man ought to go about getting a job up there?"

The gentleman considered for a moment. "Write a letter making an application," he said, "and send it to the president of the corporation."

Green wrote the letter and got a job. A few days later he discovered that the gentleman whose advice he had followed was the president of the corporation himself.

THE art of writing a good letter is a help to a man out of work. I see a lot of applicants for positions in the course of a year but I have made it a rule never to give a job to a man without reading a letter he has written. A letter often tells more about a man than you can learn from his speech or appearance. There are many who present a brisk and engaging appearance whose letters are slipshod, careless and unintelligent. If you know what you want to do and have selected the concern you want to get into, write them a letter. It will be read. All letters are read in the well-conducted business house. And if your letter shows any class you'll get an answer. It goes without saying that it ought to be a legible, typewritten letter in good English. It ought not to be too modest and it certainly ought not to be boastful. It ought to be sincere, direct and natural. A man who tells the simple truth about himself is such a refreshing novelty that he is sure of a hearing anywhere. An ultrasnappy letter with a forced air of assurance and briskness makes a bad impression. The letter need not be too short The best letter of application for a position I ever read came from a woman. The second sentence was, "I will be brief." Then she filled four pages. But they were natural, sincere pages and the sentences carried one along

PERSISTENCE is a most valuable thing in landing a job, but persistence uncombined with tact is fatal. No man can communicate to another the notion of tact and discretion. You must discover those things for yourself. The persistence that wins is a gentle, good-humored, ingenious, tactful persistence. Getting a job is like everything else, the more of yourself you can put into it the better. That does not mean setting your jaw hard and giving an outward demonstration of grit. It means using every idea you can get hold of and every fortuitous advantage. We know one man who got into a really big position. And the point of his lever was that he had a good old New England name and had once marched in a torchlight political parade years before.

THIS man is a perfect example of the proper combination of opportunism and settled purpose.

He has the disposition of a D'Artagnan and his start and rise in business were quite as romantic as an expedition of Dumas' hero.

Already he had selected the business he was going to devote himself to, and taught himself something about one branch of it. He started out to get a job as sales manager for the biggest concern of its kind in the world. He had the art of success, which, as I shall explain more fully later on, is the art of turning everything to account. His fine old New England name, the fact that he had once made the acquaintance of a prominent Englishman on a transatlantic trip, and the circumstance of his having walked in a torchlight parade formed his materials. Not very promising—but let us see how he used them.

He wrote to the gentleman for whom he had paraded, reminding him of the fact and asking for an interview. All he asked from this man was a letter of introduction to the man he had selected as his future employer. This man was a New Englander too and the name counted a little. Let's call our hero Brown. He presented his letter of introduction and asked for the sales managership. It was the biggest job of its kind in the world. Brown knew it was vacant at the time and decided that it was for him. Naturally the prospective employer hesitated. Brown talked well about the business, but he was untried. Brown suggested that he prove his fitness by going out and getting some business.

"You sell nothing to Bradbury, in England," he said. "Suppose I get that account for you."

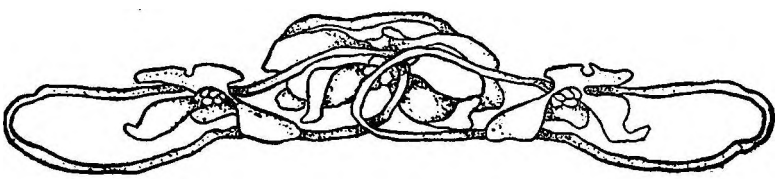
Bradbury stands for the Englishman he had met on the ship. Brown had saved up a little money. Now he began to spend it like a wild man. He cabled to Bradbury that he was going over to see him on a matter of importance and started at once He put up at a good London hotel, bought a top hat and cutaway coat and

wrote to Bradbury asking for an appointment. Bradbury remembered him as a pleasant acquaintance and gave him the appointment. The Bradbury account was just ripe for picking by the first solicitor that came along. He had no idea that his brisk young acquaintance was not just as important as he looked. Brown got the business and came back with the contract in his pocket. In a literal sense he had made his fortune. All he had to do after that was to sit tight. The business into which he had insinuated himself was growing by leaps and bounds and he grew with it.

THE choice of a business is another matter. Years ago, it seems to me, half the young men were training to be electrical engineers. Now the fashionable thing seems to be selling bonds. My own idea is that, all other things being equal, it is better to select something original that not too many others are trying. There are plenty of chances in the big cities of the East, but if I were starting all over again I think it would be somewhere west of the Mississippi. It is likely that some of the great successes of the future will be made in the way of distribution. Our present railroad system is too expensive, the farmers get too little and the consumers pay too much. There is a problem to be solved, with a big reward for the solver.

IT may seem that this advice is not very definite. It is better that it should not be so. Do your own thinking. I am furnishing some data and nothing more.

As I said, two weeks ago, I want to answer all letters that come in, providing they carry with them a stamped, addressed envelope.



FRANKENSTEIN

By Y. F. Swain

THE copper ore, for aye concealed,
The miner's pick to light revealed.
(It slew him on a distant field.)

The thought that hidden long had lain,
Was minted in a poet's brain.
(It starved him in a city drain.)

The rose of love a maiden saw,
She held it to her breast, with awe.
(It killed her on a bed of straw.)

The child a woman taught to pray,
Was hanged, without a prayer, at day.
(And she lived on, though dead, alway!)

The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Mystery Man from Prague," "The League of the Creeping Death," Etc.

IX.—THE GREEN LASH OF THE HAPSBURGS.

Mr. Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, meets an old friend and two erstwhile enemies in Lyons. They all have reason to bless his name before the day is spent, but The Just-So Kid has to buy the supper.

ONCE a very great American traveler wrote these words: "When I am away from the United States I find the Saturday afternoons the longest of all and the hardest to pass. On those afternoons all the stored memories of other Saturdays parade before me."

Robert Henry Blane, known as The Texan Wasp, sitting on the balcony of the Savoy Hotel, overlooking the Cours du Midi of the ancient town of Lyons, was aware of the parade of his dead Saturdays. They saddened him a little. In endless number they marched before a mental saluting post.

There were Saturday afternoons spent in Texas in the long ago. The fat Saturday afternoons of imperial youth. Fishing, swimming, and baseball. They swaggered by; hot, luscious hours lived with all the intensity that growing strength can bring.

Later afternoons at Happy Valley, the home of Kenney Blane who rode like a centaur and possessed the grace and charm of Prince Florizel. Wonderful Saturdays when the fierce throb of the weekly toil was geared down to meet the crystal quiet of the day of rest. The eyes of The Wasp grew soft as he thought of Kenney Blane.

And the parade went on. Saturday afternoons in Boston during college days. Walks in the Back Bay Fens in the golden springtime with Betty Allerton. Afternoons with her on the river in the summer when they rode through a golden future on wing-tipped words. Silent strolls with Betty in the sweet, soft sadness of late September days when speech was throttled by the Spirit of the Fall that came on:

> " . . . swaying feet
> With wind-blown skirts, loose hair of russet brown
> Crowned with bright berries of the bittersweet."

The Texan Wasp roused himself and went into the street. From the Cours du Midi, immediately before the hotel, came the first bleatings of a fair that had been brought into being with much hammering and noise. Cake sellers and venders of fried potatoes

lifted tentative voices to the early visitors. Pasty-faced spinners from the hundred thousand silk looms of Lyons were boarding the flying boats; grimy metal workers were forming themselves into sweaty knots before the shooting galleries where it was possible for a marksman to put a shot through a small hole that started mechanism which produced a parade of French soldiers in the Ruhr or a thrilling panorama of the colonial troops in Morocco. Yes, and at the rate of ten shots for a franc, the youth of Lyons could shoot at ten metal-made German generals who were rushed swiftly by, crouching as they ran. A great sport for the youth who had never seen war. An artist had made the running generals. The giggling girls from the looms urged their swaggering steadies to blaze at them.

Robert Henry Blane found peace in the growing riot of the Cours. He refused an invitation to pay ten sous for the handshake and the photograph of a low-grade moron who was exhibited as a human spider; he dodged the barker of a woman who was supposed to possess only one ear that was situated in the center of her forehead, but a dyed-haired lady who was the proprietress of the "Buffalo Bill Shooting Gallery" fell upon him with a squeak of delight. She thrust aside a tough-looking person and begged the American to test her rifles. Were not all the Americans splendid shots? Did not they have the famous Buffalo Beel after whom she had named her gallery? And had not the dyed one the pleasure of meeting Buffalo Beel? It is the truth! It was at Marseilles when he was there with his great circus! What a man he was with his curls! Buffalo Beel talked with her! Ah, she was younger then. He had told her she was pretty. And she was, too!

"Madame is still pretty," murmured the gallant Texan.

The dyed-haired one squeaked with delight. Again she thrust the tough-looking person out of the way. What did he mean by pushing himself forward when a rich American wished to try the little guns?

The tough-looking person made a snarling objection. He intimated that he didn't care three centimes for Americans. He glared resentfully at The Wasp. The desire to fight blazed in the little shifty eyes that looked as if they were trying to eliminate by their restless movements the very small space that separated them from each other.

The Texan Wasp smiled. He told the tough one that it was not his fighting day. Tuesdays and Thursdays, yes, but not on Saturday afternoons. *Pax* was his motto for Saturday afternoons.

This information increased the temper of the tough. He stood off and made remarks. He had seen Americans fight at Belleau. Well, they didn't impress him. Not noticeably.

The Texan Wasp picked up a rifle and sent ten pellets through the blackened center of a scoring card. The dyed-haired one clucked with delight as she pulled the string that brought the hacked cardboard to the counter. She drowned the snarls of the tough with her remarks. Ah, Buffalo Beel could do things like that! *Oui!* Pop, pop, pop! Good, monsieur! Some of her customers stared so long at the target before firing that you would think it a girl in a bathing dress on the beach at Deauville!

And was Buffalo Beel still alive? Ah, mon Dieu! He had died! What a world of trouble it was! She seized the chance to make profit out of the news. She shrieked it to the crowd around the gallery. Monsieur Buffalo Beel in whose honor she had named the shooting gallery was dead! She had just heard from the rich American whose shots ate the heart of the bull's-eye. She had spoken with Monsieur Buffalo Beel! *Oui!* He had curls like a woman, and he had said that she was pretty!

Robert Henry Blane moved on while she was prattling.

There was the booth of the strong men. It was under the management of Monsieur Jacques Béranger, wearer of the médaille militaire and lacking a leg that he had left at Douaumont when the Brandenburgers pushed the hardest. A great talker was Monsieur Jacques. Standing alone upon the platform he announced that he was the possessor of four champions. There was a Russian wrestler from Libau. Ah, a very devil of a man! There was an Italian who could lift more than a steam crane. Bigger than Maciste! They could see for themselves when he stepped upon the platform. There was a Frenchman who was unsurpassed with singlesticks. And last, but not least, was the American. Ah, the grand boxer who would meet all comers. James Dewey Casey, champion ring master of the American army!"

Robert Henry Blane gave a little grunt of

surprise, a grunt that was drowned by the unholy clatter of the improvised band that signaled the coming of the four champions. In single file they emerged from the dressing tent. In the lead was the Russian, whose bare torso showed enough scratches to suggest that he had either a bobcat training partner or a bad-tempered spouse. Behind the Russian came the Italian weight lifter and the French swordsman, and at the rear of the procession walked James Dewey Casey, the little American fighter known as "The Just-So Kid" that Robert Henry Blane had known at Monte Carlo, Paris, and Seville in the days gone by.

The Texan Wasp had a desire to unloose a war whoop but he controlled his delight. He would wait for a moment and see what happened. The pleasure that he received from seeing the little pugilist had lifted the Saturday-afternoon gloom that encompassed him. He had last sojourned with The Just-So Kid in sunny Seville prior to the disagreement that had taken place between The Wasp and the chief of the Scarlet Jackals.

Monsieur Jacques called for challengers. They answered readily. A burly sailor from a Rhone boat challenged the Russian. He was tossed a small stick in conformance with the ritual. An amateur weight lifter stepped forward and pointed to the Italian. A local singlestick champion picked upon the Frenchman. The Just-So Kid alone lacked a challenger.

Monsieur Jacques tapped the little American upon the shoulder. Was there no one brave enough to tackle Monsieur Casey? Were they all afraid of the little American? And that in Lyons, the city of brave men?

The Texan Wasp, hiding himself carefully behind a canvas wind screen, looked at the crowd. Suddenly he caught the eye of the tough who had made biting remarks about the fighting capacity of Americans. For an instant Robert Henry Blane and the fellow stared at each other, then the gray eyes of the Texan shifted quickly to The Just-So Kid and a smile slipped swiftly across his face.

The tough snarled. He jabbered excitedly. What was there in it for him? Five francs or less! Why should he fight if there was no money?

The Texan Wasp reached for his wallet. The remarks of the tough had drawn attention to him. The eyes of the crowd were turned his way. The four champions were watching. The Just-So Kid was grinning recognition.

Robert Henry Blane took from his wallet a thousand-franc bill, the fine, expansive note that is nearly four times the size of an American bill. He waved the money toward Monsieur Jacques. "My friend here," he said, indicating the tough, "is willing to fight if there is a purse. He tells me that he just gobbles up Americans, so I'm putting up a thousand francs to see him do it."

In the uproar that followed, as the crowd fought to enter the tent, a lean-faced, babbling idiot of about eighteen years of age tugged at the sleeve of The Texan Wasp. The fool tried to explain himself. He had been to the hotel and the concierge had described Monsieur Blane.

"What is it?" questioned The Wasp. "What do you want me for?"

"A lady—the beautiful one wishes to speak to you," gurgled the idiot.

Robert Henry Blane laughed. "Where is the lady?" he asked.

The fool dropped his voice. "In the Rue Rabelais," he answered. "Here, she sent you this note."

The Wasp, swept forward by the pushing crowd that sought admittance to the combats, snatched the note from the hand of the messenger and read it hurriedly. For a moment it puzzled him. He did not recognize the signature of the writer, then memory whisked him back to a night in Venice in the long ago when he had solved a cryptogram for a woman who was lovelier than Halcyone, a woman who seemed to be the very spirit of beauty which Venice cherished through the centuries. The signature was that of Valerie Caselli, the extraordinary adventuress, who had attempted to hand him over to No. 37 when the great man hunter was close on his trail.

There was a strange pathos in the note. The idiot clung to his sleeve as he read it. It ran:

> The morning paper says that there is a Robert H. Blane at the Savoy. I wonder is it Robert Henry Blane of Texas? If it is then the god of good luck has blessed me! I have escaped from the prison of Budapest and I want help. I want it badly! Please, *please* come to me! I am ill and I wish to reach the place I love before I die. VALERIE CASELLI.

It was impossible for The Wasp to turn. The news that a rich American had offered

a thousand francs as a prize in a boxing bout flamed across the fairground and the massed fans behind the Texan swept him forward. Barkers stopped barking and rushed pell-mell for the tent. Never had such a thing happened before. Even the dyed-haired lady who claimed the acquaintance of Buffalo Bill came running, skirts streaming in the wind. The action of The Wasp made the tent of the strong men a gigantic vacuum that sucked in humans.

Robert Henry Blane gripped the wrist of the youth who brought the message. "Stay by me till this is over," he cried. "I'll go with you after the fight."

The tent bulged as the fans stuffed it. The challenges thrown to the wrestler, the weight lifter, and the swordsman were forgotten. The crowd yelled for the boxing bout.

A clever manager was Monsieur Jacques. He tied the thousand-franc bill to the end of the gas pipe that hung above the center of the ring. The tinted sheet of the Banque de France waved in the breeze produced by the inpouring crowd.

The tent filled. It shuddered like an overstuffed sausage. It reeked with a thousand odors that fought among themselves for supremacy. Smells of garlic, of goat cheese, of sour wine, of black mud from the Rhone that caked the shoes of the spectators.

Robert Henry Blane, sitting high up on the bare planks, the hungry-looking idiot at his side, recalled a remark of Stevenson who said Adventure kicked his shins at every street crossing. Upon the balcony of his hotel he, Blane, had thought the afternoon dull. It had made his mind an empty parade ground in which the dead Saturdays marched like mutes at a funeral. He had stepped out onto a fairground and, lo and behold, things buzzed amazingly.

He waved a greeting to The Just-So Kid as the little fighter hopped through the ropes and squatted on the stool in his corner. Then, while the preliminary arrangements were being attended to, The Wasp let his mind loose upon the matter of Valerie Caselli. He forgot the crowd, the odors, the two fighters waiting for the word. He shut his eyes and pictured the woman who had spoken to him before Florian's on the Piazza San Marco. He saw again the startling wonder of her face lit up by the great violet eyes. What a woman she was! He recalled the strange, ethereal beauty of her features. A miasmic beauty; a beauty that seemed to be part of the City of the Lagoons.

He thought over her life. She had been born to tread the path of deceit and deviltry. In her blood was the yeast of discontent, the discontent that spurred her toward prison cells and disgrace. The Texan Wasp recalled the last news he had of her. The great man hunter. No. 37, had landed her in a small cell at Budapest, a cold, damp cell through the walls of which came a slight seepage from the Danube that swept the outer bastions.

Robert Henry Blane was brought out of his trance by a great roar from the crowd. The fight was on. In the ring was a charging buffalo with flailing fists that were vainly attempting to connect with a vulnerable section of a Panlike youngster who darted out of the path like a startled dragon fly, but who gave with the right of way a beautiful collection of jabs and uppercuts that infuriated the unscientific tough and delighted the audience.

The spectators were on their feet. It was a fight that their artistic Gallic souls loved. In it were evasion, elusiveness, a cleverness that mocked, a grace and litheness that were particularly French, and this was pitted against a clumsy brutality that was hateful in its expression.

The Just-So Kid moved like a prince of swordsmen. He thrust out a smiling face and grinned as the tough missed. He weaved in and out of flying fists and drove his own gloved hands hard on the body and face of his antagonist. The thousand-franc bill tied to the gas pipe was blown backward and forward by the wind of strife. Yells of delight burst from the tent and spread over the fairground.

A clash of the cymbals announced the end of the round. The fighters went to their corners. The hunger-worried idiot pulled at the sleeve of The Texan Wasp. "Come," he whispered. "Come now! The beautiful lady is waiting."

"Wait," said the Texan. "It is not over."

"But she told me to hurry!" whispered the fool. "She asked me to run quick. We must go——"

His words were drowned in the uproar. The two fighters were on their feet again; the dancing, smiling Just-So Kid side-stepping, ducking, driving straight lefts and rights into the face of the half-crazed tough.

The little American was the poetry of combat. His actions possessed that stamp of unstrained effort that is loved by the French. There was a shrug behind his blows; the unspoken, "It's quite easy to do it," that goes with the rapier thrust of the accomplished swordsman.

The tough stood for an instant and dropped his guard. It was the end. The Just-So Kid surged in on him, something happened that few eyes could follow, then Monsieur Jacques was chanting the count.

Robert Henry Blane, with the idiot clinging to him, shouldered his way to the ring. The Just-So Kid had been given the thousand-franc bill. He grasped the hand of the Texan and babbled his thanks.

"Golly! You saved my life again!" he cried. "I wanted to pitch this job but I didn't have a sou! Let me get into my duds an' come along with you!"

"Then be quick about it," said The Wasp. "I've sidetracked a call from a damsel in distress while waiting to see you beat that chap. And her messenger is persistent. Listen to him."

"The beautiful lady is waiting," moaned the idiot. "Come quick!"

Robert Henry Blane and James Dewey Casey were compelled to walk fast to keep up with the lean idiot who had brought the note from Valerie Caselli. The Wasp suggested the advisability of taking a taxicab, but the messenger objected to the wait. Speed, to him, existed in legs alone, and he urged the two Americans forward. At a half trot he hurried them along the Quai Gailleton that runs beside the Rhone, paced them across the fine stone bridge—the Pont de la Guillotière—and led them by the Prefecture into the Rue Rabelais.

"Is the lady sick?" gasped The Just-So Kid.

The Texan Wasp laughed. "By this chap's actions I should think she was very ill," he answered. "He's slowing up now, so we must be nearly there."

The idiot stopped before a door in an old wall. He beckoned the two Americans and whispered instructions. "Keep close to me," he said. "We must go into the house this way. We must not be seen."

The Wasp gripped his lean shoulder and asked a question. "Why cannot we go in by the front door?" he asked.

"There are watchers there," whispered the fool. "They are watching her. She cannot leave. This way is across the roof and she cannot climb. Come!"

"Jimmy," said Robert Henry Blane, "if you would like to run away and spend a little of that prize money you are at liberty to do so. This little visit might land you in trouble and——"

"I'd like to stay with you," interrupted the fighter. "I'm sort of used to rough stuff. I've been on half the fairgrounds of France this last six months an' old Ma Trouble has her big top on every one of 'em."

The Wasp grinned. "As you like," he said. "It suits me because I was putting in a dull Saturday afternoon, but you seem to have been leading an active life."

The idiot led the way through a yard in which rusted sections of machinery were piled in a crazy confusion. Parts of engines torn from river boats, broken propellers, old boilers on which rust was feasting royally. Weeds, gangling and impudent, shot up between the clumps of iron.

The idiot reached a staircase, the wooden treads of which had been rotted by the winter fogs that had drifted in from the Rhone. He beckoned the two men forward. His weak face was alight with excitement. Hurriedly he climbed the scrofulous boards. Up and up, the river itself showing through breaks in the crumbling wall. Robert Henry Blane was reminded of the desires of Valerie Caselli expressed to him on the evening he had visited her place in the Calle dei Fabri at Venice. She had told him that she desired one of the wonderful palaces on the Grand Canal! She had mentioned two as her choice. The Palazzo Loredan and the Rezzonico. She had told him that she liked the latter because Robert Browning had died there.

"Jimmy," he said, turning to The Just-So Kid, "don't you ever think you can fight Dempsey?"

"Me?" cried the little fighter. "Why if I saw him in the mob on the Cours du Midi when that Frenchy was throwin' off challenges I'd just faint."

"Good boy," said The Wasp. "Modesty is the greatest left hook that any one ever carried."

The stairs brought them to the roof. The idiot, half crouching, led them across it to a point where a gulf some three feet wide separated the ledge from the roof of an

adjoining house. With a queer goatlike spring he hopped across and beckoned the two to follow.

The Just-So Kid peered down into the gulch between the two houses. It was fully fifty feet of a drop. He turned and grinned at Robert Henry Blane. "Do you know our little Alpine guide?" he asked.

"I know the lady," said The Wasp. "Possibly this explains why she cannot leave. They have her boxed up and she cannot jump this. Well, I'm going on."

The Wasp jumped across the intervening space and the little fighter followed. The idiot gurgled his approval. At a jog trot he led them across the roof, found a trapdoor, hurriedly lifted it and bade them descend. His manner had about it that curiously expressed pleasure of a dog who has led his master to a find of importance. He drooled with delight. His queer hands scratched in a doglike manner as he pulled the trapdoor into place.

"Hurry," he murmured. "We have been a long time! A very long time, and the beautiful lady told me to be quick."

The Americans dropped down two flights of uncarpeted stairs to the first floor. The idiot knocked at the folding doors facing the first landing, there came a soft, "Enter," from within, and next moment Robert Henry Blane was in the presence of the wonderful woman for whom he had solved the riddle of the gold buried by Marino Falieri, the unlucky Doge of Venice.

She had changed little. The prison cell in Budapest through whose walls the globules of moisture trickled had not robbed her of her wonderful charm. Rather, and The Wasp thought this curious, the prison had increased the strange, miasmic beauty that he remembered. For just a moment he was puzzled, then he understood. The days of Valerie Caselli were numbered. The startling pallor of the face was heightened by two little hectic spots that burned upon her cheeks. Vivid, pulsing spots that possessed a living brilliancy which they seemed to share with the light in the great violet eyes. The prison cell at Budapest had done its work. The trickling globules that had oozed in from the flowing river had found the weak point in the constitution of the adventuress. She was doomed.

"I knew you would come," she murmured, motioning The Wasp to a seat beside her. "Oh, I knew! I acted badly to you, but I—I knew you would not remember the worst in me. You Americans forgive. It is a great gift. We do not, and—and hate kills us. I am dying! Yes, yes! I am dying, and it is hate that has killed me! Not a prison cell. Not cold! Not poor food! No! No! It is hate! All day and all night for four years I have hated royally and the hate has sapped my life. I am already dead!"

She glanced inquiringly at The Just-So Kid and Robert Henry Blane introduced the little fighter. The eyes of James Dewey Casey showed his approval of the woman's beauty. He sat watching her intently. Behind, close to the door, the idiot gurgled softly to himself. He had carried out instructions and he was pleased.

The woman lifted herself on the chaise longue and spoke in a hurried whisper. A penetrating whisper that had the quality of a whip. Her words were addressed to Robert Henry Blane. The little pugilist and the idiot were forgotten.

"I escaped from prison!" she cried. "I escaped because I was dying and I did not wish to die in a little coffin of stone that was wet and slimy! A horrible coffin! I could not sleep! I thought that some night —some night when the awful darkness of that place was thicker and blacker than ever, that the river would sweep in on me! It sent the little drops of water to tell me! They cried out a warning as they dropped to the floor! It was dreadful! The river was higher than the floor of my cell—the jailers told me! I could not breathe! I would gasp all through the long nights!"

She paused, her big eyes, unnaturally bright, fixed upon Robert Henry Blane. Again, for a fleeting instant, the Texan saw the look that he had noted in Venice years before. It was like the reflection of her innermost soul, a soul into which had come a consuming hate. For the fraction of a second it remained, then the wonderful and entrancing beauty of her face blotted it out.

"I escaped with the help of others," whispered the woman. "Others who possessed power. I bargained with them through a jailer. They made an agreement with me. I crept out in the night. The persons sent by those with whom I made the agreement hurried me across the Danube to Budapest-Kelenföld where we caught the express for Trieste. You see I had to come here. Here

to Lyons, because—because here in Lyons was the thing with which I had to pay. I had secreted it here before that devil of a man hunter had thrown me into the damp cell. Listen! I had given it to the idiot to mind! I had thrust it into his hands three minutes before No. 37 arrested me! I had said, 'Keep it for me till I come back!' and he kept it. The fools had not thought of searching him. He buried it in the yard and it stayed there through all the long days."

The poor fool knew that he was under discussion. He came shambling from the door and sat at the foot of the chaise longue. His eyes showed a doglike devotion to the adventuress.

The woman thrust a shapely hand beneath her pillow. Her fingers brought out a chamois bag which she held upon her lap. A little silence crept into the room. From afar came the shouts of the Saturday-afternoon bathers in the river.

Valerie Caselli spoke at last. "I wonder," she murmured, "I wonder, my adventurous friend from Texas, if you ever heard of The Green Lash of the Hapsburgs?"

The gray eyes of The Texan Wasp shifted from the face of the woman to the chamois bag upon her lap. For a second his habitual control deserted him. Her question was just a little startling.

A smile flitted across the face of the woman. "I see you have heard," she said softly. "How much have you heard, Monsieur Blane?"

"Just a little," answered The Wasp. "Just a rumor. There was said to be in the imperial jewels of the Hapsburgs something that was never mentioned, something very valuable."

"Just so, my dear American. Continue."

"I heard a fool story," went on The Wasp. "A crazy story, I thought. The empress, when she died, left a belt of stones with a note to the Emperor Francis Joseph. The note made him put the thing away."

Valerie Caselli laughed softly. "You have the outline of the tale," she said. "Just the outline. It was right of you to think it a crazy story. You had not the proof. You had not seen. I had heard the story often without believing. They told me that the emperor had given something to the empress. She had not thanked him as he thought he should be thanked. What did he do? He lifted up the string of jewels and he struck her with them. Struck her across the face. They broke. She picked them up and kept them. When she died they were found with a little note. The note said: 'I give back to the emperor his lash.' That's all! *His lash!* That is why the belt was never seen. Many people knew of it, but few saw it. And it was very valuable, my friend from Texas."

She had lowered her voice. Her long, shapely fingers caressed the chamois bag. She played with the curiosity of the handsome Texan who watched every movement.

"The Green Lash of the Hapsburgs!" she murmured softly. "A rather romantic name, don't you think? Listen! I dreamed of those jewels for years! They were in my thoughts night and day! Possibly it was because of the incident that I wanted them! Because an emperor struck an empress with them, and—and because she left a stinging note to bite him during the years after her death. Leaving him his lash! Ah, I loved the bitterness that was in her! I wanted the Lash! I craved it! I plotted and schemed! I went on my knees! I dragged my soul in the mud! And—and——"

The idiot interrupted with a gurgling cry that sounded like a warning. The woman silenced him.

"And I got it, Monsieur Blane!" she whispered. "I got it! The getting of it landed me in the slimy cell of the prison at Budapest, but I held to it. Held to it with the help of an idiot who kept it for me! It was clever of me to pick an idiot, was it not? He buried it in the yard and he looked at it now and then whenever my order flitted into his poor mind."

The wonderful, beautifully modeled fingers of Valerie Caselli strayed over the chamois bag. They seemed to have a perverse desire to stir the curiosity of the Texan. Now and then they would touch the draw strings as if they would unloose the treasure within, but each time that the disclosure seemed imminent they slipped away. The white hands, cut off from the body by great medieval sleeves of slashed velvet, seemed to live a life of their own; a life that delighted in teasing the inquisitiveness of Robert Henry Blane.

Suddenly the woman leaned forward. With a quick, dramatic movement she tore the mouth of the bag open. A flash of gorgeous green blazed before the eyes of The Wasp. The thing unrolled on the

woman's lap. It squirmed in the rays of the afternoon sun. It gobbled the fire in the sunbeams, and flung it out again through cunningly cut stomachs that magnified the flame!

The white fingers took the thing and spread it across the velvet wrapper. It seemed to writhe. It was made curiously alive by the fire that glittered in the great stones. It suggested the mythical snakes that Alexander the Great is supposed to have found in the Valley of Jordan, and whose backs possessed such a wonderful sheen that his soldiers believed that they were coated with emeralds!

It drew the heads of Robert Henry Blane and The Just-So Kid toward it. It had drawn the heads of ten thousand persons in the same manner. It bred cupidity; it spawned avarice; it lit the hot fires of choking greed! The great, green stones that had been gathered from spots that were leagues and leagues apart—the mines of Canjargum in India, the stony slopes of Transbaikalia, and the world-famous mines of Muzo and Coquez in Colombia—had been polished on the copper wheels of the cunning jewel cutters of Amsterdam till their chromium-tinted surfaces blazed like the eyes of basilisks!

The woman uttered the name of the thing like a wonder witch muttering over a brew. "The Green Lash of the Hapsburgs," she murmured, and the long, delicate fingers stroked the girdle of green wealth as she spoke. The stones flung soft shadows on the fingers as they passed down the length of the marvelous cincture, shadows of the faintest green—the visionary green we see on trees before the leaves bud.

Robert Henry Blane took hold of himself and brutally dragged his eyes away from the feast. He looked at the wonder face of the adventuress. The hectic spots upon the cheeks blazed more than ever; the brilliancy of the violet eyes was more manifest. The malady that clutched the beautiful Valerie Caselli fed on the excitement which the sight of the green girdle produced.

"It is very wonderful," said the Texan. "I have never seen anything half so magnificent."

"And it is mine," murmured the woman exultantly.

Again silence fell. The idiot clawed himself along the carpeted floor and patted the girdle with dirty fingers blunted by toil. The Just-So Kid sighed softly. The great emeralds hypnotized the little fighter.

Valerie Caselli leaned forward and addressed The Texan Wasp. She clutched the girdle with her two hands.

"In that agreement I made when I was in the prison at Budapest, I was to give a portion of this away," she began. "Half of it. There are sixty-four stones; I was to pay thirty-two for my freedom. It was all arranged. I was to come here and get it from the idiot, then I was to make the division."

"And now?" asked The Wasp as the woman paused.

"Now they want all!" she cried. "The people who helped me want all! They wish me to give it up to them as it is! I—I have dragged myself in the mud to get it! I have stamped on my soul! I have brought death within counting distance, and—and they——"

A fit of coughing made the adventuress pause. She dabbed her lips with a fragment of Venetian lace. The Wasp waited.

"You see I am near death," went on the woman. "The wet prison cell did it. It was dreadful. Now—now I want to go back to the city I love so that I can die there. I cannot die here! This place is commercial! I want to go to the city of beauty—the city of joy. My city! I want to go there and—and take this with me, but they will not let me! I am a prisoner! That is why I sent for you!"

Robert Henry Blane could not control the smile that her words produced. He sat and let his eyes roam softly from the face of the woman to the girdle of enormous emeralds on her lap. He was disposed to sympathize with her in her illness but he was a trifle amused at her childish willfulness; at the greed that consumed her, and the fixed belief that he was the person who could help her in her trouble.

"How are you a prisoner?" he asked. "What is there to stop you from taking the train to Venice?"

Valerie Caselli smiled sadly. She waved a hand toward the velvet curtains that were drawn across the windows looking out over the Rue Rabelais. "Look for yourself," she said. "No, let the boy show you! There is a peephole cut in the curtain."

The Texan Wasp rose and followed the idiot to the window. The gurgling fool pointed to a little circular hole in the heavy

curtain. The American placed his eye to it. It gave him a view of the sidewalk on the far side of the small street that runs between the Rue Garibaldi and the Quai de la Guillotière, the latter being the stone promenade between the bridge of the same name and the Pont Lafayette that crosses the Rhone.

Robert Henry Blane studied the sidewalk. For years he had made close and careful observations on an art that is possessed by few. It was the Art of Lounging. The Wasp had discovered that not one man in a million, detailed to observe any person, place, or object can dissimulate his interest in the human quarry or in the dead objective. The ability to hide their concern is beyond them. Although he had never read Socrates he had come to the same conclusion as the Greek philosopher who asserted that the Art of Dissimulation is one of the rarest gifts.

The Wasp examined the pedestrians that passed. Examined them with keen eyes that had the faculty of reading the motive that was behind every little action. For a long time he stared through the spy hole into the street. Then he turned to the extraordinarily beautiful woman who was waiting in silence for his comment.

"Two men passed who are interested in the house," he said.

"You are wise, my dear friend," murmured Valerie Caselli. "Very wise. You have picked them?"

"I know them," said The Wasp quietly. "Possibly I would not have recognized them if I had met them on the street. Watching from here made it different. The man with a limp——"

The adventuress laughed softly, and Robert Henry Blane paused. "The man with a limp?" she repeated. "My dear friend from Texas, if you will go out and smash him in the face as you did a man on the Piazza San Marco on the evening I first met you I will give you the biggest emerald in this girdle! And you know him?"

"He was the head of a bunch of scoundrels that I knew in Naples," said The Wasp.

"He is with a bigger bunch of scoundrels now," said the woman. "He is a sort of subchief in the league with whom I made the bargain that got me out of prison. It is a league of devils!"

She dropped her voice and leaned forward. Fear—a dreadful shivering horrible fear showed in the glorious eyes. "They kill!" she whispered. "They kill for fun! They murder for amusement. They call themselves 'The League of Death!'"

In the little silence that followed the woman's statement the mind of Robert Henry Blane flung him back to a narrow street in the old city of Carcassonne. To his nostrils there came again the odor of crushed marigolds, the biting, damnable odor that had throttled him and flung him into the dark abyss of unconsciousness. A queer hate surged up within him, a hate of the murderous crew who made murder a pastime. For the moment he felt strangely and, to him, unreasonably resentful of all crime. He wondered why. Possibly the thoughts of Betty Allerton and the memories of those strolls through the Back Bay Fens on still, soft September days had cleansed his soul. He was a little puzzled.

The woman sensed some change. She suddenly flung herself forward and thrust out her white, shapely arms appealingly. "Listen, dear friend!" she cried. "I am dying! I know I am! I feel it! Help me! I cannot die here! The autumn is coming! The leaves are falling, and a chill creeps over me! Ah, help me to go southward so that I can die in the sun! You—you told me that I seemed to possess the spirit of Venice! Do you remember? Help me to get there—to get there to die!"

The fists of The Just-So Kid were clenched as the woman finished her appeal. A fighting look came into the eyes of James Dewey Casey. He made a gurgling remark that was incomprehensible to the woman but which made her turn suddenly and look at him. A glance told her that she had the full sympathy and the undivided support of the little pugilist from Brooklyn.

"Ah, men are kind!" she murmured softly, and the great violet eyes were wet as she looked at The Just-So Kid. "They are always ready to help! It is different with women! You—you will help me, monsieur?"

"Sure!" snapped the small pugilist. "If there's any one stoppin' you from takin' the rattler to any old place you want to go to just let me see him! Where's this burg, Venice, that you want to go to anyhow?"

Robert Henry Blane smiled softly. He liked the manner in which James Dewey Casey had offered his services. There was

no ability to bargain for rewards in the mind of The Just-So Kid.

"When do you wish to leave?" asked The Wasp.

"There is a train leaving just before midnight that would get me to Lausanne in time to catch the Simplon-Orient Express!" gasped the woman. "The express passes through at six thirty-five and I would—oh, I would be at Venice at seven-thirty! In Venice at seven-thirty! Oh, God is good! You will help! Say that you will help!"

For a moment the vision of herself arriving in the City of Everlasting Joy at the hour when the mystery and wonder of the place is most poignant overcame her. She leaned toward the two Americans and whispered softly of the clanging bells of San Giorgio dei Greci that boom across the waters; of the soft, gray mists that roll in from the Adriatic, of the burst of light that night brings to "the sea city with arms of marble and the thousand girdles of green."

"Ah, you will come and bring me?" she murmured, her voice like the dying whisper of a summer zephyr. "I cannot walk! You —you will have to carry me across the roofs by the way in which you came. I will not go out through the door. Not even with you, my friend. They kill—they kill for pleasure."

"We will come," said The Wasp. "At eleven we will be here."

"Sure," said The Just-So Kid. "We'll be here."

At Morateur's, the most distinctive restaurant in Lyons, Robert Henry Blane entertained Monsieur James Dewey Casey to dinner on the evening of their unlooked-for reunion. The Wasp was the idol of the little fighter and he hung upon the words of the handsome Texan. The manner in which Mr. Blane handled head waiters and their ilk specially appealed to the pugilist. A pompous maître d'hôtel had fallen upon the two the moment they had taken their seats and The Wasp's treatment of the fellow made The Just-So Kid writhe with laughter.

The maître d'hôtel was pushing his wares. He loudly recommended crabs and The Wasp interrupted his song concerning the excellence of the crustaceans.

"Have they tails?" asked The Wasp, with gravity.

The maître d'hôtel was taken back. "Tails?" he murmured. "Why, I don't know, monsieur."

"Go and find out," said the imperturbable Texan. "It is a matter of great interest to me."

The flurried head waiter disappeared and Robert Henry Blane addressed The Just-So Kid. "Now you will have time to look over the bill of fare before he comes back," he said. "I find that a foolish head waiter standing around annoys folks, so I make a practice of sending them away on ridiculous errands."

The head waiter returned, and Mr. Casey tried to hide his laughter as the flustered fellow reported. "The crabs have tails, monsieur," he said solemnly.

"Thank you," said The Wasp. "They are not for us. Years ago I promised my mother that I would not eat a crab with a tail. Now Jimmy, what are you going to eat?"

The Just-So Kid had put a strong forefinger on "Beefsteak à la Bordelaise," and he kept it there as if fearful that the annoyed head waiter might wish to rob him of his choice. "I'm bettin' on this," he said decisively, then in a half whisper to Robert Henry Blane he murmured: "Say, isn't this the burg where Lyonnaise potatoes were born?"

"Sure," replied The Wasp. "Will you have some?"

The Just-So Kid nodded and the Texan explained to the maître d'hôtel. The fellow, annoyed with Robert Henry Blane, remarked sulkily: "We call them potatoes à l'Americaine."

"Wouldn't that bite yer?" said the little fighter. "Everything now is labeled American! Why I remember me mother makin' Lyonnaise potatoes when I——"

The small pugilist stopped abruptly and stared at a table immediately behind The Texan Wasp. His face showed concern.

"What is wrong?" questioned Blane.

"There's a guy got me lamped," growled The Just-So Kid. "And he doesn't look friendly neither. Say, I think he's the geek I tripped up one night in Monte Carlo when he was tryin' to stop you from catchin' a train!"

Robert Henry Blane turned and found himself face to face with No. 37! The great man hunter was sitting alone at a small alcove table where he was partly hidden from the diners in the room.

"Robert Henry Blane!" he said softly. "Now that's curious. I was attracted by the voice of your friend. It seemed to recall something. Where did I meet him?"

The Just-So Kid, under the concentrated gaze of the cold, merciless eyes that looked like brown-tinted and hard-frozen hailstones, glanced at the door. The little fighter saw danger, not physical but legal, in the lipless line that represented the mouth of the great sleuth. The law, to James Dewey Casey, was a proposition that could not be knocked out by a swift hook to the chin, so he took no chances. He meditated a masterly retreat that would leave the cold-faced one a little doubtful as to whether he had ever seen a Panlike person with a smiling, humorous countenance.

Robert Henry Blane saw the intention of the fighter and spoke softly. "It's all right, Jimmy," he said. "Don't worry." Then to No. 37 he remarked: "Let me introduce you to my good friend, James Dewey Casey of Brooklyn——"

"New York," corrected the little fighter. "I never say Brooklyn on the posters. Lots of 'em know of New York but none of 'em know of Brooklyn."

"Of New York," continued The Wasp. "Monsieur Casey is the lightweight champion of the American army, and this afternoon he vanquished the best man in Lyons. You have met him before, I think. You were running for a train one night at Monte Carlo and I think you kicked him in the shins. That's the idea he has in his mind."

The man hunter grunted noisily. "I remember now," he growled. "If he hadn't got in the way I'd have grabbed you, Blane. I guessed your move to jump on the top of the express. It was the little chap that fooled me. He brought me down an awful wallop and pretended that he didn't know you."

"Jimmy is a good boy," said The Wasp. "Some day you must see him fight. Won't you sit over at this table?"

"I have eaten," said the sleuth.

"Then have a liqueur," suggested The Wasp. "A sip of cointreau or benedictine? Something to keep us company."

The great man hunter rose slowly and moved himself to the table occupied by the two Americans. He accepted a cigar from The Wasp, one of the cigars made out of fine Algerian tobacco that Robert Henry Blane loved. No. 37 took it with a grim smile. "I found a few of that mark in your rooms once, Blane," he said. "I smoked them. You had cleared out a few hours before I arrived."

"A wretched habit of mine," said The Wasp airily. He turned to the little fighter. "James," he said, "here comes our food."

The great sleuth sat and watched the two Americans as they ate. Robert Henry Blane loved food and he was pleased that the man hunter remained silent while he, Blane, was devoting his whole attention to the very excellent chicken en casserole served by the restaurant. The Wasp had an idea—a very masterful and pushing idea—that he would have trouble with No. 37 before the night was over.

The Just-So Kid finished his steak and potatoes. The Wasp absorbed the last morsel of his chicken. Mr. Dewey refused a salad; they both agreed on black coffee and liqueurs.

Robert Henry Blane addressed the man hunter. "Nice town, Lyons," he observed.

"Very nice town," admitted the detective.

"Nice silk trade," observed The Wasp.

"So they tell me," said the sleuth. His cold eyes were fixed upon the handsome face of the Texan.

"Big metal industry," remarked Robert Henry Blane.

The eyes of No. 37 narrowed. "Yes, I suppose so," he said quietly.

"Good jewelry trade," murmured The Wasp.

The sleuth did not answer. His cold eyes were upon the careless, devil-may-care of a man from Houston. Robert Henry Blane smoked quietly, utterly indifferent to the keen glances of the man he addressed.

After a long interval of silence the man hunter spoke. "What is the objective?" he asked irritably. "What are you driving at?"

The Wasp laughed. "It is this," he said quietly. "You were not at that table when my friend and I entered the room. You followed us in. I am in the habit of noting every one in a room when I enter it. The little alcove table where you were sitting was empty."

The silence grew painful to The Just-So Kid. He had a desire to shake the detective who sat smoking quietly, his frozen eyes upon The Wasp. Robert Henry Blane seemed unaware of the scrutiny. He lifted

his liqueur glass, examined it with the eye of a connoisseur and sipped slowly of its green contents—the oily, perfumed, veritable chartreuse brewed before the monks were driven bag and baggage out of the valley that their liqueur had made famous.

The detective spoke at last. "You are right," he said slowly. "I did follow you in. I had lost a trail and when I saw you I thought I might pick it up again. I did intend to speak to you, then I thought to watch you for a moment. I was wrong. I am in your debt and I should have played square."

"Why should your trail have anything to do with me?" asked The Wasp.

"Now that's curious," said the sleuth. "It's just a case of association. The person I wish to find is not likely to be known to you at present, but years ago you met her. It was in Venice. I happened to butt in at the moment, and you fooled me. I got a handful of black mud in the face that nearly blinded me."

An amused smile flitted over the handsome face of the Texan. For an instant his mind framed the incident in the cellar of the house on the Rio della Madonetta at Venice when No. 37 had surprised The Wasp as he was searching for the glorious golden ducats of the long-dead Doge. He had scooped up a handful of the smelly mud from the canal and had flung it in the face of the man hunter.

"Why should the person I met in Venice have any dealings with me to-day in Lyons?" he asked coldly.

"I don't know," answered the sleuth. "I see no logical reason for it, and yet I get what your people call hunches. Lots of folk say that I can smell like a dog. Possibly you've heard that tale? Well, I can't! But I do get hunches. Mighty good hunches. Mighty good hunches. They're unexplainable. Some day I'm going to write a book about them. Some day when I retire. I've got a cottage in a valley that is sweeter than anything you ever saw, and some day when I am tired I am going there to live. Then I'll write the book and grow tomatoes. I'm awfully interested in tomatoes. I think you'll figure in the book, Blane. Quite a lot, I'm afraid."

The vision of himself sitting quietly in the cottage in the valley and writing of his exploits softened the face of "The Man Without a Name," as the Continental criminals called the extraordinary sleuth. The Wasp was a little surprised. The cold Lariat of the Law was really human.

Robert Henry Blane looked at his watch. It was eight-thirty. There were hours between the moment and the appointment with Valerie Caselli, but the Texan thought of the difficulty of getting rid of the sleuth. There was a burlike quality about the man hunter.

The Wasp called for his bill. He checked it carefully and paid. The detective watched him quietly.

"I hope the book will be a success," said the Texan, gathering up his change and turning again to No. 37. "They tell me that detective tales go well. I don't know, because I never read them. I suppose it is like everything else in life; a firsthand knowledge of a thing satisfies. And tomatoes are good. I should think there would be a lot of fun in growing tomatoes. Well, we're off! Jimmy and I have an appointment."

The great man hunter straightened himself. "Blane," he said softly, "I'm going with you."

The Wasp had made a motion to rise from the table as the detective spoke. With a look of intense surprise upon his face he slipped back into his seat. He waved aside the boy who held his velours hat and cane.

"You are going—what the devil do you mean?" he asked irritably. The old scar on the jaw showed itself as he hurled the question at the sleuth.

"What I said," growled No. 37. "I have a great desire to keep you company for the evening. It's one of my hunches. Don't get mad! I'm going, that's all about it."

"I am afraid," said The Wasp, speaking quietly and coldly, "that the reminiscences of a famous detective will never be written if you hang to your decision. And the little tomatoes will lack the tender care of a guiding hand."

"Listen, Blane," said the sleuth. "Listen, like a good fellow. I'm hired to do things and I try to do them. Just now we're friendly, but no friendship ever stopped me from doing what I thought right. Possibly this hunch I have is a fool hunch, but I always give them rope. Logic is a fine thing for people who lack imagination but it's no good for folk like me. I've got no base for my desire to stay with you. None at all. And you must have a base to be logical. I

tell you I've got a hunch. I'll write the book, don't you worry."

Robert Henry Blane fingered the little silver goblet that had contained his liqueur. His gray eyes were upon the cold face of the man who was the terror of criminals. He pondered over the words of the sleuth. The man had rounded up evildoers till his fame had spread from the smelly streets behind the Galata Quay at Constantinople to the dark hutches of the Limehouse "snow" dealers. And his dreams were of a quiet cottage where he would write a book and raise tomatoes! To the mind of the adventurous Texan the ambitions of the man hunter were amusing. He forgot for an instant the assertion of No. 37 that he, the detective, would stay with him for the evening, and he let himself picture The Man Without a Name growing tomatoes. The picture swept away his anger and brought a smile to his face.

The man hunter noted the change. "I'm going to stay with you," he repeated doggedly. "I've said it."

Robert Henry Blane thrust his handsome face across the table. There was a whimsical smile around the mouth; the sprite of mirth danced in the gray eyes. "Really you cannot," he said softly. "We have an appointment with a lady. Jimmy and I made the arrangement this afternoon. Didn't we, Jimmy?"

The astounded Just-So Kid nodded his head. He had gathered up a fair amount of information while the two had been talking, and the brazen announcement of The Wasp appalled him. He nearly choked.

"Do I know the lady?" inquired No. 37.

"Oh, yes," answered The Wasp. "You know her well. I heard you once tell her the history of her life when she wouldn't come over quick enough with some information you desired. I was hidden in the house listening to the discussion. You told her that the Spanish police were looking for a woman who knew something of the death of a wealthy Canadian on the Madrid-Hendaye express. Oh, yes, you know her! You had the dope about another affair that took place in Ostend and drove the Dutch police to the verge of lunacy. You called her the Countess Brudelière, but I know her as Valerie Caselli! Listen, my friend! I have given my word that I will call for her this evening and see her on a train that will connect at Lausanne with the Simplon-Orient express! She is dying! I would give her three days of life, less perhaps. She wishes to die in Venice—to die in the sun, and I, with Jimmy here, promised to see her off. Now you have the story!"

The choking silence that followed the announcement of Robert Henry Blane thrust out an invisible claw and clutched at the coat of the head waiter. The fellow shuffled closer to the table where sat the three men. The silence drew him like the odor of a bone would draw a hungry dog.

No. 37 placed his half-smoked cigar upon the ash tray, clutched the closed fist of one hand with the stubby fingers of the other and spoke. "Let's stop fooling," he growled. "I'm after the woman you have just named! Talk sense! She has escaped from jail and —well, there are other matters beside her escape."

"So I believe," said The Wasp coolly.

The man hunter's eyes swept the face of the Texan. "Why, you know what she's got!" he cried angrily. "I can see it in your manner!"

"You can see nothing!" snapped Blane. "I've told a straight tale. Jimmy and I are going to see her off. It's the fall, and I always get sentimental in the fall. When she told me she wished to die in the sun—well, she was already in Venice!"

No. 37 glanced around the room. The skulking head waiter caught his eye and retreated hurriedly. One of the sleuth's strong hands reached into his breast pocket. He brought forth a bulky pocketbook, opened it, found a folded newspaper clipping and pushed the cutting across the table to the big American.

"Read that," he said quietly. "I am pledged to restore that to the Imperial Museum. It has been a five-year hunt."

Robert Henry Blane unfolded the clipping and read it slowly. It was in German and it was a carefully compiled history of The Green Lash of the Hapsburgs. A wonderful, compact and colorful history of the sixty-four stones that made the glorious cincture. It had been written by an Austrian named Zumbusch, in whose care the girdle had rested after it had been removed from the Trésor Impérial to the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Art.

A painter in words was Zumbusch. Color oozed from his sentences. It welled up from the little spaces that divided his prismatic

phrases. The thing read like a saga. It had all the sonorous quality of a chapter from the Book of Kings. It possessed the thrilling quality of those wonderful lines that tell how the ships of Tarshish returned once in three years, "bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

Robert Henry Blane forgot the man hunter and the little fighter. The story dripped romance. It flung up pictures of jungles, of wind-swept tundras, of dead marshes whose poisonous air throbbed with the sounds of far-off drums. It was a tale of treachery, of slinking murder. A tale that lifted itself up like a hooded cobra and hissed of death!

A tale of emeralds! A tale of the great green stones that made the girdle of Elizabeth of Bavaria! Devilish stones, according to the writer. Outlaws of the jewel kingdom that were rounded up and brought, bloody and untamed, to the dark shops of Amsterdam where the copper wheels of the cunning jewelers bit facets in their green hides! Ropes of platinum and gold to hold them together! Locks and bars and soldiers to guard them! Green devils, every one of them! Then, old Franz Josef toddling through the big rooms of the Palais de Schoenbrunn with the thing in his weak hands! A sneer crept into the words of Zumbusch, the historian: "Sixty-four kicking green devils that had lived on blood and death were presented to an empress!" He saw something of Austria's ruin in the matter. Saw it in his own queer way. But he had made a tale of it! A great tale! It brought a glow to the eyes of Robert Henry Blane. He sighed softly as he folded up the clipping and returned it to the sleuth.

"The reward," said the man hunter, speaking slowly, "is five hundred thousand kronen in gold. *In gold,* mind you! Listen, Blane, that thing should not be at large! Do you know what I mean? It shouldn't be in the hands of one person! It's bad! It makes murder and suicide! It should be locked up in a big, cold museum with scores of stupid guards around it! It should be —damn it! What am I talking about? I'm going to get the woman that has it! She's here in Lyons! I've trailed her here from Trieste! She can't get away! I tell you that I'll have her under lock and key inside twenty-four hours!"

A note of triumph flamed in the words of the man hunter. The nose bred of battles and the chin that had thrust peace to the winds were pushed belligerently across the table toward Robert Henry Blane. The skulking head waiter wondered stupidly about the outcome. Would the sacred quiet of Morateur's with its spineless waiters and obsequiously yielding carpets be violently outraged?

The face of Robert Henry Blane showed no excitement as he spoke in answer to the challenge of the sleuth. His cool gray eyes looked unblinkingly at the merciless countenance of the other. "I have told you what I intend to do," he said quietly. "I have promised a dying woman that I would see her to the train this evening. A bigger jailer than you has already laid his hands on her! She is as good as dead, and your little man-made law doesn't amount to a row of pins!"

"But I want her!" growled the sleuth. "She has fooled me and——"

"Others have fooled you!" interrupted The Wasp. "There is a man in Lyons tonight that fooled you worse than Valerie Caselli ever did! Listen! You know a lot about me, but I know something of you! You are not as infallible as a lot of folk think! Do you remember a wet day at the prefecture of Bordeaux? A wet day when some one sneaked away from you, dodged through the Place Richelieu and swam the Garonne? You thought that he was drowned but—ah, I see that you remember!"

The great man hunter controlled himself with difficulty. The cold eyes shone with the light that weak sunshine brings to block ice. It was the hate flame of injured righteous pride.

The name of the man who had fooled him came from the thin lips of the sleuth like the soft hiss of a Gaboon viper. "Louis the Limper!" he cried.

"Louis the Limper," repeated The Wasp. The shadow of a smile passed over the face of the Texan.

"Go on!" ordered the man hunter. "Go on! I am listening!"

"Now I thought," said Robert Henry Blane, "that if you had a choice about tonight's prey that you would sooner grab off Louis the Limper than Valerie Caselli? Am I right?"

The round, heavy head of the sleuth—the head that showed not the slightest trace of

imagination, rocked slowly on its thick throat. He agreed.

"Then I have the power to give you the party you seek if you leave Valerie Caselli alone," said The Wasp. "It is curious that I should have the power. This Louis the Limper has been very successful since he took French leave of you at Bordeaux. I was told to-day that he is a subchief in the league that you are interested in. Did you know?"

"No," grunted the sleuth.

"Then regard me, the oracle!" mocked Robert Henry Blane. "This Louis is a small boss in The League of Death, and the league has a disagreement with Valerie Caselli. Louis himself is actually on guard to see that she doesn't get out of Lyons."

The detective, silent and tense, watched the handsome Texan. The light of hate, in which pride had been grilled and toasted, was more evident.

"Let's come to an agreement," said The Wasp. "Which one do you want?"

"Louis Scafferelli!" cried the man hunter. "Louis the Limper!"

"And Valerie Caselli goes free?"

No. 37 hesitated. "There is the matter of the girdle," he growled. "She can't get away with that! She's a thief and——"

"She is dying," interrupted The Wasp.

"But I've spent years trailing that thing!" protested the sleuth. "That girdle shouldn't be at large!"

Robert Henry Blane looked at his watch. "Come quick!" he ordered. "I offered you Louis the Limper! You can take him or leave him! If you don't like him, say so. I've promised Valerie Caselli that I would see her off to-night for Venice and I have a habit of keeping my word. I'd be sorry to have a row with you but——"

The Wasp paused. No. 37 rose, took his hat from a waiting boy and followed The Just-So Kid and the tall Texan out into the night.

Robert Henry Blane, No. 37, and The Just-So Kid taxicabbed across the Lafayette Bridge from the Rue Carnot. They did not speak. The great man hunter sat with arms folded, his eyes upon the floor of the cab; The Wasp hummed a little tune from "La Bohême;" the small fighter stared out of the dark streets and the swift waters of the Rhone.

The taxi, at the direction of The Wasp, turned into the Rue Garibaldi and came slowly down the dark little street in which Valerie Caselli was a prisoner. The detective had come to life now. He sensed the nearness of his prey. His cold eyes were on the street down which the cab lurched slowly. He seemed to bristle like a bloodhound.

The street was practically deserted. A cold autumnal breeze came up from the swift-flowing river and made dreary music in the plane trees. The hard-riding scout winds of winter were streaming down from the northland. The Wasp thought of the adventuress and her wild desire to die in the sun. He too, Texan born and bred, loved the warm places. He smiled softly as he remembered a little rhyme of the long ago, a rhyme that he had written for Betty Allerton in those colorful days in Boston:

> "Oh, Betty, dear, the winter's here,
> There's awful snow and frost on
> The little trails that pierce the Fens
> We walked in good old Boston."

The taxi reached the quay near the river. The driver halted for instructions. The detective turned to Robert Henry Blane.

"I expected to find our friend on the street," whispered The Wasp. "It seems that he is not there. We had better hunt."

The three dismounted from the cab and Robert Henry Blane led the way back in the shadow of the wall that surrounded the junk yard—the yard through which the idiot boy had led the two Americans during the afternoon. Into the mind of The Wasp had come a little doubt as to the wisdom he had displayed in leaving the adventuress unguarded after making a promise to help her. Louis the Limper was a gentleman who flirted daily with "Monsieur Paris," the humorous nickname which the French have given to the guillotine, because that appalling piece of machinery resides in the capital when it is not "on the road." An extra murder or two to The Limper would have as much effect upon the color of his soul as a splash of ink upon the Black Stone of Mecca.

The Wasp reached the door in the wall through which the idiot had led him some hours before. It was ajar. The Texan pushed it softly and the three entered the yard that was filled with the rusted sections of engines, boilers, and machines of all kinds. To the left, faintly visible against

the sky that was illuminated by the lights of the city, was the crumbling wall that hid the staircase up which the boy had led the Texan and The Just-So Kid to the roofs.

The Wasp started toward the stairs. He quickened his steps. A queer sense of impending trouble came to him. The quiet of the yard, the absence of the watchers in the street, and the whistling wind from the river made him a little nervous regarding the strange adventuress whose days were numbered. He had a wild desire that she should have her wish. He thought that it would give her a little joy to see the City of the Lagoons—the City of Joy where the pigeons swarm upon the sunny Piazza San Marco when snow and sleet hold the northland.

The three were within a few feet of the stairs when the quiet of the night was broken by an angry snarl. It came from the roof and it resembled the snarl of a sleeping mastiff who awakens suddenly to find that an impudent cur is getting away with a bone that he has put away for his supper.

Blane halted. From the top of the stairs there came the sounds of struggle. Snarls, curses, the soft thud of blows, the crunching of feet on the leprous treads came to the three. A fight was taking place at the very head of the rickety ladder!

The Wasp led the rush upward. Immediately on his heels was No. 37. Behind the two raced The Just-So Kid, held in the rear by the breadth of the sleuth.

The fight moved from the stairway to the roof. The climbing three heard the sounds recede, the crunch of feet upon the pebbly roof superseding the noises made by the shoes on the rotting boards.

Blane was the first upon the roof. The glow of the city made the fighters faintly visible. A pair of drunken forms weaved backward and forward, clinched, broke apart, stumbled, flailed their arms wildly, and shouted insanely. They were silhouetted against the sky, a pair of jangled marionettes whose arms and legs seemed to be controlled by strings that came down from a low-hanging star.

There was a flash of light as an arm struck with a queer stabbing motion. One of the marionettes went backward, heels digging bravely in an effort to correct the balance. The stabber followed. The flash of phosphorescent light appeared again, then The Wasp fired. A knife clattered to the ground, a curse came slowly as if to keep time with the knees that bent ever so sluggishly and dropped the knife wielder on the pebbly roof!

The big Texan was the first to speak. "Show a light!" he cried. "The devil has knifed the idiot!"

No. 37 turned a flash light on the limp youth and grunted as the ray disclosed the amount of the damage. "Got him in the arm," he said. "Nothing serious. The second jab would have killed him if you hadn't potted our friend. No, Louis is not dead. Hold this flash while I frisk him."

The Just-So Kid held the flash light while the sleuth ran his hands over the body of the disabled Louis the Limper. The bullet from the Texan's revolver had picked the limping leg of the crook as its objective, and the near assassin swore fiercely as the man hunter searched his pockets.

"Take it easy!" growled the detective. "Remember me, don't you? Walked away from me without saying good-by at—hello, what's this?"

The great man hunter rose with a quick jerk of his strong body, and as he did so the flash light bit hungrily at something within his hands. The white gleam of the light seemed to stir a sleeping dragon, a green-eyed dragon whose wicked eyes met the inquisitive ray with a poisonous flash of glorious color—the living, leaping color that came from a mass of huddled emeralds the sleuth had dragged from the pocket of Louis the Limper!

The voice of No. 37, harsh and cold, cried out a warning. "Back, Blane!" he cried. "They're mine! Don't come near! You made the agreement! I was to have this fellow and everything on him! Keep off or I'll kill you!"

There was a moment of tense silence, then Robert Henry Blane laughed softly. "I'll stand by the bargain," he said. "Turn your popgun off me."

The sleuth slipped The Green Lash of the Hapsburgs into a big coat pocket, dropped on his knees and handcuffed Louis the Limper. A very calm and competent person was the great hunter of criminals.

"If you and your friends wish to go and see what has happened to the lady I'll look after these two," he said quietly. "Move along and I'll whistle for a cop. I'm glad I met you, Blane. Somehow I thought

everything would come right. In spite of all the crooked stuff there's a law of compensation in the world."

The Texan Wasp and The Just-So Kid found Valerie Caselli in a state of collapse. They revived her with difficulty and she chattered wildly of the theft. Louis the Limper had come in through the roof, had nearly strangled her, and had wrenched from her the wonderful girdle.

"Don't worry," said Robert Henry Blane, "the gentle Louis didn't hold it long."

"Why? How?" gasped the woman. "Where is it?"

"It is in the possession of one of our friends," answered The Wasp. "A very bright chap in his way. He sends his good wishes for your health. Kind old bird at times. We left him up on the roof whistling loud enough to bring every cop in Lyons to his side. Yes, he's a wise one."

"Who—who do you mean?" cried the adventuress.

"No. 37," laughed the Texan. "Yes, it's true! Better hurry a little! We'll have to move to get that train."

There was no further need to urge the adventuress to hurry after the Texan had carelessly outlined the happenings on the roof. The terror produced by the nearness of the great man hunter made her forget the loss of the wonderful jewels. She clung to The Wasp as he placed his strong arms around her and gently carried her down the stairs to a carriage that The Just-So Kid had found. She babbled childishly. There was something dreadfully pathetic about her. Blane wondered at her talk. She was like a tired infant that wanted to go somewhere and sleep.

"I am longing for the sun," she whispered. "Oh, the sweet, sweet sun! Oh, I will pray for you because you are so kind! Yes, and I will pray for Monsieur Jimmy too! It is unbelievable! I am going to Venice, to Venice, the city that I love!"

The Wasp and The Just-So Kid installed her in a quiet compartment of the Lausanne train. They bought her flowers and papers. They rented three pillows for her tired head and they waited till the train pulled out of the station.

"I feel like a mourner," said Robert Henry Blane as the tail light of the express drove into the night. "I'd like something to eat and drink, Jimmy. You have money, haven't you?"

"I haven't smashed that thousand-franc bill yet," replied the fighter.

"Well, there's a shooting gallery over here on the Cours du Midi," explained The Wasp. "I'll try ten shots with you. The loser pays for the supper."

"I'm on," said The Kid.

The lady who owned the Buffalo Bill Shooting Gallery nearly wept with delight as Robert Henry Blane sent nine little bits of lead through a hole which his first shot had bored in the black heart of the cardboard target. It was done in the manner of Buffalo Beel! Her friend, Buffalo Beel! And he was dead! Ah, mon Dieu, it was a sad world!

"Jimmy," said The Wasp, after The Just-So Kid had vainly endeavored to equal the feat of his friend, "will you pay the lady? I haven't a sou. I went and wrapped my pocketbook in a paper that I handed to Mademoiselle Caselli. I know Venice. It's a poor place to be broke in. You see, you cannot walk away from the jolly town."

The Just-So Kid looked up into the handsome face of the tall adventurer from Houston, Texas. "I always said you were a prince!" he growled. "Golly, you are!"

Look for The Texan Wasp in the next number

EARS ARE COMING BACK

EARS are to be worn by the ladies this year. They are to be exposed to the public gaze for the first time in a quarter century. This has been decided by the delegates to the recent convention of the American Hairdressers Association. This organization also has decided that bobbed hair doesn't go well with this year's dresses and that it must be grown longer—and while it is growing the girl with the bobbed tresses must have art aid nature and build up an edifice of transformations, switches and curls that will banish all suspicion that its wearer ever was familiar with the barber's shears and clippers.

Miss Ling Tan Foo

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Lost Charm," Sleeping Dogs," Etc.

David and Goliath interfere violently with the ways of the heathen Chinee.

IT'S not because we don't know big cities, or that we're a pair of hayseeds from up in the mountains, that makes us hate them, so much as it is that these big towns make a feller feel crowdedlike and the air don't smell good, and they're dangerous. Another thing about it is, 'Goliath,' that when me and you come to any big smoke we never go anywhere at all! Now take this trip, for instance. We came down here to San Francisco to see our old friend Heald who wants us to go to Mexico to look after some mines of his because he thinks we can help to keep him from being skinned out of a couple of hundred thousand dollars. Then we are buying a little plant for our own use up on the Big Divide. To see Heald, and let him persuade us to go as soon as we can get our affairs straightened out, takes one afternoon. That night we sit in our room in the hotel and play cribbage till midnight. The next day we look around for the kind of plant we want, and that night, being tired, we play crib in our room in the hotel. The next day we buy that plant and get it shipped, and that night —being tired, we play a little crib in our room in the hotel. To-day we see Heald again, get his final instructions, buy some presents to take home to Rosita Mills and it's our last night in Frisco and says you: 'Come on upstairs. How about a game of crib?' Well, I like crib. Me and you have played crib nearly every night for just about twenty-five years; so we're beginning to learn it real well and are mighty interested in it. But, pardner, I'll be abso-tee-totallutely gosh-durned if you're going to get me to play any crib to-night! That settles that!"

Mr. David Field expressed a fixed determination in every one of his five feet three inches, and his red head bristled, and his reddish-gray eyes snapped, and his square, combative chin was thrust forward as he eyed his partner, Mr. G. Leath, known as Goliath, and the latter looked down from his nearly seven feet of stature with uncom-

plaining, handsome brown eyes and said as if astonished at this rebellion, "Why Davy, what else is there to do in a town like San Francisco?"

"Good Lord! Listen to him! He asks what else there is to do besides play crib!" The little man waved his arms and hard, freckled fists and seemed addressing the world at large and calling upon it to witness Goliath's ignorance. Then he again confronted his huge partner and growled, "There's these moving pictures——"

"Seen 'em up at Sky Gap, and Wallulla," came the rumbling objection.

"And there's sure enough theaters, and cabarets——"

"Don't like 'em. If they're slow I go to sleep and if they're good I'm always afraid I'll cry and bawl like some silly girl—and folks'd most likely laugh at me. I'm too dog-goned big to look well cryin'."

"And there's a show that's got music and girls in it——"

"You know darned well I can't tell one tune from another and I ain't looked for any girls, or at 'em, for nigh on to twenty years."

"Well, you ain't ever seen Chinatown, have you? How about going down there?" Then, gazing eagerly at his partner's face and discovering signs of objections forming, David's agile wits worked and he added, "Besides, there's some mighty wonderful shops down there and I was just thinking this evening that those fool things we bought Rosita look kind of stingy and that maybe we ought to buy her one of them embroidery things—kimenars, I think they call 'em. I reckon Rosita'd be tickled most to death with a bright red one. That's because she was born in Italy where I'm told they wear nothing but red, and so it'd make her feel more at home and happier."

The giant visibly brightened up. "Think so?" he asked, and then added warmly, "Davy, I'll swan! You do beat the band for always thinking of the right thing to do. Now I'd never have thought of one of them kimeroras——"

"Kimenars! Kimenars! Might as well pronounce it correctly, Goliath, so's not to show your ignorance."

"All right! Let's go get some of 'em. How many do we need?"

"One," replied David with a vast air of superior knowledge. "They're things to wear. They're a sort of a—um-m-mh!—dress for parties, I reckon."

"Then," Goliath asserted solemnly, "if that's what they are, Rosita sure needs one, and me and you'll buy the best one there is. Let's go!"

The partners advanced to the desk to ask directions and the clerk, who had formed a liking for them due to their simplicity and frankness, gave them sage advice: "What you two men need is a guide. Not one of the cadging, gouging, grabbing kind who is out to trim you at every turn, but a four-square wise gink who'll show you all that's fit to see and keep you from being stung if you buy anything. I'll see if I can get you the right man."

He looked out into the lobby of the little second-rate hotel that in those times, long ago, stood on the Mission side of Market Street, saw no one that pleased him, inasmuch as guides seldom came to that caravansary, and then went to the telephone. He held more or less animated conversations with one number after another and then returned to his desk shaking his head.

"Nothing doing," he remarked. "It's so late. If I had known early this afternoon I'd of got Bill Stiggins to take you; but—to-morrow I'll——"

"Nothin' doing again," David interrupted. "We go to-morrow morning, early."

The clerk studied for a moment, looked at the clock, then at the men he had grown to like and said, "See here. Tell you what I'll do. I'm off at nine o'clock and I'll take you down myself."

"That's all right, but are the places where you buy kamineries open that late?" asked Goliath.

"Kimenars! Kimenars!" David corrected him, and when the clerk after a puzzled frown suddenly smiled and said, "Oh, kimonos, you mean," they both grinned and said, "Yes, that's it."

And an hour later found the three men in one of the Chinese shops where the clerk was having difficulties in keeping his new friends from paying the first price asked for the most gorgeous kimono in the place. He finally got them out of the shop and on the narrow, crowded curb gave them sage advice.

"You fellows let me do all the bargaining. If I finally say 'No,' and walk out, you follow me. The shopkeeper will either trail us and accept the offer, or if we come back later will be more reasonable. I know how to bargain with these Chinese and you don't.

The shops are open for hours yet, and just before they shut up for the night is the time to catch 'em. Another thing, I'm keeping the best one to the last—old Wong Sam. Biggest thief, and thug, and all-round rascal in Chinatown."

"But does he sell kimonos?" David asked.

"He sells anything from kimonos and jade to smuggled opium. He buys stolen goods and helps furnish forged landing certificates to Chinese boys smuggled across the border. And yet the police have never succeeded in getting the goods on him."

David and Goliath stood, surrounded by the smells of old Chinatown, consisting of street garbage, burning punk, and the incense wafted from a near-by joss house, and looked up and down Dupont Street as if to see the abode of the notorious Wong Sam. The lights from the better shops flared over the pavement, and from a tea house balcony, ornate with carved dragons black and gilded, came the high, thin twanging of a stringed instrument presently accompanied by the high, thin falsetto of a professional singer. Crowds of darkly, softly moving figures slipped and jostled ceaselessly about them.

As if reading their minds their guide said, "No, Sam's place isn't on this street. He does business in one of the alleys where it's dark. But we'd better not go there until later. It's safe enough, I reckon, with three of us together. In the meantime we'll go to a theater."

In the dim, reeking basement where the play continued interminably Goliath went nicely to sleep; but David sat open-mouthed and now and then getting the clerk, who had a smattering of Chinese, to interpret as much as he could of it. Then, at last, they awoke the giant and he was still blinking, rubbing his eyes and yawning when they left the theater. It seemed darker now, many of the shops' lights having been extinguished and their windows closed with heavy wooden shutters. The streets had likewise taken on a deserted look and a sea fog had swept in from over the bold headlands and fallen, wraithlike, to add to the gloom. Off in the distance the clang of the cable cars sounded muffled and yet anxious, as if the gripmen feared accidents to late, and perhaps bibulous, pedestrians. The sedate residents of the great old city had retired for the night.

"Don't be afraid of this alleyway," said the clerk as he guided them into a narrow, evil-smelling passageway. "It's not a nice neighborhood, but three of us together could go anywhere; although I'm not certain that if I were a stranger I'd care to be alone in here at this time of night. Some hatchet boy out on a tong raid might mistake me for a plain-clothes cop and—here we are! In this basement."

He led the way down some shallow steps to an open door from which came the sound of muffled voices that abruptly stopped as the visitors entered. A fat, bland, wooden-faced Chinese whose shrewd, glittering eyes sharply swept over them, half jumped from the stool on which he had been seated and then, as he recognized the clerk said, "Hello! Late. Want buy something? Shop allee same shut!"

The man to whom he had been talking was a hatchet-featured, villainous-looking Cantonese with a scar that extended from one temple clear across his face diagonally and that in its passage did not spare the nose. He scowled at the visitors and seemed anxiously intent on how Wong Sam would get rid of them; but the clerk was not to be so easily dismissed.

"Shop shut, eh? Well, open it then. Two very good friends of mine, savvy? Go way early in morning. Want buy kimono. Must have to-night. Long time I been good friend of yours, eh? Send many good customers, eh? You not open shop, I send no more. Sure!"

The scar-faced man started to say something in his native tongue but instantly Sam whirled and, with palpable intent to check the sentence said, "My friend speaks good Chinese." The scar-faced man stared and then with a shrug of his shoulders relapsed into sullen, watchful silence. He glanced at the clock on the wall and David, eying him, concluded that for an unknown reason time had something to do with his evident dislike. Wong Sam, after one gentle lift of his fat hands, hastily crossed the room, took down a big bunch of keys, and led the way outward. He crossed the alley that could scarcely be dignified by calling it a narrow street, selected a key and opened his shop. He switched on an electric light and the partners were amazed not only by the size of the storeroom but by its contents. Long, dim spaces seemed filled with strange goods including everything from old pieces of carved furniture to great

silken draperies and grotesque idols. Piles of rugs, and antique Oriental armor; cleverly folding tea tables and cases of china; lacquered cabinets and curios from far South Sea islands, appeared in orderly confusion. But they had small time to satisfy their curiosity, for Wong Sam now peered at the clock and with evident haste moved to a cabinet from which he took a half dozen gayly embroidered kimonos which he tossed and spread upon his counter.

"How much this one?" David asked, selecting the most glaring red on view, and Wong Sam named a price of three hundred and fifty dollars.

"Too much, Sam," said the clerk, stepping on David's foot. "How much for this?" and he picked up another of the kimonos, fingered it and examined its texture.

"Two hundred dollars," said Wong Sam, and David saw that again he glanced at the clock.

Very deliberately the hotel clerk went through the entire assortment, questioning each price and asking to see other garments, until Wong Sam was in a most pronounced distress. All his fat complacency had vanished and his face appeared damp with perspiration, as if some mental agitation were thus displaying itself. David was amused, and wondering, and allowed his gaze to drift. From the corner of his eye he saw the yellow face of Wong Sam's friend flash against the shop window, then there was a distinct tapping, and glancing back at Wong Sam he saw the latter suddenly snatch at the silken fabrics on the counter as if to replace them. Then, as if remembering that he dared not offend the hotel clerk, he said, "Here! Which one your fliend like best? Red one, I think. Price thlee hundred fifty. But—what most you give?"

"How about a hundred bucks?" asked the clerk, with a grin.

"Yours," Wong Sam exclaimed and hastily throwing all others in a bundle behind the counter, picked up the red kimono and with great haste roughly wrapped it in an old newspaper and thrust it across toward the purchaser.

David, now more curious than ever, saw that Wong Sam watching the clock as if playing some game against time, was more than impatient of delay. He heard a low whistle out in the dark alleyway. David counted out the purchase price slowly and deliberately and then went over the bills to verify them. The whistle outside was repeated in a loud note. Wong Sam was by now almost dancing with excitement. David handed the bills across. Wong Sam seized them and without counting them rolled them beneath his blouse and fairly bolted for the shop door.

"You seem to be in a hurry," commented the hotel clerk, with a grin.

"No. No hully," said Wong Sam, still in haste, "but my fliend mebbe get tlired an' go. Must see fliend! You savvy?"

It was on the tip of David's tongue to remark, "No need to worry. Your friend has been hanging outside all the time;" but, thinking better of it he said nothing and they found themselves in the dark street.

"Good night! Velly pleased to see fliends of fliends! Must hully now. Good night," said Wong Sam hastily bowing to each; and then without waiting for a response he scuttled across the street, dove downward, and the light in his basement disappeared as the door banged shut.

"Well, that beats me!" the volunteer guide exclaimed with a laugh. "He was in a mighty big hurry about something or another. Notice it? We got that kimono for just about what it cost him secondhand. Wonder why? I intended to go to at least two-fifty and—beats me! Wonder what's up?"

"Don't see that it matters," said Goliath in his heavy voice, "so long as we got what we wanted for so much less than any of the others asked."

"Not at all. And Rosita'll sure like this thing, I'll bet." David chuckled as he fondled the parcel under his arm, and then deciding to smoke and needing both hands, held it toward his partner and said, "Hey Goliath, you take this—and—don't lose her, pardner! She's sure some bargain."

The hotel clerk laughed as if highly pleased to have been of service to his friends and they started toward the mouth of the alleyway. The rays of an arc light outside, but not at the end, exposed the broader street into which they must debouch. A vehicle like a covered market gardener's stopped, for a moment stood outlined in the light and then hastily passed away with its iron tires clattering over the cobblestones. A silhouette, tangled, confused, became suddenly visible in the alley entrance. As the three men paused, curious and uncomprehending, they saw the shape disentangle

itself and become visible as three figures, two of which, on the outer sides, were evidently dragging and forcing the middle figure forward. There was another sudden mixing of the figures as the one in the center seemed to have momentarily broken loose to freedom and then there was a single high-pitched, staccato scream, cut off as it rose to crescendo as if by a hand clapped across an open mouth.

"Good Lord! That's a girl that screamed, and there's something ugly about this," the hotel clerk cried.

As he spoke he began to run forward, and both David and Goliath plunged after him. They closed up on the three figures and the clerk called, "Hey! what's up here?"

With a Chinese expletive one of the men suddenly threw himself forward with bent head and the clerk, receiving the butt full in the stomach, collapsed to the pavement with a grunt and rolled over. Goliath lunged at the man, who nimbly dodged aside, and the other two figures became confused as one, a man, seized what was evidently a girl into his arms, swept her from her feet and tried to dodge downward into the depths of the alleyway.

"No you don't," cried David as he tripped him and the two went rolling over the cobbles. Then he in turn sensed an attack from behind, and whirled just too late to completely avoid a glancing blow from a piece of lead pipe. He grappled with his assailant and when he felt the fleshy but muscular folds of the man's body at once surmised that he was in contact with none other than Wong Sam. As he whirled his stocky frame to get a better hold he saw another figure and the dull flash of descending steel. With all the veteran experience of a skilled fighter he swung Wong Sam around and heard the soft swish of a knife penetrating flesh and muscle, and Wong Sam sighed deeply and leaned forward almost as if relaxing into protecting arms, then slumped downward, inert. David felt the body slithering limply to the pavement at his feet and before the dark figure beside him had surmised that the diverted blow had fallen upon a confederate, had doubled low and was in on him. David's quick hand swept upward in the dim light, clasped a sinewy wrist holding a slender-bladed knife, and then he recognized the scar-faced man of the basement.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" David grunted and then found that all his utmost energies would be required to keep that knife from again descending. The Canton man was singularly and exceptionally agile. To David it seemed that he was built of living, writhing steel, swift in movement, flexible in poise, sudden in attack. Backward and forward they twisted across the narrow space, fighting silently, one inordinately powerful and adept, the other limber as an eel, quick as light, and both experienced fighting men in their own methods.

One sought to break that hold on his wrist and use the slender and deadly blade, the other to retain the wrist and trip his opponent to the ground. They were oblivious of the fallen figure at their feet, of the others moving about them in the gloom, of everything but their own desperation. They rove backward and forward, now striking the wall on one side, now bumping into the opposite wall, heedless of bruises, heedless of everything save that one or the other must go down. David's fingers let loose for the bare fraction of an instant. The Canton man's wrist tensed and flung forward. David's fingers closed again in a new hold higher up at the base of the hand, tightened like claws, and jerked downward with all the heavy shoulder muscles and weight of his stocky, agile body in the balance; and then both he and his antagonist paused as if transfixed. The knife, descending with a rush, still clasped in that determined yellow hand, had been diverted and sank home in the Canton man's body. It passed downward through that fatal hollow at the base of the neck and forward of the shoulder bone, seemed to slip easily to the lungs and the Canton man suddenly threw both hands upward, staggered back against the wall, gently slipped downward first to a sitting, and then to a bent, kneeling posture and began to cough with slow, regular, hacking coughs as if his throat were congested with flowing blood.

David leaned back against the brick wall, giddy, reeling with effort, breathless and half numb to what was going on near by. He lifted his eyes just in time to see the huge body of his partner, Goliath, outlined against the light like some enormous monster in the frenzy of battle, and it held high and swung as a club the writhing body of a man in loose garb. Flaillike it fell upon three assailants of whose arrival David had

been unaware, and who had come at the single call and been adherents of that fallen fat man, Wong Sam. The flail swept through the air, descended in a wide sweep, and there were sounds of impact of flesh on flesh; grunts of stricken men; groans of agony from the fallen, and then the now limp human flail was hurled aside and in the dim light stood a great silhouette, bending forward, tensed, waiting, its very attitude expressing an anguish of anxiety, and finally a voice called almost tenderly, and half spent, "Davy! Davy! Where are you? For—for God's sake—pard—have they got you?"

David lurched forward toward his partner. "Nope. I'm here, old man."

"And all right?" The silhouette unbent and moved to meet him.

"Yes. I'm all right but—I'm afraid this is a mess. This fellow here is——"

"Coughing his damn'd life out!" Goliath finished for him as he bent forward and stared. Then there was a quick splutter of a match held forward for inspection and, "Yes, he's finishing. It's the scar-faced man out of Wong Sam's basement and—who's this over here? Um-m-mh! Wong Sam. Cashed in."

Together they moved toward another dark shape that had slowly turned over and now was painfully attempting to get to its feet.

"Hello! That's our friend the hotel man," Goliath rumbled, and then as David assisted the clerk to his feet, moved still farther and with another match alight stared at a shape that was huddled, as if paralyzed with fear, against the wall. It held tiny hands upward in an appeal of helplessness and Goliath found himself staring into the eyes of a Chinese girl. In the flare of the blazing light they were wide with terror. He had not time to appraise the graceful oval of her face, the rounded youth of cheeks, or the delicacy of arched eyebrows. All he saw was a girl in distress, for whom they had fought, and whom they had rescued from the terrible servitude that he knew existed in that maze of dark alleyways and streets, those subterranean abodes, and raftered hovels that made up the Chinatown of his day. All that he appreciated was that here was a helpless, inoffensive Chinese girl whom he had helped to save. And as the match went out, suddenly cutting from sight her frightened eyes, half-opened and pleading lips and terror-whitened face he put one of his great hands out and patted her shoulder and said, "Hell! It's all over now. Don't you be scared, girl. Me and Davy'll take care of you. Don't worry about that."

And then he felt plucking fingers at his sleeve and heard the agitated voice of the hotel clerk, "For God's sake! Let's beat it out of this. This will be a murder case! There are dead men here in this alley. Come on. Quickly!"

"But—but what about this girl?" demanded Goliath.

The clerk swung back from his first movement to run, gasped and then in his broken Chinese began to whisper rapid questions.

"She'll go with us. We can't leave her to—to this!" he said. "We'll have to see her through; but—we must get out of this —fast! I tell you——"

"Then let's go now," David exclaimed, as if he had recovered from his battle. "You tell her in Chinese that we don't mean her any harm and that we are friends and that——"

"I speak English," the girl interjected. And then before they could recover from their surprise added, "Yes. We must go! Quick go! I no afraid you men. I go where you take but—must go now! Must go quick."

"Wait here a moment till I see if the coast is clear," cautioned the clerk, whose wits had again become keen. And a moment later he beckoned them from the lighted mouth of the alleyway. "We'll hurry through the block and turn to the left," he said. "Walk apart as if there was nothing to be afraid of, and no hurry. Then when we turn the corner we'll make a bolt for it. Follow me—all of you."

They tried to obey his instructions, although the girl, as if still overcome by all through which she had passed, clung to David's arm as they walked. They passed none but a straggling, dazed, half-doped Oriental homeward and hovelward bound. They turned the corner, were again together in the gloom and now, under the leadership of the hotel clerk made wide detours, crossed vacant spaces, and ever-broadening streets, descending after a time with easier steps until they suddenly came out into a broad, peaceful and somnolent thoroughfare and found cabs on a corner by a curb. The cab drivers were visible inside of a near-by

restaurant where a long counter with its pyramids of sandwiches was fronted with high stools. The clerk called the nearest driver out. The partners, with the girl, crowded inside the musty vehicle. The clerk climbed on the box beside the driver.

"Mission Palm Hotel," he said. And then, yawning, added confidentially, "Been having a late night of it. My friend's wife wanted to see Chinatown and—she's seen it —all right!"

II.

In the tiny room behind the office of the Mission Palm Hotel three disheveled men, two of them bloodstained, looked at one another and then at the huddled figure of a still terrified but comely Chinese girl who, now that she was in the light, stared round-eyed at her preservers. She sat in the corner of the room, perched on the edge of a rickety wooden chair, considered unworthy of further use in lounge, dining room or office. She studied the chin of the clerk that was bruised, passed thence to an inspection of the battered, dusty, sweat-stained visage of the stocky red-headed man, and from there to the stolid, handsome, quiet face of the giant who bore no sign of conflict or flurry. Goliath lounged back on a heavy sofa as if his entire evening had been passed in nothing more exciting than his beloved bout at cribbage. And then, instinctively, she leaned toward him, moved, got to her feet and went across to seat herself by his side.

"Well, this is one hell of a mix-up," rasped David, looking at her. "You can speak English, can you?"

His question was addressed so abruptly to the girl that she cowered back as if from a blow, or the fear that having escaped one horrible fate she had confronted another.

"Yes. Some," she said.

"What's your name?" the harsh voice snapped.

"Ling Tan Foo."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"And—humph!—sixteen is a woman in Chinese. So, miss—how did you come to be down there, and with those—well—when we came along? Tell us that. And tell the truth too, because this is a case of——"

He got no farther; for Goliath awoke from his lethargy and said, "For the Lord's sake, Davy, don't scare this Ling Tan Foo to death, will you? She ain't nothin' but a pore little gal, and——" He turned and with his kindly smile and kindly eyes reassured the frightened girl by his side.

"My pardner's not anywhere so near savage as he looks," he said in the deep rumbling voice that sounded of sympathy and understanding. And then as she involuntarily moved closer toward him as if for protection, he went on, "And you see, it's this way. We've had to kill a man or two back there and there might be a lot of questions, and a lot of courts, and a lot of lawyers, so we—my pardner, our friend over there, and me—and you, have got to—to sort of know where we stand and what it's all about. So, maybe you wouldn't mind tellin' us how you happened to be there, and why you hollered, and—well, who you are."

She turned as if to this big kindly man alone and ignoring the others poured out her words, eagerly, rapidly, as if to convince him that she was telling the truth. It wasn't an extraordinary tale in those distant days. Chinatown of San Francisco, had it the gift of speech, could tell many worse and more sordidly tragic.

It was merely that her father, an old-time market gardener with a patch of ground near a village, had suddenly died, leaving her alone, and that there were many men of the Wong Sam type in Chinatown, men who derided, evaded, flaunted and scorned the white man's law and were willing to pay a comparatively big price in gold for comely girls who were thereafter doomed through life and until untimely death to dwell and endure behind the quiet, secretive bars of Chinatown. There were yellow men who had patiently waited, and watched her grow, and—decoyed her away when her sole protector was laid away in alien ground, and chance and blind valiance had saved her.

They were three clean men, those, who listened to her broken story. Now and then they mumbled an oath of anger, or astonishment, at her credulity or helplessness. She ended with, "What could do? Mother dead. No fliends. In America. No understand how could go. Two men come, say come from tong. Say must come Flisco see tong men. So come. Then get aflaid. Man say if make noise choke me. Kill. Bling into stleet at night. Don't know what can do. Then come alley velly dark. Me aflaid. Say not go there. Men

dlag me by arms. I cly. One man put hand on mouth and other on thloat and choke. See. I show you!"

She suddenly stripped the loose blue sleeve upward and bared her girlish arm to display great bruises where fingers had savagely clutched. Then she lifted her head and on the rounded throat they saw other marks of brutish barbarity.

"See?" she asked, with an air of offering proof.

Again the partners mumbled and restrained themselves while the hotel clerk, who had forgotten during the recountal to massage his bruises, glowered at space and then heaved a sigh befitting his almost boyish years.

"I haven't got any sister, and if I had—but—I can understand this thing better, I expect, than you men can. You see, I was born here in Frisco and I picked up some chink palaver and—well, I think she's giving us the straight dope. Think she's telling the truth."

"I am!" Ling Tan Foo asserted vigorously. "Why not? Why tell lie to you who help me—eh? Why lie? You my fliends. Got no fliends but you, now. Oh, I speak tluth, allee time."

"Ling Foo," said the clerk contritely, "I didn't mean that you lied. I was—was—sort of bothered. What I really was thinking about was—was—what the deuce are we going to do with you now that we've got you? That's what's bothering me!"

Goliath got up from his seat as if suddenly remembering something, looked around him in great confusion and then faced his partner.

"Davy," he said, "you gave me that kimeronaria we bought for Rosita to take care of, and—I've plumb forgot the dam thing! I've done lost it! I don't know when or where, but——" He stopped, ran his heavy fingers through his brush of black and graying hair and then said as if a brilliant idea had flashed through to relieve his perplexity, "We've lost the kameroniria, but we was going to make Rosita a Chinese present and—couldn't we take back and give her—er—couldn't we give her——"

"Sure," said David. "We can. We'll take back and give her something that's a lot better than anything ever made of silk. Me and you'll give her Ling Tan Foo. Rosita'll like her better than one of those what-do-you-call-'ems."

And Rosita did.

More David and Goliath stories in future issues.

AMBITION REALIZED

MRS. CHAMP CLARK, widow of the late speaker of the national House of Representatives, was recently discussing the value of a good memory in politics.

"My husband had it," she said, "and it benefited him tremendously. In what full measure he had it is shown by an experience he once had in a little town in Oklahoma. Thirty years before that, while president of a college in Kentucky, Mr. Clark had known among the students three brothers named Mosely, all of whom were red-headed. While he was walking up the main street of the Oklahoma town he was stopped by a tall, red-headed, red-bearded man who wore a long-tailed coat and a high hat.

" 'Betcher don't know me, Mr. Speaker!' challenged the stranger.

"My husband took the other's extended hand, looked at him a few moments and then said in that slow way of his: 'It isn't exactly fair after thirty years to ask me which of the three Mosely boys you are. But never mind. You're Bill.'

" 'How in the world did you know?' asked Bill.

" 'By the motion you made,' said Mr. Clark, 'when you took off your hat to speak to me. I remember, too, that you intended to be an orator.'

" 'Yes, sir; you're right,' agreed Bill.

" 'Well,' Mr. Clark inquired, 'what are you doing now?'

" 'I'm selling medicines on likely street corners,' explained Bill, 'with a little refined vaudeville to punctuate my remarks.' "

The Wise-cracking Champ

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "The Red-coated Horseman," "A Corner in Champions," Etc.

For a prize fighter, "Stump" Cassidy's French was surprisingly good. It got him everything he asked for, anyway.

"CHIN sparring," said Delehanty.

"Come again?" I requested, puzzled but polite.

"Chin sparring," he repeated. "Wise cracking," he added with an air of making it all clear. "I wouldn't tell anybody but you, 'Spike.' But I've always found you a close-mouthed guy, so——"

"Your secret's safe with me," I told him, kind of coldlike. "Since I got no notion of what you're talking about you can be sure I won't repeat it to a soul."

"Aw, shut up your crabbing," laughed Del, poking me in the ribs. "I ain't holding out nothing on you. What me and 'Stump' goes into the little coop for every morning is to give him practice in his best punch. Chin sparring I call it, because the blow's delivered with his tongue."

"With his tongue!" I yelped. "What kind of bunk are you trying——"

"Listen," cut in Del. "You know and I know that Stump Cassidy's just about one step ahead of nine hundred and eighty-eight lightweights that are lucky to be gettin' twenty-five seeds for a preliminary fight. He can hit, but so can a lot of truck drivers. He can box pretty good, but so can a lot of shippin' clerks and bond salesmen who do it for exercise in the Y. M. C. A.'s. He trains regular, but so do you, workin' out with the fat guys who're reducin' at your gym. In other words, what Stump's got, and does, ain't going to send him very far in the ring, and you know how long I'm going to waste my managing talents on a bird who can't get somewhere near the top. So when me and Stump first hooks up, I says to myself, I says, 'Del, old hoss, it's up to you to learn this sawed-off knuckle pusher something that's gonna get him and you some jack.' This chin sparring I'm telling you about is it."

"But I still don't see——" I start to tell him.

"Sh-h!" hisses Del mysterious, looking around my office, which, being about six by eight, couldn't have held no listening ears unless they was in one of the pigeonholes of the desk. "Sh-h, Spike! Easy!" he whispers. "I've learned this Stump guy to wise crack the birds I match him with to death. This is the way it works out. As soon as I makes the match I starts to wise myself up on the shady history, if any, of the guy Stump's to fight, or his family. If I gets anything on the guy I tells Stump about it. If I don't get nothing on him I

makes somethin' up, and the minute him and Stump gets together in the ring Stump starts spilling it on him.

"Suppose the bozo Stump's fighting, his name is Muldoon. 'Huh!' says Stump as the gang sounds. 'Huh! Muldoon, huh! You're the Muldoon that done time for robbing the poor box of St. Mark's Church!' And he follows that up with some other wise cracks that I've practiced him up on while we been locked up in the little storeroom out there in your gym. Well, whether the stuff is true or not it gets the other guy's goat. He gets mad, and you was in the ring long enough yourself to know that when a guy is mad—real, hopping, crazy mad—he ain't in no condition to indulge in no enterprises or pursuits in which a good, clear head is needed. And if you don't have to keep your nut in a boxing bee you don't have to do it nowheres else in the world!"

"True enough," I nodded. "But a wise guy wouldn't pay any attention to the stuff that Stump——"

"Wise guy!" guffawed Del. "How many wise guys did you ever know who was swinging their fists for a living? And, wise or not, the way Stump puts his lines over would get anybody. He's a cold-blooded, sneering, cruel little rat, as you know, and the way he shoots the harpoon into them other pugs would get a rise out of old King Tut's own mummy! 'Tain't guesswork I'm giving you; it's the goods. It works. There was 'Battlin' Frank' Tucker that Stump licked two weeks ago—a clever lad who's got everything. Stump made a sucker out of him. He guffed him about having seen him being dragged off to the hoosegow for kicking his poor old mother downstairs. It wasn't true. Frank Tucker is a good-living kid, and his old lady's his best pal, and his banker, and his sweetheart. But the fact that it wasn't true made him all the madder. He quit boxing Stump and made a rush for him, trying to wipe him off the map. He opened up and Stump just took it easy and plastered him. And they're been others. Why, I tell you, Spike, out of the last fifteen fights Stump's had he ought to have lost ten, and chin sparring's carried him through them all. They're been kidders in the game—you know, the old hokum of trying to grin and saying, 'Huh! Can't you hit no harder than that?' after the other guy's knocked out all your front teeth; but Stump's the first guy who's gone about it scientific; and it's getting him by!"

"Talking himself into a championship," I observed. "Gee, Del, if the old fight game's coming to that I've got a couple of overweight lawyers in my afternoon gym class who could give Stump a run at his chin-sparring specialty. And the bird who makes the announcements at the PZO radio station——"

"Kid if you want," grunts Del, "but the jaw work's getting Stump into the heavy-sugar class. You don't want to forget, though, that I ain't letting the kid neglect the stuff that puts the sting in the punches and the wind in the lungs. He *trains*, which you ought to know, because he does it right here in your own dump."

"Chin sparring and all," I grin.

"Chin sparring and all," repeats Del, serious, "and, with him always in the pink, the tongue action gives him a bulge on the other guys that—well, look at his record," he bids me.

"You win," I tell him, "and I wasn't arguing with you, anyways. Of course, what Stump's doing isn't very nice——"

"What *is* nice in the fight game?" demands Del on the defensive.

"The money," I said.

"And we're getting it," he declared. "Keep what I've told you under the toupee, but watch us. We're going all the way up to the top!"

"Well, there have been men who talked themselves into the White House," I admitted, "and what you and Stump are aiming for isn't much higher than that. Success! Only don't lose sight of the fact that boxing's a game played mostly with the hands. In other words, a guy who can jab has got it all over a guy who can just jabber. And I've been thinking of a wonderful defense against Stump's best punch."

"What's that?" cried Del, jumping up excited.

"Cotton in the ears," I said.

Well, since I opened this gym I've been rubbing elbows and exchanging punches with a lot of high-class citizens and I've learned a lot from them that I never knew in the days when I was just Spike Havlin, flirting with the middleweight championship. That's why Del's explanation of the success he'd been having with Stump Cassidy struck me as being just a wee bit sour. Of course, banditry of a kind that would

land a private citizen in jail gets by in the fight game as strategy; still, as an old ringster who'd learned something about fair play and sportsmanship, I couldn't help but feel that Stump Cassidy would have been a lot better off if he'd put more reliance in the strength of his good right arm and less in the fact that he shook a wicked tongue. However, that angle of the thing is none of my business; there's no moral to the story I'm telling. All I aim to do is to describe things as they happened without any Sunday-school trimmings.

Having heard from Delehanty the methods he was using in nursing Stump Cassidy along toward the top I naturally began to take more notice of Stump than I had before. I was curious to see just how far his talk would carry him. He was a squashed-down, heavy-set, hairy little runt; all springs like most of those chunky, muscular, little fellows you see in the ring. He had a broken nose, low-growing wiry black hair, sharp, squinty eyes, and a wide thick-lipped mouth with a list to starboard. He looked as tough as he was, which was plenty tough. Del had been kind of modest about him when he told me he was only one stride out of the preliminary class, for really the kid was good. He could hit, his defensive work was first class, his lumpy legs carried him around at a pace which was dazzling, and he went about things in a cool, calm, unruffled way that showed me quick why it was these other birds had been easy meat for him after he'd snared their goats. I'm not saying, mind you, that he was any phenom; but you couldn't have dropped him in the ham class, either.

It was a couple of weeks after Del told me of the chin-sparring gag that I saw Stump for the first time in the ring. He was fighting a boy named Hughey Smith, who had been tabbed regularly as a comer by the newspapers for about a year back. Smith was one of these nifty boys—you know, every move a picture—the kind that runs to lavender trunks with their initials worked in pink on the legs, and whose proudest boast is that nobody they'd fought had ever succeeded in mussing their well-greased hair.

Smith was first in the ring that night, shaping up very pretty in a dressing gown of dark-green silk with a red cord. He went through the usual hoke of testing the ropes and nodding to well-wishers at the ringside. Then he squatted gracefully on his stool and waited for Stump.

It was one of those coeducational fight clubs—women permitted to view the thrilling spectacle of young men socking each other—and when Stump, Delehanty & Co. came breezing down an aisle Stump did a halt about three rows from the ringside and leaned over to pass the time of day with a squaw in full war paint who was sitting there. I learned later that the dame was Hughey Smith's sweetie, there to observe him flatten another fresh guy. Delehanty had maneuvered Stump into meeting her a few days before.

All Stump said to her, so Del told me, was, "How de do, Miss McGoozle"—or whatever her name was—"I hope you're having a pleasant evening."

Hearing this brilliant piece of speech and recognizing Stump, the gal couldn't do much less than look up and smile, and, as she did so, Stump turned from her to the ring and bellowed:

"He-e-ey, Smitty!"

Smith turned around, and, when he saw monkey-faced Stump palavering over his gal, what the books call a dark frown spread over his handsome countenance. Stump gave him an airy wave of the hand, excused himself to the dame, who didn't like the attention she was attracting any more than a fish likes water, waltzed the rest of the way to the ring and hopped in.

He stepped right over to Smith, who had been watching him in a puzzled kind of way, slapped him on the back and said:

"Well, kid, I've stole your broad off'n you! Yep, dated her up to meet me right after the scrap. Told her it'd only take me a coupla rounds to finish you up. Her and me'll be diving into the big eats about the time they're bringing you to."

If Smith looked puzzled before, he gave a perfect imitation of the human question mark after Stump had got this spiel off his chest. So Stump, seeing that he had him going, eases him a little more out of the same pot.

"She says you're only a false-alarm fighter, anyways," he told Smith, "and I promised her I'd prove it to her. You're a sweet-looking kid, ain't you?" he remarked, stepping back as though to study Smith. "Wonder how you'll look when you're all mussed up?" And with this he reached out with one of his bandaged hands

and ruffled Smith's shining hair comb till the black wool stood up like cat-tails in a swamp.

At which point Smith's goat got up on its hind legs, sounded its hymn of hate and prepared to run amuck.

Stump dodged back just in time to escape the right for the chin which Smith aimed at him. Smith's manager and seconds and the referee and announcer pushed him back on his stool and held him there while the grinning Stump tripped blithely over to his corner, but they couldn't capture and restrain the goat. That was loose and traveling fast, and it remained at large during the rest of the evening. The result was that Smith, who had been making a name for himself mostly through his ability to fight a cautious, cool-headed battle, piling up points while the other fellow swung like the well-known gate, rushed out of his corner with fire in his eye and foam on his lips, the idea being to slaughter Stump, to whom that style of milling was oil in the can. Any question there may have been in Stump's mind, or anybody else's in the house, as to what Hughey Smith would look like mussed up was answered in the first two minutes of the first round, said answer being that he looked like something that had been through a concrete mixer. And in the third round, having gone through experiences more harrowing than those of a shirt in a steam laundry, he curled up and went to sleep as peacefully as a faithful family dog on a hearthrug.

After that demonstration of the value of chin sparring in the training of gladiators I got into the habit of attending all the fight shows in which Stump Cassidy figured. It wasn't that I approved of the methods that he and Del were using, now that I'd seen how they worked out. Maybe there was a lingering hope in the back of my skull that some night the heavy fist would prevail over the agile tongue and that I'd see some hard guy furnish Stump with transportation from the State where they were fighting into the State of Coma. Maybe I was just fascinated by the ingenuity Del showed in thinking up new gags for Stump to pull. But, whatever my reason, I went, and after some eight months of it I had to hand chin sparring this—it got results. Some of the lingo Stump let loose in the ring was awful, awful raw, but, as Del used to remark when I'd mention that fact, it was bringing home the bacon. In fact, things had gone so far that Stump's name was being coupled regular in fistic circles with that of Marty Ryan —shortened for use in the ring from Moritz Reinhardt—who was lightweight champion.

This Ryan was one of those Marathon champions. Having grabbed the championship and found it even more profitable than lending out money at interest, which was the way the other Reinhardts got theirs, he had made up his mind to hold onto the title for the rest of his life and to bequeath it, if possible, to his heirs at his death. That he deserved credit for keeping the game going for himself is proved by the fact that for at least three years before Stump Cassidy was ever heard of, every man, woman and child interested in pugilism in the United States of America had got into the habit of facing the east and breathing a fervent prayer that somebody would be sent along soon to knock Marty Ryan's block off. In other words, he had stuck round so long he had worn his welcome out and had become about as popular as an epidemic.

The record that Stump Cassidy piled up for himself soon convinced the dear old public that here at last was the gent who'd rub Marty Ryan out of the picture. Delehanty and Stump had the same idea, so it would seem that everything was set for the blow-off. However, it must not be forgot that the presence of Marty Ryan in the same ring with Stump was required in order that the transfer of the title should be legal and binding, if at all, and getting into the same ring with anybody who had a chance with him was Don't No. 1 in Ryan's list of rules for hanging onto a championship. He couldn't be coaxed, he couldn't be bulldozed, he couldn't be shamed. All of those things had been tried on him by experts and had left him cold. He wouldn't even stall off a likely challenger by bidding him lick some other topnotcher first. He just let the challenger rave and went about his business of gathering the mazuma by smearing set-ups and doing his bag-punching-shadow-boxing-monologue specialty with burlesque troupes. A cagy, hard-boiled guy!

Now, I had a private opinion about the chances Stump had of taking Marty Ryan's title away, even assuming that the two got together some time for a little exchange of hooks and compliments. It wasn't so private, however, that I didn't express it to

Delehanty, and it was about to this effect: Provided Stump and Marty met up before the latter had reached the age of sixty Marty could hobble his feet, blindfold himself and tie his right arm to his side and still make Stump Cassidy look like the victim of a massacre. The two weren't in the same class, throwing all the chin sparring in the world in to help Stump. Stump was a good battler, but Marty Ryan, no matter what people may have thought about him personally, was champion because he was the best man of his weight in the world. But I'm not here to blow Marty Ryan's horn.

About the time that the list of victims of Stump's tongue and fists began to resemble a page from the telephone directory Del breezed into the gym one day wearing a grin that looked like the first quarter of the harvest moon and with his eyes shining like a new six-bit alarm clock.

"I've put it over!" he screeched as he hurdled the sill of the office door. "Grabbed the match! Everything's fixed!"

"Who—Marty Ryan?" I inquired.

"Not yet," said Del, flopping into a chair and drawing a paper from his pocket. "But that's coming. He can't dodge us after this."

He shoved the paper over to me, and I read:

PARIS, FRANCE, September 6th, C. Hankins, N. Y.

Accept offer for Cassidy bout. Sailing on *Rochambeau* to-morrow. LA PIERRE.

"That's a copy—translated—of a cable that Charley Hankins just got. This La Peary guy that signs it, he's the manager of that French guy—what's his name?—that's been swelling around, calling himself lightweight champeen of Europe since he beat Aleck Maher, the Britisher. I been on the trail of that guy—what's his name——"

"Bonneville," I told him.

"Yeah, that's it. I been on his trail for a couple of months. Charley Hankins wanted to match him and Stump up for the Pastime Sporting Club, so he cabled a couple of offers, and this La Peary bird's at last accepted one. This guy will be peaches and cream for Stump, and——"

"How do you know he will?" I asked. "Ever see him fight?"

"No," admitted Del, "but these foreigners ain't never no good."

"That's right," I grinned. "Still, there'd be a pretty slim bunch of American fighters left if you was to bar out all the Poles, Eyetalians and Rooshians that are battling round here under Yankee and Irish names."

"But, anyways," went on Del, "Stump will lam this Frenchy for a gool, and that'll make him lightweight champ of Europe. *Then* I want to see Marty Ryan pass him up!"

"Got it all figured out, haven't you?" I remarked with a giggle.

"Sure I have," agreed Del, "but I don't see nothing to laugh at."

"No?" I inquired. "It hasn't struck you yet, eh?"

"What hasn't struck me yet?" demanded Del. "What are you talkin' about? What's the big laugh?"

"Well," I said, "I just happened to think—Stump's going to be under quite a severe handicap when he fights that Frenchman."

"Severe handicap!" exclaimed Del puzzledlike. "What——"

"Why, he'll be minus what you yourself admit is his best punch. How far is chin sparring going to get him with a feller that won't be able to understand a word he says?"

"Holy cat!" gasped Del, jumping up from his chair.

"You never thought of that, did you?" I asked him.

"By gum, I didn't!" he said, breathing hard and rubbing his forehead. "I was so anxious to match Stump up with this bird that I clean forgot all about him only talking parley voo! And now I'm in too deep to back out! It was me built the bout up. Charley Hankins wasn't so strong for it until I began camping on his doorstep and urging him to make offers. And this fellow's sailin' for here to-morrow! I *got* to go through with it now!"

"Well," I kidded him, "I just heard you say that none of these foreigners are any good, so maybe Stump can——"

"I was just talking when I said that!" wailed Del, who's lost all the cockiness he had when he came into the office. "It was the bunk, the old bull! This—this—whatever his name is!—he can fight! Bob Winters seen him lick the Englishman and he tells me he's the goods! Says he could give Marty Ryan himself a run! And me, thinking I'm slick to grab him off for Stump before this La Peary guy can go after Marty Ryan and maybe grab the *real* champeenship!"

"Tough luck, Del!" I commented by way of leading him on. "But a feller who's managing pugs ought to think of everything. Now, you—what you ought to have done was draw the language line."

"Language line!" yelped Del. "What's that?"

"There's a color line, isn't there?" I snickered. "Why not a language line, then, for pugs who do most of their fighting with their lips?"

"A fine time to kid!" growled Delehanty, scowling.

"It's no ham off my plate," I said, easy. "Remember, I been advising you all along to spend more time on the muscles of Stump's arms and shoulders and less on the muscles of his tongue."

"Funny guy, ain't you?" sneered Del. "If you're so handy with advice, slip me some now, why don't you?"

"Sure!" I said pleasant. "Two hours more a day on the roads. About six new sparring partners. A diet consisting entirely of raw meat. That ought to fix Stump up so's he needn't fear to fight anybody."

"If they's one thing I hate it's a wise cracker!" bellowed Del.

"That's why you trained Stump Cassidy to be one," I suggested.

"Aw, I ought to punch you in the nose!" Del barked.

"You couldn't get away with it," I told him, grinning, but ready to block a pass if he made one. "As you told me yourself, when a feller's been kidded separate from his goat he's in no shape to put up a battle."

"You ain't got my goat!" yelped Del, proving the fact by slamming his fist down on my desk, kicking over my scrap basket and calling me some names in lion language. He's a big, beefy, red-faced brute—one of those prominently mentioned as a White Hope about 1909—and anger and similar emotions show on him in the shape of swellings, especially about the onion, or head. For a minute I feared he'd bust, but he disappointed me, and diving out of the office he relieved himself by bawling Stump Cassidy through his daily dozen.

Del and me got on speaking terms within a week and he invited me to join him, Stump and Charley Hankins, the promoter, on the reception committee that greeted the French pugilistic invasion on the day it stepped from the *Rochambeau*. In the taxi on the way to the pier Del leaned toward me with his face full of hopefulness and optimism and whispered:

"Say, Spike, I was thinking—maybe this French knuckle pusher can chatter a little English. They was a lot of American-speaking fellows Over There durin' the war."

"Well," I told him, "if he learned the kind of English a lot of those A. E. F. lads spoke, he'll be all set to understand the coarse epithets that Stump will hurl at him."

But four seconds after Bonneville and his manager, La Pierre, stepped off the gangplank, the bitter truth was brought home to Del that whatever ragging Stump might pull on the Frenchman in the ring would have to be accomplished with the aid of an interpreter. Bonneville and La Pierre knew less English than we did French, which gives them a world's record.

Bonneville wasn't quite so rough-and-ready looking as the rank and file of our American pugs, but he shaped up pretty wicked at that. His tight-fitting suit made him appear slimmer than he actually was, but it didn't hide the wide shoulders, lumpy fists and thick wrists which meant that he had punches concealed about his person, and he moved about in a springy, easy way that bespoke fast footwork when necessary. He had the thin, drawn face of one who's done plenty training, wise black eyes and a strut that showed he rated himself not lower than Class A. Nothing offensive about his chestiness, mind you; he just had reason to believe he was good and wasn't making a secret of it.

La Pierre, the manager, was a long, elegant-looking bird with a sharp face and a pointed black beard. A classy pair, I'd say, on general appearances, and I've got to admit that they put it all over us roughneck homebreds in deportment and small talk during the course of the preliminary powwow which an interpreter helped us to hold on the pier.

Delehanty was sore as a skinned knee when we dumped the Frenchmen off at a hotel in the care of Charley Hankins.

"The nerve of them guys," he growled to me, "coming over here without knowing so much as how to say good morning in our language! Huh! They don't think enough of us to learn our talk, but they like our dough, all right!"

"They've got nothing on us there," I told

him. "Besides, you don't want to forget it was you coaxed them to come."

"They'll be sorry they didn't stay where they belonged before I'm through with them!"

"You think, then, that Stump——"

"Say!" interrupted Del. "If that frog knew what Stump is goin' to hand him he'd start for home *now*—even if he had to swim!"

"Hot dog!" I applauded kind of sarcastic, for I knew that Del was talking big mostly for the purpose of kidding himself. He's no dumb-bell, that same Del, in matters pertaining to the ring. I'd seen him sizing Bonneville up on the pier, and I knew—and he knew I knew—that he saw in the little visitor from across the seas no soft mark.

The next day Charley Hankins staged a more or less public work-out for Bonneville. That is to say, the newspaper boys were all there and so were most of the big guys of the fight game. Stump, Del and yours truly, of course, were on hand at the quarters early.

The first part of the proceedings—rope skipping, shadow boxing and the usual run of gym tricks—gave us no line on Bonneville, outside, of course, of showing that he shaped up well in ring clothes and was lively as a cricket. At last, though, came the performance that we'd come to see—he put on the gloves.

Hankins had selected Henny Peters, a coming welterweight, to try Bonneville out for three rounds. I don't know what instructions Peters had; maybe it was just his natural desire to try to show up a foreign champ, but after they'd been fiddling round for not more than ten seconds he started after the Frenchman as if he wanted to murder him. The gloves they were wearing were sofa cushions, but even at that, had a couple of the punches Peters started landed where they were aimed for Bonneville would have been lifted clean off the gym floor and dropped over by the wall where the press boys were sitting.

Said punches, however, didn't land, nor did Peters get any further chance for funny work. Bonneville looked a little surprised at Peters' idea of a friendly boxing bout; then he grinned a crooked grin and entered into the spirit of the occasion. He lambasted Peters with more kinds of punches than there are recipes for home-brew. He feinted him into knots and then backed up, laughing, to let him untangle himself. He dropped his hands, held his jaw out for a target and then beat Peters to the punch. And remember—Peters was no dub, but a lad with two years of real fighting under his belt and a swell rep for cleverness; also, he outweighed the little Frenchman by ten or twelve pounds. And Bonneville made a monkey of him with an air of not half trying.

The glummest, saddest bird in the United States of America was our old pal Del after that demonstration. Assuming that he was only half as sick as he looked his condition would have drawn sympathy from an iron statue. Not being an iron statue, however, and knowing that he had brought it all on himself, I gave him no tears.

"Well, Del," I said to him after we'd left the gym, "as you remarked a week or so ago, none of these ignorant foreigners are any good."

"Huh!" grunted Del sadly, so low in spirit he couldn't even get mad at me. "Something's got to be done," he mumbled after a minute. "Anything you can suggest, Spike?"

"Yes," I said. "You've got four weeks before Stump and the Frenchman meet. If I was you, I'd have Stump cut out training entirely and spend the whole four weeks in prayer!"

Even that didn't get a rise out of him, and we parted, Del looking like a man whose only relative has just died, leaving a vast fortune to a hospital.

What was my surprise, then, when he shows up at the gym the next morning with his fat face one big smile, his eyes dancing and traces of a fox-trot tune humming from his lips. With him is a queer-looking, skinny bird with long hair, horn-rimmed glasses and a shabby black suit.

"Spike," calls out Del as the pair bust into the office, "shake hands with Professor Dupuis! Profess," he bids the other, "meet me old college chum, Spike Havlin! Two regular guys!" he tells us both. "You ought to get along swell!"

I shake the professor's skinny hand and he makes me a bow.

"Spike," says Del, putting his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and wiggling his fingers, "the profess here is going to win the fight for Stump!"

"Hey?" I exclaim.

"Yep," says Del. "I figgered the thing out last night and I got the profess out of a newspaper—I mean I seen his ad in one and called him up. Stump around?" he asks me suddenly.

"I haven't seen him," I said.

"Him and the profess has got to get busy right away," said Del, shaking his head wiselike. "We ain't got much time."

"Much time for what?" I asked, squinting from Del to the professor in a puzzled way. "What's the dope?"

"Oh, ain't I told you?" grunted Spike. "The profess here is going to learn Stump French."

"He's going to do what to who?" I yelped.

"Learn French to Stump," repeated Del.

"In four weeks?" I gasped. "To Stump Cassidy? French? Why, say, you half-wit, Stump's had twenty-three years to learn English and he can't talk it grammatical yet! How in—excuse me if *I* talk some French!—but how in hell is he going to get——"

"Easy!" declared Del. "We—I mean the profess just learns him enough to wise crack this Bonnyvilly guy he's to fight. See? It don't have to be much; just little things like 'Say, you frog-eating French pup! D'ye know what I'm going to do to you? I'm going to send you back to Paree in a casket!' "

"That ought to sound swell in French!" was my comment.

"Get the idea?" asked Del. "It's a good one; I thought it up myself."

"That's recommendation enough," I told him. "What's Stump think about it?"

"I ain't sprung it on him yet, but he'll be tickled pink!"

"I'll bet he will," I grinned. "Guys like Stump always appreciate having their heads exercised."

Stump showed up just about then. I thought he'd die when Del laid bare the plot of the piece.

"Hah?" he gasped. "Me learn French? Why, you're crazy! Say, you," he told the professor, "if you start pulling any of your fool frog talk on me I'll bust you one in the nose!"

"You wont do nothing of the kind!" bellowed Del, grabbing the professor just in time to prevent him taking it on the loop. "You're going to do what I say, get that? You're going to start in right now. Come on, profess," he said, taking the teacher by one arm and Stump by the other and pushing them toward the storeroom. "I'll see that this guy behaves. We're going to learn him French if we got to split his skull open and push a couple of books in through the crack!"

I wasn't let in on any of the foreign-language chin sparring that was the most prominent feature of Stump's preparation for the battle with Bonneville. Del, though, gave me daily bulletins, and, according to him, once Stump got the knack of talking through his nose he picked up French the way a stray dog picks up fleas.

"I ain't saying he's no linguist," he told me. "If he had to order his chow in French he'd probably starve to death, but he's just eating up the dope the profess is handing him! Why, say, if you heard him speak his little pieces you couldn't tell it from the real, genuine article!"

"I believe it," I said. "And I probably couldn't tell it from Greek either. But is Bonneville going to understand it?"

"I'll say so!" declared Del. "Why, the profess says Stump's got the true Parisian accent! Six little wise cracks, that's all we're learning him—but they're nifties! They'll send Bonnyvilly right out of his nut! He'll be surprised in the first place that Stump can talk his own language, and, when the stuff sinks in, he'll be clean gone! Wait and see!"

"Stump'll be up against it, though, if Bonneville starts chattering back at him," I observed.

"Huh!" grunted Del. "Stump's left jab is a come-back in any language!"

The Bonneville-Cassidy bout drew the biggest house that Charley Hankins had had in a couple of years. The event had been press-agented to a fare-thee-well, and the good, dear public fell like an anchor. I was right there at the ringside, being the guest of Wilson Snow, a lawyer who's a steady customer of my gym. During the preliminaries, Snow, who's a sport and likes to have a little bet down on the right side of things like fights, tried to draw me out on the subject of the star bout. That night, though, I couldn't steer him. I didn't know myself. Bonneville I had tabbed as a whirlwind; still, having seen what Del and Stump could accomplish with the aid of their chin-sparring specialty, I didn't want to commit myself.

Bonneville was first in the ring. He got a big hand, for the newspapers had made him popular with the fight fans, and, besides, the French-American element was attending the bout in a body.

Stump didn't draw much applause. He never did, for Del's trick of keeping him in the dressing room until the guy he was to fight got nervous also had the effect of cooling the enthusiasm of Stump's well-wishers. When he'd squirmed through the ropes, Stump looked neither to the right nor to the left, but, hopping over to Bonneville's corner, he leaned over confidentially and whispered something in the Frenchman's private ear.

Bonneville looked kind of dazed for a moment. As Del had predicted, hearing the mother tongue from the lips of Stump Cassidy shocked him plenty. He tried to pull himself together and smile and nod his head, but the attempt wasn't a success. He was still looking puzzled when Stump, after giving him a glare and a scowl, turned on his heel and made across the ring for his own corner.

Snow grabbed my arm excitedly and pointed.

"Did you see that?" he asked. "Cassidy spoke to Bonneville and Bonneville understood. Now, I know that Bonneville speaks no English, for I talked with him at his training quarters a week ago. But I wonder where that ignorant little thug Cassidy learned to talk French?"

"He's been taking French lessons," I told him, "every day since Bonneville arrived. You've read in the newspapers what a kidder he is in the ring? Well, in order to kid this Frenchman——"

"I'll be damned!" murmured Snow. "What next? But certainly a little gutter-snipe like Cassidy couldn't learn sufficient French in a few weeks to——"

"He just learned some wise cracks," I explained. "Like a parrot. When he runs out of stuff he'll have to repeat."

"This *is* interesting!" exclaimed Snow, leaning forward in his chair.

As Stump moved away from him, Bonneville pulled his manager's sleeve and whispered in his ear. La Pierre, the manager, looked just as surprised as Bonneville was when Stump spoke to him. The two of them turned toward Stump's corner, their eyes and faces full of question marks. Then they started jabbering to each other at a mile a minute, shrugging their shoulders and gesturing. Whatever the debate was about the referee cut it short by ordering them in signs to get busy adjusting the gloves.

Bonneville still looked puzzled when the gong sounded. There was no sign on him, though, of a straying goat. He was a little more cautious and careful maybe than a high-class performer has any right to be at the beginning of a bout; otherwise, though, his actions were those to be expected of a stranger fighting in a strange land.

Stump was even more cautious. He circled round Bonneville, well out of range, and watching the Frenchman like a hawk. After a half minute or so of this puss-in-the-corner work, the boys in the gallery meanwhile having hooted the absence of action, Stump spoke to Bonneville. The little Frenchman understood him all right; he looked more puzzled than he had been; but there was still no sign of a goat. On the contrary, after a few seconds Bonneville smiled and nodded, and then his left went out suddenly and caught Stump smack on the chin.

It was just a feeler—not much steam behind the blow—but the crowd howled. Stump looked kind of hurt and pained, not with the sting of the punch so much as because things weren't happening according to schedule. Here he'd worked two of his best wise cracks off on the frog and the only result he'd got was a push in the face! He backed up a step or two, set himself and then went forward again, just as carefully as before, halting a couple of feet away from the Frenchman and springing another piece of chin sparring on him. This was a long one and I got the idea that it must have been hot stuff, judging from the fierce expression on Stump's face as he growled it out.

This time, however, the dazed, puzzled look didn't come to Bonneville's face. Instead, the happy smile and shining eyes with which he greeted Stump's words seemed to indicate that he was receiving the best news in the world. And the next instant Stump found the air full of boxing gloves. Before he could get his wits together and cover up Bonneville had hit him with everything but the French flag he wore knotted around his waist.

Down at the ringside Delehanty was hopping around like a big, fat toad, tearing his

hair, waving his hands and screeching instructions to Stump. Stump, though, had too many other things to attend to to pay any attention to anything that Del thought, said or did.

I'll admit I was enjoying myself, and a couple of times I was on the point of jumping to my feet, like the other loons around me, and giving a little encouragement to the visiting fighter. Del's been a good customer of my gym and we've never had an out-and-out battle. Also, I've never had anything against Stump Cassidy. But I guess I've given you a hint before this of where my sympathies would lay on the night that Stump got up against some battler who was too hard boiled and too brainy to be wise cracked out of his goat and who would make Stump fight with his fists exclusively. And this, I'm telling you, was the night I'd been waiting for!

That boy Bonneville had more ring sense in his left hand than Stump had in his whole body, and once he let go with his stuff there was nothing to it. Not that Stump laid down to him, or anything like that. Anything but! He battled the Frenchman as long as he could lift an arm or drag one leg after the other. But he was outclassed. Del's ambition and swell-headedness had put him up against a boy who was too good for him. And in the sixth round, when a right to the jaw stretched Stump out on the canvas, I think even Del had seen enough to realize that chin sparring has a place only in the kind of battling conducted in a courtroom or over a backyard fence.

Snow and I managed to work our way into the dressing room about the time that Del and his helpers were bringing Stump to. When Stump was able to sit up in a chair and let the others help him into his clothes, Snow who had been wearing a thoughtful and inquiring kind of expression, took Del aside.

"Tell me, Mr. Delehanty," he said, after explaining to Del that I'd told him about the French lessons, "tell me just what sort of thing did Stump whisper to Bonneville in the ring?"

"Why," said Del, "it was just—er—general kind of stuff—what a bum this Bonnyvilly was, how we was going to send him back to France a cripple—that kind of stuff and a few pet names."

"H'm," grunted Snow, walking over to Stump. "Sorry, Stump," he said, shoving out his hand. "If you don't feel too bad I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Shoot!" said Stump.

"What were the names you called Bonneville in the ring?"

"Why," said Stump, "it was French talk. I said them just like the profess learned me."

"Yes," nodded Snow. "Tell me just what you said."

"Well," said Stump, "before the fight, when I went over to the frog's corner, what I said was, *'Je ne sais pas me battre. Vous gagnerez certainement.'* When the first round started I told him, *'Je suis le pire boxeur du monde.'* Then, after he clouted me the first time, I come back with, *'Vous êtes un merveilleux boxeur. Vous me faites comprendre que je ne suis qu'un novice.'* I had three more wise cracks for him, but I didn't get no chance to use them."

"Pretty speedy stuff, wasn't it, Mr. Snow?" asked Del, who was listening: "And, if this guy was human instead of being an iceberg——"

"Speedy stuff, eh?" cut in Snow with a chuckle. "It was easily that. I don't wonder Bonneville felt capable of beating Stump when he heard. I should myself if he said the same things to me."

"Bad as that, eh?" asked Del.

"Worse!" said Snow. "The first insult Stump offered to Bonneville, in his corner, translated into approximate English, means, 'I don't know how to fight. You'll surely beat me.' When they got into the center of the ring Stump hurled this terrible thing in Bonneville's teeth: 'I am the rottenest fighter in the world.' Again I translate freely. And after Bonneville had tapped Stump on the chin for the first time, Stump retaliated with. 'You are a wonderful boxer. You make me look like a dub.' So, as I said, it's small wonder that Bonneville felt encouraged to——"

A horrible roar from Del cut him off short.

"Double crossed!" he bellowed. "That dirty crook of a professor learned Stump the exact opposite of what I waned him to!"

"It would seem so, Mr. Delehanty," said Snow, choking a laugh.

"And I give him five hundred bucks for it!" wailed Del.

"Well, Del," I said, "blood's thicker than

water. You could hardly expect a Frenchman to help Stump lick one of his own kind."

"That be damned!" roared Del. "I'll murder that crook when I get a hold of him!"

But when Del went to look for him the professor had moved away. He could well afford it, for we learned later that he'd bet the five hundred he got from Del on Bonneville, which at the odds of seven to five against the Frenchman which prevailed before the fight made a pretty sweet month's take for him.

PRACTICAL ETIQUETTE

A RECENT pronouncement emanating from no less a personage than the Mayor of Cleveland deplores the impracticality of male persons who insist on removing their hats while journeying aboard public elevators in the presence of ladies. His honor suggests that this form of gallantry is gratuitous and impractical. He points out that a man carrying his hat over his stomach takes up more room than a man with his hat where it was intended to be worn. Head baring therefore in public elevators should be taboo. It is *not* gallant; it is inconsiderate; it gums the game. There is no practical excuse for it.

Soberly considered, there is much honest matter in the Cleveland pronouncement against this decrepit survival of a past generation. For that matter, in our practical business-industrial era there should be room for similar reforms in other matters of obsolete etiquette. A committee of efficiency experts ought to be appointed by somebody interested in speeding up the nation's business—Mr. Hoover, for instance—to revise the entire antiquated code of social behavior and get it on a solid practical basis. It needs to be pepped up and brought in line with present-day notions of progressive utility. We are wasting too much valuable time being polite.

Take the case of salad. There was a time when reason could be found for discarding the knife with the salad course. But that was in the days of long ago when our benighted sires lived a great deal of the time for the sole purpose of eating. The embargo on knives for the purpose of cutting lettuce permitted the gastronomic dilettantes of those days to linger gracefully over a plate of raw greens, worrying them desperately with a fork, for at least half an hour. Nowadays we know better. We eat in order to do business. The idea is to spend as little of our time allotment for overhead at the table as possible. Eating salad with a fork not only wastes time but burns up an entirely disproportionate amount of nervous energy, to boot. There is nothing more trying to the nerves. Obviously the Great Salad Maker intended the succulent leaves to be wrapped up into a workable size and conveyed to the mouth with the fingers. But that seems a bit too primitive. However, there is no practical reason on earth why the knifeless salad should continue to keep us from business.

Etiquette ought to be utilitarian. A statistician we know has figured out how much time is lost every day, in every way, in the city of Philadelphia by hopelessly meticulous gentlemen who persist in stopping to remove the right glove before consenting to shake hands, but we forget for the moment what the figure is. It is appalling anyway. And the silly custom wears out the gloves shockingly. The practice should be legislated off the books.

Then there is this absurd custom of rising when a lady comes to table. If she is late, why, she's got the vote, hasn't she? It ought to be her own lookout!

And as for giving up your seat on the local public-utility conveyance to a person of the so-called fair sex—absurd! How do you know if she's as tired as you are without asking her? And if you ask her she may want to be introduced before answering. And again, maybe she will be getting off in a couple of minutes. There is every practical reason why you should keep your seat.

This is no day and no age for the observance of nice social amenities. Chivalry is a thing of the past. Efficiency is the ideal. If courtesy interferes with business and progress let us give up courtesy, by all means!

When the Red Death Rides

By Kenneth Gilbert

In the red glare of the forest fire J. Willoughby-Wray perceived new truths.

He dropped a match when he lit his seegar,
And it fell in a bunch uv grass.
And then he went on to shoot his b'ar,
In the distant mounting pass.
And the wind it riz, and the fire it spread,
Till it went all over the patch;
And the melted pants button they found was his—
The feller that dropped the match!
—*Verse found in an old ranger cabin.*

A YOUNG man sat on a rock, and meditated deeply, darkly and somewhat defiantly.

J. Willoughby-Wray, inheritor of his father's millions, and what his grizzled old guide, Joe Prentiss, termed a "double-action" name, in his leisure moments liked to fancy himself a sort of Old World manor lord. He had money, which gave him power; and he had a ducal estate, comprising thousands of wooded acres dotted with sawmills, in a certain large northwest fraction of the Union. Men kotowed to him, ran his errands, interpreted his wishes; and he bound these lobbygows to him with largess. Aside from the solicitous service his wealth naturally commanded in the halls and palaces of civilization, extra attention followed him to the wilds. There are lobbygows in the livery of Mackinaw coat, corduroy trousers and knee boots. They carried his guns, drove game to him, found the trout holes, built his fires and cooked his meals. They kept him dry in rain and sheltered from extreme heat or cold. It was all very satisfying and soothing; and in day-dreams J. Willoughby-Wray could almost see himself holding the power of life and death over a following of humans, just as did the old feudal lords—as he did, indeed, over the countless wild animals inhabiting his vast preserves.

And yet he was likable. He was merely a horsy young man, undeniably good looking, in a wholesomely pink-and-white way, whose energies found outlet along sporting, outdoor lines. He kept a stable of fine hunters, while his blue-blooded Airedales—a rough-coated, clean-limbed fighting stock that would naturally appeal to his type—had taken many trophies. The more independent and worth while of his friends declared that the only thing he lacked of being a prince was too much money; a paradoxical conclusion that could hardly be improved upon.

Yet there were two persons with whom he could not get away with it. One was old Joe Prentiss, the aforementioned guide, who feared nothing that walked and breathed, whether it were clad in the grizzled fur of a silvertip or the purple and fine raiment of a too-wealthy young man. If young Mr. Willoughby-Wray ever asked old Joe for an opinion he got it, with disturbing candor.

Secretly, the young manor lord admired the old fellow immensely, though the latter often shocked him. The lobbygow guides never understood the why of old Joe's "drag."

Faith Templeton likewise seemed dismayingly unimpressed. Yet Wray's admiration for her was not founded on that fact; it was based upon a divine passion that had the eternal zest of chase. Faith's father owned almost as many wooded acres and mills as did Wray, which placed the young man of millions at scratch in the race. She loved the great somber forests of towering firs and cedars; the wild, undammed mountain torrents, the coldly clear, shimmering lakes—and all the feathered and furred kindred, and striped and speckled piscatorial beauties therein. If ever she ate trout it was when she had not seen them caught; and as for game, it was at her long insistence that her lumber-king father caused his great holdings to be converted into a Federal reserve and refuge.

Young Wray hoped to understand her. His relaxations from business, which were so frequent as to be almost continuous, invariably took him to the woods: fly fishing until the upland bird and deer season opened; then duck shooting on the salt-water flats until the snow lay deep enough in the mountains for good cougar tracking; and after that came steelhead fishing until the snow vanished and the trout began rising—a perennial sportsman's delight. It would be expecting too much to suppose that his conversation was not tinctured with accounts of these achievements. That explained why Faith and he often quarreled. She was blunt in speaking of men who slew not for food, but pleasure; and he felt that she was unjust. He often told himself that for the life of him, he couldn't see why he persisted in hanging around her—unless it was because he loved the girl. Nor did she ever seem to encourage him, but kept him dangling; and until recently he had not dreamed he was making headway. Just as he had victory in sight there occurred the usual flare-up, but more schismatic this time. She had left him abruptly, while he, huffily, had flung himself off to lose care in the dreamy, smoky, Indian-summery September woods. The breach had opened over nothing more important than a brace of grouse he had shot with his new English-make rifle.

"Cut off their heads at thirty yards!" he boasted, holding them up for her inspection. They were a bit mussy, and their handsome, mottled feathers were rumpled—but what were two grouse, anyway; particularly when they had belonged to him—shot on his own land? Certainly not enough to justify her acting as she did.

"Poor birds!" He would have given much to have had bestowed on himself the tender, compassionate look she gave the dead grouse pair. Then she looked up with flashing eyes. "How would you like to have some one shoot at you with a cannon at thirty yards?

"Jim"—her use of the name usually presaged for him the stormiest storm or the sunniest sunshine—"you're a born slayer of beautiful things—a cruel, overgrown boy!

"I believe that any one who would wantonly take an innocent life would as thoughtlessly kill a fine impulse or a high ideal—as easily as crushing a flower.

"Until you have changed—and you never will change until you can *know* and *feel*—I never want to see you!" It was the nearest she had ever come to admitting that she was the least interested in ever seeing him.

Whereupon he had tossed the grouse—the source of the trouble—to a passing boy and had gone up to Prentiss' place in the Cascades to think it out.

The old guide masked his surprise. Usually when J. Willoughby-Wray arrived at the camp to grace it for a week or two it was at the head of an imposing retinue, with flourish of trumpet and hautboy. This day, however, he merely arrived.

He stood the new rifle in a corner of the cabin and felt for his pipe, while Joe hospitably shoved a half-filled tobacco tin toward him. It was not the guide's way to ask why or wherefore; a man usually said what he wanted to say when he got ready to say it, Joe reasoned, and the old guide, who followed the rule religiously, never pressed one with questions.

"Joe," said Wray, when his brier was going, "I'm hunting alone this time. I'm sick of being coddled by a lot of guides. Why, I've got more gun bearers, beaters, trackers, packers and cooks and the like than a maharajah on a royal tiger hunt!"

"You said *guides*," interposed Joe. "Ever see me coddle yuh?"

"Can't say that I ever did——"

"Then you're not talkin' about guides," the other broke in. "You're speakin' about

some fellers that hang out in the woods now and then."

Wray grinned.

"Anyway, I'm going out to-morrow morning, alone, at daylight. May be gone a week. Fix me up a pack and enough grub, will you?"

Old Joe looked skeptical.

"Goin' to pack it yourself?" Wray nodded. "Then I'll put up enough grub for three days. That'll make all the load you'll want to tote."

Inwardly, the guide was worried. He knew that Wray, unused to relying upon himself in the woods, was little better than a greenhorn. The greenhorns have no place unguarded in the seemingly endless reaches of the Northwest wilds. Joe wished to know where the other was going, but it was against his training to elicit such information with a direct question.

"Bear shootin' ought to be good in the Lake Wilderness country," he hazarded. "They'll be workin' in the blackberries along the hogbacks this time o' year. Still, it's a bad place to be ketched in by a forest fire, and it seems to me the smoke is gettin' thicker every day."

"That's where I'm going," said Wray. "And after bear, too."

"Then you be keerful with your fires, mister," enjoined Joe. "Be sure they're plumb out when you leave 'em; and watch your cigareet butts. Them tailor-made things you sometimes smoke will lay there and burn clear down to the end."

And so J. Willoughby-Wray sat on a rock and communed with himself.

It was early in a lazy afternoon, sultry with the warmth of Indian summer, and the atmosphere choking with the haze of distant fires; and the pack he had been carrying had incredibly developed weight during the last three miles. The rock invited and Wray was glad of the opportunity to rest and munch a sandwich, although it was a dry meal. The woods were brittle and crackly from the long drought; there was not so much as a pool of surface water where he might wet his lips; and he had neglected to bring along a canteen. Yet he guessed that the lake could not be more than three or four miles ahead.

So he sat and smoked many cigarettes and pipes, while he cogitated. Always his thoughts returned to Faith. Her position awoke his stubbornness. Womanlike, she was overly sentimental, he decided. He suspected that she liked him, or had, yet now she was willing to sacrifice that feeling for no better reason than she disliked to see wild things slain; begrudged him a single red-blooded, atavistic pleasure that has followed man down the ages—and one that many women to this day enjoy. She had said she never wished to see him again until he had "changed," until he could "feel." What could she mean by that?

Presently he observed that a light breeze had sprung up from the southward. It was still a good hike to the lake and he wanted to reach it in plenty of time to build a camp before dark. With true spartan spirit, therefore, he again shouldered the pack, wincing a bit as the straps chafed his sore muscles, and set out.

It was yet afternoon when he came out upon the shore and viewed with the pride of possession the placid little body of water and its forbidding shore line of fir and cedar forest that had never known the ax. This was his lake—his land.

The lake was perhaps a half mile long, and a quarter mile in width. Almost in the middle of it was set a tiny island, virtually a low sand bar, but covered with thick willows. Wray looked longingly at the island and wished for a boat. Though it would be cramped for camping he sensed a lonely evening ahead; and not for nothing were moats dug about feudal castles. Always when he had been in the wilds before it was with companions; and their presence gave a feeling of security the great trees that loomed overhead and the ominous depths of shadows could not drive away. He wished now he had not stamped off in such a hurry; that he had at least brought one of the Airedales. The dog would have provided a comradeship keenly lacking just now.

However he was in for it. One night in the woods and he would be at home, he told himself. To-morrow he would set out for the hogbacks beyond the lake and round up a bear. A good skin would prove a valuable addition to his collection of trophies; and especially one taken under such circumstances. Even his best friends could not poke fun at him as they were wont to do; saying that it was in reality the guides who brought in the game by driving it within range of Wray's rifle.

Remembering something of the manner in which his men set about preparing a camp he took his belt ax and hewed saplings for the uprights of his shelter. Once these were in place, providing the skeleton of a windbreak, with the open side toward the fire, he collected fragrant tips of cedar boughs. With these he crudely thatched the sloping roof and ends; and then carried more of them for a couch. When he had finished it was dark. The bed seemed strangely hard—apparently there was a knack in constructing it of which he was unaware—but it would do. Also he was tremendously hungry.

At last, with the coffeepot giving off appetizing odors and bacon sizzling in the pan, Wray began to experience a feeling of reliance he had never known before in the woods. He hastily gulped the meal and although the coffee turned out to be bitterly strong and the bacon burned he would have sworn that never had he tasted anything finer. He rolled himself in the blankets, smoked three cigarettes, and sought slumber.

Right then and there he felt the desolation of the place. A night wind, still from the south—in the direction he had come—breathed through the trees with a mournful, sighing sound; as though ghostly fingers were brushing astral harps. With the dying of his fire the black shadows from the encroaching thickets seemed to creep out stealthily to surround him. Save for the appetent song of the breeze overhead the silence seemed oppressive, choking. The haze in the air made breathing difficult; it stung his nostrils and throat with an acrid pungency until he began to yearn for a cool and sweet draft of untainted air. But at last he overcame it all, as his wearied physique peremptorily demanded the surcease of sleep.

He awoke with a start; almost it seemed that a tiny tocsin of alarm had been clanging away in his brain for a long time. His first sensation was of a splitting headache—so much for trying to sleep in all this smoke. Then to his ears came an ominous crackling, like the distant wavering roll of musketry, and instantly he was wide-eyed and sitting up.

The woods were ablaze!

He sprang to his feet to see, stretching to right and left, hemming him in, a wavering line of fire, and in the murk of haze and night the twisting, writhing flames appeared like the grotesque figures of leaping, dancing savages. The wind still blew from the south—bringing the fire with it! The place where he had eaten lunch, and smoked—he had forgotten then old Joe's words of warning about cigarette butts! He remembered now; and how, unlike a true woodsman, he had failed to stamp out the smoldering tobacco; some one had always performed such minor acts of caution for him. In one flashing moment it seemed to him that the somber forest had come to life vindictively, as if determined to deliver him to the monster of his own creation; the slave that he had thoughtlessly freed to become master and whose far-flung line of galloping red cohorts was now laying waste the land, and with it nature's slow and painful labors of a hundred years.

He retreated in panic before the advancing flames. He must run before he was overtaken or cut off! The smoke was now so thick that he could scarcely see; his tortured lungs cried for air. If not actually trapped and burned he would suffocate, he knew. Yet there was a chance——

He took three steps and tripped and fell—with a splash! The lake—God be thanked—the lake; he had forgotten it in his fright. It was bitterly cold and the chill of it set him shivering; but he had heard that near the surface of water the air usually is purest. Boldly he waded out, up to his armpits.

Suddenly the bottom seemed to drop away, and with a gurgle he went down and came up swimming. He quickly paddled back to where he could again touch ground, and stood there shaking, his head just above water.

At the end of five minutes he knew that it would never do. There was now no retreat to shore—he saw the blaze feeding on the resinous boughs with which he had thatched his shelter—while the fire seemed to have completely surrounded the lake. Yet if he stayed in the water much longer he knew he would die of cold; already he felt the symptoms of approaching cramp, a numbness creeping up his legs. Then a hundred yards down the shore, just ahead of a wall of fire that hurried toward the beach, there was a crashing of brush, and a resounding splash. Something had leaped into the water. Almost immediately Wray

saw a wide, V-shaped ripple that broadened as it moved toward the center of the lake. At the very point of the angle he descried luminous eyes, a grayish-white head, and large ears laid backward. A deer! But why was it striking across the lake, when it must know that the opposite shore was already a seething inferno of falling embers and licking tongues of flame?

But even as he asked himself the question Wray knew the answer. The deer was pointing the way! The animal was making for the tiny island—the only spot in all this scourged land that was still habitable. And in that moment the man knew hope still lived.

He quickly stripped off his heavy shoes and stood in his shirt, trousers and socks. Clothing is a tremendous handicap in the water, yet Wray foresaw that he must have some protection against the air when he emerged at the island. He knew, moreover, that he was a strong swimmer, and the distance was not great. He struck out.

The exertion quickly sent a glow through him. As he drew away from shore he found the air freer of smoke. Confidently he drove himself through the water, yet swim as he would he could not overtake the point of that ripple ahead. Soon the deer went floundering through the brush, and a few minutes later he, too, felt sand. Dripping and a little winded, but joyously grateful, he plunged ahead, eager to stand in the center of this single oasis in a desert of flame and defy the element to do its worst. What a story he'd have to tell when he got back!

He blundered noisily through the screening willows along the shore and suddenly stopped stark; the roots of his hair prickling, and a freezing sensation coursing up and down his spine. To his ears came a low, ripping snarl—from some animal so close that he felt he could reach out and touch it. He half turned and his hand involuntarily flew to his mouth as he choked a scream of fear. Within four feet of him, all but hidden by the drooping willows, lay *something* with lambent eyes in which greenish-yellow flame seemed to wax and wane. He moved ever so little and again came the snarl; a muttering, sobbing note that swept up the scale toward a high crescendo, but wavered and subsided as he froze. Cautiously he began to back away.

God, he was in the midst of a menagerie! Eyes gleamed at him from almost every point. The reflection from the fire ring about the lake struck sparks in the depths of the darkest shadows—beneath the drooping willow clumps, and overhead. Limbs seemed to sway unnaturally, as if *things* moved stealthily along them; there were ominous rustlings in the dried leaves. Why, the place was fairly a-crawl! And every pair of twin lamps seemed turned, not at one another, but on the greatest enemy of all—man—who had come among them.

Though it was too dark to distinguish the forms of the animals, an instinct transmitted through untold ages—something he never would have dreamed he possessed—awoke within him. From his first fear he slipped swiftly into a state bordering on calm assurance. He, man, though the most helpless creature of them all when stripped of the tools and weapons his brain had given them, still had that brain—he was master of them all. And perhaps it was his imagination, but it seemed to him that with the thought came a change in the glowing orbs about him. They had signaled hatred, danger—and now they reflected fear! So sure of it he was that he all but laughed—he recalled what he had read of animals being able to smell fear through some chemical action in the human body which only their keen noses can detect. His ancestors beyond the days of the cave men had taught their ancestors that man was to be avoided, that he personified death. And the lesson was unforgetable.

The same apperception of something from the vague past now sharpened his intuition. Somehow he knew which animal possessed each pair of eyes. Those softened, mild, yellow ones—they belonged to a deer, perhaps the one that had led him to this spot; and there were a number of such pairs. Those greenish-yellow, twin drops of fire, of utter intensity of gaze, belonged to a lynx, or a wild cat; perhaps a cougar. Those of more reddish flame he guessed were of bear. And there was no mistaking the steadfast, malevolent, sea-green light of the timber wolf—there was less fear in those eyes than in the others. Tinier orbs he decided were of raccoons.

Yet he felt a sudden comradeship for all of them. Catastrophe had drawn them together as perhaps they would never be drawn together again. Nature had struck a truce and in this hour the differences of these animals were wiped out. A greater

fear—that of fire; greater even than that of man—drove predacious hatred from their hearts. The deer stood within six paces of the timber wolf and was confident, unafraid. Wray, in a burst of generous spirit, told himself that hunger would pinch all of them hard ere the armistice would be broken.

Abruptly the twin lamps flickered and turned from him. He had heard nothing, yet he knew that keen ears had recorded a new sound. Then there came to him a faint splash; and, as if at a signal, the pitch-soaked stub of a lightning-blasted fir on the mainland, flamed like a giant torch, casting a baleful, ruddy glow over the entire lake. By the flare of it Wray saw something that set his heart thumping.

Coming out of the water was a cougar, carrying something limp and dangling from her jaws. It squirmed and Wray saw that it was one of her kittens. He recalled what old Joe Prentiss had told him; that cougar kittens are born at almost any season, like house cats. More, that there are usually three or four to a litter. This, he guessed, would be her first-born; and he had a queer feeling of sympathy for her and the heart-rending decision she had made when it became apparent that but one of her babies could be carried to safety.

By the light of the blazing beacon on shore he saw more clearly the animals about him. There were five or six deer, two of them late fawns, their hides still spotted; a trio of wild cats, and a lynx; one bear, a pair of wolves. Likewise smaller animals. And now the cougar.

Yet the great cat needed no artificial light to distinguish these objects. She saw them all—and the man. She dropped the kitten and stared questioningly at him, her cutting incisors half bared in a soundless snarl of warning; but as he stood moveless she apparently decided that he, too, would keep the truce. The kitten she carried to a spot beneath a screening clump; a bed hastily evacuated by a raccoon, yet she offered no harm to the lesser animal, although a single stroke of her huge, knife-set forepaw would have killed him instantly. There she curled up comfortably while the kitten petulantly sought nourishing payment for the wetting and handling he had received. The first-born was to live despite the red death that rode on the wings of the wind.

Wray felt his muscles aching from standing long in the same position. He was unafraid now, but he would not alarm his neighbors, although he must sit down, rest. Cautiously, and with an ingenuous harmlessness in his movements, as one will in seeking to approach and soothe an excited horse, he moved farther up the shore. Instantly all eyes were fixed on him suspiciously, although no sound was made. At last he reached a spot at the base of a large willow whose trunk was the thickness of his calf. Glancing upward, he saw, draped along a limb almost above him, the form of a cat, with tasseled ears that revealed his identity as a lynx, and one Wray had not catalogued at first. Yet the man calmly seated himself on the sand, rested himself against the trunk, and amusedly gave back stare for stare.

And presently the flame in the luminous ring of eyes gave way to something softer and more peaceful. Here was an idyllic spot, with fear and hatred driven out. Wray yawned and almost dozed, yet he knew that under the circumstances he would be violating a rule of the wild; and to-night he was a throw back of the great woods, merely one of the creatures there in.

He smiled and his lips noiselessly formed words.

"Pals—we're all pals to-night. By the law of the land you all belong to me; you, on my soil, are my legitimate prey. Yet that's a damned lie. You belong to Something beyond the power of man, despite his wonderful brain, to understand. You belong to the Infinite—the Grand Plan—the intangible yet intransigent thing that has survived since life appeared on earth.

"Preyers and preyed upon, you've all a right to existence, as much as any man animal that walks the earth. You've killed only for hunger's sake; I've killed only for sport. I've broken a law more important than any statute in man-made books.

"And Faith said that I would never change, because I could not know, and feel. That's a debt of gratitude I owe you!"

So passed the night; and at last the smoke clouds lightened with dawn. The fire had swept on, leaving a wake of hot ashes and smoking embers. But with the light came a faint drizzle that presently became a downpour, and Wray knew that Fate was softening her blow at the wilderness. The animals, too, appeared to sense what the rain meant—that once more they could

seek the mainland—and they began to move restlessly in the narrow confines of the island. Yet it was not so much fear that the armistice might be abruptly shattered as an idealistic desire to keep the picture intact that made Wray cautiously get up, work his way to the water, and slip in.

Once more he was on the shore, dripping, intensely hungry and cold, but knowing that he could make Joe's camp within six hours if he hurried. He guessed, too, that Joe would be out with the rain, searching for him. Through the warm, steaming and now harmless woods he set off.

As he went he almost sang in his jubilance. He knew now that he understood Faith; and with that understanding he saw the pathway of his heart's desire stretching before him like a smooth trail that beckoned him on.

More stories of the outdoors by Mr. Gilbert in early issues.

LITERARY MEDICINE

AT a recent gathering of the British Royal College of Surgeons the guest of honor was neither a surgeon nor a physician. He was a writer—Rudyard Kipling. And he explained his presence in that apparently alien company by claiming fellowship with the disciples of Hippocrates and John Hunter.

"I am, by calling, a dealer in words," said Kipling, "and words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

There is a suggestion here upon which the medical profession should seize eagerly. Why not, as the eminent dean of English fiction would seem to hint, develop a technique of literary pathology and prescribe good books instead of bad medicine?

There is at least this much in favor of good books, that they never hurt anybody. Whereas, with the products of the pharmacopœia there is no telling—what cures one man may kill another. And again, doctors assure us that in the treatment of most maladies the principal thing is to keep the patient quiet and cheerful and let him get well himself. What is better calculated to keep a man quiet and cheerful than a good book?

Imagine, for example, the delight of the medicine-ridden anæmic whose physician, bustling into the sick room some bright morning, tells him to throw his hateful potions and powders in the trash box and substitute as a tonic, say, "The Three Musketeers," to be followed by "The Garden of God" and "The Island that Nobody Leaves!"

Or conjure up a scene something like this:

"Doctor, my nerves are in awful shape. Noises make me jump. Can't work by day and can't sleep by night!"

"Didn't that bromide I prescribed help any, Mr. Smith?"

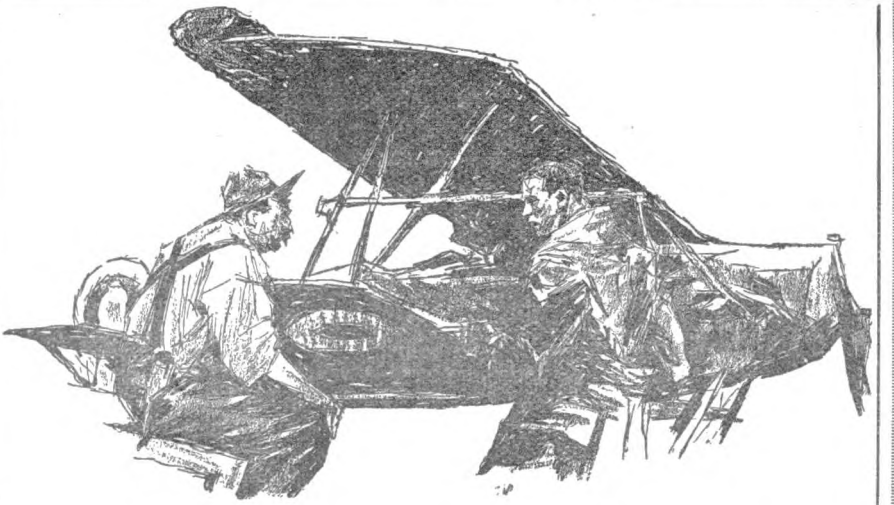
"Not a particle."

"Well, we'd better try something drastic. Take this prescription around to Brown's bookstore. Read twenty pages of Knibbs or Kauffman every evening after dinner. That will stimulate your circulation and get your digestion functioning. Then take one or two humorous stories—McMorrow or Artemus Ward. They'll make you forget worry. Follow with a hot shower, a brisk rub, and bed. When you are in bed read Spencer's 'First Principles.' Six pages are usually enough to cure the most stubborn cases of insomnia. If this treatment fails I'm afraid we'll have to send you to a sanitarium."

If any doctor ever treated us so royally and with such discerning sympathy we should feel half cured before we left his office.

Books are powerful specifics. Bad books have bred vice and incited crime; good books have built success and inspired heroism; and it seems entirely possible, as Mr. Kipling suggests, that the right kind of reading may also be turned to the promotion of health.

Stranger developments than this, and of less apparent logic, have modified the trend of medical practice many times over since the distant days when the Father of Doctors first taught the healing art in ancient Greece.



The Crew Chief States

By Kenneth Latour

AN airplane and a woman
They are mighty much the same.
If you know the airplane's fancies
You can play the other game;
The rules that guide the pilot
Are the rules a man must know
If he wants to fly a course o' love
The way the course should go.

The rules a ship will mind to
Are the laws a lass will brook,
But you've got to learn 'em firsthand
For they ain't in any book.
No ship flies like its sister;
No two sweethearts are the same;
And the ways that please the wild ones
Are not bound to win the tame.

Still, there's certain points are useful
When you take a new ship out;
They will get you past the take-off,
With the bomber or the scout.
And the rule that never alters—
It has saved a many skin—
Is to check her over careful,
Counting every cotter pin.

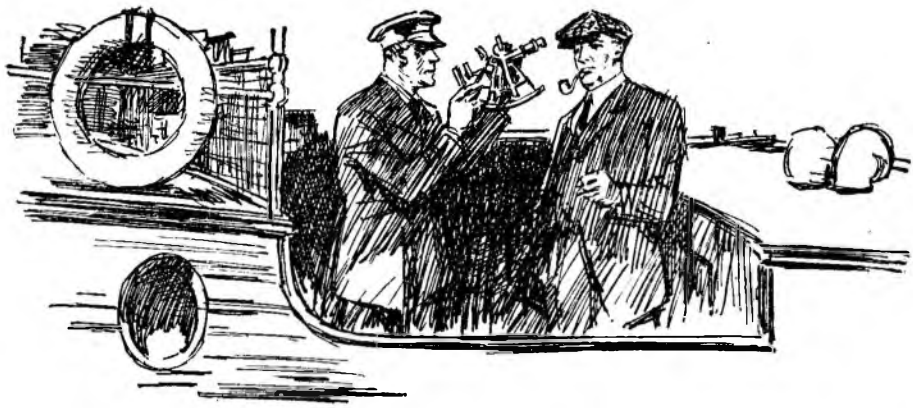
Which is much the same as sayin'
  Watch your step on little things;
With an airplane or a woman
  It's the trifles clips your wings.
You can *hear* a warped valve coughing,
  And your gauges on the dash
Will give your eyes a warning
  When you're heading for a crash.

But the tricky little cotter pins
  That lock the nuts in place—
That is to say the whimsies
  Of the lady in the case—
They don't give any signals
  When you let them rust and rot;
They just snap—and there's your airplane
  Spread around an acre lot.

There are things about an airplane—
  And a girl's a lot like that—
That you see without half looking,
  If you know what you are at;
A big thing like an engine
  With a broken piston ring
Or a busted shock absorber
  Or a flying wire or wing;

But the humble little cotter pins
  They nestle out of sight;
And the works would cave and crumple
  If they wasn't seated tight.
They're small and insignificant
  To look at with the eye
But without the pesky little things
  It ain't good health to fly.

An airplane and a woman, mind,
  Are handled much the same.
If you know the airplane's fancies
  You can play the other game.
But remember what I tell you
  If you want to play it through—
Don't forget the little cotter pins
  Whatever else you do!



Dead Reckoning

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Dream Fan," "The Ring and the Girl," Etc.

The Great Macumber lays the evil spirit of the *Picaroon*.

TELEPHONE messages, as our operators at the Hotel Rawley are wont to jot them down in the absence of the guest inquired for, follow a form most provocative to the imagination. On a switchboard busy enough to keep the minds of any two capable girls off their back hair the management sees fit to employ only one to the shift; and the same tendency to hold expenses within bounds is evidenced in the size of the call slips, which permit the penciling of only the meagerest memoranda.

Some queer communiqués, you may be sure, have found their way into the box shared by the Great Macumber and myself in consequence of this characteristic item of thrift in the conduct of the Rawley, for Macumber's penchant for playing detective brings us not only innumerable weird visitors but often an avalanche of cabalistic calls. Queerest of all, though, I'd say, was one message of three words which lay with a miscellany of mail awaiting our return from a brief early-September fishing trip. The words—and I reproduce as well the orthography of the harassed operator—were:

"Macaroons. To-morrow. Urjent."

The Great One handed the call slip to me without comment. He was blithely extracting a half dollar from the nose of the bell boy who had snatched up our bags when I lifted puzzled eyes to his; never does he by any chance produce a tip in orthodox fashion from his own change pocket.

"What an odd place to carry money!" he exclaimed. "Don't you find it uncomfortable? Put the coin in your pocket, Clarence."

Macumber exchanged a smile with the room clerk, for whose benefit and to whose bewilderment he is forever staging such simple feats of extempore magic at the Rawley's desk, then soberly asked me:

"Would you be good enough, lad, to decode for me the cryptogram of the macaroons? What does it mean? Give me your frank opinion."

"Its meaning could not be clearer," said I. "The memorandum is prima facie evidence of the insanity of Mr. Jeremiah Spofford, which appears to be the name of the gentleman from whom it comes. Who is he, anyway?"

"I don't know any Jeremiah Spofford, I'm sure. Yet the message seems to me sufficiently intelligent, everything considered."

"It does? Then what is its meaning to you, maestro?"

"Why, it's an invitation to join a yachting party, of course," replied Macumber serenely.

"A yachting party?"

"What else could it be? Wouldn't you enjoy a trip into the Caribbean at this time of year, lad?"

I threw up my hands.

"You say you don't know Jeremiah Spofford, and yet you read all this in the man's mere suggestion of the urgency of almond cakes?"

Macumber grinned.

"I don't know Jeremiah Spofford," he said, "but I do know Jeremy Southard. And I know also the catch-as-catch-can practices of the phone girls. They do their best, poor youngsters, at names and at messages. Who but Jeremy Southard could this twisted 'Spofford' be?"

"I've known our operators to come farther away from a name," I admitted. And I had little doubt that the Great One's guess, in that respect at least, was correct; for Jeremy Southard I knew as an outstanding figure in that coterie of wealthy patrons who are pleased to command the talents and proud to claim the friendship of the Great Macumber.

"For a girl trying to answer a half dozen calls at the same time," said Macumber, "our little operator has done nobly. We're absolutely safe in assuming it was Jeremy who tried to get us on the telephone this afternoon."

"But Mr. Southard has no yacht," I protested; "and I don't see——"

"It's true that Jeremy was a yachtless millionaire when last we saw him, lad. That's three months ago. He's bought one since. A quite recent Wall Street failure put the vessel on the market, and the Sunday *Sphere* published a photo of her in the gravure section when Southard acquired her. You miss all sorts of information, you see, by not following the current news more closely."

"As you've often pointed out," I murmured. "Yet, now that I share your knowledge I still fail to see the connection between the Southard yacht and macaroons."

The Great One shrugged and started toward the elevator.

"I merely make due allowance for errors in transmission of Jeremy's message. The name of the yacht he now owns is the *Picaroon;* and unless I'm vastly mistaken Southard is starting away aboard her tomorrow and craves our company on the voyage."

"You suggested it would be a voyage into the Caribbean. Why do you——"

"A guess," explained Macumber, "based on another bit of information gleaned from the caption accompanying the picture of the *Picaroon.* With the yacht, Jeremy purchased an island in that enchanted sea. What destination would be more natural than his island?"

"Your whole chain seems to me rather fragile," I told him as he flung open the door of the hotel suite which so long had been home to both of us. "What particular urgency should there be in an invitation to go cruising?"

The Great One flung himself into his favorite chair and reached a lean hand toward the tobacco jar.

"That remains to be seen, lad," said he. "I'll not deny that you've hit on the feature of Jeremy's message which most particularly arouses my curiosity. He's not the man to use lightly such a word as 'urgent.' And since he's evidently so anxious to have us with him aboard the *Picaroon,* I suspect it will not be long before we—*hullo!*"

Our telephone bell had sounded as Macumber put his pipe between his teeth and drew the match tray toward him. He jumped up, motioning me back, and strode to the phone. What he heard brought an eager light into his face, and while the brittle voice still was reverberating in the receiver, he cut in:

"Yes; we've just got into town. I was expecting to hear from you directly. You're down in the lobby, you say? Come on up, Jeremy, come up!"

II.

Five minutes later Jeremy Southard's bulky six-foot frame was sprawled comfortably out on our lounge and Macumber was shooting at me a glance freighted with complaisance. For Southard, the commonplaces of greeting done with, had calmly announced:

"I'm starting off on a cruise to-morrow—and I'm counting on both of you to be with me!"

"That's interesting," said the Great One. "I don't suppose it has occurred to you that the notice you give is rather short?"

"That can't be helped, in the circumstances," Southard told him. "The fact is that a certain business engagement of mine

in Havana—a sugar deal, as I perhaps do not need to tell you—has been set a fortnight ahead. That makes necessary an immediate departure, for I'm going to make the trip in the *Picaroon* and plan to run over to Poydras first. Did you know, Macumber, that I've become monarch of an island kingdom in the Caribbean since our last little forgathering?"

The Great One nodded.

"I can claim to know almost everything that the newspapers consider important enough to tell about," said he. "It was a sort of job lot you picked up, wasn't it, Jeremy—yacht and island together?"

"Both for the price of one. Poor Terwilliger had to let go of pretty much everything he owned."

Macumber studied our visitor through half-closed eyes.

"And which is it, Jeremy," he asked softly, "that you're having trouble with—the yacht or the island?"

Southard, a man notable for self-possession, returned his gaze innocently.

"You've a suspicious nature, Macumber," he said. "Must all who seek your company have some ulterior motive?"

"I'm curious to know what makes you so infernally anxious to take me along, that's all. It has been my experience that friends who seek me out either want me to entertain very special guests of theirs with legerdemain, or think I might be useful to them in that other field into which chance has quite often led my footsteps. Am I to assume that you add me to the *Picaroon's* company in the capacity of unsalaried entertainer? Or would there be some mystery of Poydras Island you'd wish to have me inves——"

"It isn't the island," Jeremy Southard assured him. "Everything goes well there. I'm building me a home on it that will make as fine a wintering place as a lover of solitude and the open sea could hope to have. No, Poydras is no isle of mystery, Macumber; but I'm damned if I haven't come to believe that the *Picaroon* is a mystery ship!"

The Great One moved about in his chair to face him squarely.

"Your invitation gathers weight," he said cheerfully. "Please run right ahead while you're on the subject and tell me what's wrong with the yacht."

"Enough to convince me that she may not have been so great a bargain as she appeared. She's surely got a 'ha'nt,' Macumber, as the negroes in the South say."

"Rats!" remarked Macumber, and he grinned at Southard's quick look of indignation. "Oh, no, Jeremy, I use the word not as the scornful expletive but as a suggestion. I've heard of ghostly happenings on shipboard that have been traced eventually to the vessel's rodent population."

Southard selected a speckled cigar from his case.

"It's a strange lot of rats the *Picaroon* carries if they're to blame for the queer things that have been happening," he remarked. "What sort of rats would be shouting with human voices in mid-sea? You have an answer ready, I suppose?"

The Great One shook his head.

"Not at the tip of my tongue, at any rate. Go ahead by all means, Jeremy. You've made a wonderful beginning."

"And I presume," pursued Southard, "that you've heard of rats who go in for rifle practice at midnight?"

"Don't stop, Jeremy. You're doing yourself proud. What else?"

"Well, I don't imagine you'd put it beyond a crew of seagoing rats to lower a boat occasionally and row away into the night?"

"The very apex of rat achievement," sighed Macumber.

"No," objected the owner of the *Picaroon,* "we've not come to the apex yet. Would it not be still more remarkable for rats to carry away men?"

"It would," agreed the Great One soberly. "Your point, whatever it may be, is carried. I withdraw the rat suggestion. Do you mean to tell me you've been losing men off your yacht, Jeremy?"

"Four to date—four men and two boats."

Macumber looked at him keenly, his eyes now open wide.

"You're not yarning, Southard? No, by Jove, you're not! Let's have no more indirection. My curiosity is plentifully whetted and you can be certain sure of your audience's attention. So light up that cigar, Jeremy, and let me hear about these goings-on aboard the *Picaroon.*"

Southard sat up on the lounge.

"No, I'll not smoke," said he. "My doctor limits me to two cigars a day and the quota's exhausted. Until to-morrow I'll have to be a dry smoker. But I'll tell you, nevertheless, the story of the *Picaroon* so

far as she has developed one under my ownership. I'd have given a great deal to have had you aboard last trip, Macumber. I was——"

"How many trips have you made in her, Jeremy?" asked the Great One.

"Just two."

"To your Poydras Island?"

"That was the objective both times."

"And it was on the second trip that the boats and the men were lost?"

"No. Two men and a boat vanished on each voyage."

"*Vanished,* Jeremy?"

"That's the word for it."

"You'd raised a picture of another sort in my mind—I'd a notion the *Picaroon* had nosed into a storm with you."

"No; we've encountered nothing but the finest weather thus far. The boats and the men simply disappeared between days."

"And what about the shooting and the shouting? You were serious in speaking of that?"

"Absolutely. I'll give you the yarn from start to finish. It's a little more than two months ago, you know, that I bought the *Picaroon* from Terry Terwilliger. I was naturally anxious to have a look at the island, which I'd purchased as a pig in a poke at Terwilliger's urging, and a couple of days later I started toward the Caribbean."

"With the old crew?" queried Macumber.

"Substantially. Terwilliger's sailing master had given him notice some weeks before the yacht changed hands. He had been waiting for a likely berth to open up in the merchant-marine service. Now, I understand, he has command of one of the smaller Pacific liners. I replaced him with a down-East skipper who came to me very highly recommended by the firm of yacht brokers through whom I bought the *Picaroon.*

"The first five days of the voyage were uneventful. I got a real rest and felt so much better for it that I became more and more satisfied with my investment with each new day. I'd been suffering a bit from insomnia. The good salt air cured that. I'd turn in before ten o'clock and sleep like a top. After the first couple of nights I slept straight through until breakfast time."

"You had no company?"

"No, and I thanked Heaven I hadn't. What I needed was to get away from affairs and people. It wasn't until the fifth night that my sleep was broken. The night was warm and the ports of my room stood open. I was awakened by what seemed a confusion of high-pitched voices?"

"Aboard the *Picaroon?*"

"No; the noise appeared to come from across the water."

"From another vessel?"

"I presume so. But I saw no lights. When I was fully awake there was only the echo of the shouting in my ears. I thought then that I had been dreaming and I would still think so had the boat not been missing next morning."

"So," said Macumber, "that was the night the boat vanished?"

"That very night. Captain Walcott came to me with a face full of concern while I was at breakfast. 'We're shy a boat this morning, sir,' he said. I didn't understand what he was driving at. 'How can that be?' I asked him.

"'Well, sir,' replied Walcott, 'the cutter was lowered away at some time during the night, and two of the crew went on in her. As near as I could say they've deserted—and they picked a mighty funny place, sir, to take French leave of us.'"

Macumber leaned forward.

"And what place was it, Jeremy?" he demanded.

"By the captain's calculations we must have been at least a hundred and fifty miles from the nearest land."

"Which would have been?"

"The Haitian coast."

"Your deserters," said the Great One dryly, "must have been fond of rowing."

"Walcott didn't think they'd set out to row to shore. He was a little less puzzled when I told him what I had heard during the night."

"Hadn't the captain heard anything?"

"Not a sound. Nor had the first officer or the second officer—and the latter was wide awake on the bridge from midnight until four in the morning. I'd glanced at my watch when I was aroused, and it was a little after two. So——"

"What was your sailing master's theory?'

"He had none and still has none. He was inclined to think the men must have put off to some other vessel running near us with no lights showing."

"I'd rather believe that myself," said Macumber slowly, "than to think they'd set out deliberately on a row of a hundred and fifty

miles. The cutter wasn't fitted with a sail, was she?"

"She had neither sail nor power. Wherever they were bound, they had only the oars to take them."

"Where was it that you lost the second boat, Jeremy?"

"The *Picaroon* was in approximately the same position when it vanished."

"With two men, you say?"

"Again with two men. That was just four weeks ago and we were five days outbound from New York for Poydras Island. I had found the island charming and had decided to build a big bungalow on it. We were taking carpenters and other workmen to Poydras aboard the yacht.

"It was on this fifth night of the second voyage to the island that the shooting awakened me. Like the voices, the racket seemed to come from a considerable distance."

"Others heard it?"

"Oh, yes. The rifle fire, as I judged it to be, lasted for fully ten minutes. Captain Walcott and both his officers were on deck when I turned out—and already they'd missed our new cutter, Macumber."

"No ship in sight?"

"Not a sign of one. Not a light showing. We had the night and the sea to ourselves. How long before that the boat had been lowered we had no way of telling."

"How about your deck watch?"

"Only two of the *Picaroon's* company had been stirring when the shots brought the rest of us out—the officer in charge of the yacht at the time and the man at the wheel in the pilot house."

"Do you mean to say, Jeremy, that a boat could have been lowered from the *Picaroon* without either of the two being aware of its going?"

"That's exactly what had happened. Except for the shots and the throbbing of the engines Mr. Morley—he's my second officer—had heard no sounds during the whole of his watch. He was on the bridge forward and the cutter was the last boat aft on the starboard side. Captain Walcott gave Morley a dressing down that was a treat to hear, but later I think he felt a little sorry. Morley, of course, couldn't have anticipated we were going to lose another boat in the same way and his eyes and attention were where they properly should have been. A ship's officer is concerned with what may lie ahead rather than what has been dropped astern. Personally I have no censure for Mr. Morley. It would have taken an exceptionally sharp pair of ears to have caught the slightest creaking as the cutter descended, for a yacht's gear is kept after as religiously as her brass work, I've discovered. The boat might have been taken behind my own back—or, for that matter, behind Walcott's."

"The men who disappeared with your cutters, Jeremy—who were they?"

"Just ordinary seamen, shipped in the ordinary way."

"They'd been aboard the *Picaroon* when you bought her?"

"Yes; the four had signed on for the season, as is the custom with yacht crews. I hadn't had much opportunity to observe them, of course—nor any reason. But to the officers they had seemed no different either in type or in actions from their fellows. Altogether, Macumber, don't you think I've brought you a mystery worth looking into?"

The Great One studied the ceiling.

"Don't you think," he countered, "it's a bit late to be looking into it?"

"It isn't the boats which have gone that I'm bothered about," said Southard, "although I'd like well enough to know where they went. But I've a hunch we're not through with mysterious doings aboard the *Picaroon*. My thought is that the yacht, having established a certain reputation with me, is likely to live up to it; and I want to have you along in case she does. Sieved through that uncanny mind of yours, Macumber, the puzzle of the *Picaroon* might prove a great deal more simple of solution than it appears."

"For most sea mysteries of this era," remarked the Great One, "there is a simple solution. Most of them lead us back to the well-known if not universally popular Eighteenth Amendment to our Constitution. The Caribbean, certainly, is the happy cruising ground of the rum runner, and I should——"

"The bootlegging theory doesn't apply," Southard objected. "It couldn't. We were too far off the course which illicit liquor follows on its way to the land of the thirsty. In fact the only vessels which we encountered after we were well on our way were American destroyers. Of these we must have sighted a half dozen."

"And you were a hundred and fifty miles

from the nearest land? You're certain of that, Jeremy?"

"As positive as a landlubber might be. I had the word of three experienced navigators for that—and they'd been working out our position three times a day since leaving New York."

"Which ought to settle it," said Macumber. "But assuming you *were* that distance from the Haitian mainland, how about islands?"

"I made the same suggestion to Captain Walcott. The chart shows none. So there you are. You've had the story of the mystery-ship *Picaroon* from the private log of her owner, Macumber. Doesn't it——"

"It does," said the Great One, "and your invitation's accepted."

III.

Although Jeremy Southard called the Great One on the phone the following morning to reassure himself there had been no change of heart he neglected to let us know that the *Picaroon* would carry another guest until we arrived at the New York Yacht Club landing in the afternoon with a taxi load of luggage.

At our host's side on the dock stood a pudgy little olive-skinned man with sharp black eyes and militaristically uptilted mustaches. This plump person clicked his heels together—heels, I was a little amused to notice, which seemed to have been chosen with an eye rather for what they would add to his stature than for comfort in locomotion—when he and Macumber were introduced.

"Mr. Southard has told me much of you, Professor Macumber," said Señor Emilio Suarez, bowing so deeply over the Great One's hand that I thought for a moment he intended to imprint upon it a chaste salute. "I look before me with satisfaction that you should be of our party. In New Orleans a year ago I did see you perform; and now it is my hope you shall tell me how you made that tiny rose to grow into the lovely señorita. I should buy many a rose once I had your secret!" And Señor Emilio, relinquishing his grip on Macumber's fingers to press the tips of his own ardently to his lips, delivered himself of an ecstatic sigh.

And thenceforward Suarez showed himself a gay and gregarious soul. It was not until late that night that Southard had a chance to explain the effervescent little man's presence aboard the yacht.

"I didn't know myself until after I'd left you yesterday," said Jeremy, "that we'd have him along. He's a friend of the Cuban consul general rather than of my own; and I've found it the course of wisdom to extend as many small favors as possible to officials of the Cuban government. Not infrequently they are able to reciprocate.

"Torres, the consul general, called on me with Suarez last night. He presented Señor Emilio as a very especial friend who chanced to be bound for Cuba at the most fortunate of all times. He'd heard I was starting away myself in that direction and was charmed to be able to provide me with a pleasant companion for the voyage. Suarez, he said, wouldn't in the least mind the side trip to Poydras Island. In fact, he was in a state of health which would make the extra days at sea most agreeable to him."

Macumber grinned.

"I noticed at dinner," he commented, "that Señor Suarez acquitted himself with distinction. His illness wouldn't appear to have affected his appetite."

"No," admitted Southard. "But I don't think the man's well, at that. He either has a touch of lung trouble, or else he fancies he has it—which is just as bad in most cases, I've observed. I had planned to put him in one of the big guest staterooms below but he said he much preferred to be on deck if that were possible. The best I could do for him, short of giving up my own quarters or ousting you two, was to tuck him in a little room aft. It makes a tight fit for him, and yet he seemed well enough satisfied. And didn't you take note when he packed off to bed that he said his doctor had ordered him to turn in as near as could be to ten? If he's not a sick man he's a hypochrondriac—and what's the difference?"

"And you'd never met Suarez before last night, Jeremy?" asked Macumber.

"Oh, I'd seen him a few times here and there. Business brings me in contact with a great many Cubans, you know."

"What's *his* business?"

"I'm damned if I can tell you. He spends considerable time in New York but I've never been interested sufficiently in him to inquire concerning his connections. I fancy he has means."

"I wonder that he'd not have preferred

to make his Cuban trip in the regular way, then."

"If you had had my experience with the Latin American you'd not be wondering," said Southard. "When he lets go of his money he spends with a splurge. But at those times when the recklessness seizes him you'll usually find a woman in the near foreground. Lacking the lady it's not at all hard to perusade him to be the entertained party. If he's doing business with you on which you stand to make a substantial profit, or if he holds government office and you seek his favor, he'll gracefully accept all perquisites extractable. Suarez merely feels himself more than ever fortunate in possessing the friendship of so influential a personage as Torres—a man through whose patronage he has been enabled to travel most comfortably back to Cuba at no expense whatsoever to himself. And some day, he hopes in the depth of his generous and appreciative heart, he'll be able to return the favor—to Torres!"

It had been midafternoon when we went aboard the *Picaroon*, toward evening when the yacht steamed through the Narrows and felt the lift of the long swells. Not until the following day did I begin to appreciate the luxury of this sort of sea travel as compared with life aboard a liner. Big wicker chairs beneath an awning over the stern of the yacht invited us. A steward always lurked in the offing, not obtrusively at our elbows but within easy hail. And the stores of the *Picaroon* afforded such refreshments as many of the greatest transatlantic passenger ships have long since ceased to offer on their tables.

Shielded as we were from the sun flood, the air of this second day at sea had a tingle in it; but in the late afternoon the weather warmed up noticeably.

"We're beginning to feel the influence of the Gulf Stream," explained Jeremy Southard. "Before long we'll be in it. We cut across the stream diagonally on this course we're taking. I'm feeling already the lassitude that means I need a rickey." And a snap of his fingers brought the Filipino steward leaping alertly forward.

Suarez shook his black curly head.

"Not one thing, *gracias*," said he; and when the drinks were brought to us he waved an airy farewell and began a lonely promenade of the main deck.

"Have you told him that he's riding a mystery ship?" the Great One asked Southard.

"I haven't said a word to the gentleman. Why?"

"Perhaps it's just as well that you keep him in ignorance. As a matter of fact, I'd much prefer that no one aboard but yourself knew that I had been taken into your confidence."

"Not a soul does know—or will. What's in your mind, Macumber?"

"Absolutely nothing as yet. I'm merely resigned to await developments. You don't know anything of navigation, do you, Jeremy?"

"Not a blessed thing," confessed our host. "And you?"

"I've asked questions now and then while at sea, but I've still a lot to learn. With your permission I shall seek instruction from Captain Walcott presently. The old man seems a good sort, Jeremy."

"Yes; he's the old-school skipper all the way through. This is his first berth aboard a yacht—and I really feel safer for that with the *Picaroon* under his command. It's rather hard for me not to think of yacht sailors as amateurs."

"But the two mates have the look of practical and hard-bitten seafarers."

"Oh, yes; I dare say Knudsen and Morley know their business. But Walcott's the man I'm relying on, after all."

The Great One glanced at his watch a few minutes later.

"Getting hungry?" suggested Southard. "That's the way the sea air works on me, too."

"No; I'll be able to hold out a while yet," smiled Macumber. "If we've been making fourteen knots, as you say, Jeremy, it's about time we were getting into the Gulf Stream, isn't it?"

"Perhaps we *are* in it."

"But we're not. Not yet."

"How do you know? What is there to say we aren't?"

"I know," replied Macumber, "because I've been watching the water."

"Ah, I see," murmured Southard ironically. "You can tell warm water from cold at a glance. You are certainly a man of extraordinary attainments."

"There happens," said the Great One seriously, "to be a difference which is clear to the eye. You'll see."

It was perhaps an hour afterward when

Macumber brought the conversation back to the Gulf Stream. He had been standing for some time then at the port rail, and called over his shoulder to the *Picaroon's* owner:

"Come here, Jeremy, and I'll show you what I promised you I would."

I rose with Southard and sauntered to the rail.

"What's the color of this water we're running through now?" demanded the Great One. "Green, isn't it? Right you are! Now look off there ahead, both of you. What's the color of the water we're coming to?"

"Bluest of the blue," said Southard.

"Right you are again, Jeremy," Macumber told him. "And that blue you see is the Gulf Stream. It will be a rare day when you can't tell the difference. Often the line where green blends into blue will be as sharp as if it had been drawn along the surface of the sea with a giant's pencil. Even in mid-ocean, you see, marines have what we ashore would call landmarks. Many a shipmaster can travel over a halfway familiar route and judge his position to the finest point by what they call dead reckoning—without the aid of the sextant or quadrant, that is. They take observations only as a matter of form as often as not."

"That's interesting," vouchsafed our host.

"Always interesting and sometimes vital," said the Great One; and he stayed at the rail, smoking and looking absently off toward the wavy horizon long after the *Picaroon's* sharp white bow had cleaved the blue of the Gulf Stream.

IV.

Our third day at sea Macumber spent in the main prowling about the *Picaroon,* talking with the officers and looking over the yacht's machinery. It had been after midnight when he turned in but he was stirring at daybreak. When I first saw him he was sitting down to what he declared to be his second breakfast, and he said he already had taken a lesson in practical navigation from the first officer, Mr. Knudsen, a strapping chap in whose broad blank face were set two cold little gray eyes whose expression at the very first had seemed to me more vindictive than inviting. Great, bulging-knuckled maulers served Knudsen for hands and it was easier to picture him as a swaggering bucko aboard a freighter than to accept him as belonging in a service in which urbanity might be considered a prerequisite of authority. He was not my ideal of the yacht's officer, and as I turned over in my mind the allied occurrences of the *Picaroon's* two previous voyages I had found my thoughts reverting more than once to the taciturn Norseman.

But the Great One, apparently, had found the first officer willing enough to attempt the nautical education of a landsman so friendly as Macumber with his employer.

"I've had the intricacies of the sextant explained to me in great shape, lad," he said. "What little knowledge I already had of the instrument's workings served me in such good stead that Mr. Knudsen permitted me to take the early observation. I was a few hundred miles off when I announced what I believed to be the yacht's position, to be sure, but at any rate my tutor was pleased to concede I had mastered the theory of the thing."

Later in the day Macumber held long conversations with Captain Walcott and with the second officer and he stood studiously by when Walcott took the noon observation. But it was in the engine room that he dug up the real kindred spirit among them all. The overlord of the *Picaroon's* machinery was a lank splinter of a man bearing the name Ferguson, and the bur that crackled in his voice was music to the ear of Macumber.

"You must meet Ferguson; he's a rare character," the Great One told me after he had made his happy discovery below decks; and when presently he made me acquainted with the engine-room chief he performed for the oil-spattered Scot's benefit a rapid-fire private exhibition of magic culminating—to Ferguson, most gratifyingly—in the production from a handful of cotton waste of a flask filled with a golden liquor. By smell and by taste the chief verified its contents. He ceased then even to wonder whence it had come.

"Mister Macumber," said he reverently, "it is the first MacVickar that has touched my tongue in five long years!" And the expression of infinite content which came to his face as he turned it up to the bottle told me that never had the Great One cemented a truer friendship.

On each of the three succeeding days Macumber spent an hour or more in the engine

room, and at odd times he talked with the navigating officers. So far as I could see, however, he displayed no sign of interest in the *Picaroon's* boats. Of these the yacht carried six—two large lifeboats, two small ones, the cutter and the owner's dinghy. Only the dinghy had power; the larger lifeboats, Southard told me, were provided with sails. The other two, like the new cutter, must be rowed. All were snugly covered with tarpaulins.

With the dawn of the fifth day the *Picaroon's* owner began to reveal traces of nerves.

"It was about here we began to run into the destroyers," he told me, when we came from breakfast. "They seemed to be having some sort of maneuvers, but I suppose they're over by now."

Nevertheless, Southard kept a sharp eye over the rail and in the early afternoon brought binoculars to bear on a vessel he had made out to the westward of us, hull down on the horizon.

"It's a destroyer," said he. "They're still hanging around. Wonder what they're up to?"

"Maybe Macumber will have a guess," I remarked. But the Great One, who had joined us at that moment, shook his head.

"I suppose we'll all be sitting up tonight," said Southard. "That will be the time for whatever may be in the air to happen. Do you think any more *will* happen, Macumber?"

A puff of breeze whisked out the match which the Great One had just struck; and he delayed his reply until he had held another, more carefully sheltered from the wind, to his pipe.

"I think something may happen," he conceded cautiously, "but I'd not be sure." He fixed earnest eyes upon our host. "But I trust, Jeremy, you'll abandon the idea of sitting up for the show."

"In which remark," snapped Southard. "you show plainly that the *Picaroon* doesn't belong to you. Cutters such as we carry cost between six and seven hundred dollars apiece. Perhaps you've a notion that I ought to be buying them by the dozen?"

"Maybe it won't be the cutter that's taken this time," consoled Macumber. "Anyhow, we'll get nowhere by standing guard unless your whole thought is to avoid any further investment in small boats. But if it's a mystery you wish to solve, then you'll do better to turn in about midnight as usual. If any boat is missing in the morning and you'll be good enough to have Captain Walcott take his orders for a time from me—assuming, of course, that he's still with us—I think I can safely undertake to recover it in short order."

Jeremy Southard stared at him.

"Very good, Macumber," he said after a moment. "I wanted you along, after all, to get to the bottom of a mystery, and *I'll* start taking orders from you now. I won't guarantee to sleep but I will turn in—and devil take the cutter. What do you suspect? Tell me that, won't you?"

"It would be no time to tell you now," replied the Great One, "for here's Señor Emilio Suarez bearing down upon us again with a fresh supply of scrambled English. No use spoiling the little man's rest the night, is there? What he doesn't know won't keep him awake."

Yet on that fifth night Señor Emilio seemed for once disposed to forget the advice of his physician. He sat with us until Macumber himself was frankly yawning, and for the first time he joined us in a high ball. Seven bells had sounded and midnight was close at hand when at length he rose and beaming upon us all made his way toward his isolated stateroom aft.

I had suspected that the Great One, regardless of his injunction to Southard, would keep a weather eye open through the night. But it was clear when we reached the big and luxuriously fitted guest cabin which we shared that he planned to do nothing of the sort. He calmly undressed and crawled into bed. In a surprisingly short time I knew from his deep and composed breathing that he slept.

But sleep held off from me. I heard one bell strike, then two bells and three bells. It was some time between one-thirty and two o'clock, consequently, when I dozed off.

The first faint light of day straying through the port over my bed awoke me, and before I had opened my eyes I knew something was wrong. Macumber, in the bed across from mine, apparently had not stirred. He still slept heavily.

My first concrete observation was of a difference in the motion of the *Picaroon.* Instead of buoyantly riding the seas she seemed to be wallowing in the trough. And then my ears missed the accustomed thrumming—the pulsing of life through the

yacht's light timbers that told of smooth-running machinery below.

Mr. Ferguson, I knew then, must be having trouble with those sleek engines I had seen him surreptitiously fondling as he explained their workings to the Great One. The *Picaroon* no longer was making way under her own power. She was drifting.

V.

The Great Macumber has a faculty of coming from deepest sleep to acute wakefulness, with no twilight interim of transition. On the instant my hand touched his shoulder his lids raised on bright and unclouded blue eyes.

"Eh, lad?" he wanted to know. "What's up?"

"Something's gone wrong with the engines. They've been shut down."

I could not see that the Great One was much impressed by the information. He listened a moment, and then cheerfully agreed:

"So they are."

"One thing's sure. Your friend Ferguson will be weeping and wailing below us."

"Maybe he will," said Macumber incomprehensibly. "Many of our race have a gift we're given little credit for. It's another day, is it, lad? Then had we not better turn out and take inventory of the *Picaroon's* boats?"

He sprang up and swiftly drew on his clothing. As we made our way out on deck he paused to bang on the owner's door until a sleepy voice answered from within:

"All right. I'm getting up. Is it you, Macumber?"

We found Captain Walcott already on deck, although his own time to take the bridge was hours away. Behind him loomed the bulk of the first officer.

The square and abrupt little beard which jutted from the sailing master's jaw was a-quiver with excitement.

"I was just wonderin' if I hadn't oughter wake up Mr. Southard. There's hell to pay aboard. Engines broke down and one of our boats gone—and no second mate to be found from stem to stern of us."

Walcott threw back his head and gave forth a stentorian shout.

"Morley! Morl-e-e-e-e!"

No answer came.

"When did you miss him?" the Great One asked.

"He wasn't on the bridge when Mr. Knudsen showed up to take over the watch. Dod-blamed if I haven't half a notion he went off in the boat, Mr. Macumber. Better for him, maybe, if that's what he's done. In a lifetime at sea I've not known an officer in charge to desert his post before."

"Which boat has gone? The cutter again?"

The sailing master blinked.

"Our owner's told you, has he?"

"Yes; I've heard the story."

Walcott jerked his thumb toward a set of empty davits aft. "It's the cutter again, sure's you're alive, sir, and as far as I'm concerned it's a case of three times and out. Mr. Southard shall have my resignation to take effect the minute we hit back into an American port. He won't be wantin' me; and I'm none too anxious anyhow to stay with the *Picaroon*. She's a wrong vessel, mister!"

The Great One violated an ancient rule by filling and lighting a before-breakfast pipe. That done, he said:

"I rather believe her troubles are over—and I don't think Mr. Southard will want to lose you. But he'll speak for himself. He's coming now. By the way, captain, have you been sailing these waters long?"

"Not until I came aboard the *Picaroon*. *What's* that to do with it? Give me a chart and a sextant and I'll take a man wherever we've enough water under our bottom to go."

"And that I don't question, Captain Walcott. Ah, Jeremy, good morning to you!"

The *Picaroon's* owner, heavy-eyed and collarless, gave evidence of having made only the hastiest of toilets.

"I'm hardly prepared to discuss the merits of the morning," said he. "Well, captain, I see the news in your face: Which boat is it this time—and what's the matter with our machinery?"

"It's the cutter, of course, sir," replied the skipper. "The question would hardly be worth asking aboard of us. As to the machinery, I can't say yet what's happened to it. Mr. Ferguson, the chief, may be able to tell us before long. He and his assistant have been tinkering with the engines since eight bells—four o'clock this morning, that is to say. Except that we're short a second mate, that's about all I've got to report, sir."

"Short a mate? What do you mean by that?"

Captain Walcott glanced toward his first officer, who edged forward.

"Mr. Morley, we can't find him nowheres," said he. "At eight bells I should relieve him, sir, but maybe a quarter hour early I was on the bridge. Morley was not there. Since then we look and don't find him."

"The second officer left his post without notifying even the man at the wheel, sir," put in Captain Walcott. "If he's still aboard the *Picaroon* I'll have a word or two to say to him. But if you want my view of it, Mr. Southard, he's gone with the cutter. Mr. Knudsen, will you be good enough to step into the forecastle and count noses? It's about time we learned who else is missing."

"Which reminds me," said Macumber to the owner in a low voice as the first officer lumbered away forward, "that I had a notion of looking into the quarters of Señor Emilio. He's a quaint little devil, Jeremy, and I've had a feeling from the moment I laid eyes on him that he'd be knowing more of the mystery of the lost cutters than any of us."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Southard. "What else? By Christopher, I'm glad you're with me, Macumber!"

As we followed the Great One toward the yacht's trim and slender stern the voice of Knudsen, bellowing his report to his skipper, overtook us. Two more of the *Picaroon's* crew were missing. Omitting a flood of Scandinavian cursing, that was the gist of the first officer's shout. Macumber, however, was not disposed to return for details. He kept on; and an exclamation escaped him as he rounded the corner of the deck house aft. The door of Suarez's stateroom, which opened toward the stern, was swinging free with the roll of the yacht.

"Another one gone!" cried Jeremy Southard.

But the Great One, peering into the stateroom, corrected him. "No; he's still with us—lying fully dressed in his berth."

And just at that moment I made a small but heartfelt contribution of my own. It was a yell of pain. My toes, protected only by soft bedroom slippers, had struck something hard. I stooped and picked up from the deck the offending object.

"People," said I, "hadn't ought to leave pistols lying about so carelessly." And I passed the gun to Jeremy Southard, whose mouth fell open as I pushed it at him.

Farther still dropped the owner's jaw a moment later. Macumber had advanced into the stateroom and had shaken the rotund figure in the berth—gently at first and then with vigor. Failing to arouse Señor Emilio he bent over him, his marvelously disciplined hands fluttering swiftly over his body and touching finally his head. The face he turned to us was grave and had lost much of its normal ruddiness.

"So *that* was it!" said the Great One softly.

"What was it?" Southard demanded "What's the trouble now, man?"

"Trouble far worse than any I anticipated," was the grave answer. "We'd have done better to have followed your suggestion and kept watch through the night, Jeremy. This poor devil's dead. They've cracked his skull for him!"

VI.

For a few seconds the three of us stood silent. It was the Great Macumber who spoke first, and his words came crisp.

"I'll remind you of your agreement, Jeremy," said he. "For the time being I'm in charge of the *Picaroon,* am I not?"

Southard's eyes still were on the figure in the berth. He shuddered and nodded.

"When she's ready to move you can head her where you please," he assented.

"And that," Macumber told him, "will be back over her own course for the next couple of hours. Let's see—it's just after six now, isn't it? Yes; for two hours we'll steam back the way we have come."

"But the engines——"

"They should be ready at the word, Jeremy. I'll trust Ferguson to have them turning again immediately."

Southard shook his head, but a couple of minutes later a placid voice from the engine room justified the Great One's faith.

For more than an hour the yacht raced along. The sun came cold and dripping out of the sea off our starboard beam and warmed to its climb, but none of us had a thought of breakfast. Macumber from time to time was dropping remarks which were serving gradually to clear up the mystery of the *Picaroon.*

"I happen to know, captain," he con-

fessed, "a little more about navigation than I've permitted you to see. And I'll not say I have not found the knowledge useful on this voyage—though small use it proved to the poor fellow who lies aft there. It was on a matter of dead reckoning that my eyes first began to open. Did you take note when we entered the Gulf Stream?"

"That was the afternoon of our second day out," said Walcott.

"Yes; but did you check the hour?"

"Why—not exactly."

"I did. And at our verified speed of fourteen knots, in relation to our supposed course, we should have entered it nearly two hours earlier."

"You mean we were off the course, Mr. Macumber? How could that be? Our observations——"

"Were also off."

"I don't understand you."

"Nevertheless, you were not aiming straight for Poydras Island, captain, but were on a line that would bring you in on the Haitian coast. Or, perhaps I should say, the Santo Domingan coast. By dead reckoning that, too, was not hard to work out."

"Well, I'm dummed!" grunted the sailing master.

"It was no fault of yours, Captain Walcott, as I'll explain later," put in the Great One hastily. "But it's almost certainly the fact that on your first two voyages to Poydras as well you got off on just such a course. Thus the fifth night out from New York found you not a hundred and fifty miles off the Haitian coast, but only a very few miles. Now do you see the light?"

The sailing master lifted a hand from the wheel to stroke his belligerent whiskers.

"Can't say I do, exactly."

"You were puzzled by shouting and shooting on a presumably empty sea, weren't you?"

"Yes; that was beyond me."

"Very good. But the *Picaroon* was in no such open sea as you fancied. You were then very near the coast of Santo Domingo; and the sounds you heard of course came from shore. Now, I can tell you something else in point, captain, but this I get from a habit of reading the day's news closely. Do you know why United States destroyers have been so thick in these waters?"

"Playin' some war game, eh?"

"In a general way your guess covers the ground, but it hasn't been the sort of war game you have in mind. It happens that Uncle Sam is pleased with the existing government in Santo Domingo. A strong revolutionary movement has been building up through the last few months and our government, knowing that big-moneyed interests were backing the incipient insurrection, has taken steps to keep arms out of inimical hands. An ordinary filibuster would have small chance to get through the navy cordon thrown about the island.

"But a millionaire's yacht like the *Picaroon* would be beyond suspicion, don't you see, captain? Knowing that the *Picaroon* was making more or less frequent trips to Poydras, representatives of the Santo Domingan junta did a bit of investigating. They found the yacht's second officer, we'll say, susceptible to gold. With him, we may assume, they worked out a scheme to use the *Picaroon* for smuggling arms through the naval blockade."

Macumber broke off to sweep the sea with binoculars borrowed from the skipper.

"Not a thing in sight," he reported. "But keep on as we're going, captain."

"Then our boats, you think," spoke up Jeremy Southard, "have——"

"Have been dropped," said the Great One, "within a short row of the coast at some prearranged spot and have gone in to insurrecto camps loaded to the gunwales. The shouting you heard aboard the *Picaroon* would have been a welcome; and from the shooting I should judge that on the last trip government troops had a little surprise for the 'outs.'"

"But the men who have gone with the boats—what about them?" asked Southard.

"Morley had been long enough aboard the yacht to know the crew. He picked his men carefully and sounded them guardedly. Probably he was able to offer them a promise of liberal pay for soldiering which would amount to no more than a lark ashore. Just how that was worked I'm not attempting definitely to say. Nor am I bothering about whereabouts aboard the *Picaroon* the arms were stowed. Enough that the yacht carried them."

"And Señor Emilio Suarez—what is your idea of him, Macumber?"

"That if there's a heaven for patriots who give their lives in the line of duty the little man's soul will be there now, Jeremy. He would have been in the service, of

course, of the Santo Domingan government —assigned to get such proof of how arms were being smuggled to the revolutionists as would warrant a warning by the United States to yourself, the *Picaroon's* owner. Likely he knew little and suspected much. By night he would keep watch, and when finally he saw the cutter being loaded and lowered he stepped out with his pistol, only to be dropped from behind before he could use it. I think Mr. Morley could tell who struck him the blow."

Captain Walcott looked up dubiously at the Great One.

"I'm afraid," said he, "our chances of picking up the cutter are slim."

"Oh, I really don't think so," Macumber replied. "Mr. Knudsen tells us that Morley, according to the man at the wheel, was still in evidence at two o'clock this morning. The screws of the *Picaroon,* pursuant to a little arrangement between the chief engineer and myself, ceased to turn at four. You'll pardon me, won't you, Jeremy, for having arranged the shutdown without your knowledge? I thought it would serve us well."

"You mean," queried Walcott, "that we couldn't have steamed ahead more than two hours after the cutter was dropped?"

"Precisely. That means we've only twenty-eight miles to travel before we reach the spot, and somehow I don't believe the cutter will have made land before we reach her."

And it was only a few minutes afterward when Knudsen announced with large satisfaction:

"Boat off the starboard bow, cap'n! She be our cutter, most like."

At almost the same time I observed a distant feather of smoke low in the sky. Macumber made out the vessel to be one of the destroyers. It was plain, presently, that the boat on which yacht and destroyer were converging was indeed the *Picaroon's* cutter. There were three men in the boat, and at sight of the vessels approaching they appeared to have stopped rowing.

The destroyer was first to reach the cutter and the men were taken aboard and the boat lifted on deck while we were yet two or three miles distant. We were not destined to see again Morley or his two fellow deserters. An officer from the destroyer boarded us and took our several depositions. Before the young lieutenant left, promising that he should make a hanging case against at least one of the three deserters—although, I may interpolate, it developed the trio escaped with heavy prison sentences when jointly tried in a Southern Federal court—we had committed the body of Emilio Suarez to the sea.

Once again, then, the *Picaroon* turned her nose toward Poydras Island.

We sat down together to a breakfast for which, despite the lateness of the hour, we had little appetite. Captain Walcott, who by special invitation of his owner occupied a chair at the guests' table, was constrained before the meal was over to remind Macumber of a promise.

"You said you'd tell me," he suggested, "how we got off our course. And mind you, I'm not admittin' yet that we were off it. I just want to hear what you think, Mr. Macumber."

The Great One smiled.

"Not so long ago, captain," said he, "you were telling me that the sextant was a most delicate instrument. I'll merely repeat to you your own words. Your sextant had been tampered with. The little mirror which you assumed to be in proper place had been twisted—so slightly as not to be noticeable to the casual eye, but still enough to throw you far off in calculating the *Picaroon's* position. By figuring her true position and setting the course during his own watch to suit himself, your able second officer could take her where he wanted her to go. Can't you see now how that would be possible?"

Walcott said he could. He remarked also, with every appearance of sincerity, that he was dummed.

"But the wonder is that we were able," he declared, "to catch up with the cutter before she got to shore. Morley himself must have been off on our position when he had the boat lowered."

"He was," grinned the Great Macumber. "The *Picaroon* was closer to where you thought she was than to where Morley thought she was. He'd have had to row more than a hundred miles to his tryst. You see, I took occasion to true the sextant while Knudsen was explaining it to me on the morning of the third day out!"

Another story by Mr. Rohde in the next POPULAR.

A Chat With You

SOME months ago we wondered what the typical reader of this magazine looked like. Was he young, old or middle-aged? Was he a he, or was she a she? Since then we have received various letters which we hereby gratefully acknowledge. One of them inclosed the portrait of a POPULAR reader from Pennsylvania. He is eighty-eight, a successful business man in a large way, and looks about sixty. He is an outdoor man. Another portrait was that of a reader in England. The picture shows her, seated on the grass, reading a recent number. She has bare knees, bobbed hair, and a wire-haired terrier. She appears to be about eight years of age. So apparently the magazine appeals to both sexes and all ages.

* * * *

TWO weeks ago, as you may remember, we made a good resolution. It was to the effect that the magazine was to be better this year than ever before. This is not one of the resolutions made to be broken. It is to grow stronger and more effective as the weeks go by. You have read the present number. You know whether Chisholm's serial is great stuff or not. Also you know something about McMorrow's novel and the short stories that come in between. The next issue is even better. The novel, a complete book given you in the single issue, is by Courtney Ryley Cooper. It is called "Locoed."

Cooper is one of the few men writing today who really knows the West. He knows at firsthand the West that is just fading out and the new West that is just appearing. He knows, as a matter of tradition and bringing up, that still older West that we hate to have fade out, the West of the pioneers and of the retreating frontiers, the golden age of the West that will gleam more and more brightly as we are removed from it farther and farther by the passing years. For a good part of the most formative period of his life Cooper was the friend and intimate companion of Buffalo Bill. Buffalo Bill was the connecting link between the old and the new. Until the last his personality carried with it airs from those earlier days when the West was a mystery not fully discovered.

In addition to this Cooper can write. His last book "The White Desert" was better than anything he had done before. This new novel, "Locoed," is better still.

* * * *

THERE is one short story in the next issue to which we want to call particular attention. It is entitled "Rufus, the Outlaw," the outlaw in this case being not a man, but a horse. The horse is the property of the Northwest Mounted. It is a hard horse to ride, but it finally is ridden. This story seemed to us as we read it to have a punch, a dynamic quality, a fascination of interest, a tingling sort of life that placed it in a class by itself. It is by an author new to these pages—Harwood Steele. We wonder if the story will mean as much to you as it did to us when we read it in manuscript.

THESE two stories, the long and the short, have for their setting the outdoor West where drama and colorful atmosphere seem almost inevitable. It is another thing to take the ordinary life of the city, the life of the man in business, and make it thrilling. Yet this is what William Hamilton Osborne has done in his short story. "Indorsed in Blank." Also, just by way of showing that a thrilling tale may be laid in any setting, Percival Wilde has in the same issue an absorbing narrative of the card table, "The Poker Dog." He is a real dog who can be used in a game of cards. A dog worth reading about.

* * * *

THE quality we prize most in stories is life and exhilaration. It makes no difference, really, where the story is laid. It is the personality of the author that counts most of all.

In the next issue, J. Frank Davis appears with a story which has all the thrill of a romance of the bad lands although its setting is State politics.

Montanye exhilarates in another fashion. He makes us laugh. He is represented in the next issue by a story, "According to Doyle," which is genuinely funny.

Also Rohde, with his new narrative of the Great Macumber, "The High Sign," communicates another sort of a thrill.

Roy Norton has in the number another of his stories of the West, sound and stirring and wholesome, all human interest and dramatic thrill. James Francis Dwyer, in "The Villa of Exquisite Torture," tells one of those modern European man-hunting stories which have made him famous.

* * * *

ALTOGETHER, we think the third number of the magazine for this year fulfills the promise we made in the first. There are other still better issues to follow. There is a new serial coming by H. de Vere Stacpoole. Another tale by Edison Marshall. Courtney Ryley Cooper is planning out a new novel. There are stories by Bower, Bertrand Sinclair, Clay Perry, Hugh Kennedy, Theodore Goodridge Roberts, Holman Day, William Winter, Howard R. Marsh, H. H. Knibbs, Frederick Niven, William MacLeod Raine, Bertram Atkey, Charles Neville Buck and a score of others.

It would be a good idea to order the magazine in advance from the news dealer. That's the only way of being sure of it.

A Queer Human Kink

WHAT strange bundles of contradictions we all are! We tell each other ... nestly that health is one of the most precious things in life—and yet what do we do to keep it, to protect it? It's a queer kink in human nature, isn't it, to *think* one way and *act* just the opposite!

The Harm of Self-Diagnosis

You know how idle people love to talk over symptoms and recklessly recommend all sorts of cure-all remedies.

What a tremendous amount of harm is done by attempts at self-diagnosis! Here is an example: A prominent man made up his mind that he was eating too much meat and heroically put himself on a strict diet. ...metime later, he was taken ill. His ...or astonished him by saying that while ...en of his age would have benefited ...by doing what he had done, his case was an exception and that *lack* of meat caused the trouble.

How Long Do You Want To Live?

Just so long as you are well and happy? Good!—but suppose you keep right on living long after you have ceased to be well!

Stop right here and think about it.

You would not treat your car as you treat yourself. You constantly test the steering gear and the brake bands. You make sure that bolts are tight. You listen to the motor for the faintest "knock". You are careful about the fuel mixture—it must not be too rich nor too lean or the engine will not pull properly.

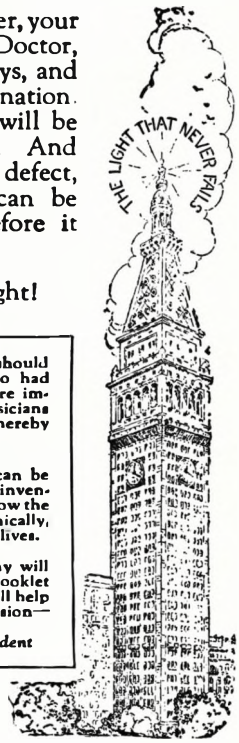
But do you know whether the food—the "fuel mixture"—that you give your own body is too rich or too lean? You can replace parts of your car, but you can't replace a worn-out heart, an abused stomach, an over-worked liver or frayed nerves.

Years Alone Do Not Age Us

The physical changes ascribed to age may be due to poison, infection, wrong food or emotional strain, principally worry. And these things are in large degree under our own control.

Go to your wisest adviser, your own good friend, your Doctor, within the next few days, and have a *thorough* examination. If you are well, you will be glad to have his O. K. And if he finds some slight defect, be thankful that it can be corrected in time—before it becomes serious.

Begin the New Year right!



The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company believes thoroughly in the value of the annual physical examination. All of the 8,000 employees of the Home Office are carefully examined each year; also its field force of nearly 20,000 employees. These examinations are carefully followed up and those employees who show impairments receive particular attention. The result of such intensive care is very gratifying.

During the past ten years, the Company has arranged for the examination of various classes of its policyholders and is extending this privilege every year.

In the first 6,000 policyholders examined, a remarkable lowering of mortality occurred. Instead of 303 deaths in the five and one-half years subsequent to the examination, only 217 occurred—a saving of 28 per cent. in the expected mortality.

It is not difficult to understand why this should happen. Many of the policyholders who had been examined did not know that they were impaired. They took the advice of the physicians seriously; they followed instructions and thereby averted serious trouble.

The great waste of life that still prevails can be prevented. If people will make an annual inventory of their physical condition and will follow the advice of trained physicians and live hygienically, they will add whole years to their working lives.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will be glad to mail you, without charge, a booklet entitled, "An Ounce of Prevention". It will help you in guarding that most precious possession—your health.

HALEY FISKE, *President*

Published by

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Never before have the opportunities in cartooning been so many or so varied. Never has there been such a splendid chance to earn big money for cartoons. And regardless of what you are doing at present or how poorly you draw now, you can easily and quickly learn to make cartoons through this new easy method.

What Students Say:

I am now working for myself and find all I can do. I find no trouble in cleaning up in the neighborhood of $250 a week. I have my own syndicate and am gradually branching out into a good field.
E. P.—LAWRENCE, MASS.

Free Employment Bureau

I want to thank you for the personal interest you have taken in me while receiving instruction from your school and for referring me to this magazine.
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$125 a Month Spare Time

I wish to take this opportunity to recommend your school. I have been doing a great deal of commercial work—making on the average of $125 a month in spare time.
T. W. P.—CHARLOTTE, N. C.

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In two weeks I earned more than I paid for the entire course. I am more than pleased with the training I received and am certain no one can fail to make rapid progress under your instruction.
O. B.—OLD TOWN, ME.

New Easy Way to Learn Cartooning

It's fun learning to make cartoons this new way. It's just like a game. You learn at home, yet it is just as if an instructor stood at your elbow. You don't need to know a thing about cartooning. You start with straight lines and curves. Then you learn the little secrets of originating cartoon ideas, the methods of exaggeration, of action and expression—all the little tricks that make cartooning amazingly easy to those who know them. And soon you are making *real* cartoons. Many of our students have cartoons published before they were half thru their courses.

When learning to make cartoons is so easy, why shouldn't you too make big money and enjoy the fun of cartooning. Graduates of this school are to be found in every section of the country. Read in the panel what they are doing and what they say about this training.

Mail Coupon for Free Book

Learn more about the wonderful opportunities for making money in Cartooning and how this new method makes it easy for you to learn. Read about our students, how they make money while learning, and big salaries after they graduate. Our handsomely illustrated booklet is crammed full of interesting facts on Cartooning and describes in detail this remarkable method of teaching cartooning. It will be sent to you without obligation. Mail the coupon for this booklet *now.*

Washington School of Cartooning,
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