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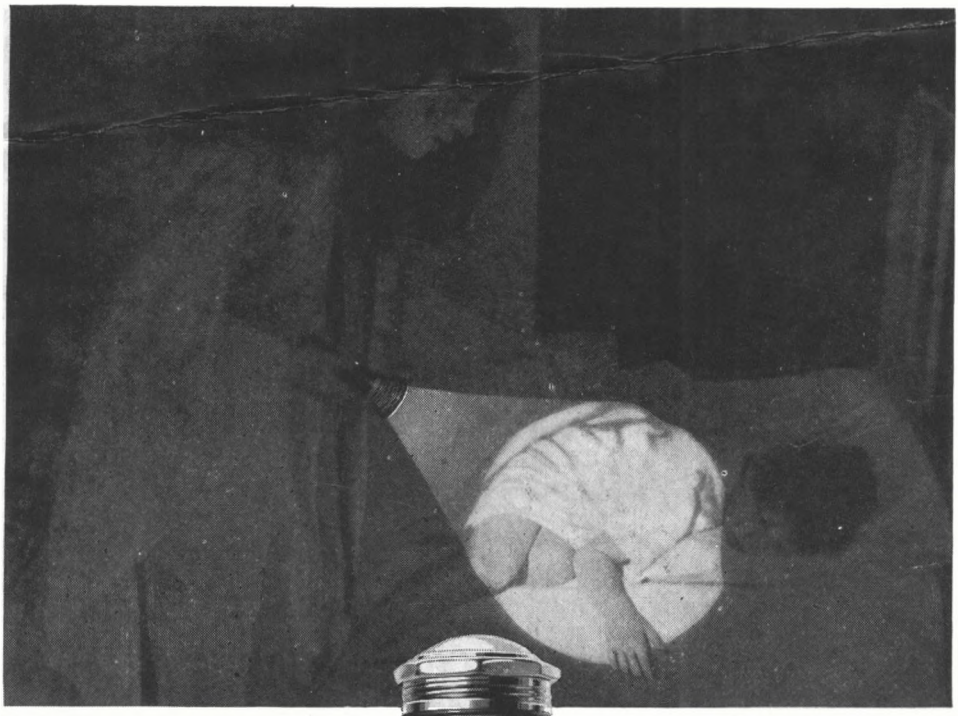

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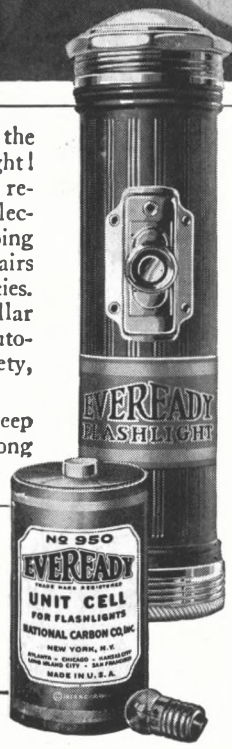

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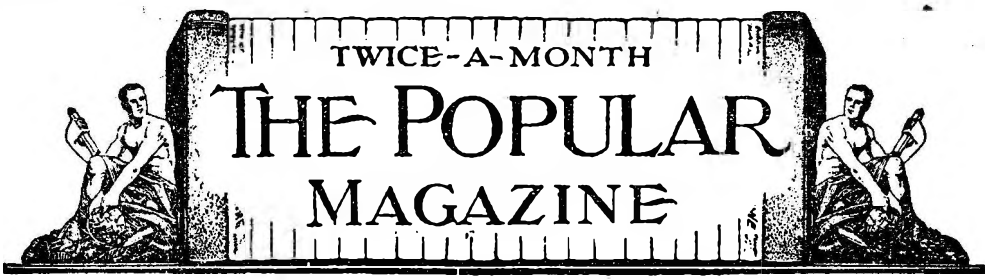

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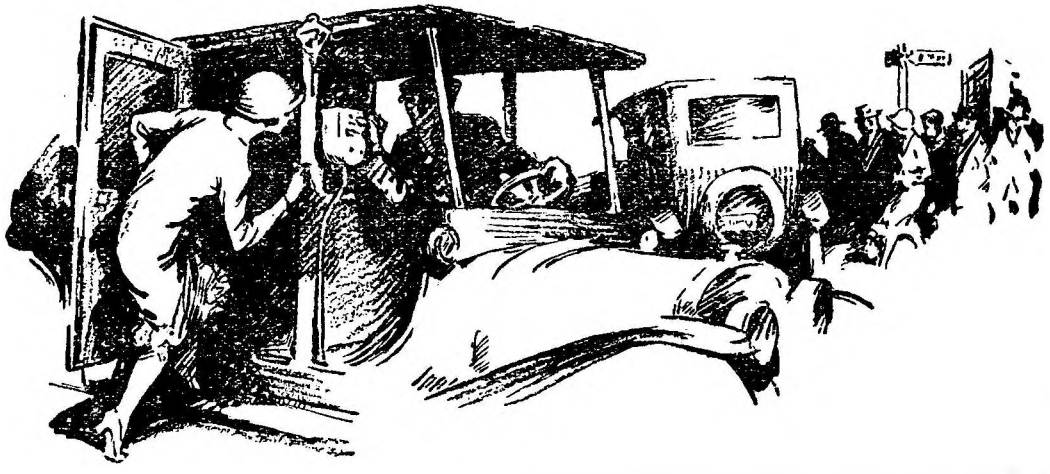

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVII. JULY 20, 1925. No. 1

One-dog Men

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "Two Men—and 'The Dog,'" "Tim of Bush Valley," Etc.

This is a story of men, and dogs, and hunting days in the Northwest. It is particularly the story of old Tom Wilson and his admirable dog, Shan, of the Chesapeake breed. The Chesapeake tribe of dogs deserves more fame than it has ever received. Especially in America, where the breed originated and was developed. Chisholm has written in "One-dog Men" a story that does the breed full justice. He has done more than that—he has written a moving human chronicle, and not the least-human factor in his tale is Shan, the great retriever, himself. There have been many good dog-and-man stories written. We have read the best of them. We have never read a better one than this.

—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel.)

CHAPTER I.

ADMIRAL.

IT was in the heel of the winter, verging toward spring, that Tom Wilson realized that something was wrong with the old dog. The preceding fall, in the duck blind and in the marshes, old Admiral had performed as usual; that is, he had given the performance of a heaven-born retriever of a tried hunting strain, with eleven seasons of practical work and excellent training to back it up.

As usual he had taken to water, mud or ice without urging, keen as in the far-off days of his young doghood. True, of late he had become heavy between seasons, but with a week's work the fat had dropped from his ribs and his paunch had disappeared, and his strength and activity

had seemed unimpaired. His sight was still keen, his hearing good, and his nose the same marvelous piece of detecting mechanism. Apart from the sedateness of years, old Admiral when he went into the winter had seemed as good as new.

But as winter ran toward spring he was slower of movement, loggy, heavy, lacking his customary ambition, with a preference for following at his master's heels instead of scouting in advance. He slept uneasily, shifting from side to side and from place to place when he kept his master company in the evenings before he went to his kennel, as if he could not find comfort for his old bones. Again, a willing fighter from puppyhood, he now avoided strange dogs.

These signs should have warned Tom Wilson who was wise in the ways of dogs, of which he had owned a succession for forty-odd years; but they did not. For one thing, Admiral had become a habit, an institution. No other dog of the many he had owned had fitted him so well; no other had he so thoroughly understood, and no other had so well understood him.

He knew that a dog is short lived; but knowledge and practical personal realization are widely separated things. He knew it, but he refused to recognize it, exactly as one blinks the fact that sooner or later death will invade and break the intimate family circle. For that matter Admiral *was* his family circle.

Tom Wilson was a bachelor who had passed the fifty mark. He was a tall, lean, weather-hardened man, with a permanent squint produced by years of staring across glaring snows and crinkling, sunlit waters. He was quiet, usually deliberate of movement, rather slow of speech but inwardly imaginative, as are many shy, silent men.

He had been born on a farm, but at the age of eighteen had gone to the lumber woods as a chore boy. Later he had become an expert logger and a good river driver. But essentially he was a hunter and fisherman. He quit logging. In season he shot for the market, and in winter, being handy with tools, he worked for a boat builder.

Meanwhile he invested his savings in a small timber speculation, and a lucky turnover gave him a modest competence. Then he returned to the Grand Bay district, which was the place of his nativity.

THE Grand Bay lay to one side of the hurrying lake and rail and motor traffic, overlooked and forgotten. A great estuary of a fresh-water sea, it stretched inland for forty miles fringed with rice marshes and dotted with small islands. Mallard, black and wood duck bred along its marshes and creeks and drowned lands; partridge, woodcock, rabbits and deer found sanctuary in the sandy peninsula that separated it from the larger waters.

The district itself was sparsely settled. At one time the Belle River, which ran into the bay, had been a logging stream. But now the big log drives were things of the past, and no activity replaced lumbering.

In point of industry and even settlement the district had retrograded. Progress—if the replacement of the works of the Creator by the works of man be progress—had passed it by. Thus it suited Tom Wilson, who preferred the former.

He selected a site at the head of a sheltered inlet handy to the best shooting grounds, and there he built a small but comfortable cottage, a boathouse and a workshop, made a small garden and planted a few fruit trees. He built himself a cabined gas boat, and in the winters he built boats, canoes and wooden decoys which found ready sale.

He shot and fished and was entirely happy. The outside world which he rarely visited did not trouble him at all.

As a hunter he was of the old order. His memories went back to the days of the passenger pigeon, when the ten-gauge was the accepted weapon and nitro powders were unknown. Now, though his trigger finger was slowing a trifle, he was as finished a shot as ever peeped along a matted rib.

But now he seldom shot his bag limit. In him for some obscure reason was developing a sympathy for the game birds

whose kind he had slain in such numbers. Sitting in a duck blind on a gray fall day, the surface of the bay stretching away before him like a mirror of polished steel or rolling sullenly drab and foam-flecked through the dead marshes, he would contrast the small squadrons of the present-day flight with the mighty, winged battalions of his boyhood days, and shake his head sadly in retrospect as might an old retainer over the fallen glories of his feudal house.

At such times he would let easy shots go by, to the patent disgust of old Admiral who, troubled by no such memories, crouched low beside his master, his eyes glaring at the swift-winged passengers. But at other times, when the thrill of the sport claimed him, he would kill to his limit, cleanly and consistently.

The interior of Wilson's cottage was in keeping with its owner's characteristics. Its living room, from which three bedrooms opened, contained his most treasured possessions. He liked to see them, and to have them handy. Thus it was a combination of armory, library and repair shop.

In one corner was a bookcase containing works most of which dealt with game, guns, boats or dogs. In another was a glass-fronted cabinet which held his guns, rods, tackle and similar paraphernalia. Beside the gun cabinet hung his shooting coat, a veteran of many seasons, discolored and stained but treasured, his shell vest, a grass-colored Mackinaw, a pair of binoculars.

Beneath these hanging garments was a rug which was the favorite couch of old Admiral in the evenings before he went to his snug, straw-filled kennel. The dog had chosen the place for himself years before, perhaps because of the hunting garments which held associations of glorious days in his master's company, and to which clung for his keen nostrils the scents of game carried in the ample pockets, of marsh, upland, and the smoke of old camp fires. As he seemed to have adopted the place, Wilson had put a rug there for him.

It was a perfectly understood arrangement. That was Admiral's rug. He owned it, and he was jealous of its possession. He occupied it till his master went to bed. Then he went to his own.

One night in the late winter Admiral who had been sleeping uneasily on his rug left it and came to his master. Wilson who was enjoying his pipe and a book, put down his hand absently and patted his retainer. From the head his hand strayed downward to the neck.

The neck of man or animal is an excellent barometer of age and physical condition. When the neck fails its owner is in a bad way. Admiral all his life had possessed a bull's neck, full and muscular, covered with a shaggy mane. But now Wilson's straying fingers revealed to him the fact that it had dwindled shockingly.

He could feel the long cords and vertebræ no longer padded by kindly flesh and muscle. This condition meant that something was very wrong indeed. Nor did he know how long this decline, thus accidentally revealed, had been going on. He could not remember when the neck had not felt full and well muscled. Yet suddenly or gradually it was now pitifully shrunken, the condition concealed by the heavy coat which to Wilson's suddenly critical eye seemed sparing and unthrifty.

He went over the dog's body carefully, and the result increased his uneasiness. The shoulders now had little padding, the nose was dry and a little scaly, the stomach seemed tight, distended. All these things together were very bad indeed, and Wilson blamed himself that he had been blind to them. But they had come so gradually as to be imperceptible.

The dog put a paw on his knee and regarded him steadfastly with amber eyes which seemed to carry mute appeal. And into Wilson's as he looked into them sprang the sudden moisture of deep affection, for Admiral was his friend; and though man may not hope to equal the single-minded loyalty of a dog, yet the love of a hunter for his old dog passeth that of David and Jonathan, and is as that of David for Absalom.

"If you could only talk, to tell me what

the trouble is," Wilson said aloud to his friend. "Never mind, old partner, now we know something's out of whack we'll fix you up."

HE put the dog on a diet, and at intervals administered medicines. But on the whole there was no improvement. Admiral became duller, more disinclined to exercise. A weakness developed in his hind legs. Wilson called into consultation one Joe Claflin, an old shooting crony also wise as to dogs, who had known Admiral from puppyhood.

Claflin came, his six-year-old curly retriever Black Jock at his heels. He looked Admiral over and shook his head.

"He's sure fell off, Tom. I don't like the look of him. Let's see; he must be nearly twelve years old, ain't he?"

"That's nothing," said Wilson. He proceeded to argue against his convictions. "Dogs live to be fourteen or more, and a man lives to be seventy or so. That makes Admiral about like a man in his fifties. And that ain't old. Both of us are over fifty, and we're both good yet. Admiral was always a strong dog, and he's never been sick a day in his life. He's good for years."

"Well, I hope so," Claflin responded with more sincerity than faith. "I don't like the way he's gone off, but as you say he's a strong dog and he's had good care. Still, if I was you I'd be looking around for a pup this spring. To break him in, just in case. And you know yourself you've been favorin' Admiral the last year or two—not puttin' him up against real rough work."

"I don't tackle stuff myself I would have twenty years back," Wilson admitted. "Nor you don't."

"That's so," Claflin agreed regretfully. "We're all of us gettin' on. It's hell, ain't it, Tom, that dogs get old so much faster'n men? You've just got time to get fond of a dog and used to him, and him used to you so's you savvy each other; and then you've got to get a new one. It don't seem like a square deal on neither man nor dog. Still, there it is.

"Well, I dunno what more you can do for Admiral than you're doing right now. Likely he'll pick up. I'll drop in to-morrow. C'm' on, Jock."

Tom Wilson looked after man and dog with something like envy. Jock was merely six years old. It seemed only the other day that Admiral had been a young dog. He himself had been that much younger.

He had never thought of the dog as old, nor of himself as aging. They understood each other, as Claflin had said. Admiral understood more than any dog he had ever had. If he got a pup he had no doubt that Admiral would understand why. It would be an affront to an old friend. No, he would get no pup while Admiral lived.

At considerable expense he brought in a veterinary to see him. The veterinary had had little to do with dogs and said so frankly. He prescribed a tonic to go with the diet Wilson had instituted, of which he approved. After all, he pointed out, the dog was nearly twelve, and when a dog of that age starts to go downhill usually he keeps going.

Admiral kept going. He began to refuse food. One day Wilson missed him, and after looking for him vainly about the place his experience led him to search the woods behind the house.

There he found Admiral sitting by himself, gazing dully in front of him. Then Wilson knew that there was no hope; for when a sick dog leaves home merely to be by himself he obeys the animal instinct to die alone.

So Tom Wilson knew, and he knew that Admiral knew; and each knew that the other knew. It might be a matter of a day or two, but the end was plainly in sight. Finis had been written for Admiral. Tom Wilson sat down beside his friend.

JOE CLAFLIN, coming one morning to inquire how the dog was, saw Wilson busy with a spade in the corner of his garden. There was something on the ground beside him wrapped in what

Claflin identified as his friend's cherished hunting coat.

Therefore Claflin, who himself had buried dogs, at which times he had desired to be alone, retreated abruptly, and as he thought unnoticed. He kept away for several days, and when he did go to see Wilson he left his own dog at home.

"Well," said Wilson at last, "you were right about Admiral, Joe. He's gone to the happy hunting grounds—or wherever dogs go." He strove to speak casually, but made a poor fist of it.

"I'm sorry," said Claflin simply. "He was a good dog."

"So he was," Wilson said. "And I'm obliged to you, too, Joe."

"For saying that?" said Claflin. "He was a damned good dog. They don't come any better."

"No, they don't," Wilson agreed. "But that wasn't what I meant. You went away the other morning when you saw what I was doing. That was thoughtful of you. I didn't want to see anybody right then."

"I figured you wouldn't," said Claflin, and his eyes strayed to the hook, now empty, where Wilson's hunting coat usually hung. Wilson interpreted the glance.

"You saw that, too, did you?" he said. "Looks like a piece of damn foolishness, maybe?"

"Not to me," said Claflin. "I've had dogs myself ever since I was knee-high to a duck. And my folks always had."

"You savvy, of course," Wilson nodded. "Some wouldn't." He hesitated, groping for words, the human desire to confide fighting his natural reserve. "I thought a lot of Admiral," he said at last. "We were sort of chums, the way a man and a dog get. Foolish, maybe, but you know yourself how it is. And when you come to think of it, Joe, a man ain't got so much on a dog—not so much.

"Say he knows more than a dog some ways, but there's other ways a dog knows more than a man. Who knows how much a dog knows, anyway? And when it comes to friendship—why a dog will stick to you, come hell or high water, when you're on the top of the wave or when you're down and out; and how many men—or women—can you say that of?

"A dog figures out in his mind you're a sort of a god, and he trusts you and puts himself right in your hands to give him any deal you like. And it makes you feel rotten mean and small, and like a fraud when he comes to you when he's sick and asks for help, trustin' you, and you can't make good. But even then he don't doubt you—not once."

Tom Wilson's voice was not entirely steady, and he paused for a moment. "Anyway," he went on, "Admiral and me savvied each other. He never once quit on me, and he never refused to buck rough water or ice or mud when I told him to go. He gave me the best he had, all his life, and it was a good best. When the fall would come, and I'd put on that old coat he'd go clean crazy with joy, knowin' it meant we were goin' huntin' again. He's slept on it many a night on the boat, and in camps and strange shacks; and at home here his fav'rite place was on that rug right underneath it. So it seemed only the right thing, and the last I could do for him, to give it to him to sleep on for keeps."

"It was comin' to him," Claflin agreed with understanding. "He was a damned good dog," he repeated. "He was the best duck dog, bar none, that I ever saw." Which from Claflin, who was jealous of the reputations of his own dogs, past and present, was a real tribute.

But Wilson, who had said more than he had intended, and far more than he would have said to any one else, changed the subject.

"Well, now I got to get me another dog," he said. "Can't do much duck shootin' without one."

"I know where you can get a year-old curly retriever," said Claflin. "He ain't trained, but a young pup wouldn't be much use this season."

"Still, I'd rather have one," Wilson returned. "I like to handle a dog right from the start. He might not be much use this year. But next year I'd have a dog."

"I like 'em about three months old my-

self," Claflin admitted. "Got any notion of what breed you'll get—Irish, or curly, or what?"

"I've been thinking it over," said Wilson, "and I b'lieve I'll get a Chesapeake."

The breed was strange to Claflin.

"I've heard of them, of course," he said dubiously, "but I never saw one. They say they're crackin' water dogs, but that's all. Not gen'ral purpose. And not much nose."

"Most every dog's got a nose, give him a chance to use it," Wilson argued. "Though of course," he admitted, "I don't expect to draw another dog with as good a nose as Admiral."

"No, I guess not," said Claflin. Both men were silent for a moment as they recalled outstanding instances of Admiral's powers of scent. "What gave you the idea of getting a Chesapeake?" Claflin inquired.

"Well, Doctor Mallet was talking about them last fall when he was here," Wilson replied. "He says they're real dogs, and I go a lot on his opinion. And Ronan says so, too."

The men thus referred to, a surgeon of wide and growing reputation, and a novelist of some celebrity, came to Wilson's almost every fall for the duck shooting. Claflin admitted that they should know what they were talking about.

"Well," said Wilson, "I've got the address of a breeder, and he says he'll have a litter of pups for sale this spring. I'll go and have a look at them and at the old dogs before I decide."

CHAPTER II.

THE EDUCATION OF SHAN.

HISTORY mingled with tradition relates that in the year 1807 the Yankee ship *Canton*, out of Baltimore, took from a sinking British brig her crew and two puppies, male and female.

The pups were brought to Baltimore. The male was a poor red, the female black. They were named respectively Sailor and Canton. From them, or from outcrosses, sprang what is known as the Chesapeake Bay dog, the American duck dog par excellence.

The foregoing version of the origin of this breed is fairly authentic; but as to the component parts going to its making before it became standardized the investigator is thrown back upon pure tradition. Sailor and Canton are said to have been otter hound and Newfoundland or Labrador. But however that may be, it is probable that their blood was crossed with that of local water dogs of good hunting strains, irrespective of breed.

Dogs along the Chesapeake were bred for the practical purpose of retrieving wild fowl from rough, cold water. For this work certain qualities were necessary—weight, strength, courage, and, for ability to withstand cold and exposure, a dense but preferably not a long coat. In time specimens showing these desirable characteristics were mated, and thus in all likelihood the breed evolved and eventually became standardized. The result is a distinct type of dog, weighing from sixty to eighty pounds, short coated, in color preferably dead grass or tan, unequaled in water, and a born retriever as a hound is a born trailer.

In May Tom Wilson left home and was absent for a week. When he returned he brought with him a three-month-old tan dog puppy.

"So that's your Chesapeake!" said Joe Claflin, when on the evening of his friend's return he came to see what he had drawn from the deck of dogdom.

The pup was ungainly with the strong, leggy ungainliness of the moose calf. But as in the moose, this very ungainliness gave promise of mature strength and stature. He was long bodied on his big legs, and as the rump was a little higher than the shoulder he appeared to be slightly swaybacked. His chest was broad and deep. The head was well domed, short eared, set on a strong, muscular neck. The eye was full and intelligent, showing little haw. Head and tail—the latter very slightly feathered—were carried high.

Claflin noted these points with an experienced eye.

"Ought to make a big, strong dog," he commented.

"His dam weighs seventy pounds in condition, and his sire ten pounds more," said Wilson. "They're big, able dogs. They're practical hunting dogs, and not just bench, so that pup ought to be a worker. S'pose we take a walk to give him a run."

They set out, following an old bush road that led inland. The pup for the most part kept close to them.

"Stays in," said Claflin.

Things are sort of strange to him, I guess," said Wilson. Admiral from his puppyhood had been a seeker, restless, inquisitive, by right of a strain of spaniel blood. This pup seemed more sedate, with less curiosity.

PRESENTLY Wilson took from his pocket a carton in which were two cigars. He gave one to his friend, took the other himself and dropped the carton on the road. They lit their smokes and went on, conversing sporadically as was their friendly habit. But Claflin, chancing to look back, halted abruptly.

"Well, I'm darned!" he exclaimed. "Look at that!"

Behind them the pup was following sedately, the abandoned carton in his mouth. His head and tail were high, and he appeared to be immensely pleased with himself. And Wilson was more than pleased.

"How's that for a three-month pup—without a lesson of any kind?" he exulted.

"A natural-born retriever!" Claflin agreed. "Look how he's got it, right at the back of his jaws. And he ain't chewin' it—he's just holding it. That means he's got a good mouth. See if he'll bring it to you, Tom."

"Let him pack it a little while first," said Wilson. "He's like a kid with a new toy. Take it away and you spoil his fun. He's tickled with himself now. He's doin' what he's been bred to do, though of course he don't know it. Let's go on a piece."

The pup followed them for a hundred yards, carrying his prize. Then Wilson halted.

"Come, pup," he invited and held out his hand. But the puppy for the first time shook the carton playfully. "No!" said Wilson, very distinctly and very firmly. "No!"

Naturally the puppy did not understand, nor did Wilson expect him to. But the tone, as Wilson did expect, arrested his attention and thus arrested the shaking. To his puppy intelligence it meant something. He cocked his head inquiringly.

"He's trying to savvy!" Claflin exclaimed delightedly.

"Come, pup," Wilson repeated. Again he did not expect obedience. First must come understanding. To that end his commands to the dogs he owned were comparatively few, short, unvarying, and so easily identified once they were understood.

When he was sure they were understood he enforced obedience sternly; but until then he was infinitely patient, inculcating absolute trust in his fairness and judgment. Now he slowly approached the new pupil.

The pup sidled away. He had a prize which he was loath to relinquish. At once Wilson stopped. The pup stood still; and he stood at Wilson's next advance. Wilson did not touch the carton. He patted the head and the swelling little ribs, and scratched the ears. Then he took a fragment of soda cracker from his pocket while with the other hand he gently took the carton.

It was a fair exchange, one that appealed to the pup. He wolfed down the fragment with the ravenous appetite of his age. Wilson gave him another piece. Then he gave him the carton again, walked away a few steps and held out his hand. The pup came without hesitation. Wilson gave him a whole cracker and put the carton in his pocket.

"Let him think it over," he said.

"Best way," Claflin agreed.

Knowing dogs, neither of them doubted that the pup would establish a connection for himself between the act of bringing something to his master and receiving a reward in the form of an edible. It was

a first lesson, satisfactory alike to teacher and pupil.

WILSON continued the pup's education. He took his time, choosing favorable conditions. He never gave a lesson when the dog was tired or sleepy or had just been fed; and he never prolonged one to the point of weariness. At first he accustomed him to retrieve an old glove; and then he substituted a small buckskin moccasin stuffed with rags. This was to encourage him to open his mouth.

When he had established confidence and comradeship he introduced the pup to firearms, and he did so very carefully. A small proportion of dogs are naturally gun-shy. It is a fault which, once established, is very hard to eradicate. But in the majority of cases it might have been avoided by a realization of the fact that a nervous pup is quite naturally frightened by the unexpected and unexplained roar of a shotgun. If, being frightened, he is dragged back and forced, cowering, to listen to the noise again and again on the theory that he will thus become accustomed to it, the chances are better than even that his fear will become permanent.

Wilson began not with a shotgun but with a .22 rifle. The little whiplike report did not alarm the pup at all. Then Wilson took him out the old tote road and began to play a new and fascinating game.

He put the stuffed moccasin on the top of a low stump and sent the pup to retrieve it. Next, he took a small bit of board, tapered at one end. This end he drove lightly into a crack on top of the stump, balanced the moccasin on top of the board, showed it to the pup, and took him back thirty yards. From there he put a bullet into the board, and the moccasin, dislodged by the vibration, fell.

"Go get him," said Wilson.

When the pup brought the moccasin he was rewarded by a soda cracker. They played this game at intervals, until the pup began to establish a connection between the report of a gun and the pleasant task of retrieving, and when they went home Wilson was well pleased.

"First thing I know I'll have a dog," he said to himself. "He learns faster than any pup I ever had. But I've got to get a name for him, to register him under and work him with."

So far the pup was unnamed. For years Wilson's dogs had received names of nautical flavor—there had been Captain, Pilot, Bos'n, Nelson and Admiral—but now he wanted something new and distinctive. Puzzling over this problem one night, association of words led him to recall the old sea duel between the Yankee ship *Chesapeake* and the British *Shannon*. And he was struck by an antithetical idea which pleased him.

"He's a Chesapeake," he said to himself, "and I'll call him 'Shannon.' I'll register him as 'Grand Bay Shannon' and 'Shan' will make a good, short, sharp working name. Good enough."

THUS Shan was registered in the archives of canine aristocracy. He grew fast, heightening and lengthening and broadening. The water was his delight. He took to it like an otter, playing and splashing in the shallows, and swimming powerfully even in rough water.

During the summer the gas boat developed a leak, and Wilson, with Claflin's help, hauled it out on ways. Wilson suspected the stuffing-box packing, and he was investigating this while Claflin, for the moment idle, was watching Shan, who was swimming on his own account some twenty feet from shore.

"Look, Tom!" Claflin exclaimed suddenly. "Look quick!"

"What?" Wilson inquired, naturally looking in the wrong direction.

"You're too late," said Claflin. "You'd have seen something worth while—something I never saw before, anyway. Tom, that pup just dived."

"No!" Wilson exclaimed, all interest and excitement.

"Fact!" Claflin asseverated. "He was swimmin' around out there, and first he stuck his head down, and then he went right under. I've seen a dog come pretty close to divin' for a crippled duck, but I'm

darned if I ever saw one before that'd dive just for fun."

They suspended work to watch for a repetition, but Shan did not repeat. He came ashore, dried himself with a single shake, and lay down. And though Wilson watched carefully all summer he was not privileged to see what Claflin had seen. But if the pup would dive for fun he might do so for a cripple.

The summer days shortened, and the nights became cool with a tang to them. Fall was at hand. Wilson and Claflin began to overhaul their gear—guns, waders, shells, decoys, boats—the paraphernalia of the confirmed duck hunter.

The afternoon before the opening day saw them chugging down the bay en route for the rice marshes of Frenchman's Bay, a punt and a canoe lashed to the deck of the cabined gas boat, at peace with the world and themselves as they smoked their pipes and watched the shores slide by. Black Jock, who understood perfectly, sniffed the air eagerly. Close beside him sat the novice, Shan. He seemed to have a deferential air, as if he knew the black dog's greater experience.

"Do you want to work the pup with Jock a while in the morning?" Claflin asked that night as they smoked a final pipe before turning in.

"No, better not," Wilson returned. "Jock would shake the daylights out of him if he touched a bird of his, and that'd be bad. Or if Shan got a bird Jock might try to take it, and the pup would hang onto it, and it might give him a hard mouth. So I'll work him alone.

"I'll go up to the head of the creek and cut over to the old beaver ponds back of the timber. It's a good place to start a pup—no bad mud to discourage him, and I can wade most places myself if I have to."

DAWN saw Wilson gliding up a narrow waterway fringed with timber. At a point known to him he landed and took an obscure trail, presently emerging on an area of grass and small ponds.

Once this had been a big beaver pond, or a succession of them. The brown workers had gone, but relics of their old dams remained. On them willows had taken root and flourished. They were now causeways on which a man might walk dry-shod among the ponds.

Wilson followed one of these ancient dams which ended in a bushy tip separating two long, narrow sloughs. There he sat down in concealment.

It was now good daylight and guns were rapping briskly in the outer marsh. But among the old dams he was alone as he had anticipated. Apart from the reason he had given Claflin, there was a sentimental one which he kept to himself. Eleven years before he had brought Admiral, then a six-month puppy, to that very spot for his first practical work. It was his whim to start Admiral's successor there.

Just at his right, at the edge of the open water, Admiral had found and retrieved his first bird; and Wilson intended that Shan should retrieve his first as nearly as possible from the same place. He anticipated no difficulty in arranging it so, for ducks crossed that point from left to right on their way from the outer marsh.

As he sat waiting he recalled the details of that bygone morning with the photographic memory of the hunter for incidents connected with his avocation. He remembered how proud the puppy had been of that duck—it had chanced to be a pintail drake—and how proud he in turn had been of him.

His mind, footloose for the moment, went back to other days and other dogs—Nelson and Bos'n, Pilot and Captain, Sachem and Bess, Topsy and Beaver—good dogs all, and all gone where good dogs go; but above them all towered Admiral, of the great heart and almost human understanding, his partner and his friend. Would this long-legged, hound-bodied pup by his side prove a worthy successor?

But against the sky to the eastward two moving specks showed. They grew, and became a brace of ducks—pintails, as Wilson knew by their flight, feeling satisfac-

tion in the coincidence—frightened by the fusillade in the outer marsh, winging for the fancied safety of the secluded ponds.

In their line of flight they would cross at approximately forty yards. As they came nearly opposite Wilson rose, and the twin, tapering tubes swept up and into the birds' line of flight, in the deadly, fast swing of the expert, which automatically takes up lead and allows for distance.

As the gun muzzle leaped to the recoil the leading bird, accurately centered by the shot cloud, collapsed, its momentum carrying it onward so that it fell in the pond some twenty feet from shore. Automatically, from force of habit, Wilson swung on the second bird; but he checked his trigger finger and lowered the gun.

"One at a time is best," he muttered, and turned his attention to the dog, which he had on a light leash lest his eagerness should cause him to break shot.

Shan stood stiffly, glaring in the direction of the falling bird. "Steady!" Wilson warned as he unsnapped the leash. "St-e-a-dy!" Shan stood obediently, though his muscles quivered. Then he heard a familiar command, "Go get him, boy!"

The pup's limbs gathered in a joyous bound and he shot forward. He reached the edge of the pond, saw the floating body of the duck, raced out through the shallows and swimming a few feet caught it neatly and cleanly, turned with a rudder-like flip of his tail and regained the land. There he stood, holding his prize.

Wilson, who knew and understood a dog's mental processes and turned them to serve his needs, did not call him. It was the pup's great moment, his first bird, the fulfillment of the purpose for which he and his ancestors had been bred. It was ingrained, rooted, a part of him. He had come into his inheritance.

When Shan had savored his moment he brought the bird to his master. In later years he would retrieve on the run. But this first bird he brought slowly, pridefully, with the air of a conqueror.

Wilson did not attempt to hurry him. And before he took the bird from his mouth he praised and petted him, so that the pup was confirmed in his patent belief that he had performed a great feat and thereby pleased his master.

THAT day Wilson killed comparatively few birds. Shooting was subsidiary to teaching. He knew that faults are easily acquired and hardly eradicated. He was at pains to be accurate in his shooting, thus inculcating in Shan's mind certainty of connection between the report of the gun and its result in the form of a dead bird. That certainty, later on, would mean persistence in search.

It was in Wilson's mind to take full advantage of the pup's undoubted intelligence and physique, and to turn out a perfect retriever, a worthy successor to Admiral and his forerunners. Now he began to reap the reward of the careful yard training he had given the pup; for Shan took to the practical work without a balk. He retrieved from water and from grass, and once he chased down and caught a cripple in a small pond after the bird had dived repeatedly.

Toward evening Wilson, well satisfied, decided to quit. He sat down to southward of a line of willows, filled his pipe, and began to stow his birds in the game pockets of his coat, which he had removed because the day was warm.

While thus engaged he heard the accelerated beat of mighty wings and a startled "H-ronk, h-ronk!" overhead. The willow bushes had concealed him from the keen eyes of seven geese bearing down from the north. He grabbed hastily for his gun and scrambled to his feet.

Nobody knows by what process of selection the wing shot chooses one bird from a flock as his mark. It is not always the nearest or most obvious. But the fact remains that he picks one bird, picks it instantly, and thereafter sees no other until he pulls the trigger. He concentrates on it to the exclusion of all other mundane things.

Thus Wilson picked the goose third from the leader, swung, and pulled. But the bird did not even waver, and Wilson

as instantly as he had made his first choice made a second, and unhooked his second barrel in a long punch at the outside bird. As with the first shot, no result was immediately apparent.

With a grunt of disgust Wilson watched the flock go, while automatically he shoved in fresh shells. He was using small shot, sevens, deadly for early ducks but entirely too light for geese. But as he knew he had been holding properly he kept his eyes on the flock.

"Aha!" he said at last. "Got one, anyway."

One of the birds had wavered and suddenly pitched straight down. Then the outside bird left the flock and swerved to the right in constantly lowering flight. Wilson marked him down in a corner of the sloughs half a mile away.

"Now, if I had the old dog I'd get both of them," he muttered. "But with the pup it will be mostly luck. That first bird is dead; but the other isn't."

The first bird he found without trouble. It lay dead in the middle of a small pond.

"Now we'll see," said Wilson, and presently managed to point it out to Shan. The pup saw, but he was puzzled. He looked at his master. "Go get him!" said Wilson. Shan took to the water dubiously, his eyes on the bird. But presumably a drift of scent came to his nostrils and clarified the situation in his mind, for his nose shot forward and his swimming stride lengthened as he neared the floating body.

A goose is a big bird for a pup to mouth, but Shan got it somehow, and his head covered by a dragging wing started for shore. He staggered up through the shallow water, not dragging the bird, but carrying it.

"By glory!" Wilson breathed reverently, "I wish Joe could see this. A five-month pup! And packing a goose!"

HE had marked the other goose in a corner of the sloughs which he usually avoided because it was boggy and the going bad. Finding a bird there was a job for a grown dog. Wilson hesitated, but decided to try it.

He went slowly, picking his way, and at last came to a neck of firmer ground grown high with marsh grass. Here Shan became interested, nosing in the grass and gradually working away from what Wilson thought was the bird's line.

He would have trusted Admiral's nose implicitly; but he was more than doubtful of the pup's. But his experience told him that Shan was working out some problem of his own in which he was deeply interested.

He did it quietly, with none of the tail-thrashing eagerness by which a dog usually signifies that he is on a hot scent; and his quest, whatever it was, finally took him across the grass-grown neck to a strip of water a few yards wide, on the other side of which lay a narrow island some fifty yards long with a few bushes in the middle. Beyond it lay a large slough. Shan, with his master behind him, came to the water's edge. There he paused and looked across.

"Well, go over and see about it," said Wilson conversationally, as he might have addressed a shooting companion. Thus he had talked to all his dogs, and it had become a matter of habit. The pup cocked his head, his intelligent eyes questioning. "Go get him!" said Wilson, with a directory forward wave of his arm.

This was a familiar command, which the pup was beginning to understand. So he splashed across the narrow water and began to investigate the little island. Thus he came to the few bushes grouped in its center.

Wilson, watching him, heard a startled "H-ronk, h-ronk!" an excited bark, and from the bushes burst a great bird running, wings outstretched in a vain attempt to take the air, while a jump behind him came Shan.

The young gander, unable to rise because of an injured wing tip, turned to face this enemy; and a gander when he makes up his mind to fight does so wholeheartedly. Shan, running in, was met by beak and wing—a nipping, driving peck

on the nose and a mighty buffet of knobby bone and stiffened feathers across the eyes. He recoiled with a puppyish yelp of surprise and pain.

Wilson awaited developments. He might have shot the bird, but he preferred that the pup should handle the situation in his own way.

Shan was taken aback. According to the rules of the game as he had played it all that day this big bird should have surrendered meekly. But instead it had nipped him on the nose and jarred his head with a knobby wing bone. So he stood uncertainly, barking puppyish protest.

The goose hissed and ran at him. Perhaps the hiss contained unbearable insult; or perhaps the shades of Shan's ancestors came to his aid. At any rate the timbre of his excited, puppyish bark changed to a lower note, a precursor of the deep-chested roar that was to be his in later years, and he launched his long, hound's body in a second attack.

Wilson beheld a rolling, composite monster, both furred and feathered, from which wings, webbed feet, clawed toes and a thrashing tail projected impartially; which honked and hissed and growled. Presently it resolved itself into its component parts.

Shan, ruffled but victorious, held the bird down by his forepaws while he sought for a safe hold for his jaws. He got it, across the back behind the wings; and thus holding the big bird helpless, its long neck outstretched, he came with it across the narrow water to his master and laid it at his feet.

JOE CLAFLIN, preparing supper aboard the gas boat, his bag limit hanging up and Black Jock sleeping the sleep of the just and weary dog, looked overside as his friend's canoe slid out of the growing dusk.

"By golly," he said, "you lucky old stiff, you got two geese!"

"Yes," said Wilson. "But I tell you, Joe, I've got something a blamed sight better. I've got a *dog!*"

CHAPTER III.

SHAN MAKES AN ENEMY.

IN Shan's second summer Wilson went to see an old acquaintance named Morgan who had logged and driven the river with him, but had turned to farming. He found him putting up a new implement shed with the assistance of a man named Austen.

"You go ahead, George," Morgan instructed the latter. "Tom and me have some business to talk over."

The two friends sought the shady side of the barn, where they sat down, filled their pipes, and proceeded to talk over their business leisurely. Shan after a time got up, stretched himself with a bored yawn, and started on a lone tour of investigation which eventually took him to the shed at which Austen was working.

Austen had been handling some rough boards, and while doing so had worn a pair of working gloves to protect his hands. But when he began to mark and saw the boards he had dropped the gloves on the ground beside him.

Now Shan, in his young puppyhood, had been trained with a glove. Later, Wilson had been in the habit of dropping one now and then as if by accident, pretending to miss it, and sending the dog back to find it.

Thus, to Shan, a glove meant something to be picked up and borne to his master. Accordingly he took both gloves in his mouth and was starting away with them when Austen saw him.

Austen possessed a surly temper and had a local reputation as being a good man to let alone. He was a rough carpenter, an odd-job man, who lived by himself and picked up a livelihood in various ways, some of which, according to rumor, were not very creditable. He had a dog of his own, a big collie, a wolfish fighter which was continually getting him into trouble, but on this day he had left the animal at home. When he saw Shan with his gloves, his temper flared.

"Drop them gloves, you!" he snarled, and kicked at him. His heavy boot landed

hard on the shoulder. Shan yelped, dropped the gloves, and fled limping to his master.

Wilson and Morgan heard the yelp, and a moment after Shan appeared, running on three legs. Morgan was indignant.

"I'll bet Austen kicked him, or hit him with something," he said rising. "I'll go and give him hell for it."

Wilson ran his hand over shoulder and leg.

"Nothing broke," he said. "This is my show, because it's my dog." And he sought Austen. "What did you kick my dog for?" he demanded.

"Who says I kicked him?" Austen returned scowling.

"You kicked him or hit him. Makes no difference which. What for?"

"He was stealing my gloves, if you want to know," Austen replied. "Think I'm buying gloves for dogs to chew up?"

"He wouldn't have chewed them," Wilson told him. "He doesn't chew anything. He'd have brought them to me, and I'd have brought them back to you. You had no business to kick him. I don't let anybody kick a dog I own."

Austen regarded him truculently. He was younger and heavier than Wilson, who by his standards was an old man. People as a rule avoided trouble with him, and he had come to consider himself something of a local bad man and was rather proud of it.

"You don't, hey!" he said nastily. "Well, what are you going to do about it this time?"

"That'll depend on you, mostly," Wilson returned. "If you own up you did wrong, and say you're sorry, maybe I'll overlook it."

Austen stared at him and then laughed.

"You'll overlook it, will you?" he sneered. "I'm to say I'm sorry for kickin' a thievin' dog, am I? Well, I ain't. He got what was comin' to him; and the next time he comes around me he'll get another dose. That's how sorry I am."

Wilson's eyes fell under his hard stare. He shifted on his feet in apparent uncertainty.

"It ain't right to kick a dog," he protested. "It hurts him, same as it does a man. You wouldn't like it yourself. If I was to kick you——"

"You!" Austen scorned. "Hell! Let's see you try it!"

BUT he was quite unprepared for the promptness with which this sarcastic invitation was accepted. Wilson pivoted on his left leg. His right foot flashed forward and landed accurately on the inner side on the knee joint, temporarily paralysing the limb and causing its owner excruciating pain.

Austen stumbled a step and fell. Sitting on the ground he clasped his injured leg and cursed Wilson.

"Now you know what it feels like," the latter told him. "And you shut up callin' me them names, or I'll put a boot in your mouth."

"I'll get square with you," Austen threatened, though prudence led him to modify his language. "I'll fix you, and your dog, too!"

For the first time Wilson showed signs of anger.

"I know your kind—the kind that says things like that," he said. "I've heard about you, and how you're a good man to let alone because you'll do any dirty trick to get even. That's the name you have, and you've got some people buffaloed and afraid of you.

"Now let me tell you something—and you paste it right into your hat and look at it frequent: You can fix me all you like, any time you're able to. But if anything happens to that pup—anything at all, mind, any time, anywhere—I ain't going to wait for proof of who did it, but what I'll do, I'll hunt you up and I'll damn near kill you with my boots!

"I can do it, and I *will*. That's all I've got to say to you, and you can pick it up or let it lie, whichever you're a mind to."

When Wilson had gone, Morgan warned Austen seriously.

"Tom Wilson will do just what he says he'll do, and you'd damn well better remember it."

"He took me off my guard and lamed me, or I'd have showed him," Austen replied. "He's dirty—kickin'!"

Morgan smiled slowly in grim reminiscence.

"You asked for what you got. Tom Wilson is touchy about horses and dogs—always was. He's whipped better men than you, and I've seen him do it in the old days when fightin' was fightin' and everything went and nothing was barred.

"So my advice to you, Austen, is to keep clear of him and his dog—'specially the dog. If anything was to happen to it he wouldn't stop far short of killin' you. If I was you, I'd walk around the both of them like they were a quicksand."

Whether or no Austen took this advice to heart, he made no immediate attempt to get even. Indeed, when next he met Wilson he was at pains to keep his own dog, which delighted in shaking up younger or smaller animals, at heel. But Shan proved that he remembered his assailant by sticking close to his master, and by a low growl which the latter interpreted.

"The pup won't ever forget that kick," he said to himself, "and when he gets his growth and finds himself Austen better not come close to him. And I guess he won't. The way I size him up, he's dirty enough—when he thinks it's safe."

But one day in the little town of Winota, Austen's collie found Shan waiting for his master outside the post office, and promptly endeavored to give him a licking. Shan fought his young best, but he was no match as yet for the seasoned warrior.

The noise of the fight brought Wilson from the post office and Austen from a store across the street. They separated the combatants.

"I s'pose you think I set my dog on," Austen said defiantly.

"No," said Wilson. "But he don't need to be set on. He's always looking for trouble, and of course some day he'll get it."

"Let him take it, then," said Austen. "*I* don't baby no dog," he added meaningly.

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTING SEASON.

FALL came, and with it Shan's second hunting season. Before it was half over Tom Wilson admitted to himself—if to no one else—that the young dog bade fair to be Admiral's equal in everything save nose; and was his superior in physical qualifications for the hard, rough work demanded of the practical duck dog.

For one thing, Shan was larger and stronger, longer of limb and of body. Thus he slashed through water and bog with little apparent effort, and he swam buoyantly in rough water which would have buffeted a smaller dog about. He had the power plant.

Again, his short coat collected little mud, nor did it hold water, to which a dense, otterlike undercoat was all but impervious. A shake dried him. Sitting in a blind in a cutting wind after emerging from icy water, he never shivered, though ice might form on his outer coat. This natural protection conserved his powers, so that at the end of a hard day he was comparatively fresh.

It seemed to Wilson that the pup would never stop growing. He was becoming a giant of his breed. Broad and deep of chest, his heavily muscled hind quarters gave him tremendous driving power. And with the power he was as quick as one of the great felines. As he grew in stature, so he grew in experience—in the practical wisdom of the hunting dog. His nose would never be the equal of Admiral's, but it was good nevertheless, and he worked out a trail with quiet persistence.

His intelligence was eager. He seemed anxious to understand. Now and then he got into mischief, broke the law and was duly punished; but Wilson was very careful that the punishment should fit the crime exactly. Ordinarily a stern, "No! Shame!" would sufficiently indicate taboo or displeasure.

Tom Wilson might have added materially to his income by guiding and catering for parties of sportsmen. But he did not

care to do so. He held the majority of them, who banged away at anything in or out of range and crippled and lost more birds than they bagged, in detestation.

They and their kind were the scourge of the shooting grounds, which they burned out with prodigal waste of ammunition, shooting before daylight and after dark, terrorizing the birds and driving them from their feeding grounds; ruining the sport for men who shot moderately and sensibly, who realized that the present game supply is no longer a vast inexhaustible reservoir from which a man may draw as he wills; but one already sadly shrunken, and ever lowering in level as its tributaries, the old-time breeding grounds, are dried up by settlement; and as such to be conserved, with extinction as the alternative.

Wilson did not greatly care how many birds a man killed in a day, if he got what he killed. But the "high shooter," the reckless ass who shot without reference to the killing range of a gun, and the man without a dog who shot at birds which if they fell must fall where only a dog could retrieve them, aroused his ire. He held them on a par with children who break windows merely to hear the crash; or worse, as vandals destroying blindly for love of destruction that which by no possibility could they replace.

But John Mallet and Gerald Ronan, to whose mention of Chesapeakes he probably owed his possession of Shan, were not of these classes. He regarded them as friends and brothers. Almost every fall they came for a shoot and put up at his house. He furnished them with boats and decoys and hunted with them.

Gerald Ronan was a novelist of some celebrity who had married a Grand Bay girl, a descendant of one of the first families of settlers on its shores, the Arrans, whose old homestead of almost manorial dimensions still stood some twenty miles from Wilson's abode. Occasionally the Ronan family spent the summer there, but otherwise it was unoccupied save for an ancient family retainer or relic, who looked after it.

Mallet was a surgeon of fast-growing reputation. He was a big man, massively built, of great strength. He and Ronan had achieved national athletic fame in their college days, from which their friendship dated. Now both were in their middle thirties.

Ronan—whom hostile grand stands had named "Rough" Ronan, as they had conferred upon the doctor the equally alliterative and possibly appropriate sobriquet of "Murderer" Mallet—was still leanly compact and muscular; but the doctor was beginning to suffer from that bane of the ex-athlete of his type, superfluous flesh.

The intimacy of this pair was marked by that brutal frankness of speech which is a not unfrequent characteristic of close masculine friendships. They "kidded" each other unmercifully, each taking his verbal bumps cheerfully in order to give. They were hard workers in their respective callings, on their way to the top. But on these annual visits to Wilson they relaxed and let themselves go, like boys on a holiday.

THIS season they arrived late in October, in a battered old touring car of Ronan's which looked like a tramp but purred a deep, even song of power. Wilson, with Shan at his heels, came to welcome them. The doctor ran his hand over the dog's body, his fingers lingering appreciatively on the powerfully muscled thighs.

"By gum, Jerry, feel here!" he said to his friend. "He's got the punch, this guy. He's built to buck the line hard. How's he workin', Tom?"

"He's a comer," Wilson replied. "He's got a good mouth. And right now he'll dive for cripples."

"No!" Mallet exclaimed.

"Yes, *sir*," Wilson asseverated. "You'll see."

"If you say so it goes," the doctor admitted. "We'll drink his health—that is, if this rough guy I'm traveling with hasn't broken all the case goods we put into that springless covered wagon he calls a car."

"That's a real car," Ronan defended his

possession proudly. "It comes darned near being an automobile."

"It looks more like an autopsy," the doctor returned scathingly, "and some day it will help to make one. It'll go to pieces like the one-horse shay. And you had the nerve to hit fifty with it on a dirt road! I had a good notion to take the wheel from you."

"You couldn't have got under it," his friend retorted cruelly. "Your chest expansion has slipped down, Johnny."

The doctor snorted.

"You'd think," he said to Wilson, "that a bird that's getting rich writing dolled-up dime novels that sell for two bucks and make pictures that appeal to subnormal intellects, would have enough self-respect to drive a decent car. One with a touch of paint, anyway. Now, I'm not proud. I'm only a poor doctor——"

"'Poor doctor' is right," Ronan took prompt advantage of this opening. "Darn poor! Why is an undertaker like a doctor?"

"If you slander the profession I'll forbid you tobacco and alcohol," the doctor threatened. "Why *is* an undertaker like a doctor, Sambo?"

"Because he follows the medical profession," Jerry Ronan grinned. "Laugh that off, Mr. Bones!"

"If I ever get the chance to trim you up there'll be poor pickings for an undertaker," the doctor retorted. "One of us will get you some day. Sob that on your saxophone, you scribbler!"

"You two are the same as ever," Wilson laughed. "Some men would get fighting mad for the half of what you say to each other."

"You have to make allowances for lunatics and authors," Mallet observed loftily. "Poor devils! But once, Tom, they were men like you and me."

As no sufficiently scathing retort occurred instantly to Jerry Ronan, he grinned cheerfully.

"Your round, Johnny," he acknowledged generously. "Your old battery throws quite a spark yet. Let's get the stuff out of the car, and I'll run it under Tom's shed. It looks like weather to-night."

THIS prediction was verified. That night it blew a heavy gale, with sleet. But Mallet and Ronan did not care. They sat by the stove, smoked, talked of guns and ducks and dogs, and were entirely happy.

"I was figurin' on shootin' Squaw Point to-morrow," Wilson told them, "but if this blow keeps up it'll be no good. It'll drive the birds to shelter in the back sloughs."

"Lots of time," said Mallet. "It'll suit me down to the ground to loaf for a day or two." His huge bulk was sprawled in the largest chair, his feet on another, a blackened brier was clenched between his solid teeth and a glass of steaming amber liquid was in his hand. He took a long appreciative pull at the latter and sighed.

"By gum, Jerry, this is the life! And to think that the rest of the year, and every year, I spend my time goin' over human engines, taking up bearings and scraping out carbon, and trying to give worn cylinders a touch of the old compression. My life is pitiful, that's what it is. By gosh, it's tragic!"

"You don't know the half of it," Jerry Ronan challenged comparison promptly. "You have a cinch. Now, if you had a rotten job like mine——"

"Yours!" the doctor exclaimed in scorn. "Why, you drivelin' leisured loafer, you don't know what real work is. You have a pipe!"

"Shows all you know about it," the novelist returned with equal scorn. "A guy comes in to you, and you listen to him for a knock; and you wheel him over the pit and open up his crank case and take out a shim or two and put on a new gasket and put him on the road. You get paid scand'lous for it, too. Messy work, maybe, but then you're naturally brutal.

"But you take my job. I have to turn out a book every so often. And to do that I have to have a good story idea."

"Since when?" Mallet asked scathingly.

"I said you were brutal," his friend retorted. "Good enough to get by, anyway.

More or less original in conception or treatment."

"Yeh—more or less! the doctor scoffed. "The gall of you wordsmiths, claimin' originality! You get a concept of a husky young guy in hard luck, and a be-yew-tuous damsel in distress, and one hard-boiled bird out to bump off the guy and cop the girl; and you mix in a few misunderstandings that couldn't occur between people of normal intelligence. And you call that an original story!"

"'When 'Omer smote 'is bloomin' lyre,'" Jerry Ronan quoted. "Rudyard had the right slant. We take what we can get. But let me tell you, you old ruffian, that story ideas not too hackneyed don't grow on every bush. You try to catch one, out of your mind or out of a clipping file, and see."

"Not my job," Mallet maintained. "You get your ideas—such as they are—and then you just sit down and write your story."

"Just like that!" the novelist returned bitterly. "Why, you poor vivisector, I've spent days trying to make a single paragraph read easy for skates like you—that skip every darn bit of good writing and merely follow the action."

"If you literary birds would think less of good writing and more of good action you'd have more punch," the doctor retorted. "The trouble with you——"

"*I'm* not literary, darn you!" Jerry Ronan exclaimed indignantly. "I'm a writer. I write for money. A literary guy isn't a writer any more than a fancy gym boxer is a fighter.

"A literary guy is an amateur with theories about ring style. A writer is a professional trying to land a punch. That's the difference."

"The literary guys set the style, anyway," the doctor maintained.

"Apple sauce!" Ronan returned. "They can't make it stick. Contemporary writing must conform to the everyday speech of the reading public. That's what these birds can't see. The public wants and gets and reads the stuff that packs the punch, written in darn good journalese English by boys that have worked in through the papers or some job where they've rubbed up against real men and women and seen human nature as it oughtn't to be, but as it is. Purists and stylists never get beneath the verbal skin of a story and into its meat. The public doesn't care a hoot for the skin, but it bolts red meat in chunks.

"Get me? And the boys who write the stuff that's read, write the speech of everyday folks for everyday folks."

"I like a story where the people talk and act the way real folks do," Tom Wilson put in.

"Of course you do," said Ronan. "What the average man wants is a yarn he can sit down and feel at home with."

"It must be pretty hard work to write a book."

"Now you've said something," the novelist agreed heartily. "It's a dog's life—and not a duck dog's at that. You're lucky to be able to live here and shoot and build boats."

"You bet he is!" The doctor for the first time found common ground with his friend.

Tom Wilson drew thoughtfully at his pipe.

"I guess the other fellow's job always looks best," he said. "I couldn't write a book, nor I couldn't take out an appendix. But I can build a good boat. I like to do it. Sometimes a man likes to do what he can't do well; but most always he likes to do what he knows he's good at. And so I'll bet that in spite of your kickin' you two wouldn't quit doctorin' or writin' for anything else."

The disputants looked at each other and grinned.

"Got us," said Mallet.

"Cold," Ronan agreed.

"I thought so," Wilson nodded. "It's a great thing—finding your right job in life. I ain't so sure that I ever did. Still, I ain't kickin'. I have a pretty good time. I don't know that I get the fun out of shootin' that I used to get, but I like to be out and to see the dog work. While you're here he'll get plenty of it."

IN the next ten days Shan got plenty. The heavily feathered birds were coming down from the north, and the sport was good. Mallet was a finished shot, Ronan above the average. In the cabined gas boat they visited the best shooting grounds, living aboard, a trifle cramped for room but cozy, lying in shelter on wild nights when the wind howled over the headlands and the big seas roared outside.

As Shan had work in open water and in the deep mud of the rush-tangled sloughs, and accumulated experience and grew in wisdom. Now and then they varied the program by a day after partridge.

But this was not Shan's game. He would retrieve a bird perfectly and he would work out a scent, but he had no idea of making a point. However, he ranged close and flushed birds for snap shots.

But in the open-bay shooting he shone. There he was in his element. Hours of alternating icy water and piercing wind apparently had no effect upon his body; certainly not upon his eagerness.

No water was too rough for him. When the weighted decoys were rolling and pitching at their anchors, or on long points where the bluebills skimmed the tops of the breaking seas, he never needed urging. He was developing his trick of diving for cripples, and though he lost some birds in rough water, he gave an astonishing performance.

"I believe he'll be better than old Admiral when he's had another season," Mallet declared.

"He's bigger and stronger, and that gives him the edge," Wilson replied, loyal to the memory of his old friend.

"You wouldn't sell him?"

"To you?"

"Lord, no!" the doctor negatived. "I live in a flat. No place to keep a dog, and no time to get acquainted with one. But I know a shooting fool with all kinds of money and a country place, who wants a good retriever. He knows dogs, too. On my say-so he'd pay three hundred for Shan—maybe more."

"That's pretty near a top price," Wilson admitted. "But I never sold one of my dogs yet—I mean a dog I'd had from a pup, and I'd got to know. They get to be sort of friends."

"It isn't every man that's fit to own a real dog, anyway," Mallet returned with understanding.

IN due time Mallet and Ronan departed, their holiday done; and Wilson and Shan resumed their strait companionship. The shooting season was verging toward its close, for winter was at hand. The marshes were drab and dead; the sloughs froze by night and opened less and less by day. In the sheltered bays ice formed, its outer edges breaking in a sustained, crystalline tinkling murmur to the lift and heave of the outside seas.

Vagrant flocks of geese came out of the north and tarried on the open waters and sand bars of the big bay. But the big migration of them—the long lines and wedges boring southward on the long flight with the great ganders breaking the air trail at the tips of their flying squadrons—did not come. But Wilson and Claflin made ready.

The freeze-up came that year heralded by a gale and snowstorm of the proportions of a blizzard; and it found Wilson and Claflin ensconced on the narrow neck of a long promontory directly in that line of migratory flight which had been followed by wildfowl for untold centuries. The big gray birds flying low, battling with wind and snow, were disgustingly easy targets.

"This ain't sport," Tom Wilson announced to his friend when he had used a dozen shells in straight kills. "This is murder."

"You don't often get a chance like this at the big boys," Claflin returned. "By gosh, here's another bunch comin' right for us!"

From sheer force of habit Wilson rose as the low-flying flock was almost upon them. The birds towered in wild alarm. The nitro cracked faintly in the gale. Four big, gray bodies thudded on the frozen

ground. Shan and Jock leaped to their work.

"I'm through," Wilson announced as his ejector spat the spent shells from the breech. "No more fun in this than shootin' birds off a limb. I didn't mean to shoot those last two. I don't know why I did it. They had no chance."

"Well, what chance has any bird inside sixty yards got with you most times?" Claflin asked, and answered his own question. "Just the chance of a poor shell or a patchy shot pattern, or the sun in your eyes. If you miss it's accident—not if you hit."

"Both of us get most of what we shoot at in range," Wilson admitted.

THERE'S a lot of bunk about game havin' a chance," said Claflin. "F'r instance, neither of us would shoot a sittin' bird unless it was a cripple. But come right down to it, ain't a duck on the wing a darn sight easier shot than one on the water?"

"It is for me," Wilson agreed. "A flyin' bird's a bigger mark, and he's all exposed. If you're swingin' right you get him, of course."

"That's what I say," Claflin nodded. "Once a man learns how to swing, it's a cinch. I'll bet if wing shootin' wasn't allowed, and we had to shoot sittin' birds or none, there wouldn't be half as many birds killed."

"Nor crippled," said Wilson. "There ain't one killed and bagged to ten that's wounded and die away off somewhere. Fool shootin'—that's what's spoilin' what there is left. Birds are scarce to what they used to be. We've killed our share, too—or more. How many ducks do you s'pose you've killed altogether, Joe—all your life?"

"All my life?" Claflin repeated. "I got no idea. I begun to shoot when I was about ten, and I've been at it ever since. That's blame near fifty years of it. No, I couldn't make even a guess. But there was one season I made about six hundred dollars sellin' ducks at two dollars a dozen."

"I'm about the same," said Wilson. "Looks like we two haven't got much of a right to talk about how game is gettin' scarce."

"Well, we know what we're talkin' about, anyway," said Claflin. "The market shootin' was hard on game, of course. But there was plenty of it, and not one shooter where there's a hundred now, and no pump guns nor automatics, and most of all no gasoline boats to take a man in an hour to places that used to be a whole day's trip.

"And besides that, the country's settlin' up, and the breeding grounds are gettin' smaller every year, and a lot of the old feedin' grounds are bein' drained. The birds won't stand it; they can't. Nowadays they're outheld, every way." He shook his head forebodingly and extracted the shells from his gun. "If you ain't goin' to shoot no more, I guess I won't, either."

"Don't let me stop you. Shoot all you like."

"Oh, well, I guess I have," Claflin admitted. "I guess to-day winds up our shooting for this year. I'm always sorry—kind of—when it ends."

Wilson, too, had this feeling as the season closed, when the frost had bound marsh and bay, and the birds had gone. Nor was it altogether regret that the sport was over. It went a good deal deeper than that.

He took aimless walks, excursions along the shore and across the frozen marshes. It was like revisiting a house, now empty, which had afforded him hospitality. It gave him a sense of melancholy, of desertion. Vaguely at such times he speculated as to the future of these shooting grounds which had so altered in his own day.

What would they be like in another lifetime? In fancy he could see the marshes deserted, bare of the once-teeming bird life, the swift wings that once sang overhead in the dusks and the dawnings gone forever, a fading memory; one with the passenger pigeon and the buffalo, one more item in a wasted heritage.

CHAPTER V.

SHAN MAKES GOOD.

WITH the advent of winter Shan and his master settled to a circumscribed round of existence. Wilson put away his hunting gear, put his workshop in order, overhauled his stock of clear pine and cedar, set up a set of templets, and began to build a canoe around them.

Shan, dozing comfortably by the workshop stove, blinked at him with somnolent eyes and dreamed of the glorious days just ended. At night, in the living room of the cottage, they kept each other company, for the most part alone.

Now and then Claflin dropped in, or Wilson went to his house. Occasionally, too, the county constable, Ed Cronk, paid him a visit. Cronk was another old friend. He was a small man who had been very active, but now had a dragging leg, the result of a nip in a log jam many years before. His job was a good deal of a sinecure, but he possessed a homely shrewdness.

Now and then there were other callers, and now and then Wilson got tired of his own company and went abroad, but he possessed a great capacity for solitude and as a rule was content to remain at home.

Shan had adopted his own house habits and selected his own favorite places, which were not those of his immediate predecessor. He never occupied Admiral's rug, which still lay beneath a new hunting coat. As a rule he liked to lie close to his master, his head or a paw touching him.

Occasionally Wilson would put down his hand and touch him, and in the course of an evening he would speak to him apropos of whatever was uppermost in his mind, exactly as he might have addressed a human companion. Thus he had talked to all his dogs, and the habit was confirmed. He was quite conscious of it, and practiced it as readily in the presence of others as when alone.

"You'll be talking to yourself next," a visitor had observed on one occasion.

"How would you like to live with a man and never have him say a word to you except to order you about?" Wilson asked.

"That's different."

"No, it isn't. Dogs like to be spoken to and taken notice of, same as humans. And let me tell you something: If you talk to a dog that thinks a lot of you and pet him, and then put your ear down close you'll hear him makin' little, strainin' sounds in his throat as if he wanted to tell you something and couldn't."

"Are you tryin' to tell me that dogs try to talk?" his visitor demanded skeptically.

"Not quite that. But I'm tellin' you that a dog knows he's bein' talked to, and those little, strainin', longin' sounds are his way of tellin' you he savvies, and loves you a danged sight more than it's in you to love him."

And so Wilson talked to Shan as he had talked to his forerunners. He made no attempt to teach him tricks of the ordinary canine repertoire. Such as he taught were practical, and based on the hereditary retrieving instinct.

Thus before the winter was over Shan would bring him his hat, gloves, slippers or overshoes, selecting the desired article unerringly.

WINTER passed. Shan swung into his third summer. He was then a grown dog, almost at his full adult strength, though not at the peak of his sinew and endurance. He weighed eighty-five pounds. Later he would increase in weight, but now, though he was in good condition it was principally bone and muscle.

He was proud of his young strength. His very walk advertised it. He paid little attention to lesser dogs, viewing them with good-natured condescension. His size afforded him protection even from quarrelsome canines. Even Austen's collie, when they met, though he growled and bristled dreadful threats, did not force the issue.

Apparently it needed little forcing. Shan, friendly to all others, cherished an antipathy to this animal and his master. He no longer drew close to Wilson when

he met them. He held his own way, eying them askance.

"Sooner or later," said Claflin, "the pup"—thus he continued to allude to Shan—"will have it out with that collie. And if I know anything about dogs, he'd just about as soon tackle Austen."

"He's never forgotten him," said Wilson. "But I don't want him to fight. When a big dog like him gets a taste for scrapping it makes all sorts of trouble."

"It does—for the other dog," said the unregenerate Claflin. "I believe he could lick the collie—the brute tore up a little cocker the other day—and I wish he would. And if he took a few fingers off of Austen it wouldn't worry me. They're pretty light fingers, from all accounts."

It was but a week after Claflin had thus voiced his sentiments, that Shan and the collie chanced to meet much as they had met a year before, by the post office. Nobody saw the beginning of the fight, but Wilson and Claflin, in the post office, heard it and emerged. The dogs were hard at it. Austen came running.

"You pull your dog out, and I'll pull mine," he said.

"Just as you like," said Wilson.

"Just as *you* like," Austen returned. "Far as I'm concerned my dog can get out of what he gets into."

"Then we'll see how he gets out of this," said Wilson, to Claflin's glee.

In short order it appeared that the fighting collie had met his Waterloo. Shan, though inexperienced, was larger and heavier, far more powerful and just as agile. The tremendous driving power of his hind quarters overthrew his antagonist again and again as they reared against each other. Finally Shan got the collie down and began to shake him ferociously

"I'll take my dog off now, and you look after yours," Wilson said to Austen.

With difficulty he dragged Shan away. Austen kicked the gasping collie, and cursed him.

"Get out of here, you useless mutt!" he said, and kicked him again.

"And you're a damn sight more useless, Austen!" Claflin exploded indignantly. "You taught him to fight, and now you kick him because he's licked. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Shut your trap, you old fool!" Austen snarled. "If you weren't so old, I'd hand you something, too."

"I may be old," the choleric Claflin returned, "but I never saw the day I was afraid of a cur, on four legs or two."

"Shut up, Joe!" Wilson counseled.

"I won't," said Claflin. "He don't run no sandy on me. You're a thing and a rotten coward!" he said to Austen.

The latter took a step toward him. Wilson stepped in front of him.

"Let it go," he said.

"No man can talk to me like that, old or not!" Austen blustered.

"Let it go," Wilson repeated. He had released Shan, and the dog stood beside him. Austen, thoroughly angry, put out his hand, either in protest or to shove Wilson aside.

AT the gesture Shan launched himself straight for the man's throat. Austen threw up his arm and escaped the teeth, but the impact of the big dog's body threw him backward; and at the same moment the beaten collie, with a dog's unswerving loyalty, leaped to his master's defense. He struck Shan heavily as the latter was gathering for another spring, and they joined battle again.

But Wilson gripped Shan and held him, while somebody caught the collie's hind legs and swung him clear. Austen shook his fist at Wilson.

"Your dog bit me," he said exhibiting a torn sleeve. "I'll have him shot."

"Let's see where he bit you," Wilson demanded. He found that Shan's teeth had missed the flesh. "The skin ain't broken," he said with some relief.

"He tried to bite me," Austen maintained. "He's vicious, and he's got no business running loose."

"Bosh!" said Wilson. "He doesn't like you, and he has good reason not to. You made a pass at me——"

"I didn't," Austen denied.

"Well, you reached out at me, anyway,"

Wilson said. "Only for that he wouldn't have touched you."

"I'll see what the law has to say about it," Austen threatened. "A man ain't allowed to keep a vicious dog."

"Go ahead with your law," Wilson told him contemptuously. He went home with Claflin. The latter grumbled.

"What did you horn in for? I ain't afraid of him. I ain't a baby."

"Well, no," said Wilson, "you ain't."

"I'm only three years older 'n you," Claflin told him with some asperity.

"I know," Wilson admitted. "You'd have stood up to him. But you ain't a fighter, Joe. And you know what the doctor told you." Claflin had been warned against violent exertion, sudden strain.

"Doctors are all alike," said Claflin resentfully. "They all got the same system. They tell you to stop whatever you're doin' if they can find out what you like to do; and if you ain't doin' anything they tell you to start doin' it. If you live in the mountains they send you to sea level; and if you live on the seashore, you got to go to the hills. Any darn thing, so's it busts up the way you're livin' and costs money. They make me tired."

He was chafing at unaccustomed restrictions in his manner of living, which he found irksome. Especially he rebelled against orders to cut down his tobacco consumption.

WILSON heard no more of the episode. Fall came, and Mallet and Ronan. Again Shan's days were full, and he tasted the full joy of life. The next winter passed uneventfully. With the summer the Ronan family came to the old Arran homestead. When they were settled Jerry Ronan drove over to bring Wilson on a visit.

"You haven't seen Moira and the kids since Bill arrived on the scene," he said. "He's going on three now. Sheila is seven and Jack is nine. They all want to see you and Shan. Come along and spend a few days with us."

When they drove up to the old homestead on the shores of the bay, Moira Ronan and the children came to meet them. She was a dark-haired, slender woman who had retained her girlish figure and her love of outdoors. After ten years of marriage she and her husband were chums. The children shouted when they saw Shan.

"Lookut, lookut, Sheila!" young Jack cried. "There's the dog that daddy and Uncle Johnny shoot with. Gosh, daddy! ain't he a whale?"

"Pray, Gerald, instruct your son to modify his expressions," said his mother, primly. Sheila, aged seven, clapped her hands.

"He ith a gweat big guy, ain't he!" she lisped through a temporary dental gap.

"Mrs. Ronan, I am inexpressibly shocked by the lack of maternal supervision betrayed by your daughter's speech," her husband grinned.

"Sheila, Sheila!" the mother grieved. "Oh, Jerry, why did I ever marry a writer of English as she is spoke? 'The sins of the fathers!' And her mother a real lady, too! Sheila, darling, say this after mummy: Say, 'Yes, brother, he is indeed a large dog.'"

"Yeth, bwother," the young lady lisped obediently, "he ith in-deed a—a darn big dog," she concluded feebly.

"Bid dod, bid dod!" little Bill declaimed, and the three fell upon Shan.

"My Lord, kids, go easy!" their father exclaimed apprehensively. "The dog isn't used to your rough stuff."

"Steady, Shan!" Wilson warned sharply.

But Shan, with Jack lying half across his back and Sheila's arms around his great neck, her soft cheek against his jaws, opened his mouth and lolled out a long, red tongue. He lifted a big paw and put it forth in a tentative, friendly gesture; but it happened to meet the midriff of his youngest admirer, tumbling him backward. His father set him upright.

"Out of your class, Bill," he said. "You can't swap punches with the heavies yet. Now, kids, don't crowd the dog."

"I'm going to have a dog like him when I grow up," young Jack announced.

"You may grow up—if you have luck," his father admitted doubtfully; "but on past performances it's about fifty-fifty. Come in, Tom, and we'll find something to cool your radiator. Bring Shan too. I wouldn't trust these congenital dog stealers with him."

Tom Wilson's visit lasted several days. Shan and the congenital dog stealers became great friends. They played together on the shore of the bay, the big dog romping in the shallows with them. The children had a raft which they propelled with poles.

"I'll build them a boat," Tom Wilson offered as he and Ronan sat in the shade one afternoon idly watching the youngsters on the beach below them, "a good, safe scow. I could knock it together in a day. I'd like to."

"That's good of you," Jerry Ronan replied. "But the fact is, Tom, their mother wouldn't stand for it, and I don't know that I would, myself. Heaven knows what stuff they'd pull if they had a boat. Try to row across the bay in a blow, likely. A raft is safer, and they get just as much kick out of it."

He paused to consider his offspring. Jack and Sheila were poling the raft. Young Bill sat grandly upon an upturned box in its center.

"Unless I miss my guess," he continued, "Jack is at this moment a pirate or a voyageur, and Sheila is the buccaneer's bride, or White Swan, the captured paleface girl. But the Lord knows," he added sadly, "they may have moved with the times. In which case Jack may be a bank holdup making a get-away in a speed boat with his partner, Carrie Coke, the Snow Queen. You never can tell. The devil of parenthood is that one generation knoweth not the heart of the next."

At any rate the children's amusement appeared to be perfectly safe. The water was shallow, the bottom white sand, lying in fascinating ripples, deepening very gradually. A couple of hundred yards down the shore it fell away in the entrance to a deep, narrow cove.

In this almost landlocked shelter was the old landing place of the Arrans in the days when the waterways were the highways and roads were not. Up at the head of the cove lay the bones of their old craft, from schooner to canoe, half buried in sand, the gray, weathered timbers protruding relics of the brave days of wind and sail. There was a wharf reaching into deep water, beside which Ronan kept his gas boat, a comfortable, open family tub.

Moira Ronan, a book in her hand, joined the two men. The afternoon was warm, drowsy. Now and then a vagrant breath stirred the leaves of the maples in a sleepy sigh, but the surface of the bay lay unruffled.

Shan left the children and went to sleep at his master's feet. His example seemed infectious. Conversation became intermittent, with long intervals.

Tom Wilson nodded and his eyes closed. Jerry Ronan, stretched on the grass, eyed him sleepily and smiled at his wife.

"Take the ship, mister!" he murmured, and pillowed his head on his muscular, bare arm.

Moira Ronan smiled to herself as she regarded the two sleeping men, noting the gap of years between them. In slumber, Tom Wilson's age seemed to increase. He looked tired, old. Some day, she told herself, she and her husband must reach that stage. Well, there were years yet to make the most of.

She endeavored to read, but found her eyes closing. She opened them, glanced toward the children. They had come ashore from the raft and were some distance down the beach, digging in the sand.

All seemed well. On this sleepy afternoon, in the home of her girlhood with her husband and children, the world was very good. She was content. She leaned back, relaxed.

SHE woke, startled. Had she heard a distant, childish cry, or had she merely dreamed? A glance showed her an empty shore line. Where were the children?

Wilson's big dog was on his feet, his head lifted, his whole attitude questioning. And then unmistakably she heard

a childish cry, quavering, appealing. It came from the direction of the little bay. She sprang up.

"Jerry, Jerry!" she cried, "wake up! Something has happened."

At her voice Ronan came out of his slumber.

"Hallo, Moira! What——"

"The children!" she cried. "Down by the old wharf! The deep water!" And she ran.

Jerry Ronan came to his feet with what seemed to be but a single muscular contraction, and leaped into the sprint that a dozen years before had made him the terror of opposing back divisions. Tom Wilson, slower, pounded stiffly and laboriously after him.

"All right, girl, don't worry!" Jerry threw back over his shoulder as he passed his wife.

But as he ran he thought he heard Wilson's voice, then a scurry of flying pads behind him and Shan shot by, running hard and low. The big dog disappeared over the bank that hid the wharf, and the sound of a splash came faintly to his ears. When he in turn topped the bank and looked down on the little bay, this is what he saw:

Beyond the end of the wharf, in deep water, Shan, his head almost submerged, was struggling toward shore, his jaws gripping the limp form of little Bill. Jack, choking and coughing in the water, clung to the outermost pile of the old wharf; while his sister was struggling to let go the stern line of the gas boat.

So much Jerry Ronan saw as he came over and the boards of the old wharf roared under his flying feet. With a curse that was a prayer he sailed from the end of the wharf and struck the water close to dog and child.

AS nearly as I can get it, Tom," he told Wilson a couple of hours later, "the kids got tired of playing on the shore and went to the old wharf in the bay. Moira was dozing, same as we were, and so nobody saw them go. They went out to the end of the wharf and lay down there to watch the suckers and perch swimming in the shade under it.

"Bill must have leaned out too far, and he overbalanced and went in. The other two yelled for help, and luckily Moira heard them. The little kid came up and yelled, and of course he choked and went down, and then Jack went in off the wharf after him. He can swim a little, but of course he couldn't have helped Bill, even if he had got hold of him. If he had, the chances are both would have locked and gone down, so it's lucky he didn't."

"It was plucky of him, though," said Wilson.

"Oh, yes, it was plucky," his father admitted. "Between friends, Tom, I'm so damned proud of the kid that I can't talk about it, rationally, so I won't. Well, he couldn't reach Bill, who had gone down again, and he swallowed some water and got rattled, and came near going down himself.

"And at that moment—I get this from Sheila—Shan came over the bank and down the wharf, and I suppose he saw Bill come up or splash. Anyway he went in after him just as he would for a bird, and got hold of him by the shoulder. That's what I saw when I got there.

"The kid's weight was more than the dog could handle. It sunk him down to his eyes and nose; but all the same he was holding him up and swimming for shore. He didn't want to let go, even when I got alongside."

"The youngster's all right, is he?"

"Absolutely all right. Moira is pretty shaky now it's over."

"She would be, of course. Lucky it turned out all right."

"When I was running," said Ronan, "I thought I heard you call out something."

"I guess I was just speaking to the dog."

"What did you say to him?" Ronan questioned.

"I told him to go," Wilson admitted. "I said, 'Go get him, boy!' like I tell him for a bird. I thought he would get there first, and maybe it would help. A few seconds make a difference sometimes. Of

course I didn't know what had happened. I was just taking a chance."

"The seconds he beat me to it were the important ones," said Ronan. "If he hadn't got there in time to grab the kid and hold him up he might not have been in sight when I got there. And so, Tom, what we owe to you and Shan is so much that we don't know what we are going to do or say about it."

"You don't need to say a darn thing," said Wilson. "But I'm mighty proud of Shan. He's a real dog, ain't he?"

"He's all that, and then some," said Ronan. "I don't want to slush about this, Tom, and you don't want me to. We're men. Moira will tell you more than I can, as women do. But just this, Tom: If there is ever anything I can do for you or for Shan—no limit at all, mind—will you let me know?"

"I sure will," Tom Wilson promised, mostly because he did not think there could be such occasion.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOOD FRIEND.

THE one truth that we know about life is that nothing is static—though we refuse to recognize that truth in ourselves while applying it to others. Others may age, sicken, die—but we ourselves must be immune. Gray hairs, wrinkling skin, slackening energies are all false signs—in ourselves. In our hearts—though our minds strive to tell us the unwelcome truths—we are endowed with youth eternal.

The majority of us wheel gently in a rut of years, with now and then an incident, a trifling bump, but nothing to throw us clear of it. Day after day and year after year we see familiar faces to whose eyes ours are familiar also. Changes are so gradual that Time itself seems to stand still. We are the young men and women we were, or at the greatest concession merely in our prime. We grow old together unknowing, in fancy young, which doubtless is merciful.

Six years have gone by since that misty September morning when Tom Wilson and Shan began their hunting companionship. They have brought certain inevitable changes.

Tom Wilson and Joe Claflin are friends, shooting partners as of old, but both have grayed. Both are more deliberate of movement, less inclined for hard work in the name of sport. Their eyesight is not what it was.

Claflin is plagued by rheumatism, and at times is a little short of breath. The doctor's orders to avoid violent exertion have been emphasized. Claflin laughs and calls them poppycock; but he worries a little secretly, and is uncomfortably conscious that on their outings his friend watches him carefully and takes pains to make things easy for him.

Black Jock, his curly retriever, has gone mysteriously, a year since, to join Admiral. In his place in the scheme of things, but not in Joe Claflin's heart, is a young and obstreperous Irish water spaniel; for Claflin holds by the old, tried breeds, the established canine gods of his fathers.

Tom Wilson to outward appearance is tough as a pine knot, as good a man as ever in lean, sinewy strength. But he knows that his staying power has diminished. He tires more easily and recuperates more slowly.

He is beginning to sleep lightly, to lie awake for long hours, to rise unrested. More and more his thoughts go back to old times, to earlier days.

Shan is now in his prime, at the peak of his powers. He now weighs ninety pounds, in hard condition. He revels in heavy going. His powerful but gentle mouth makes no more account of a fourteen-pound goose than of a teal.

He is famous, not only along the shores of the bay, but in clubs where sportsmen gather, where he is known as "old Tom Wilson's duck dog, Shan." The years have made him and his master inseparable companions. They understand each other after the manner of one-dog man and one-man dog. Each knows the habits of the other, and to a certain extent forestalls the other's desires and wants.

IN Shan's sixth season Wilson and Claflin ran down to Frenchman's Bay in the gas boat for a shoot in mid-fall. They got some shooting, but the weather was calm and the ducks in consequence rafted well offshore. Under these circumstances Wilson one day decided to shoot from a small island lying a mile out in the big bay, that is outside the more sheltered waters of Frenchman's Bay.

There were shoals off the tip of this island, which were a good feeding ground. Accordingly he took the canoe and his decoys and set out for the island, leaving Claflin to poke about the marsh.

He reached the island and set his decoys, but the birds were wary. For the most part they kept out of range. In the afternoon the sky clouded and the wind rose.

Wilson remained, hoping for better sport with these weather conditions. He thought the wind would lull toward sunset, giving him easier paddling. But instead of doing so it rose to a gale. Big seas began to run and break between him and the mainland.

Wilson was in a quandary. The gas boat, besides being a mile or more away was well to windward, and a single paddle could not buck that wind and sea. To make for the shore would be to run broadside on to the waves, which would swamp him.

If he left the island at all he must run down wind quartering the seas until he struck the shore below the lower end of Frenchman's Bay. Thence he could work back into its more sheltered waters and back to the gas boat, though it meant a long, stiff paddle.

The island was a mere sandspit with a few bushes. There was little or no shelter, and the night was cold. He did not want to spend it there. There was the possibility that Claflin might get back early from the marsh and come for him with the gas boat. So he decided to wait for a while.

But dusk came without sign of Claflin. Likely the latter, well up the marsh, had not got back to the boat until late. He might hesitate to take the boat out single-handed, considering the shoals, and would reason that Wilson had left the island while it was light, and dropped down before the wind, to work back in shelter.

Wilson reluctantly decided to make a start. He loaded in his decoys, arranged a place for Shan, and shoved off.

When he got clear of the island and felt the full force of the wind and the heave of the leaping seas he knew he was in for a very rough passage. But he had handled canoes from boyhood, and he knew that a canoe properly handled running down wind will live through almost anything, so he felt no special anxiety. Thirty years before he would have thought it fun.

He let the send of the waves drive him, paddling when the buoyant craft overran a sea and choked, checking any tendency to broach to, and gradually quartering toward shore. He knew he was being driven farther down the bay than he had anticipated but there was no help for that now. He accepted the situation philosophically.

So he let the canoe run, steadying it, holding it, feeling it with the craft of the old canoeman which combines a fine sense of balance with the hands of a jockey. The darkness handicapped him somewhat in taking the big ones, but as long as he kept running there was little danger.

He was glad that he was alone, or at least that no tyro bore him company. Greenhorns invariably did the wrong thing. They stiffened their bodies against a roll when they should let them go pliantly. Even when you made them lie down in the bottom they clutched the gunwale, thus mysteriously but effectually destroying equilibrium. They hadn't half the canoe sense of Shan.

Shan lay comfortably in slough grass with which the floor of the canoe was deeply padded, his head close to his master's knee. Wilson had paid special attention to his boat training because of his size, which made it imperative that he should lie still under all circumstances.

So Shan had learned to lie motionless though the heavens fell, and to enter and

leave a small boat quietly and gently. Now he blinked as the slopping top of a wave came inboard across his master's thigh and hit him in the face, but he did not move.

"A little wet, hey, Shan," Wilson observed. "Tough on an old water dog to get splashed, ain't it? Ne' mind, old boy, we're makin' it fine. In a few minutes, now——"

He broke off to hold the canoe, which swung in the grip of a mighty wave. He straightened it with a firm pull of the paddle. It soared high on a crest. The wave underran it and let it down. It pitched forward with a tobogganlike rush—and struck full upon a deadhead.

A "DEADHEAD" is a log partially water-logged or exceedingly heavy at the butt, so that one end sinks and rests on the bottom while the other end projects toward the surface. If the bottom is soft the butt gradually works into it, and there it will stand nearly upright indefinitely. Waters on which much log towing has been done are apt to be infested with these hidden perils.

The shock smashed in the bilge of the frail craft, swung it broadside, and a following wave hit it and completed the job, rolling it clean over.

Wilson kicked his legs free of the crossbar as he was spilled out. As he came up the crest of a breaking wave hit him fair in the face as he was drawing breath, and partially strangled him. For a moment he fought wildly, gasping.

Now Tom Wilson, in his day perfectly at home in spiked shoes upon unstable logs, an artist in a canoe, living by and on water all his life, was no swimmer. He could swim a little, much as a beginner might, and in the ability to do even that exceeded the natatorial attainments of many of his kind. But he had neither skill nor confidence.

Moreover he was heavily clad, though for freedom of movement he had removed his coat before leaving the island. Luckily for him, too, he had taken off the heavy waders in which he had picked up his decoys, and was shod with moccasins with light rubbers over them. But even so he was badly handicapped.

When he got his breath he looked for the canoe, which stove or not would float, and to which he might cling, but he could not see it. In the darkness, with the sea that was running it might have been but a few yards away and still have been invisible.

Far away, as a wave lifted him, he could see what he thought was the loom of the shore line. He turned his back to the seas, and began to swim awkwardly. His clothing weighted him down, and though the woolens protected his body from the full chill of the water he realized that he was in bad case.

Down to leeward he heard a bark, blown away by the wind. That was Shan, of course. He could look after himself. Shan, anyway, would get out. The bark was repeated. It seemed to hold an anxious, questioning note.

"He's looking for me," Wilson thought, and called the dog's name.

In a few moments Shan's head split the crest of a breaker. He swam close to Wilson with a questioning whine.

To Shan this was a new experience. Never before in all their hunting had his master shared the water with him. As one who could do no wrong, who was all-powerful and all-wise, he looked to him for instructions.

Wilson had none to give and little breath to spare. He knew his chances of making shore to be very doubtful, but he would swim as long as he could. He kept himself afloat, making slow progress, feeling more and more the downward drag of his heavy clothing. But to remove any part of it in the water was beyond his powers.

Presently he thought he saw a light far to windward. Then he saw it again. That would be Claflin in the gas boat making for the island, taking a chance on picking it up in the dark.

If he found it he would throttle down and creep up under its lee, and perhaps throw the hook and wait for him, Wilson,

to come off. When he did not come Claflin might draw the correct inference. If so he would run down wind and stand in for shore looking for him to save him the long, hard paddle back.

But already he was getting very tired. He recalled many men—good boatmen and bad, good swimmers and bad—who had been drowned, some simply and some inexplicably, in waters that he knew. Some chance had gone against them as it had gone against him.

But for the chance of striking that deadhead—say one in thousands, for nobody knew of it and he himself had passed that way in the deeper-drafted gas boat a hundred times—he would have been ashore, or working up in its shelter. There was always that odd chance in anything a man undertook.

Always there was the unforeseen, the unpreventable, not to be circumvented by thought or prevision. No man could tell when he might draw that mysterious odd chance. He, Tom Wilson, seemed to have drawn it now.

SUCH thoughts, unordered and subconscious, ran through his mind. But essentially he was patient and dogged. It was not the first time he had opposed his powers to elemental forces. His spirit possessed tensile strength as his body still held endurance. Once he made up his mind to a certain course he plugged away and did his best. He did so now.

But his weariness increased. His limbs became as dead weights to raise rather than members which moved at his volition. The shore was still far away. The cold, in spite of the partial protection of his woolens, was numbing.

He felt an overpowering weariness, a desire for slumber such as is said to seize victims of extreme cold. For an instant he relaxed, as a weary man might drop beside a trail. And naturally he went under.

But as the water began to close above his head he rallied his forces, and at the same moment felt his upper left arm caught in a grip that lifted him. A body brushed his. Shan had him in a firm grip and was fighting hard to support him.

The contact stimulated Wilson, spurred his flagging energies with a sudden sense of comradeship. The firm grip was as the hand of a friend. It sustained him morally as well as physically.

Never before had he realized the strength of the dog that swam beside him. Apart from his own efforts his body had been drawn up as by a rescuing hand. His arm was still held firmly in the dog's jaws, the animal's head behind his armpit.

The body brushing against his in the water was vibrant with power, pulsing with the beat of it, the great muscles driving hard but working with smooth, unflurried coördination. And driving this wonderful living machinery was a heart of utter loyalty, of courage that would give its own life for his. The realization braced the man, revivified him.

Shan could support his master's full weight but momentarily. But that moment answered the purpose. Wilson spoke to him, released his arm and began to swim, while Shan kept close beside him, alert and plainly anxious.

Presently Wilson put one hand on the dog's shoulder, paddling with the other, allowing his body to sink deeply. He found that thus Shan could support the weight put on him, and it rested him wonderfully. Also the knowledge that he could obtain partial support from time to time encouraged him, stiffened his morale.

The dog would not desert him. He seemed to understand. When Wilson's hand rested on him he swam more strongly. He had to do so to support the added weight, but he did so steadily, as a good team goes into the collar at a pull.

Thus they kept up slow progress with frequent pauses, and Wilson thought the shore loomed nearer. He might make it, after all.

Down wind came a sound, faint at first and then louder, the regular purring putter of a throttled engine. Wilson recognized the exhaust of his own boat. Claflin!

He saw a light swaying and swooping,

careening drunkenly across the tops of the seas. Claflin, then, had drawn the correct inference. But Claflin would not suspect that he had capsized. He would be looking for a canoe or for a signal from shore, running slowly to give him a chance to signal by gunfire or light and come alongside.

Claflin would judge with fair accuracy the course a canoe would be forced to take in that wind in order to make the shore. He would follow it himself, and hold down a little farther. Then he would go about and work up shore against the wind as closely as he dared.

He shouted again and again as the light passed him, but the wind choked down his voice. He saw the light disappear as Claflin held on, and he resumed his shoreward struggle.

He saw the light again, closer inland, and he knew that Claflin had estimated his distance, swung about in a smooth, and was coming back. He redoubled his efforts, swimming desperately as the light came on.

ONCE more he hailed, putting all the power of his lungs into the cry. Abruptly the exhaust ceased. The light held its position, bobbing above the seas. Either the engine had gone dead or Claflin had heard him and shut off to hear better. Either way it gave him a chance, and he hailed again.

He saw two spurts of flame, and the twin reports of a gun rapped up wind. The exhaust puttered as Claflin threw the starter, and, throttled to her minimum, the gas boat nosed slowly forward while a hand spotlight began to search the waves. The hull loomed out of the darkness.

"Here!" Wilson croaked. "Here, Joe!"

"All right!" Claflin responded. "Catch the rope, Tom."

A line faked out and Wilson seized it. Alongside he hung exhausted.

"I'm darn near all in, Joe!"

"Pass the bight under your arms and I'll heave you."

"Take Shan first," said Tom Wilson.

"Like hell I will!" Claflin refused wrathfully. "Which is the best water dog —you or him?"

"Just the same, he goes first," Wilson insisted obstinately. "I can pass the rope around him from here, and you can't from the deck."

Between the two of them they heaved Shan to the deck in the bight of a rope behind his forelegs, Wilson meanwhile clinging to the rolling hull as best he could. Then he got his foot in the bight Claflin passed to him, as affording better purchase than beneath his shoulders, and somehow scrambled up, tumbling exhausted but thankful into the cockpit.

Claflin's unruly heart was pumping wildly with the effects of his exertions, but the roll of the powerless boat broadside on made him jump for the clutch. The gas boat staggered into the waves, taking them green over her starboard bow, gathered way, and as Claflin kicked her wide open began to smash headlong into the seas.

"Get inside the cabin and shoot half a tumbler of straight rum into you," Claflin advised practically.

Rum may be the demon it is alleged to be; but it has been a very friendly devil to many a shivering wretch who has come to the limit of his unaided endurance. It has a beautiful pick-up, and possesses the further merit of being easy to take.

The ruby extract of cane set Tom Wilson's blood going within his numbed and water-shriveled body. He was ready to take a hand when the gas boat ran into the quieter waters of the bay. When he had eaten a huge supper he felt almost himself again. He lay back in his bunk, pipe in mouth, one hand hanging down resting on Shan's head, and reveled in the warmth and light and the grateful smells of hot oil and metal from the power plant.

"By golly, Joe," he said, "there was a time to-night when I thought I was through with boats."

"I was gettin' scared myself when I didn't see anything of you," Claflin admitted. "You're a good man in a canoe, but accidents happen."

"Yes," Wilson agreed. "I wouldn't be here now, only for the dog."

"Course you would," Claflin asserted. "You'd have kept up somehow."

Wilson shook his head.

"I know how I was feelin'. Of course I wouldn't have given up and drowned till I had to. I don't mean that I'd have sunk if he hadn't grabbed me. But it was the feel of how strong he was, and havin' him alongside me, and knowin' that if it came to a show-down he'd hold me up till he sunk himself, that put the heart into me.

"There's a lot in that. And then I could put my hand on him and rest a little. It all helped. Yes, I figure I come pretty near owin' my life to Shan."

"Maybe," Claflin admitted, "the way you put it. Hey, Shan, first thing you know they'll be pinnin' life-savin' medals on your ears."

At the sound of his name Shan raised his head, cast a somnolent eye on his master, thumped the floor once with his tail and relaxed with a deep sigh. He, too, was warmed and fed. If he was a hero he was unconscious of it. Cold, rough water to him was not even an episode. It was all in the game. He was beside his master. All was well.

CHAPTER VII.

GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME——

TOM WILSON no longer sold his game. It was his custom to give his surplus to his friends. On his return from this shooting trip he took some ducks to Morgan. He found the latter in an ill humor, due to the loss of several sheep which had been killed by a dog or dogs.

"Damned curs running loose at night," said Morgan. "A while ago Bradley lost a dozen head, and Henry lost half as many. Then there was no killin's for about a month. Now it breaks out again."

"Got any idea what dog it is?"

"I wish I had," said Morgan wrathfully, "and I'd go and put a charge of shot into him."

"Likely there's more than one," Wilson suggested. "Two dogs get to be friends, and they go huntin' together same as men. One will come and get the other, and away they'll go. Mostly it's just two, but sometimes they pick up another."

"Well, they're doing a lot of damage," Morgan said. "And they'll keep at it. Once a dog starts killin' sheep the only way to stop it is to get him. And that's not so easy."

"A dog will show some blood on his coat if he's been worryin' sheep," said Wilson, "and he'll be sleepy and so on next day. Get the men around here to take notice of their dogs, and you'll soon find out."

"The dog's owner would be liable for the dead sheep," Morgan pointed out. "So he wouldn't let on. If he shot the dog that'd be a give-away. He might chain him up, though."

"If you got everybody to do that it'd stop the killin's."

"Too big an order. The dog may come from over in the next county. Sheep killers are cunning. I've known them to pass flocks at home and get in their work miles away. I knew one that traveled twenty miles to do it. And that dog would sleep right with his master's sheep and never touch one."

Wilson had heard of the previous sheep killings, but they did not affect him. He was planning a late shoot with Claflin, and he proceeded to get ready for it by snugging up around his place so that there might be nothing to detain him. He busied himself with odd jobs and repairs, better done before the advent of cold weather.

THUS one afternoon he was busy in his workshop fitting up a storm door, when his friend Ed Cronk, the constable, limped in upon him.

"Hallo, Tom," said Cronk. "Gettin' ready for winter?"

"Hallo, Ed," said Wilson. "Glad to see you. Sit down by the stove and warm up. Sort of cold to-day."

"Sort of," Cronk agreed. He sat down by the stove, his stiff leg stretched in front of him and began to fill his pipe. Shan, who had risen at his entrance, walked

over to investigate him. Cronk looked him over with his bright, birdlike eyes, and passed his hand with seeming carelessness down his throat and chest.

"A big fellow, ain't he, Tom," he said. "Big, strong dog. Mighty kind, he always was. No bad habits. You don't find him gettin' cranky as he gets older?"

"Not a bit," said Wilson, "and I'm mighty glad of it. A big dog that's mean is a nuisance."

"Uh-huh," said Cronk. "F'r instance, last night some dog got into Dave Prentice's sheep and killed six."

"That's too bad," said Wilson. Prentice owned a farm some five miles away. "Have you any notion of whose dog it was?"

"Well, yes, I have," Cronk replied. "A man happened to be comin' along the road at the time, and the dog was runnin' the sheep close to the fence. It was bright moonlight, and he says he can swear to him. When the dog saw him it jumped the fence and took up the road."

"I guess the dog's owner will be liable for quite a lot of money if the sheep owners want to go after him."

"It looks that way," Cronk nodded. "Some of them will push him, of course. Prentice will for one. He's pretty mad."

"I don't blame him," said Wilson. "A man ought to look after his dog. Trouble is, a lot of men let their dogs run anywhere they want to, any time. That spoils a dog."

"You don't let your dog run?" Cronk queried.

"Shan's with me most of the time. I take him most places because he knows how to behave himself. But when I leave him home he stays right here."

"Chained up?"

"What do you take him and me for?" Wilson returned indignantly. "None of my dogs were ever chained up. If I couldn't train a dog better than that I wouldn't have one."

"Do you keep him shut up nights?"

"Of course I don't. Zero weather I shut the door of the back shed where his kennel is, but that's all."

"Then he wasn't shut up last night?"

"No," Wilson replied, slightly surprised. "He ain't shut up any night except in cold weather. He don't need to be."

"Well, now, Tom," said Cronk almost apologetically, "do you *know* for sure he was here all last night?"

For a moment Tom Wilson stared at him. A suspicion so monstrous as to be almost incredible stirred in his mind.

"Do I know he was here all last night?" he repeated. "Of course I do. He was here, same as I was. Why—what you gettin' at, Ed Cronk? You ain't tryin' to tell me that *Shan* killed them sheep!"

"Well, Tom," said Cronk, "I wouldn't think so, myself, but it sort of looks that way."

"You're crazy!" said Wilson hotly. "'Looks that way!' What do you mean? Shan kill sheep! Why, Shan won't ruffle a feather on a bird. I'll bet you ten dollars right now that I can set a dozen eggs on the ground and he'll bring them to me one by one without crackin' a shell."

"He might win that bet for you and still kill sheep," Cronk pointed out. "I don't need to tell you about dogs. You know 'em, and you know you can't tell a thing about what makes a sheep killer. Liable as not to be a dog that's gentle every other way."

"You bet I know dogs," Wilson retorted. "And I know Shan. You're crazy, Cronk. What gave you this fool notion, anyway?"

"It ain't my notion, Tom," Cronk replied. "You don't want to think this is fun for me. The trouble is this man says he recognized your dog and will swear to him."

"He's a damned liar!" said Wilson; "and you can tell him I said so. Who is he?"

"George Austen," Cronk informed him.

"Austen!" Wilson exclaimed scornfully. "That bluff! That imitation bad man. You tell him from me that if he opens his face again about Shan I'll put the boots to him, like I told him once I'd do."

"Now, Tom," Cronk protested, "you keep your shirt on. Maybe Austen is what

you say he is. But what you want to get hold of is that he's willin' to swear he saw your dog killin' sheep.

"It's serious, and the sooner you look at it that way the better. Let's get right down to cases now. And you remember that while I've got my duty to do, I'm your friend all the time."

THIS sensible advice cooled Wilson. Austen hated him and Shan. This was his way of getting even. It would have been easy for him to ascertain that the dog was never shut up. Yes, it was serious.

"What was that you said about puttin' the boots to Austen?" Cronk asked. "Didn't know you and him had any trouble. Tell us about it."

He nodded thoughtfully when Wilson had told him. "This is news to me. Shows he has a grudge against you and the dog. Still, if he stuck to his story it'd be good evidence, all the same. And then, Tom, there's something more."

"More?"

"Yes. Down the road about a mile I found a big hunk of wool and sheepskin, all bloody."

Wilson stared at him.

"You—found—that!"

"Sure did, Tom. But that ain't sayin' how it got there. And then nobody saw me find it."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Well," said Cronk virtuously, "I'm sworn to do my duty without fear or favor. So I'd look like hell favorin' Austen against an old friend, now wouldn't I? So, for the time bein' I ain't sayin' anything about findin' it.

"Austen told me when the dog jumped the fence near him and took down the road he seemed to be carryin' something in his mouth. Findin' that chunk of wool fits right in with what he told me."

"Yes, it does," Wilson admitted.

"Only it fits too darned well," Cronk went on. "I don't claim to be a detective. I'm just a country policeman. But I know a little about the folks I live among—like who's mean and who ain't, and who I can believe and who I can't—and I've done consid'rable huntin', odd times. I've seen a fox lay a plain trail a-purpose for a dog to follow, before now.

"Gen'rally I'm sort of suspicious of too many signs all pointin' the same way. Lots of men overplay their hands. Well let's see how it all stacks up. Take last night. Where was the dog, far as you know?"

"He was with me in the house till I went to bed. That'd be about ten o'clock. Then he went to his kennel. That's in the lean-to against the kitchen."

"And he was there in the morning?"

"He was at home. First I saw of him he was walkin' around the fence inside it. He does that about every morning, I s'pose to see if anything—a cat or such—has been trespassin' in the night. I guess there was one last night, because some time I heard him either gettin' back to his bed or gettin' out of it."

"Tom," said Cronk, "sometimes I wonder whether you got the least mite of horse sense." And Wilson suddenly perceived the sinister construction that might be put upon the gratuitous information he had given."

"Now, Ed——" he began.

"I didn't hear just what you said," Cronk interrupted. "But it sounded too darn foolish to be worth repeatin'—to anybody. Now, here's what you've told me, and you'd better remember it. You and the dog were together up to bedtime. Then he went to his kennel, and he was there in the mornin'. He didn't seem sleepy or tired, and his coat was clean, with no mud or blood on it. You know that, because you petted him and fooled with him like you always do in the mornin', and you'd sure have noticed anything like that."

"That's about right," said Wilson. "I always fool about with him a minute or two in the mornings."

"Your gates were shut in the morning, too," Cronk went on, "and the dog couldn't jump the fence."

"He could jump it easy," said Wilson. "He's like a cat, in spite of his size."

Cronk frowned.

"Gol-darn it, Tom, you're a hard man to do anything for. The way you brag about that dog of yours is awful. Why, anybody can see he's too big and heavy to do much jumpin'. And besides that, there's a strand of barb' wire on top of your fence to keep stock from reachin' over and breakin' it down."

"No, there ain't," said Wilson. "You're mistaken, Ed."

Cronk shook his head hopelessly.

"Well, I thought I saw it. Now maybe —just maybe, Tom—if I was to look again about to-morrow morning, say, I might see it. I know there's a reel or two of barbed wire——"

WILSON disregarded the naïve suggestion.

"Tell me straight, Ed, do you think Shan killed those sheep?"

"No," Cronk replied, "I don't. I think Austen is lyin', if you want to know. I think he's framin' you, and when you're bein' framed it's all right to do a little yourself. It's like settin' a back fire."

But this large and liberal view did not appeal to Wilson.

"I ain't going to lie about anything, and I ain't going to fix up my fence," he said. "Shan was home with me all night, and he was clean as a new pin in the morning. I'll swear to that, and they can't get over it."

"They couldn't if you'd swear he was shut up or chained up," said Cronk; "but you won't do that, darn you. The trouble is you don't *know* where the dog was. And Austen will swear he saw him in bright moonlight, killin' sheep. Where does that leave you?"

"In a hole," Wilson had to admit. "What'd happen, Ed, if a judge believed him?"

"You'd be liable for the price of the sheep."

"Damn the sheep. I mean, about the dog."

"The judge might order him shot. Or anyway you'd have to get rid of him. They might let you sell him off somewhere where he couldn't do any harm if you made good the damage."

"Nobody's going to shoot Shan," Wilson stated positively, "Nor I won't sell him. We're partners, him and me, and we stick together as long as we live."

"Well, you asked me and I told you," said Cronk. "I'd sure hate to have the judge tell me to destroy the dog."

"If he does," said Wilson, "you get sick or something. It'll be better for both of us."

"Meanin'?" Cronk queried.

"Meanin' that Shan don't get shot as long as I can hold a gun."

"Now that's plumb foolishness, Tom," Cronk reproved him. "It wouldn't do a bit of good. And no dog is worth a man's life."

"Matter of opinion," Wilson returned coldly. "I've got mine, and Shan's my dog. You remember what I've told you."

"You always were a fightin' fool about dogs and horses," Cronk recollected. "Have some sense. I'm your friend, ain't I? If it came to that I'd let you sneak the dog off somewheres and lie about it like a man. Will that do you, you dam' shotgun crank?"

"You're a good friend," Wilson acknowledged gratefully. "I'm sorry I flew off. It's just that Shan and me stick together. I won't sell him. I'll sell out and move first."

"Well, well," said Cronk, "no use crossin' a ford before you hit the river. I told Prentice I'd look into this, and he wasn't to swear out a summons before to-morrow. We got all afternoon to find out how much Austen is lyin'. Come out to my rig and have a look at the bit of wool I found."

The exhibit was plainly from a freshly killed sheep. Tom Wilson shook his head.

"It's genuine."

"Sure it is. But, as I said, it fits in too darn neat. Then there's something else. It rained early last night, and then cleared up and froze a little. This road ain't used much, and mine was the first rig over it since the rain. But somebody had been along on foot between here and Prentice's.

"Mostly he walked on the side of the road, on the grass, maybe to keep clear of the mud, but now and then there was a boot mark. There were footprints goin' both ways, made by the same man. He wore nailed boots, and the nails were in a sort of a funny pattern—two double rows crossin' the ball of the foot, like a St. Andrew's cross. When the mud hardened up it left the tracks plain. I'd sort of like to know who nails his boots that way. Let's take a look along the road close by."

AFTER considerable search in the immediate vicinity they found the track of a boot such as Cronk had described.

"So he came this far, anyway," said Cronk. "I believe Austen owns them boots, and I believe he packed that wool to where I found it, to make his story good. But why did he come this far?"

Tom Wilson shook his head.

"Why, to plant something else, of course," Cronk deduced. "If he dropped more wool on the road it ain't there now. Maybe a crow or something picked it up. But if I was in his place I'd want to put it as close to the house as I could.

"By golly, Tom, you heard the dog go out in the night! Now I wonder if that was because he heard Austen sneakin' around? Did he bark?"

"No, I'd have heard him. He doesn't bark much."

"Well, something fetched him out of his kennel. Austen would be mighty quiet, and he'd be afraid to come inside your fence with the dog loose. Let's take a look around inside."

Their search thus narrowed was rewarded by finding a scrap of wool clinging to the top of the fence near the gate; and by another larger piece, bloodstained, on the ground inside. Cronk chuckled as he held it up.

"This makes your dog guilty as hell," he announced with irony. "Wool on the fence where he got over it—of course he'd stop on top of the fence to pick his teeth—and a wad of it right in your yard. Next best thing to in the kennel itself.

"All neat as a new wagon. This is real crafty. It's funny," he went on reflectively, "about fellows that think they're cunnin'. They never give anybody else credit for a mite of horse sense. And most always they overplay. Austen might have made it stick if he'd just said he saw the dog. But he had to go pilin' it up."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Cronk considered.

"How are you feelin', Tom?"

"Pretty good for an old fellow. Why?"

"Would you like to take this out of Austen's hide?"

Wilson shook his head. "I'd like to, all right, but I'm gettin' too old for things like that."

"Well, anyway," said Cronk, "we'll go and call on Mr. Austen to-night."

THEY found Austen home when they arrived at his house that night. He lived alone. He peered at his visitors and scowled as he recognized Wilson. But he invited them in.

"We want to have a little talk about that sheep killin'," Cronk opened.

"Talk to Prentice," said Austen. "They're his sheep."

"Well, you see," said Cronk hesitatingly, "Prentice is sort of hostile, naturally. Now, Tom Wilson is a friend of mine, and he thinks a lot of his dog. And the only evidence Prentice has is yours."

"Are you trying to get me to lie about what I saw?" Austen demanded virtuously. "If I told that, where would your job be?"

"I might lose it," Cronk admitted; "that is, if anybody believed you."

"Why wouldn't they believe me?"

"Well, of course they might," Cronk conceded. "But the way I look at it, you're a sensible man, and we all got to live. Now, you know what you told me. I went to see Wilson, and on the way I found a hunk of bloody wool and skin on the road to his house."

"I told you——" Austen began.

"Sure, I remember," Cronk interrupted. "You said you saw something in the dog's

mouth. This proved it. You've got a good eye. Then I went to Wilson's and looked around, and I found a scrap of wool on the fence where I s'pose the dog got over it, and another on the ground inside the fence.

"It looks like an open-and-shut case—if we don't get together and sort of settle it between us. With my evidence and yours I guess there ain't much doubt about what dog killed them sheep."

"Sure, he killed them," said Austen.

"There's just one thing might make it a little doubtful," said Cronk.

"What's that?" Austen demanded.

"Why," Cronk returned, "last night Wilson and his dog and Claflin was together all night in Wilson's boat down at Frenchman's Bay."

"They're lying!" Austen exclaimed, utterly taken aback.

"How do you know they're lying?"

"The dog——" Austen began, and checked himself.

Cronk grinned.

"Go on, Austen, finish it. Were you going to say the dog came out of the house while you were fixing that wool on the fence?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Austen.

"What were you doing, prowling around Wilson's last night?"

"I wasn't near Wilson's."

"No? Well, you bring out every pair of boots you own and let me see 'em."

"Boots?"

"You heard me. Bring 'em out."

"Who do you think you are? I won't show you a darned boot. Get out of here."

"Tom," said Cronk, "go through this house and collect what boots he has. Sit down!" he said sharply to Austen, "or I'll put you under arrest."

Wilson found several pairs of boots, and among them a pair nailed across the soles with double rows in the form Cronk had described. This pair was crusted with dried mud.

"Now," said Cronk, "I've got the goods on you, Austen. I can swear to your boot tracks out to Wilson's and back. You planted that wool on the road and at his place. Maybe you saw a dog killin' sheep, but it wasn't his dog. Now, what you got to say for yourself?"

"I say you're lying," Austen maintained sullenly.

"You do, hey!" said Cronk. "And I tell you there's a heavy penalty for constructin' false evidence and endeavorin' to mislead justice; let alone for perjury. I can prove you were around Wilson's last night. You'll have to do consid'rable explainin'."

"I followed the dog," said Austen.

"Oh, you followed the dog!" Cronk retorted. "You didn't tell me and Prentice that this morning, though. If you followed the dog, how come you didn't find that wool on the road?"

"It was dark."

"Uh-huh. It was so dark you recognized the dog in the field and saw what he had in his mouth when he jumped the fence. Now, Austen, you can take your pick: You can sign a statement that you didn't recognize any dog last night; or you can come along to jail with me right now."

They left the house with Austen's signature to a statement which was satisfactory to them, if not to him.

"And that'll settle *his* coffee grounds," said Cronk. "I've been wantin' to get something on him for a long time, and with this hangin' over him he'll have to sing small. I'll see Prentice and tell him Austen was lyin'.

"But him or Austen may have talked to somebody else; so if I was you I'd keep the dog shut up nights till the real killer is caught. You know how it is when a story gets goin' and how a man will see what he's lookin' for, from ghosts to sea serpents. If folks got an idea it was your dog, any dog at all they'd see at night would look like him."

This was good advice, and thereafter until he went on his shoot with Claflin, Wilson closed his outer door at night. When he came back from that shoot the killers, two of them, had been caught and

had paid the penalty. And Austen had moved away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PASSING YEARS.

TIME, which was beginning to run noticeably against the human beings who made up Shan's world, touched him also with relentless fingers.

His muzzle and chops silvered, and he was touched with gray above the eyes. His coat coarsened and lost a little of its youthful sheen. He added a few pounds to his weight and a little to his sedateness. He became a trifle slower in movement; or perhaps more accurately in origination of movement, for once under way no diminution of activity was perceptible. He still possessed his full strength and apparently all his staying power; but a little of the dash, the élan, the mysterious something that distinguishes youth was gone. Men began to speak of him as "Tom Wilson's old dog."

Shan was now eight years old. For all practical purposes he was better than ever. He had passed the peak of his powers; but as with veterans of the ring, craft and generalship now took the place of sheer speed and prodigal expenditure of energy.

He no longer wasted his strength nor spent himself needlessly. No longer did a straight line necessarily represent the shortest distance between two points if he were one of them and the other a bird in water. He would go around a slough until he arrived at the shore point nearest to it before taking to the mud or water. In open-bay shooting from blinds, if the wind would eventually set dead birds ashore he would allow them to drift in and pick them from the shallows unless told to retrieve at once. On familiar duck passes on which the flight came mainly from one direction, he would take up a position some forty yards behind Wilson, who seldom took the overhead incoming shot, preferring the quartering and going away, with the result that the majority of birds fell close to him.

Tom Wilson came to rely more and more on the dog's developed hunting wisdom. He seldom troubled to mark a fallen bird. When he had swung and pulled trigger his part was done. Shan mopped up.

When necessary he could send the dog to right or left, straight ahead or back, by hand alone. But he seldom found it necessary for Shan had an accurated marking eye. He knew the shooting grounds, bay and marsh, slough and creek, the hours of flight and the habits of ducks in various weather conditions as well as Wilson himself.

Joe Claflin and Wilson still shot together. The former now swore by the Irish water spaniel, Clancy, which was developing the wonderful sagacity of his breed. The smaller dog had understudied the big Chesapeake to good purpose, and had picked up many of his working methods. Claflin thought the world of him.

But Wilson was beginning to worry about Claflin. Small exertion now tired the latter to the point of exhaustion. Now and then he had "weak spells." Himself, he pooh-poohed these symptoms, but it was plain enough to Wilson that his old friend was going downhill. Finally he prevailed upon him to submit to an examination by Mallet when the latter came with Ronan for the fall shoot.

"Anything much wrong with him?" Ronan queried when the doctor returned. Mallet shrugged his great shoulders.

"He's in bad shape—poor old Joe. Rotten heart. His blood pressure will blow his crown sheet one of these days."

"Can't you fix him up, Johnny?"

"That's what all you guys say," the doctor growled. "'Can't you fix me up, doctor?' God knows how many times I've heard it. You'd think the human body was a flivver I kept spare parts for. Of course I can't fix him up. Nobody can. He may hang on for a year, or he may quit any day. Depends on his luck."

"Did you tell him so?"

"What good does it do to tell a man his time check is made out?" the big man wanted to know. "It only worries him. Sometimes it kills him. Let the undertaker hang the crape. That's my system."

"Good enough, too," his friend approved. "Does Tom know?"

"I told him Joe might keel over with any sudden strain, and to see that he didn't do anything like cranking a balky engine, or heaving at a fouled mudhook, or go tramping through heavy mud with a deckload of ducks and shells.

"I told Claflin that much, too. Told him to have all the fun he could without overexertion. He might as well. But no matter what he does it's mostly luck. His engine is missing badly and it's just as apt to quit on the level as on a hill."

"Tom is aging, too. I've noticed it the past year or two."

"Uh-huh!" the doctor agreed. "But I gave him the once-over, and he's in pretty good shape, near as I could tell without facilities for thorough examination. His heart's as good as yours—and a darned sight purer.

"He's a different type from Claflin—more natural stamina, tougher fiber—the old pioneering strain. His kind don't die. They merely dry up and blow away. But I'm afraid he'll have to look for another shooting partner next year."

JOE CLAFLIN weathered the fall and winter, but toward spring his missing engine began to pound heavily. One day his widowed sister who kept house for him sent for Wilson.

"Joe wants to see you," she said. "He had a bad spell last night and we sent for the doctor. He says it's only a matter of days, or maybe hours."

Joe Claflin's bed had been moved close to the window which commanded a view of the bay, blue in the spring sunshine with here and there the darker blotch of a drifting ice pan. Close to his master, nose on paws, his eyes questioning, lay the Irish retriever, Clancy.

"Hallo, Tom!" said Claflin cheerily as of old; but his voice was a mere whisper of the old hearty note.

"Hallo, Joe," Wilson responded inadequately. In presence of sickness or sorrow he was tongue-tied, as are many men of deep feeling.

"Sit down," said Claflin. "I want to have a talk. Well, Tom," he went on, "of course you know how it is with me."

"Yes," Wilson admitted. "I—I'm sorry, Joe." He cursed himself for the utter inadequacy of the words but to save his own life he could not have found other or better. But Claflin understood.

"Sure, I know," he said. He held out his hand. Wilson took it. The pressure of his own expressed what his tongue could not. Claflin, returning the pressure, understood that, too.

"I'm kind of sorry myself," he said. "Not *for* myself so much; but sorry that things are winding up for me, like I used to be sorry when the last days of shooting came. That way. But I ain't kicking. We've had some pretty good times together, Tom, and I like to think of 'em now.

"It don't seem long since we were boys, goin' to school together and playin' hooky and trappin' muskrats and fishin' and learnin' to shoot. We never thought, them days, about gettin' old and—and so on. Life, when it's all ahead of you, looks so long; and when it's all behind you it looks so darn short."

He sighed and turned his head restlessly on the pillow.

"Well, that wasn't what I wanted to say," he went on more briskly. "It sort of slipped out—what I've been thinkin' all to myself since the doctor told me I was about through. He told me I'd better get my affairs in shape, and that's what I've been doin'—sort of tidyin' up camp before I go on. It ain't right to leave a mess for other folks to clean up after you.

"Kate, she gets most of what I have, but she won't want to live here alone, so she'll sell the house and go where she has some good friends. But there's some things she won't have any use for, and I don't want 'em auctioned off—my guns and outfit, I mean. I want you to have all those things, Tom, as a sort of keepsake, to remind you now and then of your old shootin' partner."

"I don't need to be reminded, Joe."

"No, I know you don't, old boy," Joe Claflin returned. "I didn't mean that. I just want you to have 'em. And then, Tom, there's Clancy, here. He'll miss me."

"I'll look after him, if you want me to."

"That's what I was going to ask," said Claflin. "I know how it is, of course. You've got a dog, and you're a one-dog man, same as I am. One dog at a time is all we want.

"I know you'd keep Clancy if I said so; but all I want is for you to look after him till you find somebody that wants a good dog and you know will treat him right. He's risin' four, and you know how he works. Maybe he ain't as good as your Shan, but he's a good dog, and I think a lot of him."

"He'll be looked after," Tom Wilson promised. "If I can't find him a good home and a good man I'll keep him myself."

"Thanks," said Claflin, with relief. "Well, that's all, I guess. I feel better, now that's fixed. Funny, how a man gets a lot of things around him, and sets store by 'em, and how blame little they amount to, after all. White chips, most of 'em.

"But a dog is diff'rent. A dog depends on you, and it ain't right to leave him to chance. And I think a lot of Clancy. C'm' here, Clancy, pup!"

The grotesque but infinitely sad and utterly wise face of the dog lifted and his wonderful eyes gazed at his master. He laid his head in the extended hand. As he caressed the dog a tear rolled down Claflin's cheeks. He brushed it away impatiently.

"I'm an old baby," he muttered. "But you know how it is yourself, Tom, between a man and a dog. Clancy knows, same as you and me, and he's troubled and he's tellin' me he's sorry. *I* know."

HE caressed the rough, top-knotted head: "When I lost Jock I thought I'd never think as much of another dog. Same as you and old Admiral, I guess. But you think just as much of Shan, and I'm fond of Clancy, here.

"One-dog men, Tom, that's us. I'm glad Clancy'll be looked after, right."

"Is there anything else, Joe—anything at all?"

"Not a thing, Tom," the sick man replied. "If there was I'd tell you. It seems funny," he went on reflectively, "to think I won't be with you next fall, goin' down the bay, pokin' around the old marshes, and lyin' snug in shelter nights, smokin' and yarnin' and listenin' to the wind outside and the slap of the little waves on the skin of the hull. Good times—hey, Tom?"

"Good times, Joe, just as you say."

"You bet," said Claflin with satisfaction. "I like to think of them now. I won't be with you, but maybe I'll be able to watch you. Maybe so, maybe not. Can't tell much about such things."

"No," Wilson agreed, "we don't know."

"We don't know much, after all," said Claflin. "Lot o' talk about it, but come right down to case cards, we got to take it on trust."

"I guess so," Wilson agreed again.

"On trust," Claflin repeated. "No use worryin' about what you can't help—that's fixed for you, whatever it is. I ain't been much of a Christian—not a church-goin' one, anyway. Maybe I should have. I don't know."

"You've been a good, square man, Joe, and that's the main thing."

"Well, I dunno 's I've been so good," Claflin doubted. "I've done lots of things I've been sorry for afterward. I guess we all have. And about church goin', I guess it depends on how you're built. Some folks like it. It helps 'em, and they come away feelin' better.

"But it never worked that way with me. Sundays I liked to take the dog and go for a walk along the shore or back in the woods. And maybe I'd lie down and smoke my pipe and watch the green buds pushin' out, and the little, woolly clouds driftin', and listen to the birds singin', and smell the wet sand, and see the bay all crinkly and blue just as it was before there was men, red or white, to look at it.

"And them times, just lookin' and lis-

tenin' and thinkin' to myself, I'd feel I was right near big things that I didn't understand; and yet that I understood 'em as much as anybody else. And maybe then I was about as close to God as I'd have been inside a church. Anyway, if He made all those things that I've loved all my life, and made me so's I'd love them, I guess He savvies."

And in that simple creed, pagan or otherwise as you choose to regard it, old Joe Claflin soon afterward passed on to prove for himself the mysteries over which many more learned men have disputed, all in the end to prove them in the same way. At his quiet funeral the minister repeated the words of Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

Tom Wilson found the task of collecting his old friend's bequests a melancholy one. The articles comprised in it all held intimate associations. Then there was Clancy, moping melancholy about the house, listening, watching, now and then raising his head alertly as his ears misinterpreted some sound, then drooping in discouragement. It added to Wilson's sadness.

When Claflin's sister departed and the house was closed he brought Clancy home with him. The next day, however, the dog was gone. He found him lying on the steps of the empty house. He brought him back, and till he should adjust himself to new conditions put him on a chain.

There, at the full length of his tether, the dog lay motionless for hours, his head on his paws, his eyes regarding Wilson as the latter went about his tasks. In those wonderful eyes was dumb pain and sad question that persisted for weeks.

But when a month had elapsed and the waif was beginning to adjust himself to his new surroundings and his new master, Wilson found a man who measured up to his ideas of fitness to own a good hunting dog. So Clancy was taken away, the new doggy world in which he was beginning to find a place collapsing as had his old one.

CHAPTER IX.

"HUNTIN' DAYS COME AGAIN!"

FRIENDSHIPS, like other enthusiasms, are peculiarly the product of youth. The capacity for making them lessens with age. In middle life or after one makes acquaintances rather than friends. When an old friend is lost his place seldom can be filled. Thus, gradually but inevitably, the intimate circle of the individual contracts.

With the passing of Joe Claflin, Tom Wilson's circle, never large, was sadly narrowed. Though he had other friends—such, for instance, as Morgan and Cronk—they had never companioned him as had Claflin. He recognized the fact that, though he might find another shooting partner, he could not find another who possessed with him the joint experiences and reminiscences of years. And he did not try.

When fall came he shot alone. Now and then, in the evenings aboard the gas boat or in the morning when he awoke, he caught himself glancing half expectantly at the bunk which Claflin had been wont to occupy; or, when he had come in early from the marsh, listening as dusk descended for the dripping dip of a paddle that would dip no more. But he seldom spoke of his old friend.

"Thought Tom'd miss Joe more'n he seems to," Morgan once observed to Cronk.

"Can't tell much about Tom," the latter returned sagely. "He never did do much thinkin' out loud—except to his dogs."

JERRY RONAN, whose trade was observation of his fellows, saw, perhaps, more clearly than any other the blank left by Claflin's going.

"Tom is mighty lonely without his old buddy," he said to Mallet on their annual visit a year after that event.

"Works out like that," the doctor agreed. "Two old boys with no other ties, shootin' and fishin' and havin' good times together. Like old married folks.

When one goes the other's lost. Fellow who wrote the Litany didn't get it all in. Should have added, 'From a lonely old age, Lord, deliver us!' "

"Amen to that," the novelist agreed. "Very often when one of an old pair goes the other doesn't last long."

"Naturally," the doctor responded. "They're both about due, and one merely goes first. Nothing very mysterious about it."

"Maybe not. But we're creatures of routine, Johnny. Did you ever notice how many business men start to go downhill when they retire from active work?"

"Bunk!" the doctor scoffed. "Did you ever notice how many of their unretired contemporaries die in harness, while the retired boys are shootin' eighteen holes a day—and lingerin' around the nineteenth?"

"Something in that. Anyway, Tom misses old Joe. He misses him more than he knows he misses him, if you get what I mean."

"I get it," the doctor nodded. "Section bitten clean out of his life. Well, you never can tell about these old boys. He may get married. And that," added the doctor, who was not a ladies' man, "will fix his loneliness aplenty."

"Take your own medicine," said his friend. "Get a wife yourself while the getting's good, Johnny."

"Me?" the doctor exclaimed in horror. "I haven't got enough against any woman to marry her. I haven't got time to get acquainted with a wife if I had one. And, besides, I don't want one. I never look at women except professionally."

"You don't, hey!" said his friend with irony. "Well, for a blind picker you have a lot of luck in number-one fancy peaches. Take that young woman in your office. You don't even know what she looks like, do you? Blah!"

"That ain't a young woman," said John Mallet. "That's a nurse."

"Deep stuff!" said Jerry Ronan. "Isn't a nurse a woman?"

"Not in my office," the surgeon stated. "She's a nurse. And this one," he added with satisfaction, "is a damned good nurse, too."

"Bet you ten she won't last a year," Ronan offered.

"Some guy will cop her off, of course," the doctor admitted regretfully. "A darn shame, too. Best nurse I ever had. No nerves, and thinks about a jump ahead of me on a case. She's got brains, that girl."

"Marry her and give your prospective offspring a fifty-fifty chance for some," his friend suggested tactfully.

"That'd save 'em from being authors, anyway," the doctor retorted. "Think we could get old Tom to chase himself out of here for a few weeks this winter for a tonic change? I'd ask him to my town to bunk in with me, only I'm too busy to show him around."

"About the same with me," said Ronan. "When this shoot's over I have to buckle down. But I'll ask him, anyway."

But Tom Wilson declined both well-meant invitations. He was satisfied with his mode of life, for which he was organized. He knew, too, that though Mallet and Ronan were his friends he would feel out of place among their friends.

So he and Shan wintered together as usual, contented in each other's company. Neither desired a change. More than ever Wilson talked to the dog, which he had long since admitted to equal partnership with recognized rights.

If Shan did not understand, at least he seemed receptive. His age-silvered muzzle and chops gave him an air of wisdom which replaced his former expression of eager intelligence. Tom Wilson privately was not sure how much or how little the dog understood. Undoubtedly he knew the meaning of dozens of phrases denoting action or locality. He knew the names of as many of his master's possessions, which he would bring him without mistake, at command.

Then, too, the dog had ways of indicating his material wants and of replying to questions concerning them. If asked if he were hungry or thirsty a slight lift of the head meant an affirmative; a turn of it away was a negative. Such things

were not exceptional, as every man who has made a companion of his dog knows.

But in Wilson's opinion Shan's intelligence went farther than that. Often the dog anticipated his actions, his purposes. It might have been coincidence, but it happened so frequently that he had to believe it more. He did not pretend to explain it, but there it was.

Their partnership was very close. It would endure and be closer while both lived. Its severance would be tragedy for the survivor. Tom Wilson put the thought from him when it obtruded. But Shan was now ten years old.

THAT spring, which was the third after Joe Claflin's passing, Tom Wilson did not feel himself. He thought that warm weather and greater activity out of doors would set him up; but when the warm weather came he lacked the desire for activity. Exertion required an effort of will.

Still he did not admit to himself that anything might be seriously wrong. Like most men who have had good health all their lives, he considered himself immune from all but lesser ills. But in the late summer he was forced to admit that he was far from well.

Then he did what he should have done before. He consulted the general practitioner in Winota. And this practitioner, who was a capable man, advised him to lose no time in seeing a specialist, with a view to an operation.

Like most men, Wilson had a horror of operations. That one should be necessary in his own case was almost unbelievable. The Winota doctor had not minced matters, and what he had said had sounded to Wilson almost as a sentence of death.

When he reached his home he sat down heavily and thought it over, planning, arranging his simple affairs. Suddenly a gap seemed to have opened between himself and the world of normally healthy men, and between the present and even yesterday. Across it he viewed human affairs with a certain detachment, as one removed from them, an outsider.

He looked around him at his cherished possessions and thought of Joe Claflin's words. After all, when the show-down came they were merely white chips.

He was aroused from his abstraction by a cold nose thrust into his down-hanging hand. Shan laid his head on his master's knee and gazed up at him with brown-amber eyes which seemed to hold a troubled question. Here was no white chip, no inanimate thing; but warm flesh and blood that loved him and that he himself loved with the great, yearning love of a lonely man. He took the dog's head in both hands and shook it gently to and fro.

"You savvy somethin's wrong, old man, don't you?" he said. "You don't know what it is, but you want in on it, to stay right with me, whatever it is. But this time, old boy, it's something a dog can't share. Maybe it'll come out all right —and maybe not. Anyway, you'll be looked after if things go wrong. That's the best I can do for you, old fellow."

That night he straightened up the interior of his house, and early in the morning took Shan with him in his old car to the Ronans' summerhouse.

"Now, Tom, don't you worry," Jerry Ronan encouraged him. "Johnny will fix you up in no time. He's a wonder, is old Johnny."

"I'm not worryin' much—now," said Wilson. "It was quite a jolt at first, but now I'm gettin' used to it. No use kickin' at what you can't help. I don't fool myself much, either. I'm over sixty, and an old fellow can't stand a hard racket like a young one. Still, I've always been pretty tough.

"But right now I'm bankin' on what you told me once—that if there was ever anything you could do for me and Shan to let you know."

"And I'll make good on that every time," Jerry Ronan asseverated. "You want me to look after Shan till you come back? Of course I will. Do you need anything else, Tom—any money? My roll is back of you."

"No, I've got plenty. And if I don't come back the dog is yours, because I

know you won't mind givin' him a home for the years he has left."

"You know I won't," said Ronan. "But you're coming back, and don't you think there's a doubt of it."

HE accompanied Wilson to the railway station, and after the train had gone he wired Mallet. Twenty-four hours later he received a wire from the doctor, whereupon he himself took train, and late that night entered the latter's apartment, to find its owner relaxed wearily, in most disreputable undress, smoking a more disreputable pipe.

"How's Tom?" Ronan asked without preliminary. Mallet frowned.

"Well, if you want it straight, Jerry," he said, "the gods are shuffling the old boy's chances on their knees. That's why I wired you, for I thought you'd like to know.

"Why in blazes," he broke out angrily, "didn't Tom come to me a couple of months ago? He must have known there was something wrong. His case was just on the border of the inoperable, but without an operation he wouldn't have lived a month. He was sure to lose, one way, and he may win the other. But he isn't a young man, and he hasn't got the pick-up. So there you are."

"You mean he's going under?" Ronan queried, shocked.

"He's got a fighting chance," the big surgeon returned. "We'll pull him through a damn small knot hole or know the reason why. I put my own nurse on the case as soon as he came off the table, and I got two other crackajack girls with her on eight-hour shifts.

"I've just come from the hospital myself, and I've fixed it with young Collins —he's a jim dandy on heart action and stimulants—to stick around most of the night. I've told the internes to look after Tom like they'd look after me. We're not overlooking any bets."

"I know you're not," said Jerry Ronan. "I know you, you old ruffian, God bless you. You fight death to a finish every time."

"Be yourself!" said the big surgeon gruffly. "It's my job, ain't it? Well, then!"

"All right," said Ronan. "But I want to get in on this, Johnny. This case is on me."

"Whatcha mean, it's on you?" his friend demanded truculently. "You don't get a look-in. Tom's my patient, see. He came to me, didn't he? You're out. The air for yours, fella."

"Have a heart!" Jerry Ronan pleaded. "You operate—that's yours if you like. But the nurses and hospital fees are my shout. That's fair. That's fifty-fifty."

"He's independent as the devil. He wouldn't stand for you payin' his shot."

"Say, you old crook, don't you think I know what you're going to do?" Ronan accused him. "You're going to hand him a phony bill for a hundred or so and put up the rest yourself. And I won't stand for it. I'm in on it, or I'll blow the gaff."

"Well, we'll see," the doctor partially assented. "Lots of time. He won't be out for a month or more, anyway."

Tom Wilson's tough fiber stood him in good stead. He pulled through the critical period, and Mallet was optimistic.

Jerry Ronan then returned to the bay, where Shan, for the first time in his life, was on a chain. Ronan removed collar and chain, and talked to the dog as Wilson himself might have done.

He and Shan were good friends, what of the hunting they had done together. The big Chesapeake listened gravely and thereafter attached himself to Ronan, as to the one secure and familiar thing in a world suddenly turned upside down.

"He's adopted you, Jerry," said Moira Ronan.

But Jerry Ronan knew better. The old dog lay at his feet, but he did not sleep. Constantly he seemed to listen, and his eyes held a constant question that touched the man's heart. They seemed to ask, "Why, in my old age, has my master forsaken me?"

Ronan knew that so long as the old dog's heart beat it would beat for Tom

Wilson alone; that until the amber-brown eyes filmed at the last, the one image which the mysteriously wise brain behind them would behold would be the one deity which a dog creates for himself from the common clay of man.

TOM WILSON was still in hospital when the Ronans returned to their city home, which was five hundred miles from the bay, and a couple of hundred from that in which Wilson was slowly convalescing. The dog went with them, carefully crated.

Once more Shan's world was shattered, and a new and strange one rose around him. He had never been in a city. The Ronan establishment was on the outskirts and had a fairly roomy back yard, well fenced. There was grass and a few trees.

But to the old dog, accustomed all his life to the freedom of the bayside country, it was a prison. Outside its confines lay another world, a wilderness of bad lands, of brick and concrete, of awesome cañons filled with the clamor of vehicles and crowds, exuding fetid, stale odors of dust and of asphalt, of gasoline and crank-case drippings and humanity in the mass, revolting to the sensitive nostrils of the old hunting dog. Now and then he rode through these cañons in Ronan's car, his nerves jangling at the clamor, his eyes puzzled by the unfamiliar sights and the shuttling humanity.

Then there were the dogs. Never in his life had Shan seen so many and such strange ones. There were real dogs, men's dogs, such as he knew and respected. But also there were women's dogs, freaks, grotesque little canine caricatures, very gargoyles of dogs, gathered from the ends of the earth; pampered, silken, brainless things that pulled on absurd leashes or from sheltering female arms yapped and snarled and showed little, batlike teeth at him, the great, tawny-coated hunter who was the equal companion of men in men's sport.

On one occasion, on a quiet street where he was walking with Ronan, one of these absurd creatures left the side of his mistress and flew at him with impudent clamor. Shan turned his head aside in disgust. Emboldened, the Pekingese snapped at his leg. Shan caught him in his great jaws and lifted him as he would have lifted a duck, not hunting him, but merely holding him. But the little dog's mistress was horrified.

"Mr. Ronan, make that vile brute of yours leave my dog alone!" she demanded. And Jerry Ronan, who knew and detested the lady and the dog, complied.

"Spit it out, Shan," he said. And thereby made a lifelong enemy.

He himself looked after Shan, fed him and gave him daily exercise. In his working hours he often had the dog in his room. But toward the end of Wilson's convalescence he found it necessary to make a business trip, and he gave his wife careful instructions.

"I'll be away for a week," he told her, "and in about a week old Tom will be leaving the hospital. Take good care of the dog, Moira. Better not take him out of the yard, and don't let the kids do it. He's safer there."

"I'll look after him," she promised.

And to the best of her ability she did so. But she was busy with her household and social duties. The youngsters were at school, and, in any event, Shan had passed the stage of playfulness, so that he did not attract them. Thus for the most part he was alone in the high-fenced yard.

He was very lonely. All his life he had been accustomed to close human companionship. Now he had little or none of it. Mysteriously he had been separated from his master, and now his master's deputy—so he had regarded Jerry Ronan—had gone too.

His world, material and spiritual, had been shattered. That in which he now found himself was not worth living in.

As September merged into October and frosts came at night and the leaves of the few trees he could see were painted and fell, a great restlessness came upon him. In every fiber of him was a tugging longing for his old master and for the old,

familiar things—the dawn fogs of the marshes, the leaf-carpeted woods, the long, gray points battered by the seas with the wildfowl skimming above them, and the myriad sweet scents of the woods and waters of the world he had known from puppyhood.

JERRY RONAN, detained by business, overstayed his time. When he reached home his first glance at his wife's face showed him that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, old girl?" he asked as he kissed her. "Kids all right?"

"Oh, Jerry, he's gone!" she said.

"Who's gone, and where?"

"The dog—Shan. He dug his way out last night under the fence. And to make it worse, Tom Wilson has left the hospital and will be here to-night. Oh, Jerry, what on earth shall we do?"

"Good Lord!" her husband groaned in dismay. "Well, it wasn't your fault, old girl. What have you done about it so far?"

"I didn't know what to do. I sent Jack and Sheila to look around the neighborhood, but they couldn't find him."

"I guess this needs quick action, and lots of it," her husband decided, and proceeded to get it. He phoned advertisements to two newspapers with a full description of Shan, offering a hundred-dollar reward for information leading to his return. He got hold of an individual named Jim at police headquarters and arranged for the coöperation of the force, and he telephoned mysterious individuals in odd localities, all of whom he seemed to know by their first names.

When he had thus set things in motion he got out his roadster, and with his young daughter beside him as lookout proceeded to scour the outlying roads. It was long after dark when they returned from this patrol, which had met with no success whatever. His wife met him at the door.

"Tom Wilson's here, Jerry."

"I'm sorry, old girl. I didn't mean to put a mean job up to you. You told him, of course?"

"Yes, of course. He was awfully nice about it, Jerry. He said it wasn't our fault and we weren't to worry."

"Old Tom is a gentleman and game all the way," was Ronan's tribute.

Tom Wilson, gaunt and pallid, looking little more than a shell of his former self, greeted him with a cheerfulness that was somewhat forced. He had looked forward eagerly to meeting his dog.

Many things may happen to a lost dog, and he knew it. But he insisted that they were not to worry. The dog would turn up, all right.

"He will, if there's any virtue in advertising," Jerry Ronan promised. "I've got an agency on the job, and every local paper within two hundred miles will carry an ad. There will be hand dodgers in every local post office. And I've fixed it with the exchanges of half a dozen rural party lines to notify their subscribers and tell 'em to be on the lookout.

"We ought to get action on some of these things. I blame myself, Tom, and it's my job to find Shan. He won't stay lost if I can help it."

"Well, you didn't lose him," Wilson pointed out. "He just went away himself. And maybe he ain't lost."

"Do you mean he's stolen? Then a reward'll fetch him. I'll offer double, and no questions asked."

"Well, I wasn't meanin' that, exactly," said Wilson. "Shan's an old dog, and there ain't one dog thief in a hundred knows what a Chesapeake is. They steal pet dogs and such and collect on 'em. But it'd take a pretty good man to steal Shan. He don't let everybody handle him.

"No, what I mean is that mostly he has a reason for whatever he does. I know him, and the way he works things out in his mind. So when he started to dig under your fence he had some scheme in his head beyond just diggin'. He wanted to get out; and the only reason he would have for that would be to go look for me. He'd look for me at home, and I guess that's where he's headin' for."

"But, good Lord, that's five hundred miles, Tom. I brought him here by ex-

press, crated. How would he know the way?"

"I don't know how dogs know a lot of things that I know they do know," Tom Wilson replied. "For instance, there was that hound of old Colonel Chinn's that got lost more'n six hundred miles from home in a deer country that they'd taken her to by train, and transferrin' on two or three railway lines at that. She come home by herself.

"Then I heard of a Vancouver dog that come home from near Edmonton, clean across the Rocky Mountains. They say hounds are the best homers. But when dogs' brains were bein' given out Shan wasn't hidin' behind any door. He was right up front, and got his share. Unless something happens to him, I look for him to turn up at home."

Jerry Ronan's broadcast advertising produced many dogs, but did not find Shan. At the end of a week Tom Wilson decided to go home. He himself felt the homing urge. He wanted to get back to familiar things, to his own place among them.

WHEN he reached Winota he got his little car from the garage in which it had been stored, and drove slowly homeward. It was good to be back again in his own country. As he drove along the bush-bordered, winding, bayside road his nostrils drank in the scents of fallen leaves. The crisp air was laden with the familiar odors of woods and waters. He caught glimpses of the bay, a-dance in a fresh west wind.

Here and there a partridge, taking the afternon sun on the road, scuttled into the bush. Now and then he met somebody he knew, and stopped to shake hands. Yes, it was good to be back, to be on the old road that his bare boyish feet had trod half a century before. Along it he had tramped, a youth of eighteen, lugging his "turkey," off for the shanties. Here was his own place, his "native beach, bloom and bird and strand."

His heart warmed to the familiar things. He felt a peace, a restfulness. He had come through an ordeal. Once more his life, placid, uneventful, but with which he was satisfied, stretched before him for whatever might be the normal span of his days.

He approached his home with the keen curiosity of the infrequent absentee. As it came in sight he found himself looking expectantly for Shan, listening for a familiar welcoming bark, though he knew it to be impossible that the dog should yet have reached home.

He put his car under its shed and went slowly toward the house, looking around, noting the little changes that had taken place in his absence. One fence post had sagged and should be replaced; the leaves were down and must be raked up; a heap of them, wind swirled, lay on his doorstep; something or somebody had broken a windowpane. Even a few weeks' unoccupancy had given the well-kept place an air of abandonment.

He unlocked the door and entered. The interior struck damp and cold, with the chill of fall. A film of dust overlay everything, but all was in order, as he had left it.

From force of habit he had left his wood box full and a store of split kindlings. He built fires in his range and heater, and opened doors and windows to drive out the damp, confined air and admit the dry, crisp freshness of the afternoon, and he hung his blankets outside in the sun.

When the sun went down he closed doors and windows, replenished his fires, and cooked supper, finding satisfaction in taking up again his wonted daily routine. Afterward he filled his pipe and sank into his accustomed chair to smoke and rest.

The day's exertions had tired him to the point of exhaustion. He did not wish to read, nor to do anything but rest. He felt a great lassitude, a reaction, a sinking into the old, familiar surroundings, as a man stretches himself for rest. But if Shan had been with him he would have been entirely happy. Once he caught himself putting out his hand, as he had wont to do, to pat the dog's head.

In the days that followed he set about straightening his place, snugging up for the winter, pottering about as his strength served. Gradually it began to come back to him, but he was careful not to test it too far. Once he took his gun and visited a near-by point where ducks passed in evening flight; but his heart was not in it. Lacking the hunting companionship of Shan he felt lonely. When he came home he put the gun away and did not touch it again.

Though he had spoken confidently to Ronan, his words had been inspired largely by a fine courtesy. Though there were authentic marvelous instances of homing dogs, they were the exception.

Admitting that Shan possessed this mysterious sense of direction, any number of accidents might occur to abort it. A letter from Ronan told him that the advertising, though continued and extended, had given no result. Well, all that could be done had been done.

SITTING by the fire one stormy night he listened to the wind-driven slish of rain and the beat of distant waves, and resigned himself to the probability of his loss. He supposed that he should have to get a new dog, not because he wanted one but because he could not help it. A man who had owned dogs all his life could not get along without one. To such a man a dog was a necessary complement.

It was curious about a man and a dog —a one-dog man and his dog. The dog died in time, and the man sorrowed. But he got another dog and went through it again. The process held the fascination of self-inflicted pain, of worrying a sore tooth. The men who had several dogs at a time were wisest. The one-dog man laid up trouble for himself.

He closed his eyes against the lamplight and dozed. In his uneasy slumber the bygone dogs that he had owned and loved seem to pass in procession before him as they had been to him of old—Topsy and Beaver, Sachem and Bess, Pilot and Captain, Bos'n and Nelson. And last of the long line came Admiral. He stood before his master, regarding him steadfastly with understanding amber eyes, threw up his head, and barked his old welcoming bark.

Tom Wilson woke from his light slumber. The dream had been very real. It had turned back the years so that for a brief moment he had had again the old companionships, had looked into the brave hunting days of his youth and prime. Still old Admiral's bark rang in his ears. He smiled sadly in retrospect.

But—and now he was certainly awake —he heard a dog's voice which was not Admiral's. It was deeper of note, pouring full from a mighty chest, joyful but appealing, anxious, a shade tremulous, changing to a high, eager whine. And as he recognized it Tom Wilson's heart leaped wildly. He sprang from his chair and stumbled stiffly to the door.

Out of the night and the storm a great, tawny body sprang upon him. Vibrant with love and longing it nestled to him, whining, cuddling, nosing deeply into his body, while deep in its throat crooned the loving dog sounds he knew and understood. Shan had come home!

And Tom Wilson was scarcely less demonstrative. He hugged the dog, his weathered, stubbly cheek lying against the tawny head, while out of his lonely old heart he babbled inarticulate words of affection.

But in a few moments he began to take stock of the wanderer, and then he saw that Shan had had a rough passage. He was gaunt, belly drawn, limping on pads worn raw. His coat was rough and torn. On head and neck were half-healed scars telling of encounters on the way.

"Why, you poor old pup, you're starvin'!" said Wilson. "And they've been treatin' you like a tramp. Poor old Shan, poor old boy. Hang on for five minutes and I'll have grub for you."

Immediately he prepared a hurried meal, sacrificing a juicy steak which he had intended for himself. This he cut small, mixed with cold porridge, broke half a dozen raw eggs into it, and laced the mixture liberally with milk.

"Now go to it, boy," he said as he set it down.

Shan went to it ravenously, with wolfish appetite. When he had cleaned up every scrap and licked the dish to a polish, Wilson went over his body carefully, washing off the mud and cleansing the half-healed wounds, and treating them and the worn pads with an ointment of his own compounding. After that he prepared a bed of blankets and canvas beside the stove, and Shan, home again, well fed, warm, and content, stretched himself on it, blinked sleepily at his master, nosed his outstretched, caressing hand, sighed deeply, and passed into profound canine slumber. Nor did he wake when, an hour later, Wilson rapped out his pipe and sought his own blankets.

At the end of three days, during which he ate and slept, Shan was himself again. He was still gaunt and a trifle stiff, but his worn pads had healed so that he walked without limping. Fed and rested, he took up his old life and his old habits. He made the rounds of the premises, investigating everything carefully with his nose, and apparently was satisfied.

But in a day or two he became uneasy, restless. He seemed to regard his master questioningly, with expectancy. For the winds of the late fall days, blowing keenly across marsh and bay, the night frosts, and the dawn fogs, were bringing an urgent message to the old hunting dog; and they brought the same insistent call to that older hunter, Tom Wilson, who was gaining strength daily.

"I'm strong enough if I take it easy," he said to himself. "And Shan's been coaxin' me for days. He's just crazy to go. I'll do it. Hey, Shan, old boy, we'll go huntin' again."

A KEEN west wind was whipping up a white-capped chop as the cabined gas boat nosed out into it, bound for the old shooting grounds of Frenchman's Bay. Forward sat Shan, his head lifted alertly, his amber eyes shining, his nostrils twitching eagerly as they savored and interpreted the scents of open water and marsh and shore.

Tom Wilson, at the wheel, smoked his pipe contentedly, feeling the lift and heave of the stanch hull as it smashed into the short seas, listening to the clean smack of the exhaust and watching the shores slip by. It was good to be back again on the waters he knew, blown by the clean winds.

He thought a trifle sadly of other days, when Joe Claflin had companioned him, but his regret was gentle rather than poignant. He had arrived at the fair philosophy of age, which accepts humbly where youth murmurs rebelliously. He had life and returning health, and he was thankful.

The slopping crest of a wave over the weather bow took Shan in the face. The dog rose in disgust, shook the water scornfully from his coat, and came to join his master.

A flock of canvasbacks, passing in bulletlike flight, swerved to swing wide of the plunging gas boat. The dog's amber eyes followed them intently and then sought his master's. Wilson patted the smooth, well-domed head.

"Huntin' days come again, Shan!" he said. "Good days for men and dogs. Huntin' days!"

Shan laid a paw on his master's knee. To Tom Wilson it was as the warm handclasp of an old friend. He slid his free arm around the tawny-haired muscular neck.

And so, in the perfect understanding of close friendship, old hunter and old hunting dog faced forward on the old trail which, whether by water or land, is ever fresh and new; the trail that never wearies —the trail to hunting days.

Look for more stories by Mr. Chisholm in future issues of POPULAR.

A Race at Comobabi

By Ernest Douglas

Author of "The Wooden-legged Man's Revenge," "The Shrine of the Children," Etc.

In which it appears that, in matters of horse racing, the ethics of the savage aren't much more primitive than those of his civilized brethren.

TWO things drew Manuel back to Comobabi. One was the perfectly natural desire to show his people how very greatly he had prospered and how much wisdom he had gained among the whites. The other was Marianita.

Marianita! How her lovely eyes would widen and sparkle at sight of her old playmate in all the glory of purple sombrero, green neckerchief, black-silk shirt, fringed yellow-leather chaparajos, and high-heeled, polished boots!

He felt no doubt that other girls, maidens who had once laughed scornfully at the awkward and dreamy lad whose thoughts were not the thoughts of other Papago youths, would now smile upon him admiringly and invitingly. But his smiles would be for none save Marianita, who had ever been kind to him, and on the night before his departure for that fascinating but awe-inspiring big *kihim* that the Americanos called Tucson, had whispered that she would wait patiently for his return.

And now the young men and the old men who had looked at him askance because he took no joy in the sacred dances, in getting drunk on saguaro wine, or even in the noble sport of chicken pulling, but preferred instead to roam about over the mesas alone or with some passing prospector, would stare enviously at Chico.

He leaned over and patted the horse's neck, just as he had seen Mr. Conrad Sames do. Very rich indeed Mr. Sames must be, to give away such a valuable animal, not to mention this saddle. The saddle, though, was the only part of the outfit with which Manuel was even vaguely dissatisfied, for it was not studded with the bright metal conchos that his sophisticated taste demanded.

Though in retrospect it seemed like some event of the dim and distant past,

in reality it had been only a week since Mr. Sames came home with his habitual aspect of melancholy despair replaced by one of glad relief.

"The doctor says I'm cured," he jubilated to his Indian stable boy and gardener. "Got the old lungs all healed, and at last it's safe for me to go back East. This desert air is what did it—desert air and horseback riding.

"Good old Chico! I'll sure hate to part with him. Been a regular pal to me, Chico has, though really a little more skittish than an invalid's horse ought to be. Chances are he'll fall into the hands of some one who won't humor his little peculiarities, and he'll be utterly ruined in a week.

"No! By Jove, I won't sell him! You understand him, Manuel. You know how to manage him. I'll give him to you and then my conscience will be at ease."

SO that was how Manuel came to possess a horse so superior to the lean, half-starved ponies of Papagueria that his owner must certainly be hailed as a man of distinction in that arid land. A sleek, clean-limbed chestnut he was, obviously a thoroughbred, but so nervous and high-strung that he had to be handled as tenderly and sympathetically as a new-born babe.

The slightest touch in an unaccustomed place was enough to set him rearing and plunging. That was the reason Manuel had banished the temptation to acquire those glittering silver-mounted spurs which his covetous eyes had beheld in a harness shop at Tucson. Only twenty dollars was the price, and he still had nearly fifty clinking in the pockets of his trousers.

Fifty dollars to set the tongues of Comobabi wagging with stories of the fabulous riches won by the despised orphan in his travels. Fifty dollars to convince Chief Alvino that he was worthy to be the husband of his daughter.

"Who are you, that you should wed the fairest maid in all Papagueria?" the chief had scoffed. "Where are your ponies? Where are your cattle? Twenty winters and twenty summers have you seen, yet you cannot claim even one mangy burro as your own."

The idea of running away with Marianita occurred to him; but the chief would be sure to follow, kill him, and take his daughter back. No; there was only one thing for him to do. He would go to live among the whites, learn their ways, and endeavor to acquire for himself some of that wealth with which they all seemed to be so well supplied. And Marianita, whom he had contrived to see for just a moment under the spreading paloverde behind her father's *kí*, had sadly approved the plan.

A GIANT cactus lifted its arms in solemn benediction upon the returning wanderer. Far across the llano loomed the jagged fangs of the Comobabi Range, veiled in translucent tints of opal pink that seemed to draw the mountains nearer as twilight descended.

He had timed himself to arrive at sunset, one day before the commencement of the annual harvest festival that drew Papagos from every quarter of their far-flung domain.

Dared he hope that he would be invited to sleep to-night inside the chief's lodge? If so, that would mean that he was accepted as Marianita's betrothed. Three nights as the guest of the family, and then Marianita, slim and beautiful and infinitely desirable, would be his bride to carry back to the country of the pale-faces.

It did not occur to him that his sweetheart might have changed; nothing ever changed in the desert. He was conscious, however, that a year and a half had wrought many changes in him; changes not only material but spiritual and physical as well.

The thin, underfed stripling had become a large and powerful man. Two hundred pounds was the story told by the white man's scales. Proudly he flexed his biceps. If there were wrestling contests at the fiesta——

RUDE fences and corrals now lined the trail. Children and dogs by dozens and scores swarmed out of dome-shaped, mud-plastered huts. A group of fat squaws, grinding mesquite beans to flour in stone metates beneath an open shed, paused in their work to stare curiously. The horseman was almost to the chief's lodge before some one recognized him and word spread through the excited village that this was indeed the almost forgotten outcast, Manuel.

The *ki* of Chief Alvino was all of eight feet high and twelve in diameter, altogether a fitting home for the headman of so large and important a settlement as Comobabi. Before it lounged the chief himself, resplendent in a new red-calico shirt and copper-riveted overalls purchased especially for the impending fête. With him was his broad-faced, good-natured wife, and Marianita, with his three young sons, and a stranger.

Marianita was embroidering some buckskin garment with glass beads. She threw just one startled glance at the newcomer, then bent low over her task. Alvino rose, followed by the boys, and in the guttural Papago tongue bade Manuel a formal welcome back to his homeland.

The stranger had moved over to Marianita's side, picked up a guitar, and begun idly to pick at its strings. A thin, ratlike little man was he, with the slant eyes of a Mongolian and a few black bristles sprouting from his short upper lip.

He was dressed in a velvet bolero jacket and tight blue trousers; in marked contrast to the barefoot Papagos, he wore shoes. Obviously a Yaqui from below the Mexican border. What could he be doing here?

"That is Quintin," Alvino declared proudly. The name evidently meant nothing to Manuel so the chief explained:

"He is the owner of Conejo."

Ah, yes! Conejo, the swiftest horse in all Sonora, reputed throughout the border country to be absolutely unbeatable by anything on four feet.

"He is also the owner of a rancho and many cattle down in the Sierra del Humo," Alvino went on. "And on the first day of the fiesta, after he wins the horse race for Comobabi, he will take Marianita for his wife. I shall have a rich son-in-law."

With a muttered word of farewell, Manuel rode on. The triumph upon which he had counted so confidently and so blithely had vanished like a mirage before his hurt and disillusioned eyes.

AS he moved by, Marianita turned, and for just a moment her gaze met his. The heart in his bosom gave a great leap. In that look he read dumb despair and pleading.

He would have liked to go away by himself and think, but this was not to be. Marveling and gaping Indians surrounded him, much to Chico's perturbation, and a score clamored that he be their guest as long as he might remain in the village.

Manuel accepted the invitation of Santo, son of Marto, the local medicine man. His request for a corral exclusively for Chico was promptly granted. There he watered, unsaddled, and rubbed down his steed, and threw to him a perfectly astonishing amount of galleta hay.

All the talk in Comobabi was of the horse race. Each year it was the custom to open the harvest festival sports with a match between a horse representing Comobabi and one from Tesota, a rancheria on the Gila River almost a hundred miles to the north.

For four consecutive years the Tesota entry had won, and with it had won many cows, burros, dogs, chickens, saddles, and even squaws, wagered on the result. The Tesotitos seemed to have bred a line of ponies faster than any the desert could produce, and they boasted confidently that a fifth victory was assured. All of which was extremely galling to the people of Comobabi.

Therefore there had been great rejoicing when Chief Alvino, asked by Quintin to set a price upon his daughter, had demanded the services of the famous Conejo for just one race. The Yaqui, glad enough

to accede, was now here to ride the *caballo* himself and claim his fee.

All this, of course, was being kept a profound secret within the village. The Tesotitos would come en masse, ready to bet their last centavo, and would be sent back without so much as a pair of sandals to protect their feet from the cactus along the trail. Comobabi would enjoy the sweets of revenge to the full.

Manuel heard the details of this plot without comment; his mind was occupied with other matters and he really took little interest in this. But a remark of Santo's, while they were eating a supper of *pinole* and jerked venison, suggested the germ of an idea that might offer a solution for his own difficulty.

"That horse of yours looks as though he might run very fast," Santo said.

Manuel started but made no reply. It was true that Chico looked like a racer; undoubtedly he came from racing stock, and Mr. Sames had once expressed the opinion that with training he might be a "regular whirlwind." It had never occurred to Manuel to find out how much speed lay in those long, springy legs.

BEFORE the rising sun sent pencils of flame across the tawny desert, Manuel gave Chico a try-out. He rode him into the greasewood just beyond the last hut, clucked to him, and they were off. Like the wind they flew by cactus and cat claw, the iron-shod hoofs beating a tattoo upon the gravelly earth.

Manuel pulled Chico to a swinging lope, his brow corrugated thoughtfully. Yes, the chestnut was fast. Even without training he could leave any Papago pony far behind in a mile run. But to suit Manuel's present purpose he must beat Conejo. Could he do so and carry two hundred pounds?

After turning Chico back into the corral, Manuel made a few casual inquiries regarding the Yaqui horse. Conejo, he was told, was stabled within twelve-foot walls of poles interwoven with desert-willow branches, and until the last minute before the race his presence would be kept secret from all not of Comobabi. Manuel, however, had no difficulty in gaining admittance to the inclosure.

One look at that splendid big gray, with speed written in every graceful line, and he knew that even in a race under equal conditions Chico might very possibly be distanced.

Conejo snapped playfully at the little Indian, a servant of Quintin's, who was currying him. For an instant his teeth were revealed, and Manual saw that they were yellow, with dark stains on the grinding surfaces of the molars.

Conejo was old, nine or ten years at the least. He must be slowing down. Chico, on the other hand, was not more than four, right in his prime. With a burden no heavier than the diminutive Quintin he ought to stand a chance against this veteran.

Manuel went to pull the shoes off his own horse. His decision to risk all on this slender chance was made. At the morning meal he spoke to Santo of his youngest son, a wiry youngster of thirteen, unusually bright. Yes, of course Juan could ride. Were not all Papagos practically born astride a horse?

Thereupon Manuel voiced for the first time his opinion that the chestnut was a swifter horse than the gray, and proposed that Juan ride as jockey. He took the delighted lad to Chico and introduced them. At first Chico snorted and backed away from this dark little son of the desert, but Manuel calmed him, and finally the big gelding submitted to having Juan lifted to his bare back.

"You must never whip him," Manuel warned, mindful of the Indian system of flailing a horse unmercifully from beginning to end of a race. "He will start to buck if you do."

Chico seemed to enjoy a short trial run with Juan. Manuel, holding his dollar watch in hand, was more than satisfied. All Comobabi buzzed with rumor and speculation.

A little later the entire male population gathered at the race track just west of the village to see Quintin give Conejo

his last work-out prior to the big race. They grunted and grinned wisely as the gray dashed along the dusty course, a straightaway approximately a mile in length. Apparently the most pleased of all was Chief Alvino. There was only one critic, Manuel.

"That mule!" he ridiculed in the hearing of the chief. "When he was a colt he could outrun a land turtle, but not now."

All eyes were turned upon him in astonishment.

"You surely do not expect that lame dog to win the race to-morrow?" he went on.

"Can your horse beat him?" the previously coached Santo asked ingenuously. Manuel laughed disdainfully and replied:

"That would be like a race between a coyote and a badger."

Some one waved Quintin down and told him of this unbelievable braggadocio. The Yaqui rode over and sneered in Spanish, for he did not speak the language of the Papagos:

"If you are so sure that your horse is faster than mine, no doubt you are willing to lay a wager."

For answer Manuel held out a handful of silver and bills, all the money he had brought from Tucson. It was quickly counted and covered by Quintin, the chief acting as stakeholder.

Juan had already led Chico from his corral. Several horsemen, among them Manuel on a borrowed pony, accompanied the racers to the farther end of the track for the start.

"Remember," Manuel cautioned his jockey, "no whipping. Just give him his head and guide him down the middle of the course."

AN Indian who had a revolver was chosen as starter. The nervous mounts were lined up between two mesquite trees. The pistol barked and they were off.

The experienced Quintin got the jump on Juan. Conejo was a length out in front before Chico caught his stride. But then the chestnut proceeded to close the gap with surprising ease. Manuel, galloping along in the dust behind, let out a wild whoop as his horse took the lead.

Almost equally excited were the Papagos clustered at the lower end of the track. They crowded out to get a better view of the contest. Chico heard their yells and, unusued to such noisy demonstrations, pricked up his ears. He faltered. Conejo gained.

That was where Juan lost his head completely. Forgetting Manuel's instructions, he began to yell himself, to pound at Chico's shoulders, and to dig into both flanks with bare feet.

Straight into the air went the outraged Chico, his back arched and his four hoofs bunched. His rider was hurled into a sagebush. Quintin, on Conejo, swept by to victory.

Chico went careening off across the mesa, with Manuel in pursuit. After half an hour of wary circling and approaching he caught the frightened animal and dejectedly led him back to the village, back to the jeers and taunts of Comobabi.

Alvino shouted that he had sent his sons for a land turtle to race the "badger." Quintin hilariously jingled and waved the money he had won.

Worse than all these were the reproaches of Manuel's friend, Santo, who was very indignant that his son had been inveigled into riding such a dangerous broncho as Chico had turned out to be. The boy, it seemed, had been stunned by his fall and lay unconscious for several minutes. Though no bones were broken, he was badly bruised and scratched and was even then undergoing treatment at the hands of his grandfather, the medicine man, who had been compelled by this emergency to suspend his supervision over the mixing of the sacred saguaro wine. A mournful wail from the medicine lodge, accompanied by the loud rasping of holy sticks, indicated that the aid of Iitoi, Creator and Elder Brother of the Desert People, was being invoked for the injured Juan.

Manuel made no excuses nor explana-

tions. He wandered about like a lost soul, longing for a glimpse of Marianita. But for his determination to have at least a word with her, he would have mounted Chico and ridden away, never to return.

In the afternoon guests began to arrive for the fiesta. Most of them were on ponies, but some rode burros and two or three families traveled in spring wagons. A few, from near-by villages, came afoot. Comobabi became a veritable kaleidoscope of masculine shirts and zerapes, feminine Mother Hubbards and shawls, that flashed every hue and combination of hues that rainbow ever knew.

Among the arrivals was the advance guard of the Tesota contingent, bringing the mare that had won the race the year before. She was paraded ostentatiously through the settlement and an orgy of frenzied betting began.

The Comobabians, serenely confident in the knowledge that Conejo, and not some desert nag, would represent them on the morrow, clamored to hazard their cattle, their horses, their saddles, their clothes, their blankets, their bows, their guns, their anything, on the outcome.

Manuel gloomily sized up the runty buckskin. What a farce a race between her and either Conejo or Chico would be! Chico could even carry two hundred pounds and beat her easily.

The sky of hard, brilliant blue dulled slowly as the sun dipped below a horizon of prismatic flame. Fires dotted the surrounding mesa, marking the camps of visitors. Manuel, outwardly unconcerned but inwardly smarting under gibes and hisses flung at him on every hand, did not return to the *kí* of Santo; instead he ate dried pumpkin and pitahaya fruit with an acquaintance from Quitovac.

AS the first stars glinted in their dusky canopy the voice of Alvino boomed out over the village from the roof of the medicine lodge.

"It is dark now," he announced, "and the first of the sacred harvest dances is about to begin. To-night we of Comobabi will dance to let Iitoi know the Papagos are grateful for his bounty. To-morrow night it will be the turn of the dancers from Santa Rosa."

As Manuel moved slowly toward the open space of hard-beaten earth, the *njúikot* set aside for such ceremonies, he was shocked and amazed to see an Indian staggering. Drunkenness now, at the very beginning of the celebration, was unthinkable, unprecedented, sinful by all Papago standards of morality and religion. Three nights later the saguaro wine mixed today would be ready and then it would be the pious duty of all Iitoi's children to surrender themselves to his will by drinking themselves into maudlin intoxication; but until that time the celestial liquor was taboo.

Whisperings here and there confirmed Manuel's suspicion that wine unhallowed by the medicine man's solemn rites had been surreptitiously brewed in different lodges, mostly by young couples whose faith in the beliefs of their fathers had been undermined by contact with whites. A bibulously generous buck even pressed into his unwilling hand a half-filled bottle of foamy brown spirit and hiccuped directions for finding the main supply.

Strings of eagle feathers, which in Papago theology have a peculiar significance, were stretched over the dancing place. At one end sat ancient, withered Marto and several visiting medicine men, crouched upon tanned deerskins and raptly contemplating various mystic objects, mostly rock crystals and clay images of animals.

About twenty men and an equal number of young squaws, all attired in their gayest fiesta finery, were already weaving and revolving in the dance. Upon their naked ankles were festoons of white seed pods that rattled rhythmically as they stamped upon the earth. The leader kept time by shaking a big gourd, and all chanted in unison an invocation to Elder Brother. About the fringe of the circle frolicked two clowns, wearing protesque masks of painted canvas, bearing crooked bows with broken strings, and flourishing absurd arrows of twisted roots.

With a thump of the heart, Manuel rec-

ognized Marianita among the dancers. He had expected that the chief's daughter would take part; this was why he had come here to-night. For the first time since his return he had a good view of the girl who had promised so faithfully and so tenderly to wait for him.

He had never realized before how small and slight she was. She was the shortest in all that motley throng, but also the straightest and most graceful, the most regular of form and feature. She showed none of that tendency to fat which early in life makes shapeless lumps of so many Papago women.

Yes, she was even more beautiful than he remembered her, but also more sad and thoughtful. About her was an air of melancholy, of rebellion against a hateful fate. Her gloomy eyes passed indifferently over her father and Quintin, seated near the priests, and swept the outer circle of spectators; but Manuel was too far back from the firelight's glow to be observed.

The dance, he knew, would continue until dawn and there would be no opportunity to speak to her that night. After his gaze had feasted upon her loveliness to the full he turned and stalked away, a prey to bitter fears and misgivings.

No way by which she might be saved from the Yaqui had presented itself. He knew that she would be guarded carefully and that it was idle to hope for a chance to steal her away from her father's lodge.

By no means all the Papagos in Comobabi that night were at the *njiikot*. Another fire had been kindled by a jacal on the eastern fringe of the village and a noisy crowd was collected there. Manuel saw gourd dippers being plunged into a huge olla and passed from hand to hand. Two boozy youths had quarreled and, unnoticed, were scuffling in the dirt.

A dwarfish figure flitted by Manuel and joined the knot of drinkers. It was Quintin, for whom Bacchus had more charms than had Terpsichore. He was given a boisterous welcome and in a moment had a gourd pressed to his lips.

"The swine!" some one growled in Spanish at Manuel's elbow. "He swills *vino* while I perish of thirst."

It was the little Yaqui *mozo*, leaning against the entrance to the inclosure where Conejo was kept hidden.

"If you want wine, why do you not go and get it?"

"Ah, he would kill me. I must stand guard over his accursed horse. It is not fair."

MANUEL stopped short, considering a new plan that had flashed on him with the speed of a lightning bolt. He had never heard the axiom, "All's fair in love and war," but he well understood and approved the principle. If only Chico, and not Conejo, could be the one to kick dust in the face of that buckskin to-morrow!

"Here," he whispered, hauling from his pocket the bottle that had been given him earlier in the evening. "Take this."

"Ah! *Mil gracias, amigo mio!*" The fiery dram gurgled down the *mozo's* parched throat. "But this is such a very little drink."

"Wait."

Manuel approached the befuddled group about the fire. All were now singing with ludicrous gravity; all except Quintin, whose nose was constantly buried in his gourd.

No one paid any attention while Manuel picked up a small olla, one holding perhaps a gallon, and filled it from the larger vessel. He carried this back to the volubly grateful Yaqui, then withdrew into the shadows to await results.

Quintin sent for his guitar and with unsteady hand thrummed the accompaniment of a Mexican love song. Though most of them understood the words imperfectly, the Papagos were childishly delighted with the music. They joined hands and lurched about the singer in a tipsy travesty of some ceremonial dance.

One by one, however, they slumped over in their tracks to sleep off the effects of their unholy debauch. Within an hour Quintin was stretched out with the rest. The fire dwindled to a heap of ashes, leav-

ing the darkness unrelieved save for feeble starlight.

Manuel stole softly back to the inclosure and lifted the now unconscious sentry to one side. Looking about to make sure that he was not observed, he unwired the high gate and stepped within.

Conejo, tied to a post at one side, snorted in alarm. Murmuring soothingly, the intruder edged up to the gray. One slash of his knife and the hitching rope was severed. A wave of the arms and Conejo bounded outside, surprised but joyful at his unexpected freedom. A clatter of hoofs told Manuel that Quintin's racer was headed southward, back toward the Sierra del Humo and home.

As he stood listening, his already seething brain was convulsed by another startling question. Why stop with merely liberating the horse? Quintin lay in sottish unconsciousness only a few yards away. It would be as easy to slit his skinny throat as it had been to cut that rope.

He speculatively fingered the sharp blade. A drunken quarrel—— He would never even be suspected. With his rival removed he could bide his time and take Marianita with or without her father's consent.

Manuel glided from the inclosure.

Quintin sprawled beside his guitar, his mouth open, snoring stertorously.

As Manuel stood gripping the open knife his savage instincts came into violent collision with the views that he had absorbed, more or less unconsciously, from the palefaces among whom he had cast his lot. He had many good friends in Tucson, friends whose horror of violence and the deliberate taking of human life he respected although he did not wholly understand it.

What he was about to do they would call murder. And he knew enough of their ways to feel sure that if they knew he was a murderer they would no longer be his friends. Not the fear of punishment, but the rudiments of a civilized conscience, troubled Manuel. Besides, even the Papago in him revolted ever so little at the notion of killing a sleeping guest in his own village.

After all, though, what was a Yaqui more or less? Why consider senseless prejudices in an emergency like this? He was a strong man and a strong man would ruthlessly take that which he desired, trampling over whatever obstacles might lie in his path.

And yet it was this very strength that saved Quintin. He looked so insignificant, so like a contemptible worm, as he lay there in sodden helplessness. Surely no strong man could ever be proud of vanquishing such an enemy by slaying him in his sleep. His grandfather, a mighty warrior, would certainly have pursued far different tactics under similar circumstances.

"No!" he resolved suddenly, snapping the knife shut. "I shall win Marianita, but it will not be in the way of a coward. If I kill him it will be in fair fight."

A moment longer he lingered. With a sardonic smile he picked up Quintin's puny form, carried it over and dumped it by the *mozo*.

Somehow exalted, lighter of heart, confident of ultimate victory, Manuel strode back toward the *njûikot*. The dance there was still in progress. There was no change, no excitement save that Santo had left his place and was angrily insisting that Chief Alvino take steps to curb the premature carousing. After another period of hungry gazing upon Marianita, Manuel went to rest but not to sleep on his saddle blankets in the corral with Chico.

A final rumble of drums, just at daylight, told Manuel that the dance was breaking up. He tried to guess what Alvino would do now.

First of all he would go to his home, no doubt taking his daughter with him. There he would discover that Quintin was missing. He would institute a search for the absent guest.

Something very like this must have happened. After a time a great hubbub arose down the village street beyond the dancing place. From every direction came Papagos, running toward the center of

excitement. Manuel followed, more leisurely.

ABOUT the opened gate through which Conejo had galloped hours before was a milling throng of shrilly jabbering humanity. Manuel pressed his way to the center. There Quintin, awakened by Alvino, was furiously lashing the bent back of the whimpering *mozo* with a rawhide rope. Lurid Spanish and Yaqui curses crackled through the atmosphere.

"What has happened?" Manuel asked the chief, who stood looking on with a frown of mingled worriment and anger.

"Those loco Yaquis! They got drunk and some one has stolen the horse. And this is the day of the race. I am ruined and all Comobabi is ruined. For we have wagered every pony, every cow, every chicken."

"Ah! The servant was careless."

"Both of them were drunk. Oh, why did I ever trust a Yaqui?"

These words brought a sly grin of triumph to the lips of Manuel. All was working out exactly as he had planned and hoped.

At that instant Santo came running from the south. "The gray was not stolen," he shouted. "The tracks were made by a free horse capering from one side of the road to the other."

Alvino laid a hand upon the arm of Quintin, who left off his scourging and faced about with a scowl. In Spanish he was told of Santo's discovery.

"I will give you our swiftest pony and two of our best trackers," the chief continued. "You will follow and bring Conejo back in time for the race. We will delay the start as long as we can."

"You talk like a fool, old man. When Conejo gets loose he is as wild as a mustang. He will never be caught on the open mesa by any of your Papago buzzard baits."

A chorus of groans went up at this.

"There is just one chance," declared Santo. "Manuel's brown broncho is indeed fast. He might get around the gray and drive him back toward us."

"If he is fast enough to do that he is fast enough to beat the Tesota mare today," Manuel interposed carelessly.

"That is true if he will run on the track," Alvino agreed sarcastically.

"I can hold him on the track."

"You?"

"I am heavy, but I know how to ride. I will not kick him in the flanks, as Juan did. Chico can carry a bigger man than myself and still outrun the buckskin."

The Comobabians began to laugh relievedly and to chaff the mystified Tesotitos mingled among them. Manuel received many a friendly slap on the back from persons who had hooted him the day before.

He was a hero, at least a potential hero, for he had stepped into the breach at a critical moment with an offer to save the honor, wealth and pride of Comobabi. He smiled, resolved that a reward greater than mere back slapping should be his.

"Let us go now to my *kí* and eat," urged Santo.

"Very well," Manuel consented, happy at this tacit forgiveness. "But I think it would be well to have my horse watched carefully until after the race. By men who do not drink saguaro wine before the appointed time."

"I will attend to that," volunteered Alvino.

So Manuel ate with Santo. He lingered for a time over the bed of Juan, who was too stiff and sore to move and was heartbroken over the certainty that he must miss seeing the race.

Until noon Manuel stayed with Chico, petting him and rubbing his already glossy coat with a piece of deerskin. Then Santo brought word that it was time for the race to begin.

"Those foolish Tesotitos!" he laughed. "They know since this morning that no ordinary pony is going to run for Comobabi to-day but still they think that their little mare will win. They have been running her up and down the track for an hour, until she is lathering with sweat, and making crazy wagers. They are mad."

There was a crowd gathered about the

gate of the corral. Some one dropped the bars and Manuel led Chico outside. As he did so a tiny figure launched itself straight at the big chestnut's hocks. A gleaming dagger reached for the hamstrings.

A horse less nervous and skittish than Chico would have been crippled for life. But as the cold steel touched the skin one hoof shot out and caught the attacker squarely on the side of the head.

Quintin's *mozo* fell in an unconscious heap.

The Papagos surged forward. "Kill him!" they shouted, frantic with rage.

Manuel held up his hand.

"No!" he cried above the din. "This miserable snake was only acting under his master's orders. Tie him and hide him well until after the race; then we will make him tell us the truth.

"That is good counsel," Santo advised.

Buckskin thongs were produced and the Yaqui was being trussed firmly as Manuel, now on Chico's back, continued toward the race track.

A LANE was cleared for them through the merry, chattering multitude that milled about the lower end. Comobabians laughed triumphantly as they pointed to the chestnut. To-day they would have vengeance for that string of defeats stretching back through four years.

Quintin was standing between Alvino and Marianita, earnestly arguing with the chief. Manuel rode up before them and said:

"Chico has not been hamstrung yet."

The words meant nothing to any hearer save Quintin. His face went a sickly, ashen gray.

Manuel galloped off. Chico was still a little shaky from the fright he had been given, and several times shied halfway across the course.

What was this? The buckskin mare was turning off into the greasewood. Manuel, though he was some distance away, could see that she had been warmed up far too much for a race. A chill of apprehension clutched his heart.

Thoughtfully he turned back, just in time to meet a long-legged, slender, high-headed sorrel, built not unlike Chico. And the rider on the back of the sorrel was no Indian but an emaciated, stunted, tobacco-chewing white youth with an evil leer on his prematurely wrinkled face. He wore a green-and-yellow cap, a silk shirt of the same colors, and sat on the most ridiculous apology for a saddle that Manuel had ever seen.

"So that's the ringer horse you scalpers dug up out of the sticks?"

"Ringer horse?" Manuel did not understand the term.

"Sure! But them other birds was too smart for you. They got wind of your little game and so they hired me, a professional jockey with the best miler on the coast, to come down here and win this race for 'em. It's a pipe. Kept me hid out and flashed the mare all over the place till all their books was made.

"That plug of yours don't look so worse, at that. But carryin' too much weight. Too much weight. Well, goo'-by! We'll give 'em a race for their money anyway, won't we, buddy?"

So this was what all his plotting and planning had come to! Thinking there was no horse to beat except an undersized buckskin mare, he had turned loose the gray, which with Quintin up might have stood a chance to beat this importation of the crafty Tesotitos. He had betrayed his people.

He turned his head to watch the sorrel whizzing along the track. With two hundred pounds on his back, Chico must be left far behind by that lean greyhound, bred for speed and trained for speed.

Could a boy be found at this eleventh hour to ride in his place? But since Juan's mishap all the youngsters of Comobabi stood in mortal fear of Chico, the supposed vicious broncho. And even if one could be persuaded to make the attempt, the chances were a thousand to one that he would fail just as Juan had failed. Papago boys knew just one way to ride a race, and that was to ply the quirt from starting post to finish line.

MANUEL rode back to Chief Alvino. Quintin was no longer in sight but Marianita was still at her father's side.

"You see how the Tesotitos have tricked us?" he asked.

Alvino nodded dismally.

"Listen, chief of my people. My Chico cannot possibly carry me to victory in this race. With a jockey who is light, who knows horses and will not cause him to buck, he may win."

"Where are we to find such a rider?"

"There is only one—Quintin. Though he is my enemy and sent his servant to hamstring my horse, I will yet allow him to ride my horse in this race. For my people I will do this."

"You are a true warrior, Manuel. Your people are grateful. But I cannot believe what you say of Quintin."

He directed several tribesmen to go in search of the Yaqui. Within a few minutes all had returned with word that he was not to be found. One reported that he had been seen galloping southward on the *mozo's* horse.

So! Knowing that his perfidy was discovered, probably believing that his servant had confessed, Quintin had fled from the wrath of the Papagos.

"But why should he wish to cripple your horse?" Alvino wondered, his brows knit in puzzlement.

"Because," said Marianita, speaking loudly and clearly, "I told him that I had pledged myself to Manuel and did not wish to be the squaw of a Yaqui. So he hated Manuel and did not want him to win the race.

"Now I will win the race," she continued before any of her hearers could express their amazement at this revelation. "I shall ride Chico and if Iitoi, Elder Brother of the Desert People, is not angry with his children of Comobabi, I shall ride him to victory."

"You?" Manuel looked at her appraisingly.

"Yes, I. I can ride as well as any boy."

"But Chico will be afraid of your skirt. He is not used to women."

"Wait."

She darted away and in ten minutes she was back, dressed in her brother's overalls and with her long black hair caught up by a red bandanna handkerchief. Chico scarcely flinched when she leaped to his back, light as a flower petal. Manuel saw that she was no larger than Juan.

"Gallop him to the other end of the track," Manuel directed. "Never whip him. Pat him on the shoulder if his stride breaks but keep your feet away from his flanks. And you will win."

He seized the nearest saddled pony and fogged after her. She was following orders to the letter. Chico had ceased his shying and seemd anxious to let out, but Marianita held him to an easy gallop.

The white jockey seemed surprised and just a little concerned at this change of riders. He threw some sneering remark at Marianita, but she was as ignorant of English as he of Papago. There was no chance for this race-track tough to "get her goat," which was plainly his object.

UNTIL all details concerning the start had been arranged, Manuel led Chico back and forth in the shade of a mesquite. Marianita did not dismount but sat regarding him with shining eyes. He had a million things to say to her, but in that mob there was no chance to speak.

At last the Comobabians and the Tesotitos agreed upon all the disputed points, which really were matters of no consequence. The fretting horses swung into place. A revolver popped and away they went.

As before, Chico got away behind. He had at least two lengths to make up before he realized that a race was in progress.

Manuel, quirting the sluggish pony vigorously in an effort to hold as near as possible to the racers, saw that the chestnut was trailing right in the sorrel's dust. He had forgotten to warn Marianita to look out for this. But gradually she swung Chico's nose over to the left, out of the fog. And Chico did not lose ground as he quartered across the narrow track. The girl bent lower over the shoulders, copying the style of the jockey.

The Tesota rider looked behind, saw Chico running out of the dust and slowly overtaking the sorrel. And the sorrel was doing his level best, for it had been the jockey's intention to take the lead right at the start and hold it. Strategy must win this race, and his years of experience had taught him a thousand stratagems.

The sorrel also swung to the left. A whip snapped over his rump. He cut in just ahead of Chico. The chestnut was again breathing dust.

More sharply than before, Marianita pulled to the right. She lost just a little distance. Grinning, the jockey prepared to repeat his trick.

Perhaps Chico understood and did not like the idea of running through a cloud of dust. Perhaps he heard the imploring words that Marianita poured into his ears. At any rate he strode forward with a burst of speed that brought gasps of admiration from Tesotito and Comobabian alike.

The sorrel simply did not have enough speed in those slender legs to head the chestnut again. He was still leading but Chico's head was by his hind quarters. Relentlessly the jockey crowded over, intent upon forcing the other horse out into the brush. Spectators scrambled out of the way of possible harm.

Marianita's left hand crept to the handkerchief that bound her hair. It found a pin, and the bandanna fluttered behind into the breeze. She leaned far over and jabbed the pin sharply into the sorrel's hip.

He snorted, sprang away. Chico shot into the lead and finished with half a length to spare, amid such a roar of excitement as never before had been heard at Comobabi, horse-racing capital of Papagueria.

Manuel left the course, circled around and met Marianita, proud and happy, riding back from the direction of the village. Instantly they were surrounded by a surging throng. Every one wanted to pat Chico, who submitted to these caresses with unwonted tolerance.

MANUEL threw the pony's reins to another, reached Chico's side and held up his arms. His sweetheart slipped into them; unashamedly he strained her to him. Santo, at a nod of consent, took charge of the victorious racer.

Marianita seized Manuel's hand. "Come!" she whispered breathlessly, dragging him after her. In a moment they faced Chief Alvino.

"My father," she said humbly, as befitting a reverent and obedient Papago daughter, "will you ask this young man to sleep in our lodge to-night?"

A smile softened the stern features of the chief. "Of course," he replied gently. "But you must stay three nights, my son."

THE BIG JOB

THE cooks in a fashionable Washington hotel went on strike. The management was frantic. Here were a lot of lawmakers and a group of ambassadors and humbler diplomatic officials, all as hungry as ditch diggers, and the cooks either gone home or jabbering in the alley.

At last a ray of sunshine struck athwart the Cimmerian gloom. A clerk informed the manager that one cook was true to his duty and could be found in the basement, ready to proceed with his work. The manager went hurriedly to the kitchens.

"You will stay on the job?" asked the manager.

"Yes, sir," answered the cook.

"And you will cook for our patrons?"

"For as many as I can, sir, and at the same time not hurt my reputation through haste. I have the big cooking job."

"What is your specialty? What do you cook?" inquired the manager.

"I make the meringue!" he declared proudly.

Lonny and the World's Champ

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "The Cap Comes Back," "A Word for John Lawton," Etc.

The story of a six-day bike race that ended strangely with both victory and defeat for the winning team's portion.

LONNY ADAIR was bound, I guess, to hit it off wrong with Tod Duncan. Let me give you the layout.

Here was Lonny, just finishing his first full year as a professional, and already established as the king-pin of Yankee cyclists; in a class by himself at his specialties of handicap and open riding; the world's best, if you ask me, at the six-day game; able to hold his own at match racing, and even behind the motors, which are tricks by themselves.

Here was Duncan, on the other hand, a star American biker of a few seasons back, now wearing the title of world's champion which he'd won on the European tracks where he'd been performing for almost three years, and brought back to his native land by Eddie McGee, big boss of American bike racing, for the single and sole purpose of taking Lonny's scalp.

Not much chance of two birds like that becoming little playmates, is there?

They might have got along without real bad blood between them at that—if Duncan had only picked some other time to come back and regain his American laurels. He hit Newark, though, on a blistering-hot August Sunday, and that, I've always held, is what caused all the trouble.

Lonny had performed down in New England the night before. He'd had two tough races—one a twenty-five-miler that just about pulled his cork—and between the heat and trying to fold his six feet and more of length into a Pullman berth, he hadn't slept a wink on the trip back. Then, to make the expedition a complete success, he'd managed to get hold of some bad fruit or something at breakfast that morning, and had had cramps ever since.

Add to all this the fact that he'd had too much racing of late and was going stale, and I guess you don't need any further proof that he was in no condition to ride that afternoon—especially on a

track that was like a big sizzling frying pan. I told him so, too, as we trolleyed out to the Velodrome.

"Guess you're right, 'Windy,'" he admitted. "Guess I do need a rest. I'll ask Eddie McGee if he'll let me off this afternoon."

Now, ordinarily Eddie McGee, though he's a Simon Legree at heart, would have made allowances for Lonny's being sick and let him go home or watch the races from the stand. That day, though, he shut Lonny up before the boy had hardly a chance to open his mouth.

"Nothing doing!" he squealed in the high tenor that went with his fat dumpy build. "I'm sick of you lazy bike riders laying down on me. You ride this afternoon, if you never do it again."

Lonny made another attempt to tell how bad he felt, but Eddie shut him off sharply again.

"Listen," he said, "I've got a special reason for wanting you to ride. Duncan's here. He got in this morning, and he's outside glad-handing his old pals. I'm planning to introduce him to the crowd after the two-mile handicap, and I want you to be standing there with him when the bunch begins to cheer."

"But I can do that just as well in street clothes," objected Lonny.

"No," decided Eddie, "it will go over better with the boys in the bleachers if you do it after you win the race. And see that you do win it," he warned. "Don't dog it because I'm making you ride."

"I never laid down yet," barked Lonny.

"Well, see that you don't start to-day," said Eddie, moving away.

This little confab just about put the finishing touches on Lonny. He grouched and he growled and he called Eddie McGee names and he threatened and he beefed until finally, to get away from the sound of his voice, I grabbed his bike and wheeled it up the runway to the track.

Not that I blamed the boy. If anybody was entitled to a day off, he was, that day. But it was hot down in the training quarters, and I was taking no chances on getting into an argument with him.

I SPOTTED Duncan when I reached the track. Eddie McGee had planted him in a box right behind the finish line, and Eddie himself was paying him the unusual compliment of sitting with him and exchanging small talk.

He was a big boy; as tall as Lonny maybe, but beefier. Size, though, was where the resemblance between them stopped. Where Lonny was blond as a new rope, blue-eyed, red-cheeked and boyish-looking, Duncan was dark in hair, eyes and complexion. He was older than Lonny, too; three or four years anyway, which would make him about twenty-seven.

I'd known him well, of course, when he was riding in America, and as I looked at him, I marveled at the change that had come over him. When he left for Europe he had been just a big goofer, who might have been working with a pick if he hadn't been able to ride a bike. His three years or so as a popular athletic idol in the European capitals, though, had turned him into a polished gent!

Royalty itself couldn't have improved on the high-hat, bored way he was looking things over as Eddie McGee talked, or on the poses he struck for the benefit of the curious customers. He was an important guy now—to his own way of thinking. Dressed up to the part, too, in striped-gray flannel, with a red-and-white band on his straw skimmer, a bow tie that matched the hatband, a smart little cane, and, for all the heat, chamois gloves.

Lonny was still boiling over with anger when I hoisted him to his bike on the scratch mark in the two-mile handicap that was the third event on the afternoon's card. He never gave Duncan so much as a glance, nor did he look up to acknowledge the ripple of applause that came from the faithful as he appeared.

Duncan, though, for all his efforts to maintain his bored, careless pose, couldn't hide his interest in Lonny. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the world's champ studying every line of Lonny's body. He leaned forward over the box rail, and his gloved fingers opened and

closed nervously over his little cane. Then suddenly, a whistle, and—bang! the starter's pistol, and thirty-odd bikers were on their way.

One of the reasons why Lonny Adair was known to the public as the "Handicap King" was the fact that he could get off the mark quicker than any other rider of his time. Usually he was under way and rolling along at top speed before the average biker had made up his mind whether that noise he'd just heard was the starting gun or somebody sneezing in the grand stand. This time, though, Lonny got going with all the dash and pep of a loaded stone truck on an up grade.

When Duncan saw that start he gave a relieved grin as if to say, "Well, there's not much for me to fear from *that* guy!" And his smile grew wider and wider as the race progressed. For I'm here to tell you that Lonny gave about the queerest exhibition I ever saw offered by a high-class cyclist.

Neither his head nor his legs seemed to be working for him. He found every pocket in the race, let himself get elbowed and crowded, made his bid for front position a full lap before he had any right to, and just did wabble and struggle over the finish line a winner by about half the width of a wire spoke.

When I helped him off his bike in the back stretch, his face was green, his legs were shaking, and he was panting like a fat man after a Christmas dinner.

"Wow, I'm sick!" he breathed, his hand going to his belt line.

TOGETHER we crossed the infield, me wheeling the bike, Lonny using me for a crutch. The boy may have been mad before the race; now he was in a mood to commit murder. Making a holy show of himself by riding such a bum race under Duncan's eye was about the most humiliating thing that could have happened to him.

Also, somewhere up in the stand there was a girl. Mary King was her name, and, being the daughter of "Doc" King, who was one of the best of riders in the palmy days of cycling, she had been brought up around the tracks and knew the ins and outs of the bike game as well, probably, as the average rider did. *She* wasn't likely to hop up and cheer for any such amateurish exhibition as Lonny had just given, and the cheers of Mary King, I don't mind telling you, meant more to Lonny Adair than all the titles and all the purses that were put up for him to ride for.

So imagine if you can what frame of mind Lonny was in when "Megaphone Jack" Knight, the iron-voiced announcer, grabbed him by the arm at the other side of the track and piloted him over to the front of the grand stand.

Duncan was already waiting for them, and he and Lonny stood by like a couple of boobs while Megaphone Jack let loose a line of gibberish about how much the crowned heads of Europe thought of Duncan, and similar tripe. And he wound up his ballyhoo by calling Duncan "the Lonny Adair of Europe."

To my way of thinking, that was some compliment, but you couldn't have proved it by Duncan. After viewing the specimen of riding Lonny had just turned in, coupling their names together struck the champ as an insult, nothing less.

And so when the time came for the two of them to grip hands and pose for the photographers, Duncan looked Lonny over from head to foot and then drawled with a nasty sneer:

"So *you're* the great Lonny Adair!"

There was no mistaking what he meant. His look and his tone said plainly, even if his words didn't, "Why, you big dub, have you got the nerve to call yourself a bike rider?"

Lonny dropped Duncan's hand as if it was hot. He stiffened, and his face was suddenly like fire.

"Excuse me," he said in a tone that was almost as mean as Duncan's own, "but I didn't quite catch your name."

"No?" inquired Duncan sharply. Somewhere in his travels, he had acquired an imitation English accent. "Well, I'm not surprised, old chap. You don't seem to be catching anything well this awfternoon.

You had rawther a time of it catching those cyclists in that lawst race."

Now, ordinarily that kind of kidding was Lonny's dish. No guy, though, feels much like wisecracking when he's ready to bend in two with cramps, and too many things already had happened to Lonny that day to put him in any humor to relish having Duncan rub it in.

"Aw, shut up, you big stiff," he growled.

Nice, eh, in front of some ten thousand people? A swell way to carry out his part of welcoming back a world-famous native son!

Megaphone Jack hopped nervously from foot to foot. Knowing Lonny as he did, he was afraid, as I was, that he might carry out that threat. The stands were suddenly still as the tomb. Lonny and Duncan were a little far away, of course, for anybody in the crowd to catch what they were saying, but it was easy to guess from watching them what turn their conversation was taking.

Eddie McGee was grinning from ear to ear. A master showman, he knew that two star cyclists brought to the point of blows in front of a crowd, with photographers snapping them as they glared at each other, meant increased gate receipts for weeks to come.

Duncan's sneering, superior grin disappeared from his face. For a moment he looked—well, not scared exactly; just serious. Then he recovered himself.

"I beg your pardon?" he stalled. "What was that?"

"You heard me!" shouted Lonny in a voice that carried well into the stands. "One more crack out of you, and I'll give you the doggonedest plasterin' you ever had!"

"I am no brawler," sneered Duncan quietly, though you might have noticed he took a firmer grip on his cane. "I shall dispose of you, my friend, in my own way."

"Any time, any place, any way you pick!" snapped Lonny. "Right now would suit me!"

But it was at this point that I decided Lonny had gone far enough.

"Come on, you long-legged loon!" I whispered, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him away.

"Well, of all the chuckle-headed idiots!" I called him when we were down in the training quarters. "Haven't you any more sense than to start anything like that? Didn't you know you were bound to get the worst of it?"

"Worst of it!" exclaimed Lonny. "If I can't lick that——"

"Sure you can," I admitted, "but suppose you did? The cops would have had you, and there'd have been ten thousand people to swear you struck the first blow. You'd just have made a hero out of Duncan and a bum out of yourself—which is about what you've done as it is. Wait till you see the papers in the morning."

"Shucks," wailed Lonny, "everything's breakin' bad for me to-day."

"Well, cheer up, youngster," I said, "and put your clothes on. We'll get out of here before anything worse happens to us."

"It couldn't!" declared Lonny, shaking his head.

Which remark only went to prove what a bad guesser he was. He was feeling better that evening—at least he said he was—and about seven thirty he left me to keep his regular Sunday-night date with Mary King. I went home, and I was hardly settled comfortably in front of the electric fan when in bust Lonny, looking as though he'd just been sentenced to die.

"For the love of Pete!" I gasped when I caught sight of his face. "What's happened?"

"That damn Duncan!" stuttered Lonny, hardly able to speak. "Why didn't he fall off the ship and drown himself?"

"Duncan?" I asked. "Did you run into him again?"

"No," gulped Lonny. "I only wish I could. I'd murder him!"

IT was like pulling teeth to get the story from him. The long and the short of it was that Mary King had given Lonny the air because of his little set-to with

Duncan that afternoon. As soon as he'd shown up at her house she had sailed into him, informed him in effect that she was ashamed of him, that he was a low thug, that she never wanted to see him again, and so on, and so on.

The more Lonny tried to explain, the worse it was for him. That he was sick, and mad at Eddie McGee and at himself made no difference to Mary. Neither did the fact that it was an uncalled-for bum crack by Duncan that had started the trouble.

Lonny should have been gentleman enough to control himself, according to Mary; that was all there was to it. Mr. Duncan had been able to control *himself. He* hadn't made a spectacle of himself before all that crowd by raising his voice and shouting out threats and doubling up his fists. It wasn't necessary to drag *him* away like a common street fighter.

I could picture Mary King getting all this off. She was a slim little thing, but she had flashing black eyes and the temper that went with them. She and Lonny weren't engaged, or anything like that, but she liked the boy well enough to have started trying to polish off his rough edges some time back, and I could understand why she'd feel pretty sore at him for making no better use of what she'd taught him of etiquette than he had that afternoon.

"Well," said Lonny when he'd finally got the story off his chest, "I'm disgusted; that's what I am. This bike game," he went on when I made no response, "is the bunk. I'm gonna quit."

"Quit!" I exclaimed.

"Absolutely," he declared. "I'm through. I've made up my mind. I'm gonna sell my bikes and clear out."

"Now, listen, Lonny," I began. Then I stopped. A young fellow's likely to make all kinds of wild promises after he's had a scrap with his girl. The one thing Lonny needed more than anything else in the world was a rest. Why not grab the chance, while he was in that humor, and yes him into taking one?

"Well, by gum, as I think it over," I said, "I don't blame you. I'm kind of disgusted with bike racing myself, now that you mention it. I've had twenty-five years of it in one form or another, and it's beginning to get under my skin. Let's both clear out."

"You mean it?" gasped Lonny. "When?"

"Right now," I told him, jumping up from my chair and grabbing my coat. "Run back to your boarding house, throw a change of clothes into a bag, and we'll beat it together."

"Where?" he wanted to know.

"Never mind," I told him, hauling my old suit case out of the closet and beginning to stuff it with shirts and things. "Just hurry. I'll meet you at the Penn Station in an hour."

About three hours later Lonny and I hopped off a train a few stations beyond Asbury Park. I hadn't had a word out of him on the whole trip. He'd just sat there beside me—thinking, I suppose—with a face as long as his right leg.

Waiting for us in a swift-looking car was a lively, little, gray-haired, sunburned fellow in an ice-cream suit—Jerry Duffy, an old pal of mine, and the best conditioner of athletes in the world. Jerry had a big country place down near the ocean where he did a thriving business putting pugs in shape to keep their engagements.

"Glad to see you, Windy," he greeted me.

"Here, too, Jerry," I responded. "Shake hands with Lonny Adair, the ex-bike rider."

"Ex-bike rider!" gurgled Jerry, who of course had been told all about Lonny's case over the telephone. "Since when?"

"To-night," I told him. "Lonny's retiring from the game. So am I, so we're going to lay around your camp for a few days while we make up our minds which way to turn next."

"That's the idea," nodded Jerry. "If you're in a game that don't suit you, get out and try something else. Maybe I can make a fighter out of you, big boy," he kidded Lonny as he threw his car into gear and gave it the gas.

LONNY went to the hay as soon as Jerry deposited us, and we saw no more of him until ten the next morning. Two or three hours before he appeared, I'd torn the morning newspaper into a million small pieces, for the first thing that hit me in the eye when I turned to the sport page was a picture of Lonny and Duncan scowling at each other, accompanied by a thrilling article entitled, "Lonny Adair Near Blows With Tod Duncan, Cycling Champ."

Lonny was rested when he appeared, but he was also cranky.

"What's the idea of wastin' time at a dump like this?" he demanded, gesturing toward Jerry's shaded lawns, which in the early-morning sun looked about ninety per cent handsomer than any picture I've ever formed of heaven.

"Oh, I don't know," I told him carelesslike, knowing that it wasn't Jerry's place he was sore at.

"What's there to do here?" he demanded.

"Well," I said, "there's the whole Atlantic Ocean to swim in. Or you can fish in it, if you like that better. The table Jerry Duffy sets is something to write home about. There are hammocks hanging from every tree, so a fellow can get plenty of rest.

"Jerry said we could borrow his flivver if we wanted to go riding, and I guess I could rustle up a pack of cards if I had to. If you feel the need of exercise, Jerry has three or four fighters here doing work every day. They'd be glad to have you come along with them, and maybe they'd let you box with them if you asked them politely."

"Humph!" grunted Lonny. "Real excitin', isn't it?"

He felt a little better after he'd had his breakfast. Then he found one of the hammocks and hurled himself into it. He got up long enough to eat his dinner, then he went back to the hammock and stayed there till supper time. After supper, he sat on the porch a while, then went to bed.

That was Monday.

Tuesday morning he also spent in the hammock, but in the afternoon got up ambition enough to go down and lie on the beach for a while in a bathing suit.

Wednesday morning his muscles were screeching to be used. He got up too late to join the pugs on the road, but went out for a long walk by himself. At dinner he surprised the fighters and their henchmen by making a couple of polite remarks about the weather. Up to that time they'd seriously suspected him of being deaf and dumb.

That afternoon he gave them a couple of other surprises; first by going out to the barn with them and watching them work out, and second by stripping off and putting on the gloves with a heavyweight who was shy a sparring partner. This bird got the biggest surprise of all, for Lonny could go some, and, judging from the way he went after this knuckle pusher, he must have seen some resemblance to Duncan in the pug's rugged map.

Thursday morning I strolled into Lonny's bedroom, and left the morning newspaper on his pillow.

About ten minutes later he rushed out to the porch in pajamas and bare feet, waving the paper in the air.

"Did you see this? Did you see this?" he shouted.

OF course, I had, but I pretended to be knocked silly by the headline he showed me:

TOD DUNCAN BREAKS MILE CYCLING RECORD.

"*My* record!" yelped Lonny, all but tearing the paper up in his excitement. "Look what it says: 'World's Champ Rides Greatest Race Ever Seen at Newark Velodrome.' And he breaks *my* record! Why, the darned swellhead must be a bike rider after all!"

"What did you think he was," I inquired, "an organ grinder?"

"And I'm down here, loafin' around like a millionaire, while that guy is ridin'—and breakin' *my* record!"

"*You've* retired," I reminded him.

"Retired!" he repeated blankly. "How

can I retire when that guy goes out and breaks my record?"

"Search me," I said. "You thought up this whole retirement business by yourself."

"Who did?" he demanded. "Didn't *you* take me down to this dump? Did I ask you to? Why, look here, if I don't ride now, everybody will say Duncan scared me out. Right here in the paper it says something like that.

"Look: 'Lonny Adair, the American Handicap King, who disappeared leaving no forwarding address after a public row with Duncan on Sunday, was not riding last night, nor was he on hand to witness the amazing performance of the man who formerly wore his crown.'"

"The reporter kind of got that gummed up, I'd say," I remarked. "If you disappeared leaving no forwarding address, how could you be on hand——"

"Cut out the foolin'!" snapped Lonny, "I got to get back to Newark," he decided, starting to unbutton his pajama jacket. "When's there a train?"

"What are you going to do back in Newark?" I asked him. "There's no racing till next Sunday. You aren't figuring on challenging Duncan to a private match, are you?"

"Aw, shut up!" blazed Lonny. "I've got to *train,* haven't I? Cripe, I ought to be out on the road on my bike now, instead of wastin' my time——"

"Well, for a bimbo who was all ready to sell his bikes and get out of town, you've certainly turned a somersault!" I remarked.

"Well, what of it?" demanded Lonny defiantly. "I didn't know, when I spoke, that this guy Duncan was as good as all that."

"I suppose you thought he'd won the world's championship at a raffle?"

"Well, he didn't look like a bike rider," insisted Lonny, "with the boardwalk clothes, and the little cane, and——"

"He doesn't dress like that when he rides," I suggested. "Listen, youngster," I said then, "put on your bath robe. I want to show you something."

"What?" of course he wanted to know.

"Never mind," I grinned. "Just speed it up, and you'll see."

He ducked into the bedroom, and when he came out, I surprised him by leading him across the lawn to Jerry Duffy's barn.

"See anything here that looks familiar?" I inquired.

Lonny looked about him for a moment. Then he let loose a whoop, and dived to a corner where stood a large crate.

"My Arrow bike!" he screeched, jumping up and down and clapping his hands as though he was a kid under a Christmas tree. "My road bike! Is it?"

"You ought to know," I told him, smiling at the exhibition he was giving.

"But how——"

"It came on Tuesday," I said.

"But—but——" stuttered Lonny. "Well, you old son of a gun!" he called me, leaping over, throwing his arms around me and lifting me off my feet. "*You* had it sent down, didn't you? You—but how did you know I'd want it?"

"Don't make me laugh," I requested him wearily.

"But I said I was through, and you said——"

"Listen, Lonny," I interrupted, "I've been listening to bike riders talk since before you were born. If all the apple sauce they've spilled in that time were heaped up out there on the lawn, you wouldn't be able to see Jerry Duffy's seventeen-room house. If you thought you were springing a new one on me by announcing your retirement, why, just guess again!"

"You wise old bird!" cried Lonny happily.

"Maybe," I admitted. "Anyway, here's the bike, and if you'll go in and get your clothes on and grab yourself a bite to eat, I'll have it put together for you by the time you get back."

IT was a different Lonny from the tired, sour-faced boy who rode down there with me that left Jerry Duffy's place on the following Sunday morning. Not that way down deep within him there wasn't

remaining some bitterness. He would have been more than human if he wasn't still sore at Duncan, and, when you're twenty-three, being given the gate by your girl isn't a thing that you can forget in a week.

The difference, though, lay in this: Lonny's week at the shore had put him back in the pink of condition, and, when a fellow's that way, he'll tackle any problem that presents itself, and try his best to solve it. When he's out of shape, though, and things go wrong, he just grouches, grumbles and cusses his luck without helping himself any at all.

I had phoned Eddie McGee on Thursday that Lonny would be back for Sunday's races, and Eddie had scheduled him and Duncan to start from scratch together in a one-mile handicap.

Lonny rode that race for me a hundred times, I'd say, between Jerry Duffy's front door and the track gate. He was going away with the crack of the gun, and, if Duncan wanted to stay with him, well, the one-mile record would be broken for the second time in a week; that was all there was to that. And, if Duncan wanted to sample some more of his wares, there was the five-mile open at the close of the program. All in all, as Lonny saw it, the world's champ was going to be darned sorry before the end of that afternoon that he hadn't stayed in Europe.

Then there was Mary King. Well, I knew what girls were! They got a little flighty at times and said things they didn't quite mean. Mary certainly would listen to reason after she'd seen him ride Duncan into the ground twice in the same afternoon. And, as long as she wanted it, he'd cut out the rough stuff. It never got him anything but trouble to be so handy with his tongue and his fists. Yes, he was going to be a different fellow from then on.

For three solid hours, all the time it took us to ride from Jerry Duffy's to the track, Lonny rattled on like this. When the taxicab we'd taken from the Newark station lurched to a stop at last in front of the track Lonny jumped out, and dug into his pocket for money to pay the driver. I was busy getting our bags out and didn't notice him for a second; then I suddenly woke up to the fact that he was standing on the sidewalk like a statue, his hand frozen in his pocket, gazing pop-eyed up the street.

I followed the line of his glance, and I guess I got a little pop-eyed myself, for right in front of our taxicab another cab had come to a stop, and out of it were stepping Duncan—and Mary King and her mother. Moreover, there was no mistaking the meaning of the smile Mary wore as she watched Duncan while waiting for him to pay off the driver.

Lonny came to—partly, anyway—as the three of them passed through the gate. He settled with our driver, then he turned to me and shook his head.

"I tell you there was a curse fell on me the day that bird landed!" he muttered solemnly.

"Oh, forget it," I advised him, picking up our bags and pushing him toward the gate.

"But where does he head in?" persisted Lonny. "How does he get so chummy all of a sudden?"

"Nothing sudden about it," I said. "Duncan knew Doc King when he was here before. Doc's a friendly sort of a gink, so I guess he invited Duncan round to meet the family."

"And I suppose it was Doc King that made Mary smile at him like that!" growled Lonny sarcastically.

"Keep your head, youngster," I warned him. "You let Duncan get your goat last week, and see what happened."

"The only thing I hope," said Lonny savagely, "is that Duncan rides me close this afternoon. I'll put him right over the fence!" he promised.

"Don't be stupid," I told him. "If Duncan fouls you—take it, and let the referee disqualify him. There's no surer way of queering him with the crowd. And I guess you know how long a certain young lady will be letting Duncan pay her taxi fares if she ever sees him give anybody the elbow."

"You're right," admitted Lonny. "I'll make a monkey out of him—ridin'!"

I'VE told you before that Eddie McGee knew a few things about steaming up a sporting event. He outdid himself, though, in making a big thing out of Lonny's first race against Duncan. He called it the "Handicap Championship Stakes," put up a first prize of five hundred dollars, pared down the list of other cyclists who were entered and arranged their handicaps so that it was bound to turn out to be nothing more than a match race between the two scratch men, and then ballyhooed it in the newspapers as the greatest thing that had taken place since the invention of the bicycle. The result was that the biggest crowd that had ever crammed the old track was on hand that afternoon.

Neither of the stars of the race glanced at the other as they mounted their bikes for the start. The same mean grin that Duncan had worn on the previous Sunday came to his face when he noticed that Lonny drew more cheers than he when they appeared. "I'll change all that!" the look seemed to say.

With the gun, the two of them were off the mark like a team. For three or four yards maybe they rode as if their bikes were locked; then Lonny leaped to the front. No advantage, this, mind you. Rather, it meant harder pedaling for Lonny for a while, for it's the man who sets pace for the back markers who always has the toughest time of it in the chase after the long handicap men. Right after rounding the first turn, Lonny had caught and passed the man who started from the ten-yard mark, and, with Duncan "sleigh riding" on his rear wheel, whirled along after the rest of the field.

As I said before, the competitors in that race were hand picked, and the handicaps arranged so that there was scant danger of any of the outsiders grabbing first money. The result was that in three laps Lonny and Duncan were caught up and sitting back on their wheels watching each other like hawks. It was then really that the race began—a match race complicated by the presence on the track of some twenty other riders.

For the next two laps they rolled around at a snail's pace, Lonny and Duncan doing little more than keep near the front to avoid the possibility of being pocketed when the time came to sprint for the money. Then sounded the bell for the last lap, and with it Lonny jumped.

Duncan was right after him, but there was open daylight between them in no time, and, as they pedaled by the grand stand on their way to the first turn, Lonny was plainly drawing away. The other riders, of course, were where Eddie McGee had intended they'd be—far in the rear. It was all Lonny and Duncan. The rest of them were "atmosphere" only, as they say in the movies.

The stands were a bedlam. Duncan had his friends, of course; yet what the majority of the spectators had paid their money to see was happening—Lonny was taking the champion into camp. He'd beaten him to the jump, had drawn into a two or three-length lead, and no cyclist in the world had ever overcome any such advantage as that on Lonny Adair.

And then, as Lonny passed the center of the back stretch, a half lap from home, Duncan suddenly seemed to find his legs. Lonny rode no slower. In fact, he put on more steam if anything as he approached the turn, but inch by inch Duncan began to draw up on him.

As they shot into the turn, Duncan was only a length behind. On the high-banked curve he cut down Lonny's advantage to a half length, and as they plunged into the stretch, Lonny was holding the lead by about the diameter of a wheel.

Riding like madmen, they whirled down the stretch, their backs hunched, their legs working like pistons, gripping their handlebars as though seeking to perform the impossible task of lifting their bicycles from the track and leaping on them across the finish line. So close to each other were they that a sheet of tissue paper could not have been passed between them.

And then suddenly the suspense that made every man jack in that inclosure

temporarily a lunatic was broken. Duncan's front wheel wabbled a little. He shot up the track, missed the grand-stand rail by inches only, and, as Lonny shot across the line leading by a full length, came down again, his right hand raised in the air as a claim of a foul.

I COULD have murdered him. I saw what had happened, and there was no foul—on Lonny's part at any rate. The boy had kept his word to me that he would ride a fair race no matter what happened.

Even when Duncan had leaned on him in the ride through the stretch, hoping that his weight might throw Lonny out of stride, Lonny had made no attempt to protect himself. And so Duncan, realizing at the last moment that Lonny was bound to lead him to the tape, had tried to save the day by a daring, desperate trick. He had swung his wheel and taken a chance on dashing into the grand stand to make it appear that Lonny had hipped or elbowed him.

The boos, catcalls and hisses that rose from the crowd were deafening. I grinned with satisfaction as I heard. Duncan had fooled nobody, it seemed. Everybody at the track had seen through his trick, as I had. And there could be but one result. Joe Whitman, the referee, would give the air to Duncan if he tried to press his absurd claim of foul. Duncan would be discredited before the fans more than if Lonny had beaten him by half a lap, for there's no character in the world of sports quite as sour as the lad who tries to save himself from a licking by a phony claim of foul. In my mind's eye I could see a certain little lady in the grand stand forgetting all the harsh things she'd said the week before and jumping up to cheer for a boy who'd always ridden on the level.

"Did you see what that crooked son of a gun tried to get away with?" grinned Lonny as I helped him off his wheel.

"Did I!" I laughed back. "He's queered himself this time; cooked his own goose. He might better have taken his licking."

"Can you imagine it!" exclaimed Lonny. "The world's champion tryin' to get away with a moth-eaten gag like that!"

"He might as well buy a ticket back to Europe right now," I replied.

The crowd was still booing as we crossed the infield. When we reached the other side of the track we saw a little group standing in front of the judges' stand—Duncan, his trainer, and Joe Whitman. The champ and his man Friday were jabbering away like a pair of lawyers, waving their arms, pointing to the track, trying to grab Joe and turn him this way and that to follow their gestures and their arguments.

Joe was standing there in a bored kind of way, paying no attention at all to anything they were saying. Their attempt to ram their fairy tale down the throat of a hard-boiled, wise duke like Joe Whitman struck me as being the year's best laugh.

And at last Joe walked out on them. He strolled over to Megaphone Jack Knight, whispered in his ear, and Megaphone Jack raised his arm for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," roared Jack when there was quiet. "Winner of the One-mile Handicap Championship Stakes. First, Adair——"

Jack got no farther just then, for the crowd cut loose with a riot. Jack waited until they quieted down some; then he announced the four other riders who had got into the money, and the time of the race.

The crowd started to yell again, and Lonny and I, laughing like a pair of school kids, were about to duck down to the training quarters, when we noticed that Jack had lifted his hand and his megaphone again and was waving the mob to be quiet. It took him ten seconds or so to get silence. Then:

"Adair disqualified and fined one hundred dollars for foul riding!" shouted Jack.

HAVE you ever taken a dive over a pair of handlebars while tearing around behind a motor cycle at pretty close to a mile a minute, landed on your skull and lay there while another motor cycle and

a bicycle passed over your chest? *I* have. It was a little accident like that which drove me out of the paced game and into my present double job of selling Arrow bikes and acting as trainer for Lonny Adair. And I want to tell you that not since that day have I come so close to going out for the full count as I did when I heard that last announcement of Megaphone Jack.

Lonny disqualified! Duncan's claim of foul allowed! I couldn't believe my ears!

Why, everybody at that track should have seen what Duncan pulled. It was unthinkable that Joe Whitman, sharp-eyed, suspicious, old Joe, who had been seeing through the tricks of bike riders for twenty years, should have missed it!

I turned to Lonny. His jaw had dropped, and his face was the color of chalk. A rap on the head with a lead pipe could not have knocked him any more cuckoo than had that crazy decision.

And then suddenly I was aware of another roar from the crowd. Not boos and hisses this time, but—cheers! Can you imagine it—they were *cheering!* And that could mean but one thing—Duncan had fooled them all as he had fooled Joe Whitman. He had jobbed Lonny and had got away with it clean!

I dropped Lonny's bike and started for the track. One idea and one only was in my head—to get hold of Joe Whitman and tell him what was what in language that he'd understand. But Lonny grabbed me and hauled me back. Usually I have to calm him down; this day, though, it was myself that needed a guardian.

"Cut it out, old-timer!" he ordered sharply as he hauled me back. "That's *in;* you can't change it."

He was right. Joe Whitman's decision stood, no matter what I might have thought or said about it. I reached down, picked up the bike, and we started for the training quarters.

Duncan was mounting his bike as we walked away, and Megaphone Jack was handing him a big bunch of roses—the gift of the management. He was about to start on a triumphal circuit of the track. Just before his trainer shoved him off, he pulled a flower from the bunch and tossed it with a flourish into a trackside box. A little girl in white stopped clapping her hands long enough to catch the rose and hold it up while the crowd laughed and cheered.

Lonny saw that, too. Things sure were breaking bad for the boy all around!

Well, after watching it do its flip-flaps and head spins for twenty-five years, I didn't need to be told how fickle the sporting public is with regard to its heroes. It was a new experience for Lonny, though, to be cheered and hissed by the same bunch on the same day, and it got under his skin. A chorus of boos greeted him when he came out on the track for the five-mile open that wound up the card.

"Oh, forget it, youngster," I advised him when I saw him scowl. "They'll shout themselves hoarse for you if you trim Duncan."

Which, probably, is what they would have done. But they didn't get a chance. Lonny punctured and had to call it a day after going a mile. The crowd gave him the razzberry once more as he withdrew.

Let a public character step off on the wrong foot but once, whether through his own fault or not, and everything good he ever did is forgotten. And that goes whether he's a United States senator or a third-class box fighter.

Further grief came to Lonny on the following day. First, the newspapers handed him a sweet panning. Then Mary King completed the job. Foolishly, Lonny called her home on the telephone and was informed that she wasn't there.

Nothing in that, you may say, to make him sore. But it happened to be Mary herself who delivered the message. Lonny recognized her voice.

They don't call me "Windy" Bush because I'm tongue-tied or bashful, and for the next two or three days I didn't spare my voice any. Eddie McGee, Joe Whitman, the riders, the trainers, even Doc King whom I hunted up especially in hope that he'd pass what I had to say along to Mary, heard *my* version of how Duncan

beat Lonny, and about all it got me was to be called a sorehead and a squealer. Professional bicycling, you know, is no parlor pastime, and even those who listened to me with some attention took the attitude that if Duncan had got away with something, why, more power to him for being a smart fellow.

Lonny, though, kept his mouth shut and attended to his knitting. In that he showed more sense than I did, for the one way for him to dispose of Duncan for good and all and to get back in the good graces of the bike fans was to hand the champ a couple of good beatings on the track.

LONNY'S first chance came on the following Wednesday night—and he muffed it. Once again he and Duncan hooked up from scratch in a mile handicap. Once again the race seemed to lie between them as the bell clanged for the last lap. Then a train of second-raters suddenly shot out from the rear.

Duncan managed to work clear of them, and rode on to win. Lonny, though, found himself all messed up in the bunch and never could get free. He finished in seventh place, as I remember it, and got a ten-dollar prize—hardly enough to repay him for the booing and the caterwauling that followed him as he left the track.

Well, I won't bore you with the harrowing details of the rest of that outdoor season. Suffice it to say, as they write in books, that Lonny and Duncan raced against each other about forty times before the cold weather drove the bare-legged pedal pushers to cover, and that it would have taken the finest kind of hair splitting to have chosen between them at the end.

Lonny was the better cyclist, and all the statistics of that season that you can dig up won't make me back down on that statement, but Duncan got all the breaks. His luck was something to marvel at—especially on the occasions when he had to resort to a little coarse work to pull a close race out of the fire. He never tried anything quite so raw as the trick he pulled on Lonny at their first meeting, but he never hesitated to give the merry old rules a kick in the slats when that was the only way he could win. And not once did he grab a disqualification, a fine, or a suspension. Joe Whitman always seemed to be looking the other way when Duncan pulled the trick stuff, most of which was way over the heads of the fans.

THE ticket buyers lost the habit of booing Lonny after a while, but there was no doubt but that Duncan had pretty well displaced him as the fair-haired boy of the bike game. And the champ remained the fair-haired boy, too, in another quarter where Lonny had formerly shone.

With his good looks, his wardrobe, his grand duke's manners and a line of talk that would have charmed a starving cat away from a bowl of milk, it is little wonder that Duncan kept Mary King dazzled, especially since he let her know that it was she who had caused him to stay in America through the fall instead of going back at the end of four weeks as he had intended. In fact, judging from the amount of time that Duncan managed to devote to Mary, it wouldn't have astonished a lot of people if he'd announced that he intended to stay here permanently. All of which, of course, made a tremendously big hit with Lonny.

About the time that the outdoor season closed, Eddie McGee began to make plans for the New York six-day race. So did Lonny, his plans having to do mostly with grabbing off Dave Morgan for his partner.

Morgan was an old war horse of the cycling game. Never a first-string rider, for ten years or more he'd made himself a pretty sweet living principally in the motor-paced game and the six-day merry-go-rounds. Almost any fair to middling amateur could have trimmed Morgan in a short sprint, but give him something to follow, and he could go on forever, not very fast perhaps, but he'd be plugging along at the same old pace long after the speed boys who'd whizzed by him a few miles back were ready to curl up and quit.

Teamed up with a fancy, flashy per-

former like Lonny, he was a bearcat in a six-day nightmare. He and Lonny had copped the Garden race the year before—Lonny's first attempt at a bike Marathon—and both of them were anxious to repeat.

Well, as I've said, Eddie McGee was making plans for that race, too, and he divulged some of them to Lonny one day at his office. Lonny had been invited round to talk over the six-day race, and he was surprised to find Duncan in the office when he arrived.

"I'm making up the teams for the Garden race," Eddie told Lonny when he was seated. "Duncan here is going to ride with Morgan. You——"

"What?" yelped Lonny, jumping to his feet.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Eddie innocently.

"But I want Morgan," stuttered Lonny. "I had him last year, and——"

"What's that got to do with it?" said Eddie. "Who's running this race, anyway?"

"I'm *ridin'* it," declared Lonny, "and I ought to have the right to say who——"

"You ought to know better than to try to dictate to me," interrupted Eddie. "That's the trouble with you riders. You'll never learn that you can get more out of me by being nice and behaving yourselves than you can by getting rough."

"Apple sauce!" grunted Lonny.

"What I'm trying to do," went on Eddie, "is to make it an even race. You're to ride with young Bell."

"Bell!" screeched Lonny, hardly able to believe his ears.

"That's it," nodded Eddie.

"But—Bell——" stuttered Lonny helplessly, and you couldn't blame him. Asking a rider to make a showing in a six-day race with such a partner was like sending a swimmer into a race with an anvil chained to his waist.

Bell was a kid who'd just passed out of the amateur class, and who had never ridden more than ten consecutive miles in his life. He had shown a little speed toward the end of the season just closed, but there was absolutely nothing about him to suggest that he had it in him to last beyond the first twenty-four hours of the six-day racket.

"I can't ride with Bell," said Lonny when he was able to think once more.

"Oh, you can't, eh?" muttered Eddie, and Duncan grinned.

"Listen, chief," pleaded Lonny, "give me *some* chance, won't you? You want this to be a race, don't you?"

"It'll be a race, all right," declared Eddie confidently.

"How can it be?" demanded Lonny. "Why, with Bell for a partner, I couldn't even guarantee that I'd finish."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Eddie sweetly. "You don't think you're the whole race, do you?"

THIS time Duncan laughed out loud, and Lonny rose straight up in the air like a balloon.

"You're tryin' to make this damn big four-flusher a present of the race!" he charged, shaking his finger in Eddie's face. "You've let him get away with murder ever since he came here, and now you go and——"

"Never thought you were a cry baby," drawled Eddie.

"Cry baby!" exploded Lonny. "Me? Have I made a squawk all fall while this guy Duncan has been breakin' every rule of the game to beat me? Look at him laugh! He knows what he's been gettin' away with—under protection."

"Oh, you're crazy," said Eddie, which, you'll notice, was not a direct denial.

"Am I?" snapped Lonny. Then he suddenly quieted down. "Well, maybe I am," he said. "I'm just about crazy enough to take you up. I'll ride with Bell, and I'll come pretty near winnin' the race. Think it's funny, do you?" he asked Duncan, this being the first time he had addressed the champ direct since their debate on the day Duncan arrived. "Maybe you think you and Morgan can beat us out?"

"Undoubtedly," said Duncan with a sneer.

"All right," said Lonny. "If you're

as sure as all that, I've got a proposition for you. I'll bet you——"

"Cut it out, Lonny," interrupted Eddie McGee. "You know that isn't allowed."

"You keep out," Lonny bade him. "This ain't your affair. I'll bet you anything up to ten thousand bucks that we trim you—team against team."

"Now, listen, Lonny," insisted Eddie McGee, "don't be a damn fool. Duncan here is no dub at the six-day game. He's won two races here and four in Europe and——"

"I wouldn't care if he'd won every race that was ever rode!" declared Lonny. "I want to see how game he is."

"I can't have this," objected Eddie nervously. "If it ever got out that——"

"You've got nothin' to do with it," Lonny told him again. "Look here, Duncan," he said then. "I'm goin' straight from this office to the newspapers. I've *got* ten grand, and I'm gonna draw it out of the bank and put it up with Bob Page of the *Courier* for you to cover—if you're game enough. If you take water, you might as well go back to Europe without ridin' the Garden race."

"I am no common gambler," stalled Duncan.

"This ain't common gamblin'," Lonny said. "It's damn uncommon. Ten grand's pretty near my last dollar, and I guess losin' that much would break you, too. Well, what do you say?"

"Absurd," said Duncan, though he looked worried. "I have nothing to gain by such a transaction."

"Good day, gents," said Lonny, and the next sound that was heard was the door of McGee's office slamming behind him.

I nearly dropped dead when I read in the next day's papers what Lonny had done. Of course, they printed it. The guy who puts up cash money gets attention in the newspapers as elsewhere.

"Well, of all the crack-brained tricks I ever heard of!" I said to Lonny when I found him. "You ride your fool head off for three years and go without things you need to save your winnings—then you want to throw all you've got away!"

"I want to smoke that skunk out," Lonny explained.

"You're a bright boy," I sneered. "The only one who'll be smoked out is yourself—and you'll be suffocated!"

"Can't see it," declared Lonny. "If Duncan don't put up——"

"The newspapers will have a little fun with him, and then everybody will forget all about it. If he does put up, he'll nick you for ten thousand seeds as sure as today is Thursday."

"Think so, do you?" growled Lonny, getting sore.

"I know it. Why, you and Bell are a ten-to-one shot, team and team, against Duncan and Morgan. I'd like to take some of that bet myself."

"I'll bet you——"

"You won't bet me anything. You've overbet yourself now. You've just made a grand-stand play, and all you'll get out of it is to become ridiculous.

"I hope you don't think that putting up your ten thousand bucks is going to make you look like a hero to Mary King, even if Duncan doesn't cover the dough. You know what Mary thinks about gambling. She used to give you blazes for shooting a little crap and playing ten-cent limit. You told me so yourself. If you ask me, you've certainly gummed things up."

"I'll send this Duncan guy back to Europe broke," insisted Lonny.

"You won't." I predicted. "You'll never get a tumble from him on this bet. He's too wise a lad to run the risk of shooting his bank roll in one play."

Good guessing that, I thought. And yet the newspapers on the following morning announced that Duncan had covered Lonny's dough.

You'd have thought that Lonny had come into his fortune, the way he took the news.

"Now," he said, banging his fist into his palm, "I've got the son of a gun right where I want him."

I shook my head. I was through arguing with him, but I was sad. Duncan already had done enough to the boy, I figured, without taking away all that he'd

gathered in three hard years of riding, and I could see no other way in which that Garden race could end up. It was Lonny riding alone against two class-A performers, and the result, on my dope, was already in.

And, if I felt mournful about Lonny's hard-earned ten thousand then, imagine how I felt on the second day of the race when a sporting gent from Newark eased me the news that not a single cent of Duncan's own money went to cover Lonny's bet. The ten thou he'd put up had been slipped to him by a bookmaker who'd grabbed the chance to lay even money against a ten-to-one shot!

OF course, I didn't tell Lonny. He had enough on his mind as it was. Six-day riding is no picnic at best. Picture, then, what it must be to a bird who's put up his last dollar on a race that he's riding with a partner that can hardly be depended on to hang onto the tail end of the parade while the guy who's doing three quarters of the riding for the team tries to grab a wink of sleep.

For young Bell was about the sourest specimen of a six-day rider I ever saw take the track. Eddie McGee told me later that he'd figured the kid as a comer and had teamed him and Lonny up as a possible winning combination, which only goes to show how far wrong a good judge can be at times. As I saw it, Wednesday night at the latest would ring down the curtain on the youngster, for he was handing out distress signals as early as Monday noon.

He made not so much as an attempt to get into the point scoring in the sprints on Monday night, being content to carry the red lamp for the train at all times. Lonny, though, was going great guns, and in the sprints turned in some of the fanciest pedaling I ever hope to see.

He won every sprint in which he rode, trimming friend Duncan in three of them with ridiculous ease. The six-day fans—almost an entirely new crowd, remember, from those who had been booing Lonny during the fall—cheered the boy till the rafters of the old Garden shook. It's a game guy who'll do his best in a hopeless cause, which, of course, everybody in the place realized Lonny had with young Bell tied to him like an anchor.

A couple of times I thought I saw suspicious fluttering of a pair of small hands in an arena box—Mary King's. As a thirty-third-degree bike fan, she ached to applaud a classy piece of riding. As the girl who'd given Lonny the gate, though, she couldn't applaud him.

The one member of our camp who got any sleep between Monday night and Wednesday morning was young Bell. We treated him like a new-born child. He had a ham trainer, who knew about as much about looking after a six-day rider as I did about stenography. I switched this bird over to take care of Lonny, who didn't require much care to speak of, while I took over the job of keeping young Bell in shape to go through the motions of riding.

It was a hopeless job, though, right from the beginning; something like performing a hundred operations on a patient who's got to die anyway; for Bell had no more chance of getting through the week than I had of being appointed to the United States Supreme Court.

In fact, Wednesday morning the kid was riding on nerve alone, and not much of that. He was hollow eyed and saddle sore, and his wrists and knees, despite the fact that my arms ached from massaging him, were swollen to twice their normal size.

It was close onto noon, I guess, and I was sitting on Lonny's trackside bunk, helping the ham trainer rub some knots out of his legs, when suddenly there came a rumble from the track and a roar from the half-filled arena seats. Such sounds could mean but one thing—some ambitious rider was starting a sprint.

Lonny came up to a sitting position as if he was worked by springs, but I pushed him back.

"It's no use, youngster," I told him. "This is the finish for you. They'll lap young Bell before he knows what it's all

about. Better let it go at that. This is as good a time to quit as any."

"Quit!" yelped Lonny, wriggling out of my grasp and getting to his feet. "Quit to Duncan? I'm gonna get out there and give him a run if I've got to ride till I drop. To blazes with Bell! Let him quit if he can't go on; I'm gonna finish this race by myself!"

"Don't be a fool, Lonny," I pleaded, trying to drag him back as he dashed for his bike. "You can't——"

A sudden crash, a dozen quick thuds and a howl of horror from the crowd drowned my words. I rushed to the trackside, and looked down the arena toward the spot from which the crash and the thuds had come. Men and bicycles were mixed up on the flat and sliding down the bank in the darndest mess you could imagine.

IT was the worst spill I ever saw at a six-day race. Every other trainer rushed with me toward the spot, while up in the scorers' stand the bell clanged to signify that the race was suspended until the wreckage could be cleared.

When I reached the scene of the smash-up, the mess was pretty well untangled. Cyclists were limping away, rubbing their bruised bodies and heads; trainers and helpers were carrying off the damaged bicycles. Two riders, though, lay where they had fallen. One of them was Bell, the other was tough Dave Morgan, Duncan's partner.

I unstrapped Bell's feet from his pedals, swung the kid over my shoulder and dropped him into the first cot I reached. He was out, clean out.

"This kid needs a doctor," I barked at the ham trainer as I started to work over the boy. "On the job—and be quick about it too!"

Before the doctor came, though, even before my first-aid treatment had brought a flash of color to Bell's pale cheeks, I knew the worst—his right forearm was broken, just above the wrist. He was out of the race—no question about that—and so with him was Lonny, and a greasy bookmaker had won Lonny's ten thousand!

I found Lonny sitting on the side of his bunk, after the doc had set Bell's arm and ordered him taken away. He had his elbows on his knees, and his head was sunk to his hands.

"Well, youngster," I said, "I guess that's the finish."

"Uh-huh," he grunted. "Got a great run for my money, didn't I?"

"Well, cheer up," I said. "You're young yet; you can make that up."

"Sure," he said, pretending to smile. "Anyway it's worth ten thousand to get away from this nightmare."

"That's the spirit," I applauded him.

The bell clanged in the judges' stand. The race was on again.

"Well, pleasant journey, fellers," murmured Lonny sadly, waving his hand toward the track. "Sorry I can't be with you, but I'm dated up elsewhere."

He rose from the bunk, wrapping his bath robe about him. "It's you and me for the big sleep, I guess, Windy," he said, leaning on my shoulder and starting for the stairway that led to the training quarters under the arena.

WE hadn't gone three steps, I'd say, when a figure in a black-and-white-checked suit blocked our path—Eddie McGee.

"Where do you guys think you're going?" asked Eddie, squinting queerly at us.

"Home, sweet home, old feller," replied Lonny. "Had an awful pleasant time. Thanks for all your——"

"Home!" echoed Eddie. "You're crazy! You stay right where you are!"

"Don't kid, Eddie," I requested. "Lonny's tired. So am I, and we want to get out of here."

"We're all tired," replied Eddie. "And we'd all like to get out of here. But this race doesn't happen to be finished—not quite yet."

"It is as far as I'm concerned," said Lonny. "I may drop back to see somebody trim Duncan in the finish, but——"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Eddie. *"You're* still in the running."

"You're out of touch with things, boss," said Lonny. "Didn't you hear about the spill just now? Young Bell busted a coupla arms or somethin', and——"

"Sure he did," agreed Eddie. "But Dave Morgan snapped his collar bone at the same time. He's out, too, and you and Duncan are riding together."

"Duncan!" Lonny and I screeched at once.

"Sure," said Eddie. "Say, what's the matter with you fellows—especially you, Windy? An old-timer like you certainly ought to know that the two surviving members of two teams——"

"Of course I know it," I interrupted dazedly. "But I didn't know Morgan had been hurt so badly. There was so much excitement that——"

"That's the way things lay," said Eddie, preparing to waddle along. "Duncan's out there on the track now. Better get Lonny ready to relieve him when he rides off."

"Do you think I'd ride with that guy?" bellowed Lonny, who had been standing there like a dumb post since Eddie informed us of the odd turn things had taken.

"Think it!" returned Eddie quickly. "I know damn well you'll ride with him—that is, if you ever expect to ride a bike for a living again!"

"Shut up, Lonny!" I whispered, pulling him away as he started to go back at Eddie. "Don't you see, you big loon," I asked him as Eddie moved along, "this is the luckiest break you've had in months? Riding with Duncan, you save your ten thousand, because, if you're a team, neither one of you can beat the other. Besides, Duncan is some rider. You and he ought to whistle off with first money now."

"Yeah, I know," growled Lonny stubbornly, "but——"

"Oh, shut up, and climb into your bunk!" I ordered him roughly, and that ended the argument.

WELL, I've seen all kinds teamed up in the six-day grinds—blacks with whites, Dutchmen with Yankees, Italians with Australians, squareheads with Frenchies—but in point of being a queer mixture, the team of Adair and Duncan topped them all! Two guys who hated each other as that pair did, riding together and trying to help each other win! When I got a chance, I ducked off by myself, threw my head back and just howled.

Of course, the fact that they were riding as a team put them under no obligations to meet socially. For that matter, I don't think any two men in the world can be so close together and yet so widely separated as the two members of a six-day team. They meet only when relieving each other on the track. Then their chance to exchange polite pleasantries is about equal to that of two locomotive engineers who pass when making up time in opposite directions.

There were twelve other teams left in the race when Lonny and Duncan joined up. Eight of them were tied in mileage; the others were from one to four laps behind. The eight leading teams made up a tough bunch—one of the most evenly matched fields ever—and from the moment Lonny and Duncan started to ride together, every one of those sixteen riders had but one idea in his head—to keep the new combination from getting back the lap it lost under the rules when it was formed from the remnants of two former teams.

It slowed the race up, of course, to have the chief contenders watching Lonny and Duncan constantly, instead of doing any fancy pedaling for themselves, but the riders couldn't be bothered about that, and I don't know that you can blame them. Prize money was what they got their living by, and in keeping Lonny and Duncan back in the ruck lay the only chance the others had of taking a hack at first money in the finish sprints on Saturday night.

So each time that Lonny or Duncan made an attempt to go after the lap that would draw them up even with the leaders,

he found a young army of rough-and-ready wheelmen climbing all over him. At least fifteen times during Wednesday and Thursday one or the other of them made a try at jumping the field, only to be overhauled after going a lap or two.

It was discouraging, and at last they gave it up, causing the race to settle down to a cat-at-a-mousehole proposition that was about as thrilling to watch as a chess match. This, however, hurt the attendance not at all.

Evidently the fans took it for granted that the team of Adair and Duncan didn't intend to stay lapped, so day and night, early and late, they jammed the old Garden to capacity, hoping to be on hand when the big blow-off came.

As you probably know, a six-day race is decided on points, won in a series of sprints, the most valuable of which take place in the last hour of the grind. A team that cops enough of the last-hour sprints wins the race, even if it hasn't done so well in the daily sprints through the week. However, only those teams that are tied for first place on a mileage basis get into the last hour of sprinting.

So, with Lonny and Duncan a lap to the bad and consequently facing the possibility of being given the gate when the time came for the sprint carnival of the last hour, you can see why everybody in our camp grew steadily more fidgety as the hours of Saturday slipped by.

Evening came, and with it a howling mob to see the finish. Mary King, of course, was there, occupying a box near the finish line with her father and mother.

And I'm here to state that everybody who bought his way by the gatemen that night got his money's worth! For the last hour and a quarter—about—of that race made any other sporting event I ever witnessed look like a game of ring-around-a-rosy! It was the wildest, most hysterical orgy of speed and excitement ever staged anywhere.

FIFTEEN minutes before the beginning of the last hour the field was crawling around as it had crawled most of the time since Lonny and Duncan had joined forces, and the crowd was lazily smoking its cigars and chatting, waiting for the deadwood to be cleared from the track and the deciding sprints to begin. A minute later the riders were tearing around the track as though suddenly gone crazy, and every spectator in the place was on his feet, cheering and yelling wildly.

For Lonny, suddenly conscious of the fact that the other riders had relaxed somewhat in anticipation of the tough riding that was due to come in the final hour, had put his bike into high and gone out after the lap he needed. Almost before the first rumbling roar from the crowd greeted his sudden dash, he was clear of the field. Before the others were fairly after him he was virtually a quarter of a lap in front.

Duncan had left the track not more than five minutes before Lonny made his jump, but he tumbled out of his bunk with the roar of the crowd, hopped to the trackside and mounted his bike in readiness to relieve his partner.

I let Lonny go six laps before sending Duncan out to the track. The big champion made a perfect pick-up, and was off like the wind with a third of a lap advantage, possibly, on his pursuers. The latter, exchanging pace every lap or so, were riding like fiends, but Duncan, little by little, drew farther ahead of them until, when Lonny relieved him at the end of a half mile, it was to start off with a lead of pretty close to half a lap.

Every rider in the race by this time was on the track at once. The field was strung out around almost the entire circuit. The scorers and judges, systematically tabulating the progress of the jam, probably knew where things stood during this riotous riding; to the crowd, though, screaming like Indians, I'm sure all was confusion—all, that is, except the fact that Lonny and Duncan, taking up their relays as though they had been practicing the trick together for years, were slowly but surely making up that lost lap. That fact was evident to every one, whether bike wise or not.

THE first half of the lap that Lonny and Duncan made up came pretty easily. The last half, though, was won only after a spasm of heartbreaking riding that put the spectators in a frenzy, and it was Lonny who supplied the bulk of the effort for the team.

Duncan stood his trick each time, and did his best, but I've got to admit that toward the end he just about managed to hold his own without losing any ground. Lonny, though, made real progress each time he took the track, and at last had completely encircled the field.

The cheers and applause that followed him as he shot by rider after rider as the wild dash came to a close were deafening. Then things quieted down gradually, and the announcement of the team standing was made.

There was another roar from the fans when the announcer told them that Lonny and Duncan had won their lap, and more yells when it was made known that two of the eight teams that had been tied for first place before the jam had lost not one lap in that mad sprinting but two, meaning that Lonny and his partner had only six teams to beat out in order to draw down first money.

Duncan was out on the track, and I was sitting beside Lonny as the announcement was made.

"Things look pretty bright now," I remarked to him.

"Yes," said he thoughtfully, looking oddly off into the distance. "You noticed, didn't you, Windy, that Duncan wasn't helpin' me much toward the end?"

"He did seem kind of tired," I admitted.

"I'm goin' out on the track," announced Lonny, still with the same queer look in his eyes. "It's pretty near time for the finish sprints. Don't let Duncan get off his bike when he comes in."

"Hey?" I exclaimed.

"Don't let him get off his bike," Lonny repeated. "Have him ready to get out on the track right away—if he has to."

"But what's the idea?" I insisted.

"Never mind," said Lonny. "Just keep him ready."

"But I'd like to know——"

"I've got an idea I have an imitation bike rider for a partner," said Lonny mysteriously, getting up and walking over to the trackside where he mounted his bike.

THE crowd gave him a big hand when he came out. I kept my eyes on the box near the finish line where Mary King sat with her pa and ma.

This time Mary's small hands did more than flutter. They came together a dozen times at least, and there was real force behind them. A job of riding such as Lonny had performed in getting that lap rated a hand from any real bike fan.

Lonny had scarcely taken the track when the bell clanged in the scorers' box, and the announcer rose and waved his arms for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen——" he began, but he got no farther, for the instant he opened his mouth, the crowd, still nervous from the excitement of a few minutes before and consequently easily excited, was on its feet with a roar.

A red streak had suddenly emerged from the string of riders that was circling the track, and had shot away from the bunch with the speed of a racing auto.

It was Lonny, of course. Once again he had taken advantage of the other riders' woolgathering to steal away.

But—why? Going after that first lap was necessary. Without it, he would have been out of the race. Starting another jam, though, was sheer madness.

True, he might gain a lap on the field and so sew up the race for himself and Duncan beyond any chance of losing. On the other hand, his attempt might fail. He would be merely tiring himself out needlessly, ruining his team's chances of grabbing off enough points in the sprints to win the race—a thing which a pair of topnotchers like himself and Duncan should be able to do easily.

On and on sped Lonny, his back hunched, his long legs driving his pedals with a force that seemed to threaten to rip them from the sprocket wheel. The

other riders, weary from their other unsuccessful chase, nevertheless were after him like wolves.

The crowd now was made up entirely of lunatics. Nobody was seated; everybody was yelling; hats and programs were being waved and flung in the air; people who never had met before in their lives were manhandling each other like college boys celebrating a winning touchdown.

In five laps Lonny had gained a quarter of a circuit. Then I sent Duncan out to relieve him. The champ was tired, but so were those who were chasing him, and he made up a little ground on his trick.

Just before I shoved Lonny off to take Duncan's place, he turned to me and shouted so that his words could be heard above the uproar, "I'm goin' a full mile this time. Make Duncan do the same thing next time he goes out."

"You'll toss this race away if you're not careful," I warned him.

"To hell with the race!" he yelled back, which, considering everything, was rather a queer remark.

By the time Lonny had gone his mile, the field again was strung out around the entire circuit. Twice now the bell had rung, to signal the last lap of one of the point sprints. Nobody, though, was paying any attention to bells, or to the attempts to make announcements. That wild riding was show enough, and it required no explanation.

Duncan was faltering a bit as he reached the end of the mile which Lonny insisted that he ride. You'd have thought, though, that Lonny was taking the track for the first time in a week, he started off with such a rush as he took up his next relay.

The race by this time had become a go-as-you-please affair for your life. Except for Lonny and Duncan, I don't think that any pair of riders was making even a bluff at making proper pick-ups. They were just going out in their turn and riding, resting while their partners rode, then going out to ride again.

Like the spectators, I don't think any of them knew for certain whether they were ahead or behind. Everybody, of course, was certain that Lonny and Duncan were leading the pack; they had got off to a lead and had not been headed again; the rest of the field, though, was lost in the shuffle. How the scorers ever were going to rate any but the leading team I couldn't have told.

And so it went—first Lonny going out and riding his head off, then Duncan taking the track and duplicating the effort. I had long since stopped sending them out for any particular number of laps. I let one man ride until he began to show signs of having enough; then I pushed off the other one. Such a program, though, can't go on forever.

I TOLD Lonny so as he rode in from one of his whirls.

"For Pete's sake, Lonny," I asked him, "what are you trying to do—kill yourself?"

"No," he said, "not myself."

And then I understood. This insane sprinting, this mad endurance contest had not been begun to win the race for Lonny and Duncan. The whole thing was aimed at Duncan! Lonny had set out deliberately to ride himself into the ground if necessary in order to show Duncan up!

That was what he had meant by his queer remark about having an "imitation bike rider" for a partner! That was what he had meant when he had told me profanely that he didn't care if he tossed the race away!

That this was the finish of a six-day race was merely an incident. What that mad mob up in the arena was witnessing—though none of them realized it—actually was a finish fight between Lonny and Duncan. One of them would have to quit sooner or later—no rider in the world could hope to keep up that crazy kind of pedaling for a full hour—and Lonny was certain that the quitter wasn't going to be himself.

And it wasn't!

FOR Duncan ran up the white flag, chucked it clean, twenty minutes or so before the scheduled time for the finish.

The thing came so suddenly that it left the crowd stunned.

The big cyclist had started off a hitch of riding with as much pep and energy apparently as before. He had gone five laps. Then he began to slow up, and the first thing we all knew he was back-pedaling on the flat looking for some one to help him off his wheel.

He wasn't exhausted. He got off his wheel and walked to his bunk without assistance, but his nerve was gone. For as soon as he reached the bunk, he plunged into it face down, and began to cry like a baby.

Lonny, of course, had taken the track as soon as Duncan showed the first signs of having enough. For a few laps he sprinted wildly as before; then gradually he slowed down. Apparently he knew that the end had come for Duncan.

"I walked to where Duncan was lying, and shook him.

"Brace up, Duncan!" I bade him. "You're due to go out and ride again pretty soon."

"Let me be! Let me be!" he wailed.

"But you've got to ride! Lonny can't finish this race alone!"

"I can't, I tell you!" he sobbed, "I'm all in! Go away from me! Let me be!"

He turned his grimy, tear-stained face toward me, and I was shocked. The contrast between this shaking lump and the dapper, superior gent Duncan had been since his return from Europe was startling. I'd have been sorry for him, I think, if I could have overcome my disgust.

"Suit yourself if you don't want to ride," I grunted, motioning to Duncan's trainer to take care of him.

And as I walked away there rose from the crowd a sound that I had not heard at the Garden all week—a chorus of boos. The spectators, puzzled at first, apparently had doped out what had happened, and were bestowing on Duncan the prize that always rewards the quitter in the world of sports—the grand old razzberry!

Lonny might have expressed himself profanely and contemptuously about the possibility of winning the race, but you never could have proved it by the way he rode during the rest of it! Of course, the trainers of the other riders, as soon as they learned Duncan had given up the race, sent their charges out under orders to give Lonny a dose of his own medicine.

They'd probably have done it, too, for one man can hardly be expected to stand off a group of teams for twenty minutes under ordinary circumstances, but the wild riding of the previous hour had gone a long way toward removing their ambition. They made a few half-hearted attempts to get back the ground that Lonny had taken away from them, but Lonny stayed right with them, and they gave it up. And when the gun was fired to signal the end of the race, I guess nobody had much doubt but that the team of Adair and Duncan—or what was left of it, anyway—had grabbed the long end of the purse.

LONNY was a bit wabbly, but he was grinning like a fool when I helped him off his wheel. I tried to extend congratulations to him, but he became suddenly serious and shut me off.

"Where's Duncan?" he asked.

"Guess he's gone downstairs," I told him.

"Come on," he said shortly, making for the stairs.

Duncan was half dressed when Lonny found him. He had got himself under control to an extent, but he was still far from himself.

"You're yellow!" Lonny spat at him when they were face to face. "You're a quittin' hound—I proved it!"

Then he swung his hand and caught the world's champ a stinging blow on the cheek.

"You can give that back to me," he said tauntingly, dropping his hands and extending his face invitingly, "if you've got nerve enough!"

Duncan's hand had gone instinctively to his cheek. He stood there, holding his face, and blinking dazedly at Lonny, but made no move to return the blow.

"You're a fine big stiff to be world's

champion!" sneered Lonny. "You fouled me the first time we rode together, didn't you?" he demanded. "Didn't you?" he repeated when Duncan made no reply.

Duncan nodded dully.

"You saw that, didn't you, fellers?" Lonny asked the crowd of riders and trainers that had gathered round them.

"He jobbed me, he admits it—the world's champion! Well, listen here, Mister Champ," he said, stepping forward and thrusting forward his head until their faces almost met, "you're through—here! There's no use of you showing your yellow, quittin' carcass on an American track again! They'll boo you off it, the way they booed you here to-night—the way they booed me this fall! And, if I ever catch you around anywhere after to-night —*anywhere*, get that?—what I'll do to you will be plenty! Understand?"

Again Duncan nodded. He was thoroughly scared.

Lonny stood glaring at him for a moment. Then he walked away.

A BRISK young fellow with tired eyes that were shining with excitement, and a two-day growth of beard on his face, grabbed Lonny's hand and started to shake it. It was Bob Page, sporting editor of the *Courier*, stakeholder of the fool bet that Lonny had so nearly lost.

"Lonny," cried Bob, "I haven't been out of this place since Thursday morning, just waiting to see you do what you did to-night! It was immense, old scout, and you earned every cent it got you, I'll say! Whenever you want it, I'll have your check for you."

"Check?" repeated Lonny blankly.

"Holy smoke, you haven't forgotten it!" exclaimed Bob. "By golly, you must have it in stacks when you can be as careless as that about a ten-thousand-dollar bet!"

"But that bet——" stammered Lonny. "That's off. When Bell quit and Morgan quit, that busted up the teams the bet was on, so it was off."

"Off—my eye!" laughed Bob. "That wasn't a team-against-team bet, it was man against man—you and Duncan. You beat Duncan, so you collect."

"But I thought——" began Lonny.

"Don't you remember," interrupted Bob, grinning and winking at me, "I typed off a little agreement for you to sign when you came to the office with your money. I tried to put it in legal language, so I didn't mention Bell and Morgan by name. I made them 'such partners as the managers of said race shall select for said Adair and said Duncan.' You signed it and Duncan signed it, so I guess it holds as a man-against-man proposition, even though I may not be so good a lawyer as I tried to make out."

"Nit!" said Lonny. "The bet's off. I'm well satisfied to get my dough back. We didn't mean it the way you wrote it, so——"

"Suit yourself," said Bob. "I guess Dave Israel will be glad to hear that he gets a stand-off, instead of having to pay."

"Dave Israel!" exclaimed Lonny.

"Yes, you big boob!" I broke in. "You weren't betting against Duncan. He went out and got himself a professional gambler for a backer."

"Oh, Lord!" wailed Lonny. "Why didn't I clout him *right* when I had a chance!"

"Well, so long, Lonny," said Bob Page. "I've got to run along and write a little piece about the race for the morning paper. By the way," he said carelessly, "Doc King asked me to tell you that he has his car over here and wants you to ride home with him. He's got the missus and his daughter with him.

"Say, that girl knows this bike game, all right! And she thinks a lot of you, Lonny. She was just telling me that if I only knew what a wonderful fellow you really were, I'd——"

"Holy chowder!" roared Lonny so suddenly that I jumped a foot. "Where's my clothes?"

The End of a Perfect Play

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Revenge Is Bitter," "Rose of the Rodeo," Etc.

The riders of the Centipede Ranch gallop round the bases.

SOME one once remarked, "the play is the thing," and while there's some doubt as to whether the drama or the national game of baseball was meant, this famous quotation works equally well in either case. Applied to the great open spaces where men are men and women are governors, the statement still gets across, as any cow hand connected with those ranches who receive their mail at the Chester Crossing post office will readily attest to.

In this particular instance baseball was the drama and if you think it queer that the game should have had a setting in a Wyoming locality where the hoofs of galloping ponies raised clouds of dust and herders rode the range, blame it all on the film industry.

The truth of the matter was the sagebrush land of the six-shooter had been invaded by a six-reeler entitled, "For the Heart of a Girl and the Love of the Game." This celluloid thriller made its appearance on the scene in the movie house at Beverly, the cow center of the neighborhood, and promptly began to spread its insidious germ.

The photoplay had as its star a certain big-league pitcher who worked in the East and some of the final scenes depicted a regulation ball game at the Polo Grounds in far-away New York. Only a few stirring innings were revealed, but they were more than enough to serve their sinister purpose.

A few days after the showing of the picture, which had been viewed by all the cowmen in the county, "Silent Pete" Waller, a talkative clown who punched cattle on the Centipede Ranch of Jefferson Billings, slouched into the shanty office where I had just finished getting the pay roll in some sort of shape. Waller, who had piled his rope on a bunch of calves who had to be stretched for the branding iron of "Mon-

tana" Monty, flicked a pound and a half of alkali away with his crimson neckerchief, unhooked his belt and pushed back his silver-mounted .45.

"Well, Charley," he began, "here's one you can swing a lariat at. Early this morning I run across 'Buck' Jones of the Triple Star outfit. Buck looked as excited as if he was ankle-deep in a prairie fire and didn't lose no time passing me talk. Guess what that crowd of leather pinchers down yonder are up to?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. Breathe the information."

Silent Pete tipped back his chair, dragged a muslin bag of tobacco and papers from his shirt front, rolled a cigarette of a brand called "My Own," struck a match with his thumb nail and inhaled.

"What do you know about them crazy coyotes over at the Triple Star? They've gone and got together a baseball team! Did you ever hear the beat of it? That's what that picture did to them polecats!"

I slipped the petty cash book back in the office safe and registered interest.

"Baseball? What do they know about it?"

Waller chuckled.

"Nothing, but you can't keep no one from learning. Buck took up a collection and has already sent to a mail-order house in Chicago for gloves, bats, balls and a book of instructions. I asked Buck who they thought they was going to play with and darned if he didn't tell me that the Silver Circle crowd had gotten a nine together and were practicing themselves.

"I guess, mebbe, that explains how the window in the mess house got busted the other day. By cripes! This here country is getting loco!"

WALLER'S news was news indeed, if you understand what I mean. The Silver Circle Ranch adjoined the Centipede on the west and north, was the property of an ex-dude wrangler known as Blaney Harrison and corresponded to the thorns in a rosebush, the stone in a mustang's shoe and the collar button under the bureau.

In other words, the perfect Mr. Harrison and his egotistical peelers, punchers and wranglers were as popular with the Centipede gang as nettle rash and saddle burn. Looking across at Waller I caught a suspicious expression on his leathery face.

"One moment! Now that the baseball bug is buzzing around Wakefield County the Centipede is the next victim to be stung by it! What are you up to now? You haven't made plans for getting a team together, have you?"

Waller snapped the remains of his cigarette out of the window, drew one of his stamped leather cuffs across his mouth and went back into his cigar-store shirt front for a sample of plug tobacco.

"Why not? We've got to keep in style the same as the womenfolks. If it's baseball for the Silver Circle and the Triple Star it's going to be baseball for us. I ain't said nothing to the boys yet, but I will to-night.

"Come around to the bunk house after chow and listen to me, Charley. You'll hear something!"

I took the hint for what it was worth and toward nine the same evening looked in at the headquarters of the Centipede employees. Sure enough, instead of the usual tournament of Ethiopian dominoes and wild deuces, I found the hilarious Silent Pete concluding a serious piece of oratory in the center of the floor.

The other cattle hands squatted around with mouths open wide enough to admit a buckboard and a pair of pinto ponies. In one corner Cowboy Eddie Rose held forth, looking as skeptical as a sheriff investigating a suspicious brand.

Rose, a little comic from Texas and a demi-tasse poured from the steaming coffeepot of life, had come to Chester Crossing by slow freight, had been handed a job and had proceeded to ride and rope just a shade better than the best of them. In an opposite corner "Lingo" Sully, Waller's slapstick side kick and one of the most ludicrous wranglers who had ever uncinched a saddle, listened to his partner's eloquence dumbly, while the others

impersonated deep silence when the address had ended.

Rose broke the quiet with a question.

"What do you mean—we should get together and make up a baseball team? Because them brand blotters get the blind staggers don't say that we have to hit the same gait. Besides that, how many of us hands know if you play the game with nets or a billiard cue? And who wrote all that chatter for you, Pete? Honest, this is comical!"

"I'll shoot at you three times and only miss you twice if you don't fold up!" Waller snapped. "Nobody is asking you to do *anything*. A little greaser like you would only be good to carry the drinking water and if you ever stumbled you'd get drowned."

The laughter that greeted the statement added color to Rose's complexion.

"Yeah? What license have you got to talk about water? If you ever put any of it on the back of that silly neck of yours you'd be laid up with pneumonia!"

There was more laughter at this. I took pity on Waller, touched his arm and gave him a little free advice.

"Come, come. This is no way to conduct any kind of a meeting. Put the matter to a vote and find out what the sentiment of your audience is, Pete."

The perspiring buckaroo grunted.

"I never thought of that, Charley. Listen, boys. Them who want baseball and who are willing to take a couple of dollars out of their wages and put it toward getting the necessary tools, will stand up. Them who don't want baseball will sit down and keep sitting. Altogether now. Whoop—ee!"

With the exception of the diminutive Eddie Rose, who yawned, and a puncher named "Tulsa Joe," who was as deaf as a post, the crowd in the bunk house warmed Waller's heart by arising as one.

"If Buck Jones of the Triple Star can swing it, so can we!" some one bawled.

"If them Silver Circle skunks are getting ready to play baseball, I guess we can show 'em that we can play a little of the same ourselves!"

"You can count on my two dollars!" another voice declared.

"Wait a minute," Lingo Sully cut in nervously. "I'm a little short this week on account of buying that horsehair hatband. Can't you make it a dollar and a quarter?"

"One twenty-five!" Eddie Rose yelped. "This bird Sully kills me all day long with his comedy. If he ain't got pawnbroking blood in him I can bulldog two steers with four fingers!"

"You'll get four of mine on the end of the chin if you don't shut up!" Waller howled. "*You're* out of this. All right, boys. It's a go then. Each of you gives Charley Sayles here permission to deduct two dollars from your next pay.

"Get that, Charley? It's nice to have business with a well-to-do crowd."

"Not well to do—hard to do," Rose giggled. "I can see now where I'm going to get a lot of laughs out of this."

"And a few tears!" Waller bawled, slapping at him.

THE matter was arranged to the satisfaction of all, the deduction was made from the pay envelopes, a postal money order was mailed to an Illinois sporting-goods house for the necessary baseball paraphernalia and a period of watchful waiting set in.

In this interim the enthusiastic Silent Pete who knew as much about the national pastime as a reservation Indian did about deep-sea diving, spent the majority of his leisure time over on the Triple Star property watching Buck Jones shape up his team. From the gossip around the Centipede it seemed that the other nine was rapidly approaching a degree of condition.

It also seemed that the Silver Circle outfit, working together secretly, had challenged the Triple Star for a nine-inning game and not the least surprising development broke out when Lingo Sully galloped in one afternoon with the information that the Little Big Horn Ranch, out toward Beverly way, had caught the fever and was following in the base-line footsteps of the others.

"Who says the movies are the bunk?" Waller chuckled when his partner served the gossip. "Listen. To-morrow our stuff comes through by express. We're going to call a meeting down at the pasture back of the calf sheds. I don't like to brag nor nothing, but the Centipede team, when I get through with it, is going to do me a lot of credit."

"When *we* get through with it it will do *us* a lot of credit," Sully cut in. "Wasn't I the one who told you to let Montana Monty catch? Didn't I tell you to put 'Pink' Henderson on first base and leave 'Weary' Jansen throw them in from the pitcher's crate—box, I mean? Dog-gone it, if you'd been cook on Columbus' ship I'll bet you would have taken all the credit for his discovery!"

"Who started this baseball rolling?" Waller demanded curtly. "Me or you? And what's Columbus got to do with the Centipede team?"

"There they go again," Eddie Rose laughed, coming out of the bunk house and stopping to knot his neckerchief. "If words were home runs nobody around could stop us. How do I look, Mr. Sayles? I got a date with Luella Bright, the important cashier down at the Palace Eating House."

"You look as high-toned as a tenor," Waller sneered. "You and that cashier. You make me tired."

Rose grinned, vaulted into the Texas saddle on his buckskin mare and wheeled her around.

"'Who started this baseball rolling—me or you?'" the little cow-puncher laughed, using his spurs. "Ha-ha, so long, have a nice time, don't fight!"

"If it wasn't for that blond-headed money changer," Lingo Sully mumbled, "Eddie would be playing on our team. The kid's got a great arm on him, but he says he can't see spending two dollars to join up when two dollars will buy four pounds of candy and two moving-picture magazines for Luella Bright. I suppose he thinks he's a king every time he goes down to the Palace."

"Darn tootin' he does," Waller chimed in. "We ought to get the kid using that arm of his. Well, that's that. Don't miss to-morrow evening before it gets dark, Charley. You're due to see the first practice of the Centipede team."

THE buckboard returning from Chester Crossing the next day brought back the long-expected case that had been dropped off at the railroad station and at six o'clock precisely the Centipede baseball team, on the diamond laid roughly out in the pasture, assembled for initial instructions. Joining Eddie Rose who sat perched on the top bars and who appeared to find a dash of amusement in every action of his stablemates, I watched the famous pastime as it was interpreted by the nine cow-punchers with high interest. Really, until twilight merged with dusk and night came up the range, the comedy handed out was of an unusual and beautiful quality.

The Centipede wranglers in their chaps and sombreros had only a scant idea of the rudiments of the diversion and were too anxious to begin playing to pay any polite attention to Silent Pete's bellowed instructions. Weary Jansen, a rawboned Swede, ran out to the box where he twirled with such energy that half a dozen of the new baseballs were lost back of the blacksmith shop in less than ten minutes. Pink Henderson at first base was hit twice by Jansen's wild throws to home and Montana Monty, acting in the capacity of catcher, needed an airplane to get anywhere in the vicinity of Jansen's wild delivery.

"Outcurves," Rose stuttered, after his merriment had dropped him off the fence, "is correct! And will you please take a look at Montana now! Honest, this here is shortening my life by weeks!"

Silent Pete had handed the branding-iron man a bird-cage mask which Montana Monty immediately used as a hat. Considerable argument as to the proper way the mask should be worn followed with Rose hysterical, and it was not until the big wrangler had sent a puncher into the bunk house for the instruction book

and had shown the catcher that a mask was worn to protect the face and not the top of the head that some sort of order was restored.

Then "Slim" Jordan started the comicals again when he managed to get a hit and sprinted directly to third base. Sully was taking care of that bag and shooed him off, yelling for him to go to first. Jordan refused and a fist fight started after which three other players threatened to quit the team cold and Silent Pete was compelled to reach for his silver-mounted cannon to get attention and service.

"Instead of taking Luella to the movies," Rose chortled, "I'll bring her up here to-morrow night sure. It's cheaper and funnier. Honest, this has got a dude wrangler at a rodeo roped and thrown!"

"Just a minute," I said. "No matter what mistakes are being made, your laughter isn't worthy of you, Rose. Pete is doing his best out there and your loyalty is needed. Sitting there, making fun of the boys, is pretty poor stuff and you know it."

"Lay off, Mr. Sayles," the little cowboy begged. "You'll have me busting out into tears in a minute. I know I should be in there pitching instead of Weary—it would be less expensive for Pete, but where does he get that two-dollar idea? Who does he think I am—J. P. Rockefeller? If Pete wants to hand me a glove and leave me play I'll do it but nix on the entry fee, *amigo*. *You* tell him that if you want."

A few minutes later I drew the Tris Speaker of Chester Crossing aside, surreptitiously handed Waller the necessary two dollars, asked him not to mention the fact I staked Rose and went back to the pasture bars. The big wrangler scratched an ear and finally wheeled around.

"Hey, kid!" he yelled. "Get down off that fence and come in here and pitch for us. Just to show you the kind of a friend I am *I'll* give you the two dollars for your share of the new stuff. You play out in the garden now, Weary."

"What's the matter, don't I throw 'em far enough?" the Swedish puncher whined, shedding his glove and starting off in the direction of the truck garden that was on the sunny side of the ranch house.

Lingo Sully grabbed him, explained what the outfield was frequently called and Cow-puncher Rose, grinning from the tip of one ear to the top of the other, took a reef in his belt and shuffled out to the box to twirl until complete darkness fell and the lesson ended.

MEANWHILE, as tempus did its usual fugit, the Triple Star nine received the Silver Circle team on a sunny Saturday afternoon for the very first ball game that Wakefield County had ever closely scrutinized. There was no grand stand, bleachers or press box and the crowd of curious and expectant spectators sat in their saddles and looked on, but the diamond was as level as the top of a billiard table and as fast as the work of a train bandit.

The gorgeous Blaney Harrison was there, riding a roan whose saddle was of stamped leather, inlaid with silver on skirt and cantle. The owner of the Silver Circle wore his usual white-silk shirt, highly varnished riding boots, platinum spurs and had a supercilious sneer for the remainder of the onlookers. The blond and entrancing Luella Bright was as charming as Cleopatra on the front seat of a station cart with Eddie Rose parked beside her, while in the gathering were such celebrities as a sheriff or two, a few dusty deputies and a couple of visiting cattle barons, to say nothing of the taciturn Jefferson Billings and the carefully observing Silent Pete Waller.

The game itself would never have increased the blood pressure of any traveling baseball scout. The work on the part of both teams was crude, rude, coarse and rough. Errors were more frequent than often, amateurish blunders marred the entire session and before the first inning had concluded it was obvious that the team who made the smallest number of mistakes would be the winning nine.

By combined luck and accident this happened to be the Triple Star outfit and the

ninth inning concluded with the visiting team slinking back to the Silver Circle fences with the speed of coyotes riddled by buckshot.

"Dang it all!" the jubilant Sully chanted when we rode back to the Centipede. "This here ought to take some of the wind out of Harrison's sails. If we can't beat that team by a bigger score than Buck Jones added up it'll be time for the whole bunch of us to give up baseball and start learning that there Scotch game. What's the name of it?"

"Drinking?" Montana Monty asked.

"Don't you boys be too certain of yourselves," I put in earnestly. "Harrison isn't one to take defeat easily. You can make up your minds that when you're playing well enough to ride over and throw down the gauntlet he will have thought up some clever method to beat the Centipede. He won't allow his old hatred to defeat him. And you know the saying about the leopard being unable to change its spots."

"Sure, but he ain't no leopard," Walker mumbled. "He's just plain skunk!"

"The Silver Circle will never be able to beat us," Sully added. "Just as we are we could lick 'em just as they were today. This is one time where we've got them with their guns off. Wait and see!"

Oddly enough any reorganization or strategical moves on the part of the Silver Circle Ranch failed to be in evidence a week later when the outfit met and clashed with the team from the Little Big Horn. Buck Jones umpired and the Harrison warriors again received the short end of it with a score of two to seven.

The nine from the Circle, however, showed some improvement as far as the in and out fields were concerned. Their pitching department was as weak as water, their work with the wagon tongue was a felony, but their aggressiveness indicated that the vainglorious Harrison had called them up to call them down.

ONCE this second game was over there was no holding the buckaroo manager of the Centipede nine. The same night Waller on a plaid cow pony together with Sully and Montana Monty galloped over to the adjoining ranch to fling down a challenge. This was accepted, a date arranged that was ten days distant, Buck Jones was again decided upon as umpire and some prewar Bourbon had been broken out that none of the Centipede representatives, dusty though their windpipes were, dared to sample.

"Did they appear anxious for a game?" I asked Waller, after his return.

He shrugged.

"Like a dressmaker—they were sew-sew. We seen 'Red' Ferris first and then the big boy himself—Harrison. How could they help but accept when they knew they would be called quitters if they crawled. We'll just naturally scratch the ornery hides off 'em!"

"Don't be too sure about it," I said. "You know the saying about not counting your chickens until you've paid for your incubator."

Confronted with the impending conflict and with the consent and approval of the proprietor of the Centipede who, rapidly becoming a ball addict himself, Waller began to throw more work into his nine. Work was one of the things that the large wrangler delighted in—as long as it did not personally affect him.

Comfortably ensconced in a morris chair which he had dug from the litter in an outhouse, Pete steamed up the team with the merciless heart of a Roman emperor and answered all complaints with the trite remark that practice makes perfect. The little Rose, twirling continually and constantly, lost three pounds, his good disposition and developed a Charley horse. Rose sprained an ankle while base running for Montana Monty, was hit in the shoulder by a wild pitch from the outfield and went to bed exhausted at night, with no thought of Miss Luella Bright to take him down to the Crossing. Really, his condition would have brought tears to the eyes of an orphan-asylum keeper.

"That big half-breed!" the short novelette of nature moaned, limping in from an unusually tough period of instruction.

"He's run me ragged and threadbare and now he tells me that if I fall down when we play the Circle he's going to beat me up personally. And I was expected to pay two dollars for this!"

"What are *you* moaning about?" Lingo Sully inquired harshly. "It's usually so dark at third base that when they peg a ball at me I can't see it. I told you last night I got hit in the mouth and lost two teeth. That ain't false, neither!"

"What do I care about your teeth," Rose whined, "when I can't answer the question of who is keeping my sweetie company while I'm being ruined every eve at twilight. Baseball, is it? I bet the party who invented that game was the same guy who first thought up prisons. I got a date with Luella for to-night, but can I keep it? I'm asking you."

"Why not?"

"What gal wants to be seen up around Beverly accompanied by junk and how can I put my arm around her when I can hardly lift it? Excuse me while I limp in and bed down."

THE following afternoon Rose was excused from practice and an hour after that I dropped in at the Palace Eating House on my way over from the telegraph office and found him oiling Luella Bright's six-cylinder cash register with his left hand. The minute I sat down the undersized cow-puncher staggered over, his eyes gleaming.

"Here's a dish of news for you, Mr. Sayles. 'Big Andy' and Red Ferris, the knockabout team from the Silver Circle, were in here for the noonday chow. The two of them must have been hitting the grape juice because Luella reports they were full of talk.

"She couldn't help but pick up a little of it and just now she put me wise. You were right about Blaney Harrison. Guess what he's gone and done?"

"Armed the team with shotguns?"

Rose licked his lips and curled them.

"Worse than that. He's hired a professional pitcher to come out and twirl for the Circle team when we meet them! What do you know about a dirty trick like *that?* Er—what did Ferris say the pitcher's name was, sweetie?"

"My name is not sweetie and his name is Larry Richards," the charming cashier murmured in a voice that would have made an ordinary waterfall go dry.

I whistled softly. Though in the golden West I kept up with the doings of the effete East through the medium of the newspapers that adorned Jefferson Billings' library table and the name of Larry Richards was somewhat familiar. The twirler had formerly been a member of the Scranton Green Sox. He had let his contract expire and while awaiting bids from the major leagues was free lancing about, pulling down large advertising and no amount of small change through his remarkable work in the box.

For just an incredulous minute it seemed impossible that Blaney Harrison in Wyoming could lure the mound star out to his ranch. Then I remembered the magical effect of those souvenirs turned out by the U. S. mint, recalled the well-known fact that Harrison never played Midas when there were ends to be gained and looked sympathetically at Eddie Rose, who was trying to get his right wing up as far as his toothpick.

"I expected as much," I said. "Where are you going now—back to the Centipede to break the bad news?"

"What a chance," he snarled. "If I slip back to the ranch Waller will even up on the break by putting me back to work again. That guy might think he's little Red Riding-hood but he's only a wolf to me. I'll stay and do a second supper. Hey, Gus!" he bawled in the direction of the kitchen. "Chop me off another steak, draw one and make them Paris fried this time."

The information concerning Blaney Harrison's ranakaboo play set the Centipede up in flames of hot indignation. Lingo Sully, at a mass meeting of protest, voted to refuse the issue. Pink Henderson, wide awake but sound asleep, backed him up by refusing to play and three or four others on the team embraced the

same opinion. It looked like an open strike and an entire walkout until the boss of the Centipede was hastily sent for.

Billings, as silent as midnight and as reserved as an orchestra seat, listened to both sides of the argument, shook his head and tossed off a decision.

"The fact the Silver Circle has a professional pitcher don't change matters. You boys will have to play. No one's going to say that the Centipede balked because the odds were against them.

"Why don't a delegation ride over and ask Harrison what it's all about? You can let him know that we're on to him."

This seemed fair enough and was decided that Silent Pete, Sully, Rose and myself were to be the emissaries. Ponies were saddled and some twenty minutes later Big Andy of the Silver Circle, doubling for a flunky, showed us into the spacious living room of the ranch house.

There, making merry over a bottle of beverage that was as Scotch as bagpipes, "Sheik" Harrison was discovered. He was not alone. Beside him, his ankles on the back of one chair and his shoulder blades in another, sat a dumb-looking nobody I had failed to previously perceive in the land of the mesquite brush and the soap-weed blossom.

The stranger had the smirk of a flapper, the expression of a horned toad and if size was money his feet would have made him a millionaire. When we stepped into the living room I noticed that Eddie Rose, coming to a halt, gave the stranger a quick, sharp look of surprise that narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth.

I had little time to wonder what the significance of Rose's look was, for the reason that the overgrown Pete, putting his best shoe forward, opened up with a growl.

"Hey! What's all this talk we hear about you hiring some star pitcher to chuck against us next Saturday?"

The grand mogul of the Silver Circle yelled for his chink to bring him in a fresh bowl of cracked ice and smiled thinly.

"What you've heard is perfectly true." Harrison waved a hand that had never known twenty minutes of hard work, at the gentleman with the feet. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Richards, the famous pitcher, late of the Green Sox. These gentlemen," he went on, addressing his guest, "are from the Centipede Ranch."

"They don't look like much to me," Richards yawned. "That big guy for instance. He's dressed for the cow, but I think he's a lot of bull."

Waller, exchanging one glance with Sully, reached for his holster. I grabbed his arm before he could drag out his silver-mounted artillery. Harrison, his expression as cold as the ice the pigtail had brought in, stepped forward.

"That will be enough of this. I am entirely within my rights in the matter of hiring one or any number of players for my baseball team. Nothing of any kind was said about it being against our agreement to use professional players. Your nine is at liberty to use them too—if you can get them and," he sneered, "can afford to pay their price. I believe that's all. Andy will show you out."

THE exit was so skillfully handled that Waller and Sully found themselves outside before they knew what it was all about. Rose brought up the rear and again I observed the long, thoughtful stare he directed back at the Eastern pitcher.

"We've got to beat 'em!" Silent Pete muttered, once we had headed the ponies in the general direction of the Centipede fences. "We've got to beat that measly brand blotter by hook or by crook!"

"Anyway," Sully stated cheerfully, "we've got nine whole ball players to do it with."

"You don't need nine hall players—you'll need nine magicians," Rose chuckled. "That reminds me—what else sounds like pasteurized, pulverize and plagiarize? Pasternick, mebbe.

"Listen, Pete," he straightened up in his saddle, his friendly eyes bright as a couple of stars in the dark. "Before you turn into your box stall I want to see you down by the calf sheds. I'm going to let bygone be bygones, because I got a little

something on my chest I want to get rid of."

"What—a cough?" the tall wrangler grunted. "Or are you going to beg for another day off to-morrow so you can ace that blond money changer around?"

"You lose both times!" Rose shot back. "What I've got to tell you is the most important thing you'll ever hear in all your life—whether you live until next week or until you're a hundred and eighty."

"That's what you say," Waller snorted. "The question is, do I believe it?"

The manager of the Centipede team, however, must have found some importance in the conference held in the starlight by the calf sheds for the following afternoon both, accompanied by Lingo Sully, received a message from Chester Crossing and spent several mysterious hours there. Upon their return, the team was locked in the bunk house for a period of secret rag chewing and from that minute on all talk of defeat was definitely ended.

On Friday Waller gave the team a day off to rest up in and Saturday at noon sharp he mounted his players and let them jog over to the Silver Circle for the bull ring of conflict. En route, I turned my pony in close to Rose's buckskin mare and eyed him quizzically.

"How does it look now that there's no more talk of losing?"

He grinned provokingly.

"Fair enough, Mr. Sayles, as the weather prophet said. You needn't throw this around, but just to show you how confident I am I bet a month's pay at big odds that we'd make a chimpanzee out of the Silver Circle team. I ought to win enough to buy my sweetie an eight-day wrist watch—the kind she can wear eight days before it makes her arm green.

"By the way. Luella's taking a half day from the stew factory to see us perform. I wish you'd sit beside her during the game. I don't want to take the chance of any stranger stealing her on me."

"What," I asked, changing the subject, "makes you so confident of victory?"

His grin widened.

"Ask me. Here we are," he continued, when we had cantered over the boundary line and were in the enemy's territory. "I've got to put the mare in the corral now and warm up with Montana. My arm's feeling pretty good again. I was able to scratch my chin last night.

"Don't forget what I told you about Luella. So long until we meet again."

A LARGER crowd than had witnessed either of the other two games was on hand. Realizing the bitterness of the elderly feud that existed between the Silver Circle and the Centipede Ranch and possibly imagining the ball game might develop into a brawl game, all cattle land had turned out in gala array.

There were hard-boiled herders who didn't know if baseball was a drink or a game, if a fly was a hit or an insect, if a double meant twins and a home run a gallop back to their own outfits. Good men, bad men, pinto men, cowgirls, half the population of the country seat of Beverly, to say nothing of those cowmen who had come up from the southern ranges and the good grass country that lay to the southeast, mingled, milled along and jammed the base lines.

Deciding that I could have no better companion for the afternoon's merriment than the charming young lady who made change at the Palace Eating House, I circulated about and finally found her on the front seat of the station wagon. She extended an invitation, I climbed up beside her and, once comfortably seated, stared out over the heads of those in front of us, across the field where the Silver Circle nine was limbering up.

Among the players, the only one who boasted a regulation uniform, Larry Richards tossed slow ones to his receiving teller that had a professional twist to them. The crowd watched him pop-eyed.

The others of the Circle players wore their chaps and work shirts. A number of them argued with Buck Jones, who refused to let them play unless they took off their spurs. Buck, as umpire, had to appeal to the exquisite Harrison before he

could get any degree of attention. Then the Centipede wranglers ran out to get overheated, there was a half hour more of argument and finally the game was opened up with the visitors at bat.

"Oh, dear," Luella Bright sighed. "I just know there's going to be trouble if Eddie does what he intends to. I see the sheriff over there, and his deputy too."

"What does Rose expect to do?" I asked, looking her in the blue eyes.

"Steal bases!" she whispered breathlessly. "Imagine that with all these people looking on!"

In the box, with ridiculous and single-handed ease, the expensive and highly advertised Larry Richards blanked the first three Centipede players that faced him, retiring the side before they were aware of it.

Red Ferris went to the plate first for the home team and, as cool as a seal's nose, Eddie Rose began to deal them out. He walked Ferris, struck out the next man up and would have thrown Red out at second if the Centipede bagman had not taken off his glove in order to roll a cigarette. However, Big Andy, next at the platter, popped up a weak fly that the little pitcher could have caught with his ankles, the next man fanned, and Ferris, enraged because it was no longer possible for him to run home, hurled down his Stetson and piled into his teammate for striking out. They were finally separated and the game continued.

The second inning was almost a repetition of the first, but in the last half of the third Richards hammered out a four-bagger and the Silver Circle Ranch yell went echoing through the sunny spaces.

In the fourth frame, both teams feeling the furious pace, began to weaken, and errors cropped up like weeds after a spell of rain. Bunts that could have been easily fielded were stretched into three-baggers, both catchers could have resigned from each team without having been missed, the harassed Jones in his anxiety to keep the game going smoothly called strikes, balls; fouls, fair ones, and made countless other mistakes.

It developed that the score was six to five in favor of the Silver Circle and this brought about a fresh assortment of argument. Six-guns were brandished, oaths and threats made Luella Bright put her hands over her ears, and it looked as if the game was ended for keeps.

The umpire from the Triple Star, as pale as Blaney Harrison's silk shirt, presently admitted that the one run he had chalked up for the Circle was not a run at all and after another period of wrangling the score was changed to read five to five, favor any one, and the burlesque continued.

FROM my seat on the station cart it looked as if the Circle team would win on Larry Richards' flawless pitching, but when the seventh stanza opened I was forced to alter my opinion somewhat.

Richards, on the mound, wabbled badly. The first balls he tossed over had none of their previous snap and nothing at all on them except a trade-mark. The Centipede, recognizing the delivery had slowed up, went to it like a rabbit dog after a cottontail.

Pink Henderson lined out what would have been a positive double if his sheer amazement at the hit had not made him stand, shade his eyes and watch the progress of the ball down the outfield. Montana Monty had to kick him twice to get him to the first station.

The branding-iron catcher was up next. He swung so violently he fell on his face but Richards' second ball hit his bat and by the time the home team had found the apple Henderson was home and Monty was on third. Silent Pete bellowed for him to come on. While the outfield was dubbing around and coming to blows because none of the trio could agree as to who was to throw the ball in, the Centipede catcher, excitement itself, ran halfway to the plate and then back to third base. He did this four times before Waller threatened him with his gun.

"*You* slide, darn you!" Silent Pete roared. "Home! Home!"

To a tumult of cheering Montana

Monty left third. He might have crawled in on his hands and knees but instead he threw himself down and slid up to the platter on his chin. Harrison, himself, had to ride out into the outfield and separate the three fielders.

You have no idea! After that moment of hilarity Richards went further to pieces and when the round was over the Centipedes had padded their score by six more runs.

"We're winning!" Miss Luella Bright exclaimed feverishly. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

Rose gallantly held the Circle crowd to a few assorted hits, Big Andy clouted, was sacrificed by Richards, brought in a single marker and the inning ended. The eighth showed nothing except the fact Harrison's leased twirler was all through and concluded with a sharp rally that won the Silver Circle three distinct home runs that were really petty larceny. Even at that the Centipede was in the lead with two to the good when the concluding chapter opened.

"Whoop-ee!"

THE yelling of the crowd and a fusillade of shots appeared to brace the shaky Mr. Richards up somewhat. However, the new leaf he turned over was promptly torn in half, he became as generous as Santa Claus and before the Centipedes were retired they had added three more runs to their collection.

This five-run lead, however, looked as if it would mean little or nothing, for when the small Rose tottered out to the shelling peak it was plain that the long-drawn-out strain of battle had placed him on a par with the Eastern twirler. It was simply a question of which was the worst—Richards or Rose.

Big Andy stretched a single into a triple and wandered home. The Circle shortstop registered with a circuit smash and in a quiet that was eerie the home team's left fielder with two men out, singled and scored, when Larry Richards luckily hit for three bases. This put the enemy two runs behind the Centipede, and Rose, pulling himself together with an effort, stared in our direction and waved his glove weakly.

"Poor Eddie!" Miss Bright cried softly. "Why did they send a boy to do a man's work? I can almost see him trembling!"

"I can *hear* the little freak!" one of the Circle wranglers laughed, picking up the remark close to the right front wheel. "Beat us? Just you keep your eye on Larry Richards out there on third. We need two runs and here's where we *get 'em!*"

Cowboy Rose wound up like a second-hand alarm clock and the home team desperately tried a squeeze play. Red Ferris, at bat, waited until he had two and three hung on him and then rolled a bunt down the first-base line.

Instantly the quiet that had been so deep and unshaken was shattered by the appearance of Mr. Pandemonium. It didn't require any technical knowledge of baseball for the tumultuous audience to know that while there were two out, if the squeeze play was made perfect, the imported Richards would bring in the run necessary to tie the score while Red Ferris would possibly click with the one extra run necessary to win!

While Luella Bright, stood on the wagon seat clapping her hands and shouting, Rose made one last, dying effort. Not trusting Pink Henderson to retrieve the pill and snap it home, the little puncher dashed after it himself, collided with Henderson, knocked the first bagman cold, and grabbing up the ball let it fly.

It looked like a cinch for Richards, but the stranger in the cow country proved conclusively the inconvenience of possessing large feet. Halfway into the platter he stumbled. Before he could get going again by some happy accident the sphere was resting snugly in Montana Monty's glove, the perfect play was ended and the Centipede after a comedy of errors, had won by a single tally!

A BUCKBOARD was needed to convey Rose back to the ranch. On the way I interrupted the vocal celebrations long enough to turn to the exhausted pitcher

who occupied the back seat of the turnout.

"While you're dispensing credit," I said, "don't forget to make Harrison's pitcher a present of a little of the same. If Richards hadn't blown up and gone to pieces in the seventh inning you'd have never won if you'd have shed real tears."

Rose giggled before turning to me.

"Don't be talking about Larry Richards, Mr. Sayles. *That* guy's real name is Hy Pasternick, no matter if he calls himself Wales. The minute I seen him that night at the Silver Circle I knew him.

"Hy used to play semiprofessional ball down at Dallas, Texas, before he went up North. I told Pete this, we got together and we wired the real Larry Richards in care of the Green Sox, asking him how much to come out and pitch for *us*.

"This was the bunk, of course, but we got an answer O. K. Richards replied that he wouldn't accept no engagements so far West, but would be glad to send a substitute who could use his name if the price was right. Get me?"

"Go on," I requested.

Rose pulled down his leather cuffs.

"Well, Sully and me and Pete went down to the Palace Eating House when Luella sent us word the fake Richards was there having a table d'hôte. I accused him of being Hy Pasternick, late of Dallas, and he laughed it off until we flashed Richards' telegram on him.

"Then Hy broke down and begged us not to expose him to Harrison, who had no idea he was paying a large piece of money for a ringer—money, by the way, that Pasternick has to split with Richards for using his name and advertising. We finally agreed that if Hy would meet our terms we'd keep it quiet. He did, so what more do you want?"

"What were the terms?"

Rose looked at the sunset across the prairies and grinned.

"Not so stiff. Hy pitches swell, but he knows just when to go to pieces without taking the chance of getting shot and he certainly can stumble nifty, can't he? I'll say so.

"Baseball, is it? I've heard of games, but I'll bet there ain't one that's got more fun in it. And that reminds me. How much will a genuwine wrist watch for a lady cost if I buy it brand-new, Mr. Sayles?"

Another story by Mr. Montanye in an early issue.

THE CHAMPION ORATOR

SENATOR MORRIS SHEPPARD of Texas is described by the gallery loafers of Washington as the greatest, finest, all-round, catch-as-catch-can, show-'em-no-quarter orator in the upper house of Congress. There is nothing that the Honorable Morris cannot do with language. He asserts a fact in similes, declares it in metaphors, sings it in pindaric odes, swears it in hyperbole and vows it in the height of passion.

He backs his opposition against the wall, hits it between the eyes with a bunch of philippics, finishes it up with two or three scoriac invectives, and informs it in melodious parlance that it can play no tricks on him, armed as he is with all the linguistic loot of a dozen obedient dictionaries. In his college days at Texas and Yale he won all the medals offered for oratory. Since then he has won everything else he has gone after. Borne aloft on the wings of fancy, he sails the airplane of his diction to dazzling heights, learning the harmony of the spheres, grabbing shooting stars by the handful and snapping off comets' tails for exclamation points. His tongue, wagged by inspiration and whetted on the grindstone of necessity, splits the air like the first shot at Concord or charms the ear like the fade-away melancholy of "Lucia." No note of the nightingale, no murmur of the babbling brook, no whisper of the perfume-laden breeze through towering pines, is too delicate or faint for him to ensnare and glorify it in the gorgeous alchemy of his guttural gift!

Western Stuff

By Charles Tenney Jackson

Author of "Slow Motion," "The Lady or the Trigger," Etc.

In his misguided youth, Colvin Murdie had perpetrated a bit of pretty lurid Western stuff himself—but that was in the good old days. Gun play, now, was a thing of the past—and the movies.

THERE was a single bar of sunlight coming from above the green shades down into the cool quiet of the directors' room of the Marinburg Stockman's Bank, and this struck upon the glass top of the mahogany table so that a faint color of sea water reflected up to the face of the man who sat there.

It made the little white scar under his chin vivid.

Still, President Colvin Murdie of the bank would have recognized Tommy without that. For many years now, he had been rather absently, and yet with an uneasy indecision, making up his mind what he should say when a man with a scar like that walked into his office. Ten years of living with a sinister certainty that this would come.

Well, Murdie had met it admirably. None of the busy bank force along the marble-and-bronze partition could have noticed the president's first start of fear when Tommy uprose from the luxuriant little lobby lounge within the inclosure. And with a brief greeting Mr. Murdie had conducted the caller back to the directors' room, instead of to his private office. This would be entirely private; not even an employee passing in the corridor beyond the paneled wood and glass.

Tommy seemed to sense this. Murdie adjusted his glasses and looked at the visitor's card. It was just at the opening hour. The precise, soothing reiteration of an adding machine, a distant murmur of voices in the front of the bank, all the casual, comforting security of place and time, the benediction of the sunny morning over the street and town with their friendly respect through which Murdie had driven, as usual, all his later days. This expected and perturbing thing, arrived, even now seemed far and unreal

"Did you know I was here—with the bank?" inquired Murdie.

"Not till this morning. Heard it at the hotel. But I was coming anyhow. The Stockman's was on my list of prospects. Of course I was surprised, Colly. President, eh?"

The banker studied the business card. "You're representing the Multiple Index people—Chicago?"

"General office furniture. Western representative—third year with them. Never made Marinburg before; the old town's grown from the decayed cow-loading station we knew as kids, ain't it?"

Tommy Leeds rubbed his pink, well-shaved chin as if caressing that little white scar—covering it—was second nature now. He was not the sort given to nervous tricks. Murdie began to realize a growing astonishment in himself at Tommy's reality—square, rugged, serene of face, sure eyed; big-town tailored and assured.

"The Index people—pretty big people," mused Murdie. "You—Tommy—— Tommy, how long did you serve?"

"Nine years. You knew I drew a fifteen jolt. I been out eleven. The old job never bothered me any since. I've done well, I'll say."

"Ye-es——" The banker hesitated. "My God, think of it—a couple of country kids, twenty years ago, doing that—job!"

"Well, it cured us, didn't it? Can't lay that to the movies, can they? I'd never seen one then. Just devilin' kids!"

Murdie twisted uneasily. "Wish you wouldn't talk of it, Tommy."

"Never intended to. You brought it up. I came to talk fixtures."

"Yes, I know. Chesman will see you about that. We—could give you an order, I think. But we refitted things a year ago."

HE looked about with a wan satisfied smile. Not a small-town bank west of Kansas City was better appointed. The marbles, the palms, the gold lettering and polished desks, rails, leathered cubbies for the customers; the great round steel of the vault front like a ramhead thrusting forth from the concrete wall behind the cages—all a challenge of security and civilization to the thin, vanished phantoms of the lost, lawless West.

"I see," said Tommy. "Well, you might need some minor things. Now, the new Multiple——"

Murdie lifted a deprecating hand. "Wait. Landry—I mean, Leeds—well, let's say Tommy Landry, then. Nobody'll recognize you, Tommy. It's forgotten. You paid the price. It's wonderful—come through, clean—big! We did, didn't we?"

"We? You never were suspected. 'Big Bart' getting done in by the deputies down in the Haw Creek bottoms saved you, Murdie. Folks thought you'd gone to Tulsa to your uncle's the week the express office was robbed.

"You just kept on going. You know I never found out till I was released that you got away with the stuff. Close to twenty-four thousand dollars, wasn't it?"

"Keep still," said Murdie hollowly. "Yes, I—got to Mexico. Scared stiff. Wonder I made it. I didn't know what to do. Just a scared kid.

"Didn't know you were even captured till a year after you were in Atlanta. Tommy, I—I'd helped with that money, if—if I'd known how. I just hid that currency two years—scared so."

"You couldn't have done anything. Money wouldn't help. You know it was that cut on my chin that identified me. I cut it on the barbed wire that morning, you remember.

"When I knew Bart had set that Saturday night for the job he pulled us into, I slipped over to Milroy's from our place. You know!" Tommy laughed shortly. "To say good-by to Nellie. It was in their south-forty fence corner, and she met me there—it's funny, isn't it?

"I leaned over the wire. Kissed her, Colly—laughing and cutting up, and Nellie pushed me into the wire and I dragged my chin on the barbs. She—never dreamed I'd gone into a holdup with a fool kid idea that we—that I'd get a stake and marry her some day on it."

The banker clenched his hands across the glass-topped table.

"You remember every detail, Tommy. That day—and night——"

"Well, nine years—eighteen then, and facing fifteen in Atlanta the government gave me—you bet I recall everything. If Nellie Milroy hadn't made me scratch my face they'd never got me.

"You remember that night—I bumped it and it kept bleeding. It bled on the handkerchief old Bart tied about my face for a mask. And old Jack May, the express agent, remembered it. When the posse run across me in the eating house at Oxnard, that nick was still bleeding."

"You confessed, didn't you?"

"Yes. They sweated me. And old Bart killed! They had me right."

"You never brought me into it."

TOMMY laughed. "No! I should say not! I didn't know what became of the swag after we separated. You made the clean get-away, Murdie. And they accused old 'Bald Jack' May of tipping off the big loot to Bart's gang, didn't they?"

"They couldn't prove it. He—but it, you might say, ruined him. He couldn't prove his innocence. He just went down, Tommy. Gave up what he had on his bond. Just a wreck, now."

"Yes? Still alive—old 'Bald Jack?'"

"Didn't you notice him in the lobby? He's porter here now. He went a bit crazy, folks think, after that Haw Creek job. Of course, you swore he wasn't in it, but tongues wagged. The old man has a strange way of looking at me, but he's quiet and resigned now."

"Yes," muttered Leeds. "But smashed. And I did nine years in the pen. You—you've done well, haven't you, Murdie?"

Murdie shrugged. "Well, yes. I stayed in Mexico six years. Put that money in oil prospects. I came back with a hundred thousand, and bought land here just before the big boom came on. Then, five years later, organized the bank. Yes, I did well." He laughed briefly.

"That job cured me, Tommy. Yes, I've made good. Pretty big man here, now. Think of what a fool kid thing that holdup was!"

"Yes," muttered Tommy. "And old Bald Jack now porter for you."

"I didn't want him here. He grins around like a death's-head, and gives me unpleasant memories. But he'd gone crazy if some one had not shown faith in him. Nellie insisted we help him."

"Nellie?" echoed Tommy Leeds.

"Yes—my wife, now," said the banker nervously. "After your conviction she seemed—waiting—as if life passed her by. Then, after eight years she married me, Tommy. I'd done well by then."

Tommy rubbed his little white scar. A laughing boy-and-girl kiss in the fence corner, a scratch from the wire that put a bloodstain on a soiled handkerchief—and Tommy put in nine years of his youth behind the gray walls of the pen. Some government funds were in the express loot and the Federal courts put him away with a vengeance.

Well, maybe it did him good. He went in an idling, foolish ranch boy, and came out a square-backed man with a ruthless will to make good.

Murdie sensed it when he muttered that if the two of them hadn't learned this lesson they might have gone on to worse things.

Yes, they had made good. Here was Colvin Murdie, president of the Stockman's Bank, president of the Marinburg Realty Company, organizer of the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company; prime mover in every advance the town made, respected and known over the State—all because he got the bad-kid stuff scared out of him at nineteen. Not forty yet—Murdie could go far.

He saw Tommy staring at him. Tommy, who had paid in full. Murdie was relieved at Tommy's own comeback. It sealed Tommy's lips forever. And if Tommy wanted a split on that get-away swag which the world had now forgotten, but on which Murdie had built his fortune, the banker would be only too glad to hand over Tommy's share.

But Tommy didn't even mention it. He

stared out to the smart little department-store façade across the street.

"NELLIE," he muttered presently. "How is she, Colvin?"

"Well, fine. Sort of a dreamer—always was, you remember. Wants to go abroad, study, travel. Not quite satisfied with Marinburg, but patient. Of course she never knew I was in that—job."

Murdie smiled deprecatingly. Tommy nodded slowly across the table. "Sure—she must never know. She mustn't see me, Colly. It might be unpleasant, raking old memories. But she's good to old Bald Jack, is she? I don't want him to recognize me either, Murdie."

"No, sure not. Old Jack worships Nellie when she comes here. Well, you know that money we got, Tommy. I've often thought we ought to restore it, somehow. To the express company. Couldn't we?"

"We?" Tommy looked at him curiously. "How, we? I'm out of it. I paid, I think. And I never got a dime of the stuff."

"Of course," said Murdie hastily. "If it came to that, I'd split."

"Not with me. I paid in full. It's nothing to me any more."

The banker winced. Something about Tommy made him awkward. He would like to pay over Tommy's share in bright new bank notes and never see his boyhood friend again in Marinburg. Not that Murdie feared him, after seeing what Tommy had made of himself.

The Multiple salesman sat looking at his clean, hard, stubby hands as if, somehow, proud of them. There should be the inner pride of a man in some one thing. Back in this quiet room of shining panels and rugs there was pride. The business of the bank beyond was now more noticeable, a voice, a machine, a footstep somewhere but all keyed to the attentive efficiency which Colvin Murdie loved.

The town out there, it moved so. The old hectic West quite gone from it. Smooth boulevards shining out through the level home spaces of lawns and white and brown-shingled houses; the little space by the railroad station green-shrubbed and inviting the overland passengers to this vista of order down Second Street, where their eyes could rest on the new baby-blond skyscraper with gargoyles which the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company had just flung eight stories to the prairie sky.

Fine, clear, serene as the sunshine, thought Tommy Leeds. A folk of law and churches and lecture courses; twenty years ago old Bart and his two shivering youthful dupes had pulled the last raw Western stuff the county could remember. No one, save old Bald Jack, ruined by it, could even recall its legendary details.

Safe enough—every one, everything. Colvin Murdie swung in his director's easy-chair. Tommy Leeds swung with him. They both faced out toward the sunshine over the green shades, a sweet soft light about them here; and out beyond the corridor the alert friendliness of the bank's lobby open to the friendly folk it served.

Murdie began to feel his well-fed complacent satisfaction with life again. To meet Tommy, to talk this old bad business over so frankly, in so comradely a spirit—well, a board of directors could not have gone over it and come to the right understanding any better. Murdie felt a fine new jubilance singing in him. He could go out to the new country club after lunch to his golf feeling quite fit.

He even thought, for a moment, of asking Tommy out. But, then—well, Tommy had done time in Atlanta, and you can't ever tell. It was pretty hard for a former convict to cover up and keep out of the law's eye after one spill, Murdie had heard.

Then, possibly some old resident might recognize Mr. Leeds, the outfitters' salesman, as the Tommy Landry of long ago. Just possibly. Not likely though, save in two cases. Nellie Milroy Murdie, who had loved Tommy then, and old Bald Jack May, the bank porter, who had convicted him.

No, Tommy better stay out. Tommy

had paid and was through. If Murdie offered him entertainment Tommy would have the good taste to decline. He appeared to be just that quiet, decent sort.

THE telephone buzzed. Miss Sweetser spoke from Murdie's office where she had been much puzzled at the president's long seclusion with this salesman.

"Oh, yes!" Murdie showed a pleased surprise. "I'd forgotten it, Miss Sweetser. Mr. Holloway called me at home this morning about it. Have them see Mr. Lund. I'll be out in a minute."

He turned to Tommy Leeds with a felicitating smile, rubbing his hands. Tommy had arisen and was by the window. There was a small but growing crowd across by the smart little department store of Marinburg's main street.

A long, gray, powerful car had just stopped. It was dust streaked and curtained; there was about it some odd mystery, seclusion, intriguing as a masked stranger at twilight. Tommy was watching indifferently when Murdie joined him.

Murdie chuckled hesitantly. Then pointed to a closed car parked beyond the store entrance, a shining-metaled blue sedan with a correct and liveried chauffeur at the wheel. Tommy could see a woman behind the glass, dimly, but there was a sort of diffused light from the sun upon her and the autumn flowers against the window. A suggestion of soft grays and golden browns.

"There is my wife, now," said Murdie complacently. "I told her perhaps she'd like this. Say, I better tell Lund, the cashier, what he's to do. And get Holloway at the Chamber of Commerce about the luncheon. I'd almost forgotten, you coming in on me, Tommy."

"What's that?" muttered Tommy. He still had his glance upon the woman in the closed car. He saw her better now. Not plainly, but there came to him a suggestion of wistfulness, resignation—he could not tell whether it was Nellie's hair or her hat that had graying silver against blue. "What? Don't let me stop you from any engagements, Murdie."

"Oh, no! But that big dusty car. It just got in from Fayette. They called up about it. Sparks, the director, did. They want to make the scene for a motion picture here. Lloyd Fortune's with them. You know—the big Western star. The two-gun fighter of the Westerns. Of course, you know of him, Tommy."

"Sure. The world and all knows him. Lloyd Fortune's here? What do you mean—picture?"

Murdie was finding his hat jubilantly. "It seems this director was going to shoot a scene, a location he said, over the wire from Fayette, for a big bank-robbery film they're doing. He asked if they might come to Marinburg for it. Said they got into Fayette, but the bank building was the wrong type.

"They want a street scene, a get-away with a gun fight out of a bank, he called it. And Fayette wouldn't do after he saw it. Only a shot, Sparks said."

"They motored over here for it, did they?"

"Jumped right over. This director phoned me early. Of course we're mighty pleased. A big actor like Lloyd Fortune don't land up in a town like Marinburg every day. The word gets about and there will be a crowd. Nellie drove downtown to watch the doings."

"Nellie," repeated Tommy Leeds. "Oh, yes! There's another car. Got the camera set up. Movie bunch on location, eh—and the great Lloyd Fortune with 'em?"

MURDIE was at the phone. "Get Mr. Holloway at the Chamber of Commerce, please." Then he turned to Tommy, swelling with a manifest pride. "Say, we hustled on this when we heard Fortune wanted to shoot a picture here. The Chamber of Commerce will give a lunch to 'em. I'm chairman of the publicity committee—— Oh, yes—is that you, Holloway? Murdie speaking. I understand we'll need about thirty covers at that luncheon, Holloway . . . Yes, I'll be toastmaster. Fortune will respond. . . . I haven't met him yet, but I'm going out now.

"Big day for Marinburg, Holloway. The old town on the screen for the millions. Yes, sir—see that young man from the *Record* gets in touch with me at the lunch, Holloway."

Murdie turned grinning to his boyhood friend. "Yes, big day, Tommy. And we didn't start arrangements till this morning. Got the Boy Scouts out to line the curb to keep folks off the picture folks. There'll be a mob around the bank when it starts. You know how crazy the girls'll be when it's noised around that this Lloyd Fortune's in town."

"He's good in his line. Did you see 'Flame o' the Border,' Colly? But Western stuff's a lot of hokum."

"Isn't every town gets to entertain Fortune. Now, these Fayette people must be wild. The director ordered his bunch over here the minute he looked over their bank location. Wouldn't do—not at all. Sparks got us right on the wire and asked to come over. Besides the picture we'll show him a live town, Tommy."

"That him, now?" said Tommy watching out the window.

Murdie's glance followed. He seized his hat.

"They asked for three horses from Jamison's old livery stable. For their bandits' get-away stuff, Sparks said. That was the hardest hurry-up order to fill. Cow ponies, they should have been, but in these days—— Say, Tommy, what do you think of the old town after twenty years!"

"Wonderful," said Tommy. "Well, I expect you'll be busy now."

"Well, yes." Murdie chuckled. "I thought—well, it sounds foolish, but I thought, from what Sparks said over the wire, he wants a few local people as extras. Just in the background, I suppose.

"As I understand it, his bandits hold up the bank—they're coming out, and Lloyd Fortune, the two-gun fighter, tries to stop 'em. The hero, you understand? The gang shoot up the street as they hop for their horses with the loot. Fortune cleans 'em out, of course, in the next shot. At Haw Creek bridge, Tommy——"

"Haw Creek? It's where you and me met old Bart that night!"

Murdie turned nervously, laughing, at the door. "Soft pedal, old boy, on that! Not so loud!" He had swung the door, and then started absently. Leeds saw a dim form in the corridor.

Old Jack May, the porter, was fumbling past with a dusting cloth and mop. Leeds had hardly a glimpse of him as Murdie raised a warning hand. But old Bald Jack, a grinning, toothless death's-head, passed with no more than his usual queer trick of watching the banker out of his narrow, lowered eyes.

It always made Murdie feel uncomfortable. It was as if old Jack May was weighing things, groping back in the darkened portals of his mind to that night when, as the Haw Creek express agent, he fought the three holdup men—fought them, and the town did not believe it later. Old Bartley killed, young Tommy Leeds captured—and the third man got away with the express company's packages.

Old Bald Jack, who could never live down the nods and whispers.

"He's gone," Murdie muttered. "Come on out, Mr. Leeds."

Tommy glanced back the corridor. That shadowy old figure groped on and around a turn of the paneled wall.

"You said something about restitution," mused Tommy. "But nobody much was injured except Jack May. Say, Colly, couldn't we do—something?"

Murdie rubbed his hands expansively. "The old man's got a job here as long as he lives. My wife'd see to that even if I —if anything ever happened to me. As far as I'm concerned—well, you ought to see the list of charities I head, Tommy. Now, last week—the Murdie Memorial Hospital—that new pressed-brick building just south of the K Street crossing. You must have noticed it coming in, Tommy. Just opened last week—say, isn't that something?"

"I heard of it at the hotel," said Tommy.

"I'm on the State board of pardons, too. As a matter of fact, Tommy, if it

wasn't for my business interests, the governorship wouldn't be so far away for me, maybe."

"I heard the Matson House clerk saying something like that," added Tommy. "Well, I'll get back to the hotel. Pretty good crowd gathering out there, Colly."

Colvin Murdie laughed again. "That reminds me. What I said was foolish just now. About Lloyd Fortune and this picture shooting. I had old Bald Jack bring some plunder into the wash room that he's had in his shack since the old cow days. An old Mexican hat all streaked and battered, and a pair of chaps that Jack says were taken off one of the old-time bad men of Bartley's days. They're good—these movie actors'll have nothing like 'em.

"You know, Tommy, I'm going to slip that stuff on, and follow Lloyd Fortune and his gang out of the bank. It won't hurt their picture. The director, in fact, will be glad to have an extra type or two in the background. I'll just slip out on the bank steps when Fortune and his bandits are gunning each other in the street get-away!"

"Yes," said Tommy. "I see. Colly, I'll get across the street and watch it."

"Sure," chuckled Murdie. "It'll surprise 'em. Bet the folks don't even know me. Well, I'm not too old to play, yet, Tommy."

He waved an ingratiating hand from the corridor. Old Bald Jack was by the wash-room door in the rear. Tommy saw the gray shadow of a man; then his quavering call to the president.

"They've come, Mr. Murdie. The director man is talkin' to 'em what to do. He saw me and wanted me in it, Mr. Murdie."

"All right, Jack." Murdie was back there now. "Sure, you'd be the type, Jack. A real old-timer. Where's the things, Jack?"

TOMMY went forward past the private rooms. No one was in the bank lobby except a few excited and curious bookkeepers and tellers peering out the great windows. Mr. Lund, the cashier, was in the vestibule listening to Director Sparks of the Lloyd Fortune Company, vastly flattered by the somewhat importunate instructions megaphoned out to the crowded curb lines.

The car with the camera was on this side. The five Marinburg policemen were keeping open a lane down toward the railroad station where some of the old wooden buildings would lend a verisimilitude of 'eighty-eight, perhaps, to the long shot. Halfway along this three weary horses stood with a red-kerchiefed outlaw holding their bridles. And just across the street from the bank three more of the screen Thespians idled by the big gray touring car.

Gray, tall hats, chaps and spurs, and loose-hanging gun belts!

"Shucks," said young Mr. Crosby, the bookkeeper, by Tommy's side. "Would you ever? They look like raw amateurs. Awkward as a lot of high-school boys! Gunmen, hey?—bandits? The celebrated Lloyd Fortune—well, he looks better than the rest of 'em."

Still the famous star looked ill at ease. He adjusted his new neck scarf and swaggered rather boredly across the chalk lines toward Director Sparks on the bank steps. A short, gray-sweatered assistant was bawling at the giggling townsfolk who crowded the space.

"Get set!" grunted Sparks, and mopped his perspiring head. "Stiver, you ask them officers to keep that space cleared toward them hawsses." He raised his voice in the megaphone:

"Ladies and gentlemun! Now, I repeat, please keep off them lines we marked on the street, and out o' that stretch toward the depot. We come here, as I said, folks, to just shoot a couple o' outdoor bits in Mr. Fortune's next great Western picture, ladies and——"

"Get 'em started, Jerry," whispered the assistant. "The whole block'll jam on us, school just out and all. Let's go, Jerry!"

The director's alert eye went from the crowds back into the cool dim shadows of the Stockman's bank. He watched Mr.

Lund, the cashier, covertly. Then the megaphone again.

"Ladies and gentlemun! This scene is the front o' the bank with three fello's hoppin' out after cleanin' up the vault. They are followed by Mr. Fortune, the old-timey deputy, ladies and gentlemun. He opens up on 'em, two guns, as they get away and they crack him down, you understand, in the street.

"Don't be alarmed at the gun shootin', folks—nothin' but dummies; and Mr. Fortune gets up right after and goes with me in this big car follerin' the bandits down to the Haw Creek bridge, which is the next shot we need to get. Ladies and gentlemun, thankin' you one and all for your——"

"Mr. Murdie wanted to see it," complained Mr. Lund. "Where is he, Miss Sweetser?"

"Murdie?" said Director Sparks hurriedly "Oh, yes—the man I was talkin' with from Fayette."

"The president of the bank." Young Mr. Lund gazed at him stupidly. Mr. Sparks shot a swift glance at Leeds, the stranger, idling alone in the lobby. The corridor to the rooms in the rear was dim and empty.

Sparks looked again to the street. Then his gray, narrow eye settled again upon Tommy Leeds. He glanced at the sun.

"We ought to pull those shades, mister. Got to shoot toward the door from the camera car. There'll be refraction—reflection—on all that glass. On this side—pull 'em up."

"Oh, certainly," beamed young Mr. Lund, and hurried to do so.

The windows, then, toward the crowds were hidden. A semilight reigned in the lobby and beyond the empty bronze grilles of the tellers' cages. Sparks took one hurried look about and stepped to the vestibule. Leeds heard him shouting again through the horn.

THE tall, bored young man who was the celebrated Fortune of the Westerns, lounged over to the director. The three other grease-paint mimics listened to a gestured argument. All down the curbs townsfolk craned and crowded for a look past the chalked line where the assistant implored the grinning policemen to restrain their ardor.

"Well, anyhow, this is Mr. Murdie's show," said the little chief of the force. "So you folks keep back. Murdie give 'em permission.

"Boys, turn that farmer's flivver down the side. Traffic's off for this bank robbery till one o'clock."

But he touched a respectful cap to the sedan when he went to ask that it be moved out of the great bank-robbery scene. The woman within smiled graciously, and the car moved slowly past.

"Nellie," muttered Leeds, and thereafter paid no heed to Lloyd Fortune's whispered conference with his director. "She'd remember me. And I don't want that—never, never!"

Yes, that silver gray was her smart little hat—in part. He recalled how her hair had shone in the sun of the wild-grape corner where he saw her last twenty years ago. All gold, he thought, like herself.

He saw her face now, too. A bit blurry through the glass, but patience there, weariness, a quietude as of one who had learned much and found it little. And how that blond little girl, the sheriff's daughter, had laughed that morning when Tommy left her to ride away to Haw Creek bottoms to wait for the night's job!

A bleeding little scratch on his face and his heart singing! He just hadn't thought—Bartley had told the two boys it was such an easy thing to hold up Jack May's office. Well, it had been.

He could see Murdie's golf sticks in the car beside her. Murdie had said she wanted something. Study, travel—something. Tommy could see it now in her haunting eyes—something.

Still Murdie had done well. For himself and for her. For the whole town. She couldn't have expected more in any girlhood dream.

Murdie's twenty-four-thousand-dollar get-away roll had rolled to an easy million

or two. Well, the luck some men have. Tommy turned away presently—there was no use looking upon her. The bad thing of living is that one must remember.

A funny thing—living. One man had gone to ruin and the other to success from the same flying start—but, after all, here were Tommy and Colly both back and able to talk it over in a bank directors' room—and smile.

The movie bandits did strike Tommy now as a trifle amateurish. He saw the unreal theatricism of them arouse the humor of the crowd. The white tall hats a trifle too new. The gray flannel shirts and red bandannas; their clumsy trousers, the hang of their dummy-loaded .45s. They looked so like actors and not at all like outlaws, Tommy thought. A child could tell they were just actors.

He wondered if they wouldn't amuse Nellie. Her father, big Jim Milroy, had been the last real fighting Western sheriff of the county. It was Jim Milroy who ran Tommy Landry to earth and killed old Bart in such jig time twenty years ago. Yes, this Hollywood stuff must surely amuse Nellie Murdie now. And twenty years ago—it might have broken her heart.

Tommy tried to see her face again, but that camera-man's car was between. He had seen it too many times in the gray quiet of the Atlanta pen—he turned to look upon this little mummers' play which was thrilling Colvin Murdie so fatuously. Well, after twenty years of putting Marinburg on the map, perhaps lunching with the celebrated two-gun-shooting Lloyd Fortune was a thrill!

Director Sparks was going down the bank steps to climb into the camera-man's car. Cashier Lund continued to plead that Mr. Murdie ought to be present.

"All right," grunted Sparks. "Go get him." Then to his four spurred and white-hatted players: "All set? Hop to it, Mr. Fortune. In the bank—and then you come out follerin' the get-away. Got that plunder bag, Sim? All right—get set, camera man! And Mr. Officer, please put that kid with the straw hat off'n the lines. The life of a motion-picture director is just one plain hellin' worry, folks." He mopped his head again from the camera car.

"Don't crowd on that lane to them hawsses," warned the assistant. "The camera car it follers, shootin' the get-away, out the road."

The bored Mr. Fortune followed the three shambling bandits up the bank steps. When they dashed out again he was to follow shooting gallantly, but they'd drop him just at the foot of the steps. Everybody knew now what it would be.

Everybody was happy except the drug-store cowboys of Marinburg, who were grieved to learn that Olive Delbert, Mr. Fortune's leading woman, was not here, because she wasn't needed on the big bank-robbery location. Mr. Sparks had loudly proclaimed his regret that Miss Delbert couldn't be here for the Chamber of Commerce luncheon for which he thanked Marinburg from his heart. But when the picture was finished in Hollywood, Marinburg would get a first run in its picture house, along with Broadway and Los Angeles. Mr. Sparks, himself, would see to that distinction.

"I hoped they'd shoot one in the bank," complained Cashier Lund, glancing back at all the dim palm-and-marble glory. "I'm sure Mr. Murdie thought so. He had Jack clean everything. Where can Mr. Murdie be, Miss Sweetser?"

"I hope not——" shivered Miss Sweetser. "Those awful guns——"

"He gets five thousand a week for shootin' 'em," continued Mr. Lund. "Shootin' up Hollywood barrooms—on the lot, they call it."

"He's coming in," gasped Miss Sweetser, and wondered if she'd be introduced. "Where in the world is Mr. Murdie! He'll miss it!"

LLOYD FORTUNE flung open the bank doors in a sepulchral silence. His painted face turned at once to watch his three masked bandits follow. A highly professional ignoring of the gallery at least.

Not a glance did he bestow on Miss Sweetser or Mr. Lund or the remaining

teller behind the cages. But he stopped with a slow study of Tommy Leeds. Tommy, burly bodied and phlegmatic—one sees a lot of men around big-town plain-clothes headquarters who are Tommy's type professionally.

The three masked bandits shot him glances also. Lloyd Fortune tapped his high-heeled spurred boot lightly on the tiled floor, absorbed in this keen scrutiny of the silent stranger.

"Tell Sparks 'camera' out there," grunted Fortune dryly. "And say, you lady, now—do you mind steppin' back by the cages? You, too, gents. We don't want to catch you in them clothes. The camera is pointin' toward the big doors, you understand?"

A trifle of menace in the step he took toward Miss Sweetser. Well, this was better—Lloyd Fortune ought to have menace.

"Oh, certainly!" gasped Mr. Lund, and he hurried Miss Sweetser down the empty lobby. "We can peek out the side window when you fight in the street, can't we, Mr. Fortune?"

"Sure," said Mr. Fortune languidly and looked at his .45. "Peek an eyeful. Say, is Sparks still pannin' that crowd?"

And the movie magazines had said the famous Lloyd Fortune was a Harvard man? Miss Sweetser fled on agitatedly. The clamor out in the street was growing. Director Sparks was bawling at his camera man and mopping his brow nervously—he repeated that the life of a picture director was one mess of care and worry.

"You!" Fortune challenged Tommy Leeds with a cold eye. "Move——"

"Hello, Jakey," murmured Tommy Leeds. "What's the play, now——"

TOMMY never finished the sentence. He had been standing, hands in pockets, and the butt of an automatic in the hands of another man fitted neatly into the throb of his left temple. At that he came up crawling on the tiled floor, groped weakly for a rail, and then collapsed back to watch dizzily what was happening at the farther end of the lobby.

He thought he heard a muffled scream from Miss Sweetser, and a perplexed protest from Mr. Lund. But he did not see them. With the three movie bandits the bank employees had vanished behind the grille-work.

Tommy wasn't sure he heard anything against the flicker of his reeling senses. As to getting on his feet, that was impossible.

Then, six paces away, gun out and watching him stealthily, stood the celebrated Lloyd Fortune of the Westerns. What the three bandits of his cast were doing behind the bank grille appeared to be of no interest to Mr. Fortune. He listened to the delighted cries of the crowds out behind the shaded windows where Director Sparks must be telling them the latest Hollywood wheeze, but his eyes went from the helpless Tommy Leeds to the rear corridor of the bank from whence, now, came a low murmur, and then two indistinct figures.

Lloyd Fortune slipped to the corner of the caged inclosure and there stood with his gun pointed at Tommy Leeds, who was out of sight from the corridor. The automatic menaced Tommy in silence broken only by the mutter of the three fast workers before the face of the open vault. Tommy knew it without seeing.

Even at that he tried to shout as President Colvin Murdie of the Stockman's Bank rounded the corner. The gray, gaunt head of Bald Jack May was just over Murdie's shoulder—grinning.

Grinning. So was Mr. Murdie. Even when the tall Lloyd Fortune swung viciously out with his gun straightening to Murdie's face, the banker continued to grin delightedly. Even when Lloyd Fortune yelled warningly Murdie's teeth showed broadly.

But make-up and costume might fool any Hollywood star. And Bald Jack May had done wonders with his patron. Murdie was brown from the sun of the wide, free open spaces where men are men at the eighteenth hole. The worn fringed chaps, and old gray shirt, the battered sombrero and the dulled gun belt—Murdie

swung about and shoved a rusty .45 in each hand up under Lloyd Fortune's nose.

"Shove 'em up! Hands up!" shouted Murdie riotously.

Then his merry eyes widened, his jaw dropped. He must have been looking straight into the cold level stare of Lloyd Fortune's own. Menace, they would call it on the lot.

And Tommy Leeds groped to his knees, muttering thickly, a hand out to clutch Mr. Fortune's boot. Then a gun cracked.

Tommy felt the acrid spit of the powder on his own lips just as the picture star crowned him again with the steel butt. As he went down again Tommy thought he saw old Bald Jack May hurling himself upon Lloyd Fortune. And the other three screen players swinging out from the grille-work for the bank door through a film of smoke.

Tommy remembered crawling through an odd silence toward the doors, getting a hand to the knob and not having strength to turn it. Then old Bald Jack coughed. They were fumbling together at the knob and neither could open it.

Out in the street, cries and shots—and laughter and applause. Curious, that—coming on the cool, dim silence of the bank within!

"Shoved Lund and 'em in the vault," blurted old Jack. "Got the cash—and a get-away. Hear that? Folks think it's playin'—and I'm shot. He got Murdie and me both—one crack."

"Open—door," mumbled Tommy. "Know me, Jack? I'm done in."

"Hell," grumbled old Jack hollowly and mysteriously, and the lights went out for Tommy Leeds.

HE came back through the shadows days later in a bed of the new Murdie Memorial Hospital on K Street. His first consciousness was of a perfume, and when he could identify the nurse he was sure it was not disengaged from her professional primness.

"Damn if he ain't come to, and she just went out," said a throaty chuckle near him.

Tommy turned his bandaged head. Old Bald Jack, in the next bed, was sitting up smoking a cigarette. His gray, unshaven face looked like a death's-head, but he was grinning. Tommy slumped down and tried to remember, to consider what the two of them were here for.

Then old Jack mumbled on. "You and me, Mr. Leeds, were the first guys ever lugged into the new Murdie hospital. The two of us——"

"But the stick up!" said Tommy dully. "Lloyd Fortune——"

"He wasn't no movie actor. He was a Baltimore gunman named Jakey Mizzner. The real Lloyd Fortune outfit was in Fayette, and this bunch o' Eastern yeggs, they cut the wires that mornin' and had this town to themselves after they asked Mr. Murdie to let 'em use his bank. They almost got away with it, too."

"Jakey Mizzner—Atlanta," mumbled Tommy, and stopped.

Old Jack peered at him. "Was you ever in this town before, mister?"

"No," grunted Tommy, and turned his bandaged face away. The strap of cloth was under his chin, and cerebral concussion makes for slow conversation. "No, and I just heard somewhere of this Mizzner. Did they get 'em, Jack?"

"They rounded 'em up near the Oklahoma line. Killed Jakey and the feller who said he was Director Sparks. Got the rest. It seems that gang was trailin' the movie crowd waitin' to pull this on some town. And, Mr. Leeds, with the bank folks locked in the vault and people outside payin' no attention to shootin', they could have got an hour away in them two big cars if it hadn't been for you and me hammerin' at the doors, done in as we were.

"We saved the bank sixty thousand dollars and also Mr. Lund and the girl shut in the vault. Yes, sir, Mr. Leeds—— Leeds, you make me think of a little feller I knew once here."

"Never was here before," repeated Tommy. "And say—all these flowers on that table? Who gave 'em to us? I can't imagine who would——"

"Mrs. Nellie Murdie," grinned old Jack. "She's been here every day. She wanted to thank you for what you did, mister."

Tommy tried to touch Jack's arm. "Look here—has my chin been bandaged up all the time I was unconscious like this?"

"Sure," said Jack. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing! But I want to get out—go home. Don't want to bother Mrs. Murdie, Jack. Thanks for the flowers, but——"

"You won't bother her. She's gone to Europe. She made a last call on us just before she caught the three fifteen train to Kansas City. She used to stare at your eyes, but you always had 'em shut."

"Gone!" Tommy tried to raise himself up. "How come—gone?"

"Well, she always wanted to. And then Murdie gettin' killed by the same .38 that winged me in the shoulder from Fortune's gun——"

"Colly Murdie?" whispered Tommy. "Dead?"

"Say, you ought to seen the funeral," grinned old Jack. "Folks acted like they never knew what a big man Murdie was till he got killed defendin' the bank. It was a great comfort to Mrs. Murdie."

"But," retorted Tommy, "he didn't! It was that Western make-up you put on him that got him killed. It scared Fortune cold. He——"

Old Jack leaned over wistfully to Tommy's side. "Wait, mister. It was me told 'em Murdie was a hero. On account of Mrs. Nellie bein' so good to me, I told 'em Murdie tried to battle the whole gang."

"Oh," said Tommy faintly. "All right, Jack. I'm good at lying myself. Got a little wife back in Chicago. Pretty roses, these we got."

"Wait," grinned old Bald Jack again. "Another little joke. These flowers come from the State pardonin' board, Murdie bein' a member. They got here too late for the funeral, so Nellie Murdie gave 'em to us. Somehow she looked kind o' happy when she went away."

"Isn't life the grand joke, though?" mused Tommy.

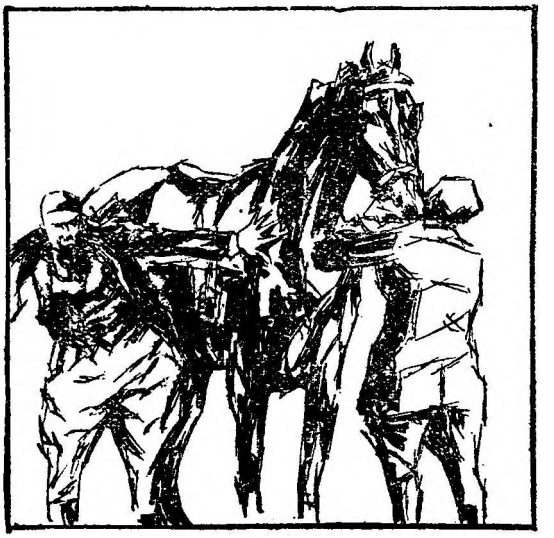
WHAT IS OUR NATIONAL GAME?

BASEBALL is considered to be the national game of America and is commonly supposed to have the strongest appeal to the American sport lover. But in American football even baseball has a rival that is dangerous.

It is estimated that during the summer of 1924 about ten million baseball fans paid admissions to see professional teams play. The baseball season extends over five months, and most of the league teams play in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty games. In only a few cases was it necessary to close the gates of the ball parks while cash customers were outside.

During the fall of last year, about ten million football followers managed to crowd into college stadiums in various parts of the country. Two or three million more would have liked to see the games but couldn't get what the sport writers term "the precious pasteboards." The football season lasts only two months, and the teams only play seven or eight games each.

This doesn't mean that we think that football is more popular than baseball. If the football season were spread out over a longer period the attendance at each game would be very much smaller than it is now. But it does mean that the sport-loving public is learning more and more to appreciate and like games other than baseball. This being the case, it would seem to be a wise move for the men who have large sums of money invested in professional baseball to do some thorough housecleaning and remove conditions such as led to the O'Connell-Dolin scandal that almost wrecked the last World's Series.



Hard-riding Tony

By Mildred Fitz-Hugh

Author of "The High-priced Horse," "Performance Only," Etc.

There's one like Tony wherever sportsmen congregate—the man who's long on glories past and short on hazards present.

HIS real name was Anthony Stowell, but we boys at the Greenfield Hunt stables called him "Hard-riding Tony." That was just behind his back. We wouldn't have dared use the name to his face or he'd have known we was guying him.

He was the queerest bird I ever run up against in my ten years' experience as swipe and exercise boy. To see him come swaggering down to the stable in a pair of lemon-colored breeches, cutting at his boots with a hunting crop sort of casual-like, you'd have thought he'd ride to hell and back again, while the truth of the matter was, the sight of a barn door made him uneasy.

Lots of folks wondered why he hung around horses all the time, seeing as he was so short on nerve. I never could figure it out myself excepting that he *wanted* to ride worse than any man I ever met. I often heard gentlemen who stayed at the club where he had a room, say he never talked nothing but horse. And he was a walking encyclopedia when it come to dope on the big races.

Another point about Tony, he was tremendously stuck on his riding togs and he couldn't very well wear 'em if he switched to golf or basket ball. I'll bet he kept half the tailors in England working overtime making him breeches and coats.

His valet was nothing but a laundress for his chamois gloves. He had a different pair of boots for every day in the week. I seen 'em all lined up against the wall of his room when I went in with a message.

There was just one thing Hard-riding Tony seemed more keen on than his clothes, and that was lying. You couldn't mention a place in this country or England that he didn't say he'd ridden there.

He was always taking trips and the whoppers he'd tell when he come back!

"Got some wonderful sport in Warrenton, last week," he'd say. "It certainly felt good to ride over big fences again." Or "Ran out to Millbrook when I was in New York two weeks ago. They laid a special drag for me and my mount was a corker. A hot-headed thoroughbred that dove a bit at his jumps, but with all the speed in the world."

Of course we knew Tony was lying, but we listened as if he handed us straight goods. You couldn't help liking the old joker. He tipped liberal and was always pleasant. Besides his talk tickled us no end.

I DIDN'T catch on to Hard-riding Tony till after I'd been at Greenfield stables some weeks. Then one morning when I was out exercising, I met him on Molly, a cold-bred hunter of his that was a dub if ever I saw one. I bet one of her forbears got crossed with a cow.

Hard-riding Tony was posting along neatly, cracking his hunting crop and looking like some of them advertisements in a horse-show catalogue. I reckon hacking on Molly he managed to feel quite brave. The only thing in the world that mare was scared of was that she wouldn't hear Tony when he hollered, "Whoa!"

Tony spoke to me pleasant and suggested we jog along together. This suited me and we started across some fields where the club laid a drag every autumn. It was good going and we galloped a ways, Tony crawling up on his horse's neck like he was the jockey who invented the monkey crouch.

He looked a sure-enough horseman. I hadn't paid much attention to the stories I'd heard, for the boys at the stable were always talking, and I lapped up the line he shot me about all the hard riding he'd done.

We come to a place where there was no gate to get through, only one of the regulation hunt jumps. I asked Tony if he'd mind giving me a lead, seeing my mount was nothing but a colt and green as grass.

He cleared his throat a couple of times and said he guessed we'd better not take the fence, as the farmer who owned the next field didn't like folks riding over his property.

"That's all right, sir," I said, not catching on to the fact he was scared. "That feller told me yesterday that so long as the ground keeps dry he don't care how much we use his land."

Tony's eyes did a lot of traveling over the landscape. "To tell the truth, boy," he said, "I guess I'd better not do any jumping to-day. My mare's going sort of lame behind."

I had his number then, for I'd noticed Molly starting out, thinking how cow hocked she looked, and she went sound as a dollar.

We rode back the way we'd come and the farther we got from that fence the more cheerful Hard-riding Tony acted and the bigger he talked. He seemed even tickled with the weather which was chilly and overcast.

"A day like this," he said, "always reminds me of the time I won a steeplechase at Pimlico." Pimlico's the place where they have about the stiffest amateur racing in this country. Trust Tony to pick out a joint like that!

"The crowd there were all afraid I was going to win," he told me. "As two of the riders lay in wait to gang me, I kept back until the last half mile when I started riding for all I was worth. By this time every one else but myself and these two riders were out of the running. The rest had fallen or dropped hopelessly in the rear."

Do you get the picture? Tony coming up hell bent for election on the two men in front, and they planning to crowd him at a jump so his mount would refuse or fall.

"You sure was in a tight place, sir!" I put in, knowing it would tickle him.

Tony agreed, swelling out his chest.

"What did you do?" I asked, kind of excited in spite of the fact Tony weren't lying any too smoothly. His talk about ganging a man in an amateur steeplechase

is the bunk. Most amateurs don't ride well enough to pull rough stuff, and the ones that do are too decent.

"Well," said Tony, "it was this way. Those other chaps couldn't be obvious in their plan or the crowd would catch on. When they saw I was likely to pass them they slowed up just enough to make it look as if they were saving their horses.

"As I came abreast of them one was on each side of me, and that was the way we rode at the next jump. As it was too late for me to risk losing my position by pulling up any, I must get there ahead of the others.

"Understand, we weren't riding at any hand canter. We galloped all right, but steadied our horses just a bit till after we cleared the next fence, a nasty-looking affair with a ditch on the far side.

"However I took the one course open to me. I laid my bat to my mount suddenly and he sailed down on that big jump like a shot out of a gun. We cleared it somehow. The other fellows were eating our dust before they realized what had happened.

"Ladies told me afterward that they hid their faces, for they didn't think my horse could rise to his fence at that terrific pace. From then on we had the race to ourselves."

I sure enjoyed my first taste of Hard-riding Tony's line of talk and I told him so. "That was a swell story," I said.

"Story!" boomed Tony, looking mad and working his eyebrows at me.

"I meant *account,* sir," I apologized.

When we got back to the stable some of the boys seen us come in together. "Bet you five dollars," one of 'em said afterward, "I know the dope old Tony was handing you."

"What's that?" I asked.

"About the time two fellows tried to gang him at Pimlico."

"I didn't make no bet," I answered.

I NEVER could decide in my mind whether Hard-riding Tony got any pleasure out of the fall season. Of course he had the chance to rig himself up in a pink coat and a topper, but then he was more scared wearing them clothes, for it meant he had to follow hounds a ways.

I guess he enjoyed the meet, at any rate. He'd mount Molly early and ride out ahead of the others. There'd be a line of cars, people waiting to watch the start. I'd often be on deck myself when some gentleman took a late train and had me bring his horse out for him.

Tony would dash up and down along the side of the road doffing his topper to the gentry in machines, cracking his hunting crop, and shouting at me, "Where do they throw in, Jack?" He knew as well as I did, but his question sounded good.

The folks in the limousines would lean out and look impressed, but some days when there'd be other riders whose horses weren't so quiet as old Molly, they'd get pretty done when Tony made all that unnecessary racket with his whip.

After they'd thrown in was when I had my fun watching Hard-riding Tony pick the broken rails. No bird dog was ever keener on spotting quail, than Tony on finding gaps.

The queer thing was old Molly jumped just as high as if there was a stiff fence under her. She was awfully rough, always bucked her jumps, but as safe a leaper as I ever seen. Tony sat her in good form, too. You couldn't take no exception to his seat or hands. It was only nerve that Hard-riding Tony lacked.

When there weren't no gaps he'd make a short cut down a road and join the crowd farther on. He'd gallop like mad, cracking his whip, and if there was a hound on the landscape he'd start yodeling so folks in the cars would think him important and maybe take him for an extra whipper-in.

The finish was where he'd come in strong, because some of the horses would be sure to be tired and start smashing rails. Tony would sail over the kindling wood, pull up, jump off Molly, throw the reins to me, and say in a loud voice, "Topping run, Jack!" I guess he figured that sounded English and matched his breeches.

His chauffeur would be waiting for him

with a white polo coat which he'd wrap about Tony's shoulders. Tony'd lean back in the car, mopping his face with two yards of yellow-silk handkerchief covered with hounds' and foxes' heads, while people in machines muttered and rubbered, thinking they looked on a sure-enough horseman.

Of course the gang that hunted were wise to him but they never said nothing to his face to hurt his feelings. Once there was an Englishman out, though, who weren't so tactful. He was coming along behind Tony at a fence, where Tony, not spotting any gaps, swerved, and made for the nearest road.

At the next check I heard the English guy speak to him. "I say old chap, what made you pull out at that jump in the woods? Nerves a bit seedy?"

Tony was wiping his face with one of his sporting handkerchiefs. "Well," he said, "to tell the truth, I didn't like the looks of that new timber. It reminded me of one of the worst jumps in the course the year I rode at Pimlico. Ever been there? Two fellows were laying for me trying to gang me——"

Tony was off on his favorite spiel.

I NEVER knew how stuck I was on the old boy till after I left Greenfield. I had a job offered me in Meadowbank, outside of New York, at the club stables there, and seeing that the guy who proposed it said they'd provide my traveling expenses if I agreed to stay a year, I figured a change of scenery wouldn't do me no harm.

The place was good enough, but at first I felt right homesick and blue. There was nobody around to make me laugh like Hard-riding Tony did.

After a while things got brighter when a new swipe named Pete Bilters showed up. Pete was a comic card if ever there was one, and as big a liar as Tony. He was a funny-looking chap, quite old, and bald as an egg. You couldn't mention no event in the sporting world for the past fifty years that Pete wouldn't pipe up and say, "Sure, I was there! I *seen* it!"

According to his accounts he'd seen so much it was a wonder he had any eyesight left. It would have taken a millionaire to pay his expenses skipping about the country attending every big race meet, to say nothing of prize fights and wrestling matches. The only difference between him and Tony was that Tony always lied about what he'd done, while Pete's hot air ran along the lines of places he'd been and things he'd seen.

Pete kept me so cheerful I'd almost forgotten about Hard-riding Tony when one day the end of the summer after I'd been at Meadowbank some eight months, I heard Guntley, the stable manager, taking orders for horses over the telephone. "And one of Mr. Baird's quiet polo ponies for Mr. Stowell," he finished up.

I dropped the tack I was working on and breezed over to Guntley. "Is that the Mr. Stowell from Greenfield?" I asked.

Guntley said it was. Then he remembered I hailed from the same burg.

"Look here," he said, "I'd like to know about that man. He'll never do anything but go riding on a patent safety animal around here, but he's always talking about the hard riding he does in other localities. Tells some story about winning a race at Pimlico, to say nothing of the outlaws he tames and the rough schooling he does at home. Ever seen him do any of the things he brags about?"

I told him I didn't aim to give Tony away. "But I put it up to you," I said. "When a feller tells you around Christmas when there ain't no Y. M. C. A. tank handy, what a bird he is in the water, and again in July starts sighing for ice skates so he can show the world a real skater, you don't swallow it whole, do you?"

"No," said Guntley, "but that don't apply in this case. There's plenty of hard riding right here for Mr. Stowell if he was inclined that way. How about our steeplechase last year? He did a lot of talking and told the other gentlemen how to ride, but when they offered him a mount didn't he wake up the morning of the race with a pain in his appendix?

"How about our point to point this year that's only four days off? The rest are trying to make him ride because they're sore at the way he talks so big and never comes across himself. I heard them say the other day they wished he'd have to enter to save his face. They're trying to think of a frame-up but I bet he'll wriggle out somehow."

"You can't beat him on alibis," I agreed.

I sure was glad Tony showed up just at that time because Pete got himself kicked by a horse and had to go to the hospital. They took an X-ray of his arm and the doctor told him he had a compound fracture.

"Sure," said Pete, "I knew it all along. I seen it!"

The doctor laughed and said he guessed they wouldn't need no X-rays at the hospital while they had Pete.

Tony looked in good form and he greeted me cordial. He come down to the stable with Mr. Baird, whose pony he was riding, rigged up as usual in those lemon-colored pants of his. "Why Jack," he said to me loud so Mr. Baird could hear, "it brings back old times to see you! Those were the hard-riding days, weren't they—what?"

"You bet!" I agreed. "We sure did wear out the leather!" Guntley and Mr. Baird looked so disgusted at my encouraging Tony I thought they'd fire me on the spot.

"Maybe you can help us persuade Mr. Stowell to ride in the race, Saturday," Mr. Baird put in. "Several of us have offered him mounts but he seems to feel he's done so much racing that he'd like to retire and give the rest of us a chance."

Tony started in hemming like he always did when he got cornered. "It isn't that," he said very modest, "but steeplechasing doesn't hold many thrills for an old-timer like myself."

AFTER Tony and Mr. Baird had left for their ride, a lady named Miss Arthurs showed up. She was a mighty fine rider and kept three horses with us, two hunters and an old steeplechaser called Roderick that a gentleman friend give her when he went to Europe.

Roderick weren't no Grand National prospect, but he was a pleasant ride and so steady he usually finished around third or fourth. It tickled Miss Arthurs to see him run, so she always got some gentleman to ride him for her.

She looked upset that morning. Her cheeks were flushed and she kept swishing her stick against her boot.

"Guntley," she said, "I want to consult you about Roderick. Mr. Prince was coming up from Virginia to ride him for me on Saturday, but I just had a wire from him saying his father's ill and he can't leave. What am I going to do this late in the day? All the men around here are supplied with mounts."

"How about Mr. Stowell?" Guntley suggested, with a wicked gleam showing in his eye.

"The dressy-looking gentleman who's visiting Mr. Baird?" Miss Arthurs inquired. "He looks like a sportsman, but I didn't know he went in for racing."

"I guess you ain't never talked to him, miss," Guntley said with a grin. He nodded at me. "Ask Jack about Mr. Stowell. They both come from the same place."

Miss Arthurs turned to me with a worried frown. "Is he really any good cross country?"

"You get him to tell you about the time he rode at Pimlico," I said, trying not to let Tony down before a lady.

Miss Arthurs cheered up at that. "Oh," she said, "if he's ridden at Pimlico he must be excellent. I'll get Mr. Baird to introduce him to me, so I can ask him."

"Pardon me, miss," Guntley put in, "but in this case you'll have to do some persuading. Mr. Baird and the other gentlemen asked Mr. Stowell to ride and he turned them down. But you being a lady, it might be different."

Here a mean look come in Guntley's eye. "Maybe if you was to ask him outright, miss, before a number of gentlemen he wouldn't dare say no."

MISS ARTHURS thought that a good idea. Next day when she saw Tony standing outside the stable with a group of men, she got hold of Mr. Baird and sailed up to Tony. "Mr. Stowell," she said after the introducing was over, "I want to ask a great favor."

Tony bowed and said no act within his power would be a favor where a lady was concerned, particularly—here he made an extra deep bow—when the lady was young and handsome.

Miss Arthurs beamed, and said: "Then I'm glad it's settled. I'm sure Roderick will give you a good ride and I think he's lucky to have such an experienced jockey. My colors are violet and green. I'll have my chauffeur leave them at Mr. Baird's for you."

I had my eye on Tony and I wondered why he'd never used a weak heart as an alibi for he looked like it would quit working any moment. Before he could speak one of the gentlemen who was a steward of the race clapped him on the back and said: "That's mighty decent of you, Stowell! If you hadn't volunteered your services we'd have had to let Miss Arthurs ride, herself, and we'd all hate to see a lady take such a risk."

Tony didn't look as if the mention of risk bucked him up any. Of course a lady never would be let to ride in a steeplechase, but Tony wasn't the one to deny it. Mr. Baird took his turn at thumping him over the shoulders.

"Riding for a lady's a big responsibility, Stowell. Whatever happens you mustn't disappoint her! Let's go back to the house and have a drink to the success of Roderick and his jockey."

Tony made some excuse to stay behind and soon as he was alone with me he collapsed against the barn door. "There's a horse I want to show you, sir," I said, winking at him to follow. He went with me sort of dazed and I took him in a tack room and shut the door.

I was sorry I brought him there when I remembered the pictures hung over the bridles. Guntley's brother-in-law broke his neck steeplechasing in England and Guntley had tacked up some enlarged photographs of the accident.

Tony rolled an eye at them and his teeth begun to chatter. I set him down in a chair while I dug in my hip pocket. I told him it was good stuff. One of the boys from Canada that come with the Craddock string give it to me.

Tony took a few swollers and it seemed to loosen his tongue. "Jack," he said, "this is an awful situation! What am I going to do?"

"You might get took sick," I suggested.

Tony shook his head. "I did that last year."

"Then there's only one other thing as I can think of," I said. "Take the first train out of here and go to some new sporting place where you haven't been before."

"There's nowhere left in this country that I haven't been," Tony groaned. "All through Virginia and the East as well as at home they know me for what I am, Jack—a bluffer and a damned liar!"

Tears were in his eyes and I wished I could help him, but the only advice I had was for him to buck up and ride that race so as to show the world that whoever said he was a four-flusher were liars themselves.

He agreed he guessed he'd have to go through with it. "But, oh, Jack, the fences are so big!" he moaned, "and I never took a big jump in my life."

"Sure, you have!" I told him. "Molly always cleared them split rails as if they were a solid four foot six. You've jumped as big as any of them obstacles in the course, only instead of timber underneath there was air. But the motion was just the same."

That cheered him a bit. "Thank you, Jack," he said. "I'd better go back to Baird's and drink to the funeral of Roderick's jockey."

I laughed hearty. "So long as you can crack jokes, sir," I told him, "it's a sign your nerve's keeping up."

YET though I spoke encouraging, I was fearful for Hard-riding Tony. He hung around the stable most of the time

those next two days before the race and he seemed to lose weight just while I looked at him. His eyes were so scared I used to see 'em in my sleep at night. He'd follow me around and whenever he got me alone he'd start looking for comfort and asking my advice.

"What would you do, Jack," he'd say, "at the water jump? Would you fly it or steady your horse a bit?" And, "Jack, I don't think it pays to crowd too much at the fences, do you? Isn't that the way a man gets the worst falls?"

I told him I weren't no authority on steeplechasing, but that it looked to me like it was the fellows who crowded the hardest that come in first. "You leave it to Roderick!" I said. "Cross-country going is A B C to him."

"I'm afraid it will be X Y Z for me," Tony would croak. "Jack, if anything happens, will you write my old mother in California?"

"You oughtn't to carry on like this," I'd keep telling him. "The course here ain't nothing compared to the one at Pimlico."

He'd look at me kind of funny at that but a bit more hopeful. I guess he'd told that story so often he almost believed it himself.

Saturday morning the sun come out strong which was a relief to my feelings about Tony. Nothing saps a man's nerve worse the day of a race than to hear the rain clatter on the roof and to know that every moment the course is getting heavier and the take-offs more slippery.

It was a busy day for us all, and Pete Bilters showing up with his arm in a sling didn't help matters any. He couldn't do no work, but come around to find out what was going on. He'd want to know the history of every visiting horse that had been shipped to us for the race, and ten minutes later I'd see him stick that eggshell head of his into a stall and hear him tell the boy in charge how he'd seen the horse win a point to point in Canada two years back. It made a great hit with the visiting boys and they give him so many cigars and drinks that he was jazzing around like a bald-headed grasshopper.

HALF an hour before the race Tony arrived in a car with Mr. Baird and Miss Arthurs. She was the only one of the three who looked like she'd enjoyed her lunch. Mr. Baird was riding himself, so his face was quite serious.

When all's said, steeplechasing is no child's game and I've seen some of the best jockeys appear at the scales so glum you'd think they'd just come from making their wills.

Tony got out of the car last, rigged up in Miss Arthurs' violet-and-green colors, which were gay enough, but you couldn't look at Tony long and feel cheerful. His face was the color of mud when it's dried on your boots, and his eyes reminded me of glass ones I'd seen at the optician's once.

Miss Arthurs seemed extra happy. She carried a box of Domino sugar under her arm which she said was for Roderick if he won the race, and she kept saying brightly as if it pleased her: "Our course this year looks *very* sporty, doesn't it, Mr. Stowell?"

Tony made a sound in his throat like a death rattle and mumbled that he'd step around to Roderick's stall with me to have a look at the tack. I shut the door and he wiped his face with his violet sleeve while he propped the green one against Roderick's shoulder. I guess he couldn't have taken no pleasure in a sporting handkerchief just then.

He focused those creepy glass eyes on me and said in a voice like he was talking in his sleep: "I'm only getting what I deserve after all my bragging, Jack, but it doesn't make breaking my neck any the easier."

It give me the shivers to hear him carry on so. Then I noticed how the tree outside Roderick's stall was splashed with sunlight like a dappled roan, and I heard the band playing "California, Here I Come!" Roderick's ears went up and he started prancing and shimmying with excitement.

I got such a thrill I wished it was me going to the barrier in that violet-and-green shirt of Miss Arthurs. "You'd better be getting weighed out, sir," I advised Tony.

He walked to the door of the stall, where he turned and faced me once more. His hands kept opening and closing as if they were trying to take hold of something that weren't there.

"The worst of it all is, Jack," he said, "no one believes in me or thinks I can ride a decent race!"

"Miss Arthurs wouldn't have asked you if she hadn't thought you was pretty good," I suggested.

"That's true," Tony agreed. "Yet somehow I don't care, where she's concerned. I shouldn't talk this way about a lady, Jack, but I find Miss Arthurs most unattractive. She's so damned cheerful!"

I WALKED out with Tony and seen him headed for the scales. Once I thought he wouldn't make the grade when he passed the ambulance. He took one look at it and made a shy like a scared colt.

After that I fetched Roderick, who capered out of the stable same as a three year old. His green cooler with Miss Arthurs' initials give him as swagger a look as any of the visiting animals, and we joined the parade of boys and horses that was circling around the paddock back of the grand stand where folks watched a flat race.

I seen Tony again standing on the side lines with some other men. It was pretty warm but he had a heavy coat wrapped about his shoulders, and he looked all hunched up as if a cold gale was nipping at his spine. He was smoking so continual I feared for his wind.

At last they blew the bugle for the steeplechase riders to mount, and Tony come over to us. He got into the saddle like it was an electric chair, and as I was adjusting the leathers Miss Arthurs appeared, looking as cool as a cucumber.

"They say the water jump's a foot broader this year," she told Tony with a grin. "I hope Roderick makes it all right! He very nearly went down there last time."

Tony slumped an inch lower in his saddle and he give her a look like one of them wild animals in a cage that's so scared and mad it ain't safe to stick your hand between the bars. Miss Arthurs shook her box of sugar at Roderick and then she walked up to some of the other riders. I guessed by their faces she was telling them the glad news about the Liverpool.

When they called out it was time to form in line for the parade to the barrier, I was still hanging on to Roderick, for he threw his head around like a snake that's looking for a place to strike and I didn't think Tony had heart enough left to control him if I let go. I felt some one bump into me sudden, and I got a whiff of alcohol that I hoped weren't lost on Tony, for it was near sufficient to give one a jag. Pete Bilters planted an elbow in my lower ribs and wheezed in my ear: "Say, who's the bird on Roderick you're playing nurse maid to?"

I looked at Tony quick to see if he'd heard but he was in sort of a trance. Pete got my goat with his patronizing airs, so I said grandly: "Where have you been all these years that you ain't never heard of Mr. Stowell, him they call 'Hard-riding Tony?' He won a big steeplechase at Pimlico."

"Is that so?" said Pete, cocking a respectful eye at Tony. I was watching him too, but for another reason. Roderick was still raising hell and as Tony seemed as if his upper story had stopped registering, I was afraid he might come off before they dropped the flag.

THE other riders was all in line so I had to let go of Roderick who did some fancy side-stepping to join the rest. It was just as Tony headed Roderick for the barrier that Pete hove into view and sailed up to him.

"Say," he said, swinging on to Roderick's bridle, "I'm putting my money on you for third place."

"How's that?" Tony asked like some

one spoke to him in his coffin and he tried to answer. "You think Roderick such a good horse?" His voice was harsh and anxious but a bit more reassured.

"Roderick's all right, but it's the jockey I'm betting on this time!" Pete declared. "Say, I was there at Pimlico. That was a grand race! Sure, I seen you win. 'A man that can ride like you done at Pimlico,' I've been telling the boys, 'isn't going to be eating dust in a little affair like this!'"

All the time Pete was jawing Tony kept staring at his face sort of puzzled, but soon as he saw Pete weren't laughing at him, he began to look pleased. Then Roderick come down on Pete's foot and Pete let go the bridle like it was a live coal, Tony straightened in the saddle and his chin seemed to get a sudden lining of concrete. He appeared as bold as any of 'em when Roderick waltzed by the grand stand.

Roderick played up so at the barrier he was facing the other way around when they dropped the flag which made his getaway none too promising. But he sailed after the rest at a good clip.

Luckily he jumped easy in his stride, so Tony didn't appear to have trouble staying with him. At the end of the first mile, though, when they come by us, Tony was still trailing the others and he weren't pushing Roderick the way he ought to have. I figured he was worryin' about getting into a jam and spilling off at the fences.

Pete begun to act mighty nervous about the five dollars he'd placed on Tony for third, so when Tony and Roderick come pounding by, he started hollering, "Come on there, Stowell! Ride like you done at Pimlico!"

I GUESS Tony heard, for he turned his head a little. Then he leaned over farther on Roderick and give him the bat.

Roderick flattened his ears and commenced to gallop in earnest. Them next fences, Liverpool and all, he cleared at such a pace it made me dizzy.

By the time they'd reached the other side of the course they'd passed two horses. That cheered Pete and he hollered some more. Naturally Tony couldn't have heard him then, but it seemed like every time Pete opened his mouth Tony got lower on Roderick and urged him harder.

Second time they come by us Roderick was fifth from the front horse and Pete was dancing like an Indian. He'd gotten some of the other boys shouting by now and they was all bellowing: "Come on there, Stowell! Ride like you done at Pimlico!" Tony started in using his bat again.

At the end of two miles one of the front horses fell, and I got mighty scared for fear that would kill Tony's nerve, but he was riding so hard by then that lots of the folks in the crowd were yelling. He crowded two riders at the next jump so bad that one of them near rode over the third who'd gotten a spill and who was lying by one of the wings too groggy to get up.

Tony finally finished third, Mr. Baird and a man from Virginia coming first and second. But they was on faster horses and the crowd was all talking about Tony's riding and the brilliant finish he'd made.

Soon as they pulled up I grabbed hold of Roderick and you couldn't tell who was sweating harder, him or Tony. Roderick looked pretty mad at Tony for using his bat so free, but he was too tired to do much but blow and foam and roll a mean eye.

Tony snorted and puffed like an engine that's letting off steam and his face was the color of the red brow bands Mr. Baird uses on his ponies, though of course he wore a grin that spread the width of his face. Miss Arthurs kept thanking him and offering sugar to Roderick, who slobbered foam all over the sleeve of her dress.

But it was when Pete appeared that Tony looked happiest. He leaned over and grabbed his hand like he never meant to let go again.

"You haven't gone off on your form one bit, sir!" Pete crowed.

Tony beamed and slipped him a ten-dollar bill. "For old-time's sake," he said. "In memory of Pimlico!"

So far as I remember, that was the last lie Tony ever told. I went back to Greenfield the next summer and I never heard him hand out no more yarns.

I sort of missed them. Funny thing was, he wouldn't even talk big about the steeplechase at Meadowbank. But maybe that's the way human nature goes. When folks has really done something to be proud of they don't have to keep their spirits up by braggin' about it.

Another story by Mildred Fitz-Hugh in an early issue.

THE INSEPARABLES

RAYMOND T. BAKER, director of the mint under Woodrow Wilson, and Joseph P. Tumulty, who won fame as secretary to Wilson while Governor of New Jersey and president, are the Damon and Pythias of Washington's political world.

"Those two men," somebody in the National Press Club observed recently, "are inseparable. For years they have had lunch together at the same table in the same hotel every day that both of them have been in town. Their friendship and admiration for each other is a beautiful thing to see. They renew one's faith in human nature. They shatter the old cynicism that there is no such thing as lasting friendship. They live up to an ideal. They are an inspiration!"

"Yes," agreed Colonel Franklin Pierce Morgan, man about town and dean of the newspaper correspondents; "those two boys are as inseparable as a pair of pants."

IN SEARCH OF TREASURE

ONE summer when Colonel Fred E. Purchas, Wall Street operator, sailed for Europe with his wife, he fell in with an Englishman named Ellyson who was on his way to the Congo rubber fields. Ellyson was full of money and the spirit of adventure. Day in and day out he haunted Purchas with stories of the millions that could be picked up in Africa.

"Look here!" he said. "I've just had ten thousand pounds left me. With that fifty thousand dollars and a stake put in by yourself, we can go down there and in a few years be sitting on the top of the world with money and jewels running out of our overstuffed pockets. And the fun, Purchas! That regal feeling that comes from bossing the native 'boys' around and owning the whole camp! On top of that, a search for treasure! Come on. Go with me!"

"But I can't do it!" said Purchas. "I've got a wife. I can't leave her. So stay away from me. Stay away from me, man! If you don't, I won't be able to resist your invitation."

Three years later Purchas was riding across town in New York in one of the last of the old horse cars, and was roused from his absorption in the stock news by an extremely English voice saying: "Fares! Fares, please." He looked up and recognized immediately the man who had so grievously tempted him to join in that search for treasure.

"Ellyson!" he exclaimed.

"Purchas!" Ellyson shouted, and, as they shook hands, added with a grin: "Another search for treasure with you! Where do you live now?"

Then, without a moment's hesitation, he stripped off the leather belt holding his metal cash box, handed it to the driver of the car and stepped off with Purchas.

"I went broke in two years," he explained, "and you look more like a gold mine to me than anything I've seen since I met you on that boat!"

By

WILL C. BEALE

The Frontiers

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MOTHER.

ONE day, about this time, marked the passing of Margaret Legere. There came a morning when she did not rise from her bed. She died the next day.

Margaret Legere simply let go her hold on life. Watching her son day after day and feeling helplessly the iron impregnability of his heart, had borne constantly and heavily on the sources of her life. She wanted to go.

Père Andre came. He heard of it through one of the men who had gone to the Legere home to find Legere. And Graciette Dorion came, quietly, sorrowfully, and smoothed out the tangled domestic affairs, and put the house in order.

No other women came to the house of the infidel. Here the faithful could retaliate, and straightway they turned ferocious.

Toward dusk the woman had turned to her son, sitting by her bedside, stilled, immovable, like a great husk that might have been burned out. She spoke evenly, simply, and on her words faith came to make appeal.

"I hate to be leavin' ye, Davy, lad," she said. "It's a lonesome road for a man like you. I don't suppose now ye'd be willin' to jest say ye'd try again—try to git back your faith, your God, and your man's place in life?" There was a long, silent pause, then: "Would ye, Davy, lad?"

No answer from the great figure by the bed. Legere had fallen forward with his face in his hands. All his soul was desolate before a great empty loneliness.

The woman was speaking again in softest, gentlest pleading. "I'm goin' to be seein' your father, Davy, soon. I'd like to be tellin' him how all was right with ye—I'd like him to be proud of what I'd tried to make of ye—after *he* went."

Stillness again.

"As it is, Davy, lad, I—I—don't see jest how—jest how I'm goin' to face him; and —oh, I'd been longin' fer it so—longin' and prayin' that—that when the time come —and I should see him——" The softly stumbling voice seemed swallowed up in its clouding apprehension.

A story of human conquest in the North. In four parts—Part IV.

of the Deep

A low, strangled, tearing cry came from Legere's throat. "Oh, mahm," he cried in the tender manner of his little boyhood, "it's all gone, and the place where it was is all empty! I'd be willing to die if I could only tell you different, but I can't lie to you—I can't—I can't, because soon you'd know!"

The eyes of the woman on the bed had closed slowly. "Ye can tell me ye'd try, son. That's all—I'm askin'. I'd like to know ye'd always be doin' your duty, that ye'd never be desertin' one of God's creatures when they needed ye. I'd like to know——" Père Andre and his little aid came in from the kitchen. The woman sensed their coming. "Ask him," she murmured, feebly, "to tell me—that he'll try—before I go."

The priest sat down and pressed the woman's hand. All through his sorrowing office of prayers, he was conscious of the great human creature that held unchangeable throughout the period of sacredness and devotion, with the chilling immobility of a half-embedded rock.

Then came silence and waiting.

The somber eyes of the priest were bent on the knotted figure of the man like scorching coals in the intensity of their waiting. Every fiber of his body, every impulse of his mind was bent to the one thing; it seemed the very stream of his life itself was being sent forth to beat upon the other in a flood of overwhelming exhortation. He waited for the son to make some sign. And waiting, prayed, from his soul.

Across the bed, the girl was kneeling on the floor. She too had prayed, constantly. Her uplifted face had a divine quality about it. And she, too, stilled in her prayers, was waiting—waiting with a growing awe at the continued silence.

The knotted figure strove continuously with his clenched hands; the veins on his temples stood forth like tangled cords, his face began to drip water. The girl's lips moved on, although a white, despairing fear was stealing across her face. The priest watched, unceasingly. Then:

Out in the kitchen, a wet stick snapped softly in the stove. It sent up a sibilant little rocket of hissing.

The tiny sound threaded in through the dead silence with the shattering impulse of

a bomb. The terrible tenseness was broken.

The eyes of the three turned quickly to the face on the pillow. The woman on the bed had ceased to breathe. Margaret Legere had gone along down the road on which there is no return.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BUDRO BECOMES ALARMED.

SAUL BUDRO had begun to cast uneasy glances across the cove to the fish stand of David Legere—the crude, uncouth structure that stuck to the rocky shore over by Legere's house compactly, like a great brown heron's nest. For Saul had finally dragged himself forth from enforced seclusion and started things going again with a bang.

True, he was not the old Saul—his huge, stocky bulk was broken somehow, and he walked oddly, like a crab. But Saul's spirit was intact, and, now, fuller of battle than ever—and things over by Legere's began to worry him.

He had learned of the fish buying, and that Legere had made money on it. And then the herring activities. Saul knew what they meant. If, after all, Legere should ever get together his one, sole, single cannery, it would mean certain extinction for one Saul Budro. So now, more than ever, was Saul bitten by fear and worry.

One day Saul had jerked his great bulk out upon the end of his wharf. It commanded a view of all the cove. He sat in the sun. And then, before he had much more than taken out his pipe, his whole attention became fixed, set, with the baleful intentness of a snake.

Across the cove strange things were going on on the shore site below the old Legere place. A colony of men, like ants, were operating busily on the beach running down from the fish stand of David Legere.

Little knots were burrowing antlike into the rocky shale, starting excavations for piles; others, still antlike, were fastening upon imbedded rocks and boulders and dragging them about; others still—antlike still—fastened upon great logs up beyond the tide mark and were tugging, yanking, pulling and carrying them down the beach. Plainly recognizable among the inferior ants, loomed the great stalwart figure of the boss, overseeing everything at once.

Something like a knell came coldly into being in Saul Budro's heart. He knew the preparations to be actually under way for an extensive wharf—the big pile of lumber, landed while he was interned—to be designed for an extensive building; and now, he noted the great black iron stack which would some time cap a boiler.

Saul Budro knew intuitively what all these things were to be for. And something told him his hour had struck.

With sullen fires beginning to glow within him, he watched. The damned Frenchmen! Look at them, leaping obsequiously about at this man's curt bidding, when in reality they hated him, scorned him, loathed him, and would grill his everlasting soul over hell coals forever, for a heretic.

And the man himself! The fires in Budro leaped to flames. He had never forgotten the man—never could, now. His mind might, but his body wouldn't let it.

Saul couldn't sit. He got up and lurched impotently about. While he had been watching, a boat had landed from the schooner that had made into the harbor the night before. He was conscious that one of the men left behind to make her fast, had loitered up the beach and was sitting hunched on a log just along from the Budro wharf. And this man also was watching the distant Legere operation.

The vessel must have brought the iron stack and probably some of the lumber. This man might know something. Saul lurched up the wharf and stumbled down upon the beach.

Somehow Saul sensed the hatred in the man watching Legere, as soon as he came near him. The man's crafty, unshaven face might have been thinking Budro's own thoughts. Budro spoke peremptorily, as was his wont. "Did you bring in that stack and material over there?"

The man looked up surlily, but his surliness vanished when he saw who it was. "Yes, sir. Some of it."

"Any more off aboard?"

"Yes. A boiler."

"What's the place going to be—do you know?"

"A sardine cannery." The man's shoulders hunched down sullenly. "I hope the first fire in the boiler blows its owner to hell!" he observed, acidly.

Saul started and began staring. "Why?"

"Oh, I dunno. I don't like him. I hate him like hell." The man's hands crept absently to his throat.

Saul Budro was appraising keenly the flat, weak face, and crafty, shallow eyes. then: "What's your name?"

"Sleeth."

Saul nodded. "So—so?" he remarked. "I've heard of you. All right, let's talk."

He sat down on the log.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BONE OF DEATH.

GRACIETTE DORION had been rising early, putting her home in order and—going to work.

The swift-planned work quarters which Legere had outlined to Robertson for the skinning and boning of the herring cure had become a reality. The great lofts over the Gowdy, Doan & Robertson stores had undergone a hurried transformation. Two stoves had been set up in the big main loft, for already the mornings were beginning to come quite cool; work benches had been roughly constructed along the four walls, and already the place was humming like a beehive with activity.

The cure had turned out a marvel of perfection. The heavy runs of herring had been of a quality and condition ideal—not overlarge, nor overfat; solid, and firm-meated. They had taken salt to perfection; they had "strung" with scarcely any gill breakage—no loss; they had "smoked" into a hard, firm cure; by no means oily, they showed, when skinned, a ribbon of gleaming silver down each bronzed flank.

They were brought from the houses in great, crisp heaps of wonderful bronze and gold. In the cool of the early morning before the women had taken their places, they lay on the benches along the white-washed walls in great, dull-glimmering heaps, as of strange, ancient riches—flat tones of amber, and high lights of brass; glints of gold like a goldsmith's platen; glimmer of copper and tinge of bronze—the red-gold bronze of the vivid undermetal.

Graciette had been quite enraptured with it all from the start. She was in charge of the work. She had learned very rapidly. Her deftness and ready comprehension had stood her well in a work that was wholly new to her, and Robertson had set her to teach the others.

On a cool morning in October, Graciette had arrived at the loft early. She had not slept. She had been up long before dawn, had put her house in order, and now sat waiting. A couple of days ago she had run a fishbone under her nail, and it had become very painful.

Graciette sat by the stove, getting warm. Old Guite, who built the fires and brought in the work, was babbling on endlessly while pushing his broom about the floor. Graciette shivered occasionally. Old Guite sweeping round the stove noted her bandaged finger.

"Oh, là, mamselle," he crooned, pityingly. "Fishbones are bad! It is I that know! And of such a painfulness, such a misery. Now," he bent over her hand, critically, "take a good strip of fat pork, mamselle, and cover it thick with pepper, and tie on tight, and—pst!—all is gone!"

The women began to come, bustling and chattering like guinea hens. They donned their coarse aprons and the places at the benches filled up. Madame Flavie Boudreau, the little Tamant's wife, occupied a place of vantage near the center of one side. Madame Flavie consented to lend her presence to the new work only when she saw practically half the women of the village at it—and later, saw the first pay envelopes.

Graciette passed slowly down the line

inspecting the work—seeing that the skin from the two halves of the fish was peeled off to the uttermost speck, and the halves then trimmed of waste and adhering bones to an attractive neatness. The women loved Graciette—a large statement to make about women *of* a woman—but the eternal sweetness and consideration of Graciette could never attract anything but love.

Madame Flavie was one of the "packers" who packed the finished product in neat wooden boxes lined with heavy waxed paper. With shrewd selection, Graciette, who knew the tall grenadier's rigorous housekeeping, had selected her and the Widow Saulnier for this important work.

Now, Madame Flavie remarked the white linen on Graciette's finger. *"Mon Dieu, chérie,* how thy finger is swollen! But they are terrible—fishbones! Come home with me this noon, *p'tite.* I will make thee a nice poultice of bread and milk. That will draw it all out."

At the noon hour, though, Graciette thanked her kindly. She smiled and shook her head. "It will be quite all right, Madame Flavie. I shall not go home this noon. I will sit here by the stove and get warm."

At the door, Madame Flavie peered back over her shoulder, her face set forebodingly. "I like it not, *ma chère,"* she said to the Widow Saulnier. "My old father was given to say that a fishbone imbedded was like to be a death bone!"

All through the afternoon Graciette seemed working in a haze of fiery vapor. And at the same time she seemed cold—shivering. She was very tired, too, and her thoughts seemed most unaccountable in the things they followed.

For instance, she thought constantly of David Legere. She had never before allowed herself to think of David Legere—that is, save to pray for him always. All the dear thoughts that, in the beginning, had drifted constantly through her mind like the incense from flowers, she had suppressed, rigorously. She felt it being unfair to that other woman—a poaching, as it were—thievery, if you will.

Now the rigid guardian of her mind was strangely lax, strangely fitful, and she found her thoughts pouring out and around David Legere with helpless lavishness. She *wanted* him. She was so terribly lonely. Life held so little after all without love. And thereupon her mind would be seeing him, his figure, his face, his eyes and his hair, in a thousand paining little intimacies.

At six that night, big Jean, the boss from the sheds, spoke to her kindly. "It must be that you have taken cold, mamselle. Your face is flushed. And thy hands—if it is a bone sore, it is well to be very careful. Take some peppers from the bottle of pepper sauce and bind on overnight. They always draw the pain."

Graciette felt oddly strange when she reached home.

Next day she was not at work.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DRY BLOW.

WAR—grim, sinister war, was openly on between Saul Budro at one side of the cove, and David Legere at the other. It became a recognized thing in St. Anne's

As the days went by the entire life of the village seemed to hang upon it.

The war between the two men themselves was a war of deathless hatred and hostility, of one man against another. Besides this, there was the conflict between their respective aims, which was of far deeper significance, touching as it did the welfare of others. But there was a third warfare going on in which both were pitted against an adversary that was common to both—the passing of time and the coming of winter.

Since his knock-out, Budro had been hampered constantly. His master planner, Desmond, had decamped hurriedly in the famous dénouement. A hurried, secret command from Halifax had recalled him away from trouble—Gowdy, Doan & Robertson could not risk having their connection with affairs known.

Saul's builder also had returned down shore. So work on the construction lagged, until Saul could get about again

himself. Then, to reorganize his crew took time. Saul had lost several weeks.

As things were now he could get no farther than completing the substructure before cold weather made building impossible. But toward this much, Saul bent every impulse of his soul.

Legere? Since he started, Legere had gone steadily on. He had passed relentlessly over, into, through all difficulties. To the men of the village The Infidel might be a grossly evil thing among men—but he certainly was a good fighter, and the man does not live who does not reverence that last, no matter how deeply he may conceal it.

Besides, Legere paid well. And he hired every man he could crowd on the job without retarding things. And his wharf was going up, was about completed, in fact. And the cement foundation for his upright boiler was soon to be laid, and after the setting of his boiler and the cement work for his tanks was in, he did not fear so much the advent of freezing weather. By then the bulk of the heavy work would be completed, and the rest could be done before snow fell, or before the herring struck in the spring.

And now Budro was beginning to see certain handwriting on the wall. If Legere's building should be continued to completion, Saul knew that he would find a way to finance his first pack; St. Anne's would boom and Saul would be hunted out of the coast like a wharf rat driven by the tide. And this new contraband of liquor—and its thrilling growth!—and the money in it!—gold mines!—Saul Budro would willingly have bartered his soul for some way out.

Any actual interference was out of the question. No man tampered with David Legere nowadays, not even Saul. Saul's talk with Sleeth a while back had held possibilities, but Sleeth had run on down the coast to return later, and until he came back——

IT was that very week the weather broke, and broke bad. There came a night when every sign of rotten weather known to the men of St. Anne's seemed to be set. And in the morning the coast was a raging battle line of battering seas. Then set in a "dry blow," the bugaboo of many sea coasts, when the wind raged up and down the shore in a fury wholly demoniac.

All through the day Saul Budro sat secure in the lee of his place across the cove, and gloated. His own wharf construction the wind would not stir, nor would it harm Legere's. But Legere's half-completed building——

Saul watched Legere's new stack, but half guyed the day before, go down with a toppling bang, strike across the edge of the wharf and buckle into an inverted V. He saw the wind rip off little flurries of shingles and unsecured boards, and snatch them sailing, wildly, crazily, through the air to land lightly far back from the shore, and blow on in erratic skips and hops. And he saw——

A great, roaring blast came, that filled the cove as it might a bowl on its side. The half-boarded sides of Legere's building buckled and bulged. The roof rose majestically, folded back on itself, and a great fragment crashed to the beach and went careering away, over and over, to fall flat, and skid grindingly up the rocks. What was left of the building structure crumpled feebly up, and ever and anon fed the gale with choice fragments.

Saul Budro rocked in frenzy of joy.

And then, from his vantage point directly across, Saul saw something else—something that stayed in his mind to the day of his death. In the tenseness of his gaze across the cove he became conscious of a sudden change in the customary aspect of things—a swift, tiny change, somehow, in the black sky line against the dead gray.

And then it struck Saul what it was: the tall cross on the headland, the weather-beaten symbol of the *calvaire* for years, had been broken off above the ground; he could make out the splintered stump. Even the atrophied spirituality of Saul Budro was awed for a moment. It struck even Saul as an omen of ill.

And so it proved; in a way, that no man could foretell.

Toward evening Saul saw the big figure of Legere making toward the wreck, when at length the blow was becoming spent. Legere stood alone and surveyed the ruin.

None of the villagers consorted with The Infidel in this his hour of desolation. To them, this was a direct visitation of the wrath of God. If one doubted—well, let him wait and see.

But one man came—Tod Robertson. He blew along, holding onto his cap, and leaped from shelter to shelter. He caught Legere's arm and drew him into the lee of one of his old sheds.

"I'm sorry, old man—damned sorry." He pressed the arm in his grasp in fervent sympathy. Then: "Have you got any money? I know about what all this stands you, and about how much you have made."

The Infidel shook his head. "No. I have no money, m'sieu'."

"Well, what are you going to do, then?"

"I know not. Only that I'm going on."

Something terrific suddenly flamed in Legere. He seized an old fragment of dried cod lying on a fallen hogshead. He gathered it into his long, powerful hand and held it out. The fingers gripped into it, steadily, unbelievably, until a little trickle of moisture dribbled out, before the awe-struck eyes of Robertson.

"I'm going to take life like that, m'sieu'," he blazed, "and I'm going to squeeze victory out of it—like that!"

Robertson's face might have been staring at the virile gods of old in his thrilled reverence. And now his gambling instinct was aroused. "How much will it take to put all this back?"

"Nearly two thousand dollars, m'sieu'." Legere waited a moment, swallowing persistently in some powerful emotion. "If you mean that you will lend—I—I will pay you, if I live."

"I know that, all right." Robertson wheeled. "All right. Figure up and let me know."

"M'sieu'!" Legere was looking altogether strange in the gray light. He was holding out his hand. "I—I make, perchance, but a poor friend, m'sieu'. But—but—I thank you."

In that one moment of vast relief an impulse of mighty gratitude had sprung to life in the soul of Legere, and he had forced himself to act on it even before he should think.

Robertson had gripped the hand with instant fervor. He shook it powerfully, grasped tight in both his own. "That's all right, old man." A dead quiet exchange of glances, alive with things that could not be expressed, then: "I'll see you in the morning."

But next day Robertson had left St. Anne's.

CHAPTER XLI.

DREAMS COME TRUE.

IT was just after dawn next morning that the Widow Saunier knocked at her lodger's—Tod Robertson's—bedroom door. "A man to see you, monsieur."

Robertson was just dressing. He looked out into the little kitchen. A big, burly figure waited him.

"Come in," he called out.

It was Jo Michelle. Jo shut the door behind him. "I have come for your help, m'sieu'," he began in careful French.

"For what?" Robertson eyed him curiously.

Jo's under jaw seemed to tremble. "For one who is very close to us both, m'sieu'—Graciette Dorion."

Robertson dropped a boot. "What is the matter with her?" His face showed suddenly startled—white.

"She is very sick. And she is all alone." Jo's burdened face fell to the cap that he was twisting nervously in great, shaking hands. "I have done what I could, m'sieu', but—but—I am frightened in my heart, and—I—I cannot think."

His face came up, mournful like a great dog's. "Your brain, m'sieu', is—is trained to think, always. It came to me that you would know what—what to do."

Robertson's hand, snatching at his boot laces, were trembling visibly. He finally managed getting dressed. By the door, the big messenger's eyes were wandering unseeingly over the array of silver dressing-table luxuries, glinting under the lamp

on the old-fashioned bureau. Robertson spoke.

"Don't give up, old man." He ran a soft kerchief around his neck for a tie. "We'll do something."

Some emotion almost broke Jo Michelle. "I—I knew you would help, m'sieu'. I, Jo, would give my life! It would not help, but it is all I have. You—can give much more."

Out in the kitchen Robertson spoke swiftly to the Widow Saulnier. "Never mind the breakfast, madame. Mademoiselle Dorion is ill, and we are going there. Will you come, too, as soon as you are able?"

Graciette Dorion lay on the old lounge in the little sitting room. She tried to sit up when she saw Robertson coming in, but he took her gently and forced her back. Her face was flushed. Her pupils were very large as though from pain. Robertson noted her swollen bandaged hand. "How did you do it?" he asked in a voice of concern.

"A bone under the nail, monsieur—down at the shop." She closed her lids wearily. "Without doubt it will be all right, but I shiver, always, monsieur, and ——" Her voice faded out to a weary little sigh. "Ah—the pain!"

"Where is the pain?" sharply.

Graciette's well hand traveled gropingly across her breast. "In my arm, my armpit, monsieur—and now here, and here." She touched her shoulder, her side.

Robertson's face had gone suddenly gray. He rose and went swiftly to Jo Michelle by the window.

"Jo," he said, "go to Narcisse Comeau. Tell him to hook up the horses to his express wagon and put a mattress in it, and put in plenty of robes. Tell him to drive up here, ready for a trip out. I want him, himself, understand!"

"M'sieu'!" Jo's face was working badly. "Down shore to St. Etienne is a doctor. Let me go, m'sieu'. I can make it, and fetch him. M'sieu'—m'sieu'—let me go! I want to do *something.*"

"No, Jo! He couldn't help much if you got him. I'm taking her out to the railroad—to a hospital—the best one along the irons! It's the only chance. Go, Jo!"

The man crumpled. "I knew it in my heart!" he muttered, and ran.

Madame Saulnier had arrived and was taking her shawl off in the kitchen. Robertson stopped her.

"I am taking mademoiselle to a hospital, madame. Will you return home for food, and bring my grip, and pack in it mademoiselle's things that she will need? And will you hurry, please?"

The girl on the couch had risen and was staring wildly. "Oh, monsieur, I cannot let you do this thing. It—it—is——"

"Can't you?" he muttered, between set jaws. "Tell me," firmly, "where will I find your warmest clothing?" The girl succumbed, weakly.

Fifteen minutes and Narcisse Comeau, calm and efficient, wheeled his horses deftly at the Dorion door. In the little sitting room, as they prepared to lift her, Jo Michelle suddenly put them aside.

"M'sieu'—Narcisse—let *me!* It is all I can do."

They stood back. Jo bent over the couch and raised the little bundled figure to his breast. He stood one moment thus, his face upturned, his eyes closed. Then, with infinite tenderness he carried her out to the wagon.

He stood looking on while they tucked her in swiftly, silently. The horses started spiritedly. Madame Saulnier, in a maze, followed on, absently, down to the road. The team passed along the street and off up the road to the upper woods.

Jo Michelle turned on the door stone and reëntered the house. The little place. now, might have been a shrine with the holy presence removed, and the light gone out.

Jo Michelle dropped to his knees in the center of the floor. The water from his eyes began dribbling hopelessly down his face. A little wool shawl lay on the table The man groveled toward it on his knees, encircled it with his arms, and buried his face in its folds.

"Au revoir, my angel," he groaned, brokenly. "It is finished!"

IT was thirty miles to Lacrosse—ten through the woods over a road that was scarcely more than a trail, and then twenty along the general direction of the coast. Narcisse Comeau negotiated the difficult woods road with the skill of a charioteer.

The journey out to the traveled road was made swiftly and silently, without incident. Robertson rode in back. He was disposing his own body so as to ease the girl; he would not let her talk.

At Lacrosse, the sole train for the day connecting with the main line for Quebec and Montreal, had gone. It was here that Narcisse proved his worth.

"There is another train on the main line, m'sieu', late this afternoon; it connects to get into Quebec in the morning. The nearest station is Castleton. From here, it is forty miles. There are big lumber people here. They will have automobiles that m'sieu' might get. I will see."

A few minutes later Tod Robertson stood in the little general office of the lumber people telling his story, amid grave-faced attention. "I *must* make this trip," he finished. "If necessary I would be willing to *buy* the car."

"You won't have to do that." The manager, himself a young man, rose from his desk and gave a few concise orders over a phone. The car arrived a few minutes later. It was a closed car of some distinction, with a chauffeur.

WHIRLING silently through the fall-denuded country, passing swiftly almost like the flight of a spirit, through a world constantly new, constantly different, Graciette Dorion was at times completely detached from her pain. In Narcisse's wagon, she had lain inert. deadened, with life, its hardness, its pain, hovering her broodingly.

But now, in this keen, spiritlike flying, she smiled wanly—she could not help it. When she was a little girl—little enough to be playing with dreams—she had reached the very acme of delight in visioning an automobile and herself in it; well—here it was!

She had never known much about automobiles but, in her child's dreams, it was to be one of fineness and beauty. She looked now at the soft upholstery that lined this car luxuriously like a nest; she noted the crystal flower holder, the efficient speaking tube—ah, this must be the very vehicle of her dreams—surely nothing could be finer! She had prayed that there would be a chauffeur; well, there he was! And a young cavalier to be with her—oh, he was to be fine, handsome, noble—attentive to her every wish.

Tears filled her eyes. She reached out and startled young Robertson by touching his hand with her well one. Surely no one could ever have lived so kind as he.

He looked at her questioningly from his brooding eyes, and she told him her thoughts. She told them whimsically, even to the detail of her little girl's dream companion—they had been so vague, so poorly comprehended, but so wonderful, so enchanting always—and now it had all come true.

Her speech brought Robertson sharply out of his gloomy thoughts. And, now, all the things checked in him for hours—nay, days, weeks, came out. He began speaking, recklessly, with the headstrong disregard of youth. "God, and I might have given all these things to you before!"

She had turned her head slowly out the window. "That could not have been, monsieur," came to him, gently.

"Couldn't it! *Couldn't* it! It *could* have been, and it *should* have been. Listen, little Graciette—I have been trying to be wise, trying to be straight, to be decent, and for your sake absolutely right about this thing, and I have only been—a fool!"

"No, monsieur—no!" Graciette's face out the window had settled into a grieved, expectant stillness.

"I knew from that first day when I held you—the day your father went away—that I loved you. You can't fool your real love things, Graciette!"

"No—ah, no, monsieur!"

"And mine had sprung to life that day in a way to take my breath, to set me groggy—with just gladness——"

"Oh, monsieur! Please——"

"But I didn't have sense enough to go right back and tell you, then and there. I wanted to be so upright, and noble, and on the level about everything——"

"Please don't, monsieur. Please be—be kind."

"Kind?" He was clenching his hands together in abject self-abasement. "If I had taken you out of it, then, as I should have done, all this——" He swallowed a moment. "Oh, little kid, when a man sees some one he loves suffering—suffering poignantly and terribly—just beyond reach, just where he cannot help—why, it—it does things to him—terrible things, cruel things!"

Silence now from the girl at his side.

"I have thought of you every day!" He choked. He could not finish.

But she herself was finishing, in a little thoughtful voice, as if, indeed, she might have been reading his own mind. "On waking, perchance?" she was intimating. "On ending the day?" It came softly—but with gentle conviction, as though she herself had caught a breath from the dear field of reminiscence.

"Yes, that's it!" He caught at her suggestion. "And beautiful thoughts—inspiring thoughts—that—that——"

"Thoughts that brighten each day and hour, that make a steadfast radiance out of the future?"

"That's it!" he agreed. "You have it. And at times I have just *suffered* to march right up to your place, and just take you in my arms," fiercely, "and hold you!" He pressed the back of a hand vacantly to his forehead.

"Close?" came to him barely audible. "Close, and closer, until you forgot time and place, and knew only eternity?" The girl fell back, her face a calmly tragic, little white blur against the cushions.

"Ah-h!" he gasped. "You've known it all, little girl—you've got it all perfectly." His mood changed. He was back in the present, determined, invincible, with a man's fierce intensity of purpose. His hand fell and closed tight on hers.

"Well, I'm going to make good for all the time I've lost, for the fool I've been. And you're going to *have* all these things you've dreamed of, every last one!"

The little hand clutched his closer. "Monsieur, dear monsieur, I must speak. And, oh, it seems I would rather die than say to you what I must." She stopped a moment. "But I know in its every detail the way of love as you have told it—I have learned it all. But"—life grew hushed in the little place—"but not through love for you, my dear, dear friend. Ah, I thought you knew!—but for David Legere. And my heart is sealed."

Robertson sat very still. Life seemed dropping swiftly down within him, seemed falling low—like mercury in an ice-chilled tube. Outside, the world was running by dizzily; now sickeningly, in bewildering confusion. Then——

He felt her body. It had tilted stiffly against his. He drove his own misery from him, and supported her. Her face was dead white. She was barely conscious. The pain was scathing her body like withering fire.

Robertson fumbled in his pocket. He gave her one of the tablets he had obtained from the doctor in Lacrosse.

IN Castleton they got aboard the sleeper for Quebec. A nurse, secured by wire from Lacrosse, accompanied them. Robertson had also managed the drawing-room.

Graciette lay on the couch. In the periods of drugged ease she noted gratefully all the wonders of luxurious travel that Robertson's thoughtfulness had secured—and again the things of young-girlhood dreams came drifting back.

Travel she had dreamed, travel in splendid luxury, although she hardly knew what that represented. Well, here it was! And her dreams had included a serving woman to anticipate her every wish, to undress her, to brush her hair. Somehow she had never pictured any serving woman as being like this serene, marvelously capable nurse—but here she was!

At night Graciette looked at the glittering little tray of food. She did not wish to eat, but the dainty beauty of it—oh,

her soul loved it! There was a single red carnation gleaming among the silver like a great jewel. She wanted to cry at it all.

Her arm was terribly swollen.

IN the evening Robertson spoke quietly to the nurse and for a moment she left them.

He knelt by the couch. Graciette smiled, although she seemed to be doing it through the mind, through the features of some one else. The nurse had given her tablets regularly, and once a thrust of something in her arm.

The nurse had bent and kissed her tenderly after that last, as though in sudden abandon of profoundest pity. And then she had got up hurriedly, and turned away. And Graciette—had *understood*.

Robertson knelt down and began with the frank, unrestrained emotion of a boy—one that suffered. "I have been in misery all day, little Graciette. It's—it's been pretty bad! At first I—I thought I could not stand it. And then—I forgot everything but *you*, little girl, and the fact that you, too—in addition to all the other things life seems to have heaped on you—that you, too, had suffered in your love, as I was suffering. And it made me want to—to——" Robertson choked miserably.

"Oh, I'd willingly die for you, Graciette!" In a moment he was calm. "But then, it came to me—I don't want to hurt you, dear—but I know about Legere, and that he loved some one else. And that leaves me free to keep on loving you, to fight for you, *over* everything, *through* everything!"

"Oh, monsieur," she pleaded, gratefully, "I thank you *so!*" She pressed the hand that held hers, and made answer with unwavering truth. "But even if I could say to you to hope, it would be—be quite useless now, *mon ami*. For now something else had drawn nigh to stand between us."

"You mean?" Robertson's throat was clutching spasmodically. "You mean *this?*"—indicating her arm. He knelt closer. "It *can't* come between us, Graciette. I'm going to fight—fight till my last quiver of life is on the table—staked. And that is what I came to tell you." He pressed his lips to her face and got up.

"Oh, monsieur," she was murmuring. "How good God has been to let me know—such love! But—but—the thing stands waiting, monsieur!"

The nurse came in.

That night in a little white cubicle in the hospital, a nurse and an interne remonstrated gently, but uselessly, with a young man who sat in a grim, little, hard, white chair by the door and would not leave.

He had laid down his mandates in a hard, firm manner of iron. He wanted it understood that this patient was to receive every attention of treatment known to science. That if the hospital did not include such among its own facilities they were to procure it wherever it existed.

They listened gravely, courteously, noting rather the young man's own face—gray, haggard, seamed with deep lines—than the tenor of his remarks.

And now it was dusk. There was a smell of ether abroad in the air. The doctor was talking in a low tone with the nurse. The little patient in the bed was moaning in semiconsciousness.

By the door the man's mind wandered vaguely in its dead weariness—and he almost lost himself. The nurse was passing out. The doctor sending her for some one. Then she was back, and——

Robertson was stark upright, staring as a man might in a nightmare. The nurse was bringing an assistant in the person of a young probationer. They were standing before him. And the young probationer was Justine Ducharme.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE THING BETWEEN.

IN a relieved interval of the silent night watches, Justine Ducharme had talked to Robertson, and in turn had listened, seated on a settee in the corridor just outside the little room. She explained briefly her own presence in Quebec, and in the hospital.

She had left St. Anne's the morning after Legere had learned the truth. One of her uncle's men had put her aboard the power schooner far up the coast. Her face grew very intense as she went over it all.

"I came back to Quebec, monsieur, but I have never returned to my people. It was necessary that I work. I should have died otherwise. I wished to work at something that would keep me occupied every hour of every day. And so I came here, and was taken on.

"And I *have* worked! And the good God has helped me!" She glanced at the gray, care-lined face listening stolidly on the seat beside her. And, for a brief instant, something she saw there diverted her. "You—you are suffering, monsieur."

He turned slowly to regard her out of hollow, burning eyes. They were all together in his mind—Graciette, himself, this girl, and the poor wretch of a Legere. "Have you too then learned—about suffering?" he asked, grimly.

Her face went even whiter, and her lids came slowly down over her eyes. "This you could not have known, monsieur," came from her lips, "that I *loved* David Legere, that I loved him with all my soul, that—that I love him now."

Robertson was dragged to attention in spite of himself. "But how could you do the thing you did?"

"I could not help myself. Fate had me bound, monsieur, bound hand and foot. And the only way I could save him was by getting him away. We were leaving that very day—when—when he was told of my part in it." Her hands knotted strivingly in her lap.

A flood of pitying tenderness came over her listener. He put a hand over hers. "Forgive me, mademoiselle. I am sorry." Then, as realization dawned on him: "If what you say is all true—God! how you must have suffered. And—poor Legere!"

Robertson was staring pensively straight ahead far down the dim corridor. "Ah, mademoiselle, what a force was ordained of love! For when it goes amiss"—his head settled wearily back—"when it is love in vain, it kills with a sureness stronger than death. You loved Legere—so did my little girl in there; I love *her*—so, I know now, did poor Jo Michelle. Legere loved you, and so did the man Lacasse; and all—all seem to have suffered of their love. Ah, God—what's the answer?"

In a moment she touched his hand. "Can you—will you tell me just a little word of *him*, monsieur?"

Robertson roused himself. "Surely, mademoiselle." A moment, and then: "Poor Legere! I do not know but what it has cost him more than us all. We suffer in ourselves, and we have our life experience, our teachings, our philosophies to bear us up.

"Legere has none of these things. He had but the one thing in his life that answered all—his faith. And I am afraid, mademoiselle, that this mix-up cost him even that."

The girl started around on the seat beside him, clutching his arm with terrible eagerness. "Oh, no, monsieur! Do not say it! It could not be! His faith was his very life—the very blood of his heart!"

ROBERTSON nodded grimly. "I believe you, mademoiselle. Legere knew nothing else. Well, it's gone, mademoiselle! All gone! He speaks of it as something that had simply died in him, and the place it occupied is empty." He paused a reminiscent moment. "When you fool a man like that, when you mock him in his very vitals, you simply kill his faith in life, his faith in faith—kill it, mademoiselle," gently.

"I doubt very much if Legere could come back even if he wanted to." A moment, then: "St. Anne's hates him. I never knew before that your people class such as he a good deal lower than the devil himself. They—why, they call him 'The Infidel.'"

There was a bleak, stony suffering on her face—a thing so poignant that Robertson felt himself deeply moved in spite of himself. There were no tears. Justine Ducharme's life of bitter struggle had left little time for tears—for weakness.

She began speaking at length, slowly, as though to herself. "I could not believe it could have hurt him so—and, ah, merciful God, how much I have to suffer for." She turned at length: "What—what is he doing? What was there left for him to do?"

"He is fighting. That is his creed now, mademoiselle. He says it's the only one. You know how he *can* fight. But, too, you are probably wise enough to know that fighting gets one nowhere. It never has. You simply stack up so much to be fought that it topples over on you at length and you go down and out."

He told her briefly of matters at St. Anne's. "A gale just before we came away put him out of business. He had no money. It comes to me now that I offered to help, but this drove everything else out of my mind."

A quiet moment, and the girl was suddenly alive, eager. "You say he needs money—that if he had some money it would save the winter to him?"

"Yes," he said, wearily. "I think he had things coming his way when the gale broke him." A deep silence, and at length Robertson indicated the little room. His mind had closed again to all but that.

"What's going to happen in there, mademoiselle? I want the truth, understand—the truth! You have heard the talk—you can tell me something."

The girl's face had relaxed into a great pity. "No one can tell, monsieur. We can only hope." She put a hand on his—the concerned probationer nurse now. "It is almost dawn, monsieur. You are worn out. Go get yourself some food.

"Nothing will happen while you are gone. I know it. And—and I shall wait here until you return."

Robertson had fallen back and closed his eyes. "I don't want to leave," he murmured, half audibly.

"Please, monsieur! She would wish it if she knew. And if there is any change I promise to come for you, to tell you, at once."

He pulled himself together, got up, and lurched away.

WITHIN the little room the nurse on duty stepped to the bed. The patient, looking like a little child between the sheets, had stirred, had raised a hand slowly as if to regard it, as if to test her consciousness—and let it fall. The nurse laid a cool hand on the flushed forehead. Graciette reopened her eyes.

"Will—will you ask moniseur to—to come to me?" she panted.

"He has gone for coffee, mamselle. He will return presently." She turned to the stand and the hypodermic.

But the patient held up a feeble hand. "No—no, mamselle, *please,*" she pleaded. "Not just now. I—I must talk to him. Please——"

The nurse hesitated. Never before had she been so moved as by the care of this gentle little child-woman; her heart had ached regretfully, unremittingly. "But, my dearest one, you cannot——"

"Yes, I can stand the pain—a time. Ah, mademoiselle, please—if you have ever loved——"

Outside, Robertson was back. The girl, Justine, met him hurriedly. "She is asking the nurse for you, monsieur. Go. And will you, if you can, explain about—me?"

Robertson went in swiftly. The nurse stared in uncertainty, but already was he on the floor by the bed, his mouth pressed to one small hand.

Slowly Graciette drew it loose and it came to rest on his hair. "I have wanted to ask you, monsieur. Will you—will you help him? Will you help him find life—true life again?" Her body was beginning to burn again as with fire; but her face lay suddenly serene. "You—you know, monsieur: all my life I have wanted to—to help, and have been forbidden——"

"Oh, little one," the man groaned, "you *have* helped! You have helped *me!* God knows how much!"

She smiled a little, weakly. "It makes me very happy," she murmured. "Now, if through you, I can help *him*——" The terrible searching pain seemed rushing now upon the very sources of her life. "Promise," she whispered faintly. "Promise that

no matter what befalls, you will be his friend—that you will help him to—to come back. Promise."

"I promise." He raised his head. "You will see how much I can do, little one."

"And that other—Justine!" faintly. "If she could only——"

"She suffers, Graciette. I have seen her. She *loved* Legere all the time with all her heart. She was trapped!"

"Ah, *ma pauvre!* I am *so* sorry!" The pain was twisting her body, slowly, inexorably, as if it were bound on a wheel. She kept her face to his until she could gasp out: "I know now—that I have helped—a little—at—last."

The nurse stepped forward. Robertson got up. His face, looking on, was filled with a terrible sternness. He turned away. A doctor entered and he marched toward him.

"I must have the truth, monsieur! I *will* have it!" he demanded. The institutional discretion, the impersonal absence of feeling maddened him. "What are her chances?"

The man regarded him kindly. "No one can say, monsieur. Everything is being done." His face softened in sudden sympathy. "We find an area as of old bruises on the arm, where at some time the arm has been injured. In these bruises the circulation is impeded somewhat. It is that which makes matters a bit more serious. But be of good courage, monsieur. No doubt——"

Robertson had turned away. The old bruises were probably the hoofprints of one Felix Dorion. If he could have but had him there! Robertson clenched his hands in impotent anguish.

AT eight o'clock in the morning Justine Ducharme was in her own little quarters, changing for the street. There was a look of calmest determination on her face as she smoothed her hair, standing before the mirror.

At length she knelt and unlocked a small trunk in the corner. Well down in the bottom was a little tin box. She took it out and emptied the contents on her bed—a few trinkets, some letters, a large envelope stuffed with bills.

She stared at the latter lying before her on the bed as if all it meant was pictured upon it in cold reality, as if it visibly denoted itself—the hard cash for a man's soul.

Saul Budro had given it to her the morning of the day that things had burst in St. Anne's. In a big, jovial mood of impending success, he had given it to her just as it was. There was fifteen hundred dollars. It was the sum agreed upon in her mad, bitter eagerness to be rid of Cesaire Lacasse, the sum Cesaire had expended on her schooling.

She had taken it from her uncle, meaning to give it to Lacasse before she fled with Legere. Here her heart contracted mightily, her eyes closed tight at recollection of what had happened. Lacasse had gone mad and betrayed her at the last moment.

Slowly her eyes came open. She picked up the envelope and balanced it in her hand. In breaking the pact of silence, Lacasse had relinquished all claim to either herself or repayment. And the money had lain untouched. She could not have taken a dollar of it if she had been starving.

But now—— She suddenly crushed the packet in both hands and pressed it to her breast. She raised her face reverently and murmured: "God grant this may bestow some little bit of the atonement that, alas, I never shall."

At nine o'clock Justine stood before a teller's window in one of the banks. She thrust through the money. "Will you be kind enough to give me a bank check for that amount, payable to this name; and will you also be so good as to type me an envelope to this address?"

The name she slipped through was Legere's, and the address St. Anne's.

NIGHT had fallen, two days later. It seemed to Robertson, hunched on the hard settee outside Graciette's door, that the hours dragged themselves torturingly from out the very recesses of his own

heart. He had been there for an eternity —waiting outside the door.

Early that morning they had thrust him out. And the door was closed. Through the day an increased activity had taken place in and out the door. And at each entrance, each departure, his eyes had hungered for a word until——

His body was drugged with weariness. His mind seemed functioning sluggishly, apathetically. All day, the ebb and flow of ether fumes, stealing upon him out from nowhere, and receding from him equally stealthy—the strong, cloying, acrid *presence* that hung heavy and sweetish in her air passages, drenching him with languor, then clearing away slowly like sun through the fog—seemed at length to have gradually buried his consciousness deeper still. And now, with the added let down of nightfall, came a strange little change within him. He was conscious of it keenly, even in his exhausted stupor.

Some little quality of his mind had become detached, as it were, and was functioning vividly, brightly, blithesomely almost—like a thing apart; on its own. And it seemed to have to do with a different world entirely, a world of gay little happinesses, a world wherein appeared actual fulfillment of bright little desires, of subconscious dreams.

He was seeing keenly these bright little things—clear and sharp cut, like little pictures growing into sharp reality in brightest sunlight; and he was seeing them too, without effort. They seemed to be pictures of Graciette Dorion; of Graciette Dorion, and life; and himself, Theodore Robertson. And in each and all Graciette was of such ethereal loveliness always; Graciette in soft beautiful frocks; Graciette in a garden—a garden so beautiful that it made something in one ache—oh, terribly. And behind the garden was a house—a home—a home beautiful like the garden.

But somehow, up to now, he couldn't see into the house, couldn't *get* within it —couldn't get within it even in visioning. The garden was so utterly lovely; it held him tranced by its loveliness.

But now, Graciette was gone from the garden. And now he was getting into the house—with his mind. And now—it was very easy—he was *in* the house. It was beautiful in the house. Many things he loved were there, but there was a sadness about it—a sadness because of a waiting. And in an inner room Graciette was in bed; and there was a doctor and nurses.

And, now, out of the room came the doctor; he was a smiling happy doctor, and from within the room—the waiting Robertson's heart gave a great gladdened leap —from within came out to him the quavering little cry of a tiny voice, a tiny new-tried voice, bleating its first little challenge to life itself. And a great joy was upon Robertson, waiting in the beautiful room. It seemed that an actual, tangible radiance had burst about him in transcendent glory, had——

Roberson started up from the settee. He had been asleep. The door was open —the hospital-room door. And something had happened.

He was inside, swiftly—dazed, confused. A nurse barred the way. "No! Please! You cannot see her, monsieur! You would not wish to see her!"

He stopped stock-still, and life ran low within her. The thing had come to stand between them—between Theodore Robertson and Graciette Dorion.

It was death.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A REPRIEVE.

THE INFIDEL sat hunched on a rock. He was a living replica of Rodin's "Thinker." Below him lay the wreckage of his plant.

He had been organizing the wreckage. He had got it disentangled. And all alone. But rebuild it he could not.

The Infidel was tattered and disheveled. In more than one place his white skin showed gleaming through his disarray. He was fighting a mental battle of deadly intensity. Massive, powerful, hunched upon himself, he was "The Thinker."

That morning the first cold had struck

St. Anne's stingingly, like the snap of a whip. And it had precipitated a move of grave importance on the part of some of the fishermen—a vague thing of ominous portent that for some time had been hanging over the life of the village like gray, banked snow in a November sky. They were preparing to go away from St. Anne's.

Weeks ago, when Saul Budro had put over his raw deal on the entire life of the place, the men of St. Anne's had decided that God's hand was against it. Then, for a time, this was forgotten during Legere's flurry of business through the fall; for the moment he seemed to be succeeding.

But how could a man succeed who was fighting God? It was not to be. And the gale that had smashed him flat was but the answer.

So they planned to leave—some of them. Things were better at many places down the coast, better and easier. St. Anne's, in the hands of a Chinese smuggler and rum runner, on one side, and a black infidel on the other, could never by any possible chance amount to anything.

David Legere had learned of it laboring alone among the wreckage of his plant. He was powerless to offer anything that might hold them. Without money, he might have been a worm in the dirt.

Robertson had been gone several days. There was no knowing when he would come back. And any day now, with the cold set in, might make it too late.

A man came skirting about Legere warily. Old Jean Corteau dropped a letter by The Infidel's foot and sidled away hurriedly. Safe to one side he crossed himself precipitately, and made "the horns" with his scraggy old forefingers, to ward off the evil eye.

The Infidel regarded the letter fixedly. It was hard to detach his mind from its treadmill. Presently, he picked it up and ripped it open, and a check fell out.

He stood up, did The Infidel, stood up to the uttermost inch of his great height. And he stretched himself gloriously. And he was no longer the submerged "Thinker." In two minutes he had become the David Legere of a fortnight ago—the big, smashing, irresistible force that was fighting to build a cannery, and was winning out. That's what he was! And in ten minutes all the village knew it. And in less than a half hour, half the village was over in the vicinity of the wreck—and before the hour was up were at work again, antlike, ant eager, as before.

The Infidel had indeed been scourged of God, but when a man is in dire need of help—and has money to pay—why, what would you?

Legere had received the check with scarce a thought as to its origin, and went forthwith to Gowdy, Doan & Robertson to get money on it. There had come no letter with it. He knew not who had sent it and he wasted no time thinking about it. That he had it was enough. Without doubt Robertson had got it to him. And some day he would pay. That was all.

Then began a frenzied, feverish activity. In two days the cannery wreckage was being restored encouragingly. In four days the place was practically back to the point it was before the gale. And over across the cove, Saul Budro was again on the brink of corroding fury and madness.

On the fifth day the man Sleeth returned to St. Anne's. That fact was not significant, however, until some time later. But things were moving very swiftly. Activities had assumed the momentum of a fly wheel that was like to burst.

That was what happened—the Legere activity burst; David Legere himself and all that touched his life was effectually annihilated in St. Anne's. It all grew out of the return of Sleeth, and it happened in this wise:

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE HEWING AX.

A DAY of rarest Indian summer had befallen among the raw, cold days of late fall.

Early in the morning the utter peace and

harmony of the day had come to impress itself powerfully, even upon David Legere himself—softening him. There is nothing in life that engenders softness in one like the knowledge of impending success. And he was winning out.

To complete his cannery, he had driven himself almost beyond the power of one man. He had converted himself into every sort of workman the job needed. In the early days before the blow, with his great hewing ax gripped constantly in his fist, he had done work on the raw timber equal to heavy mill work; after that, he had mixed and poured concrete; now he was a machinist of grim efficiency, setting the boiler. At dawn it seemed almost as if the day had come like an actual benediction on his efforts.

ACROSS the cove that day, however, things were brewing which had little to do with peace or benediction. The man Sleeth stood in the door of Saul Budro's cabin. He had returned to St. Anne's that morning. He wore a manner of gloating exultation that radiated from him in powerful waves.

Saul Budro felt it—felt it so that he got hurriedly to his feet. "What's up?" he asked.

"I can do it!" Sleeth announced with grinning assurance. "I can stop work on that shack across the cove—like that!" He snapped his moist fingers sharply. "And I can fix things so that St. Anne's won't hold Legere twenty-four hours."

Saul stared. Sleeth's claims were wild to impossibility. But Sleeth's manner was convincing. "How?"

"That's all right—that part of it. I can do it, all right. But first, how much is it worth to you? I'm here to do a little collecting."

When Sleeth left, a few minutes later, his manner of amazing satisfaction had communicated itself to Saul Budro also. Saul loaded up a pipe with fingers that shook with excitement. He knew now that he had his enemy down at last.

Meanwhile, in the reverent stillness of the day, Sleeth was skirting the woodland heights well back of the village, making warily around the cove for Legere's cottage.

Gaining the deserted dooryard, his movements took on swiftness and cold certainty. With the stealth of a weasel he passed into Legere's tool house. He came out bearing Legere's great hewing ax, and started climbing the slope to the headland and the *calvaire* of Pierre Legere.

Sleeth's scheme was an outrageous thing that had flashed upon him earlier in the day when landing below the headland. Now, up upon the *calvaire,* he emerged confidently from the screening spruces into the open. Before him the great weather-beaten cross lay prone on the ground below its splintered stump.

The place of the *calvaire* was screened from the village and the cove below by spruces. Up to now the accident to the cross had been known to no one save Saul Budro directly across, and Sleeth who had come upon it that very morning.

Now Sleeth advanced upon the pitiful wreckage deliberately. Swiftly he wielded the ax—deftly for a few moments. When he finished, both cross and stump showed that the cross had undisputably been hewn down.

Sleeth trampled the chips a moment, and discolored his work slightly, making things look a week or more old. Then he left Legere's ax conspicuously in the dirt by the cross, and passed down from the headland.

A few moments later, down on the shore, a terrified, slobbering old Jean Corteau stood transfixed before Sleeth, listening to the latter's crafty mention of the inconceivable deed that had been done up on the headland in the holy place of the *calvaire.*

Then Sleeth watched him go charging crazily away to see for himself, and, grinning complacently, he made for his boat.

TWENTY minutes later the half-completed cannery of David Legere was sending up a clamor of victorious construction never so triumphant. Twenty-two minutes later Fate had flung athwart

the building a mantle of silence that might have represented a death and dissolution going on for years.

At the turn of the afternoon a thin but frantic little piping of a man's voice had penetrated through the noise of hammer and plane and saw. It reached a shingler on the roof first, and he looked off. At some distance away old Jean Corteau stood on the beach mouthing and screaming like a madman—screaming things unbelievable. Another moment and each individual sound of activity became plucked to silence one by one as though each sound might have been a tangible thing falling off the building into space.

In the dead stillness old Jean was disturbingly audible. "The cross! The cross! Get yourself away from the man who has assaulted God himself!" And on a fresh breath: "For sending him the dry blow—which served him right—he hewed down the holy cross of God himself!" Then, frenziedly, chokingly: "Save yourself quickly from the wrath of God! Come and see for yourself!"

Another moment and men were clambering down and out from the silenced cannery, grave, still faced—detaching themselves from the proximity of Legere as though from a presence unholy, unclean. Stumbling along in growing confusion in the wake of old Jean, they made toward the headland.

They never came back.

Up on the headland, in the place that had been a *calvaire,* came to be assembled half the people of St. Anne's. Men with bared heads stood in frozen silence about the mutilated symbol, and the condemning ax.

Others, together with women, knelt and prayed in deep perturbation of soul. Even McTavish, the Scotsman, peering in from the rear, straightway bared his head.

The thing was inconceivable. It stunned life itself at the very roots. The heretic's soul was his own to damn forever if he must; but in this thing he had attacked all life, all faith—to their way of reasoning, God's very person itself.

In the solemn stillness of the hilltop did David Legere become condemned of his kind forever and beyond all fathoming. It was a process that needed no words, no sitting in judgment. No man in St. Anne's would approach him now any more than he would embrace a leper.

It was the involuntary sentence of their soul of souls—swift, certain—as instinctive as breathing air into the lungs. And it was as sublimely inexorable as a scroll rolled up—rolled up and set with the seal of an everlasting God.

In the somber time of dusk, in the plant that was to go unfinished, the man Legere stood alone. He had just come down from the empty headland. The hopelessness of the thing was crushing him; his project in St. Anne's was doomed forever. He gave little thought as to who might have done the thing on the headland—he had enemies enough—but better than most did he know how far it closed all life to him.

He was alone.

Beyond him, as he stood, the boiler stack was dangling in its fall, unset. It was never lowered. A handsaw rested in its cut, out through the board walls. It rusted there. On a cool breath of approaching night that came to him through the unglazed windows, the bell for vespers summoned to worship. It pulsated sweetly in his ears—and with terrible mockery.

What had he to worship for? He glanced at the great stack, forever deprived of its function; at the swift-thwarted handsaw, that now would rust.

He passed out.

FOR hours that night Legere lay on his bed stark and wakeful. Every fiber of him was groping for solution, for understanding. He had but meant to withdraw from God, and God, if God there was, had withdrawn from him; he had but meant to hold himself aloof from the claims of mankind and lo, all mankind had turned away.

Even his half-stifled regard for young Robertson had turned on him. For on his solitary way home that day Saul Budro, hoping to cut off every possible chance of further help, had stood gloating by the

side of the road and yelled after him in crazy glee the fact of Robertson's connection with affairs through Gowdy, Doan & Robertson. Legere had but meant to live unto himself alone, and now he *was* alone; alone in his house, alone in St. Anne's, alone in life.

And what was the answer? What the trend of it all?

He recalled Father Andre's warning that the man who fights for himself alone carries the seeds of defeat sown in his every act. Could this be true? He recalled Robertson saying to him: "Your setting yourself off from your kind isn't sensible—isn't human, and it will surely get you in the end." It *had* got him.

Whoever had hewn down the cross had figured just on that: that as a heretic Legere would be condemned unquestioned. Such a thing could not have happened under any other circumstances.

Legere got up. He sat heavily on the side of the bed, staring, inert, dumb.

What to do?

He did not know. In every fiber he struggled for a ray of light in the awful black cavern of life. Useless! He paced the floor. If as his mother said, some men needed breaking to teach them—ah, surely was he broken, but as yet he had not been taught.

DAYBREAK came a little later, and with the dawn Jo Michelle stood in the kitchen waiting. "I have been away, M'sieu' David. I have just got back, and just heard." Legere's eyes were staring out the window. "I—I know what it is like—being alone!"

Legere turned from the window. "Jo," he said, "is there a God?"

"Of course, M'sieu' David."

"Then what have *I* done to be damned alive?"

"I know not, m'sieu'."

Legere turned back to regard the sea—the never-resting sea that rose and tossed and swayed, on and on, and never stopped. "Up to now I have only done what any man might do—I refused to believe, but I said nothing and minded my own affairs. Now I seem even to be outcast from men. And for what?" He stopped, and his voice came full. "Now, I am *compelled* to fight, my Jo. It is that or die. The priest said once, 'God may be using the sea as his agent,' and all my misfortunes have come from the sea.

"So it seems I am forced at length to fight it out with the sea—I must live somehow and the sea is all that's left to me. I'm going to Newfoundland, Jo, for the winter herring. Will you go?"

"Yes, M'sieu' David. I will go."

"All right." A moment, then: "It is a bitter country, Jo—that country in winter. But it is all the life I know. I'll come back a man with a place, or I'll not come back at all. And," wearily, "may it be a good fight—and a short one!"

LATER in the day, Father Andre, accompanied by one of the St. Anne's coast men just ashore, strode down from his place on the hillside, down to the little main street where well-nigh the entire village congregated and talked—soberly, low toned.

There was a stern majesty about his bearing that brought a sullen deference. He summoned them all. He stood in their midst, his eyes ablaze with feeling, his white hair adrift in the wind.

"Listen, all," he commanded in a voice of quivering intensity. "You have done a terrible thing in the sight of God, to condemn a man unheard!" He turned to the seaman who had accompanied him. "Speak, Anastase!"

The man faced them calmly, gravely. "A fortnight or more ago, on the day of the dry blow, I had to put inshore below the headland yonder and lay out the gale. The holy cross up on the calvaire was snapped off that day by the wind. I saw it. David Legere was at his cannery at the time. He had nothing to do with it."

The priest spoke at once. "I want you all to make amends. I want every man here to pray for forgiveness, and for David Legere. I want——"

The priest looked up. A wagon had emerged from the upper woods and was

speeding down the slope into the town—the wagon of Narcisse Comeau, bringing a passenger to St. Anne's.

The pair of sweating horses rounded up. The passenger was Tod Robertson. He seemed very white, very tired. He spoke to Father Andre and the people heard:

"I have come back to say that I am throwing my lot in with Legere, monsieur, on the development of St. Anne's. I have made a promise to that effect. Where is Legere?"

A look of sorrowing regret deepened on the priest's face. "No man knows, monsieur. He has left St. Anne's."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE STORM.

THE herring fisherman *Phantom*, out of Lunenberg, was running up the west coast of Newfoundland. Among her crew were David Legere and Jo Michelle.

Legere had come out to battle with the sea. And battle was to be his. The sea was to teach him, profoundly; was to unfold to him great truths through the simple processes of his own reasoning; finally, was to present to him the lesson of all life, ready for his acceptance or rejection. But this he could not know.

It was getting along in December, and the entire coast country of the gulf was fast in the iron grip of winter. The *Phantom* had been long on the way. At times for days at a stretch, she had been hove to, riding out unholy gales.

But still she kept on, heading along into a region of fierce, watery wilds—for no fisherman turns back until the run is made. Now, the Newfoundland coast lay to the east'ard, and the *Phantom* was picking her way north, toward her destination of Bonne Bay.

And now, late in the day, when a run of a hundred miles ought to bring her in, the wind was hauling to the north'ard; it was turning bitterly cold and the glass was falling fast.

The captain stumbled up from below. He sized things up in a trice. "This wind's blowin' straight outa hell," he growled, "but I'm goin' to run on and make Bonne Bay or die tryin'!"

His commands spattered sharply, like buckshot. The vessel came up in the wind, amid the thudding, rumbling thunder of gale-slatted sails. The mainsail was taken in; the riding sail set.

STILL the wind grew. Nightfall—and the jib was put in a jacket. The jumbo was taken off. The *Phantom* rode shackled in the sea like some great sea gull with wings clipped and bound.

Now the wind held a freezing sting like the bite of a knife. Suddenly it leaped to the fury of a gale. In a mad flurry of command, all sail came off the *Phantom* but the double-reefed foresail.

Then the captain sang out: "Below all but the watch!"

Legere separated from the bunch of men. The dog watch was over. It was eight o'clock. "Better let *me* take this watch," he said laconically.

The captain eyed him appraisingly. "No. We'll need a man like you later. Send up Michelle."

Down below, Legere passed far forward and sat down on a locker in "the eyes of her." A man had risen on his entrance and crawled into a bunk. Now he sat with his back against the bulkhead, his knees hunched, his face in the shadow, staring with ever-sleepless eyes at Legere up for'ard.

This man was the sailor, Sleeth. He was already a member of the crew when at the last minute Legere had shipped.

Sleeth had got out of the North shore country. He had left St. Anne's well satisfied with what he had done, and he never intended to go back. But here was Nemesis right on his trail. And his days and nights had become one long nightmare of fear, for something told him that Legere *knew*.

He was right. Legere *did* know—much. Jo Michelle long ago had learned of Sleeth's activities against Legere, and when he found him among the *Phantom's* crew, had told Legere, and warned him.

Neither Jo nor Legere could know of Sleeth's final stroke in St. Anne's, but Legere had begun to connect much of his disaster to this man; he felt that some time he was going to kill him, and as to this, he brooded always. Sleeth felt the weight of Legere's decision as though he had been told, and Legere's somber eyes, always upon him, were gradually unhinging the thing of his reason.

The vessel took to ramming the waves with mighty, jerking thuds. The fo'c's'le floor listed ever and anon to a reckless slant, and the place resounded with the prolonged faint tinkle of loose things—crockery, nails, cutlery—jingling along to a place of rest.

The gale was increasing. Even down below could be heard the never-ceasing scream of the wind in the rigging—the long, swashing roar of seas.

The crew got up at length, lurched about, gripping at the stanchions, and melted carelessly into the bunks. Jo Michelle was the watch on deck. Legere was alone. He did not sleep. Neither did the man in one of the upper bunks.

At midnight Jo Michelle came stumbling down, bringing a raw blast of clean, though freezing air. "Your watch, M'sieu' David."

Legere went on deck. In five minutes he stood lashed to the wheel. All about him was impenetrable blackness, and the sea. It came to be a night that marked an epoch in Legere's life; he remembered it to the day of his death.

Alone in the blackness, his body lashed to immobility, he could only think; but he could think clearly, directly, with the penetrating illumination of a searchlight. And as his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness, he stared at the black, roaring void with calm speculation.

It stirred things in him—great vital things of the soul that he had never guessed—wonder, awe, supremest homage to the might that moved in it. The sea first laid hold on David Legere that night.

Time and time again he watched the empty blackness ahead change; change suddenly from empty blackness to a blackness that *lived,* lived riotously; a throbbing, pulsating blackness that his eyes followed up to toppling heights, heights of slapping, deadly ascent that finally blossomed a roaring, foaming crest, visibly white. And sometimes this roaring, palpitating blackness would snatch the vessel up—up—up—with giddy velocity, until it seemed her spars would pierce the sky; and then she would drop down—down—swiftly down, until the foresail was calmed rapidly in the through of the sea.

And sometimes, again, the blackness would simply come lolloping straight forward toward him as though racing directly forth from some yawning hell, and would burst along the vessel and sweep aft and half bury the living thing at the wheel, and tear at the life of him; and then——

It was very bad.

And through it all, the thoughts that stirred in Legere's soul rushed inevitably, and seemingly without will of his, to the stark, bald question of: "What is doing all this? And why?"

At first his mind would not answer, save that it was a *force,* the same force that ruled all things—a force that staggered the mind even to consider. And yet, he, Legere, a mere puny man, had set himself against this *force.*

The thought revealed Legere to himself—and disheartened him sickeningly. For straightway he knew that there could be but one answer: the *force* was God.

In that very hour Legere came to recognize it—the truth was beaten into his consciousness amid terrible turmoil that was undermining his will to its very roots.

And at length loneliness swept him, loneliness and helplessness of soul. And suddenly in the terrible loneliness, with his will relaxed and spent, he was conscious of something newly reëntered to life within him—something familiar, something that warmed and stirred him through and through. *Love* had come back.

In a sudden rush of recklessness Legere gave in to it; threw down every barrier to it, relived again all its joy, torturing himself with its bitter sweetness, and shut-

ting out only the sorrow. And love stayed with him. It burned through his veins with fierce, ravening ecstasy. It glorified the madness of the night.

Legere stayed on until daylight. Toward morning it hailed. With a terrific snor-rring rush the missiles filled the whole world of gray night and nothing escaped, not even the man; and when these things struck they brought the blood. But he ducked his head, and lived on.

At times battle with the sea wages very fierce, and victory is by so narrow a margin as to be quite empty of glory. The dawn peered curiously at the grisly thing at the wheel. It was tall and stark. Its oilskins, frozen into sharp rigid lines, made it look *hewn out,* with clumsy, unskillful strokes.

Ice was sodden on the great mittens; ice lay gray and opaque in the hollows of the shoulders; icicles fringed the stiff sou'wester and hung down around the brooding face. That morning when the man at the wheel was spelled, the captain made for'ard himself with a shot of rum to give him, in profoundest admiration.

Below, the men regarded the frozen apparition, that had stood a double watch, as they might a stone image that walked. They had never fathomed him; they could not know.

TWO days it took to satisfy that gale. On the third day when it died out the crew were sullen, morose, discouraged. They should have had a good run of herring, and got out of this country long ago. As it was they had not even reached the grounds—without doubt had run far by. Matters had long since passed by the thing of ordinary "luck." There was something deeper the trouble. Luck was not only playing with them but was set against them—dead.

The man Sleeth listened and spoke darkly from the edge of his bunk—Legere and Jo were on deck. "You know the answer, don't you, bullies? It's Legere that's the Jonah!

"He don't believe in no God, that man. Down where he come from the Canucks won't give him a kind look. They call him 'The Infidel,' and he's about *canned* the town he come from!"

It was enough. It was the bit of leaven. It began to work.

Next morning it was Legere that sighted Bonne Bay in the mists. The crew revived—somewhat.

But the world fears a silent man. The crew feared Legere, and fearing, hated him. It was instinct.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HERDSMEN OF THE SEA.

THE *Phantom* anchored off the cliffs and ran a line inshore. And down from the hills came a horde of Newfoundlanders. They swarmed off aboard, a motley crew. They represented every type and mold of man. But in one thing they were the same—to a man they harbored a grim and bottomless hunger.

The cook fell to, a harassed maniac. He had one helper, a second maniac. Barrels of grub were salvaged from the hold. In the fo'c's'le stove the red-hot fire never dwindled; by the end of the run the stove would be melted down.

On deck, the *Phantom* might have been a fragment of honey discovered by ravenous bees. Men swarmed all over her. The hold was disgorging, was yielding up an indiscriminate mess of gill nets, buoys, floats; of oilskins, oars and gear; of barrels, salt and grub.

The next morning the fishing began. The herring were running well. The captain was overjoyed. He made a deal with another belated vessel to sell them his herring salt, and planned to stay himself for another load, to freeze. He put four men to work building a freezing scaffold between the masts above the deck.

At night the fo'c's'le was packed to suffocation. Legere watched from the background. This was the life of the sea. These were the herdsmen of the sea. Legere watched; and, watching, reflected.

Down by the little, jerking brass lamp sat a big Dane who had shipped from Halifax. He was half naked; in the semi-

gloom, his magnetic white torso rose upward like some strange magnificent flower, from its calyx of grimy clothing at the waist.

Down on a locker by the stove four others were intently watching a fifth. Gripped between his knees, this man held a big can of sheliac. He was stirring it furiously with a paddle to separate a possible round of raw alcohol from the baser ingredients. The salt-reddened eyelids of his watchers framed fixed stares of famished intensity, their lax lips drooled.

Out of some of the bunks hung dangling legs, unbooted. Down in a bulkhead bunk beyond the stove the cook slept busily and snored magnificently. Over all, the foul close air, heavy with the smell of the supper's fried pork, of vile tobacco smoke, of the reek of bodies, hung rank and unstirred in the few open spaces.

For the rest Legere listened to tales being told by the men from offshore, tales of cold, and sickness, and bitter privation; tales of man prowess on sea and land that would put to shame the pages of romance; tales of famished lives, of glorious deaths; tales of horror, of gory man battles—grewsome, unspeakable tales. Ah, a man's country this, where man was gauged by the measure of his brawn and where fear was not.

But suddenly, in all this, a sharp thought struck Legere. With these fishermen, here in Newfoundland, life was a matter of keeping alive only, and of fighting for the means thereof. Here, the sufferings, the griefs, were mere animal sufferings, animal griefs, and the joys the same. Great soaring ambitions of the mind, of the spirit—of faiths, of loves—did not appear; neither did the corresponding sufferings.

Legere was being taught profoundly, and this set him to thinking deeply. He was learning of the grim, terrible fighting done all their life by these people of the sea—yes; but he saw all this was but the fighting of *material* things. And yet, it was this very thing that *he* had come forth to do.

Suddenly he knew that he could be a finished master at all this, but it would not bring him peace. And then, it was as though a great light dawned upon him, and he knew the truth; that peace for the spirit was to be found only in spirit. Up to now he had been all wrong—but how, then, was he to come upon peace. The thought was too big for him.

Meanwhile all this sickened him. The *Phantom* might have been a breeding cage of human spawn. Down aft in the hold was the overflow. Legere wormed out of the fo'c's'le. His personal independence, the fastidious claims of his own person drove him out. He spent the night on deck.

And in the watches of the long night, he tried to reason out this new thing; that the great battles of life were not matters of food and shelter like with these Newfoundlanders, nor yet of canneries and railroads as with himself. The great battles had to do with the things within one, with the things of one's own great passions and hopes and despairs, things that could not be fought with two hands—any more than could the great force behind the elements. And again he finally gave up in despair.

And then love came again to be with him. And this time, too, he let it stay. And now it was not the fierce, flaming thing that tortured his body, as on that other night. It was a blessed advent throughout; it brought a glow of infinite sweetness, although of great sadness. And in his new-acquired habit of thinking, of analyzing, of trying to get at the bottom of things, his mind came to wrestle also with this thing of love.

What was it? Whence was it? Again had he found a thing he could not fight with his two hands—something that was stronger than every last thing in the world put together—stronger than himself—stronger than life. The source of it? Suddenly he was startled. Could it be at one with the *force* behind the elements?

He considered this deeply. If this be true, what use then to fight at all?

Again did loneliness and bitter helplessness fill him with deepest dejection. He

wormed his body far into its shelter in a fold of the mainsail. He was sick with the agony of it all, and then——

The watch shook him awake. It was a new day.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FEAR.

THE man Sleeth was afraid. For days now he had been slowly scaring himself to death. Both he and Legere knew each other's thoughts beyond all doubt.

It so happened that one night they ate together with the same crew. Sleeth felt Legere's somber eyes burning directly on him as he sat down. He did not look up for some time, and when he did, the eyes of the other seemed to him, in his nervous state, to be gravely studying the very things of his soul. And now, he could not look away.

Legere broke his bread, casually, and ate his fried pork, and drank from his dipper of tea, but his eyes never left the eyes of the other. And Sleeth sat staring back as a bird might stare at a snake, and horrible fear seized upon him, and froze him with a sickening, deadly chill.

Sleeth threw down his eating tools, sprang into his bunk and cowered there. But the fascination of fear drove him to peek out. And still his eyes met and were swallowed up in the deliberate regard of the other's, burning up at him, calmly, relentlessly.

Later, Sleeth was hunched in the shadows and the great young St. Anner sat in his old vantage point far up for'ard, and gazed up at him blandly. And the fo'c's'le reeked with smoke, and the smoke wove things out of the wretch's fancy—sinister things, grewsome things, wholly malevolent in their grip of his mind. He saw himself dying in a dozen ways at the other's hands—broken, mauled, flung aside, a shapeless, battered mass of flesh.

Outside, the night turned suddenly eerie and ghostly with great silent falling snow. The whole world seemed a close-packed, feathery mass.

It heaped up high all along the freezing scaffold above the deck. It made of the vessel a foolish little toy ship; like a crude little plaything made of sugar, with clumsy sugar rigging, and clumsy sugar spars. It buried completely all suggestion of swiftness—of strength.

Before dawn the sea was a gray expanse of soft dappled mush. Suddenly, the quality of the snow changed to a harsher nature. The wind had hauled, and it came down in blinding sheets. The wind picked up in intensity and turned piercing cold. The wind grew to a gale.

There was no fishing that day. The fo'c's'le was a clogged beehive of gloomy men who smoked in silence, and shook their heads. And all that day the man Sleeth lay in his bunk trying to avoid losing his very reason in a pair of calm-burning eyes in a great figure enthroned up forward like a big magnificent idol of sheerest manhood.

BY nightfall the sea heaved inertly under a coverlid of "pancake" ice—ice formed of the freezing slush, and broken into disks. And in places were wide expanses of heavier ice—shore ice, evidently, or fresh-water ice, afloat in the wash. And clumsier cakes appeared—gray, desolate, sodden, slumping about on the messy sea in sloshing wave-devoured plateaus. And the piercing cold grew.

Long after dark Sleeth crept forth from his bunk furtively, like a rat, after food. Most of the crew had been fed. Legere was on deck.

Sleeth slipped along a locker for a mug of hot tea. He looked ghastly in his dank, moist undress; his lank hair was plastered with moisture; his eyes were incandescent as though with fever. He grabbed at the scalding tea and supped it eagerly. Its fire drove a firmness into him—a strength. He passed it back for another.

Around him the men were cursing solemnly, viciously. If they were nipped in, they would be there all winter. A great inspiration struck Sleeth.

"I told you he was a Jonah, that St. Anner!" he cried out. "Now I guess you believe me!"

A meditative silence greeted him. Sleeth opened up again. If he could only stir them up enough to *get* Legere! He began a venomous tirade of taunts, jeers.

He was sitting at the table now, all engrossed in his loud talk. A big figure slid into place through the men opposite and fixed Sleeth's eyes in a dead silence. It was Legere.

Sleeth choked. He sat still trying to mumble a crust of bread, his eyes fixed. He dared not flee. And as he watched, he felt his scalp tighten—felt the skin at the back of his neck grow suddenly ice cold as if brushed wetly with rapidly evaporating ether.

Legere's hand had closed idly on a sheath knife. He was toying with it. Sleeth's bulging eyes swam as he noted the play of tendons and sinews as Legere's hand gripped the knife—turned it over, flicked it with his fingers, played with it.

Sleeth crawled into his bunk. He was terribly sick. And in him was growing the despairing fighting spark of the cornered rat.

About ten o'clock he crawled out. Still like a rat, he slipped up for'ard. Legere sat leaning inertly back on the locker, where he had fallen asleep.

Sleeth stared with fascinated, beady eyes at the other's chest bared for coolness in the close, heavy air. He lunged with the sheath knife, madly, furiously—and slipped. A lightning thread of scarlet had flashed across the white skin of Legere's chest, had opened widely and poured.

Legere sprang erect. He shot a glance after the dim figure stumbling away from him, making for the companionway, and he leaped in pursuit. He overtook it on deck aft; it was making for the protection of the watch.

Sleeth turned and lunged again madly. The two locked together, careened on the icy deck and went overboard. The watch and two others from the fo'c's'le rushed to the rail and stared at the black opening in the ice wash, that swirled wildly like a boiling spring.

Down below, while he was still striking out madly with the knife, the man Sleeth's fear was being quieted forever. Once Legere's face emerged a moment for air, but the other's did not.

The water settled to stillness. The watchers saw a man emerge, catch a rope and climb aboard with the agility of a leopard.

It was Legere—alone.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

NIPPED IN.

THE *Phantom* was "nipped in"—frozen solid into the ice. When the furious, piercing cold abated, the sea wore a solid white coverlid of ice. And it extended all over. And already it was of a thickness that no ice breaker could get through. And each day now would make it thicker. The *Phantom* would be where she was until spring.

The crew was filled with bitter wrath, to a man. And, to a man, they cast constant black looks at Legere—Legere, the God-hater; Legere, The Infidel; Legere, the Jonah. And their looks now were frankly easy to read.

Legere himself was again helpless before the things of fate. Again had the sea thwarted him; again was he beaten, and helpless.

His greatest emotion, now, was a feeling of wonder at it. Why was it? What was the motive underlying it all? Why was he being so constantly balked and thwarted? Why?

In the enforced idleness of that day Legere found the answer; it had been the priest's, Père Andre's, answer, but now in the light of his new discoveries it had a bearing of truth that was worth considering. The priest had sought him in the final days of misfortune in St. Anne's, to try and reason again with him. And the priest had said: "You are a part of God's great plan, and you cannot get away from it even if you will. But you must bow to it. It is hopeless to fight Divine wisdom; the world is run by it—how could it be run else! It is the law of all laws. God is but molding thee, perchance, for great things in life, and thou art com-

pelling Him to teach thee by first breaking thee."

And now his concluding words struck Legere with a new and blinding significance.

"All human experiences are sent us to teach us. By refusing to learn their lessons, they come back again and again until we do; and if we fight, then they come back only in redoubled vigor. My son, remember this: just so long as you fight God, just so long will you be beaten, for in fighting God you are surely fighting *yourself*."

For a long time Legere lay very still. And one by one things coupled together in his mind: the great *force* that lay behind the sea and all the elements, and the power that created love was God—could it be possible also that He ordained the hopes and ambitions within one, and made use of them to carry out His great plan?

From that day, Legere began to reason over all the things of his life from a different angle. Meanwhile——

He sensed trouble from the crew even before Jo came to warn him. There came a day when the Newfoundlanders piled over onto the ice and dribbled ashore to the last man. They took with them the big Dane, who held a commission from the crew of the *Phantom*.

The man Sleeth, so far as the crew needed for their purpose, was murdered. A murder on shipboard came under the jurisdiction of the port it was committed in. The Dane was to acquaint the authorities, have things all ready, and when the hour was ripe they would promise to have Legere, the murderer, ashore.

The plan worked all right, and the hour struck. But when the seamen of the *Phantom* attempted to spring their trap it was as though the imprisoned vessel had become a den of wild animals.

Legere and Michelle had fought with any weapon to hand. Four men managed to make the deck in pursuit of them. Two went down and out into the icy scuppers; a third was hurled by Legere bodily into a nest of net boats, where he dangled inert and motionless, and dribbled blood peaceably; and a fourth was knocked completely over the rail onto the ice below. It was the way of the sea.

Legere and Michelle were over upon the ice and running swiftly for a concealing point along the shore, where already they had hidden a small cache of supplies. And once around the point, Legere came to a dead halt.

He stood still, towering tall and erect. His face was battered; his mouth and chin looked as if he had been feeding on raw meat. But Michelle saw that it was not on things of the body that he was thinking. He was rigid, abstracted; a little perplexed frown was stamped upon his face as though he were trying to pierce the unknown with a tense concentrated ray of thought.

Michelle had recovered his wind. "M'sieu' David," he gasped in wonderment, "what is it?"

Legere spoke. "I am going back to St. Anne's, Jo. I know not when or how, but I am going back to St. Anne's. I knew it the minute my feet struck the ice."

Jo crossed himself devoutly. "But, M'sieu' David, in St. Anne's they won't permit you to——"

"Just the same I'm going back. But before that time comes——"

He shivered slightly as he started for the line of the shore.

THEY made north along the coast, Legere and Michelle. Up along they would find the seal country, where later they could take a hand in the shore seal fishing, and, too, stand a chance of somehow or other meeting up with a sealer that might take them out.

For weeks they journeyed, these two, along a sparsely settled coast, where they came close to the heart of a people of wistfully beak and barren lives, but of faith inviolable.

And in a this time Legere had pondered constantly on the things opened up to him by the words of the priest. He found that to the God-inclined the priest's theory of the "law of laws" might answer

for much that had come to him himself in his own life.

Gradually, inexorably, through the long silent hours he had been forced to acknowledge the God in all things, and consequently the futility of fighting back. Sometimes he felt he might be even inclined to *learn*—learn the lesson in the bitter experiences that had come to him. But as to that he could not tell—yet.

And so they came to Chalnak, which was to be journey's end; Chalnak, that Legere was never to forget.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AT THE BOTTOM OF LIFE.

DAVID LEGERE had been in the Chalnak country several weeks. The winter was passing, and the seal hunters of Chalnak were out, looking like tiny specks upon the far white stretches of ice.

As the hunting progressed the sea became more and more open, the white of the ice more and more mingled with the black of the water, the water running into zigzag channels that changed constantly. And still the seals came, sometimes in such great colonies as to seem to make the ice field alive.

Then gradually the ice of the sea began to break away from the ice that clung along the shore, which was still unbroken and intact. And now when they went to hunt, the hunters from shore took flat-bottomed boats with them, and when the shore ice happened to be separated from the outlying floe they crossed the narrow strip of intervening water in the boat and pulled it out upon the ice on the other side.

Legere and his comrade had no boat of their own, so their operations were confined to the ice margins along the coast. They were able to hunt on the outer fields only when the wind was on shore and the outer ice was held close on the coast, and no open water intervened.

There came a day when they had started out together, Legere and Michelle—in fact, now, they never traveled apart. Through the winter they had grown very close to each other, these two. The tie that had bound them since early boyhood had grown powerful and constant through the years. And now for weeks Legere had fanned the little flame of his love for Jo Michelle deliberately, encouragingly. Always it warmed something within him.

This day the wind was on shore, and the two crossed easily the thin threads of black water running between the shore ice and the world of floes farther out, where the hunting was best. And far out, among the hummocks and winter-built mounds and towers and pinnacles, they became separated, each being drawn on and on in engrossing pursuit of the kill.

Legere's luck was phenomenal. Always his gaff lunged like lightning, and it never missed. By the middle of the afternoon he had hauled several drags of pelts, nested in each other like great pods, to an elevation in the ice field which he could make out from a distance. His gaff was a reeking thing of red; his own clothing, his hands and face, were smeared in crimson and black, with blood and with the hot, steaming fat.

Suddenly he stopped. He stood erect, a solitary speck in the great white vastness. Something like a voice of warning had roused him—something that brought him to his senses like a stirring wind blowing chill on his spirit. The seal drag slipped from his grasp, striking the ice with a greasy *flap*.

For an instant he knew not what had stopped him. Then it struck him like a javelin. The wind had changed. It was blowing offshore!

Everything within him now leaped to attention. He ran up to the crest of a rise in the ice. Far toward land he saw hunters making for the shore ice like ants. And they were running.

Even as he looked he could see that the black streaks of water had become more numerous in toward shore, and a well-defined area of water had opened up between the rim ice and the floes. Legere leaped down and raced.

He moved across the great white desert with the lope of a wolf. On a rise he

hailed mightily. The boats had all gone but one. The crew heard and waited stolidly. Legere dashed in and slowed up.

Now there was considerable open water in the direction of the shore. And the floes were jamming and turning with grim deliberation, and sending up sodden, drum-like thunders, and long, rending, splintering crashes.

A hunter spoke soberly. "Stir yourself, my lad! We'll get mashed in a few minutes."

Suddenly Legere stopped, and shot a glance around. "Where's Michelle?" he asked.

No one knew. He had not gone ashore among the foot hunters. He had not been with the boats. One man spoke soberly. He had seen him an hour ago, far to the south.

A terrific rending came in the slow-changing world of ice, a terrific, crunching, mumbling roar that struck to the very heart. The vast pattern of ice and water abroad upon the sea changed in slow, weird magic. The boatman cried out sharply with an oath. "Board, man!"

But Legere shook his head. "No. I'm going to find Michelle."

The boat was in the water. The men were considerately tossing him back a little hail of gear that clattered about his feet—a tin of tea and one of matches; an extra knife; some scraps of the day's food.

Legere looked at them quietly. "We'll be back when the wind shifts," he called out.

The man in the boat muttered beneath his breath. "Maybe!" he grunted.

THREE days.

In three days' wandering Legere had not been able to find his comrade; and he was lost—a human atom—in the world of ice.

He had searched the first day until the sun went down, and found no living thing in the weird white wastes, finally not even a seal. And he had been forced hurriedly to camp for the night.

He hollowed out a shelter in the leeward side of a hillock of frozen snow, and dug in. The warmth of his body tempered the cold inside somewhat; for the rest he kept moving about. He had not eaten—the tiny scraps of food he saved.

And in the morning the entire face of the sea had changed; the ice had turned, and circled, and crawled upon itself, until yesterday's landmarks were gone. The shore, swallowed up in the distance, might have been one of several different ice elevations. And now the whole world of the ice seemed moving.

All that day Legere had searched, and without success. He had come across a boat on the ice, evidently relinquished in haste by hunters the day before. It rested mockingly before his eyes, far now from any open water—preëminent in its uselessness. But he dragged it up onto a higher elevation where he might find it later, if only for shelter. In it he found a little tin of hardened seal oil.

And that night, too, had closed down fruitless; and again he built himself a shelter and crawled in. He had not eaten. The seals seemed to have departed. He was saving the scraps for Michelle.

He managed a little tea from the seal oil, with a rag wick, in a tin. That day the loneliness had been getting Legere.

THE third day dawned in blinding brilliancy, and with a keen, roving cold that gnawed like acid. The air quivered and scintillated with frost. The world of ice turned flinty—became a chaste, trackless waste of sheerest marble powdered with mica, ethereally blue in shadows, and wholly soulless.

Legere journeyed about in an ever-widening circle, and with ever-narrowing strength. He had not eaten for two days, nor sighted a living thing. Michelle could not be moving about, or somehow in his own wanderings he must have seen him in the distance. He must have been wounded, and be lying lost somewhere in the depressions of the floe.

That day Legere began to take note of the strange freaks of his mind. It took on an odd fashion of wandering far, into

all sorts of realms. It was uncanny, borne of the dread loneliness.

The day remained all through the stark, diamondlike thing of piercing cold. The sun dropped. In his widening circle, Legere was coming into a more broken country, into a region where winter had jumbled its materials of snow and ice and frost into a domain of weird phantasy. There rose all about him a fantastic maze of glittering shapes, like huge ornaments of crystal that might have been conceived by a disordered mind, and constantly discarded, unfinished, to start on another.

Suddenly a change stole across the face of things. The world was slowly reclaimed from its soulless white brilliancy, and life dawned through it—a life of sheer, peerless beauty that glorified it, although it intensified the haunting loneliness a hundredfold. A world of radiant color was born of the setting sun. Gold, and orange, and rose dawned through the pinnacles and towers and turrets in the nearest distance; and amethyst, and violet, and sheerest sapphire far off, until lost in the deep purple of the east.

And through all this weird enchantment, as through interminable enchanted halls, the wanderer stumbled doggedly, warily. He was afraid of it—sickeningly afraid of it. It was the sort of world one sees in dreams, endless in its aisles of supernal beauty, terrifying in its weird outlandishness. Once he put forth his hand and touched a pillar that at a distance had been a resplendent pillar of sapphire—touched it to test its actuality, and the measure of his reason.

All at once, the wanderer stopped. His mind had flashed clear of all vaporings. At his feet lay spots, splotches, pools of color, of crimson that stayed red and changed not, and that he knew was blood. And with the color he noted snow crumpled by a trail.

He began to run along the bloody trail. And now as he ran the body of a dead seal lay in his path; then a broken gaff. On he ran. He ran swiftly around a jumble of hillocks, threaded in through a tiny defile, and there——

Legere threw himself down. He had found Michelle.

In the greatness of his relief, Legere's manhood went well-nigh to water. He clasped Jo in his arms. He fondled him like a child, and there came a desperate choking in his throat.

But the man in his arms was not moving—not responding, although his heart was still beating, sluggishly. Legere glanced around. Michelle's leg lay in a sodden frozen stain, still red in the falling light. The "hood" sea Legere had passed had probably got him, for Legere knew that the slashing jaws of a "hood" can sheer through anything short of steel.

Legere pulled sharply together every faculty of his mind, of his body. If Michelle died it would be more than a man that would be leaving him now—it would be the last of all human ties that was left in Legere's life. He forced himself steady, forced himself to move swiftly.

The enchanted hues about him were settling to uniformity now; a transparent tinge of saffron held the wilderness of ice.

In a few moments Legere had a tin of hot tea at the man's mouth. Then, only, did his hand shake—foolishly, violently. He forced the hot stuff down the other's throat.

In a moment Jo's eyes came apart. "I knew you'd come, m'sieu'," he murmured, "but——" He was gone again.

A swift wave of the great loneliness shook Legere through and through. And out of the vast still distances, settling to quiet hues, came a long, wailing cry, as though the very spirit of the wastes itself was bewailing its own desolation. Legere leaped up; it was the gurgling, blubbering, throaty blat of a young seal.

On a swift inspiration, Legere raced away in the direction of the cry. Again it came. He changed his course, leaping, stalking, peering like some strange panther.

ALL life depended on that young seal. And it could no more have escaped this hunter than it could have flown. With lightning jabs, Legere struck down both the dog seal and the mother.

He had their pelts off in a moment, like stripping off husks. Then he caught up the young seal, soft, and fat, and *warm,* and ran.

It was an idea born only of despair. He thrust the live seal close inside the great jacket of the man on the ice and lashed it in; threw over him the green pelts still warm and steaming.

He hollowed out a shelter swiftly, like a burrowing dog, and lay the living bundle in it out of the knifelike cold. He made more tea. Then he lay down beside the bundle, and clasped it close, for further warmth.

The glow abroad in things was settling to soft tenderness, to amethyst and mauve.

For a moment the injured man's life stream seemed to thin again, and sag along sluggishly. And he babbled, faintly.

Legere lay staring into the blankness and, with his own mind, followed along the course taken by the great things of Michelle's own life, as revealed by his babbling. And now he learned many things about Jo. He learned that he must have been in Quebec at the time of Graciette's death, for he babbled of all this; of a Mass that would mean repose for her soul; and of seeing her left behind in the cold earth.

And then——

The voice guttered low—went out. The awful silence of the ice wilderness seemed to roar in Legere's ears. He sprang up. He used his last tea. There was nothing more.

And now he knew it was the man, Michelle himself, that he was fighting to hold with him—Michelle, the lovable comrade. He was the only living thing left for Legere to expend love upon. And, God! he knew now that a man must have *something*—he had known for long that the urge to love underlay all life, *was* life—*was* God; love of country, love of progress, love of human creatures—and he had let all go. Now with the passing of Michelle the world was being stripped from him clean and clear.

Something slipped in the matter of Legere's reason. He was losing himself again. A great whimpering moan was wrung from him, and he cast himself down again, and he hugged the body of the other close, and he talked to it in a low, endearing babble. He *begged* it not to leave him, he coaxed it, and——

A change had come. The feel of the other was heavier in his arms, more leaden. Legere gripped him close, choking. And then he tried to pray. In his agony of soul he pleaded strivingly with the God that was behind all life, he exhorted, he bartered with it.

But the spirit was passing in the thing in his arms, and in passing it seemed almost as though it functioned apart from the body.

"M'sieu' David!"

Legere clutched him close, mad in his efforts at warmth. And Jo spoke again, quite clearly. "It is all warm now, *mon vieux!* And it is time to tell thee—that which I never have. The black one, Budro, killed thy father, when thou wert little.

"I—Jo—was there on the beach that day and saw him throw away the compass, and start the boat's seams. I, too, owed him the same debt as thou, and, always, I, too, meant to repay. But, now—I—Jo—tell thee—that thou—must——"

Beyond all doubt it was Jo's message to say: "Thou must leave him to a Power higher than thou," but the spirit was gone before the words were said.

In the searching cold, Legere lay deadened—long, long—his body stilled, his mind, only, flaming. And a drowsiness came stealing upon him, a drowsiness as of something touching him soothingly from afar.

It was the drowsiness of his freezing blood. And he knew it. And now instead of soothing him, it stung him to fight with every atom of his dwindling life—he was never to be soothed again, by anything.

All his new-made resolutions were wiped out in a flash at what Jo had told him. He was down again, down at the bottom of life, down with the brute, and like the brute he lived now only to kill.

He struggled viciously, and slowly feeling came back. Now, the body in his arms was quite stiff. His own hands clasped behind its back felt gone from the wrists. He wrenched and fought himself clear.

He knew only that he must move, and keep moving. He turned and fumbled the little seal out from its covert. His hands were still numb and dead. A moment later the little creature lay slaughtered on the ice, and the man was holding his half-frozen hands thrust deep for warmth in the steaming carcass.

Life came back. He made it. Saul Budro wavered and danced before his eyes like a jerking manikin. Saul Budro it was who had brought him, Legere, to this —beginning with the day he had killed his father. Saul Budro had been the cause behind all the suffering of his life.

And now Legere was seeing red, seeing only the thing of bodily vengeance. "Damn him!" he croaked, impotently. "This ice country can't hold me now. It can't! And when I get out I'll hunt Saul Budro to his black end!"

He raised his wet hands in the gray and ashes of the twilight. They glistened blackly. They were symbolic.

IN five minutes Legere was on his way back in the direction of the sealer's abandoned boat. By dawn he had found it. Two days later he was making south among the floes, working his way toward the path of the steam sealers.

CHAPTER L.

LEGERE RETURNS.

IT was the last of March.

David Legere was back in St. Anne's No one knew when he had come; one morning a dumfounded boatman had seen smoke coming from the Legere chimney at the end of the village, and had told of it. And he reported also a strange-style net boat down on the shore.

It was an odd, heavy-built boat. It was battered and scarred. Its upper streaks were stove in—some of them.

Then Legere was seen. Even at a distance the boatmen crossed themselves. He was a great, gaunt sombre scarecrow of a man.

He padded unhurriedly about the Legere place like a wolf—a wolf that had come through a long, hard winter. But even at that there was something hard and unconquerable about him; a fearless directness that a wolf never had. No one braved his presence, after—things.

In a week he was on every tongue. He seemed now to be living a life that was a consummate waiting. He sat much on the rocks in the lee, when the sun was warm. He sat hunched and motionless, like a great cormorant. He seldom moved except to shift along into the sun. He kept his great back in the sun always. And the fire never went out in the Legere cottage. And when the sun slanted too far down, the man went in and sat by the fire. And he devoured great rations of food—often.

He seemed entirely oblivious to St. Anne's.

In the village life was starting sluggishly. Spring had begun early; along the coast the course would soon be clear. Outside craft were already beginning to come in.

Among the villagers, Saul Budro had gone overland to Quebec. Now that traffic was well-nigh open, he was expected back soon to finish building.

Gowdy, Doan & Robertson had not opened their store. Many of the fishermen were gone from St. Anne's. Their cottages were empty. Narcisse Comeau was considering moving away; he had talked to Father Andre about it.

And Father Andre—for weeks Father Andre had been grievously disturbed within by a certain matter, and only now had he regained his tranquillity. Weeks ago he had received a letter—a piteous, pleading letter from Quebec which perplexed him to deal with. It read:

REVEREND SIR: I set myself to write you in all humility, on a matter that it seems has come to touch upon the well being of my everlasting soul——

Here the letter snapped off in its sedate phraseology and burst forth with hysterical violence:

Ah, monsieur, for the love of the good God, will you not be kind—will you not let me have one word of tidings of David Legere! You forbade me St. Anne's, but I have suffered, monsieur—God knows how much! What I did I forced myself to do in the beginning, thinking to buy life with counterfeit, and it was not to be. But my love for this man was true, monsieur, was holy. I have tried to atone in work, unselfish work, but all winter it seems have I but fallen far short. It is not my destiny—this work, monsieur! This love that possesses me thwarts it. It is a love not of the body, but of the soul—and David Legere, and he alone, is my destiny; for him I would willingly give life itself. Is it not then of God, this love that is willing to die for its loved one? And, this being true, who, then dares to stand in the way of it!

Ah, forgive me, monsieur. But sometimes it seems if I do not have one little word of him I must die. There are times when I am mad, *mad* to go to him. If that time ever came, and I returned to St. Anne's, would you sanction it?

Thine obedient, JUSTINE DUCHARME.

And only now could Father Andre reply:

MY DAUGHTER: Possibly it is divine will that I should be of help. I have not been able to tell you of David Legere, since last fall he left St. Anne's, no man knew whither. I learn but to-day that he is back again, for which I thank the good God. Pray, yourself, for guidance, my daughter, and if, later in the year, God should send you to St. Anne's, come to me. I will try and guide you in the way of His will. My blessing upon you.

ANDRE LE BLANC.

And now Father Andre was looking forward to the time when he himself should see David Legere, and talk to him—looking forward eagerly, and yet tremulously.

Meanwhile, Legere warmed himself and fed himself—and waited. His whole life now was an hourly waiting. That chance should fail to bring him his opportunity against his old enemy seemed to him unbelievable.

His period of waiting was not to be for long.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SEA.

THE sea was gathering itself in sublime majesty. It was April and a belated line gale was upon the North coast like a wolf.

For hours had the mighty forces latent in the world of waters been assembling, been rising, rushing—bursting, as though in experimental provision for grave affairs ahead. The dawn had come terrifyingly; heavy purple clouds had covered the eastern sky, split lengthwise above the horizon by a single long streak of blood red, as though the sky had been slashed through upon eternal fires; and there had followed a weird, misbegotten sunrise that crawled across the senses leaving a trail of fear.

Early in the day a small steamer from down the coast had rounded the headland and lurched in to a providential mooring in the inner cove. Since then chaos had held upon the sea in stern reality.

One human being only seemed to be visible in the increasing gale. Over on the Legere shore site David Legere could be seen moving about the sheds and wharf of his fish stand.

All around outside the confusion and litter of the preceding fall was still as it had been left. The boiler stack had broken down from its fall; it lay along the shore above high-water mark and gathered rust; the refuse of lumber and material lay in jumbled heaps.

It began to rain. The wind whipped a cask from the cove and spun it afar. The empty barrels began to slide tentatively along in the gale.

Legere moved about swiftly, making things secure. Suddenly he stopped. He stood in the lee, staring out upon the cove.

A lone messenger in a motor boat was laboring across the cove from Budro's point. The seas licked it and tasted at it, and constantly appeared to swallow it. The gale now seemed to have a new triumph in it. The tide had just turned flood. Over his paltry chattels, Legere watched

the man leave the boat and tear frenziedly up into the village.

A little later Legere saw another man out in the all-encompassing storm—a mere glimpse as he fled behind a sheltering building. Again. The man was making round shore in his own direction.

He was a strange-looking creature in the wind and rain, tall and thin and flapping clad. Idly, Legere wondered why the wind didn't snap him up and blow him away. But now Legere stood still in interest.

The flying figure was out in the open again and making for *him*. At last Legere rushed forth and gripped him—Father Andre, the priest; the wind was scudding him relentlessly up the rocks. Legere bore him into the lee like a child.

IT was the first time these two had seen each other. There was a majesty about the tall, slight figure. A sudden lull had fallen without. Then: "God is calling you, David Legere."

A contemptuous grunt, and Legere turned away. "He must be calling indeed loud, m'sieu', to be heard in this!"

"Cease!" The upraised hand was dignity immeasurable.

Legere was smiling almost indulgently. Something inside him was glad to see this man—foolishly glad. But he had shut it out, quickly.

He wondered now if the priest thought he really had anything to say that might affect him, Legere—that might change the current of his determination. But he said: "What is it that He says, m'sieu'—your God?"

"He gives you a chance to reconcile yourself to Divine laws—to atone for your sin in turning your back upon Him. Remember, just so long as you fight God, just so long will you be beaten. He gives you another chance. It may be your last."

"I am quite content, m'sieu'." Legere stooped and tossed a plank across the shed with a resounding thwack.

The priest watched tensely. The face of Legere changed never a hair. Then: "A vessel is ashore off on Thread of Life ledges. They will soon be covered by the sea. You, with your boat, are the only man in St. Anne's that might reach through this gale and save them."

Legere's face was unmoved, inscrutable. "Who saw them, m'sieu'?"

"From Budro's Point." There was a pause packed with great things. Then, "Saul Budro is aboard—the vessel is his."

The other's face leaped to vivid life. Back shot his head. His hand clutched high in empty air. He laughed—loud—long.

The priest held himself firm. "This is no time for mirth!"

"Oh—h—ho! There's Divine power behind things after all!" roared Legere.

"Will you go?"

"No! Oh, no! No. Why spoil such splendid planning? And Saul will die unshriven!" gloated the other. "And that, to him, is torment forever! Oh, ho! It is to laugh!"

"Will you go?"

"No, no!" moaned Legere, in terrible mirth. "Oh," with a gasp, "I hope he tarries long in hell!"

"Hark ye!" sharply. "It is for his soul as well as yours I'm fighting. You maimed and broke his body. Let God have his soul. And others are there—poor benighted aliens. Will you not consider them?"

"Oh, no, m'sieu'!" Legere still gasped. "How can you ask me—*me!* The Infidel of St. Anne's—to meddle my poor hand in such a splendid outcome? Ah, no, m'sieu'! It is not to be!"

Legere's eyes hardened. "I hope he rots on the bottom; and may the lobsters get his eyes!" He turned to pick up a salt bucket.

The priest braced himself. He began pulling together every force of his life to launch upon the other—and the other felt it and grinned, laconically.

"The hand of God is in this! Take heed, David Legere! You said: 'When the sea restores love and peace—then will I believe!' It will mean restored love of thy fellow man, peace for thy everlasting soul! Wilt break thy word?"

"What are words, m'sieu'?" smiling blandly. "The Scriptures are full of them!"

The priest stared squarely at the other. His will surged through his body like fluid iron. He would conquer or die. "Thy father," he returned, sternly, "he founded this town on those words!"

"And like One Other, crucified, they cost him his life, m'sieu'!"

The priest winced, then drove straight back at his antagonist. "Hast forgotten thy father?"

The grin was gone. "No."

"You say 'no!' What, then, can his memory mean to such as his son! Tell me!"

A swift uneasiness stole upon Legere. He turned away coldly.

The priest clutched his arm. "Hold! Thy mother! She watches thee in this hour. What of her?"

A shaft, as of things somber, shot into Legere's eyes. Like a flash came the clean-cut vision of his mother's pleading with him at the hour of her death. He wrenched himself clear. "We will not speak of her, m'sieu'!"

"But we will!" The priest's face glowed like an archangel; the voice drove on direct and clear above the howling wind outside: "For hark ye—it is thy mother's voice speaking through me. You denied her her deathbed plea, David Legere. Wilt do it yet again?"

His antagonist was staring blankly. Some terrible emotion was bursting the very heart of Legere. Through all these months of awful loneliness had striven the memory of his mother. Steadfast throughout every hour of his existence, he had come to know her the one thing of all his life that had never failed him for one instant.

THE priest was speaking on. "This day thy mother's soul is in torment because of thee. Think upon it!"

In Legere now the surging in his heart was stifling him. And, clearly, as though spoken, his ears were hearing his mother's voice: "I'd like to know ye'd never be desertin' one of God's creatures when they needed ye——"

"Thy mother!" The priest's eyes were narrowing on their intensity. "Hast thought on how, for thee, she suffered in life, and on the day of her death." His voice dropped suddenly. And now it came, infinitely gentle. "Can you torment her still—this mother who would gladly have died for thee?" He was silent.

The thing in Legere's heart had burst forth and rushed upon the forces of his will. It was a swift, terrible battle, and his will gave way. If the priest *should* be right! If his mother's soul *should* be in torment!

The beliefs of a lifetime suddenly rose and swamped all else. Slowly he raised his face. It was stilled and quite gray, but in that one moment it had become the gentle, earnest face of the David Legere of old.

"I go, m'sieu'! But"—a thought had struck him, a little sadly, though not unpleasantly now—"but I have the feeling that we none of us come back."

The priest's face shone with the glory of God. His hand went upward in benediction. "Leave the rest to the wisdom of God, my son."

From a hundred shelters, every human being of St. Anne's watched the tiny boat creep through the paths of the sublimely moving sea. The little boat had been a craft of intense pride to its owner—a stanch little vessel with a marvel of an engine, which Legere had recently brought out from her shed and put into perfect order. Legere crouched low in her, as much a part of her as the engine—and more.

Out on the yet bare ledges, the schooner was driven among the rocks on a wellnigh even keel. The sails were gone clean from the bolt ropes. The rigging remained, to slit the wind into grim outcry; the vessel screamed—always—always—and never let up. The man from shore knew that on the flood her time was short—already the seas were licking her into wreckage. High up, a man's body clung to the rigging.

In the wild uproar a strange and infinite peace held in the tiny sanctuary of the little boat. For the first time in months all things in the soul of David Legere seemed stayed of their turmoil—seemed at rest. Swung and tossed like the merest atom, he yet knew a strange, almost unearthly security.

The little craft from land slid down the lofty seas into a livable quarter in the lee of the ledges. The boatman dropped an anchor astern to hold the craft off the rocks, leaped into the sea and swam ashore with the painter.

He stood up. The wind swept cold upon the skin of his drenched body, as though it had been dipped in a volatile essence. Shattered water from the windward side of the great rocks fell about him like icy lava.

Each shock stung his spirit to a higher realm of its own, apart from his body. He was thinking again—thinking *clear*. This might be the end. The thought brought, not fear, but a feeling almost of relief.

He started forward. The two spars of the schooner showed above the ledges, curving like bows in the wind. Then something happened—near him. It seemed that a living thing had suddenly become visible among the rocks and had gone bounding past in the fury of spume. He looked and saw that the man's body was gone from the rigging. It left Legere strung taut.

He kept on. It happened again. Three other creatures appeared, dimly, stumbling crazily onward over the rocks. He could see now that these were Chinese. But oddly they, too, were passing him by.

The rescuer strode forth and caught one by the arm, shouting questions in his ear. But the thing in his grip was stark mad with terror. And he was pointing back to the ship, his lips moving frantically, and then tearing himself away.

Half across the great ledges—realization of what it all meant struck the rescuer like a blow. He turned and ran back. It was as he knew: the castaways had taken the boat and left him.

EVEN as he looked, the boat appeared. The bulked figure of Saul Budro showed in the waist of her, and clinging along the stern line three black bobs—human heads like strung beads—trailed down the watery hill.

The solitary man left behind stood stock-still. This *was* the end. And this being so——

Slowly, wonderingly, he turned his head about, taking note of all the terrific turmoil about him. If this was the end, where was the terror? He felt not a shadow of it. It was very odd—the strange feeling of peace, of security, that held him completely, that lulled him like an anodyne.

He turned and forged back toward the vessel over the rocks and slime, his mind still busied with its own strange estate. Perhaps the answer was that death ***held*** no fear when one was actually on the threshold—that what was called the fear of death was fear of the *fear*.

His mind seized on the idea of "the threshold!" Soon he was to *know*. In his battling struggle against the gale, a little smile grew on his face—there was something tremendous in that thought, something wonderful beyond all fathoming—that soon he was to know more than every last man on all the earth knew—soon, very soon.

And God? One no longer challenged God when one was about to meet Him in His own domain. And now, it was very strange, but somehow or other, even with death facing him, he was glad he had come—that he had given in at last. He was weary, terribly weary of the struggle, and his having relented might help when he had crossed "the threshold!"

Legere struggled on. About him the world seemed tearing up. Every succeeding burst of the sea roared higher and higher in tremendous explosions. Kelp and rockweed hanging from the rocks at his feet swept about him in weird, violent-swaying life in the boiling surge, only to settle back with each recoil, black and wet, and hissing.

He caught the bow chains of the

schooner, climbed to the bowsprit and stood clinging to the rigging. His scant clothing was sucked tight to his body like another skin; the wind upon him stung to exhilaration no longer—there was a raw, deadening kill to it.

He clung fast, sweeping the wreckage far along on deck with his eyes—noting the swift dissolution of Saul Budro's craft at the touch of the sea. It was a little saddening, after all.

He moved onward along the deck, clinging, battling. A great sea lifted the whole vessel. She grounded heavily. A sharp list, and an avalanche of gear stormed down the deck in a wild torrent.

David Legere's body shot rigid. His mind flashed blank to all things of life or death. Along the deck, now cleared, he saw a small sodden mass of beaten humanity that was wedged between the water casks. A still, little face of deathly pallor glimmered there, and out of it two great, dark eyes looked into his with the deep, utter calmness of a finished destiny.

It was Justine Ducharme, stretching pleading hands to the man on the rail.

LEGERE dropped in the sluicing seas and drove his body to her side, and crouching low in the uproar he could hear: "It seems we are to die, my David, so thou canst believe I speak the truth. God has given me no peace, neither day nor night, for the love I carried away from this place. And I hid aboard my uncle's vessel till she was out to sea to get back to thee.

"I love thee, my David; I have always loved thee better than life itself." She clutched his head close to her bosom. "And, loving thee so, I am glad to die with thee!"

The foundations of David Legere's being rocked. Life, the life of the body, of cold and wet, of raging elements, had passed clean from consciousness. He was living wholly in spirit, detached, free from all material things, and he was seeing clear.

This was the answer! He had been but an atom in the working of eternal law, a rebellious atom which had brought only untold suffering to itself. And this one time that he had yielded had already brought a wonderful, an amazing reward—for love had come back; love, the very fountain of life!

He buried his face madly in the girl's sheltering arms as he thought of what would have happened if he had *not* yielded. Love had come back, and the sea had brought it!

He leaped erect. It was *life*, wild unconquerable life that tore through him. Death could never have him now!

He snatched up the drenched little creature and was over the side. Down on the ledges he leaped over the precarious footing with a dexterity to stun. He carried her over to the lee side and set her down beneath the rocks. He was gone.

Thrice he came back with wreckage, with spars and ropes, and lashed all together in the fury of his great strength. Then he bound the girl's body tight to his own.

A great, green mountain of toppling water flicked them off the raft like flies. The girl found her mouth and nostrils pressed tight to the firm cold flesh of the man's chest in the roaring world of water; held there—held until the fading life within her fought madly, instinctively. Then a brief instant when all the universe seemed confined to a matter of wildly laboring lungs——

Again the close, terrible struggle; a besieging, roaring chaos, full of blinding lights and snapping things, and stretching on into eternity. Then a weak little sucking at the tiny moment of ensuing freedom.

Again there came a rushing blackness.

Oblivion.

CHAPTER LII.

"BLEST BE THE SEA."

MORNING.

Men gleaned awe-struck along the shore. There was massed and varied wreckage. There were loose, jumbled logs, and great tangled fragments of solid wharf structure—puny playthings of the sea. There was the remains of Legere's

motor boat, once a marvel of man's artifice, wantonly strewn apart as though in whimsical jest.

In a black pool beside it, all gripped in a tangle of kelp things, was pitched something that had once been human—a big man among men, made carrion by the sea, Saul Budro. On the outer shore of the cove the new structure of Budro that had occupied the site of the Golden Hope had vanished clean; the tide ran smoothly over the sands of its channel as of old.

Beyond all lay the pacified sea, tranquilly inscrutable.

David Legere had survived. No man knew how he could have accomplished it, but he had reached shore with the girl. A knot of men approached him as he stood on the shore. They had come ashore from the steamer that had ridden out the gale in the cove.

Tod Robertson led. He put out his hand to Legere. "Before you say anything, Legere—no matter what you may have been told about my part in things—I, myself have been with you always. I'm here to prove it now."

Legere looked once at the thin, pale face which seemed to have grown so much older, and took the hand warmly. Never again could he be deceived in a man, and this man was *true*.

Robertson turned and introduced a companion. "This is our Mr. Doan, Legere. Our senior, Eleazer Gowdy, died in the winter. Mr. Doan here seems to think a good deal as I do about St. Anne's and things in general. He's in on this thing, too."

The stranger smiled gravely. "You've put up a good fight, my friend. But you've won. I've taken things up with the railroad myself, and now they're anxious to come." He stared a warm moment into the other's eyes. "No one can stay the wheel of progress, young man—God never intended it. The greatest thing we all can do is to put our shoulder behind it, and push!"

A moment later Robertson hooked his hand in Legere's arm and turned him away. "I saw Miss Ducharme in Quebec, Legere. I had been telling her about you, and I learned afterward she sent you money, fifteen hundred dollars—the check passed through the store." A soft silence, then: "Her love for you is a pretty big thing, I feel sure. Love always is—that."

Robertson looked away out across the sea, and his lids blinked rapidly on swimming moisture, burning in his eyes. He spoke slowly, reminiscently. "It's funny, old man, how love can put you—oh, I don't know—sort of in sympathy, in understanding with the rest of the world. And, God knows, sometimes there seems to be so much world, and such a little, little love to—to go round.

EVENING.

Sunset and moonrise; stillness; beauty; and peace unutterable. The sky in the west was a great pink petal, splashed and painted lavishly in the wanton chalice design of gorgeous tulips. Against the background were shafts and javelins of crimson and scarlet, flying across the glow like weapons of flame.

Lower down lay tumbled, lurid masses of ignited clouds—the sun departing in chariots of fire. Lower still all was mauve and purple, and the outline of the land was tempered to softest gray and dove. Reflecting all, was the sea; a gleaming floor of purest gold that gave back everything, kind for kind.

A man and a girl sat stilled up on a headland, in the peaceful *calvaire* of a great new-erected cross. The girl spoke.

"It is strange, *mon ami*, the ways of the good God. Behold!" She raised her hand and pointed to where the half-built construction of Saul Budro on the site of the weir, a shifting bottom after all, had been battered into a hundred fragments and strewn along the shore. "The sea has brought retribution and given thee justice. It has given thee back thy Golden Hope site all clean as it was in the first, and there is none left to dispute it.

"And see, dost thou take in the strangeness of it?" She pointed below to where the crude fish-stand construction of the man rested as secure among its rocks as

before. *"There,* beyond all doubt, is a well-proven site for thy terminal. The sea has shown thee that."

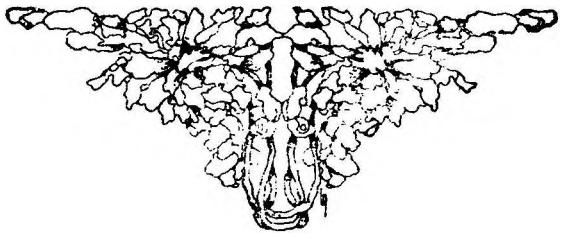
The bell for vespers came pulsating about them from the church up on the slope. The man rose. Trained and tried and tempered, David Legere stood tall and strong and splendid in the golden light—the invincible, perfected pioneer.

"It has done more than all that," he said. "It has given me a new love to replace the old, and I have a vow to fulfill. Come!"

Reverently he led her up the slope, up where the little church of St. Anne's shone like a jewel in its spruce-clad hollow, its little cross of gleaming gold uplifted bravely upon the sea.

THE END.

The first installment of "The Squealer," a four-part story by Edgar Wallace, will appear in the next issue.



THE CHAMPION ORATOR

ONE of the best things done by the virile and verbose representatives of the people in Congress assembled is the delivery of speeches lauding, boosting and advertising the achievements of their native States. In each Congress one member, luckier than his fellows, so excels in unbridled puff, praise and panegyric that his effort stands out as the unforgetable outburst. In a recent session the prize was won by the Honorable Charles L. Abernathy of North Carolina.

After paying hyperbolic tribute to many of the manufacturing interests of the Tarheel commonwealth, he shrilly concluded:

"Sir, if all the cigarettes manufactured in North Carolina in one year were rolled into one great, long cigarette, a young sport leaning nonchalantly against the south pole would light it with the everlasting fire in the tail of Haley's swift and restless comet; use the starry Dipper for his ash tray; blow smoke rings which, unbroken by all the hurricanes that lash the seven seas, would hide the circles around Saturn for a thousand years; and with the immeasurable inferno of its stub blot out and usurp the glowing fame and place of the hitherto quenchless morning star.

"If a young lady would wear in one skirt all the silk woven in one year in North Carolina, its whispering edges, as she turned around on top of the Washington Monument, would, with their musical and alluring froufrou, charm the ears of yelling cowboys on the wind-swept pampas of the Argentine; brush the fragile liquor glasses from the tables in the sidewalk cafés of sparkling Paris; and, with a coquettish swirl, create a perfumed draft that would shake down to the shadow-embroidered grass the blushing bloom of the sacred cherry trees in the Imperial Gardens of Tokyo, Japan!"

The Counselor at Crime

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "The Preachin' State-o'-Mainer," "The Auzanier Jewels," Etc.

As the meek and mysterious Mr. Phineas Tutwiler very well remarked, there are more than enough bootleggers extant to furnish fair game for the honest burglar.

MISINFORMED persons say that there is no such thing as neighborly relations in the great city of New York. Such persons will tell you that the family next door neither knows nor cares who you are or what you do—that the neighbors are oblivious equally to your good fortune and your bad fortune. If they are to be believed, you may roll in wealth or lie at the point of death from starvation, with none to envy nor to sympathize.

But this is not true. New York is observing, even prying, and in its most congested districts too, as Phineas Tutwiler, young and bookish and cautious, learned to his dismay.

Mr. Tutwiler, with certain secret things in mind, turned into Bleecker Street, which is a very old street of grubbing little business establishments, musty tenement houses, noisy pavements, and smells. Bleecker Street touches both the slums of the East Side and the bohemianism of Greenwich Village. It is not a wide thoroughfare, yet it is filled with stir and bustle from sunrise to sunset, and for hours afterward.

It is a business street and a street of homes too. It is a playground for swarms of children who make of its clustered ash cans and gloomy doorways their forests and their caves. Children play at chalk and skipping games in Bleecker Street, but they also play at wild Indians there. When the white-clad emissaries of the street-cleaning department come into Bleecker Street to flush the cobblestones with swift streams of hose water, boys float tiny boats in the gutters and imagine them to be pirate craft.

Phineas Tutwiler, having reached his destination, gazed thoughtfully at Bleecker Street through his owlish glasses, and was

pleased. He was a thin young man with a grave face and a preoccupied air, who had a mannerism of standing with his long, artistic fingers loosely dovetailed over that part of his anatomy commonly associated with cramps. Indeed, when he stood thus in meditation, one might have been excused for thinking he had a pain in his abdomen, so concentrated was his stare and so solemn his visage. It was so on this fine summer morning.

"Well, Mr. Tutwiler," came a solicitous voice from behind, "ain't you feeling well?"

Phineas Tutwiler turned in surprise.

"Feeling well?" he repeated in his soft, deferential voice. "Why, what made you ask that, Mr. Gorm?"

The elderly Mr. Gorm had emerged bareheaded from his dingy little bookshop, having seen Phineas Tutwiler standing in front, and having every reason to be nice to this young man. He rejoined:

"You looked so—so kinda solemn, Mr. Tutwiler."

"I was merely thinking," Phineas assured the old man.

"Ah, that's good," Mr. Gorm returned, with a sparkle in his eyes. "Thinking about the neighborhood, eh?"

"Yes—in a way."

"And whether you'll like it or not, eh—is that right?"

Young Mr. Tutwiler did not reply. He continued to study the street and the throngs therein and the buildings all about with an air of profound meditation. The other took advantage of this opportunity to urge:

"Now you'll like it here, I'm sure. I just know you'll like it, Mr. Tutwiler. It's crowded and noisy and all that, and it ain't very clean—but crowds mean business. Just like I told you right along, there ain't a minute there ain't somebody looking over the books on my tables here in front.

"Of course," he added hastily, feeling the necessity no doubt of making this statement jibe with the fact that the book tables were entirely deserted at the moment, "it's early yet. Folks're hustling to work—no time to stop. But wait—just wait. Folks with time to look at books don't get into the streets so early.

"They'll come—yes, yes, they'll come—and they'll buy. Other times you been here, you seen that, eh?"

"Yes," Phineas Tutwiler conceded, "you do a good business, Mr. Gorm—a good business, I may very well say." Another moment of thought, and then music to the ears of Mr. Gorm: "And I rather like the neighborhood. Yes, I may very well say that I like it."

"Then come now," Mr. Gorm pressed, with a happy, breathless grin, "let's settle our business now—this morning. If you'll do that, I can start for the West to-morrow morning—yes, sir, to-morrow morning.

"Y'understand how anxious I am, Mr. Tutwiler—doctor's orders. I can't wait much longer, even if I hafta give the business away—and that's what I'm doing now, almost. Come now, what d'you say, eh?"

Phineas Tutwiler took a final look up and down the street, and then turned rather a lengthy gaze on the tenement house which lifted its three stories over the basement bookshop. When he lowered his eyes to the face of Mr. Gorm it was to announce:

"I came prepared to buy the shop this morning, Mr. Gorm. We should be able to handle everything by noon. It will be, as I told you, a cash proposition. I shall pay your price in full.

"I have instructed my lawyer to meet me here, and he should appear at any moment now. You may very well say that the shop will be mine the moment I have paid you for it—and I shall take possession at once. That will leave you free to make your arrangements for departure—and I sincerely hope, Mr. Gorm, that you find the health you are seeking in the West."

"Thanks, thank you, thanks! You're a fine young man, Mr. Tutwiler."

They went into the old bookshop arm in arm—Mr. Gorm happy and voluble, yet remembering to show appropriate distress

over the sacrifice he was supposed to be making; Phineas Tutwiler silent, sedate, restrained, as became a young man of a studious and philosophical turn of mind who had an important enterprise ahead. Important indeed! Much more important than old Mr. Gorm suspected and the nature of which he hadn't the faintest glimmer.

AND so it happened that about noon young Tutwiler found himself in absolute and sole possession of the dingy little secondhand bookshop in Bleecker Street. He decided at once to call his place "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe"—and to have such a sign, in Old English lettering, hoisted over the front door as quickly as possible.

After he returned from lunch Mr. Tutwiler stood for a moment in the doorway of his shop, studying again the various aspects of Bleecker Street. Once more he was conscious of satisfaction.

"A busy street," he ruminated. "I may very well say that I will not be subjected to undue scrutiny here. It is such a little shop—insignificant. But I shall have no neighbors—no friendly neighbors who might pry into my affairs. That is well."

With fingers still clasped across his abdomen, the young man withdrew to the seclusion of the shop, and began to look things over again, planning and replanning various changes in the arrangements. He was to occupy a sleeping room at the rear of the shop, and a woman was already at work there tidying things up. His baggage would come along during the afternoon.

Meanwhile Phineas Tutwiler attended to the trade, of which there was a comfortable amount, and shifted books and dusted—conscious all the while of handling his own possessions, even while he thought of more important things.

As the afternoon progressed Phineas Tutwiler was somewhat disturbed to learn that his advent into the neighborhood was not without interest. The owner of a little print shop across the street sauntered over to get acquainted with Phineas Tutwiler. Three or four women from the tenement house above, seeing him busy at the tables in front, stopped to inquire diligently into his affairs.

It was a matter of interest that old Mr. Gorm was gone. He had long been a familiar figure in the neighborhood. The proprietor of the delicatessen store next door, fat and friendly, called to pay his respects, as did others from stores thereabouts.

A HOUSEWIFE from the tenement above came in with her baby in her arms, looked around, and inquired:

"Where's Mr. Gorm at, young man?"

"Mr. Gorm is no longer here, madam," young Mr. Tutwiler replied.

"He's went an' sold out?"

"Yes, madam," with a pleasant smile; "and I am the new proprietor. Is there something I can do for you?"

She looked at him doubtfully. The baby squirmed.

"Well, I do' know," she said. "Ye look awful young, but maybe ye c'n handle him. He ain't much trouble, if ye just wiggle yer fingers in front o' his face now an' then—if he starts up to cry."

Mr. Tutwiler's heart sank.

"I don't quite understand, madam," he said weakly.

"Mr. Gorm took care o' my baby fer me when I hadda go out," the mother explained. "Three times a week, afternoons fer two hours, I go over to a house on Washington Square to sew. I ain't gone but two hours. Think ye c'n manage it, Mr.——"

"Tut—Tutwiler is my name, madam. Ah—did I understand that you wish to leave your baby here? Here with me, madam?"

"Yes, Mr. Tutler. His name's Alfred."

Alfred squirmed more vigorously, and made as if to cry.

"But I hardly think, madam, that I—— You see, I know nothing about babies, nothing to speak of. I may very well say that I never took care of a baby in my life."

The woman's face fell.

"I do' know as ye could manage it," she admitted. "Ye're so awful young. Well, I s'pose——"

The young man's heart was touched. She was a sad-looking woman. The baby had a clean, round face. He was smiling now.

"Ah, madam—you say you go out to sew? Yes, I understand. Mr. Gorm said nothing at all to me about this—no, not a word. But if you care to intrust your baby to me, I assure you that I will do my best. Yes, indeed!"

He grew more sympathetic and anxious to be of service with each word. "I may very well say," he added, "that I will exert myself in behalf of your baby. I will give him, so far as possible, my undivided attention. You have a fine baby, madam. You say his name is Alfred?"

"Yes, Mr. Tutler——"

"Tutwiler, madam."

"Tutwiler. That's a funny name, ain't it, Mr. Tutwiler? Well, Alfred ain't a fussy baby—long's somebody's paying tenshun to him. Mr. Gorm alluz stayed in sight o' him, and just sort o' kep' talking, an' wiggling his fingers. He set him on that wide table there, an' kep' his eye peeled so's Alfred wouldn't crawl too close to the edge. He give him a book to play with too—some book he didn't care nuthin' about. Alfred's hard on books."

"I'm sure, madam, that Alfred and I will get on splendidly," Mr. Tutwiler said as he took the baby.

And they did. Yet the incident, together with the friendly calls he had received, disturbed Phineas Tutwiler. He would have to be extremely cautious. He had vital secrets to keep.

ALONG toward evening, after his sleeping chamber had been freshened and put thoroughly in order and the woman had gone, Phineas Tutwiler's baggage was delivered. The first thing he unpacked was a small case containing a few treasured books. He selected one of these, and walked from his bedroom into the shop.

This book was valuable neither from a standpoint of rarity nor as a piece of literature. It was old but not old enough to have taken on value because of that, and being a treatise on astronomy, it was far out of date. Had Mr. Tutwiler proposed to offer this book for sale, he would have tossed it onto a table on which there was a placard bearing the legend: "Any book on this table twenty-five cents."

As a book, it was worth just about that much. Yet this volume was destined to play an important part in the mysterious affairs of "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe."

Phineas Tutwiler stood midway of the shop. There were tall rows of shelves along each wall, so tall that a ladder was always at hand to enable one to get at the books above. There were a half dozen tables down the center of the shop. There were a few chairs for the accommodation of patrons who wished to sit and read.

The sleeping chamber behind the partition in the rear was divided in half by curtains. One half of this room contained a desk, a table, a few chairs and a shelf of books. It was there that Mr. Tutwiler proposed to transact his more important affairs.

Just now, alone, with the perpetual shadows of the shop melting into deeper gloom as evening came on, Phineas Tutwiler gave his undivided attention to the volume labeled "Astronomy," by Sir John Herschel. He had evidently searched this volume before, for he turned without any trouble to the page he sought. Then he plucked a pencil from an upper vest pocket and made a notation on a scrap of paper: 159—247—17.

That was all, yet as Mr. Tutwiler reopened the book at the appointed place, page one hundred and fifty-nine, and read the first seventeen words of the paragraph labeled in brackets two hundred and forty-seven, a smile of extraordinary satisfaction broke through the accustomed gravity of his countenance:

In this manner, then, may the places, one among the other, of all celestial objects be ascertained.

"I like that," quoth he to himself. "My mission is not exactly celestial, yet it lies in the pursuit of difficult objectives." A

moment of meditation, and then: "I like it even better as I dwell upon it. I shall be here an astronomer scanning the heavens. I shall point out stars and planets to those who come to see me, and bid them look for themselves. The skies I study are earthly skies studded with stars of gold. I shall send out agents to pluck those stars." He reread the words. "Yes, I like that. I may very well say——"

At that moment the front door opened.

The visitor, coming in from the brighter atmosphere outside, did not at first perceive Phineas Tutwiler. He was a large, portly man, who wore a plaid vest and carried a heavy walking stick—an elderly man. He walked a few paces into the shop, then thumped the door with his stick, impatiently.

"Mr. Dolley," said Phineas Tutwiler, moving forward; "welcome." He had laid the book aside. "You couldn't have come at a better time," he added. "I may very well say——"

"Didn't see you there," said Mr. Dolley, in some surprise. He was rather gaudily dressed from head to foot—a walking counterpart of that breed of men who used to sell gold bricks and green goods to visitors coming in from the country. Indeed, that as well as various other forms of swindling had been Mr. Christopher Dolley's purpose in life, though he had now retired. Retired—not reformed. There is a difference. Any one familiar with the history of crime in America would recall Chris Dolley. He was known far and wide as a fast-working confidence man and swindler. But he'd been wiser than most of his kind. He had amassed a fortune, and had then resolutely refused to turn any more tricks. Christopher Dolley did not propose to die in prison.

"No, I didn't see you there," he repeated. "Well, you're started, eh? Just as you said. That's fine! And now I suppose you're ready any time, eh?"

"I may very well say that I am open for business," Phineas Tutwiler rejoined.

"Fine!" He looked around. "It's a smoky little hole, ain't it?"

"Rather dark—yes. That partition back there cuts off the light from the rear windows. But," with a significant smile, "you and I don't mind darkness."

"That's right—we don't," Mr. Dolley agreed. "The darker the better, for certain things. Well, what's up—what's up? Just how're you gonta start business?"

MR. TUTWILER, standing with accustomed meekness, unclasped his fingers from his belt band, glanced pointedly through his owlish glasses and led the way toward the combination sitting and bedroom in the rear. On the way he picked up the volume labeled "Astronomy."

Their earnest conference lasted nearly three hours. Mr. Dolley went away swinging his stick vigorously, which always meant one of two things—extreme pleasure or extreme impatience. In the present instance it was the former emotion that stirred him.

"Now that young fella's a nut," he soliloquized, "but there's such a thing as a clever nut in this world. He certainly's clever—and he's fulla ideas. I'll get a lotta fun outa this—and take no chances.

"Just what I been looking for—something to take up my time, and still not get right down to the business of sharping again. I'm too old for grifting but I ain't too old to play along with this pleasant little nut."

During the next few days Phineas Tutwiler continued the placid business of buying and selling secondhand books, and he became pleasantly aware of the fact that his previous observations had been a fair barometer of the business he was likely to do there. There was a steady, profitable trade—nothing miraculous, but satisfying just the same. There were numerous steady customers, some of them wealthy connoisseurs on the lookout for rare volumes.

Phineas Tutwiler was just the man for this sort of thing. He knew books, and he had a pleasant way about him.

He accepted the task of minding little Alfred for two hours three afternoons a week, and got some amusement out of it.

And all the while Phineas Tutwiler was on the lookout for the first move in the game he had set on foot. He studied each customer carefully.

It was almost dusk on a Saturday afternoon when a tall, loose-jointed young man walked under the new sign, "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe." He paused just inside the door, closing it slowly behind. His steady gaze met the gaze of Phineas Tutwiler—and Mr. Tutwiler intuitively felt that the great moment was at hand.

Yet he made no sign. He was too cautious for that. In those few moments of silence he took in the outward aspects of the visitor. He was well dressed and groomed, quietly and in good taste. An intelligent young man, Phineas Tutwiler assured himself, with a cool gray eye that spelled shrewdness and daring.

"Thought I'd drop in," the visitor said, keeping his gaze riveted on the face of Phineas Tutwiler, "and look over your books."

Mr. Tutwiler waved his arm in a comprehensive gesture.

"The shop is at your disposal," he said. "I was just about to light things up."

He proceeded to do this while the visitor turned to the nearest shelves. Phineas Tutwiler watched him.

The newcomer hadn't so far taken down a book, but he industriously ran his eyes over the range of titles, along one shelf, then another, and a third. Mr. Tutwiler approached him obsequiously.

"Ah, are you interested in any particular kind of books?" he inquired.

"Well, now," the young man rejoined, "I got it in my head that I'd like to read up on astronomy."

THERE were no other customers in the shop. Phineas smiled, yet it was no more than a trade smile that he might turn on any other patron. It was a curious spectacle—two men groping for an understanding, yet both too cautious to come out and say so.

"Over here," Mr. Tutwiler suggested, "I have numerous books on astronomy. Perhaps you will find what you want—I may very well say that I'm sure you will, as my offerings are quite varied and very extensive."

He led the customer to a certain shelf, and left him there. It was up to the visitor to make the next move, and the man was not very long in so doing. He selected Sir John Herschel's "Astronomy." He opened it, fingering the leaves a trifle clumsily, as a man unused to books, but presently found what he sought.

He appeared to be reading thoughtfully. He looked up, smiling with sudden interest, and said to Phineas:

"Here's a good line. Le' me read it to you."

Phineas stepped closer. The stranger read from the book:

"'In this manner, then, may the places, one among the other, of all——'" He hesitated a moment at the next word, but finally achieved it with undue accent on the first syllable—"'celestial objects be ascertained.'"

He had read not as one interested in the passage itself but as a dull schoolboy reciting a lesson. Yet Phineas extended a hand.

"I may very well say that I'm happy to make your acquaintance, Mr.——"

"Bashford's my name—Charley Bashford. Chris Dolley told me to come here, Mr. Tutwiler."

"Yes, I understand." Mr. Tutwiler's face was grave. "And could you come back, say, at nine o'clock to-night? My shop will be closed then, but I'll be on the lookout for you, Mr. Bashford."

"Yeh—sure. Nine o'clock—I'll be here."

And he was. Their conference took place in the little sitting room at the rear. This was an ideal place for such a meeting. There were two windows in that room, but only one on that side of the curtain which screened the bed.

It was of course a very old house. That floor, although it was called the basement, was on the street level. The window looked out into a yard, but it was provided with a heavy shutter. Thick walls were on two sides. Toward the front was the

partition with the dark spaces of the bookshop beyond.

Phineas Tutwiler had already left on this room the impress of his taste. He had replaced some of the chairs left by Mr. Gorm with handsome pieces of antique furniture. He had a new rug on the floor, and the curtain and the draperies at the windows were in harmony with that. A few well-chosen prints adorned the walls.

His bookshop customers might have been surprised if they had perceived the change in the manner and bearing of Phineas Tutwiler. He was still quiet and restrained, affable in a friendly way, but he was no longer meek and obsequious.

"Now, Mr. Bashford," he inquired, "what is your line of work?"

"I'm a burglar."

"And your problem—tell me all about it, please, as clearly as you can. I take it that you have a problem—that you are in difficulties of some sort—and that you came to me for advice."

"That's the idea—exactly. I'm in trouble." He hesitated a moment with the characteristic wariness of his kind, but reassured no doubt by a reflection that a trustworthy friend had sent him here, he told his story: "I'm what they call a 'thick guy,'" he began. "Know what I mean?"

"Ah, I can't say that I do," Phineas Tutwiler admitted. "You understand of course that I have but little acquaintance with the terms and speech of the—ah—underworld. I may very well say that I am ignorant in that respect."

"That's what Chris Dolley told me," Charley Bashford rejoined. "He said you wasn't a crook—that you never lifted even a Lincoln penny—but you had a system that beat 'em all. He said you're the guy that can pull me out of the hole." A doubtful ring had crept into the burglar's voice. "Well, I don't know. It don't seem——"

"I presume you're worrying," Phineas put in, "because I'm not a crook—but pray don't let that disturb you. My system is good, nevertheless, as we shall see. Now Mr. Dolley wouldn't have sent you here unless——"

"Oh, that's all right," Charley Bashford hastened to say, with restored confidence. "I'm used to funny breaks—and this is a funny break, ain't it? Here I am, a burglar, a thick guy, coming to a little bird like you for a lesson—a little bird that looks like a college boy.

"Well, it's all right. Now like I said, I'm a thick guy—and that means that I tackle the heaviest and thickest safes they make. Get it now, eh? I thought you would. Well, that's it.

"They don't make 'em too thick for Charley Bashford. Course there's bank vaults that I can't touch, and there's even safes that I can't riffle—but not many. I ain't a 'piano player'—there I go, talking lingo again. I mean by piano player that I can't open a safe with only my fingers—like some guys can. You heard about them—touch artists, that figure out a combination by touch and hearing.

"No, I ain't a piano player—I'm a thick guy—and that means I hafta tear 'em to pieces or blow 'em, whichever's best at the time. So now you got it. I'm a burglar that specializes on safes, big fat safes with real dough in 'em—and I've struck a snag."

HE paused to light another cigarette. He resumed:

"About three weeks ago, I started to deal myself a hand—— Say, I gotta stop talking lingo, or you won't get me at all. Well, I mean I started to look a job over—see what I mean? Us fellas work like that—we get a squint at something that looks good, and we begin the deal, which is looking it over. That's the real work in this burgling game—looking 'em over. It takes time and it takes patience, and if a fella misses out on sumpin' in the look-over, things go flooey at the come-off.

"This box—that's what we call a safe—it was in a fella's office up in the Bronx, in one of them new office buildings. You know the kind I mean—little joints, but modern, with stores below and offices above. This fella's office is on the second

floor, one flight up, right in the corner, with windows on two streets. This fella's got an insurance business—but he's got sumpin else too.

"He's a bootlegger—that's what put me next to him. Not no bootlegger that goes around with a bottle in his pocket peddling drinks, but a big-timer. He deals in case lots and truck loads. He never sees the stuff himself, I don't guess, but he's the guy that fixes the deals and collects the dough. Got a fleet of trucks and taxis working for him, and all that stuff.

"Well, he's wise. He's known in the neighborhood, and for years the business people around there knew about how much money he made in insurance and dickering in real estate maybe. He'd be a fool to spread out—now that he's got rich from bootlegging. He ain't spread out. He's making a fortune, but don't nobody know it except a few friends.

"I picked all this dope up by just snooping around. And I found out that there's nights when there's a fortune in his safe—sometimes two or three nights, till he can get down to Philadelphia, where he does his big banking. That's one of his protection stunts—not banking in New York. Way he figures it, he ain't gonta take no chances on getting tripped up with his big deposits—so he railroads clear to Philly every few days, and packs the dough away safe, in a big bank down there.

"But sometimes he can't get away, so all that dough lays in his safe—in that little office. And say—I can open that safe just like I'd open a can of tomatoes! It's that easy."

There was a pause. Phineas Tutwiler had dropped into a mood of profound meditation. Occasionally he stroked his long black hair. His eyes, behind the tortoise-shell glasses, had taken on a dreamy look.

"Well," he inquired presently, "why don't you open that safe, Mr. Bashford?"

"Now we've struck the snag," the burglar replied. He hitched his chair closer. "Chris Dolley says you can jerk me loose from the snag, but I don't see how."

HE had evidently grown doubtful again.

He couldn't be blamed for that. The inoffensive young man in front of him, so mild, so pale, so soft looking, certainly didn't seem to fit into a burglary plot, either as an actor or director. But—well, Chris Dolley had been enthusiastic, and Chris Dolley understood crime in all its various aspects.

"I don't see how," the burglar repeated, "but here's your chance. I can't go near that job because I'm being trailed by a mob of 'wheelers.'"

"Wheelers?"

"That's it—wheelers—and I don't guess you know what wheelers are. Well, here's the dope. A fella in my business don't only hafta watch out for the cops—he's gotta look out for wheelers too. They're the guys that tag fellas like me.

"I'm a man that works alone mostly, and I got a special reason for wanting to be alone on this job. If I took some guy in with me, I'd hafta make a fifty-fifty split. If I took two guys in, it'd be a three-way split, and so on. Now I don't intend to split no dough that I don't hafta—and I don't hafta on this job.

"I don't need help on the job itself—it's just a game of sneaking up that stairway some dark night—it's a building without an elevator, see—and letting myself into that office by picking the lock. I'm a bear on locks, Mr. Tutwiler—as Chris Dolley'll tell you—and I know the lock on that door.

"Oh, I looked this job over from top to bottom and across the middle—before I spotted the wheelers. Well, as I say, I don't need no help on the job itself—and I ain't gonta be squeezed by no wheelers. That's what wheelers are, Mr. Tutwiler—sneaks that trail burglars, and form a wheel around his job. And when he comes out with the dough, they close in on him and shake him down. If he don't stand for the split, there's a fight—and the police come on the run. See what I mean?"

Phineas Tutwiler nodded with interest. His education into the intricacies of crime had begun—and he was immensely

pleased. All this information would be extremely valuable to him in the enterprise he had set on foot, and of which the present problem was the first detail.

"Now I don't mind paying you your ten per cent—what Chris Dolley said you'd charge as your fee," the burglar continued, "but I'll let the job flop before I cut any wheelers in—and that's that! Yes, sir, I'll let it flop.

"Now Chris Dolley said you had a system of figuring things out—a kind of a scientific system—that found the answer to all problems. That's by me. I don't know as I understand what it means, but anyway he said you'd——"

"There is no problem," said Phineas Tutwiler gravely, "that cannot be made to yield to an application of logic. There is no human enterprise that cannot be defeated.

"I am confident that I can circumvent these men whom you designate as wheelers —a picturesque term, I assure you. I may very well say that I can, after my information is more complete, and with a reasonable time for deliberation, tell you how to defeat the purposes of the wheelers. To carry the thing further, just as an illustration of my system, I could, after figuring out a plan to defeat the wheelers, formulate an equally workable scheme to defeat my first plan. And so on."

Charley Bashford, though he shook his head in bewilderment, was nevertheless cheered by the promise which seemed to run in the other's words.

"All right," he said. "Tell me how to trip these wheelers up."

"That," Phineas Tutwiler suggested, "can only be done after my information is more complete. Now then, Mr. Bashford—how many of these wheelers are there?"

"I seen four of 'em—fellas I know."

"And do they know exactly what you are driving at?"

"I don't guess they do—exactly. Course they know I'm after sumpin in that building, but they ain't figured out exactly what it is if I don't miss my guess. I don't see how they could. They didn't follow me in the building. They wouldn't come that close."

"Ah, then—they don't know that you have discovered their purposes, eh?"

"No—course not. It's my game to keep what I know to myself, and beat 'em when they ain't watching so hard. If they was wise that I was onto 'em, they'd be prepared, see? I covered that up."

"Splendid—splendid! And now, just how do they follow you? It isn't possible of course that you would permit these men to follow you at all times—to this place, for instance?"

"Say! I ain't that kind of a dummy. Course they didn't follow me here. They don't hafta watch me. All they hafta watch is that building, every night—waiting for me to crack down."

"Yes, yes," young Mr. Tutwiler rejoined, with measurable relief. "I didn't intend to appear doubtful of your wisdom. But—but perhaps you understand just how careful I must be. In this new life I have taken up, my safety depends on the men who come here to see me. I know that Mr. Dolley will send only the most trustworthy men, the wisest men, who will take every precaution to protect me as well as themselves.

"You understand perhaps why I chose to set myself up in this bookshop, instead of living a life of ease in an apartment or hotel. Suspicion is easily directed toward an idler. But, you see, I have a visible means of livelihood—and I might add, I am conducting a business which I like. Too, I may very well say that I have further protected myself with the little matter of the book in the shop out there. If a man came in and told me that Mr. Dolley had sent him, I should be inclined to believe him—but I wouldn't be absolutely certain. There are ways perhaps that strangers might ascertain that Mr. Dolley and I are friends, and, suspecting something, come here and mention his name, just to see the result.

"But when a man comes in, as you did, and takes down that particular book and reads that particular passage—I may very well say that he was sent here by Mr.

Dolley. There is no longer any doubt. As things go on, it will be necessary to formulate other means of protection—indeed, I sometimes tremble to think of the intricacies and dangers into which this may lead me. But that is a matter of the future.

"Just now we have to consider the case of Charles Bashford, burglar, versus a gang of conspirators he designates as wheelers. Now then, Mr. Bashford, you must give me a completely detailed and accurate description of this building in which you propose to exercise your skill as a burglar.

"No doubt, from looking it over, as you express it, your information is complete. You could of course draw me a little sketch of the building—I shall provide you with pencil and paper—so I may understand the nature and plan of the business establishments in the building. And the immediate neighborhood, too."

Young Phineas Tutwiler gravely produced the necessary materials.

ON a night of wind spattered with rain Charley Bashford, burglar, emerged from a subway station in the Bronx. It was late—very late. Yet Mr. Bashford was used to late hours, and he knew exactly how to efface himself in streets along which he was almost the only pedestrian.

It was a summer night, yet the wind and the rain gave him a plausible excuse for wearing a topcoat with large pockets. That was well, for large pockets are handy for the transportation of burglar's tools. A case or a satchel is a trifle too prominent and certainly cumbersome for one who wishes at every moment to be as light and as ready for flight as a bird.

Alert and knowing exactly what he sought, the burglar's quick eyes detected a movement in the shadows of an alley. Had he been oblivious to the presence of those parasites known to hard-working burglars as wheelers, it isn't likely that he would have noticed this movement. But he was not oblivious, and like all men who know what they are looking for, he was quick to act when he saw it.

He darted into the alley. In a twinkling he had collared a man who shrank there. He twisted him around, and peered into his face.

Other men, perceiving the dash into the alley, came from their lurking places at various points around a certain building, and joined the two in the alley. In all, four men faced Charley Bashford.

He had dropped his hand from the collar of the first. There was no hint of gun play as yet, though hostilities might break out at any moment unless the burglar took the situation in hand. He did that. He surprised the four men by laughing softly, apparently in an agreeable frame of mind.

It isn't often that a burglar laughs amiably when he finds himself in the presence of wheelers.

"Just the guys I'm looking for," Bashford said. "I'm gonta put you to work."

One of the wheelers edged a trifle in front of the rest, as spokesman.

"What're yuh talkin' about?" he demanded.

His voice was threateningly low, suspicious, yet it contained a hint that he and his companions were ready for friendly relations.

"Just what I said," the burglar rejoined. "I'm gonta put you to work. Think I ain't been wise to you all along? You been heeling me three weeks now—thinking you'd squeeze me when I cracked down on that joint over there. Well, I'm gonta crack down to-night—and you're gonta get your bit." He offered this in a tone of friendly surprise. "But you gotta earn it," he added.

"Sure," the spokesman came back, "we'll earn it. Tell us how."

"This ain't no one-man job," Bashford informed them, after they had looked around and withdrawn a little farther into the shadows. "I gotta have help on this job. I was wise to that all along, and first I thought I'd get some of my friends in on it. But I couldn't find the fellas I wanted—so I says to myself, I'll get them wheelers in on it.

"I guess I might's well split with you

guys—not because I like you, but as a matter of business. I gotta have help. There's dough enough over there to make us all rich. You're here—on the job. Well, that's plain enough, ain't it?"

THE wheelers were delighted. The situation was not unique in the world in which they lived. Other artists of the shadows had put wheelers to work when they could do so to advantage. It was, as things appeared on the surface, very much to the advantage of the burglar to work with the men he hated and held in contempt. Well, that was that.

Various rejoinders of approval greeted Bashford's proposal, and he was of course accepted as leader of the expedition.

"Now listen," he explained. "We gotta work on the street level, see—with all them big windows, on both streets. That ain't no cinch, and you guys——"

"I thought you was riggin' up a job upstairs," it was suggested. "You went up there enuff."

"Upstairs! What's upstairs? A lotta dinky offices, with about eight cents in postage stamps in their boxes. Upstairs—huh! Course I been going upstairs. How else'd I get into that joint on the corner?"

"That big real-estate place—you're cuttin' through the ceilin'?"

"Now you hit it," the burglar informed them. "I'm gonta cut through the ceiling. Well, that means work, don't it? But there's five of us, and I got the tools planted in that building—upstairs.

"We'll all go up there, see—and do the cutting. Then three of us'll drop through the hole and do the job on that big box in the real-estate office. Other two'll come outside, and do the lookout stuff."

"But that box—it's a big un. I seen it through the winders. And it's kinda open—to work on that box."

"Now listen—I got this job sized up from all sides. Am I a good burglar or ain't I?"

"Best in the bus'ness!"

"That's enough, ain't it? Come along."

The burglar's reputation in those walks of life in which these men were more or less sneaks and outcasts was sufficient to awe them.

With due care to escape the observations of the policeman on the beat, each of these five men sneaked up the stairway of the building in question. At the end of twenty minutes all had attained the corridor on the second floor. There was no watchman in the building.

They attacked the bootlegger's office—although of course Charley Bashford was the only one in that party who knew it as such. They gained entrance by picking the lock. They stepped inside.

Charley Bashford thoughtfully locked the door behind, and put his skeleton keys in his pocket. They were locked inside the bootlegger's office—all five of them.

But there was another office in this suite, a small inner room wherein stood the heavily laden safe. A door opened into the corridor from this office too.

Charley Bashford maneuvered. The others expected him to produce the tools with which they were to cut into the real-estate office below. But he did no such thing.

Instead he darted into the other room and flung the door shut behind him. It locked with a snap lock on his side, and in another moment he had shut the wheelers off from himself and at the same time held them prisoners.

"If you guys stir up a rumpus," he advised through the locked door, "the cops'll come—and you'll all fall. I got you, and I'm gonta hold you till I got my job done here. Better be quiet, or I'll flop the job and stir the cops up—leaving you here to take your medicine."

They had no way of opening the door except by smashing it, and that would draw the police. They couldn't climb out the windows, for a policeman from somewhere in those lighted streets would be sure to see them; and furthermore, they couldn't jump without injury to the cement sidewalk a full story below.

The burglar was a fast worker, and the bootlegger's safe was small. He set to work.

TWO men sat waiting in the little sitting room at the rear of "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe," in Bleecker Street. They sat in the soft light, and the smoke of a fragrant cigar was sent into the room by Mr. Christopher Dolley.

"That was a great idea," Mr. Dolley was saying. "A great idea. I hope it works."

"I may very well say that I hope so too," Mr. Phineas Tutwiler rejoined. "It is important to me. It is my first case as a counselor at crime, my first effort to subtract some of their ill-gotten wealth from the bootleggers who infest our country. But it was an extremely simple idea that I suggested to your burglarious friend."

"Simple—yes, after a fella hears it. Like all other big ideas, it makes a fella wonder why he didn't think of it first. Point is, you figured it out.

"It'll be a big thing if it works. There's many a way to tap these bootleggers—and I'll send you the fellas who can do it. Like I told you, clever's you are at figuring things out—you could get rich if you'd go into a general business, say——"

But young Mr. Tutwiler lifted a restraining hand, and said in his gravest manner:

"I must repeat that I can't do that, Mr. Dolley. I may very well say that it would be impossible for me to lend myself to stealing from those who have acquired their money honestly. But surely there are enough bootleggers, and rich too, to provide us with riches and amusement.

"What more should we ask for? And it's much easier, if one is troubled with a conscience."

"Yeh—I expect," the retired swindler returned. "I don't know nothing much about this conscience business, but——"

At that moment they received the signal from the front of the shop which announced the return of the burglar from the Bronx. He came in laden with the riches of the illicit whisky dealer.

"I tossed them guys the skeleton keys—through the transom," he explained at the end of his thrilling narrative.

"A thoughtful thing to do," Phineas Tutwiler said solemnly. "I may very well say that that was decent of you—decidedly so."

A HAPPY HOME FOR GORILLAS

FOR many years the gorilla has been regarded as perhaps the most dangerous of all game for a hunter to tackle. Most of the comparatively few men who have killed them have had hair-raising tales to tell of their ferocity. But a few years ago Mr. Carl E. Akeley, the naturalist and animal sculptor, who hunts for the American Museum of Natural History and who kills because he has to rather than because he wants to, visited the Belgian Congo in search of specimens. He found that the gorilla, instead of being a ferocious, dangerous game animal, was an easy-going, peace-loving citizen of the African mountains, hard to hunt because of his surroundings, but easy and safe to kill when tracked down. Upon his return to civilization he made these facts known, with the added fact that there probably are less than two thousand gorillas living in Africa. One result of his experience was that there was a rush of "sportsmen" to the Congo to bag a few of these animals. Another result was more creditable to the human race. The Belgian government has set aside two hundred and fifty square miles of territory as a gorilla sanctuary. Arrangements are being made for scientists to study the animals in their native environment, and the sanctuary will be carefully guarded against the activities of hunters.

Gorillas in captivity usually become bad-tempered and dangerous with advancing years, but it is thought that under natural conditions they will live at peace with the gamekeepers and scientists who will be connected with the sanctuary, which has been named the Albert National Park, in honor of King Albert of Belgium, who is greatly interested in the project.

The Roper

By H. C. Wire

In the ignorance of comparative youth, Jimmy Carson held that circumstances didn't count. "A crime's a crime," he said. But experience brought home his error.

CHIMES in the tower were on the stroke of two as Jimmy Carson turned abruptly from the darkened street and ran up a flight of steps to the sheriff's office. He passed along the corridor above, paused with a scowl bringing puzzled lines to his young face, then entered a room at one side.

Sheriff Jernigan was standing alone with his back toward the door. Carson hurried to him, the impulsive banter that was usually his greeting checked by the silence of the other man.

"What is it, chief? Something up?"

The sheriff turned, his huge bulk swinging slowly.

"Something up! You are. What time of the night is this for you to be keeping my girl awake. Don't you ever sleep?"

A relieved smile lighted Carson's gray eyes. "Milly was just coaching me in the steps of the latest wedding march. Gosh! I never knew it was such a job to get married!"

"That's no excuse for this hour and if her fool husband elect won't use judgment, her dad will. Eleven o'clock hereafter—understand?"

"Exactly! But why didn't you tell me all this over the phone. What else have you got on your mind?"

Jernigan's brow gathered in wrinkles that sank deep into his leathered skin. He produced a pipe, lighted it and sat in a chair before his desk. Then he spoke.

"Remember the Sam White case?"

Carson shook his head. "Not clearly. It happened while I was still a cub on the *Times*."

"Well, you've heard about it. A surveyor got in a row over a Spanish girl and killed a man before the thing ended. Made a run for the border, where he crossed into Lower California and disappeared. It was a damned regrettable case all the way through, for White was not bad."

"Oh, I know what you're going to say,"

Carson cut in. "You would like to justify him somehow. You're getting soft. If a man loses his head, let him take the results. Circumstances make no difference; a crime's a crime. That's my opinion."

Jernigan shrugged. "You are very young."

"Yes, but before I was made your deputy in this little game of man hunting I chased criminal news for ten years."

"And I've been chasing criminals for thirty! We're all puppets, Carson, jerked by the strings of our passions—hate, love, greed and the like until we learn control. One man never learns it, another finds himself after a single violent act. There is not a man in this world I would trust until after I had seen him under stress of some terrific emotion."

"Sort of an acid test, you mean," Carson laughed.

"Worse than that—the test of one human played against another. But let's not argue. This is your job.

"I have just received a tip that Sam White is in Ensenada, seventy miles below the line. My information says he has set himself up in an office as a mining man. Here's a picture taken twelve years ago; no doubt he has changed a great deal."

Carson studied the photograph handed to him from the sheriff's file. He saw a mild-faced man of squat, muscular build, dark hair and eyes of striking directness. Long experience in observing people gave him a vivid impression of the picture, and as he returned it to Jernigan he noted mentally the outstanding features that even time might not alter.

"I'd recognize him if he would look at me like that. Regular gimlet eyes. Must have been a strong devil too. I admit he doesn't look criminal, but I'm not soft on him."

"No one was further from being an outlaw," Jernigan insisted. "I knew him well. That's the reason I cannot make this trip myself. Of course it will be a roping job."

"No other way to do it?" Carson objected.

"No. Even if the man proves to be Sam White we could never land him through the Mexican authorities. So you will have to lead him across the line on some pretext, then wire me and I'll send a warrant by special delivery. It would be unwise to have the paper on you down below; no telling what friends White may have, even among the inspectors."

Carson nodded. "White has an office as a mining man? All right, I'll go down representing big interests who want to invest in Mexican property. Of course before the deal is closed I can make it necessary for him to meet me in San Diego. Easy!"

"Perhaps not so easy," Jernigan prophesied, "but you have the right idea."

A moment of silence settled upon the room, until the sheriff continued. "I am interested to see how you handle this trip, young man—for two reasons. Now you will just about have time for breakfast, then take the eight-o'clock stage. You can sleep riding."

THE average American, entering Ensenada on his first trip down, sees only a modern village on a blue crescent bay, very little different from the other settlements closer to the line. Here on the central street are the usual Chinese restaurant keepers, speaking the Mexican tongue as they serve their chop suey or Fu Young Dan. The dollar is preferred to pesos, and beer is sold at border prices.

But up the hill or down toward the bay front, life drops back a century. Rows of adobe huts stand as they have always stood, yellow blocks of sunbaked mud rising as a part of the same mud underfoot.

These streets are narrow, drab and silent, yet this is the true pulse beating beneath that tawdry sham of civilization above. Revolutions have been plotted here; Walker the filibuster hatched his schemes of conquest within these dim rooms; who can tell what fires are kindling in the mind of a ragged figure hunched alone over his bottle of tequila?

With an eye trained for the unusual, Carson having registered at the Hotel Hi-

dalgo as Patrick Hughes, soon found his way along a street leading down to the water. He reached the Pancho Cantina suggested as a miner's hang-out by an acquaintance on the stage, paused a moment to survey the room through an open door, then entered.

Dusk was fast deepening the shadows, and two lamps hung over the bar no more than equaled the twilight outside. There were only a few men in the place, some standing at the rail, others seated at tables pushed back against the wall.

Apparently no one noticed the American as he sat on a bench in one corner and asked for beer. Yet Carson knew he was watched; fleeting glances over the top of a glass, a quick curious look covered by the pretense of one man speaking to another, told well enough that his entrance had not been ignored by the Mexicans.

There were men of other nationalities too; a Chinese, several Italians from the fishing boats; then presently Carson saw an American gazing at him openly from farther down the room. He was a strange-looking fellow, with a gray beard that concealed most of a rugged, tanned face.

Friendly interest showed in his scrutiny and Carson returned it. A renewed spirit was just beginning to loosen under his skin. It had taken some time after the steady mill of newspaper work to accustom himself to greater freedom, until now, though this saloon was dirty, smelled to heaven of mixed liquor and was filled with the dregs of many races, he felt a reckless pleasure in being here.

So he was not displeased when presently the gray-bearded stranger picked up his glass and approached the same table.

Occasionally Carson met men who interested him even before they could exchange a word. This was the effect as he sat watching the one across the boards.

"Sir," the man said gravely, without the formality of an introduction, "it is true that poverty is no vice. I am also aware that drunkenness is no virtue. Behold in me, sir, a victim of circumstance."

He paused to drain the contents of his glass. "You are a man of learning, I can see that. You are young also. Youth with its dreams, its hopes, its ideals! Good sir, may poverty never bury your ideals; may you never come to the position of one whose drink takes the place of wealth. Mine are buried but temporarily, sir. Would you believe it, with a few thousand dollars I could gain a fortune."

A soiled hand reached toward Carson's arm. "You are not, sir, in Mexico looking for an investment?"

Carson stared into his cup. Plainly the old man was laboring under more than the effects of drink. There was mental distress in his words; there was also sincerity.

Then he became aware that loungers near the bar had turned toward them, some grinning, others openly scoffing, as if the old fellow and his talk were well-known to regular customers in the cantina.

A drunken Mexican came forward with a glass of foaming beer in his hand. He splashed it onto the table, saying a few words in his own tongue that brought a roar of laughter from the crowd.

The old man ignored the interruption, yet a look of humiliation crept across his face. Carson pitied him, and was on the point of a remark to the Mexican when the stranger stood up with one swift straightening of his legs.

No one could follow the rush of his next movement as he clutched the Mexican's extended hand, jerked it up and backward, spinning the fellow around, then boosted him bodily by his neck and trousers out through the open door.

For a moment he stood there, his hands clenched as a flow of curses came from the street. Then he returned to his place at the table and sat again without even a quickened breath to show of his exertion.

A GALVANIC shock had shaken Carson. The man's hat was thrown to the floor in the scuffle and as he sat now with his head uncovered there was but little gray in his brown hair to match that of his beard. In the one tense moment when he had risen to meet the Mexican, a changed look had come into his eyes; an

expression that was imprinted with photographic clearness on Carson's mind.

He knew now he sat face to face with Sam White.

Conversation was resumed where it had been broken off.

"This is really fortune," he said. "I am looking for an investment. Represent interests in San Diego—mining speculation, mostly."

The other man's head came up; he seemed instantly sobered.

"I deal in mines. I've an office down the street where we can talk, if you want to."

Carson hid his eagerness under a show of having other engagements, but consented at last. So they walked back toward the center of town and came to a store window displaying row upon row of mineral-bearing rock.

Lettered on the door was the inscription: "Daniel Whitney, Mining Engineer and Investments." The man introduced himself by pointing to it as they passed.

Carson in turn gave the name Hughes, stating his business with impressive decision. "No limit to the amount of capital available, if the thing is good. I've heard of you, Mr. Whitney. Strange we should meet this way."

Whitney winced. "You mean—drunk? Well, I'm sober enough now." Despair came into his voice. "That's all I can do, here. Out in the hills it's different. But I can't run this business entirely from the field."

"Are opportunities so great here in Ensenada that you would rather stay on this side of the line?"

"Yes," Whitney answered, without a pause, "they are. I deal very little outside of Mexico." He had reached a certain index in his letter file. "Now here's a proposition down in Almo. A new mine in an old field. Proven property. I'll take you out to-morrow if you want to see it."

Carson hesitated. It was not in his plans to tour the country.

Then Whitney solved the problem himself. "Of course you know the new law down here?" he asked. "Americans cannot hold land unless there is one Mexican in the company."

"No!" Carson exclaimed. "A very recent law, isn't it?" He frowned thoughtfully, then added: "Well, that sort of ties things up. Our organization is already formed, and I know the home office would not take in a Mexican. Sorry. I rather hoped you could help us—and we you. There will be a fortune in whatever we buy."

A time of silence settled between the two men.

"You have nothing over the border?" Carson finally asked.

WHITNEY'S hands trembled as he thumbed through the file, closed it and turned suddenly in his chair. "I have," he admitted. "Just north of San Pas is the biggest thing a man could want. I've been saving it for myself; some day I hoped to work it alone, but that hope is passing.

"The trip there is mostly desert and too much for me. If you want to go, I can arrange for some one to take you."

Carson shook his head. "No, Whitney. I deal straight with the owner. No agents and no lost time. Our money is idle and my orders are to get it working at once.

"Give me the dope, and if it sounds good why can't we leave San Diego tomorrow? I'm going back on the ten-o'clock stage to-night—meet you in the morning. Now, what is it?"

"Placer gold," Whitney answered, then sat with troubled lines gathering about his half-closed eyes.

"You mean you have found the nugget fields of San Pas?"

"Yes. Years ago, but I have never been able to go back. Somehow this seems an opportunity. I am getting old—even a small share of this will be enough to keep me as I live down here."

For the moment Carson was himself overcome by the game he played, and exclaimed with all sincerity: "You won't live down here when you're rich!"

"Why not?"

The news man shrugged, and cursed his idiotic question. He'd soon believe he was actually a mine speculator!

After he had completed a deal with Dan Whitney, arranging to meet the prospector in San Diego the next morning, and was once more on a stage headed back toward the border, he could not banish the unpleasant knowledge that the fugitive was unlike the sort he had expected.

Since darkness blotted out the sights of the country, Carson fell to following his varied thoughts. What things could happen in twelve years. Whitney had not made the most of them. Now, if he had been in the outlaw's place he should never stop so close to the line; he would go on, Central Mexico, South America where a man could start again. Why bury oneself in Ensenada?—with the fear and possibility of capture so close at hand.

Sudden consciousness of his mental trend came upon Carson with a shock. Good Lord, why picture himself in that fix! He would never kill a man. Premonition? Would he have to fight Whitney, or some one else? No chance; he was not armed with as much as a knife.

He considered other things, yet gradually there came an impatience to secure his prisoner without delay. So having arrived at his hotel in San Diego, he immediately sent a wire to Sheriff Jernigan which described the person he had found and asked for a warrant at once. He had just given the message to the operator and turned from the desk, when he saw a familiar face in the lobby, and the next moment Dan Whitney came to meet him.

"Raced you all the way up," the man said quickly. "We've got to begin that trip to-night."

CARSON had to think quickly. He saw there was no detaining the other man, for he was fired with an insane eagerness to be gone.

Well, why not? The warrant for his arrest would not come until morning. They could make the trip and settle the real business later.

So he agreed to change his plans and dispatched a second wire to Jernigan, advising him of the trip to San Pas. Then Whitney led the way, action seeming to clear the turmoil of his mind. Sometimes distrustful, yet with an inward enjoyment of this adventure, Carson followed.

They began with a long ride in a hired car, mile after mile of racing through a hill country, with only the shaft of their headlights penetrating the darkness. They passed but few other cars; and there were no lighted windows along the way.

It was three in the morning when they swept over the crest of the hills and dropped into a settlement of half a dozen houses. There was a light in one, and before this Whitney halted the car. He leaped out, knocked on the door, and remained for some time in conversation with some one who answered.

When he returned to the car he said no more than: "All right," paid the driver and waited for Carson to clamber out.

The news man stood sleepily stretching his arms into the morning air, with thought of a good rest uppermost in his mind. Then abruptly his hands came down and he turned on his guide, for the man who had been in the doorway was coming from behind the house leading two saddled horses.

"Good Lord!" Carson objected. "Let's stop a while."

Whitney shook his head. "It will be hot down on the desert. We ride while we can, then rest at midday."

WHEN dawn came over the eastern rim, lifting the shroud of darkness from the country through which he was riding, Carson stared with puzzled eyes across the desolate floor of the desert.

Hours had passed since the horseback journey began. By sighting at the stars he knew his course was north by east, yet how far he had come was a mystery, for behind him now, as in front, lay only the bleak barren land. Here was desert in its true sense—no sage and greasewood as on the Mojave; nothing but lifeless dunes.

He looked at Whitney. The old man

was hunched in his saddle, arms hanging at his sides, his eyes fixed with almost childish eagerness on the distant hills.

Carson could only guess what the years had done to him; years of banishment from happiness in a land to which he dared not return. With a start of surprise he noticed for the first time that Whitney carried a heavy revolver hung in the cartridge belt at his waist.

The thing had a singularly businesslike appearance and Carson wondered if he was foolish to come unarmed.

"Say," he asked, "where are we?"

Whitney raised one hand without looking back and pointed into the south. "Those mountains are in Mexico. The line's just this side of the foothills." His hand swept ahead. "Yonder over the rim lies San Pas. That clump of willow is a water hole. And to the north——"

He ended abruptly, drawing his horse to a stop. For some time he sat shading his eyes from the sun, then mumbled to himself: "A wagon, with two big grays. Now what they running for?"

Carson stared in the same direction. A sudden exclamation burst from Whitney.

"Sit here," he ordered, and rode at a lope to the top of a dune. He came back scowling. "Hell's broke loose. I guess that's why the wagon outfit is on the run for the water hole. We'd better try for that, too."

Fatigue made Carson irritable. "For Heaven's sake, what are you talking about?"

"Look. Old Santa Ana's coming."

Carson glanced to the north, seeing only a dull yellow cloud mushrooming over the edge of the desert.

"What is it?"

"Sand storm, and she's a heller. We'll strike for the cottonwoods. Come on."

Forgetting his fatigue, Carson bent low over the horse's neck, sending the animal in a mad race after Whitney as with incredible speed that first yellow bloom advanced across the sky, until soon the air was filled with a hot, dry powder through which the sun shone no brighter than at twilight.

There was no wind, the stuff sifted out of a breathless calm with suffocating heaviness until Carson choked with the strain of filling his lungs. The horse was lathered beneath him, its nostrils extended red and quivering.

Yellow twilight turned to darkness pierced only by the pale ball of the sun. From across the desert came the rumble of cannon. Then even before the full force of the wind came roaring down upon him, Carson saw the sand underfoot tremble into little waves. The next instant the dune rose in a blinding swirl and the force of the gale half flung him from his seat.

Instinctively the horse turned along the course of the storm and with head down and eyes closed Carson could do no more than cling to the swaying saddle.

A thousand points of rock shredded his fingers where they gripped the pommel. Breath came in gasps. A thought for Whitney flashed through his mind.

Could the older man stand such punishment? Grimly he wondered if it was Fate's trick to take the criminal this way.

Exhaustion swept over him and he reeled drunkenly. Once his eyes blinked open. The desert was flowing like water. It would kill a man on foot, suffocate him, bury him alive as the dunes rolled before the wind.

He thought of the lone figure they had sighted on the wagon. They were like three ships at sea—himself, Whitney, that other, cut adrift in a gale, all striving blindly for an island harbor somewhere ahead.

THE heat grew unbearable, his hands were lifeless, he was mad with the sting of sand against his neck. Twice his foot slipped from the stirrup and he lunged sideways. He was fast falling into the relief of unconsciousness when the movement of his horse stopped, while for the moment there seemed a break in the force of the wind.

Opening his eyes to narrow slits he saw the dancing shapes of cottonwood trees. His horse had found the water hole. Here was protection of a sort and he started

farther into the clump, then halted suddenly almost upon a figure that came stumbling to meet him.

The shock of surprise passed quickly, for even in the next moment, when he realized this other one who had also gained the trees was a girl, he was too deadened himself to feel more than pity. As one exhausted, she stumbled through a final step and collapsed into his arms.

A feeling of panic swept upon Carson as he held her. She might be dying. She seemed far more than in a faint. Then the limp body shuddered.

Slowly the girl looked up, dark lashes trembling over wide brown eyes, the rush of wind sending her hair in a cloud around her upturned face.

"You are brave," she told him, rising close to speak.

Her voice came softly above the storm. There was the beauty of pure Castilian blood in her deep color, red lips and smooth skin.

Carson smiled, and moving nearer to the barrel of his horse, formed a barrier between the animal and his own breast. He was still in this position when the main force of the gale was spent. A movement of the girl's head sent his eyes downward to find her watching him intently.

"All right now?" he asked. "If I only had a canvas we could have a real protection."

"There was one in my wagon," she offered, "not a mile back. I couldn't bring it when the horses broke away."

Carson looked into the desert. "The wind's down now. Perhaps I can get it. You stay right here. I'll come back in a jiffy."

He left the girl in a shelter of branches and returned in the direction she indicated, coming presently to a wagon that stood with pieces of broken harness hanging to the tongue. There was a strip of canvas weighted down in the box, also a bedding roll, a supply of food and cooking utensils.

Carson surveyed these things curiously. His little friend was traveling? From the looks of the outfit she was moving herself bag and baggage.

Before he had turned back to the water hole the wind dropped as suddenly as it had come, with no more than the vanishing tail of yellow dust to show where it had crossed. Spurring his horse into a lope, he had swept over the top of the last dune and was following on down to the cottonwood clump when he noticed that something was added to the scene.

Whitney's horse stood near the trees, but the man was not in sight. Then Carson saw him crawl quickly from the girl's shelter, throwing himself down to drink from the pool.

Words were unexplainably few when they met.

"All here and one more," said Whitney.

"Is she all right?" Anxiety showed in Carson's voice.

"Right enough," Whitney answered, smiling. "Watch yourself, friend. She's Spanish."

THEY rested at the water hole until the midday had passed then started on across the desert. Whitney rode ahead. As the girl seemed weakened, Carson lifted her up before him, carrying her half cradled in his arms.

She lay as if drugged for some time, her soft warm body relaxed against his breast. But presently her hand crept for support around his neck and rested there as she looked up searching into his face, nor could he turn his eyes away, until it seemed some power greater than he could resist was drawing him down toward her.

Her words came as a little sigh. "You won't leave me? You won't? Oh, I'm afraid."

Carson's head bent lower. "No, I won't leave you! Why are you afraid?"

"It's the cascarone dance—'Tequila Pete.' I was running away. He can't have me. But there was no one else—no one to help me."

His arms tightened. "I'll help you. What is it? Who is Tequila Pete?"

Her eyes flashed open. "You will claim me at the cascarone? You won't let him have me?"

"Of course," Carson laughed.

Her arm bore hot on the back of his neck, as swiftly she raised her head and pressed a kiss upon his mouth. The next instant she relaxed, dozing as before.

Carson touched his horse and soon overtook Whitney. There was a queer expression on the other's face, he thought, yet the man said nothing. So in silence the afternoon deepened, until at sunset they climbed a gentle slope from the desert floor, came to the first fold of the foothills and looked upon the village of San Pas.

Although the settlement was some distance north of the border it was as surely a Mexican town as if it had been far below the line. The truth of this struck Carson abruptly, when, having demanded and secured a room for the girl in the same house where Whitney arranged for their own accommodations, he left her in the care of an old woman to stand on the front veranda in curious scrutiny of the place.

The ugly lines were softened by the glow of evening, which hid the shabbiness of the cluttered shacks and covered all with a tint of reflected twilight. There was but one short street, beginning at the skirt of the foothills and ending with the road that was lost in the desert, flanked on each side by half a dozen adobe buildings.

Most of these were decadent huts; one was a store, three were saloons, for prohibition had not altered life in this desert camp. Who should care what happened in San Pas!

HE was on the point of turning into the house, when a figure came up from the street, glanced once in his direction, then passed boldly through the door.

Carson sprang in behind him, overtaking the fellow in the hallway. He was a thin, sinewy Mexican of about thirty, with a sharp face and black eyes shining with malice. His head was uncovered and tangled hair fell forward to the arch of a beak nose.

"What do you want?" Carson demanded.

The Mexican's face drew closer, a fawning smile on the loose-lipped mouth. "Maria!" he said. "You bring her here?"

Carson's hands were clenched. "No! Get out."

The fellow stood motionless until Carson gripped his arm to turn him away. Then the smile he had worn flashed to an evil leer. "You dog!" he spat. "You want her? Then talk first to Tequila Pete."

Anger bred of hatred swept over Carson, his neck bulged hotly; he would have struck at the Mexican in blind rage had not a door of the hall opened on the uttering of that name.

"Tequila Pete!" Whitney called, coming from his room. "What the devil are you doing here?"

Pete turned, surveyed the American, then spoke in his own language.

Whitney answered in the same tongue, and for some time the two men stood in animated conversation. When it was finished Tequila Pete backed to the veranda, leaving the house with no more than a sidelong glance.

Bewildered, Carson stared after him. "What did you say?" he demanded of Whitney.

"Oh, nothing. Pete's drunk to-night." For the space of a minute Whitney looked at him, seemed on the point of saying more, yet retreated to his room in silence.

Carson was relieved the next morning to find Whitney, for the moment at least, had lost his urge to go on from San Pas. That simplified matters; for time must be spent somehow until the second telegram reached Jernigan and the warrant was changed to this new destination. He would rather not be away when it came.

But there was another reason why he wished to remain in the village. Maria had told him more of the cascarone, pleading pathetically until he had repeated his promise of yesterday. There was a feeling of gallantry in Carson's act. His own love adventure was running happily; how then could he refuse to help any girl in distress?

Their plan was simple. She had only to show her preference for him, which, by the custom of the fiesta would end the

claims of Tequila Pete. He loathed the Mexican anyway, and the girl seemed so helpless.

It was about midday that Whitney followed him to sit at his table in the saloon. Seeking relief from the tension of past events, Carson ordered a bottle of gin between them. He knew it was the first the old man had taken since they rode into the desert and he felt a vague look of reproach in the miner's clear vision.

Neither spoke for some time. Carson nipped at a third glass, puzzled by the feeling that he was being minutely examined. It was as if the other man knew something he did not.

Whitney pushed back his second serving. "No thanks, it works the other way with me. I don't need it out here on the desert. What do you say we move on this afternoon?"

Carson shook his head. "To-morrow. Got a purpose in staying here one more night."

The droop of reminiscence came into Whitney's eyes. His gray head sank low upon his shoulders; weather-worn hands clasped and unclasped on the table before him. "You are young, my friend. I was your age once. I made a mistake. No need to say what it was, but there is no need for you to make the same one now.

"Come, you know what I mean. A girl can raise hell with a man if he isn't careful. His head's gone before he knows it, then there's no telling what his hands will do!"

"Do you think I'm afraid of a damned Mexican?" Carson retorted. "I'll go to-morrow, but to-night there's to be a cascarone dance. You know. Publicly, once and for all, I can help Maria cut off Tequila Pete."

"You're a fool," Whitney answered. "The cascarone is a devil's jig. It's all right for them, but you stay out of it."

"Oh, hell," Carson mumbled, "I wasn't born yesterday!"

The miner stared at him, then a queer smile crossed his face.

Carson scowled as he saw it. "What the devil you laughing at! I don't intend to horn in on these brown women—for one good reason. But I'm no rotter, I tell you. I've made Maria a promise and I shall keep it."

Whitney stood up, his hand falling on Carson's shoulder. "Perhaps you know yourself; few men do. I'll be with you to-night."

Carson stiffened as he watched the old man pass into the street. Know himself? Of course he knew himself. Whitney was still weak, as he always had been.

THE cascarone was an event in San Pas; a symbolic fiesta handed down from old Spanish days.

Toward evening lanterns were hung from poles reaching across a large square space surrounded by adobe walls. Here the ground was packed as hard and smooth as any dance floor. Wooden benches lined the sides.

Soon after nightfall three casks of wine were trundled in and placed on racks at one end, then presently came the dancers.

It was a motley throng of Mexican laborers, miners and others whose business kept them close to the border. Men from the village greeted those who had ridden in from their hill claims; all vied for attention from the women.

The few Americans present seemed content to sit on the benches and watch. They arrived unnoticed until Carson entered the space with Maria clinging to his arm. Then a murmur of voices came from the farther end where a group was gathering around Tequila Pete.

The sound vanished as two violins and two guitars opened the first strains of a waltz. Partners were chosen, the dance was begun.

There was no hint in the slow music now of the heights to come. All was proper. Eyes were cast discreetly down; dark faces towered with grave expression over the heads of the girls.

Wine was given. The dances changed from languid waltz to steps of fiery meaning. The music grew louder, appealing now with a suggestion of the night's promise.

Soon men's faces were no longer grave. They flamed as the pulse of the music and red wine swept all aside save the dance and the favor to be won from their women.

An hour passed. The lamps burned low; swifter came the music, begging, pleading, demanding. A boy ran to the center of the floor bearing a basket of blown eggshells filled with wine, as with a suddenness that startled, the music ceased, only the high, wavering notes of the violin drifting out upon the night.

The time had come. The men stepped back in a circle, while lightly dancing to the thin notes of the violin, the girls went on toward the basket, stooped and clutched an eggshell as they passed. Still to the music, so stifled now that their quickened breathing could be heard above it, they moved with taunting steps behind the ring of silent men.

Came a scream of the violin, answered by a crash of guitars, then cries, laughter and the crushing of shells.

Throughout this scene Carson had stood motionless, to start with tense surprise when a stream of wine splashed over his head. He turned on the instant to clutch the person at his back, and stopped.

Maria was gazing into his face, yet even as he looked, her alluring smile broke into lines of terror. He stared beyond the girl and saw Tequila Pete walking from his place some distance down the floor.

A drunken curse fell from the Mexican's twitching lips. He advanced with the slow glide of a snake, one hand dropping to the butt of his gun.

CARSON was no coward. His mind seething with the night's revelry gave no place for calculation. His senses reeled; all he felt was the blinding surge of hatred that sent him out to meet the Mexican.

A whispered word from Maria startled him. The next instant he felt the touch of cold steel as an object was thrust into his hand.

He raised it curiously, stupidly, little knowing that his trigger finger fell into place as if by instinct. Then out of the mass of faces he saw Tequila Pete spring forward.

His finger moved. Together with the report of a gun he saw the weapon in his own hand jerk from the recoil and felt himself hurled backward as Whitney leaped from the crowd. But even as he fell he watched the Mexican slump down, with a trickle of blood already darkening his neck.

The dance floor was in a turmoil of women's screams, cries, and the tramp of feet as the throng surged back from the shooting. Lamps fell with a crash of glass, their supports struck from beneath them. At once the place was in darkness.

It took but an instant to bring Carson's befuddled brain to the point of realizing what he had done. In the confusion a way opened through the throng and plunging from the center he gained the adobe wall, flung himself over the top and ran into the night. A volley of gunfire sounded behind him as the fight he had begun was joined by others.

A horse was tied at a near-by rack. He leaped into the saddle and raced on. A thought for Whitney flashed to his mind, but there was no time to wait for the man now. He would be all right. He'd done nothing.

Panic surged upon Carson as the rush of night wind cleared his brain. God—what had happened! As in a frenzied dream he saw Tequila Pete falling—dead. For a time he could do no more than cling to the pommel of his saddle and let the horse run free.

At last, dazed, confused, yet with the fumes of drink and the blinding passion gone from his head he found himself down on the desert, riding toward the water hole and the cities beyond. Terror came again. Cities—could he go back to the cities? Was he—was he—— He'd killed a man!

Dawn found him hunched over the water hole, bathing the fever from his face. He tried to think, tried to reason, but it all seemed useless. He could go no farther than his own words, spoken, it seemed, ages ago. "Nothing justifies murder."

The drone of a motor struck upon his ears. Instantly the hunted man, he crouched behind a tree listening. He knew only one sort of car could cross this desert. It was a special make used by the southern county against border runners. Then word of the killing had already reached San Diego!

He sprang to his horse and lashed the animal away from the road. Hidden by a dune after some distance he stopped, saw the car pause at the water hole, then sweep on toward San Pas. There were two figures in it—members of a sheriff's posse searching for him!

Mounted again, he rode southward at a run, yet half a mile had not passed when his hand tightened to the reins.

If the fear within him had remained the controlling instinct he should have continued south, to cross the border eventually, a wanted man. But gradually something stronger, an accumulation of experiences, began to assert itself. He had written the news stories of too many hunted men not to know the consequences of escape.

It was his own conviction against a criminal act, his old creed—a crime is a crime. Confronted by the fact he knew he would never follow his fancy of starting again in some distant place. He would do as others had done; cling to the border towns, held by a longing for the sight of his homeland, always with the hope of going back. He saw himself no more than Whitney—living a drunken hell. And what of Milly—waiting?

Better a quicker, easier end. That was his choice. He drew the horse to an abrupt halt. His mission here had been to secure a man. Now he would fulfill it, and two of them would face justice together. This decision reached, he swung his mount into the back trail.

SHADOWS of evening were flung again from the hills before he urged the tiring animal up from the desert and approached San Pas. The village was strangely still after the gayety of last night's fiesta, the silence of death. He wondered why he had not met the sheriff's car on the road; surely the posse would be spreading out or returning by this time.

Then he saw it at the farther end of the street, standing in front of the house where he and Whitney had taken rooms.

A moment of wavering courage gripped him, but he went on, dismounting at the veranda. There was no one in the hallway when he entered and he stood hesitant until the sound of a footfall turned him to a closed side door. His next movements were accomplished blindly, fear, duty, honor, pulling him back or driving him on as in a daze his hand found the doorknob and pushed.

He took one step over the threshold, to stop, struck dumb by the vision before his eyes. Across the room Sheriff Jernigan was standing alone with his back toward the door.

"Chief!" Carson gasped.

The sheriff turned, his huge bulk swinging slowly, his tanned face wrinkled in a smile. "Take it easy," he advised. "Thank God you came back!" He held up a warning hand as Carson's lips twitched violently. "There's nothing to explain. I know."

"Nothing to explain!" Carson echoed. "Where's Whitney? I came to serve a warrant and I'll do it—in spite of you and all hell!"

"Calm yourself boy, there's no warrant for Whitney. The Sam White case was thrown out of court before you started south."

Carson stumbled into a chair. "Spill it quick, or my head's going to crack."

"Remember what I said?" Jernigan asked. "That I was interested in this trip for two reasons? For one I wanted you to test your theories regarding a criminal of White's sort; and for the other, I wanted to know what kind of a man my daughter was marrying. I'm satisfied all around. Will you shake?"

A smile drove the trouble from Carson's eyes as he returned his chief's firm grip. "But I don't get it all," he objected. "Where's Whitney?"

"Asleep."

"Didn't I kill Tequila Pete?"

"That rawhide devil—I should say not. You only skinned his neck. Whitney must have jarred your aim. He was a badly scared Mex though, for he took out over the line when he saw our car coming—along with Maria."

"He made her go?"

"Perhaps. But I imagine she was willing enough to get away; after her game last night."

A great chuckle rolled in Jernigan's throat.

Suddenly Carson sat upright in his chair. "Say!" he demanded. "Has this whole thing been cooked up on me? You engineered this job just to see what I'd do?"

"In the beginning, yes," Jernigan admitted. "In the end it was a straight murder plot with you as the goat.

"I've known Whitney's case was going to be outlawed and have been in touch with him for some time. So I sent a letter down the day you started telling him to play around with you there in Ensenada; sort of wanted to see you handle the job. But he didn't get my message until you were on the way back. Then he followed up, planning a little party in San Pas.

"He said his scheme was vague until you found a girl on the desert. Then he framed the whole thing—cascarone, Maria asking your help, Tequila Pete. But there was one little item he overlooked. Maria actually did have it in for Pete and took this way to let you kill him. When I got your second wire saying you were headed for this hell hole I knew it was time for me to follow along. So here we are."

Carson crossed to an open window. "Well, I certainly have been a fool."

"You have not!" Jernigan's hand rested on his arm. "You've been through the devil's own mill. You have found yourself, son, and I'm proud of the way you proved up."

AS Carson stared into the glow of sunset the heaviness that had come upon him suddenly vanished, with Jernigan's words growing indistinct in his ears, for his attention leaped to a figure beyond the adobe walls.

"That's Milly!" he exclaimed. "She came with you!"

Jernigan laughed. "Why, so it is!"

Carson was halfway out of the window when the sheriff caught him by the collar of his coat. "Remember young man, eleven o'clock!"

WHAT AILED THE METROPOLIS

WILLIAM SIDNEY PORTER, famous under the pen name of O. Henry, was a brother-in-law of James S. Coleman, a well-known lumberman of Asheville, North Carolina. On one occasion Coleman went to New York as the guest of Porter, who had written him, promising him the time of his life "up here where more happens in a minute than in a month down in western North Carolina." The morning after the brother-in-law arrived Porter began the sight-seeing by walking him down Broadway to Canal Street. The man from the mountains of Carolina stood on the corner and stared at the tremendous congestion of traffic, hundreds of drays and trucks thundering along in every direction with a bedlam of rattle and creak.

"Looks like a nice town all right," Coleman finally gave his verdict, "but 'pears to me like your folks was a whole lot behind in their haulin'."

Salvaged

By Jack O'Donnell

Author of "When Winter Came," "The Hollywood Touch," Etc.

This, in a way, is a mystery story of the race track. The mystery is: How did "Old Doc Doane," that inspired strategist of the turf, train a horse without running him so much as a mile in preparation?

"OLD DOC" DOANE'S the miracle man of the turf. He's more'n that he's the only real, genuine college professor and doctor of philosophy that the race track ever saw. He's the college professor who brought what the highbrows call culture to the sport of kings.

Lotta you guys didn't know he was a professor, hey? Well, he was, all right, until the folks who run the brain factory got hep to the fact that he had a weakness for the ponies.

When they found out that he was in the habit of closin' classes on pay day and goin' to the races, the college stewards told him he'd have to change his habits or he'd be personally none gratis around there. But the old man's love of hoss racin' was greater than his ambition to pound brains into the heads of the sons of the idle rich, so he took the gate, bought hisself a coupla bangtails and came to the Bush Circuit.

I'll never forget the day he came to Tall Oaks. It was the spring of the year and a lotta us guys was sunnin' ourselves out in front of the stables when this tall, gaunt old man comes amblin' along in search of information about the track officials.

The first time you lamp him you think he's dressed up for a part in some play. He has the whitest hair that ever decorated the top of a head, and it curls up over the collar of the Prince Albert coat he allus wears. He ain't got the face of a race-track follower a-tall. It's more like you'd expect a nice old innocent school-teacher to have. It's kinda long and—and kind, or maybe it's the smile around his lips makes it look kind. And his eyes are sorta pale blue.

But the thing that hits you funniest is

the skullcap he wears whenever the weather ain't too snappy. Imagine!

Well, anyway, me and the old man get friendly right off. Some of you guys which are old in the hustlin' and toutin' game prob'ly remember that "Handsome Harry" Kearns, the king of the gyp artists on this circuit, and his side kick, "Piker Pete" Silverman, the crookedest bookmaker that ever quoted a price, tried to take Old Doc Doane before he'd been at Tall Oaks thirty minutes.

But it didn't take the old man long to prove that he wasn't one of the guys Barnum meant when the old circus man threw his famous line to the mob. In their first skirmish Old Doc Doane tied Handsome Harry and Piker Pete in a knot.

And speakin' of Kearns and Silverman recalls that old hoss, Brass Knucks. At the time I'm talkin' about, Kearns has Brass Knucks in his stable down at Tia Juana. Brass Knucks is a six year old at the time, and as fast as a bullet. But he has brittle legs.

Simply couldn't be banked on to go any distance without pullin' up lame. Keep him in the barn or out in a soft pasture for a few weeks and he was all right, but just as soon as you brought him back to the track and worked him out five or six times he was a bust. And of course every one knows that a hoss has gotta have enough work to tighten up his muscles and his wind before he can go the route.

More than once Kearns got Brass Knucks right on edge—right up to the point where he needed just one more workout to win a race. Then old Brass Knucks would break down in that final trial or in the race next day. If it wasn't for havin' to work out old Knucks on hard tracks—he wasn't a mud runner—Kearns coulda cleaned up a fortune with him.

I THOUGHT everybody in horsedom knew of Brass Knucks' weakness, but I overlooked Old Doc Doane. The old man ain't much of a mixer, y'know, him bein' one of those guys what would rather ruin his eyes over a book in his tack room than go visitin' other stables at night.

Kearns knew this, so he framed the old man into buyin' Brass Knucks. I nearly fell off the paddock fence when I see Old Doc Doane comin' from the direction of Kearns' stable one day leadin' that old cripple. The Doc is smilin' and happy as he comes up to where I'm sittin'.

"Son," he says, kinda confidential, "I just got a wonderful bargain. I bought Brass Knucks from Mr. Kearns dirt cheap."

"If you paid him in German marks, Confederate money or good wishes you've been cheated," I tell him, wondering how bad Kearns had harpooned him. "What'd he set you back?"

"Set me back? Oh, you mean, how much did I pay for him?"

"Yeah. What's the bad news?"

"Twelve hundred dollars," says the old man, smilin' at me like a child showin' his mother a perfect score on his school card. "Dirt cheap, don't you think, son?"

"Eleven hundred and ninety too much!" I tell him, and I mark up another grudge against Handsome Harry Kearns.

Old Doc Doane seems pained at my remark. "Why, son," he says, "Brass Knucks is a good horse. Two years ago he broke four track records at Oakwood."

"Sure!" I says, "and a year ago he broke every bone in his four legs and since then he's broke every hay-eatin' record in history. He'll break your heart, too, before he wins a race."

"Son, you've known me quite some time now, and you've never known me to make a mistake in buying a horse, have you?" he asks, and I'm forced to admit he's right.

"But," says I, "this baby breaks the charm. Patricia was a mare that needed nothing but her half brother to run with in order to win. You found that out some way and won. Then everybody laughed at you when you began paying feed bills for Christiania, but you discovered that all she wanted was a dark, foggy day to beat anything in training.

"But those hosses was sound, doctor. They had four feet, good wind and everything. Now, this hay destroyer ain't got a leg to stand on. He's pulled up lame

every time he's started in the last year and a half. He's dead but refuses to lay down."

"Well now, that's funny," he says, handin' me the bridle while he stoops down and looks at Brass Knucks' feet. "Mr. Kearns assured me that this horse would beat anything in training when he was right."

"*Was* is correct!" says I. "But *try* and get him right again! All he needs is four new legs.

"Take my advice, doctor, and don't waste time nor money on Brass Knucks. Give him to a glue factory and charge him up to profit and loss."

"I'll see, son, I'll see," says Old Doc Doane, movin' off toward his own stable.

When I go over to the Doane barn that night I find the old man workin' on Brass Knucks' feet. He looks up when I walk in and says:

"Son, if I had this horse in a wet climate where there are soft tracks and pastures I could get him in shape to win. But this Mexican climate has me stumped. If all you say is true—and I know you wouldn't deceive me—it will be just about impossible to give him enough work on this hard track to get him on edge. But maybe I can figure out a way to work him and rest his feet at the same time."

Many times since I got to know Old Doc Doane I thought he was a little cracked, but that remark almost convinced me. How in the cockeyed world can you build up a hoss' wind and muscles without gallopin' him? I put it up to you. How?

I didn't say nothin', but just nodded my head kinda noncommittal. The old man keeps on workin' on Brass Knucks, but I can see that he's doin' some heavy thinkin'.

Suddenly he straightens up, removes his skullcap and smiles. And when old Doc Doane smiles, boy, he restores your belief in mankind. There is something gentle about his grin, something that kinda reaches down into a fellow and makes him wish he was decent and—well, you know what I mean.

"Son," he says, puttin' his hand on my shoulder in that fatherly way he has, "I believe with your help I can salvage Brass Knucks. You are not a rider yourself, but I presume you can recommend a trustworthy boy who knows something about horses and who has good courage. I want somebody who can keep a secret, even from you!"

"Easy!" says I, wonderin' what the old man's got up his sleeve. "'Louisville Johnny' Daniels is your ticket. Before he lost his waistline and had to go to hustlin' he was a jock and a good one too. And a deaf-and-dumb guy is as talkative as a politician compared with Johnny, once he says he won't talk."

"Fine, son, fine! Send him to see me in the morning. I have an idea."

Tia Juana ain't the best place in the world for a hustler and as me and Johnny was engaged in that gentle art without much profit, Johnny was glad of the chance to earn a piece of change and at the same time help Old Doc Doane.

I left the Doane barn as soon as I got the pair together, and havin' a lotta respect for the old man's wishes I don't ask Johnny anything about the Doc's plans when I meet him later. All that Johnny says is: "Kid, I'm afraid the old man's a little loose in the bean," meanin' he thinks Old Doc Doane is off his nut.

"A lotta guys around the track think that way, Johnny," I tells him, "but don't lay any odds against Old Doc Doane's horse sense."

As I said before, pickin's was pretty tough at Tia Juana that season and I'm so busy tryin' to find disciples to bet on hosses about which I have info that I don't get round to Doane's stable very much And I only see Johnny in the paddock or the bettin' ring now and then.

BUT one day, about three weeks after Old Doc Doane buys Brass Knucks, I'm strollin' along when I meet Old Doc Doane's daughter, Darla. You all know —by name at least—the "Little Mother of the Turf," the title "Sunny Jim" Coffroth gave Miss Doane at her twentieth birthday party, because she's allus helpin' some poor

sucker out of a hole or nursin' somebody's sick kid, or doin' something kind. Well, Darla's blue eyes are shinin' like these Mexican skies and I know right off that she's motherin' somebody or something.

"Roy"—she allus calls me by my right name—"Roy, will you do me a favor?" she says.

Would I? Well, if there's a guy in this world who'd refuse that little queen anything he's a rank sellin' plater. I just take one look at her smilin' face and say: "Name it!"

"You know Mrs. Turner, don't you?" she says.

"Sure!" I tell her. "Her old man died last week, leavin' her that little mare, Joan Mallow, and a lotta debts. Yeah. I know her ever since I came to the race track, ten years ago. Why?"

"Mrs. Turner's a sick woman, Roy, and she wants to get away from the race track where everything reminds her of Mr. Turner. The poor thing doesn't know anything about the racing business, and that scamp, Bleeker, who is training Joan Mallow, is always drunk. She distrusts him and thinks perhaps he will do something to harm the mare's chance of winning the Tia Juana Handicap next Saturday.

"She says she has reason to suspect Bleeker of tampering with Joan Mallow in her last race. Now, I've been doing a little private investigating and I'm convinced she's right. You may recall that Joan Mallow was an odds-on favorite in that event but she finished out of the money. Kearns' horse, Livewire, won. Everybody believes that Joan Mallow can beat Livewire over any distance if the race is on the square."

"Yes, and give her ten pounds," I cut in. "Joan Mallow is one of the fleetest little mares that ever made a bow to the judges."

"Well," says Miss Darla, "I wish you'd sort of keep your eyes open and see what you can find. I know that your business is finding out what's doing around this track and disposing of that knowledge to your clients."

She and her dad both know I'm a hustler, but they are wise enough to know there's a difference between a honest hustler and a tout—they know that I never ask a sucker to bet unless I *know* something.

"Livewire and Joan Mallow are entered in the Tia Juana Handicap again Saturday," she says. "Everybody says Mrs. Turner's mare should win. If she does Mrs. Turner will sell out, take the purse and what she gets for Joan Mallow, and buy a home for herself. I'll trust you to see that nothing happens to Mrs. Turner's mare. And I know you'll do your best!"

And I'm here to tell the people I *did* my best. I did so well that starting on Monday night I spent every night until Friday under a lotta empty sacks in an old feed box in Kearns' tack room. I was about as comfortable as a cake eater at a longshoremen's ball, but I'd go through worse'n that for Darla Doane. Don't grin, guy, I mean that!

WELL, I'm all hunched up in that feed box for the fifth night when in comes Kearns, Silverman and Bleeker. Bleeker's so cockeyed he couldn't hit the ground with his hat, but Kearns and Silverman are sober.

They don't lose no time gettin' down to business. Kearns, who's the brains of the little band of gyp guys that are doing their worst to ruin the sport of kings, pulls a flask from his pocket and hands it to Bleeker.

"Help yourself," says Handsome Harry, running his soft white hands through his steel-gray hair and winkin' at Piker Pete. I can't see Bleeker through the crack in the box outta which I'm watchin' the play, but I can hear the music of that booze as it gurgles outta the neck of that bottle and into the neck of that rat, Bleeker.

"Now," says Harry, as he takes back the flask, "let's get down to business. The understanding is that you are to let 'Weeping Ernest' take Joan Mallow out of the stable at midnight and give her a good long gallop on the road between here and San Diego.

"As soon as she's out of the barn you're

to come here and sleep. That will give you an alibi in case there's any slip-up. If anybody asks questions your story is that you got stewed in town and couldn't get back to the barn. We'll get you up by dawn so's you can slip back and be on the ground before people are stirring. Am I right, Bleeker?"

"Right s'far. But go on," says Bleeker.

I saw Kearns and Silverman give each other knowin' looks. Then says Kearns: "What do you mean?"

"I mean money!" Bleeker blurted. "Money! 'At's what I mean. Money lets the mare go! Ha, ha! That's a good joke. Money lets the mare go.

"Get me? Money lets the mare go outta the barn. Sabe? No money, no mare. And Joan Mallow can win the handicap too, that's what I mean!"

"Not so loud!" warns Kearns, as Bleeker's voice gets kinda hysterical. "That's all arranged. Silverman here will bet a grand for you on Livewire to win. A grand at the price my horse will be to-morrow ought to bring you back four or five thousand dollars.

"Joan Mallow will be the favorite—probably not better than even money—and Livewire ought to be at least three to one, maybe four to one. He'll——"

"Wait a minute," snaps Bleeker. "I want my tickets right now or all bets are off. Understand? All bets are off!"

I could see that Bleeker wasn't takin' any chances with two crooks like Kearns and Silverman, and I could also see that them birds was tryin' to double cross him. Can you picture that pair of bandits bettin' a thousand dollars for Bleeker once the trainer let Joan Mallow go out on the road and work until she'd be too stiff and sore to beat a cow next day? I can't!

Well, they argued back and forth, but Bleeker was stubborn and the session finally ends by Kearns handin' him a grand and tellin' him he could do his own bettin'. Then Bleeker leaves, after tellin' 'em he'll have everything ready when Weepin' Ernest comes.

I could see the clock on the tack-room wall and it said half past ten. I still had an hour and a half in which to stop the night-ridin' racket and save the day for Mrs. Turner and—Darla Doane.

BUT it didn't seem like Kearns and Silverman was in any hurry to be on their way. They gassed about the Tia Juana Handicap and speculated on how much they'd clean up—twenty-five thousand, was their guess.

"I see by the entries that Brass Knucks is in that race too," says Piker Pete. "Didn't know he was in trainin'. Haven't seen that crazy old doctor work him once since he bought the hoss from you. S'pose Doane will start him?"

"No chance!" says Kearns. "And even if he did, what difference would it make? Brass Knucks' days as a racer are over. He's ready for the glue factory."

"Never can tell about a hoss, though, when that old fox gets his hands on 'em," says Pete. " 'Member what he did with Patricia and Christiania."

"Yes, I remember!" snapped Kearns, and a dirty look comes over his handsome face. "But it would take a miracle to put Brass Knucks in racin' form. Once the old legs go bad on a hoss that ends him unless he gets a long, long rest.

"Even a rest won't help that one though, for as soon as he starts trainin' on a hard track the stuff's off. He might get through three or four work-outs without breakin' down, but he'd never be able to get enough work before the legs went bad to get him in shape to go the distance.

"Just forget Doane and Brass Knucks to-morrow. The race is as good as in. With Joan Mallow goin' to the post stiff and sore from to-night's gallop over these Mexican roads, Livewire is the surest thing that ever came to the races. We'll clean up big to-morrow, Pete."

"Guess you're right for once, Harry," admits Piker Pete. "I hope there's lots of play on Joan Mallow. I'll make her look like a cinch by opening her in my book at four to five. I'll take all I can at that price and then I'll lengthen the odds and get the rest.

"My book needs some sucker money

right now. I was hit hard at Tall Oaks —thanks to that old rascal, Doane. Wish he'd come around to-morrow with some dough to bet on Brass Knucks or Joan Mallow."

"Not much danger of him bettin' on Brass Knucks, but he might send in some on Joan," says Harry. "He knows she's about the fastest thing on this circuit since Brass Knucks broke down. So, maybe you'll get a bet outta him."

As they talked I watched the clock, wondered what Old Doc Doane had been doin' with Brass Knucks, and when this party would break up so's I could get out, stretch myself and stop the midnight-ridin' party.

IT was a quarter after eleven when Kearns and Silverman beat it. I waited a few minutes to give 'em time to get away from the stable, then crawled out and made it fast for Doane's barn.

The old man and Louisville Johnny is sittin' in Doane's tack room talkin' earnest-like when I get there. Both of 'em see I'm bustin' with information.

"What's up, son?" says the old man. "You look as if you were carrying a heavy weight on your mind."

"I got plenty on my mind, doctor," I tell 'em. "And we only got a few minutes to get it off and get busy."

And then I tell everything I seen and heard at Kearns' barn. Before I'm half through the old man is on his feet and I can see the light of battle in his kind blue eyes behind his specs.

I tell 'em about Darla and her 'spicions, too, and just as I'm finishing up who busts right into the meetin' but the girl herself. She's as excited as a two year old at the schoolin' post, and her red-gold hair is mussed up, but it just makes her look prettier.

"Dad!" she says, without waitin' for me to finish. "Bleeker—that's the trainer of Mrs. Turner's mare, Joan Mallow—is terribly intoxicated and he's over at the stable with a little wizened-up old fellow who seems to be cryin' or——"

"That's Weepin' Ernest!" I cut in before I think of how it ain't proper to interrupt a lady. But she don't seem to notice it, but just keeps on.

"This little fellow is tellin' Bleeker that he don't want to do anything crooked," the girl tells Old Doc Doane, "but Bleeker just curses him and tells him to do what he's told and that he'll be well paid. Mrs. Turner was so worried about Joan Mallow that she couldn't sleep, and just to pacify her I went to the stable to see if everything was all right.

"I saw a light in the tack room and peeked through a crack in the door. I don't know what they intend doing, dad, but I'm sure it is something to harm the mare's chances in the handicap to-morrow."

"Calm yourself, my dear," says Old Doc Doane, pattin' his daughter's hand. "We know what's up. Roy has been doing as you requested, and he has found out just what has been going on.

"Now you go back to Mrs. Turner and tell her everything is going to be all right. Johnny here will go with you."

Before she goes she gives me a smile which more'n paid for all the uncomfortable hours I had put in in Kearns' feed box.

AFTER her and Johnny leave Old Doc sits down and tells me to do the same. "But, doctor," I say, "they're gonna take that mare out on the road and run her so's she'll be too stiff and sore to run a lick to-morrow. We gotta be movin' if we're gonna stop 'em."

But the old man never budged. He seemed to be thinkin'. I was just bustin' to get over to the Turner stable and wring Bleeker's neck, but Old Doc Doane seems to have forgotten all about it. Then comes the surprise of my life.

"Could Joan Mallow beat Brass Knucks if Brass Knucks was right?" he asks me.

For the first time since I got to know Old Doc Doane I lost my temper.

"What's that got to do with this night-ridin' business?" I snapped. "Suppose old Brass Knucks could beat Joan Mallow —and I expect he could if he was *right*—

what has that got to do with this crooked stuff?"

The old man don't seem to notice that I'm mad. He just nods his head and smiles. Then he asks another one.

"Do you think Brass Knucks could beat Kearns' horse, Livewire, if Brass Knucks was right?"

By that time my patience is worn to a frazzle. Here's Old Doc Doane talkin' nonsense while dirty work's goin' on at the crossroads. I don't answer his question, but glance at the clock.

It's just twelve! I jump to my feet and start for the door, but Old Doc Doane just reaches out his long, white hand and signals for me to sit down again.

"A little gallop won't harm Mrs. Turner's mare, son," he says in his soft, quiet voice. "She won't be fit to run to-morrow, but she'll be all right in another week. That'll be soon enough for her to win, because by that time she'll be running in my colors."

Well, that settled it. The old man had gone off his nut. I was sure of that and was figgerin' how I could handle the situation single-handed when he says:

"No, son, I'm not crazy as you are thinking I am. I'm just taking the surest and shortest way to rid the turf of two or three men who are a disgrace to the sport of kings. And besides getting them ruled off for life, I'm going to punish them through their pocketbooks."

"But how about poor old lady Turner?" I ask.

"Her horse will win to-morrow. And, son, I'm going to have a big bet down on her entry, too. That's all I will say about it now.

"But I wish, son, you'd stay here with me until the night rider gets back with Joan Mallow. I'm going to give her the best care I know how, so she won't suffer from her gallop over the roads to-night."

Well, I was completely bumfuzzled, not knowing for sure if the old man had gone off his nut or whether he knew what he was talkin' about, but I decides to let nature take its course.

We stick around until almost three o'clock before Weepin' Ernest comes back to the Turner barn with Joan Mallow. The little mare is steamin' like a washwoman's kitchen on Monday mornin' and blowin' like a fat man in a potato race when we get to her stall.

The old man works on her until almost five o'clock and I could see by the way he operated that what he didn't know about hosses was hardly worth botherin' about. But I know something about hosses myself and I knew that Joan Mallow would be in no condition to run her race in the Tia Juana Handicap.

I'M up with the crack of dawn and out lookin' for Louisville Johnny to get some light throwed on the doin's of last night, and the three weeks that Johnny has been on Old Doc Doane's pay roll.

I find Johnny at "Mother Murphy's" boardin' house. Floppin' down alongside of him I say: "Look here, Johnny, me and you is friends. We've hustled together for two years now, and you know when you tell me anything it's like writin' it down with disappearin' ink. I want the insides of this business you've been doin' with Old Doc Doane."

"Won't the old man tell you?" asks Johnny.

"I ain't askin' him. I'm askin' you," says I.

"Well," says Johnny, "I don't guess Old Doc Doane would object to me tellin' you that we have been gettin' Brass Knucks in shape to win the Tia Juana Handicap this afternoon. That's the whole story, kid, so help me!"

"Where you been workin' him—on somebody's lawn?" I says, with all the sarcasm I can put in words.

"No, kid," says Johnny in that exasperatin' way he has when he wants to get your goat, "we didn't work him out on no lawn, or on no track neither. Old Doc Doane don't train hosses that way. He's modern, he is."

"You mean to tell me Brass Knucks is gonna race this afternoon without havin' been run?"

"Right-o, kid. I give you my word of

honor Brass Knucks ain't run a hundred yards since Old Doc Doane bought him three weeks ago!"

"Johnny," says I, plumb disgusted, "you're either a damn liar or a damn fool!"

He just snickers at that and shoves a pancake into his mouth, and I get up and go away from there madder than a circus owner on a rainy day.

I'm standin' in the bettin' ring lookin' for a customer who is anxious to make a bet for a good young hustler who can give him the winner of the Tia Juana Handicap when I see Old Doc Doane, his daughter Darla, and Louisville Johnny come along. By this time I'm cooled out, so I joins 'em, and remarks:

"Well, I see the road is all clear for Kearns to cop this heat with Livewire. Now that Mrs. Turner has scratched Joan Mallow there ain't nothin' to it—a regular walk around for Kearns' hoss!"

"There are five other horses in there, including Brass Knucks, son," says Old Doc Doane, "and you've been around race tracks enough to know that racing is uncertain at best. If I were you and I had a client I wanted to keep I wouldn't have him *bet* that Livewire will win this race."

"What's gonna beat him, doctor?" I asks, tryin' to be as polite as a fellow can who's havin' his judgment used as a football.

"Brass Knucks," says the old man in his soft, calm voice. "Brass Knucks, or Mrs. Turner won't be any closer to that home she desires than she was yesterday."

"Are you bettin' on your hoss, doctor?" I asks.

"No, son," he says, "in fact——"

But I don't wait to hear no more. I have a disciple waitin' in the bettin' ring and I take it on the wing to tell him to set in his checks on Livewire, and not to forget the guy that gave him the winner, meanin' myself.

JOHNNY tells me later that, a few minutes after I leave, along comes Handsome Harry Kearns and his crooked bookmakin' friend, Piker Pete Silverman. Piker Pete—the pig-eyed galoot!—stops to taunt Old Doc Doane about the next race, which is the Tia Juana Handicap.

"Oh, see who's here!" he says to Kearns. "The new owner of that record-breakin' hoss, Brass Knucks."

Old Doc Doane and his daughter and Johnny look up but nobody says nothin'. Then Pete continues: "I see you're startin' that twelve-hundred-dollar lemon this afternoon, grandpa. What's the bettin' he won't finish last?"

"Brass Knucks is a good horse, Mr. Silverman," says Old Doc Doane, smilin'. "I have your friend's word for that."

Kearns just grins, and Piker Pete, tryin' to get the old man mad enough to make a bet, keeps layin' it on. "Well, doc, you sure showed yourself a sucker when you bought that cow. I'd allus heard you was a wise old coot, but you ain't wise—you're just lucky."

"Maybe you are right, Mr. Silverman," says the old man, still smilin', "and I hope some of my luck will be with Brass Knucks to-day."

"What! You ain't nursin' the idea that that cripple's got a chance in the Tia Juana Handicap, are you?"

"Well, now," says Old Doc Doane innocentlike, "I always figure every horse has a chance until the first three are under the wire."

"You can take a lot of my dough if he can win and you've got enough nerve to bet on him," says Pete invitin'ly.

"He may not win, but he may be in the money," says Doane.

"Lay you three to one he ain't as good as third!" says Pete, flashin' his roll.

Old Doc Doane rubs his chin as if tempted by the odds Pete is offerin'. He looks at Johnny, and that wise young feller says: "Go ahead, doctor, bet him. Old Brass Knucks might get all the breaks and drop in the third hole. You never can tell what's gonna happen in a hoss race."

"The kid's right!" says Pete. "With Joan Mallow scratched there's only Livewire, Socrates and three others to beat."

"Guess I'll take a chance," says the old man, as if fallin' for Pete's line of talk.

Although he wasn't at his regular stand Pete had tickets in his pocket and he wrote out one for fifteen hundred dollars to five hundred dollars when Old Doc Doane shoves five one-century notes under his nose.

"The more I think of what you say, and the more I think of the important part luck plays in the racin' game, the more I'm inclined to make a little bet that Brass Knucks *wins* this race, Mr. Silverman. I suppose you are laying fifteen to one against his winning, aren't you?"

Pete's eyes just danced with joy when he sees that the old man is really willin' to bet on Brass Knucks to win. Without hesitatin' a second he said: "You're right. How much do you want at them odds?"

"I haven't much with me," says Old Doc Doane quietly, "but I guess I'll bet you five hundred dollars. That'll make an even ten thousand dollars that will be coming to me—if Brass Knucks wins. Is that right, Mr. Silverman?"

"Right you are, old-timer—ten thousand dollars *if Brass Knucks wins,* or two thousand dollars *if Brass Knucks just finishes in the money.* Two ifs, Doc, two tough ifs!"

"I'll add another if to those two, Mr. Silverman," says the old man, his smile goin' from his face. "I'll be richer by nine thousand dollars after this race, *if* you don't welsh on your bet!"

That hit Pete in the solar plexus 'cause he knew that Old Doc Doane knew that he had run out on a big bet on one of the Eastern tracks before he came to the Bush Circuit. Pete was sore enough to fight, but Kearns pulled him away toward the rail.

IT just happened that Pete and Kearns came to where I was standin' near the judges' stand to watch the race. The hosses was just comin' from the paddock, and I had an interest—about twenty dollars' worth—in Livewire. As the parade passed I seen that the Kearns hoss looked as fit as man could make him.

"Then I looked for Old Doc Doane's colors, but there ain't any gold and blue anywhere. It didn't take me a second to pick out old Brass Knucks, however, and when I did I thought I'd gone color blind. The boy on Brass Knucks—Old Doc Doane's jockey, "Midget" Murray—was wearin' the black-and-white checks with the red trimmin's of the Turner stable.

I wasn't the only one that was puzzled. Kearns sees the same thing and says to Piker Pete: "Look, Pete, Brass Knucks is runnin' in the Turner stable's colors! What does this mean? Has that old bird double crossed the widow?

"S'pose he unloaded that old cripple on Mrs. Turner? And why is he betting on Brass Knucks? Do you s'pose that's her money? No! Couldn't be; she's broke. This beats me. What do you make of it?"

Pete's brain ain't geared very high except in money matters, so he just shakes his head—dumb.

Well, we don't have much time to spec'-late. The race being over the mile route the start is almost in front of the stand and it don't take Starter Hennessey long to get the six prancin' beetles in motion. The good old yell: "They're off!" came less'n half a minute after the hosses line up at the ribbon.

Socrates goes to the front in four jumps. He has the rail position and is a fast breaker as you know. Livewire, which is the hot favorite—he went to the post even money—lays right in behind Socrates, then at the first turn the other four are bunched, with old Brass Knucks on the outside. I can see that "Monk" Evans, who's got the leg up on Livewire, has been told to stick close to Socrates as that's the hoss Livewire's got to beat.

The positions are unchanged at the three quarters and Kearns starts callin' the race to Pete. "Livewire is runnin' easy," he says. "That boy Monk knows how to follow instructions. He's just where I want him. At the three-eighths pole he'll go around Socrates and gallop from there home."

Livewire did pass Socrates at the three-

eighths pole, but I could see another hoss shoot out of the bunch in the rear and do the same thing. And that hoss is Brass Knucks.

"What's that goin' after Livewire?" asks Pete, and I can tell he's nervous.

"Don't worry!" says Kearns. "That's just old Brass Knucks. He'll crack before he gets to the head of the stretch and finish last and lame. He always runs just like he's runnin' now. He's always first or second until his legs give out."

"S'posin' they don't give out to-day?" says Pete, chewin' his finger nails.

"Don't be a fool!" snaps Kearns. "That hoss hasn't been in trainin' for three weeks. He couldn't last even if his legs didn't go back on him."

But old Brass Knucks didn't seem to be payin' no attention to what Kearns was sayin'. He just kept creepin' up on Livewire, havin' passed Socrates on the turn, and he didn't seem to be strainin' any tendons doin' it.

At the head of the stretch Livewire was leadin' by two good lengths. Monk Evans looked back and laughed at Murray on Brass Knucks. Down the stretch they came, Livewire and Brass Knucks gradually increasin' their lead over the others.

"He'll crack in another jump!" Kearns keeps repeatin'. "He'll crack in another jump!" But the only thing that cracked was Midget Murray's whip. He brought it down on old Brass Knucks' flank just as he hit the sixteenth pole. And if ever a hoss responded to punishment it was that brittle-legged old beetle.

He just laid back his ears, stretched out his tail and began bitin' at Livewire's rump. The way he cut down Livewire's lead was somethin' pretty.

"He'll crack in another jump! He'll crack in another jump!" Kearns was yellin' now.

"Yeah! He'll crack that plug of yours in the hind quarters in another jump if old Livewire don't get outta his way," I shouts back over my shoulder.

I was gettin' kinda excited myself. I forgot all about the twenty my disciple had bet on Livewire for me, and was pullin' for old Brass Knucks.

As Livewire and Brass Knucks passed us, thirty feet from the wire, they was head and head, and both boys is layin' on the leather.

The crowd is yellin': "Livewire!" "Brass Knucks!" but I know that it's all over but hangin' up the numbers. Livewire hung just a trifle at the end and old Brass Knucks got the decision.

When the placin' judges hung up Brass Knucks' number Piker Pete reached over my shoulder and caught hold of the fence for support. "Ye gods!" he moaned. "Old Doc Doane outwised us again—outwised us for close to sixty thousand dollars. I bet on Livewire all over the ring. This is awful!"

"Don't forget I'm hit too," says Kearns. "I thought sure Brass Knucks would crack!"

"He did crack," I tell him as the time for the heat was hung up. "He cracked a fifth of a second off the track record."

WELL, I lost no time lookin' up Doc Doane. I was sore at not bein' declared in on this killin', so I go straight to his barn. He's there with Miss Darla and Louisville Johnny, and the first thing I see is ten one-thousand-dollar bills on the tack-room table.

"What's that?" says I.

"A little money I won on Brass Knucks, son," says Old Doc Doane.

"You told me you wasn't gonna bet on your hoss to-day," says I, and I don't try to keep him from seein' I'm sore.

"I didn't bet on my horse, son," he says smilin'. "I bet on Mrs. Turner's horse."

"Mrs. Turner's?" says I. "I don't get you!"

"Well, son, if you hadn't been in such a hurry to-day I would have told you that I traded Brass Knucks for Mrs. Turner's mare, Joan Mallow, this morning. That's why you saw the Turner colors on Brass Knucks in the Tia Juana Handicap. I felt sort of responsible for letting the night riders get away with that stunt last night, and I knew, too, that Brass Knucks

could beat Joan Mallow, Livewire, or any other horse in the handicap, so I convinced Mrs. Turner that the best thing she could do was to trade Joan Mallow for Brass Knucks.

"It just happens that the old lady thinks I'm honest so she agreed. Then I scratched Joan Mallow. Brass Knucks won for Mrs. Turner, and now the old lady can retire from the turf, buy herself a home with the purse and have a nice little nest egg left in the money I'm going to give her for Brass Knucks when I buy that hoss back this afternoon!"

"By the way," says I, when I get all this through my bean, "I know you are a wonder at getting horses in shape but how in blazes did you ever train Brass Knucks so that he could run without breakin' down?"

"That was easy, son," says Old Doc Doane, smilin', "as soon as I got it figured out. You see all that a horse gets out of work-outs on the track is good wind and good flexible muscle. I thought a long time trying to figure out a way to give Brass Knucks these things and at the same time save his legs. Once I found the way the rest—with Johnny's aid—was easy."

"I'm still guessin', doctor. What's the answer?" says I.

"Well, we took him to a secluded spot on the ocean beach the other side of San Diego and let him swim a mile or so every day," said Old Doc Doane. "He liked that kind of training and got in excellent shape without having to touch his feet on a hard track!"

Now, is there any of you guys what still thinks that Old Doc Doane is dumb?

Handsome Harry and Piker Pete? Oh, they was ruled off for life when Old Doc Doane got Bleeker to go before the jockey club and make a confession about the night ridin'.

Look for another story by Mr. O'Donnell, "The Pearl of Tia Juana," in the next issue.

STRAIGHT POLITICS

SMITH WILDMAN BROOKHART, who captained the team that won the world's rifle championship in 1912, was returned to Congress as a senator from Iowa after winning the closest and most picturesque of all the political fights staged last November. When he went back to Washington, he was asked how he accounted for his victory over such powerful and strong opposition.

He did not reply to that directly.

"There used to be an old man in the Senate named Gear," he said with apparent irrelevancy, after a pause. "A grand old man, John H. Gear! I've always admired him, not always for what he stood for, but for his honesty, his straightforwardness with the people.

"At one time in his State the prohibition fight was very hot, and Senator Gear was invited to appear before a big mass meeting to make known his stand on liquor. The chairman of this meeting was a well-known and influential old Quaker who had been delegated to question the senator.

" 'We learn,' he began, 'that thou dost not belong to any temperance society, and also that thou dost drink liquor at thy discretion. Is this true?'

" 'Every word of it,' replied Gear; 'but did you ever hear of my doing anything dishonorable?'

" 'Nay, senator,' the old Quaker answered; 'we have never heard anything else to thy discredit. Thy frankness is more to be commended than thy habits. But thou hast not lied to us, and we will support thee at the polls.'

"And they did," Mr. Brookhart concluded, "and elected him too. The people like sincerity in public life."

A Chat With You

NOT so long ago there was a scientific dream to the effect that some day mankind might do away with the trouble of cooking and eating. Some chemist in a laboratory would make a tablet containing the correct number of proteins, carbohydrates, calories and what not—and one of these tablets with a gallon of water would keep a man well and duly nourished for a day.

Since the days when people believed this dream there have been many new discoveries. The problem became more complicated the more one studied it and it has finally been fairly well established that the only way to really nourish the body is to eat ordinary human food, food that tastes like food and not medicine and that has a pleasant savor in the nostrils.

We are not organized to assimilate chemicals in tabloid form. We must have bread and butter and apples and salads and chops and fried chicken and lots of other things such as ice cream and blueberry pie. If the scientists had realized their dream, eating would have become an idle luxury and a selfish indulgence.

But now under the rulings of a more humane bunch of scientists, eating—and eating the things it is most pleasant to eat —becomes a sacred duty.

Do you like lobster Newburg? Does it agree with you? Then by all means eat it. You need the iodine it contains. The iodine will ward off goiter and you are just doing your duty to your family when you shake out your napkin and pick up your fork. Do you crave lettuce-and-tomato salad, and strawberries and cream? Eat them. You need the vitamines. They may save you from having rickets or Riggs' disease and becoming a burden on the community. No one knows how many valuable lives have been saved by ham omelets and waffles.

By and by they may be giving the good cooks medical degrees and teaching doctors how to cook. We remember some years ago signs which read "Food Will Win the War." Absolutely correct. It did win the war. The American army was the best-fed body of men for its size that had ever been assembled anywhere.

Speaking of scientifically prepared chow, we once ate some corned-beef hash that had been concocted in a chemical laboratory. We have been careful to keep away from laboratories ever since.

* * * *

THERE are still people going around who entertain a similar belief to the effect that education can be administered in tabloid form. Feed the young idea with bald facts, get him so he can name all the presidents of the United States and all the kings of England, make him sweat over physics and mathematics, give him English A and Latin B. Then give him a diploma and turn him loose as an educated man.

As a matter of fact the better educators are now fighting hard against this very tendency and encouraging their pupils to browse around and absorb whatever literary fodder seems to suit their mental digestion. The really educated and civilized man must have educated himself. And the best of all habits for a man who wants a really broad education is the habit of general reading.

And the best of all general reading, the most wholesome, the most natural, is almost always fiction. You think you eat because you like it, but you are really safeguarding your health and building up your body. You think you read for pleas-

ure, but you are really cultivating your mind and exercising your emotions. If you read good, well-chosen fiction you are unconsciously absorbing all sorts of facts and lessons. So let us fill a fresh pipe and consider the next number of THE POPULAR.

* * * *

A GOOD many years ago when we were in the newspaper business it was what might be termed a precarious calling. A man might be fired for the slightest cause or for no cause at all. Or a whole batch of men might be fired suddenly and without warning. This was what they called "having a shake-up."

Looking back to those days they seem to have a romantic glamour. Living this sort of hair-trigger life made the old newspaper man a reckless and engaging figure. But at the time it was not so enjoyable.

When we were reading the manuscript of the book-length novel which opens the next issue of THE POPULAR we were carried back to those days. We wished that it had been written then and that we might have read it. It would have carried us over many a blue hour.

* * * *

HERE we have for an opening scene the city room of a morning newspaper late at night. The staff, young and old, are genuine people, lovable and congenial. They are about as contented in their occupation as people ever get to be.

A bombshell is burst among them and their whole scheme of life is shattered. It is suddenly announced that the paper has been sold, that it is to be merged with another paper, that the editorial staff is not needed any more and that everybody is fired.

It is at this point that we see how much more charming fiction can be than actual life. For now the hero enters and he could not have appeared at a better time. He is a young man of great wealth who formerly worked on the paper for amusement and who has come back to see the old gang.

His yacht is in the harbor and he is hunting for a number of resourceful, intelligent, trustworthy men to help him in a mysterious enterprise he has on foot. He knows them all, they are all his trusted friends and he hires the whole staff—yes, even the girl society reporter—and next day they go to sea.

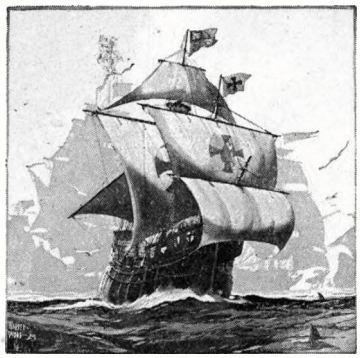
This is the opening of "The Isle of Missing Masters," by Robert H. Rohde, a two-dollar novel which appears complete in the next issue. The whole story is just as good up to the end as the opening promises. It is good enough to make you forget all your troubles, if you have any; and wholesome and true enough to make you the better for reading it.

* * * *

THIS full-length book is only one feature of a big magazine. The other writers who have helped to make it are Holman Day, Jack O'Donnell, Edgar Wallace, Frederick Niven, Benjamin Richard Sher, William S. Dutton, Theodore Seixas Solomons and J. H. Greene. It will make its appearance on your news stand August 7th. We think you'll like the cover and we hope you'll like the contents still more.

The Toll of Water

THREE little ships weighed anchor in the harbor of Palos, Spain, four hundred and thirty-three years ago and set sail upon a perilous adventure; 88 hardy, hopeful souls faced the unknown. Had Columbus and his men gone down who can say what the history of America would have been?



"Imagine a Fleet * * *"

Imagine a fleet of 68 Santa Marias, 68 Pintos and 68 Ninas—204 ships in all—going to the bottom of the sea with every one of their crews drowned! Then you will have some idea of the number of persons who perished last year in the United States from drowning accidents. More than 6,000 drowned.

Day after day, all through the summer, you read the tragic story of death by drowning. Some one dares a beginner to swim out to the raft. Or perhaps the water is too rough. Even the strongest swimmers take unnecessary chances. "Go ahead, be a sport" has brought disaster to thousands.

Don't Be a "Sport"—Be a Sportsman

There is a vast difference between a sport and a sportsman. The sportsman is courageous and willingly hazards his life for others—but he is not a daredevil.

The sport, showily daring, is the one who does stunts to dazzle onlookers—who dives without knowing the depth or what lies beneath the surface—who swims far out, disregarding unknown currents, undertow and cramps.

Learn to swim—not alone because swimming is joyous recreation and splendid exercise—but so that you can save your own life and the lives of others if called upon. Swimming is not at all a difficult accomplishment. Once learned it cannot be forgotten. Good instructors may be found almost everywhere. It is of highest importance to be well taught.

Your Chance to Save a Life

There is one thing that *everybody*, young and old, should know how to do—revive the apparently drowned. Often they are not dead though life seems to be extinct. Patient, persistent manipulation of the right kind would bring them back to consciousness. It is heartbreaking to think of the lives that could have been saved if some one in the crowd, standing paralyzed with horror, had but known the simple manipulations necessary to rekindle the vital spark.

This summer, be prepared. Never court danger but be ready to meet the great hazard that sometimes lurks in water sports.

During the months of July, August and September, deaths from accidents lead all other causes—except heart disease and tuberculosis—among the 22,000,000 policyholders in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Deaths from drowning are at their height during these months.

In July 1924 the number of deaths among Metropolitan policyholders from drowning was about twice as many as from typhoid fever and diphtheria together.

It is the duty of parents to have their children instructed in swimming and the art of resuscitation, so that the danger from drowning attending summer vacations may be minimized. The Metropolitan has prepared a booklet, "Artificial Respiration" which shows by diagrams just how to restore breathing by manipulation of the apparently drowned body, as well as what to do in the case of gas suffocation or electric shock. Carbon monoxide poisoning claims an increasing number of victims each year because it is not generally known that artificial respiration, applied in time, will restore life. The information contained in this booklet is valuable and may be wanted any moment. The booklet will be mailed free. Send for it.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

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YALE-HARVARD BOAT RACE — NEW LONDON

SUCH POPULARITY MUST BE DESERVED

A brilliant race and a colorful crowd to cheer its favorites on! Much less spectacular perhaps is Chesterfield's race for sales, but smokers from coast to coast are backing it by the million.