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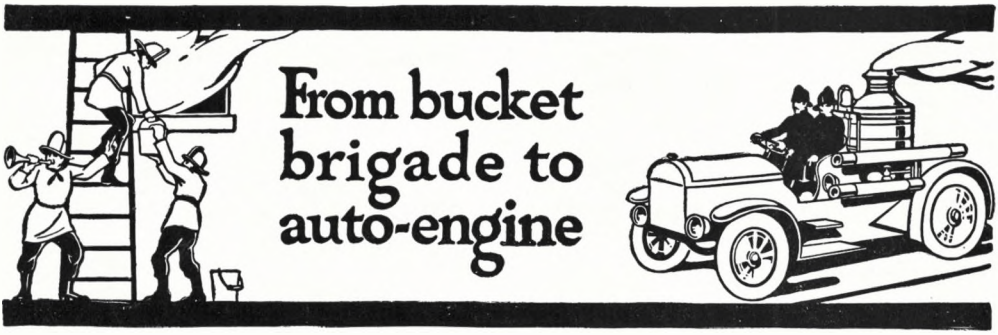
SECRET SERVICE

John A. Coughlin



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VOLUME XL NUMBER 1

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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MARCH 20th, 1916

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THE NEXT POPULAR ON SALE APRIL 7th

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XL. MARCH 20, 1916. No. 1.

The Crusader

By Alan Sullivan

Author of "The Secret of No. 1," Etc.

"Peter Brent, aged twenty-one, was bounded by the snake fence that marked the limits of the farm." Thus Alan Sullivan introduces the Crusader, who is shortly to feel the urge to adventure in the wide unpeopled spaces where his splendid equipment of muscle and brain may have full scope. Lands untrodden call to him in every murmuring wind, and listening to the call he goes forth, beyond the lumber camps, out into the haunts of the black bear and the moose and the lean timber wolves, out into the solitudes where the rainbow was to terminate in a six-inch lode through which ran a vein of black and oxidized silver one-inch wide. This is but the beginning of a story dealing with big things, great enterprises, great villainies, great love, and over all the great heart of the Crusader.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE Brent Farm lay a little more than a mile from the center of Winton, a lovely mile that stretched over soft earth roads and past ordered orchards and snug brick houses and gently undulating fields that every year changed from the most tender green to ruddiest of autumnal bronze. It was a fat country, one in which people spoke slowly and moved easily and lived long.

Peter Brent, aged twenty-one, was bounded by the snake fence that marked the limits of the farm. Higher on the hill nestled the school to which his eyes often roved—more often than his widowed mother dreamed. For there—in days that now seemed to have been deliriously happy—he had licked James Symons, junior, for cheating, and learned to love the blue eyes and yellow hair of Mary Dart. It was just after the licking that his school days ended for all time. The farm and its responsibilities had got too heavy for Widow Brent.

It was, too, on that fateful day that he had looked at the surrounding hills and longed for the first time to cross them and explore the world. Love and anger were raging in his small soul. His mother had found and comforted him, and with infinite understanding read deep into his heart. He was clumsy, awkward, and freckled. His

big joints and heavy shoulders gave promise of unusual growth, and he had, moreover, a grim tenacity of purpose. His brain worked slowly but relentlessly, and in his brown, doglike eyes lay that which mirrored the man behind the boy. At fourteen, he had begun to do a man's work.

The years passed gently over the Brent Farm. Peter's mother stooped a little more, and the gray hairs were thicker on her head, but her face was as gentle as ever. Peter spread out, rather than shot up. His shoulders broadened, and his long arms swung nearly to his knees. His big bones were covered with tough sinews, and the freckles were even browner. He began to be known for his strength and a certain dogged, unimaginative persistence that refused to accept defeat.

He worked, large and uncouth, about the farm, stopping now and again to cast curious glances at those distant hills behind which lay the waiting world. He had never mentioned them again, but waited with infinite confidence till his mother should speak.

It was on a day when they seemed doubly distant that Mary Dart drove close up to the fence in a new and shining buggy. He came to her, hoe in hand, contrasting her white dress with his own torn, stained clothes.

"I've come to bid you good-by, Peter," she said, smiling like a goddess in dimity.

He frowned till the freckles on his forehead disappeared in ridges. "You goin' away, Mary?"

She nodded. "We're going up to the city to live. Father's bought some property there."

"And you ain't comin' back to Winton?" He was conscious of a dull sense of loss.

"Only sometimes in the summer. I'm real sorry to go, Peter, for some reasons." Her gaze wandered up the hill to where the old schoolhouse slumbered beneath its ancient elms. "But I won't forget," she added gently.

Peter's pulse gave a great leap. Always he had worshiped her. Ever since boyhood, she had glorified his dreams. In the last few years, he had had terrific struggles at the very thought of leaving her. They invariably ended in a picture of his victorious return, laden with wealth, to carry off the object of his heart. And he had worshiped silently, asking but a glance or a word in return and never even remotely imagining that she herself might be the first to go. Now, fumbling for words, the very ground seemed to shake beneath his feet, and Mary began to look far away already.

"I'll always remember the last day of school. It seems long ago, doesn't it? And how you licked Jim Symons."

"Yes," said Peter dully.

"And do you know that Mr. Symons is going to have a park and an electric railway and electric light in Winton?"

"I dunno as I care much."

She glanced at him quickly. "Why, Peter, what's the matter? The value of your farm will double, and it will be a great thing for everybody."

He turned and stared at his familiar fields. "I warn't thinkin' of the farm," he interjected.

"But you should," she went on hurriedly. "Father has taken shares in the company that's going to do it all."

Peter's great fist closed over the handle of his hoe and gripped it till the lumpy knuckles stood out white. "In fact, every one's doin' something or goin' somewhere but me."

"Your turn will come next," she laughed; then, noting his huge frame and prodigious strength, she added: "And I'll be sorry for the man who gets in your way."

He looked up, and there was that in his eyes which silenced her. The cover of his soul was taken off, and she could see straight into it.

"Why, Peter!" she said nervously. "I never——"

But Peter began to laugh a hard, mirthless laugh that frightened her. "I was only jokin', Mary, only jokin'. Didn't you know that? I ain't no one to fall in love with any one—pshaw! What are you feared of?"

He vaulted the fence as gracefully as a deer, stepped up to the buggy, and took her hand. Peering at it a moment, he dropped it and broke into a strange, deep-throated chuckle. "Better git on, Mary, better git on. I'd hate to see you here when I quit laughin' over the joke. Giddup, there, giddup!"

The horse started forward, and two white clouds of dust rose from the revolving wheels. He watched till they dwindled along the road and vanished round the turn that led to the village. Moments passed, and he did not stir, till, with a stern face on which the tense muscles stood out like cords, he slowly reclimbed the fence. Then he walked absently across the field and threw himself face downward on the ground beneath the big maple in the corner of the ten-acre lot.

The shadows had moved, and the chaffinches twittered for an hour in the hedge, when a hand was laid gently on his shoulder.

"Mother!" He did not move at the familiar touch.

"I want to talk with my son." Her voice sounded cool and sweet.

"It ain't no use talkin'. I was a blame fool, anyway."

"Peter, look at me!"

She sat down beside him, took the flushed face on her lap, and began to stroke the ruffled hair.

"Don't you think this would be a good time to go over the hills?" she said gently.

He stared at her from beneath suddenly wrinkled brows. "How did you know?" he demanded abruptly.

"Why, Peter, I always knew."

He straightened instantly, with blank amazement in his gaze.

"Don't you understand that when a boy is very fond of any one he shows it in a thousand ways?" She paused, then went on in a level voice: "It is strange that it was Mary Dart."

"I don't see nothin' strange," he put in, with a touch of defiance.

"Because Mary is your second cousin."

Peter sat up very stiffly. "My second——"

"Her father is my cousin. It's time you knew that now."

"Why, mother, you ain't never said anything about——"

"No, dear, and that was quite on purpose. No one here has any idea of it. Twenty years ago your father and I were married. That was before we came here."

Peter grew an angry red. "What was the matter with that?"

"My cousin, who was also my guardian, didn't approve. I was quite dependent on him. So, when I married, he stopped the allowance he used to give me. And your father——"

"You said that my father was the finest man that ever lived."

She nodded. "Yes, Peter. I will always say and believe that."

"Then what made your cousin——"

"He did not like it because your father was a farmer, and Mr. Dart thought that—that——" She hesitated, and a faint pink grew in her cheeks.

"Gosh! Thought he wasn't good enough—my dad."

"Some people are very foolish, my son. I've tried to forget all about it."

The young man's mind began to work confusedly. He was in love with Mary Dart and he shouldn't be. Old Tom Dart had been cruel to his mother—his very own mother. And faint, but clear, through all this came a call drifted over distant hills.

"I guess I'm all mixed up," he said slowly; then added, with a direct glance: "Ain't you goin' to say anything more?"

"There's a lot I wanted to say, but now it seems that it's no use. What you have just learned is only another reason for—for going. You couldn't be happy here now."

"I ain't goin'," he blurted.

"But, yes, I think my son will, for in the bottom of his heart he wants to. It's the biggest school of all that's waiting for you now, Peter, the only school that counts for much."

The lad drew a great breath—and her hand stole into his. She felt his grip tighten till she could have cried with pain. He did not speak, but his brown eyes were fastened on her. She explored their changing depths, then continued quietly:

"It takes men to make a man, Peter. Women can't do it. Perhaps, when it's all over and you've seen the world, you will be still just an ordinary boy. I'll be quite satisfied so long as you are straight."

From that moment till the day of his departure, she was transformed into a blithe woman who went cheerily about the house and sang when her son was near enough to her. She talked with a bright anticipation and a wise understanding of his heart. She made no further reference to Mary, and, because his soul was aching with the wrench, he thanked her in a thousand silent ways. When the time came, she packed the last of his clothes and drove with him in the farm buggy to the station.

The rumble of the train swelled along the valley, and he glanced at his best friend with beseeching eyes. "Let me stay," they pleaded. "Let me stay."

"I'm very proud to bid good-by to my Crusader," she said, with a break in her voice; "and when he comes back, I'll be prouder still. I wish I were a man to go through the world with you, Peter."

His lip quivered, and he could not speak. His great arms went round her as the train thundered in. At the moment, he longed for nothing but to go back with her and take care of her forever.

"My Crusader," she whispered. "God bless him!"

CHAPTER II.

Bob Street sat on the counter of the Winton grocery store and reached into the prune barrel. His leathery jaws began to champ steadily, and he winked at Si Haskins, the storekeeper.

"As I was sayin', Si, I don't see any sense in makin' five per cent on your capital when you can lend it out in Alberty an' git seven."

"I guess you worked for your capital to start with, didn't you?"

"Waal, yes—some. T'other feller's workin' now. The Ontario farmer ain't downtrodden any more—as I knows of."

Haskins absently slid the cover back on the barrel. "See Symons last night?"

"Yep."

"Well?"

"I dunno but what he's right. It's comin' straight through the middle of my farm. Don't have to put up nothin' unless I want to, either. Jest give an option on the land."

Haskins strolled to the door and looked out. Winton lay in a vast valley on which the farms were checkered in brown, black, and green. Farm succeeded farm as far as the eye could reach. Street's big barn shouldered up a mile away, and beyond it the Brent cottage shone white. The air was bathed in sunshine and washed with rain. The land was fat and opulent. This district, it seemed, could almost feed a nation.

Bob noiselessly tilted the barrel lid. "Dern good country, ain't it? Privi-

lege to be storekeeper here. Why in Tophet do you put so much 'lasses in your currants? The boys all knows."

The storekeeper chuckled. "Well, if every one knows, what's the harm? You folks is uster it. I suppose you know," he went on calmly, "that it's your money Symons is goin' to build his road with, and Emery Taylor's, and every one else's?"

"I hed quite a talk with him last night," put in Street, "and I dunno but what he's got the right end of it. My money's only changin' form—as he puts it—and I guess a live road is better than most things—even mortgages in Alberty. Spend an evenin' with Jim Symons, and you'll git the business of Winton by the hind leg. My option goes in to-morrer. So long, Si."

Bob Street climbed stiffly into his buggy and drove slowly away. The storekeeper lifted an unopened box onto the barrel of prunes and took out his bank book. His credit balance was something over six thousand dollars—this was after eight years' labor. Winton always paid, but competition with the mail-order business was getting more and more serious, and he contemplated the future with misgivings. Jim Symons never seemed to turn a hand, and yet he owned a bank. There must be some mysterious way of making money without earning it. He looked up. The subject of his meditation was on the doorstep.

If James Symons looked anything, he looked affluent. A large, ruddy face, active blue eyes, and loose, comfortable clothing that fell about him in ample folds. All these contributed to an individuality that seemed to demand confidence. His vest pocket continually bulged with cigars, and his conversation invariably opened with: "Have one." Add to this that he owned the Winton private bank, and you get a personality to whom one would naturally turn for help in time of trouble.

Glancing at the bank book, he plunged into his mission at once. "Have one. How much are you coming in for? I needn't tell you much about it—hey?"

"How much have you got?" said the storekeeper cautiously.

Symons smiled blandly and took out a fat leather pocketbook. "Well, there's about seventy-five thousand from the neighborhood—and you know I'm putting up whatever you fellows do—that's a hundred and fifty. And I'm going up to the city to-morrow, and I reckon I can get another hundred and fifty there. That's three hundred, and on the strength of that we should borrow another hundred—that's four, so far. Pretty good sledding, isn't it?"

"But what about your right of way?"

The banker beamed. "Fine—first rate. We're getting options to purchase, but we'll only lease for the first ten years. When we buy, we can pay for it out of earnings. That's what I call a sound, conservative way of doing things."

But Si still hesitated. He had not yet asked the great question. Finally he blurted: "And where would I come in?"

"Why—you don't tell me you don't know! Right on the ground floor—and there isn't any cellar, either. Every hundred-dollar bond carries a hundred dollars in common stock, and——"

"What do you reckon that'll be worth?"

Symons put a fat hand on the storekeeper's shoulder.

"I'm glad you asked that. It's exactly the right question. The Pittsburgh & County Railway common stock, running through a poorer country than this, pays thirty per cent and sells for three hundred and fifty. Barrier & Simcoe for two-seventy-five, Chatham & Erie for four hundred. And, mind you, all these roads were started just as we are starting."

Si Haskins was visibly impressed, but grasped at some further assurance. "Did Bob Street come in?" he ventured.

"Why, yes—he took a little. Six thousand, spread over two years. If I remember right, it's secured by mortgages up in Alberta."

Si flushed angrily. Bob had been talking about western loans, and all the time investing right here in the Winton Railway. And six thousand was only a little!

"And Emery Taylor?"

"Oh, yes. Emery's with us strong. He's down for twelve thousand. I don't know but what we'll put Emery on the board to represent the farmers."

In the face of such figures, the grocer's balance began to seem contemptible. "I guess I haven't enough to be of any use. I've only got four thousand to spare, and that——"

"Four thousand! Why, Si, do you know that's just the amount I like to see. It's the smaller sums that do the trick. How do you want to put it in? I'm making the first call on subscription on the first of next month."

"Pay interest on the bonds from the start?"

"Right from the start. Seven per cent."

"Well, I guess I'll pay up. You're only paying me three on my savings account. All the same to you, I hope," Si added, noting a change in the banker's expression.

"Why, sure—that's all right," said Symons. "Do you know, I've begun to feel that I've wasted most of my life just sitting in the bank and taking deposits? What we've got to be is constructive. That's the thing, instead of rotting away in the sun."

"When do you reckon you'll begin?"

"The boys say next month, and I guess that's good enough for me," answered Symons. "We'll have a meeting just as soon as I get things fixed in the city. I'm going up to-morrow. So long, Si."

He moved away, large and placid, seeming immune to anxiety or uncertainty. The next Si heard was that success had awaited him in the city and a meeting was called.

Toward the Winton town hall a steady stream of buggies moved in the cool of the evening. Men came from miles round. Most of them with their wives. The latter were impressed at the magnitude of matters to be discussed. Emery Taylor climbed stiffly onto the platform and seated himself amid the applause. He signaled to Si Haskins, who shook his head and spat defiantly. In a back row sat Mrs. Brent. Old Tom Dart mounted the platform looking serious, and shook hands ostentatiously with Emery Taylor, who drank a glass of water and settled back. The next to appear was James Symons. Behind him, a thin young man with a bundle of papers. This was the teller in the bank. The stamping of heavy feet greeted them, and Symons looked over the assemblage with a smile that embraced them all. Emery drank another glass of water, and in a florid speech presented "Mr. James Symons, banker and promoter."

"Mr. Chairman and citizens of Winton," began Symons. "There's quite a lot I'd like to say to you, but there ain't time, and we all want to get down to business. But before we talk business, I just want to say that I'm a plain man like the most of you. I came to Winton because I thought it was a pretty good burg and a darn fine country. Then I hitched up with you people in business, and things went along pretty slick" (voice from the audience: "You bet they did!"), "and I found the folks in Winton were just the same the hull way through." (Another voice: "So are you, Jim, clear white.")

Mr. Symons hesitated, and his eyes

roved over the audience. Then his kindly heart burst its barriers, and he stretched out his big arms. "Boys," he shouted, "you know me, and I know you. We're all going into this thing together, and we'll put all our cards on the table and not play any solitaire, either."

Old Tom Dart nodded vigorously and pounded the platform with his heavy stick, while the rest of the audience clapped their approval.

"Now," resumed the speaker, "the business questions to be discussed this evening are very important, and, as I called this meeting for business reasons, I reckon we'd better get right into them. You all know the road will run from Millville through Winton, and, passing close to Henderson's Corners, will finish up in Emporium. This route will give us practically all the freight of three townships, and a short cut to the city that will earn good returns from passenger traffic; but the big end of it is freight. So far as Winton is concerned, I guess you know where the road is comin' through—that is, if the engineers don't upset our plans.

"You may ask me why we quit at Emporium without running right on eight miles into Dunfield. Well, gents, when I was in Dunfield the other day, I went right to the directors of the electric road that runs between there and Emporium and said that we wanted runnin' rights over their road. Well, sir, they jest laughed at me, and I said: 'All right, gents, it's just as you say; but in five years you'll be asking me for runnin' rights, and you watch me smile.' 'What do you mean?' says they. An' I up and told them we'd build right alongside and put 'em out of business no matter what it cost.

"Well, sir, they came right down. Then they asked what we were goin' to do about power to run the road, and I says: 'Make it, of course.' And they said: 'What will it cost?' And I said: 'Darn little, because we farmers are goin' to use it for milking cows and chopping feed when we can spare it from the cars.'" (Loud laughter throughout the hall.) "Well, maybe you'll be surprised," continued Symons, in great good humor. "They said they'd sell our road all the power we wanted for four cents a killywatt hour, and, gents, I just offered them cigars and says I'll consider two, and I'm blamed if I knew what I was offering, but I reckoned that that crowd would take me for a hayseed and stick up their prices about one hundred per cent. What's more, I said: 'You can put your offer on paper right here and now.' Well, gents, they put it down, and I found out since that it's the lowest rate ever made in this country and it would take a million-dollar power house to beat it." (Loud and continued applause.) "And now we come to the money side. I have to state that the total funds raised up to the present time are"—he paused and cleared his throat—"four hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"Hear, hear!" said Emery Taylor loudly, and old Tom nodded his head while applause came heartily.

"I had reckoned on getting four hundred and fifty altogether, and there wouldn't be any hardship getting it, either; but I don't know but what I've a better scheme, and it will help keep down our capital, too. We've got eighteen miles of road to build, and at twenty thousand dollars a mile, that means three hundred and sixty thousand. That includes cars and trolley lines and everything. Buildings and cost of right of way into Emporium will take thirty more, and right of way from Millville to Emporium is about forty. Now, half of that is in our township, and if the gents that own the land will get right onto the wagon and take stock for their land, they'll help the whole scheme along and make

a better deal than if they took cash. Now, I don't *ask* these gents to do this because the money is ready for them if they need it."

He glanced at Emery Taylor, who sat plunged in deep and sudden thought. Then the latter leaned over and whispered to old Tom Dart. The banker surveyed the two gray heads that were so close together, and looked over the audience till he caught the interrogating eye of Si Haskins.

"The matter will be open if any one wants to say anything."

"When'll work start?" came a voice from the benches.

"I was going to tell you. We have appointed our directors. Mr. Emery Taylor, of Winton; Mr. Saxon, representing the Empire Trust Company; Mr. Dutton, of Millville; Mr. Thomas Dart, and myself. We reckon to start work in a month right here in town; that's because Winton finds most of the money. Now, gents, this ain't a directors' meeting, but I don't know that you couldn't call it an informal meeting of stockholders. If there's any questions—why, trot 'em out."

The promoter sat down amid cheers, and immediately a subdued buzz of conversation ran through the hall.

Emery Taylor emptied the jug, and rost to his feet.

"Friends," he began slowly, "we have all of us heard what Mr. James Symons has had to tell us, and for me I want to say that he's told a pretty good story and I'm with him. We've got the money to build the road with and the produce to load her up with, and I guess that's all that's necessary. Now, as to takin' payments for land in stock. Mr. Symons suggested this to some of us yesterday, and I was a bit worried, because I reckoned I'd pay for some of my stock with land. The road runs acrost my farm for nigh forty rod, and the right of way is a hundred feet wide, and that makes nearly two acres at seven hundred an acre. But if Jim says so, I'll let her go, providing the rest here does the same."

He sat down abruptly, and loud approval was immediately manifest. The eyes of the meeting swung toward old Tom, who fidgeted, then nodded at Symons: "Same here."

They came fast after that. Man after man in the audience got up and gave his assent, and the pale young secretary scribbled vigorously as the list lengthened. Then he handed it to Emery Taylor, whose brows lifted as he read it.

"Friends," he said, and a hush fell in the town hall, "thirty-seven men have agreed right here to take stock for land, and I guess that means that this whole township is sold, and Easterley ought to follow along with us."

The meeting broke into applause that redoubled when a tall man spoke from the third row: "I guess Easterley's all right. We just wanted to see what you fellows were doin' over here."

Then Symons spoke very briefly, and quoted Shakespeare about taking the season when it served, and promised them the best built and best managed road in the country, and they agreed to call it the "Winton-Easterley Electric Railway & Power Company, Limited." And when that was done, Emery Taylor got up to say it would have to be passed by the directors and that they would do that at the next meeting. Then he said that he thought James Symons had earned a vote of thanks, at which the whole gathering got up on its hind legs, women and all, and cheered the banker promoter to the echo and sang "He's a Jolly Good Fellow," and told him to get busy and make the dirt fly.

CHAPTER III.

Peter Brent went straight to Toronto, and, confused by the roar of traffic, turned in at the nearest employment

office. It didn't matter so much what he did first, so long as he did something.

A sharp-eyed man was at a desk in the corner; around him a semicircle of Swedes talked excitedly. The employment agent snapped back, and the voices died instantly. He turned and saw Peter's great bulk darkening the doorway.

"Here—you! You want work?"

"Yes."

"Can you saw? I'm trying to fill up a gang for a lumber camp."

"Yes—I can saw—but——"

"You're on—twenty-five a month and board—up on the Montreal River. Fare paid one way. Sign this—three dollars my charge."

A silence had fallen in the room, and the Swedes were watching Peter. The latter hesitated, seemed about to speak; then, in a sudden abandon, wrote his name at the bottom of a printed form, after which he fumbled in his pocket and produced three dollars.

The agent stuffed the money into a drawer. "Train to-night—eight-thirty—I'll be there—get out! You can be arrested now if you don't come."

A flood of anger throbbed in the young man's veins. He mastered this with an effort, and, more and more bewildered with the sounds of the city, stepped out into the street. At once he felt terrifically alone. These hurrying crowds had no interest in him. Automatically he said "Good day" to the first man he met.

The man looked up sharply, glanced at Peter's face, then at his clothes, and hastened on, laughing audibly. The country lad colored deeply and made no more friendly mistakes. He paced the streets, staring into shop windows and contrasting his own rough attire with the sleek perfection of city men. The day dragged wearily, and he found himself at the station hours before train time.

Late that night, he deserted the thick atmosphere of the car, and balanced himself on the swinging platform. The moon was white, and shone clearly. The farming country had given place to a broken area in which lake after lake lay like flat silver in the windless night, encircled by rocky ridges whose sides and summits were clad with timber. Pale birch trees glinted amid the darker spruce, and the sky line was jagged with giant pines that heaved themselves high above the lesser growths. The woods looked soft and tender. Their depths invited him.

Matchford, the starting point on the Montreal River, was a busted town. Out of two hundred houses, only twenty were tenanted. The place was desolate with pathetic landmarks of brighter days.

Past Matchford flowed the mighty volume of the Montreal River, and up the river went Peter to the camp with a group of French Canadians. He eyed them curiously, saying little. The vast expanse of timbered country began to fascinate him, and his gaze wandered across successive and apparently endless ridges. In the hush of evening, a dull boom palpitated through the motionless air.

"What is it?" he asked.

A lumberman laughed. "Cobalt—silver——"

"Oh——" Peter hesitated. He had heard of Cobalt, and its nearness gave him curious sensations.

The lumberman spat into the green water. "I have a friend who went prospectin' three years ago up in Coleman Township. He hadn't been out two weeks before he pulled some moss off a knub of rock and sold the knub for a hundred thousand. He lives down in Three Rivers—married now. Fool luck, I call it."

"What's the rock there?"

A Frenchman leaned back and pulled a rough fragment from his pocket. "She's conglomerate—mostly. Diabase, pretty good, too—you look——"

Peter took it, an irregular plate of silver, to which pieces of white calcite still adhered.

"Guess you don't see dat before," continued the owner. "She's four t'ousand ounces a ton. You get one car and den you buy a farm and quit."

"Who struck silver first?" queried Peter, trying hard to keep a quiver out of his voice.

"Pete la Rose and the government road. Pete was blacksmithin', sharpening steel for the machine drills, and his shack was right close to the cut. One day he heaved a piece of rock at a fox. He missed the fox, but where the rock struck, it knocked the moss off a streak of silver right on top of the ground. That's the La Rose Mine now. Yes—and by gosh, there's just as much and more that ain't been found yet. These here professors and engineers reckon they know a heap; but, believe me, it takes a darn fool who don't know nothin' to find somethin' good."

"These fellers go alone?"

"Nit—travel in pairs. The tenderfeet stick right along the shore, but the sour doughs git right in among the black flies an' musketeers. I guess it's somethin' like fishin'."

Peter swung his feet. "Don't know but what I'll go."

"Ain't you under contrac'?" said the other sharply.

The young man colored hotly. "That's so—I clean forgot."

"You're just as far ahead. Bin in the woods before?"

"No. I came from a farm."

The Frenchman rolled a cigarette against his thigh. "She's the life," he exclaimed.

The sun dipped, and the long reaches of the Montreal River seemed transmuted into flat avenues of molten silver that stretched far into the mysterious regions of this marvelous country. Peter pictured it rolling on and on interminably, a vast sea of green with silent lakes lying open to the sky, scattered through this immensity. In Winton, everything that man could do seemed to have been done, but here was a kingdom practically unscratched. He put this away in his mind with a new resolution. Then he took out a tattered copy of "King's Geology" and became lost to the world.

He reached camp the next night, and the foreman scanned his great figure with a grunt of satisfaction. Then he fell into an accustomed round of working, eating, and sleeping. Winter in the North had a new bite in it. The stark and breathless silence in which, long before sunrise, he plowed through the snow, struck him as something cruel and terrible against which human flesh had to fight to survive. But this contest of man with nature bred a new and greater strength in him. His mind worked slowly, as always, but bone and muscle thickened and swelled with a crescent power that was to make him, ere long, spoken of as the strongest man in the North. He moved deliberately, and his long arms, short, bull-like neck, broad, freckled face, and vast, heavy shoulders were noted as he walked.

It was in the spring that he received a letter from his mother which made him think deeply.

DEAR PETER: There's not very much to tell you except that the electric railway will soon be finished. I saw Mary Dart last week. They say young Jim is in love with her, too. She seems to favor the engineer. Young Jim will be rich, and I hear that his father is going to make him superintendent of the road. The engineer's name is Jephson. The bay mare dropped a colt yesterday. It has a white star on its forehead. The thorn bushes are all out, and there's going to be a Conservative meeting in the town hall on Tuesday. It's lonesome here

sometimes, but I'm not ready for you to come back. Do you change your socks when they are wet? YOUR LOVING MOTHER.

P. S.—Mary Dart inquired for you. They're not going to leave Winton.

Peter's brows wrinkled as he read. He had wanted to forget all about Mary. But even though the thought of her had driven him forth, her vision followed to the northland and haunted him day and night. He had fought with it desperately, and now the old sore was open again.

Scanning the camp, it suddenly struck him that it was but a mean housing for a man and that he had had enough of it. In the revelation of spring, it seemed unclean. Piles of empty cans, broken packing cases, cast-off clothing, splintered ax handles, and rotting shoepacks—all these were laid bare by the dwindling snow. And from the roof came a steady drip-drip into the sodden eath. He looked away and up into the vault of sky. How clear and ineffably pure! He was, it appeared, squatting on a midden, while all around under the vast curve of this blue dome lay lands untrodden that called to him in every murmuring wind.

He grasped this, turned it slowly over in his mind, then backed away and viewed it from every possible angle. Finally, he nodded grimly.

The foreman glanced up from a medley of tally sticks. "What you want?"

"My time. I'm goin' to quit."

"No, you ain't. You're going down with the drive."

"I didn't sign on for any drive," said Peter gently.

"What has that to do with it?"

"A whole heap. I've filled my contract, and I'm through. Now I want my time check."

"He wants his time check, does he?" sneered the foreman. "And who's a-goin' to give it to him?"

"You," answered Peter softly.

"Get out of here!" snapped the boss, and he turned to his tally sticks. "You think you are John R. Booth himself, don't you?"

Peter's lips tightened. "Now, please." He advanced almost involuntarily.

The other man jerked open a drawer and reached for a revolver that lay amid his own personal belongings; but, as he did so, Peter's hand shot out and closed over the outstretched wrist. He said nothing, but the knuckles stood out white as his terrific grip tightened.

The foreman flushed, and, turning deadly pale, stared at his own finger tips. The blood seemed about to burst from beneath the nails. His lips moved, and deep wrinkles suddenly furrowed his leathery cheeks.

"Well," said Peter coolly, "do I get my time?"

A convulsive nod was the only reply. The grip slackened, and the victim peered at a limp, pale wrist from which the blood had been driven and to which it was now returning and bringing with it an exquisite agony. Then numb, stiff fingers guided an awkward pen, and the time check was completed by a rubber stamp.

The recipient examined it carefully. "You're a day short, and you owe me a dollar," he remarked deliberately. "I'll take it in tobacco."

He pocketed eight plugs from the shelf. At the door, he paused, and, turning his broad face to the foreman: "If you want it, you know how to get it; I hate a cheat, anyway." Then he strode across to the sleeping camp. In a few moments, he emerged with a pack sack on his shoulder, hunted about till he found an old ax and a striking hammer, the face of which had been battered out of smoothness, and, swinging these as though they were walking sticks, strode off along the main lumber road that led away from the river. A few seconds more, and he stepped out of sight, while a group of chattering

Frenchmen climbed back into their bunks to finish a Sunday sleep.

Peter whistled as he walked, then broke into a laugh. "I guess I'm the biggest fool north of the boundary," he chuckled to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

If from the camp where Peter worked you go down the Montreal River till you come to Matawabika Falls and lift over these, you get into a long arm of Lady Evelyn Lake—and should you paddle due west, you come to Willow Island Falls, and, twenty miles to the northwest, you get into a country which the prospector has hardly scratched, and where you can count, on any summer evening, a dozen moose standing knee-deep along the shore.

Now, there be many who hold that outside of the Elk Lake country and the Porcupine and Cobalt areas there are no mineral riches in that section of Ontario. Here there are found conglomerate and diabase, the latter lying in great, irregular sheets over the former. That is the view held by men learned in geology. But Peter, who had pondered deeply all winter, conceived a rooted conviction that somewhere else lay a fortune, if he could only unearth it. So he sold his time check at a Hudson's Bay post for a bark canoe, a fly tent, a prospector's kit, four months' grub, and forty dollars in cash. After which, having written to his mother not to expect letters, he journeyed, as indicated, northwest of Willow Island Falls.

He wandered up and down for months, meeting occasional prospectors; then, called by a voice that seemed to be getting clearer, drifted off on a new trail. The rocks were almost friendly. He found lake after lake, ridge after ridge. The latter he explored carefully, stripping off moss and soil in long gashes, at the bottom of which he peered and picked. On quiet days he sometimes caught the faint boom of far-distant blasting; but, for the rest, what sounds he heard were of his own making or of the timid people of the forest. He came upon black bears sitting on their haunches, gathering the blueberry bushes into their short, thick arms. The moose seemed almost as tame as cattle, and once and again he caught the lean shape of timber wolves, whose coarse and matted hair had come off in yellowish-gray tufts. He killed only for meat, and then with a curious reluctance, as though he were assassinating those of his own tribe.

All through these arduous days, he was conscious that somewhere within him a change was taking place. His love for Mary Dart and his contempt for her father still remained, but they now seemed part of a larger scheme. Passion and desire had in these solitudes been transmuted into a dull ache that he knew would live forever.

It fell on a day in the end of August that he explored a ridge far from camp, and, working through the underbrush that gathered against its side, pulled off yards and yards of soft green moss. In so doing, he came hard against a sharp, angular bowlder. He scanned this at first carelessly, then with increasing interest. Ripping off a patch of moss, he revealed a pink stain that creased the bowlder in a six-inch band. In the middle of it was an irregular strip of black, incased in walls of soft brown material that crumbled at his touch. His breath came sharply as he dropped on his knees and fumbled for his magnifying glass.

Presently, with flushed face, he rose, stepped back, and swung his hammer. It rebounded like rubber, and he swung again. This time the rock splintered, and he snatched at the largest fragment. The strip was there, but the

stain had vanished. In its place was a ribbon of gray-white metallics, through which were twisted irregular lumps and threads of glistening silver.

His lips moved without words as he examined fragment after fragment. Here and there the vein became visible. Finally, with a mighty effort, he rolled the bowlder over and traced the precious seam on its lower side.

Blazing a trail back to camp, he moved to his find the same day, and began methodically to strip the ridge in the vicinity of the bowlder. He worked steadily, utilizing every hour of daylight. At the end of a week, the ridge was scarred and pitted, but he had not found silver in place, nor, indeed, had he even found diabase. Pit after pit revealed only a hardened, barren quartzite, devoid of veins and value. Then slowly a new conviction closed around him. He was only the plaything of the gods. They had led him here through toil and loneliness and brought him to the foot of the rainbow, beyond which there was nothing. He traversed the ridge again with the same result, and, with a curse on his lips, broke camp and started along the newly blazed trail toward his canoe.

Halfway there, he dumped his pack, and rested on a bare flat rock that thrust up through the low country. Its surface was furrowed with fine grooves which he regarded without interest. Suddenly, from some far recess in his brain, he remembered reading in "King's Geology" about these grooves. King said they were made by stones imbedded in the lower surface of the great glaciers that had passed over this country in the ice age, and had ground it down by thousands of feet, and that the grooves themselves were called striæ. This remembrance set some other cells at work, and he noted that the marks ran from northeast to southwest. Presently it became clear that any bowlders moved by ice must have been moved along that line, and that the bowlder in which he had found silver was on the northeast side of the adjoining ridge. It was evident that it had been transported from a ridge still farther northeast.

He sat for a moment breathless at this new vista, till, thrusting his pack beneath a cedar, he set off, oblivious to the fact that the sun was already near the horizon. Reaching the bowlder in twilight, he lit a fire and lay beside it half asleep till dawn. At dawn, he tightened his belt, took out a compass, and started due northeast. In half an hour, he was ripping the moss out of a crack in another and parallel ridge. By noon, he had uncovered twenty feet in length of a six-inch lode, through which ran a vein of black and oxidized silver one inch wide.

Within three days, Peter established several facts. First, that his vein dipped into a swamp at one end and ran apparently straight into the ridge at the other. Second, that outside of that particular exposure there was no diabase for miles around, and, third, that without proper tools and explosives he was helpless. All this being clear, he had now to determine what to do.

He was, he reckoned, about thirty miles west and a little south of Elk Lake, and at Elk Lake he could record his discovery. Then came the question of working the claim, and, think as he might, there appeared just one man to whom he could write and put the whole thing. That man was James Symons. If he could build an electric railway, he could, without doubt, organize a mining company. This settled, Peter struck out for Elk Lake City.

He went straight to the recording office, and, with the confidence of ignorance, leaned over the official's desk and produced a lump of silver nearly as large as his fist.

"I want to stake the place where I found this. What have I got to do?"

The recorder glanced up impatiently, and his eye fell on the sample in the great, brown hand. His brows wrinkled, and he stared at it without looking higher. A group of men gathered from another part of the room, and Peter heard a low whistle.

"Good Lord!" said a voice. "Look at it!"

Peter did not even turn his gaze. "Well?" he asked, with a lift in his tones.

This time the recorder gazed straight into his face. "You—you have a license——" he said slowly.

"No. I didn't know I needed one."

"Write your name and address there." The recorder pushed a paper at him, and, with another glance at the sample, added: "I guess you'd better get busy. Five dollars, please."

Peter scratched his name, and looked over his shoulder as he finished. A tall, sharp-faced man with black eyes and sloping shoulders was peering at the license.

"That'll do, Louis," snapped the recorder. "If you haven't any business here, I have."

The man lounged out, with another swift glance at the sample. His friends went with him, and Peter saw them cross the road and gather together at the door of a bakery. Then the recorder's voice came in again:

"If you ain't used to this game, Mr. Brent, I advise you to keep your eye peeled. Of course, you understand, it's none of my business what you do or what you find, but I might as well tell you that it looks as though you've found something good. Those fellows think so, too. A good many claims have been jumped around here, and I'm sitting up at night trying to stop it. We've got some bad men in Elk City, and Louis Bradeaux is one of them. You needn't put it in the paper that I've told you anything," he concluded, with a nod. "You ought to be able to take care of yourself. I advise you to get out on the quiet to-night."

Peter's brow became furrowed. He looked from the sample to the recorder, and then across the road.

"Say," he blurted, "I haven't no partner. Can't you come in with me? I want some one straight. Any one that's crooked and knows the ropes can beat me out."

The official laughed and shook his head. "Sorry, it's against the rules of the department. If we started that sort of thing, every one would get twisted. If you'll draw me a map and show me where your claim is, I can protect you for two weeks, and that ought to be enough—here."

"All right. I guess I should have left my name there." The big man's head bent over the paper as he laboriously traced out lake and portage, valley and ridge. It was not workmanlike, nor was it drawn to scale, but the wisdom of the woods ran through it, and the route was unmistakable. Just as he made the cross that marked the vein, a sudden gust of wind filled the office with a cloud of dust and lifted every loose paper in the room. The recorder blinked and hastily slammed his desk, and, as Peter's hand went to his eyes, the map was whipped into the air, and, like a leaf before a gale, danced across the road to where Louis Bradeaux jumped and nimbly caught it. He glanced at it, and then, seeing Peter's great bulk running toward him, dashed round the corner and out of sight. One of the group, realizing what would happen if the thief was ever taken, pushed out his foot as Peter tore by. The latter tried to jump it, but tripped on the rough planking, and fell heavily forward. His temple struck the ground, and he lay motionless. In another moment, the recorder was kneeling beside him.

In a few moments, he looked up.

"What's the matter?" His voice was a whisper.

"A bit of bad luck, that's all. I guess we can straighten it out."

"Did he——"

The recorder nodded. "Yes, but you can make another now if you're able. Come across to my office and get something. Hanged if I can bring it out here in my position." He looked up at the crowd and laughed. "Come on, fellows; give a hand."

An hour later, Peter leaned back and thrust his canoe from the landing. In front of him was a pack sack full of provisions, on top of it lay a rifle. He had refused all offers of assistance. The recorder, in spite of a vast desire, could not go with him, and Peter refused to believe that any other man was honest. Strength had flowed back, and as he felt its pulse he became nerved with a grim resolution to do this job single-handed. So he posted his letter to James Symons, dictated a long following telegram, got food and arms, and now, as he bent to the stroke, looked back and nodded to the little crowd that had assembled to see his departure.

"Don't sleep near the fire," shouted one. "Louis can see at night."

The big man grinned as the canoe leaped forward. Sleep! He would sleep only when his claim was staked, and for the rest of it he blessed the rugged life that lay behind him.

As he shot round the first bend, the blade of a broken paddle knocked sharply against his trembling bow.

CHAPTER V.

Now, there be railways and railways, and many of them, though commenced in faith and hope, are, in a short time, nothing but two rusty and ignominious streaks of iron. The Winton & Easterley fared differently. Fortune smiled from the commencement. Symons bought his rails secondhand. They were twenty years old, but came of a better breed than many a rail rolled after them. Copper was low, and that helped, and, by and large, the promoter knew enough to realize that there was much he didn't know, and secured shrewd and competent assistance. In twelve months the first trolley car rolled smoothly into town and stopped at the terminus just past Si Haskins' store. From the platform, with his hand on the controller, James Symons made the speech of his life.

Those who knew him best noted that in past months the burden of the railway had aged him. He was still genial, still cheerful, but his ruddy cheeks were subject to floods of a still deeper color, and his breathing was shorter than of yore. He had tramped the right of way month after month, welcome from one end to the other. With him went young Jim, to whom people somehow did not take so kindly. He drove a harder bargain, and once or twice would have taken advantage of a flaw in a farmer's title, but old Jim would have none of it. But he was sharp, and, with the directors' approval, his father had sent him to Dunfield to master the rudiments of railway management before he should take charge of the new Winton road.

Now, as his father began to speak, young Jim stood near him and scanned the crowd through half-opened lids. They made a good contrast—thought old Tom Dart.

"Friends," said the banker slowly, "a little more than a year ago we had a meeting right here in Winton and settled we'd build a railway. When the dirt began to move, I found out that it was one thing to decide to build a road and another thing to build it. The farther I went, the wuss snarl I felt I was gettin' into." (A voice: "Oh, no, you weren't, Jim!") "Well, after makin' a considerable mess all

along the right of way, I said to Mr. Jephson"—here all eyes turned to the engineer, who was hiding behind the car—" 'Here, Jephson, you do the work and we'll find the money,' and Jephson he says to me, 'That's what we're doin', anyway.' " (Loud laughter.) "Well, friends, what's past is done with, and we've spent the money and got the road."

The banker hesitated, and a curious shadow crept into his eyes. Then he leaned over and whispered quickly to his son, who, with a hurried glance, ran into the druggist's and returned with something that he pressed into his father's hand. A touch of anxiety was on the broad face as old Jim resumed:

"Now, right here I want to confess that I flew pretty high when I undertook what I did, and if some of you folks thought so, I don't blame you. What I want to thank you for is for backing me right through and nary a renig. Them as gets that sort of help can do most anything. I'm an old man now, I don't deny, but the Winton & Easterley has made me feel a heap older and"—and he stammered a moment, then stretched out his big arms while his face flushed deeply—"my boy Jim will run the road—and—friends" —his words died to a murmur—"God —bless——"

The sentence was never finished. James Symons, banker, promoter, and president, swayed for an instant, till suddenly his knees gave way, and he fell forward with his chest across the front rail of car No. 1, and his limp hand still on the controller. He shivered once—and was perfectly still.

For a full half minute, not a person moved. It seemed a curious thing to look at that well-known figure huddled so grotesquely, with the collar pushed into the fat neck, and the round face so strangely purple. Then, with a simultaneous gasp, the people of Winton awoke and surged forward. Jephson leaped to help, and reached his employer just as did Emery Taylor and young Jim. Together, they lifted and drew him back through the glazed and varnished door to the bright red plush cushions. Putting down the windows, Emery asked the crowd to keep back, and, with Jephson clanging the bell and young Jim at the controller, the first coach of the Easterley & Winton began its first passenger trip with the body of the president of the road. It moved slowly, till, like a flashing funeral car energized by some mysterious power, it glided out of the sea of faces and slowly down the main street toward the Symons' home.

There is grandeur in death and heartbreak in bereavement. But to the people of Winton it appeared that there was that which approached an unthinkable majesty in the method of old Jim's taking. "Just to think," they said; then stopped, being conscious of the futility of trying to express what they felt.

The afternoon of the next day young Jim spent in the private office of the bank. He was trying to determine where he stood, and the table was heaped with papers. His father, it appeared, had put all he could raise into the Winton & Easterley, and in the process had put a mortgage on his house, and had secured a loan on his banking business. There were, moreover, in the safe a dozen or more mortgages made to Symons by residents of Winton and the vicinity, on which many payments were long past due. It struck young Jim that these were all poor people. In a package marked "Notes" there was a bunch of unpaid I O U's now long outlawed. After several hours' work, he figured the loss in the latter was twenty-four hundred and in the former considerably more. The bank itself had been run easily and comfortably. Considering the business done, the inheritor decided that it could be made to yield twice the profit by

dispensing with sentiment. He had just come to this conclusion when the door opened and Emery and old Tom Dart sauntered in.

"Gosh—sorter hurts to see any one else in that chair," said the former soberly.

Old Tom nodded. "Without hurtin' any feelin's, young man, it'll take a durn big man to fill it."

"Yes—I guess you're right," admitted Symons.

"Seems to me somehow," ruminated Emery, "as though things was all out of joint. I tell you, lad, you've quite a contract to live up to, if you're goin' to keep step with the old man."

"I can run that road and this bank," said Symons.

Old Tom nodded. "I reckon you can; 'most any young blood could. The job you've got, my son, is to run yourself, to be wise, to be just and help along them as needs help. That's what he did."

"I'm willing to do that," said Symons; then added sharply: "But there's a limit."

"What you mean by that?" put in Emery.

Symons lifted the two packets. "I mean this. There's twenty-four hundred in notes—no good, and the same with four thousand due on mortgages. That's what I call past the limit."

"Mind if I take just a little peep at them notes?" queried old Tom.

"Keep them if you like."

"No. I'd jest like to refresh my mind. It's gittin' creaky." He put on his spectacles, and stared at the yellow paper. "Why, Emery, if it ain't old Luke Hopper, the Methodist minister that lived down past the crossroad!"

"You mean the feller that went blind?"

"That's the identical. The Reverend Hopper," old Tom added, turning to Symons, "had eight children and a sick wife. I don't rightly know what happened to her after he died. And, by Jiminy, here's two hundred from Ephraim Blood, the feller that started opposition to Si Haskins—you remember him. I guess this is what took him out of Winton. Si got the rest. And——"

"Here's one from Peter Brent," said Emery, "him who got killed fellin' a tree—you know—why——"

Old Tom stopped short. His face had turned a bright crimson. His lips were trembling, and a long, lean arm was thrust across the table.

"Lemme see it."

The old thin frame sat very stiffly, but the gray head drooped over the paper that quivered in his grasp. Presently, he looked up, and his eyes seemed almost soft.

"I'll redeem this," he said slowly; then added: "And with interest."

Symons laughed. "Any more offers?"

"See these mortgages?" went on Emery, with a lift in his voice. "One on Mrs. Simmons' store, one on Phil Dwyer's farm—no—by gum, two—a second mortgage. The hull farm ain't wuth the first."

"That the feller whose wife went insane?"

"Yep. This is dated December, 1895. They sent her to the asylum June of the same year."

"Don't you think," put in Symons coldly, "that there was a good deal of mistake about all this? Of course, I respect his generosity and all that—but——"

"Mistake!" exclaimed Emery. "Yes, I'll allow it was some mistake, but I sometimes think that men is loved more for their mistakes than anything else. You've got a hull table full of 'em right thar in front of you, by gorry. Them papers of yours is alive. They ain't paper at all, but human sufferin' an' despair an' hope an' failure an'

success. There's blood an' tears an' laughter an' smiles all mixed up in 'em, too, an' you'll be a durn fool if you don't let 'em be as they are, and I'm a durn fool for talkin' like this." He sniffed suspiciously, then spat defiantly in the corner, and continued: "You hang on to them papers, son. I don't know but what they're wuth a durn sight more than 'most anything else you've got."

Symons looked at the two old faces, and suddenly withdrew into his inner self. "Did you want to see me?" he said diffidently.

Old Tom shook his head. "Oh, no. We only dropped in to look at the wall paper. Emery an' me was havin' an argument about the pattern. But sence you're here why, it jest occurs to say something about the road. You're goin' to run it?"

Young Jim nodded.

"Well, I reckon you can, but I jest wanted to sorter remind you thet thet road was built by some of us fer all of us. I ain't shettin' my eyes to the profits, but I don't want to bleed no one. We'll have a meetin' next week and elect another president, but we calculate your father's goin' to be a hard man to foller." He paused, then added, with a lift in his voice: "The Symon's Estate ain't got no majority interest, neither, but we'll play fair with you, son, so long as you play fair with us." He turned to Emery with a laugh. "Well, I declare you had the right of it, after all; that pattern is round spots, and I was 'most ready to swear it was stripes. Mornin', son. Come on, Emery, and don't stare at them mortgages. There ain't none of yourn in that pile."

The two stumped out into the afternoon sunlight, and young Jim sat motionless. Many things had begun to baffle him. Here were old Tom and Emery, two of the shrewdest, hardest-headed men in the country, saying that unredeemed notes were his greatest asset!

A doubt stole into the son's mind as to whether he had ever quite understood or appreciated his father. He had seemed generous and easy-going, but had there not been behind this a largeness of view and a depth of human understanding? Old Jim was only dead twenty-four hours, but the testimony of his friends was already evident. It came in a multitude of forms, and beneath it all was genuine sorrow and sense of loss. They seemed to have loved him, not for his ability or means or energy, but for some lovable quality beside which young Jim, with his calculating mind, had grown up without seeing it.

A knock on the door, and the bookkeeper handed him a telegram. It was addressed to James Symons, senior. He rubbed the envelope between his fingers, then suddenly ripped it open.

Have discovered valuable silver mine in Cobalt district. Money wanted to develop and ship ore. Can you come up and see it? Call on recorder at Elk City, and he will give you more information. Have to hike back myself. Act quick, and I'll try and hold her down. Tell mother.

PETER BRENT.

Young Jim stared and stared. His last definite memory of Peter was that day when Peter had sat on his chest and offered to be friends the day after. From then on, he had seen him occasionally in the village or working his mother's farm. And now? The long, slim hand began to shake with excitement. He glanced at the heap of notes and mortgages, then back to the telegram. The vision of Mary Dart flashed into his brain, and after that came the figure of Jephson. The two seemed uncomfortably close together. Then, while his rioting brain battered at the future, there came a sudden thought. It involved them all—Mary, Jephson, himself, and the silver mine, too. He

crumpled the yellow paper, thrust it into his pocket, and started toward the side road to the Dart house.

He turned the corner. A hundred yards ahead, a tall, athletic figure walked in the same direction. Symons caught the width of shoulder, and recognized Jephson. He reflected rapidly, and slackened his pace. There was yet half a mile to the Dart house. Jephson swung his stick, and began to whistle, while Symons, watching, completed his plans. Then the latter called loudly.

The engineer halted and turned. Seeing who it was, he came slowly back.

Symons nodded and held out the telegram. "What do you think of that?"

Jephson's brows lifted as he read. "Who is Brent?" he said shortly.

"Went to school with me—big fellow—slow, and, I guess, honest. Son of Widow Brent. You know her?"

"If he's anything like her, he's all right."

"You know anything about mining?"

"Yes. I spent a year in the Michigan ore field once. That's open cast work, and I was up near Cobalt for two years."

"Well, what do you make of this?"

"I don't know, but I do know that Cobalt is shipping about fifteen millions dollars' worth of silver a year. I don't see why he shouldn't strike it. Did he ever study mining?"

Symons shook his head, and laughed. "His desk at school used to be full of rocks." He hesitated, then added: "I don't know but what I'll send you up there to look things over."

Jephson's eyes narrowed. "What's that?"

"Well, it's this way," continued Symons smoothly; "the Winton & Easterley don't need a railroad engineer now. We're closing up that department soon, and there's nothing more in your line here, and you aren't the sort of man to just hang round, so this is the chance to go up into a country that's rich, as you say yourself, and do well, if what Brent says is right."

"I—I hadn't thought of leaving just yet. I've earned a little time off." In spite of himself, his gaze traveled down the road toward the two great elms that marked the Dart gate.

Symons glanced at him sharply. "It's a mighty good chance, I should think," he said heartily, "and you might decide now—right away. In fact, if I don't send you, I'll send some one else. There's nothing to keep you here," he concluded. "You've got your fortune to make; why not go and make it, then come back—if you want to?"

Jephson scanned the smooth face, and thought like lightning. He was sure of Mary. She had promised to wait for him—years, if necessary. Old Tom, not ignorant of his visits, regarded him with a kind of grim benignity which had in it as much of feeling as he showed to any one. Symons, with his position and means, had made no progress, winter or summer. It would be a reflection on Mary to doubt her now. He realized, moreover, that always he had had a longing for the North. The true engineer itches to match himself against the wilderness.

"I'll go you," he said quietly. "I can get away in a day or two."

Symons smiled frostily. "If you go for me—you go to-night." He took out his watch. "You have an hour to pack."

Jephson drew a sharp breath. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say. Here's a telegram about a silver mine that is probably worth millions, and asking me to act quick, and when I offer to let you in you talk about a day or two. You'll never catch the bird of fortune, at that rate. Now"—he paused, then said sharply,—"you can take it or leave it."

A sudden flush of anger surged

through the engineer. There was a moment's impulse to take this thin, domineering Symons and shake him viciously. Then came a quick defiance that wove itself into his words and tone:

"I'm game. Have you got any money about you?"

They walked back to the bank, where young Jim scribbled a note; then, opening his private cash box, handed his employee a roll of bills. "There's three hundred; you can wire for more as you need it. Report fully by letter, and"—he stammered—"I trust you."

Jephson nodded. "All right. You'll hear from me as soon as possible." He strode away without extending his hand.

Symons looked after him, and stood for a moment smiling curiously. Presently he reached the door of the Dart house.

Mary came forward quickly, with both hands extended. "I'm so sorry—it's dreadful." There was a world of sympathy in her tones.

Young Jim was pale. She noted this as he stared hard into her beautiful eyes. "I can't realize it—yet. Twenty-four hours ago he was making a speech—and now——"

"I sometimes think it's the best men who go that way, and we are suddenly left to realize all they meant to us."

He nodded. "I feel a bit crushed. I'm—I'm——" he broke off abruptly.

"Yes—what?"

"I suppose I'm——" He hesitated, then concluded: "I suppose I'm lonely—as well as stunned."

For a moment, she did not answer. His eyes found hers, then turned away.

"It's not only to-day that hits me," he went on impersonally, "it's the next day and the next. I've got a big load to shoulder, and——"

"But you're good for it, Jim."

"Perhaps—I don't know—but I'm not good for it alone. It's strange to speak of such a thing so soon, but I see it clearer than ever before."

She glanced at him with heightening color, and when she spoke her voice sounded small and remote. "You won't be alone for long. You'll marry and settle down, and then things will be much brighter."

"That's what I want to do," he put in quickly. "If I could be only sure of that, I'd be ready to forget it for the present. Mary—is it very strange for a man who has lost his father one day to ask you to marry him the next?"

"Don't!" she expostulated. "Don't!"

"It seems unnatural, but I don't mean to be that with you. The way seems clear to happiness. There's work to keep a man busy—the bank and the railway. I'll build a new house if you say so. There'll be no trouble about money, either. I want you desperately—Mary."

"You don't understand," she said faintly. "You must not say any more—please."

His face was tired and drawn as he stared at her with new knowledge dawning in his eyes. This moved her to a deeper pity.

"I should tell you," she half whispered. "Last week I promised to marry Mr. Jephson."

Symons looked at her, wrinkling his brows. The ticking of the clock sounded loud and harsh, and outside he could hear the wind moving through the elms. "What's—what's that?"

A flush rose to her temples. "You didn't know. How sorry I am to hurt you, but I don't think I ever loved any one till I met Bob. I can't explain it. He's coming here this evening. It will be some time before we can be married. I told him that I'd go anywhere with him, but he said not yet. Don't you see, Jim, that there's always just one man, and when——"

The telephone rang in the corner of

the room. "I'm sorry," she said, and took up the receiver.

He heard the vibration of a deep voice, and saw her stiffen at the tones. Suddenly she started, then stood the image of astonishment. The voice went on, and the girl's lips compressed, while involuntarily her eyes were fixed where the young man sat plunged into mingled emotions. "Yes—yes. I understand. Exactly—yes——" she said quickly. "Wait a minute—hold the line!"

She turned, and in her face was the look of an angered goddess. Never had Symons seen her look so beautiful or so stern. Her gaze had hardened, and ere she spoke she seemed to be caught up in a whirlwind of resentment from which her words came like ice:

"I would like to speak privately."

He shrank back as though struck in the face; then, without a word, stepped out into the dusk. The moon had risen, and her silver sickle was sailing daintily through a maze of stars. Overhead, the night breeze sang through the telephone wires, and, as he walked slowly homeward, it struck him with savage significance that above him was Mary's voice, speeding to the man she loved. Then he remembered Peter's request about his mother.

It was late on the same evening ere Margaret Brent finished her work and went to sit, as she always did, in the little arbor beside the house. Months had passed since Peter's last letter, and the oppression of loneliness began to weigh heavily. She did not fear for him, but the long succession of arduous days had been harder to bear than she had ever dreamed they could be. Then came memories of big Peter and his communicable strength and understanding. At this, her lips began to tremble.

A figure stepped out of the dusk and began to fumble at the latch. "Who is it?" she called.

There was no answer. The gate swung open, and old Tom's lean figure moved slowly up the path. He stopped in front of her, and, folding his long hands over his stick, stared at her without speaking.

"You!" she whispered under her breath. "You!"

He nodded. There was a moment's silence; then his cracked voice came in jerkily: "I reckon I'm a few years late, ain't I, Margaret?"

She caught at her throat in sudden terror. "What's the matter? Is Peter——"

"No. It ain't Peter. I don't know anything about him."

She held out a shaking hand. "Won't you sit down—Mr. Dart?"

The lines on his face twisted into wrinkles, and he sat stiffly. "Mr. Dart—yes—I reckon you're right. I ain't any claim left to be called uncle." He turned to her with curious interest. "How're you keepin'?"

"Well—quite well."

"Nice place here," he went on, peering through the gathering shadows. "Real nice place. Does you a heap of credit. Suppose you're wonderin' what brought me round after all these years. That's reasonable. Well, it happened that I was up at the bank this afternoon to see young Jim, and I came acrost a paper with your husband's name on it." He took out a leather pocketbook and drew forth the yellow slip.

Margaret turned crimson. "I know what that is, but——"

"Oh, ye know, do ye?"

"Yes. I went to Mr. Symons just after Peter died to pay him something on it, and he wouldn't take anything."

"H'm! Well, now, of course it belongs to young Jim, and things are different."

"I will pay it now. I've the money in the bank."

He coughed again, and surveyed her critically out of his wise old eyes. A

touch of color was visible beneath his leathery cheeks.

"Keep your money. I paid it to-day."

Margaret became a little faint. "You —you——"

"Why, yes. I reckoned the dern thing had been runnin' long enough, and young Jim wasn't any way backward about agreein'. I don't know but what I should have paid it before."

"But you didn't know."

He leaned forward, and touched her gently on the shoulder. "Seems to me, Margaret, now that I'm goin' downhill, that there's a whole heap of things I didn't know."

She tried to speak, but the memories of eighteen years engulfed her. Old Jim's voice sounded thin and far away, almost as though it came from another planet:

"When you and I fell out about your marriage, you was twenty and I was fifty. We both felt we was right and stuck to it. But the difference was that you knew what love was and I didn't. I reckon now that I never did know. I was right fond of Sarah, but I didn't in no ways get het up about her. Then, when she died, I seemed to freeze right up inside. It was about that time your Peter came along. Sister liked him, but I wasn't goin' to say yes, when it was jest as easy to say no. After that the ice got thicker, and it didn't start to melt till to-day."

"Why?" she said under her breath.

"On account of old Jim Symons. There was a heap of papers on his table in the private office, and young Jim set there breakin' his heart because they proved that his dad was the finest man that ever looked over a snake fence. There was evidence from 'most every one that needed help that they had got it. Well, when I see that, a voice spoke up right inside me and asks what sort of a showin' would my private papers make when they was dumped on my table. And I hadn't no answer, neither."

"And that's why you came here?"

"Yep. Thinkin' it all over, I decided that the world's plum full of a lot of fools who git an idee and go off half cock and then git sorry afterward. I ain't goin' to do no more sich things, so I'm here to talk things over with my ward, and carry part of the load if she says so, and git behind that young feller of yours and push him ahead jest as far as he wants to go." He took her hand, and patted it awkwardly.

"Didn't you hear about Peter?"

"Nope. Only knew he was out gittin' experience. That's cheap."

"I haven't heard for months. He's in the woods near Cobalt looking for silver."

"Well, well! And with good money right here every harvest."

"It isn't only that. I wanted him to see something more than Winton. It isn't good for any one to live only in one place."

"I don't know but what you're right." He looked toward the road. "Visitors is plenty to-night. Here comes another."

A quick step sounded at the gate, and the latch clicked sharply. Young Jim Symons strode up the path and knocked at the half-open door.

"I'm here," said Margaret, out of the shadows.

He turned; then, catching sight of the figure of old Tom, stared in amazement.

"Met before to-day, ain't we?" said the latter briskly. "Ef you've come to talk business with Mrs. Brent, I guess I clear out."

Symons recovered himself. "No, don't go. I'm glad you're here."

Margaret held out her hand. "I'm so sorry about your dreadful loss. One can hardly believe it. We will all miss him—all of us."

"Seems now as though your dad were

a bigger man than ever. Have to get away from a thing to see it fair, eh?" put in old Tom.

On the young man's face, mingled emotions were still evident. He was numb with the sense of loss and disappointed. He was amazed to see Dart with Margaret Brent for the very first time since he could remember, and he was tremulous with the importance of the news in the wanderer's message.

"I had a telegram from Peter today," he said unevenly. "Will you read it?"

Margaret's hand trembled while she read. At the end, she looked up. "May I?"

Symons nodded, and she gave it to old Tom. "That makes me very happy," she admitted. There were tears of relief in her eyes.

Old Tom glanced at the message. "So—that young prospector struck it? He's no slouch, either. What you goin' to do about it?"

"I didn't just know what to do"—Symons spoke with a curious intonation—"but it seemed a pretty good chance—too good to miss. I wish it had come at some other time."

"Wishin' will never git you anywhere."

"Well, I had to act quickly, so I got hold of Jephson. He's goin' up."

"So! That's pretty quick movin'. When's he goin'?"

The nine-o'clock train began to move out of Winton, and her whistle throbbed over the peaceful fields. "Now—to-night. He's on No. 7. I just wanted Mrs. Brent to know about that telegram. I guess I'll go home now. Hope you'll come in some time this week, Mr. Dart. Good night, Mrs. Brent, I'm about used up."

He slipped away, and his step dwindled into silence. Old Tom fished out his pipe. "Don't mind if I smoke?" He sucked away, then said diffidently: "There's something behind all this. No feller has to go into the silver-minin' business with his dad lyin' dead in the parlor."

"There is something behind it," she ventured presently. "I thought you knew."

"Knew—knew what? It seems there's a heap of things I don't know."

"Mary told me herself, months ago. Young Jim is in love with her."

"So! I don't blame him. I guess most of the Winton boys is the same way."

"Perhaps. But she doesn't love Jim."

Something in her voice made him stare. "You're mighty mysterious, Margaret. I don't blame her. He's a mighty smart feller—but—I don't know but what there's a yeller streak in him somewhere. Do you suppose she's leanin' toward any one else?"

Margaret nodded. "She wants to marry young Jephson, who went away so suddenly to-night. Don't you see?"

The old man slapped his thigh. "By gorry—yes. Sit tight a minute and let me think. But, first, is there any one else?"

"My boy Peter was very fond of her. That's why he went North last year," she said gently.

He sat wordless, and she watched him with an ache in her heart. Presently he lit his extinguished pipe, and, as the match flamed, she caught a quizzical smile that peeped and vanished.

"I don't know but what we'd better let things be," he said finally. "Here's three fellers and one girl. It's plum dangerous to git mixed up in it. You suppose your boy's out of the runnin'?"

"Yes, long ago. She didn't care for him in that way."

"Bein' as they're pretty near cousins, it's jest as well. Now, as for young Jim, he's got more'n most fellers of his age, and he's smart, as I was sayin'. But from what I've seen of Mary, she won't take him unless she wants him.

I guess you and I had better jest stand round and watch the circus so long as nobody gets hurt." He tapped the ground with his stick, and went on unsteadily: "I jest dropped round to say that I'm kind o' sorry I've seen so little of ye this long time back. One gits set in one's ways nigh seventy years. And say, I'm sending ye down another farm hand to-morrow—this place is most too much for one man."

"Thank you so much—that's very kind of you."

"No, it ain't—not a bit. Now you better git right to bed. Goin' to be fine sunrise, I reckon, to-morrow. Good night, Margaret. Good night. I'm gittin' that old I kin see in the dark."

He stumped off, and she heard the latch lift. Then his voice came back from beneath the elms: "You quit worritin' now. I'm goin' to even things up in future, and there's no sense in sp'ilin' your eyes."

CHAPTER VI.

Bear River runs into Elk Lake, close to Elk Lake City. The first stretch upstream trends to the southwest. Following this, you come to the North Branch, down which Peter traveled to record his claim. Paddling northwest, you arrive by a series of lakes and portages at that expense of water called Wedge Lake, because it is exactly like the end of a chisel, with the point turned toward the east. By traversing one leg eastward to this point, and then turning sharp west along the other leg, you strike a new trail that leads, in a matter of four miles, to the scene of Peter's discovery. To go round Wedge Lake by the canoe route is eight miles. Over the hills, from water to water, at the west end of it, is three miles. At least, that's what it scales on the map, for there is no trail across that steep and rocky backbone.

Peter, sighting the broken paddle blade that bumped against his bow, settled down to his work. Far ahead, as he could see, there was no sign of Louis Bradeaux. If the pursuer had known that Louis was one of the most skilled canoe men in the North, and that his partner Clark was nearly as good, it is possible that he might not have attempted any pursuit. But now, as the light craft leaped at his stroke, he knew only that he must win out at whatever cost of strength or courage.

The first portage took him across a high neck of land, and far in the distance he saw a speck. Two flashes of silver throbbed in unison beside it. He had gained nothing as yet. So, with a tightened belt, he forged on. The sun got lower and the air cooler. By now he had been paddling at top speed for five hours, and was conscious of no fatigue.

On the next portage, he trod in the smoking embers of a tiny fire. They had stopped for tea, and the insolent confidence of it sent new anger surging through him.

Full moonlight spread over water and land. Peter's great body still swung rhythmically. The thrust of his back and mighty arm were still as powerful as ever, and the vicious flick with which he finished every plunging stroke betrayed no weakening of muscle or sinew. All around, the lake lay like flat silver, and a broad ribbon of white and dancing light led from his canoe to the moon, in the midst of whose calm luster he seemed a wild and insensate thing that rioted through the dreams of a slumberous wilderness.

He took a loaf from his pack, gnawed at it, then dropped it. By morning, he was still going strong, and five of the six portages were passed. A cord in his right arm had begun to burn like fire, and his eyes were hot and bloodshot. At sunrise, as he slid the canoe into Wedge Lake, he saw

Bradeaux and Clark not more than two miles ahead. At that moment, an agonizing pain shot through his arms, and his great fingers closed in a cramp. Swinging them till the blood circulated, he guessed that the game was up at last. Simultaneously, a dull ache spread through shoulders and back. Forty-five miles he had traveled in the last twelve hours, and there remained but eight more of water and four of trail. Sinking on the moss, his whole frame began to tremble, not with exhaustion, but with baffled anger. He cursed the carelessness that had cost him a fortune, and pictured his ignoble return to the home farm. He glanced from the dwindling canoe to the ridge that lay to the north. Its sharp and jagged edge lay like a barricade between him and success.

In another instant, his eyes narrowed. Staring along the ridge, it was evident that a depression crossed the backbone of rock. This was, he decided, in line with the far end of the other leg of the lake. It followed, then, that if he could make three miles through the bush and over the ridge while Bradeaux and Clark were going six through the water, there was an opportunity to cut them off.

Shoving the canoe into a thicket, he turned it bottom up over his pack. Then, rifle in hand, he struck due north. For a little the going was fair, and he half ran, half jumped, and walked through broken patches of timber. The south slope of the ridge was strewn with bowlders, between which there were tangled vines and alder bushes. The passage of these required force, and he began to breathe hard. Higher still came the great mass itself, seamed with ravines invisible at a distance. Pushing upward, he groped for foothold, clinging and clambering up the cliff face by sheer strength of grip. Cedar branches caught at his clothes and ripped them into streamers. Forging ahead like a bull moose, he crashed through the undergrowth that fringed the summit, and stood at length, panting, on the divide. On either side stretched Wedge Lake, and far to the east a moving speck rounded the distant point like a water beetle.

Peter gulped for air, glanced at the belly of the bay two miles to the north, and plunged downward. His weight carried him on, till his going was like a storm. At the foot of the hill, he floundered through a swamp, whose chill waters cooled the fever in his veins. Striking the shore a quarter mile from the portage, he ran swiftly behind the fringe of timber, and in a few moments stood with heaving breast on the well-remembered trail. A glance up the lake showed the flash of paddles to be within half a mile. He breathed deeply, and, picking the twigs out of the breech of the rifle, stepped behind a thicket. Hitching his sheath knife to the front of his belt, he waited till the bow of Louis' canoe pushed softly into the sandy beach.

The Frenchman stood up and stretched his long arms. "By gar," he said, glancing back toward the point, "I guess we finish him dat stretch."

Clark's hand shook as he lighted his pipe. "That's the quickest trip we'll ever make. Remember that sneak up into Tisdale Township? That was easy against this."

Louis laughed, and put one foot on shore. "Come on—plenty time to make tea. I guess he gets here to-morrow."

"No—don't be a fool. Let's go up the trail a little. Take that pack!"

He swung the canoe over his head, and Louis thrust his shoulders through the pack straps. Then, like an enormous blue-backed beetle, Clark started up the bank.

"Stop—right where you are, and don't move, or——" The click of a cocking hammer completed the sentence.

There was silence while a man might hold his breath. The bottom of the canoe began to shake violently. Louis raised his eyes till they took in a pair of ragged legs. Then the voice came in again:

"You with the canoe, stand still! Louis, drop that pack and turn round!"

The Frenchman narrowed his shoulders, and the pack sack slid to the ground. Then he turned. Peter, walking up to him, laughed in his face. "Do you want to fight?"

But fight had gone out of Louis, if, indeed, it was ever in him. Suddenly weary, sick at heart with disappointment, and terror-stricken at the apparition of this giant who rose from the earth with the blood running from his scratched body, the Frenchman put up his hands.

The long blue beetle, from which the lower part of a man projected, swung across the trail. Peter laid a mighty grip on Louis' collar, dropped the rifle into his right palm, and crooked a finger. The bullet plowed up the dead leaves beside the wavering feet.

"All right—I quit," shouted Clark, "whoever you are. You've got the drop on me."

Louis was about to call, when the big man shook his head. There was a menace in the motion. "Your belt," he said shortly.

In three minutes, the Frenchman lay on the ground in a curious posture, his wrists and ankles being bound together. Then Peter approached Clark. "Put it down!" he commanded.

The blue canoe descended rapidly, and the other prisoner stared in amazement. "For God's sake, how did you get here?"

His captor laughed. "I walked. Put out your hands!"

Clark glanced at Louis, and surrendered without hesitation. Shortly he found himself facing his fellow captive. Peter laughed again, and opening their pack sack took from it all food except enough for one meal for two men. The latter he pushed under the bow of the blue canoe; then, lifting this gently, he slid it back into shallow water. After which he searched Louis, and appropriated the map that had blown out of the recorder's door. Lighting his pipe, he seated himself in the moss, and regarded the two with contemplative eyes. After half an hour, he began to talk as though to children:

"I suppose I'm a fool, but I don't suppose I can prove anything except that you stole that map and your pardner nearly broke my skull. Perhaps, if I hadn't showed that piece of rock so free, this wouldn't have happened. I guess you've had enough."

"By gar—yes!" exploded Louis. "I hope you break your neck next time."

"Say," put in Clark seriously, "I didn't mean to hurt ye. I guess you'd hev killed Louis if you'd ketched him. Suppose we call it quits. I'm ready for Elk City any minute. Take off these darn straps. They're cuttin' my wrists. It's all right. I know when I've had enough."

Peter hesitated, then nodded, and slackened the leather. Clark lay too stiff to move. The big man picked him up with one hand and steadied him.

"Say," he went on admiringly, "I guess you could put any man this side of Montreal to sleep. I'd like to stay with you. You don't look as if you needed help, but don't ye want some one on that claim of yours? Forty a month will catch me. Honest! I mean it."

"No. I reckon I've had enough of you fellers. Ready to start now?"

"Say!" burst out Louis. "Yer t'ink a feller walk when he's tied like a chicken?"

Peter strode over, loosed his bonds, jerked him to his feet, and pointed to the canoe. "You get in there and git!"

The rifle lay in his arm, and the two stared at him. The thing was too good to be true. Half dazed, they pushed off and paddled stiffly outward. Peter's voice followed them:

"When you get down to Elk City, you can tell the recorder I'll be close after you, and, say, next time you want to jump a claim let me know; I'd like to see you do it."

They moved slowly from the land, and a curse drifted back to him. He laughed again, lit a fire, and sat watching the dwindling craft till it vanished behind the point. Then he began to eat ravenously.

Jephson sped northward with a glowing heart. Mary's last words had set his pulses bounding, as she told him of Symons' visit and its abrupt ending. They vowed eternal constancy, and, at the end of it all, she asked to be remembered to Peter Brent. When he asked why, she only laughed and blessed him, and hung up the receiver.

From the recorder at Elk City, Jephson got all the details of the theft of the map, supplemented by the defeated Clark's description of the race for the discovery and the double capture on the trail. The recorder told it simply and without excitement or garnishing. At the end, he laughed, and added: "He ought to be back in a day or two, to make official application. Don't you want to wait for him?'"

"But are you sure he's coming?"

"He's got to, inside two weeks. Five days are up now."

"And what do you think of it?" queried Jephson.

"I don't think anything at all. I only know he left me a piece of ore. It's a sample, but every ton like that carries from four to six thousand ounces. That's from two to three thousand dollars. My dear sir, if your friend has really got silver in place, and it is anything like the piece he brought me, he can hold it for practically any sum you like to mention up to half a million."

Jephson swallowed a lump in his throat. "I guess I'd better go over to the hotel and have supper. Then I'm going to get some stuff and go to bed."

He slept uneasily, and sought his friend before breakfast.

"I'm going out to the claim. Can you get me a man who knows the way?"

"There's only two who know the far end of it, and I guess they're not anxious to go," said the recorder. "Hold on, here's one of them now."

He ran out and stopped Clark, who was lounging by. There was a long argument, which the recorder terminated abruptly. "So I guess you'd better go, Clark. It'll help me to overlook one or two little matters."

The prospector nodded sullenly. "Here's your man," called the official. "You're all right now. Get him to tell you about his last trip to Wedge Lake."

As they loaded the canoe and pushed off, it was difficult for Jephson to believe that this was one of the men Brent had trapped and bound. Clark paddled steadily and without words, till, as he made camp for the night, the tide was loosed and he gave his companion the whole story. "I want to work for him," he concluded, "and I wish to the Lord he'd take me."

"What does he look like?"

"Oh, you'll see, all right, all right. You won't mistake him for any one else afterward, either. He's white clear through, even though I do say it." He spat into the fire, and sliced the bacon. "Don't know but what it's a good thing he tripped me up. I was gittin' too thick with that skunk Louis, and he's bound for——" He lifted his chin with a jerk, and tossed some coffee into the pot. "This country's all goin' to glory because there ain't enough honest men in it. Oh, I know

it sounds queer from me, but I've had my medicine and I'm not forgettin' it." He lit his pipe with a hand that shook. "Ever been in this country before?"

"No. I haven't been north of North Bay."

"Well. Most of us are liars and the rest are thieves. I ought to know. I've been both."

The second afternoon was nearly gone when they rounded into the last leg of Wedge Lake. Clark pointed to the gap in the long hill that lay to the east. "I guess he came through there. It was some trip, too."

Their paddles dipped monotonously for half an hour, when the man in the stern shaded his eyes and looked into the setting sun.

"Here's your friend now. By hickey, watch him come!"

Jephson stared, and, over the long expanse ahead, caught the quick flash of a swinging blade. It drew rapidly nearer, and he made out a gigantic figure poised on the middle thwart. So fast it came that Peter Brent appeared almost to jump into vision. His shirt was open, revealing the great, brown, hairy throat. The breadth of his shoulders made the paddle seem a small and flimsy thing as, at each stroke, the smooth water crumpled under the lifting bow. He looked a god in a shell —a form that carried its head proudly and in whose steady eyes was the consciousness of vast and untiring strength.

"What a man!" said Jephson to himself. Then he lifted an arm. "Mr. Brent. Hello! I've come up from Mr. James Symons."

The giant stopped his canoe abruptly, and, edging toward the other, extended his hand. "Glad to see you, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Jephson's my name. Are you going out to Elk City?"

"Sure. I've got to record my claim. By George, Clark, what are you doin' round here?"

Clark colored furiously, and jerked his chin toward the engineer. "He hired me. Recorder said I'd better come since I knew the way."

Peter laughed. "You bet you know it, but"—he laid his paddle across the canoe and leaned forward—"I don't see but what you'll have to wait till I get back."

"You've seven days more. The recorder isn't doing any worrying."

"No one's a-goin' to jump your claim," put in Clark, with emphasis.

The giant chuckled. "Where's Louis?"

"Lit out for the Shining Tree country the day we got back; he's through in Elk City."

"Any more of your friends round?"

"They're mostly yours from what I hear," interrupted Jephson. "You've become something of a celebrity up here."

"Oh, pshaw! That was nothing. Well, I'll take a chance. Come on, fellows!"

He swung his canoe. The others were hard put to keep abreast. As they ran into the white sand, Peter shot a mischievous glance at Clark. "Remember this trail?"

"Say," replied the other desperately, "quit your foolin'. I ain't afraid of you nor any other man now, because I've quit bein' crooked. Don't you know enough to stop?"

The big man colored. "I guess you're right. Now, Mr. Jephson, we can either camp here or go right into the claim."

"Right here. I've had enough for one day."

They ate, and, not bothering to put up tents, lay on brush beds and stared at the sky. The engineer, full of interest, questioned Peter about his wanderings. Monosyllables were the only response, for this stranger's advent had

brought Winton curiously near to the wanderer. He longed to make countless inquiries, but his loneliness and a fear that he should betray the depths of his heart struck him into silence after he had determined that his mother was well. Then Jephson rapped his pipe sharply.

"That was a sudden thing about Mr. Symons."

"What about him?"

"His death. Oh, of course, you couldn't know."

"What!"

Jephson told it all carefully, even to the manner of his own sudden commission to go North. There was not a word, however, of Mary Dart.

"Then you represent young Jim?"

"Of course. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I clean forgot that it was impossible for you to know anything about it."

"I don't know that I want young Jim in this. I didn't send no telegram to him."

Jephson whistled. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know—now. He was too darn slippery when I saw him last."

"But he's got to be straight. He's going in with Taylor and Dart and a dozen others that won't stand any funny work."

"Maybe—maybe—I don't know but what I'm 'most too particular, specially in a mining country. You go to sleep and let me think it over and tell you in the morning. My brain works a little slow."

"I'm agreeable." Jephson turned toward the fire, and, taking a leather photograph case from his inside pocket, peered at it intently.

"Don't worry over your face. You can't change it," put in Peter, with a grin.

"It isn't my face. It's the girl's I'm going to marry."

At noon next day, Jephson straightened his back, took another keen glance at the vein he had been examining all morning, and began to talk.

"It all depends on the depth and length. What one can see is worth a good deal, and, even if it only goes down ten feet, it's worth a good many thousands. Surface work won't help very much with conditions like these. I wouldn't advise diamond drilling, either. These lodes are too bricky and irregular. You've got to go down, and that's all there is to it. I'm going to advise Symons to sink a hundred feet and drift another hundred each way. That will cost ten thousand all told, and it will only tell whether it's worth while to go on. To make a mine will cost fifty thousand."

"Symons won't spend ten thousand," said Peter.

"That's for him to say. My instructions are to wire whether your vein is worth taking. There's no question about that, and the rest is up to him. Now I've got my samples. I'm going back to send the wire just as soon as you have finished your staking. Come on, Clark, and we'll give him a hand."

They blazed the boundaries, while Peter, frowning over his book of instructions, squared the corner posts and carved his name and license number and the date. Then he took up his hammer and sledged off a slab of silver as big as a small plate. Flattening this, he began to scratch on it diligently.

Jephson came up, and, wiping the sweat out of his eyes, peered over the giant's shoulder. In another moment, he stiffened.

"Mary Dart!" he said under his breath.

The plate dropped from Peter's big fingers. "What is that to you?" he demanded, with a shake in his voice.

Jephson slowly took out the leather photo case. "Look! The girl I'm going to marry."

He caught Peter's gaze. It was so

surcharged with storm and lightning that involuntarily the engineer stepped back. Clark stared at the two, fascinated.

But the giant stood motionless. The blood had deserted his brown cheeks, and left in them a ghastly pallor. His great shoulders began to heave, his breath came tempestuously, and in his gaze was the desperate look of a smitten animal.

"You going to—to marry her? You are——"

"Yes." The answer was gentle with pity. "She promised me last week. I didn't——"

With a bound, Peter was upon him. Jephson felt the mighty grip and knew that he was a child against that strength. The livid face was close to his own, and he could see the cords on the thick neck twitching like banjo strings. Then came a voice, so husky, so crowded with poignant emotion, that it seemed not to be human. A huge hand closed over his arm till it hung limp and nerveless.

"If you marry that girl, be good to her. Take care of her, everywhere, and all your life, or I'll break you into little pieces."

Then he thrust the engineer from him and reeled off blindly down the trail.

It was a strange journey back. They took Jephson's canoe. Peter sat speechless in the stern and wielded a mighty paddle. Clark took the bow and talked intermittently to the engineer, who leaned in comfort amidships. But these efforts at conversation were answered only in monosyllables and soon died a natural death. Utter silence fell upon them—a silence that lasted all that day and through the evening, when Peter moved noiselessly around the fire, and all next day, till, as dusk fell, the lights of Elk City twinkled like small and ruddy stars across the unwrinkled river. It was not till they stepped ashore that he spoke, and then it was to Clark:

"You get ahead. We'll see you later."

The man disappeared toward the hotel, and Peter turned to the engineer.

"I reckon you know what's the matter," he said, with difficulty. "I wanted to marry that girl just as soon as I could keep her. I found silver, and everything seemed all right—then you came along. The lode's no good to me now. You record the claim, and I guess I'll move on. When a man can't get what he wants, there ain't much else that's any use."

Jephson stood, robbed of words. He felt voiceless in the face of this baffled worship, and dimly glimpsed the tempest that must have surged through this giant's heart. Then Peter's tones came in again:

"I don't know but what it's just as well, anyway. I ain't in her class, and I don't mix with her folks. It'd only make her uncomfortable. I ain't got much brains, either—never did have, and them that hasn't shouldn't try and live up with them that has. I've been thinkin' pretty hard these two days, and that's the way I come to see it now. I—I wish you luck. So long."

The engineer caught at him as he moved away. "I say—stop! You can't go like this, and I won't take your claim."

"I reckon I don't want it now."

"You mustn't talk like that. Of course you want it, and of course you're going to stay with it. And I'll stay with you, and if Symons will find some money to start with, we'll make the biggest mine in the district. Men of your size don't run away from trouble, and you haven't got that reputation, from what I hear. Do you want to play into Symons' hands?"

"No, I don't."

"I'll make you a proposition. I'll stay with you till the thing's a go. We

can afford to part on a success. And, besides——"

"Well?"

"You're going to get over this and be our best friend. And that will make us both very happy."

"Where would I come in?" said Peter slowly.

"Everywhere—because you're a man, and because you're the biggest, finest man I've ever seen in my life and I'm proud to be associated with you. And if you don't agree, it will make a difference to us all our lives."

The big fellow hesitated visibly. "I'd hate to do that."

"Well, I'm telling you the truth."

There sounded in the dusk a sudden sharp sigh, and Jephson felt a great hand engulf his own. "You want to be pardners?"

"Of course I do, and I want Mary to be the third, and whatever hurts one will hurt the rest of us, and whatever helps one will do the same for us all."

After a moment's silence, the deep voice spoke again: "I guess—I guess we can shake on that, but you'll oblige me if you don't talk too much about our pardner for a while yet. Let's get some grub."

CHAPTER VII.

My Dear Son: Mr. Symons showed me your message, and I write to say how glad I am to hear about your great success. Mr. Dart came to see me last week. You can guess I was surprised. We had a long talk, and he seems all right now. It seems to me that Mr. Symons' death had something to do with it. Young Jim came in in the middle of it, and showed me your telegram. Mr. Dart seemed surprised that he acted so quick and sent up the engineer that same night, but I guess that's his way—sharp and quick. Then I told Mr. Dart about you and Mary. He didn't seem to think much of it. And now I am afraid of something. You don't know—not till I tell you now—that Mary is going to marry Mr. Jephson. I hate to tell you while he is there with you, but it seems to me that it's better than finding it out afterward, and perhaps you have found out already. Don't have trouble with Mr. Jephson. It would kill Mary if you hurt him. Mr. Dart says he's going to push you ahead, but I guess you don't need it. Si Hawkins had a fire last week, and there was a damage sale. I bought a new dresser. Write as often as you can.

Your Loving Mother.

Peter, unconscious that many eyes were focused on him, read the letter as he leaned against the Elk Lake post office. His eyes were quiet, and his face revealed nothing of his thoughts. Jephson beckoned to him from across the street.

"I'm sending this report to Mr. Symons," said Jephson. "You might as well see it. That's the case, as near as I can get at it."

The big man went over it carefully. "You ain't takin' any chances with that report."

"No, I'm not, but it's the best I've sent on anything for a long time. If Symons doesn't take it up, I can find others who will—or buy you out altogether for that matter."

"Well, I guess you know your business. Say"—Peter hesitated, then felt in his pocket—"you'd better go through this."

Jephson glanced at the first line. "Why, it's yours. I don't read that. It's from your mother."

"I guess you'd better, just the same. You're in it—see?" Peter held it out, and his gesture was imperative.

The engineer took it. A flush of color mounted to his temples and he darted a curious look at Peter. Finally he folded the sheet and handed it gravely back.

"She doesn't know we're pardners," continued his companion. "Saves a heap, doesn't it?"

"I'd like to write to your mother. May I?"

"Sure. I don't know but what"—Peter faltered, then went on doggedly—"I don't know but what I'll write to Mary and straighten the whole busi-

ness out. It'll be my first letter to her, too."

They walked in silence to the hotel. Half an hour later, he thrust his sheet in front of the engineer. There was sweat on his face, and his voice shook. "Guess you'd better run over it." Then he strode out and down the street toward the canoe landing.

Jephson stared after him, then turned to the letter. It was written in a big, bold hand and had curious breaks and erasures in it like a schoolboy's epistle:

DEAR MARY: I've never wrote to you before and now I want to say that I've met Mr. Jephson and that he's a fine man and I wish you both well. I understand that I ain't in your class and I ain't just the right kind for you and my mother told me he was coming up and not to have trouble with him but we was pardners by the time the letter reached Elk Lake, so it's alright. Your friend has sent a report to young Jim and I'm sorry it ain't old Jim and we're waitin' for the answer and if that's all right we're goin' to get to work and make a mine of her for Mr. Jephson says you can find a prospect but you've got to work for a mine which is different altogether. And I want to say that you're a pardner in the mine too and I don't want anything for a single man don't need money, but your friend says I'm crazy and I guess perhaps I am. So bye and bye when we get her runnin' and diggin' up silver, I guess you can come up and see her. You'd better go and see my mother and tell her your friend is all right and he's a darn fine fellow and perhaps I'd be if I had the same chances. This is all at present and I guess you'd better not write me because the least said is the soonest mended and I want to say that nothin' is broke yet and God bless you and your friend, is the earnest prayer of PETER BRENT.

When Jephson finished, his eyes were full of tears. Then he went to the door and saw, sitting at the water's edge, a gigantic figure with its head buried in its arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

The telegram which Jim Symons received from his engineer was eloquent of something that set his heart beating and snapped his jaw shut with a click of sudden determination. There was silver, after all—possibly millions' worth of it, so why not keep it to himself? He grimly considered the men about him. If they came in—— But why should they? He had read, the day before, that one Cobalt mine—The Royal Crown—had shipped one car of ore that brought just sixty thousand dollars—and he flushed at the thought of it. Here was he, undertaking to manage the Winton & Easterly for three thousand a year. This was, he instantly decided, a mistake that would be put an end to at the earliest possible moment. The thing now to do was to get hold of the property at once.

He wrote message after message and tore them up. Emery Taylor drove past, and, just as he drew abreast of the bank, pulled up and seemed about to descend. Then he shook his head and jogged slowly on. Symons looked after him, puzzled, then began to scribble again till finally satisfied:

Will put up five thousand for development in consideration of fifty-one-per-cent interest and option on balance for fifteen thousand. Draw on me for one thousand to start work, if acceptable wire answer and papers will be forwarded.

He sent it, and kicked his heels for twenty-four hours till the answer came. He did not know that in the meantime Jephson had shown the telegram to Peter and advised him not to accept, and that the offer was preposterous. But Peter had only wrinkled his brows and thought hard; and then, concluding that fifteen thousand dollars was more than enough for his mother and himself, and concluding also, in spite of all Jephson's arguments, that he wanted the mine to be owned in Winton, he wired acceptance. And on receipt of this, young Jim carefully folded the message, and, with a satisfactory smile on his smooth face, sent off the papers and plunged into meditations on just what kind of a house he would

build, and where. Then he went out to talk finance with Si Haskins.

In less than twenty-four hours, the men and women of Winton were possessed of certain facts. Young Jim had acquired the richest silver mine ever known, one carload being worth fifteen million. Si Haskins was going partners, and arrangements were being made to let Winton folk in on the ground floor, and if it were possible to unearth a more successful method of creating suppressed excitement, people had not heard of it.

CHAPTER IX.

Louis Bradeaux was known as a bad Frenchman. His spirit, already ugly, had grown more venomous after his failure to jump Peter's claim. He counted out Clark as a weak milk-and-water brother, and brooded for days in search of revenge. It did not improve matters when men looked at him out of the tail of an eye and chuckled; for if Louis was as slippery as a snake, he was also more persistent.

Of Peter, he had a wholesome fear. He recognized not only his strength, but also the blind bull-doggedness that refused to accept defeat. But of Peter's wits he was not afraid at all. All honest and unsuspicious men are at the mercy of scheming scoundrels, if only for a little while. Thus, while Peter slaved with a striking hammer, the Frenchman schemed and pondered.

There was in the Shining Tree country one Anthony Brewster, of like kidney with Louis. Chased from the prize ring for foul fighting, he wandered north, taking such work as was offered in recognition of his huge shoulders, but always quitting a job when he became in the least necessary. It was but a step to whisky smuggling, and for a year he had oscillated between a railway siding and a dozen camps. Shrewd with the shrewdness of the ring, he traveled on the ragged edge of arrest. His canoe and toboggan had been searched a dozen times without result, and Brewster only sneered and slipped away to break the law with leisure and security.

It was on a day when whisky peddling had grown for a week or so too dangerous that he received a letter from Louis Bradeaux. So, striking across from Shining Tree, he came to Elk City by way of the Montreal River, and found the Frenchman in a haunt known to few of the chosen spirits of Elk Lake.

What the mission was he knew not, but he did know that in the past there had been doings which left him no liberty to refuse to come. Seldom, indeed, does one lawbreaker decline to answer the call of his brother, and strong indeed are the criminal cords that bind them together. So Anthony Brewster, ex-heavyweight prize fighter and jailbird, slackened his great limbs and drank and smoked, while Louis talked and his black eyes flashed with hatred.

At the end of it all, Brewster shook his head. "That's no use; we've got to get him alone. I ain't takin' any chances with a cove of his size. There's him and Jephson and Clark, besides the rest of the gang. You're a bigger fool than you were six months ago, an' that's goin' some."

"But dat will fix de *sacré*——"

"Shut up, and let me think!" said Brewster, and relapsed into a grim silence. His great fists clenched and relaxed, while behind the narrow forehead the crafty brain discarded plan after plan. Presently he grunted and took another drink. His face had grown red, and beads of perspiration sparkled on his leathery cheeks.

"You kin git a piece of paper out of th' recorder's office."

"What's dat fer?"

"Never mind. You kin git it."

"Yes—I guess so."

"Well, that's the pipe. Don't ask me questions. What you don't know won't hurt you. You say there's a couple of men goin' out to-morrow?"

"Alphonse Laroche an' Antoine Desbareau."

"That's all right. You git that paper an' leave the rest to me."

Louis did get it. At four in the morning, he pried up the back window of the recorder's office, and, crossing the floor with the step of a cat, fumbled under the long counter that cut the room in two. It was cautious work, for the recorder himself slept overhead with a revolver under his pillow. He turned once in his cot, and Louis stood breathless for ten minutes till he heard a faint snore.

Brewster took the block of printed headings and scowled amiably. "Now go and swipe a typewriter."

"What's dat?"

"A typewriter, see! The recorder ain't a mutt that writes his letters with a pen. You get me?"

Louis pondered. "She's dat machine dat makes print?"

"You're on. I don't care where you get it."

The Frenchman blanched, and hesitated, irresolute. "I get trap dis time, sure."

"Fix it up yourself. I'm for Shining Tree in th' mornin'." Brewster took off his coat, rolled it into a bundle, and lay down on the floor.

Louis cursed and slid out into the darkness. The prize fighter chuckled, reached for the bottle, relit his pipe, and listened intently. The night was still, and the croaking of frogs came clearly from the adjoining marsh. Elk Lake City, at least the honest part of it, was deep in slumber.

Twenty minutes passed, then suddenly three or four blocks away a door banged sharply, followed by a crash and the breaking of glass. Immediately two revolver shots cracked viciously. Brewster held his breath. There was no subsequent commotion, no windows opened. Breaking glass and revolver shots were mundane occurrences in Elk City.

There ensued utter silence. Brewster laughed and lay down.

Half an hour later, a board creaked outside, the latch was gently lifted, and Louis entered, treading on tiptoe. Beneath his arm bulked a typewriter case. Putting this on the table, he swore long and fluently. Brewster watched him without words, a saturnine smile on his broad face.

"What did you strike?" he said presently.

"By gar, I go to de hotel. De clerk, she's asleep in de office. De machine, she's sit on de desk. The door, she's lock. *Sacré!* I hope de window and grab dat machine, when the cover she's slip from my han' and bang de desk. I jomp for de window, an', *nom de Dieu,* but I break de glass. De clerk she's wake up an' ron for de door and shoot twice wit' his pistol. But, by gar, I go more fas' dan his shoot. An' now you make write for fix dat feller."

"If you were in little old N' York, you'd learn not to drop anything you were tryin' to lift. Now what I'm goin' to do is this: I'm goin' to write your friend a letter from the recorder, tellin' him he wants to see him on business. Something to do with his claim. See? That'll fetch him red-hot, and I guess he'll travel alone. Now, all we've got to do is to get this in to him by those fellers you speak of, an' then foller them up, easylike, and wait on the third portage—that's Black Lane—halfway. When he comes hikin' along, we get the drop on him and fix him any way you like. But I ain't fer murder—understand that. Them that thinks they can hide a man in this country under a heap of leaves makes some mistake—believe me! Now it might be just as well if we

separates till this afternoon. There's reasons, an' I guess you're wise to 'em."

Just two days later, Jephson looked over Peter's shoulder. "I guess we'd better both go out. There's nothing to worry about—but——" He laughed, slapping the big man's shoulders. "You'll be giving the claim away again."

Peter shook his head. "I thought you wanted to be here when they shoot the next round."

"I did, and I do. I don't just like the way that vein's acting."

They both turned to look at the gray ribbon that crossed the bottom of the seventy-foot shaft. By this time, much work had been done on the surface; camps were erected, a blacksmith shop was in operation, and timber cut for the headgear. But always the vein itself demanded their first attention. Peter had watched Jephson, and began to learn many things that he put silently away in the back of his head.

"One day you have it, and the next you have nothing," ruminated the engineer. "I believe I'd better stay—but I can't imagine what——" He hesitated, then laughed cheerily. "You sent in notice that the assessment work was finished, didn't you?"

"Yes, three weeks ago."

"Then that's it. You get a certificate."

Peter strolled into their shack, rolled up his blankets, and glanced at a rifle in the corner. "Shucks! There'll be nothing to shoot till October."

Jephson went down to the lake with him. By this time the blazed trail had broadened into a road, and the two walked side by side. At the water's edge, he handed over a letter. "Post it, will you?"

Peter grinned. "That's all right. I guess the place is all healed over now. So long, Bob."

He struck off toward the far corner of the lake—paddling easily, for the wind was with him. The wilderness in all its beauty slid steadily past. Peter noted it not. His body moved rhythmically, but his soul was far afield. To all appearances, he was heart whole and in tune with all the strength and activity of the North. He had smiles for Jephson and jokes for all the gang. But for all of this there were terrific seasons in which his heart reached out to clasp again that which he had so valiantly surrendered. Deeper far than his life, stronger far than his superb strength was that terrific yearning which no self-sacrifice could put at rest. Jephson never guessed. Nor did Mary. And only to the eyes of Margaret Brent did the truth appear between the lines of letters written in a great, boyish hand. Mary would marry his friend. That was proper and inevitable. She would make a home, and their children would play in front of the fire, and, however close they might desire to draw him, there must still be that inmost circle into which he would never penetrate. The thought lay bitter in his brain.

The Black Lake portage is only a quarter of a mile. He reached it before sundown, and decided to camp at the other end. The sharp bow touched the sand, and, stepping out, he tossed his pack over his shoulder and swung his canoe over his head.

Five minutes later, he was blinking into the muzzle of a revolver behind which leered the crafty gaze of Louis Bradeaux. Beside Louis, a big man lay on the moss and regarded them both with concentrated interest.

"Drop dat canoe!" commanded Louis in a voice shaking with triumph.

It descended like a feather. Brewster's eyes narrowed as he saw that Peter put the canoe down with one hand.

"Gimme dat pack!" continued the captor.

Peter narrowed his shoulders, and the pack slid to the ground.

"Hole out yo' arms!"

The order was obeyed. Louis produced a thong of babeche, or rawhide, and made a running noose. At that moment, the revolver slipped from his fingers, and Peter grabbed his wrists. Brewster glanced quickly, and, rolling like a panther, rescued the revolver from between their feet.

"Quit!" he growled, with the barrel leveled at Peter's left armpit.

Louis sprang away and began to rub his wrists. Already they were growing numb. "Kill him!" he yelled. "Kill dat fool!"

But the prize fighter only laughed. "Kill nothing! Tie him up, if you know how, and then give him what's comin' to him."

In a few moments, Peter was helpless. The babeche, drawn tight over arms and legs, sank deep and began to feel like a hot wire. Brewster, still indifferent, lay in the moss and produced a bottle. Louis sat in front of his prisoner and surveyed him with shifty eyes.

"Take dat!" he said swiftly, and struck him in the face.

Fury surged through Peter's veins, and he tugged desperately at his bonds.

"An' dat, an' dat!" went on the Frenchman. "You got pretty strong rib, by gar!" He laughed, and kicked him in the side.

"Cut it out!" said Brewster, with a new tone in his voice. "Come an' have a drink."

Peter leaned back and watched the bottle diminish. The drink went rapidly to the Frenchman's head, but Brewster might have been swallowing water. The latter's eyes never wandered from the prisoner. They were cold and forbidding. Darkness drew on, and Louis lit a fire. Then, just as numbness was mastering Peter's arms, he heard the faintest whisper. It came apparently from a bush behind him. In a moment, it was repeated, and he moved his head slightly.

The moon slid behind a cloud, and something touched the captive's wrists. He felt the blade of a knife sawing gently, till after a period of sharp uncertainty the tension of the babeche suddenly slackened. He moved his wrists and crooked the stiff fingers, but the firelight revealed no sign that he was free. Louis woke up and began to play with the revolver. Brewster was, as before, silent, suspicious, and watchful.

From behind these two something whirled in the air, and, landing in a dead tree behind Peter's back, broke a branch that cracked loudly. The two sprang up and peered into the woods. As they did so, a figure loomed dark behind Louis, crooked an arm under his throat, and grabbed the revolver. Brewster turned to the rescue, but as he did so Peter strode across the fire and laid violent hands upon him.

The two on the ground struggled for an instant, then Clark rose with the revolver. Louis lay whimpering with a sprained wrist.

"Sit down!" rasped the newcomer, and squinted over the foresight at Brewster's head.

The whisky peddler sat down.

"I reckoned there was something wrong," went on Clark. "Alphonse Laroche told me he seen Brewster sneakin' round Elk City last night, and he does most of Louis' dirty work when the job's too big for Louis. Lay still, you black snake, or——"

Peter drew a long breath, and his finger tips began to tingle. "You're square with me now, Clark. I don't know what'd have happened."

"I know what's goin' to happen now. Hold this gun, will you?"

He stepped into the bush and cut a green stick. "These fellers' hides is goin' to be so darn sore they'll think

they're full of porcupine quills for a month."

It took about ten minutes for Louis. He lay on his face, and his shrieks filled the night, but Clark was merciless. Presently Peter intervened: "That's enough for him."

Clark laughed savagely. "Now for that bull-headed moose."

Brewster stood sullen and mutinous. His broad face was drawn with fear and shame. To be beaten like a dog was something that had never happened to him before.

"If it warn't fer that gun, I'd break yer back," he growled. "You call yourself a man, you big runt. Drop that revolver, and I'll eat you alive."

Peter blinked, for it was just as if some one had shaken something red close before his eyes, and yet he felt himself getting colder and colder.

"Better go back to the farm," continued Brewster contemptuously, "an' get out of the spotlight. Men ain't weighed in pounds in the Elk Lake country."

That settled it. Peter flushed hotly. He had had a flash of memory, and again his mother clung to him and called him her Crusader. Here was the enemy with a challenge. Again he saw red.

"Gimme that gun!" He turned to Clark, glanced at the shining barrel, then pitched it on the moss.

"Come on!" he said, and looked Brewster in the eye.

The prize fighter stared, then a slow smile crept over his face. "Reached you that time, did I, and you're a-goin' to stand up and take your medicine? Well, if it's my last fight, I'm goin' to wipe the earth with you."

He pulled off his jersey, and Peter had a closer view of the big frame. The hairy chest was massive, and the pectoral muscles lay like plates over the great bones. His shoulders were rugged and heavy, his arms thick and massive. The bull-like neck stood up like a column, and the ears lay close, as those of a fighting man should. But Peter noted with a grim satisfaction that this huge frame was overfed. Grossness and drink had left their mark, and there was a layer of fat beneath the coarse skin. Brewster was, however, at the moment, a dangerous man. His crafty brain had acquired every trick of the ring. He fought not so much to win as to injure. Heavy as he was, he retained a lightness of foot and deftness of movement that hitherto had invariably counted for as much as his strength and science. Now, with a look of evil triumph, he put up his guard and laughed in Peter's face.

Against this, Peter opposed little science but a body like iron. His skin was clear and silky, his eye hard and firm. Months in the wilderness had suppled his sinews and fortified his body. If he could hit Brewster where he wanted to, if he could do that just once, it was all he wanted. His wind was perfect. Years of clean living had repaid him well, and he had long since achieved that pitch of perfect training in which one tires not in one place but in all places at the same time. His reach was greater than Brewster's, but of this he knew nothing. Weighing about the same, he measured two inches more about the chest and six less about the stomach.

He glanced at Clark and laughed. His rescuer was sitting astride of Louis. The latter had twisted his head round toward the fire. Both were watching intently.

"Come on!" said Peter quickly. In spite of himself, his breath quickened.

Brewster advanced. His left was well out, his right guarding his stomach, his head slightly back. Leading, he landed easily. This encouraged him. In the next few minutes, he got home several times, once on Peter's cheek,

a blow that stung the challenger into unbalanced action. This time, he was punished more severely, and blood trickled from a split lip. Then Brewster hit him above the heart. There was an instant in which he wavered, till it came to him in a flash that he was only trying to fight Brewster's game in the way that Brewster liked most. After that, he gave up trying to hit, till, with a throb of satisfaction, he saw beads of sweat stand out on the coarse skin. By this time, they had been at it for a quarter of an hour.

Presently Peter became aware that if he could stand another few minutes, the odds were on him. Brewster, growing slowly more and more impatient, made short, savage jabs and tried desperately to end it with close infighting. Once Brewster clinched, and Peter felt his teeth sink into the muscles of his shoulder.

At that, a sudden spasm of fury shook him, but the great arms closed round and he barely broke away. The red curtain fluttered again before his eyes, and he decided swiftly that he, too, must get inside—inside those flail-like limbs, close to the sweating body, and crush the life out of it.

He waited for the opening, taking what punishment might come. Brewster was panting, but his head was still up and he seemed nearly as strong as ever. Clark kicked some wood on the fire, and the flame flickered on the two half-naked giants, on their shining skins and heavy chests, and on the space of trampled moss stamped flat and here and there stained and torn.

Brewster gulped, took a long breath, and lurched forward, leading a smashing right. Peter dodged a blow that would have finished him, and, stooping, came up like a flash inside his guard. In the same second, his arms went out and pinioned Brewster's elbows close against his ribs. They stood thus for an instant, their breaths mingling, their disfigured faces close together. In that instant, Peter's hands locked.

Brewster felt the growing pressure and twisted violently. As he did so, the arms slackened for a fraction of time, and, when they tightened, Peter had him sideways and pinned tight. Then slowly the pressure increased. The prize fighter's left elbow was turned out. He felt the joint yield, and struggled the more. But the encircling arms had now been transformed into steel cables, and there was flowing into them the whole superb strength of the farm, the pack strap, and the paddle. Whatever of force Peter had accumulated in all the years of his clean, wholesome life was now vibrating in opposition to the whisky-soaked years of a jailbird. It had ceased to be a battle between science and ignorance.

Moments passed, and but for their hoarse breathing the two made no sound. That grip was tightening by imperceptible degrees. Peter's arms drew in, and his mighty chest expanded. Brewster quivered with futile effort, but the only response was a compression that brought the blood out from beneath his opponent's finger nails. Then the prize fighter's face grew purple, and in the silence there came the dull snapping of an overstrained rib. Immediately after came a sharper sound, and Brewster's left arm doubled softly backward. He groaned twice, then red foam gathered on his lips. Instantly Peter's hold slackened, and Clark jumped to his feet and sprang forward. It was too late. Anthony Brewster shivered once, then swayed, and, without a word, pitched over on his face.

For a space there was no sound whatever save Peter's labored breathing. The flame leaped again. Louis still lay on his side, staring, his black eyes shadowed with fear and astonishment. Peter, flat on his back, flung his mighty arms over his head and filled

his quivering lungs. Clark half knelt beside the fallen man and fingered at his heart. For the rest of it, there were only shadows in the bush and the wind talking in the poplars.

Presently Brewster groaned, and his lips fluttered. Peter heaved himself up and moved over to his fallen foe. The thick lips were trembling. Putting his ear down close, the victor caught the faintest whisper:

"Come back to old N' York—with me—and I'll make—make you heavy-weight—champion—of—of the world."

The victor laughed, shook his head, and strode across to Louis.

"Well," he said, "have you had enough?"

"Planty," answered Louis quickly. "I'll be good."

At daybreak, they parted. Peter, seized of a great weariness, lounging sleepily to the rhythm of Clark's paddle, was borne back toward camp, while another canoe moved jerkily and stiffly across Black Lake and back toward Elk City. There had been nothing to say; words seemed unnecessary for such a parting.

Night had fallen again when Clark's canoe reached the beginning of the four-mile road, and it was an hour later when Jephson, the engineer, looked up from his blue prints and saw the travelers standing in the lamplight.

He advanced anxiously. "What's the matter? Had an accident?"

Peter smiled grimly. "No, we've had no accident. Get me a bite; I'm dog tired."

It all leaked out in the night. Clark proved incapable of retaining such news. Peter, when he emerged in the morning, found himself regarded as nothing short of a demigod, for it had been generally accepted that Brewster was cock of the North. He was pointed at, and the eyes of the gang followed him admiringly as he walked. When he spoke, they jumped to obey, and the great question was: "How did Elk Lake take it?"

At the end of the week, there was a general exodus. Half the gang had imperative needs that could not be supplied in camp. They came back on the Wednesday smelling of whisky and with unbounded admiration for the victor. Brewster's sun had set abruptly all up and down the Montreal River. They also brought a telegram from James Symons saying that he was coming up to inspect the property.

That night, a round was fired in the bottom of the shaft. It revealed a streak of silver some six inches wide and worth about three thousand dollars a ton.

CHAPTER X.

A thrill of excitement ran through the people of Winton when the news leaked out that young Jim Symons was going up north to see his silver mine. By this time, the new discovery had entirely eclipsed the Winton & Easterly Electric Railway. Old Jim was a good head, who saw a good thing and went for it; but young Jim had expanded into a prospective millionaire who reached out and grabbed untold wealth in distant parts of the country. His mine was the subject of general discussion. Men drove their buggies through the ditch and up against the snake fence to talk about it with others who dropped their reins and relinquished the rigid handles of their plows. It crept into the country papers, and even into those of big cities. And as it traveled, it grew.

The day before young Jim went north, he sought out Tom Dart with a plan that had been brewing in his brain for weeks, a plan based on the knowledge of that cupidity which had been the moving factor in the old man's life. In young Jim's hand was now a new power, and he was filled with de-

termination to use it to secure his heart's desire.

He found him without difficulty, and after a moment's hesitation began to play his cards.

"I'm going up to-morrow to see the mine, and thought perhaps you'd like to go with me."

Old Tom thrust a horny finger into the bowl of his pipe. "Seein' as I haven't any interest in your mine, what's the use?"

"That's just what I came over to talk about." Symons studied the lined face, then added slowly: "There's no reason why you shouldn't have an interest, and a big one."

"I guess that'd come a little high fer me. I'm not sayin' but what I'd like to, though." A faint flush had become visible on his temples.

"Mr. Dart," said young Jim, with an air of great heartiness, "I'm a young man with only a little experience. You're a good deal older and know a heap more. What I want is to associate myself with men like you. The success of the whole thing depends on my doing it. Now that's worth something—in fact, it's worth a good deal, and I'm ready to pay for it—provided I can get your help in something else."

"What's that?" There was a note of suspicion in the dry voice.

"I thought of coming to it later. Suppose we get the other part of it straight first."

"All right, but I ain't got more than three or four thousand I kin——"

"I hadn't reached even that. I wanted your advice first about capitalizing the mine."

"H'm! What's she worth?"

"I don't know, but I'm told it's worth not less than half a million as a prospect, and after development it should run into several million."

Old Tom was visibly impressed and hitched his chair a shade nearer. "Makes the Winton & Easterly look kinder small, don't she?"

"It's a different kind of thing. The Winton & Easterly is a good enough proposition, and we've cleaned up all any one expected. But the mine——" He paused. "Why, the possibilities stagger me."

Old Tom's heart began to pump in spite of himself. But this, he decided, was the time not to appear too eager.

"What capital are you thinkin' of?"

"Five hundred thousand."

"An' you bought her for what?"

"I don't see that that has much to do with it. The bigger the capital, the better I can take care of my friends before we let the public in."

"Mebbe—mebbe; and what do you reckon to sell the shares for?"

"To my friends at a nominal price, say ten cents; to outsiders at twenty-five."

The old man made a rapid calculation. "Then supposin' I put up two thousand, I'd git twenty thousand shares."

"That's it."

There was a long silence, in which Symons peered about the garden in search of Mary. Presently her father's voice came in again:

"I don't know but what I kin put up four thousand."

"That's fine. And you'll take a seat on the board?"

"Why—why, yes." This time Tom Dart colored with pleasure. "When do you want your money?"

"Not for a few weeks. There are legal matters to be got through with; besides, I've got a plan I want your advice on."

"Gosh, you're full of plans! Drive on."

"The thing that has impressed me most that I can remember is the way father started the Winton & Easterly with that big meeting in the town hall. I'll never forget it. Now I want to do

something of the same kind when I get back from the mine. You know that folks around here are a bit worked up, anyway, and a lot of them want to come in. Well, my idea is to call a meeting of those interested and give them all the latest news from the property and let them ask all the questions they want. Then read out the list of the larger subscribers that I will have by that time, such as you and Emery Taylor and Haskins and two or three others, and then throw the list open. That's one thing I want your advice about. Of course you would take the chair, Mr. Dart." Here Symons leaned earnestly forward, and the keen eyes stared from his shrewd face. "This will be a bigger thing than the Winton & Easterly. Seven per cent is all right, but the Crown Reserve paid seventy per cent for years. And I can't tell you what it will feel like to go up there and see money—bullion—lying ready to pack up and ship out."

Tom twisted his fingers for a full five minutes ere he could reply. When he did speak, his voice was pitched higher and just a trifle cracked. "That's all right. I don't see what's to prevent makin' a pile of money."

Symons laughed and took a small, rough slab of white metal from his pocket. "That weighs six ounces, and it's worth three dollars. Keep it. It came down yesterday."

The lean grasp closed over it, and something electric ran up the old man's arm and through his shoulder into his brain. "An' the other thing?" he said suavely.

"Mary."

"What's that!" Tom shifted uneasily.

"Mr. Dart, I want to marry Mary."

"Then why don't you ask her? I'm agreeable."

"I did, but she thinks she's in love with that engineer I sent up to the mine from the Winton & Easterly. We don't know Jephson, you and I, and we don't know anything about him. Why shouldn't Mary marry right here in Winton?"

"You suppose she's given her promise or anything?"

"I don't know, but I'm afraid so, and I can just about see the life ahead of her. An engineer never makes any money. He's just thrown out of one job and perhaps into another and perhaps not. He's got to go to the ends of the earth if he's sent, and most of the time he's in no place fit for a woman. I want to make Mary comfortable, and I can do it. I'll build her a fine house here in Winton, and she can have a car and all the rest of it."

The wrinkles deepened around old Tom's eyes. "I take it the arrangement is that you let me in on the ground floor provided I—I persuade Mary to let you make her comfortable. And ef I don't ——"

"I'd sooner you didn't put it that way."

"Pshaw! I'm only jokin'. Why shouldn't you git her? I'd a gosh blamed sooner see old Jim's son around the place than any one else. Now don't you get too frisky and break out of a trot. These gurls are darn hard propositions."

"I'd just like to add," put in Symons smoothly, "that I'd be proud to be your son-in-law."

"Easy, now—easy! Suppose you take a look in when you git back. I don't know as I'd git too pressin' tonight. You can't tell which way a grasshopper's goin' to jump."

It was several days afterward that old Tom balanced up all his powers of strategy, and, finding them wanting, went at it bull-headed—and demanded to be told if there was any understanding between Jephson and his daughter. The minute he spoke, he realized that the wrong end had come first.

Mary colored. "Why do you want to know?"

"Seems impertinentlike that a man should want to know what his daughter is thinkin' of, eh?"

"You know I don't mean that."

"I'm glad you don't. You and this feller Jephson correspondin', perhaps."

"Yes, every week."

"An' mebbe you're thinkin' of gittin' married."

"Yes—as soon as he can afford it."

"My gurl's husband don't have to afford it, ef he's the right sort and kin run a farm."

"Then you don't think Mr. Jephson is the right sort?"

"No, sirree, I don't. You kin marry him or any durn engineer you like if you're bent on it, but you finish with me when you start with him. An', besides——" He fumbled in vain for diplomacy, then blurted: "What's the matter with Jim Symons? He's dead set on you."

Mary started and turned pale. "Ah, so that's it!"

"When I see a gurl," broke in old Tom angrily—"when I see a gurl want to go traipsin' round with a feller that has to root all over God's creation fer a job and that holds it fer six months, mebbe—and when the gurl gives a cold shoulder to a man that's well fixed and is goin' to be rich and will give her a darn fine home to live in, it seems durn pig-headedness an' that's all—an' ef I kin stop it, I'm goin' to."

"How much do you know about me and Mr. Jephson?" There was a quiver in Mary's voice as she spoke.

"Reckon there ain't much to know," said her father grimly.

"Well, I'll tell you: Weeks ago, I became engaged to Mr. Jephson. We thought no one knew, but Mr. Symons evidently suspected it and sent Mr. Jephson up to the mine at a minute's notice. Then he came to me and asked me to marry him. Mr. Jephson called up from the station just as he was speaking. I'm afraid, father, that Mr. Symons isn't quite as clever as you seem to think him these last few days. And, besides——"

"Might as well finish up."

"I don't like him. He may be all you seem to think he is, but a woman can't always give reasons. I don't trust him, and in spite of all you've said I'm glad you haven't any business with him. He's a poor imitation of his father, as I see it."

"He's goin' to be a bigger man than his father, just the same. Well, Mary, you ain't told me yet."

"What do you want me to tell you, father?"

"That you'll quit philanderin' with this feller Jephson and act sensible."

"Father," said the girl earnestly and with a sudden appeal in her lovely eyes, "don't you want me to be happy? I've been so all my life—thanks to you."

Old Tom hesitated. The shaft struck home, and he had misty and poignant memories of another girl who had looked just like Mary, when she walked up the church beside him. But ever, as he pondered, there whispered that potent message from the north: "Here am I—come and take me." He struggled for a moment, then surrendered utterly:

"I want you to be happy—that's why I'm talkin'."

"Then I can only tell you that I'm of age and have decided for myself. I hate to seem ungrateful, and I'm not—but I wouldn't marry Mr. Symons if he were the richest man in the world. I wouldn't give myself to him for a hundred fortunes. And if you insist, I can only leave home and do for myself. Mr. Jephson is only waiting till he can save some money; and if he heard what you have said to-day, he would ask me to marry him now, and I'd do it."

Her lips began to tremble, and sud-

denly she sank to the floor and put her head against his knees. "Don't—dad—don't say any more!"

Old Tom blinked, and his hand crept out till it rested on the brown hair. "Well—well, s'pose I jest ask that you don't git hitched up without letting me know beforehand."

"Of course I'll promise." The tears began to trickle down her cheeks. "Oh, dad, how I wish mother was alive."

This was too much for her father. He walked away, his brain in a new tumult and with a pang in his heart.

The girl wrote to her lover the same evening, and poured her soul into the letter. She was constrained, however, by the consciousness that Jephson's position hung by a hair and that a hasty word from him would forfeit it. If Symons did not hesitate about dispatching the engineer to the north, he would have no qualms about getting rid of him altogether. Reflect as she might, there seemed to be but one course for her to follow. She must not antagonize either Symons or her father. She must be very wise and cautious, remembering that haste is imprudent and impulse dangerous. Jephson must stay where he was as long as possible, and when the time came she would act and act quickly. In the light of this ultimate decision, she reread her letter—tore it up and wrote another.

Before going to bed, she sought out her father.

"I hope we don't misunderstand each other, dad. It must be anything but that."

There was trouble in his eyes, and he looked at her steadfastly before answering. It struck him now that Mary was very beautiful, and it seemed strange that he should not have seen it so clearly before. She stood before old Tom, the embodiment of all that his joyous youth had seen in his own bride. That message from the north, which had been so dominant since Symons came, weakened as he stared at her.

"S'pose we jest git along fer a while as we are." Then his brow wrinkled and he added: "Hold your horses fer about a year, and what I'll give you will surprise you."

CHAPTER XI.

Young Jim Symons started north in a state of exaltation. The stars in their courses seemed very favorable, and he was full of a consuming desire to behold that which fortune had cast so gracefully in his way. It was four hours from Winton to Toronto. The time passed pleasantly enough with an intelligent companion whom he found in the smoking car. About halfway to the city, this individual sent a telegram, after which he relit his cigar and demanded the complete story of Peter Brent's discovery.

Symons gave it, nothing loath, and they parted with mutual good wishes. As he stepped from the train, a well-dressed man advanced and held out his hand.

"Mr. Symons, of Winton?"

"That's my name."

"I'm George Fulton, of Fulton & Co., financial agents. My people would like an interview, if you can spare the time." He walked beside young Jim as he talked, and halted at a large touring car. "Here's my machine. Better let me run you up. Oh, I beg pardon—my card."

Symons glanced at it and nodded. "How do you know who I am?"

"How don't I know? You've become rather a personage since you took up that property on Elk Lake. Correspondent keeps us posted."

He chatted easily as the car moved swiftly on: "Of course I can't tell you anything about your own business, but perhaps you'd be interested to hear some of ours. We propose an amalgamation of about six properties. Big

affair. English capital behind us, and, as you know, they do things on a big scale."

Young Jim glanced at him shrewdly. "Just how far have you got?"

Fulton smiled. "Let's have a drink and go up to the office, and we'll put our cards on the table. Then you can lead what you like.

"Seems to me," he went on, when they were comfortably settled, "that there's a great country up there, and if it's well handled there's no saying what it won't come to. I guess it's the richest piece of ground in the world. You seem to have cornered the biggest mint of the lot, from all I hear. What does your stuff go a ton?"

"About six thousand ounces," said Jim easily.

"That's three thousand dollars. Now don't you see, supposing there are half a dozen good mines scattered round and each running its own show in a haphazard sort of way, it's going to cost about six times as much to get the ore out than it would under one management."

"I guess my property can stand it."

"Maybe. I'm not disputing that, but you, as a business man, wouldn't put that forward as an argument. That's not the way you run the Winton & Easterly."

"Who told you I had the running of the Winton & Easterly?"

Fulton crooked a finger at a waiter. "My dear sir, you can't hide your light under a bushel."

Symons pondered. It might just be possible that he had become a bigger man than he suspected. How was he to know that Fulton had never heard of the road till he received a certain telegram two hours previously?

"Have you been interested in mines long?" he ventured.

"Nevada, Oregon, California, and the Yukon. My dear sir, I breathe mines. Quartz is my lodestar and free gold colors my dreams. Yes, I know, because I've paid to know and I've learned what to take up and what to let alone. I've come to the time when I can do my own picking and choosing. Now suppose we go on up to the office, and if we've any luck we'll find Sir John Andrews."

Symons did not ask who Sir John was, but five minutes later they descended at a skyscraper and shot up ten stories. Fulton threw open the door and motioned the visitor in.

The office was divided up into several rooms, but between these and the door was a row of tables covered with samples. Each table was labeled with the name of the property from which its samples presumably came.

Fulton waved a hand as he passed. "Some of our stuff, but the best is inside. By George, here is Sir John!"

Symons looked with interest as a short, red-faced man rose to greet him. Sir John was round and heavy. His nose had a purple tinge, and his fingers bore traces of tobacco stain. He wore violent clothes and white spats, and his general appearance was not one of nobility. Thrusting out a pudgy hand, he coughed slightly and said: "Haw! Glad to see you."

Symons was, in spite of himself, a little impressed. "Glad to meet you, I'm sure."

"It's rather fortunate that Fulton caught you on the fly, so to speak," said Sir John. "You have—er—not been in mining very long?"

"About two months."

"Well, you seem to have made a brilliant beginning. When I had been in it for a month—ah—my dear sir—how full I was of hope and ambition! Yes, sir, when I look back at that period and realize that if I had been content to take a little advice I would have made a fortune in a year. Such reflections, sir, are cause for thought. But now one has a saner view." He turned

to Fulton. "You have broached the matter to our friend?"

The broker nodded. "In a very general way."

"Hah! At the risk of being possibly a little prosy, let me put to you a certain proposal, Mr. Symons. As an axiom, I would submit that while we have in the Elk Lake country probably the richest portion of the habitable globe, I would—er—at the same time venture—er—the opinion that a great, I might almost say a glaring, injustice is being done to that marvelous district. Consider for a moment that the average value of the ore is two thousand dollars a ton. View this against the fact that the value of the ore in South Africa is about nine dollars."

He paused, then went impressively on: "Now, sir, the country is speckled with mines that are under most incompetent management. I say without hesitation, most incompetent. What would be the result if a group of the best properties were under one control and were operated at the highest pitch of efficiency? The result—the result, sir, would amaze the world."

He paused again and looked thoughtfully out of the window. His face was stern and prophetic. Fulton leaned slightly forward and whispered: "A famous man, Mr. Symons, you must have heard of him—the acknowledged leader of mining consolidations."

Whether Sir John heard him one could not tell, but presently his jaw closed with a click and he continued:

"You will understand that I could not take any personal action or express any personal opinion until I had absolutely satisfied myself that great wealth lay there without any shadow of a doubt. Too much depends upon what I might say. Too many people would be influenced. And if that savors of immodesty, I might say that I first established the value of the 'banket,' the conglomerate of the Rand. You see how necessary it was to use the best possible judgment. I am now, I am glad to say, entirely satisfied, and my views have been corroborated by my corps of skilled engineers. I have been intrusted with very large sums by English clients for whom I have frequently done extremely well, and you will shortly learn of the Elk Lake Consolidated, Limited. It will embrace the richest properties in the district, among which"—he laid a finger on Symons' knee—"among which you have now the opportunity to place your own. This flotation will create a furor on the London Exchange. Mr. Symons, we are at your service."

There was a little hush in the office. Sir John took out a red silk handkerchief and mopped a shining brow. "This climate of yours, sir, is demnition hot. I trust I have made myself clear."

"I think it's wonderful." Young Jim was a trifle breathless at the thought of figuring on the London market. "But of course I can't quite realize it yet. Your idea is," he added, turning to Sir John, "to put in each property at a valuation and then issue shares on the whole thing?"

"You are quite right. I think, Fulton, that Mr. Symons has grasped the matter admirably."

"And how do you get at the valuation?" went on Symons. "It seems to me that——"

"Under certain circumstances, that, sir, is a subject of some difficulty, but in a well-established field like Elk Lake there is no trouble. If you, for instance, reckon that your mine will produce two million dollars, one would capitalize at about five million and sell the stock at, say, fifty cents. That would yield nearly one hundred per cent, with no allowance for those sudden enrichments with which Nature often fills her underground shelves."

"Then I would have to——"

"You wouldn't have to do anything. One-half the value of your mine would be issued to you in consolidated shares. We would make a market for them. May I ask what you paid for your property?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

Sir John got up, and, glancing at Fulton, walked round the table and took the visitor by the hand.

"You are a wonder, sir, a wonder. Mr. Fulton, we are going to get points from Mr. Symons. I congratulate you, sir. Now what do you say?"

"I'd like to think it over first. There's one thing that occurs to me. Suppose I made my own flotation first, would the Consolidated take over the property afterward? I've reasons for asking."

"If you continue to show good value, as, of course, you will—yes, without hesitation. We would have to get the thing on paper, of course. Why not make the shares exchangeable—share for share?" But here Sir John leaped from his seat. "Fulton, we're forgetting ourselves; it's past lunch time. Come, come, Mr. Symons—you will give us the pleasure."

"I'd like to, but my train leaves at two-thirty."

"Train—two-thirty—nonsense, sir! You must stay overnight, and we'll show you that there are other things than business, and finish our affairs at our leisure. Is your car here, Fulton?"

"I don't see very well how I can stay," put in the visitor.

"My dear sir, you must—you simply must. You're dealing now, if I do say so, with the biggest thing that's happened in the mining world for years. Lead on, Fulton."

They whirled away just three blocks for lunch. The lobby of the hotel was filled with tobacco smoke, and a hundred men lounged about on leather sofas. Prospectors in large sombreros and long boots talked earnestly, surrounded by groups of others who drank in every word. The place was buzzing. Sir John, who attracted attention the minute he entered, stopped for a minute to whisper to a tall, lean youth. Then they marched on to the dining room.

Halfway through the meal, the tall youth came up and shook hands with Fulton.

"My friend, Mr. Booth, of the *Planet*," said the latter, introducing him to Symons.

"Sit down and talk to him," urged Sir John, nodding at the visitor. "You'll hear more of him in a few weeks."

Booth took the odd chair and lit a cigarette. "How's it going with the Winton & Easterly?" he asked, smiling.

Symons stared. "Why, how——"

"Oh, you chaps are better known than you think. We have also heard of the Empire Trust."

Young Jim blushed. "My father started that; I——"

"And his son has started something bigger. Go on—tell him," chuckled Sir John.

In a little while, with here and there a touch from Sir John, the reporter had it all. Symons found himself speaking with a strange assurance.

"Why not tell him the rest of it?" said his host cheerily. "He's got glimmerings already."

But that was too big. "You'd better say it yourself. I don't believe I'd do it justice."

Sir John cleared his throat, and Booth took out a notebook. In ten minutes, the reporter looked up. His eyes were sparkling. "Is this for the *Planet?*"

"Yes, in a general way. I wouldn't mention any names just yet. I'd be pestered with prospectors with claims to sell. The point to make is the saving by consolidation and the better output that will result through permanent

management. I think that's right, Fulton, eh?"

The broker nodded. "That's it—but probably Mr. Symons has no objection to being quoted in connection with his own property. It's a good thing for the country."

"Would you?" said Booth. "This is a scoop for me."

Symons colored with pleasure. "Oh, no, I think there's no objection."

Somewhere in the small hours of morning, young Jim stumbled into bed. His hand was shaky and his head sore. He had drunk champagne for the first time in his life, and drunk it like water. He had smoked more cigars in the day than formerly in a week. He had met various friends of his friends, mostly ladies. They had smiled on him and asked him to put ten dollars on various horses on their behalf. Having done this, he found that the horses invariably lost and his advance was not made good. The day closed with a party at which he had made certain promises and engagements that now entirely escaped his memory.

He breakfasted—or tried to breakfast—alone. The head waiter, who had seen the *Planet,* folded it conveniently and laid it before him. Young Jim's eye caught a paragraph of mining news and straightway became dead to all else. In large type was:

James Symons, capitalist of Winton Railway, director and mine owner, goes north to inspect his property, said to be one of the richest men in the Elk Lake district.

Young Jim read on, and with an inward glow that he was traveling with such a man as himself. Booth had modeled and modulated, had taken him as he was, dipped him in ink, and produced a remarkable person whom to know was to emulate. His opinions on mining, finance, and railroading had been deftly imagined and gracefully blended into a paragraph worthy of a Morgan. He read and reread; then, thrusting out his chin and narrowing his gaze to resemble as much as possible this synthetic stranger, glanced at the waiter, who still stood menu in hand.

"I want some strong coffee and dry toast."

At half past nine, Fulton, looking as fresh as paint, met him in the office. Sir John was not visible. "He's not the man he used to be," volunteered the broker. "He's knocked about from Alaska to Ceylon for forty years, and it's beginning to tell on him. He'll be in later. Well, what do you think of our proposal? I don't mind telling you that we had a chat about it last night. I thought Sir John had gone a bit too far to meet you, but he insists on his own way."

"I appreciate that, and I'm just as anxious as any one to make the most of a good offer. My position is this: I've already made arrangements for some of my stock, and a certain friend has been promised a seat on my board. What I'm willing to do is to go ahead with arrangements as I intended, but when I put the thing out for subscription to explain your offer and make it clear that stock in my company can be exchanged for Consolidated stock if you take the property over. I—I rather want to get it started myself—after that, I don't mind."

"I quite understand. Then the best thing to do is to give us our option on your property so that we will be in a position to issue our stock against yours. You see, we would require some security."

Symons glanced up suspiciously. "Why not an agreement without an option?"

Fulton smiled with a touch of condescension. "Well, because the option is the kernel of the agreement. One is worth nothing without the other."

"I don't know that I want to give any option."

The broker rose, and, doing so, knocked over his chair. "I'm a clumsy devil," he apologized. "Don't you see that——"

A footstep sounded in the outer office, and Sir John entered benignantly. "Good morning, Fulton. How d'ye do, Mr. Symons? No headaches, I hope. Fulton, you've got some demnition pretty friends. Oh, you dog, to let an old chap like me in for that!"

Symons blushed uncomfortably, and Fulton chuckled: "I find the gentleman from Winton is a hard man to follow. I couldn't keep up his pace. But we were just trying to see daylight through our affairs when you came in. Mr. Symons doesn't seem oversatisfied."

Sir John turned suddenly. "Eh—what? Not satisfied? God bless my soul!"

"I didn't quite see why I should give an option on the property, that's all. I think your suggestion is splendid."

"In other words," said Sir John stiffly, "you question us."

"No," put in Symons hastily, "not at all; but I don't see why an option is necessary."

"My dear sir, without in the least wishing to influence any decision you may make, I ask you to try and imagine whether it would be possible to make such a flotation as the Consolidated will have without first securing the various properties which are to be bought. I shall shortly be going to Parrs Bank, in London. You probably know it——"

He waited a moment, and young Jim involuntarily nodded.

"And say to my friend Parsons, the manager: 'I want four hundred thousand pounds for a month.' Parsons will naturally ask for my documents—in other words, options—before he advances any such sum. Five are already secured, and with these I had determined to be satisfied. Your name came up, and a point was stretched to include you and your holdings." He reflected a moment; then, addressing Fulton, continued: "You remember Baxter?"

The broker laughed. "Bit of an ass, wasn't he?"

"Baxter," said Sir John thoughtfully, "insisted on playing his own game in the Mysore goldfield in India. I offered to put him in the way of making fifty thousand pounds. He took the bit between his teeth and made five. Mr. Symons," he added coldly, "do you think your people would buy your stock if they had a chance at Consolidated?"

Symons stiffened where he sat. Would they? The question suddenly jumped at and held him rigid.

"Don't you see," went on the voice, "that we can't make unless you do, and the more you make the better for all of us? When your production goes up, your Consolidated stock jumps with it. And if you fall down, there are five other mines to make good on. I merely put this to you because, since you have closed the matter, I am loath to have you carry away any misunderstanding of our proposal. It's only my fault that I went too far to meet you. And now"—he rubbed his hands briskly—"what's the next thing on the list, Fulton? You'll lunch with us, of course, Mr. Symons? There are no bones broken, I hope?"

But from the gaze of young Jim his double fortune already began to recede. It had walked up to him and begged to be accepted, but because he had a small and unskilled mind he had strangled and thrown it away. This was the conclusion to which he swiftly came. And then his tongue raced with his brain to undo the evil and retrieve the day.

"No, no! You don't understand. I only wanted to know why an option was necessary. You've told me, and that's enough. I'll come in and be glad to do it. I'm not"—he paused for a minute, then continued with palpable

confusion—"I'm not used to things as big as this."

"I think, Sir John," put in Fulton ingratiatingly, "you ought to consider this. The circumstances, you can see, are——"

"Oh, very well—very well, I agree. You're quite right. It would be a pity to leave our friend out of the family. You say your train is at two-thirty, Mr. Symons?"

Young Jim nodded.

"In that case, we had better get through the formalities. You might use that same option form, Fulton. It's the one we got up for the Ecuador amalgamation. What did you say was the number of your claim, Mr. Symons?"

"H. L. 237. It's forty acres."

Fulton wrote vigorously, and filled in one blank space after another. "And the consideration?" he queried, glancing sharply at Sir John.

"I think I suggested that we might make our shares exchangeable," said the latter, turning to Symons. "Your capital was to be two and a half million."

"Yes—but don't you think it would be better to keep that down, say, to one and a half?"

Sir John shook his head with decision. "My dear sir, one must not be blind to the psychology of the thing. People are not impressed by a small capital. A large one bespeaks confidence on the part of the owners. Leave it where I suggested, and sell your stock at a little lower figure. The man who gets a dollar share for fifteen cents does not think about the latter but of the dollar. You note that I speak without reserve now that you are one of us. The justification of the dollar share is the natural increase of value of your mine. Then there's always one thing to be remembered. The man who went in first and risked his money—in this case yourself—is entitled to a good profit for his own daring and initiative. Put up your shares a cent a week, and your mine increases in value by one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. But these are matters we can discuss at our leisure when you return—eh? Shall we stick to the original proposal?"

"All right, since you put it that way." Young Jim was beginning to be terrified at his own potentialities. That weekly increase staggered him.

"You've got it, Fulton? Just let me run over it. H'm! Yes, very good. As representing the possible purchasers, I'd better sign first. There, Mr. Symons—just beneath me. Clause three? My dear sir, clause three would never apply to you. It is only used in case of fraud. Very good; now this duplicate, Fulton—you'd better witness. Thank you, gentlemen, thank you."

He folded the duplicate and slipped it into a long envelope.

"Take it, sir, with our joint congratulations. Now I would like a few samples of your ore. People have a habit of dropping in here, and I would like to make our collection as representative as possible."

"I'll bring some down with me. Now just what had I better do? They expect something down in Winton, and I don't want to change my plans if I can help it."

Sir John stroked his chin. "Fulton, what do you think? Mr. Symons has the thing pretty well worked out, and I don't see that what he proposes will affect the larger matter. We retain the right to substitute Consolidated stock for his shares, eh?"

There was a little silence, during which the broker fondled his cigar. Presently he laughed. "Why, no, there's no objection. Of course he understands that whatever he receives, he receives for us according to the contract."

Young Jim whistled. "I didn't understand anything of the kind."

"I mean, of course, after you have been reimbursed to an amount which we might as well settle now—say one hundred thousand."

Sir John nodded. "Quite so. I had overlooked that. For a property that cost you fifteen, a hundred is not so bad, Mr. Symons."

"Oh, I see—I didn't get that at first. That's all right."

"I'd better give you a memo of that." Fulton scribbled and handed over a paper. "That's our authority—witness it, will you, Sir John?"

Young Jim read and put it away carefully. "It's getting on to noon, and I've some things to get. Won't one of you come up?"

"Sorry—we're full of work. There's a zinc mine in my table drawer that the market is howling for. You'll come in on your way back?"

"Sure." Young Jim colored and extended his hand. "I'm grateful, and I'll remember this and do all I can to help with a big success. Can I say anything about it up there?"

"No, no!" Sir John protested hastily. "We're not ready; but, when we are, it will come with a bang. The market in Johannesburg will be nothing to it. Don't say a word. Now come to lunch."

But Symons wanted to be alone and think. They parted, and he walked slowly back to his hotel. The things in the windows he passed had curiously lost their attraction for him. He could buy any of them. The contract crackled in his pocket, and he was full of a vast desire to get north and inspect that which had caused the surprises of the last twenty-four hours. He had long since ceased to remember that Peter Brent had discovered it, because now it had come to stand for the consummation of all his desires. He glanced into men's faces and wondered why they tramped the city asphalt when the wealth of the north lay waiting for them.

Just as he climbed into the train, he thought of the Empire Trust Company, to whom he had sent his weekly reports of the Winton & Easterly. "Would it"—he drew a sharp breath at the reflection—"would it have been a good thing to have shown them that contract before he signed it?" The suggestion gnawed in his brain, till, unfolding the document, he read it again and again. On the face of it, everything was in order. Clause three, to be sure, provided that in case he did not live up to his undertaking the Elk Lake Consolidated was thereby relieved from all responsibility—and could proceed to recover damages. There was nothing unusual in that. But—and here he laughed at his own doubts—the name of Sir John Andrews was sufficient guarantee. Already it had a familiar ring. He chuckled at the vision of Si Haskins being introduced to the president of the Consolidated.

That night, he crawled into his berth with a vision of Mary Dart clear before his eyes. He lay for hours staring at the moonlit country. Mary, he decided, could not resist what he would soon have to offer. Then he thought of old Tom, and fell asleep with a sneer on his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

To say that Elk Lake City stood on tiptoe to welcome James Symons would be an exaggeration, but it nevertheless regarded his advent with considerable interest. By this time, the inhabitants viewed the Brent claim, not so much as a possible silver mine, but as the place where the man who whipped Anthony Brewster hung out. This was made the more evident when the owner stepped off the train. Men marked his pale skin, slim body, and shrewd face and contrasted him with the giant he

was about to visit. Of Jephson they thought not at all except as one of a host of engineers—and the name of "engineer" was beginning to be a by-word in the camp as of one who damned good claims and spoiled prospective sales.

It was Clark who met him, for long ere this Clark had refused to leave Peter's service. They regarded each other with interest as they shouldered through the crowd that invariably met the evening train. Elk Lake also had a look at young Jim and balanced him up against hundreds of other claim owners who had disembarked at that platform for purposes of inspection. Clark slung a new suit case over his shoulder.

"Great showing up at camp. Vein six inches wide."

"Six inches!" Symons knitted his brows. "Is that all?"

Clark stopped and stared. "Say, how much do you want—a solid township?"

"No, but——"

"See that little feller acrost the street? He sold a half-inch vein last week for two hundred thousand. What's the matter with you?"

Symons glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, and began to feel distinctly uncomfortable. This was hardly the manner in which he expected to be addressed by an employee in shoepacks and a corduroy shirt. But a glance up the sidewalk revealed groups of just such individuals. They apparently owned Elk Lake City. Just ahead of him was another man whom he recognized as having been on the train. A fragment of conversation floated back:

"I'll split the difference and make it a hundred and fifty thousand. I can't go beyond that."

The answer was equally distinct: "Say, you want something for nothing, with the Consolidated buying next door for half a million. You get me? Take it or leave it. I don't care."

Symons smothered an exclamation. "Much going on here?" he queried of Clark.

The prospector spat vigorously. "Yes, sir. Daylight to dark—and then it don't stop."

"What's the Consolidated?"

"Don't know; lot of talk and some deals. They ain't sayin' much."

"Has that man a good property?"

"Depends on how bad you want it. It'd look blame good to some folks. He's got a showin', and that's about all you can say. Have to be mighty careful on some of these claims not to blow the mine into the lake."

Symons laughed, and at that moment bumped into a hulking fellow who had his left arm in a sling. The man cursed and passed on.

"Ain't dangerous any longer," commented Clark. "Last week he'd have landed you one fer that."

"Was he dangerous?"

"Some. But when you get trapped in a vise and feel it closin' in and your heart's in your throat, why, you ain't likely to be any more peril to no one."

Symons glanced back and noted the huge shoulders. "Who did it?"

"Ask Mr. Brent. I ain't got no orders to say anything. Now I guess I'd better hang round the post office and get the letters. I'll catch you later at the hotel, an' say, the recorder wants to see you. That's his office acrost the street, and if I was you I wouldn't sass back if any one speaks loud."

They started early next morning, and it is probable that young Jim would have abandoned himself to the beauty of the north had there not been in the bundle which Clark handed him a square envelope postmarked "Winton" and addressed in a woman's hand to Jephson.

Mile after mile slid by, while Symons leaned back against the middle

thwart and stared at the envelope till the writing on it burned in letters of fire. It was sent by the woman he desired to the man he employed. It contained that for which he would have given a finger to have written to himself. It was a part of Mary, an outpouring of her love across the wilderness to the man she held most dear. He could see her bending over it, could imagine her exquisite eyes, the glory of her face, the proud poise of her head. Why had fate destined him to be the messenger of her devotion?

The more he reflected, the deeper the worm worked into his brain, till of a sudden he wondered with a gasp what would happen if Jephson did not get that letter. The thought at first assailed him with condemnation, for, mean as he was, he had not stooped so low. But the peace of these solitudes seemed at variance with fear, and he gave way to a calmer but more deadly contemplation. Presently it became quite clear that nothing whatever could happen except the possibility of his own remorse—and this, being a lesser likelihood, was set aside.

But immediately behind came Nemesis. In the hours that passed since leaving Elk Lake City, Clark had come to a strange conclusion. From the start, he had conceived a queer dislike for Symons. It was not expressed in any word or gesture, but in a curious consciousness of discomfort. He compared the newcomer with Brent and Jephson and found him waiting. Now he surveyed the sleek back of the young man's head, and, with unwonted intuition, damned him where he sat. It wasn't that he made himself wearisome or objectionable. He wasn't the right sort, and simply didn't fit in. Clark nursed his distaste, kept his eye on his passenger, and forged steadily ahead.

Symons leaned gently forward, reached for the bundle, and went over the letters one by one. At the same moment, Clark rose and without changing the stroke peered over his shoulder. The ripple at the bow did not cease; and the sun, dead ahead, cast no revealing shadow. With Mary's envelope in his hand, the traveler hesitated, then slit it neatly along one edge. After another breathless moment, he drew out the folded sheet. Clark had seen enough, and sank back noiselessly. His jaw stuck out, and his eyes were flashing.

For five minutes, Symons sat motionless, then crumpled the envelope and dropped it over the side. The man in the stern stooped a little lower, and, still maintaining the stroke with one hand, noiselessly scooped up the dancing ball. There was no break in the vicious whip with which his blade left the water, no hesitation in the swing with which he put his back into his work. For a second, he paddled one-handed—that was all.

A little later, the letter followed, torn into tiny fragments that littered their wake for a hundred yards. The thing was done, and honor was debased. Young Jim, with savage satisfaction, had at least robbed his rival and penetrated into the inner sanctuary. And all the time Clark, perched on the stern of the canoe, cursed him for a thief and a traitor, and swore that the appointed time of reckoning would not be long in coming.

For the rest of the journey, speech seemed to have died between them. Clark answered questions in monosyllables and was put down as a surly brute devoid of manners. Symons got out stiffly when they reached the landing. He had been rereading the paragraph in the *Planet* and been fortified. But the night before, when he was deep in sleep, Clark had spread out a sodden envelope and dried it in front of their camp fire.

Brent and Jephson took the owner's arrival very coolly. Clark dumped his

suit case in a corner of the engineer's shack and made for the cook camp, and Symons found himself standing on the collar of the shaft, looking down into a darkness from which came the clink of drill steel. Beside him was the dump of splintered waste, and above rose the frame of a rough headgear. The bush was cleared back for three hundred yards all round, and dotted about in the clearing were two or three log houses. This was all.

He gazed around with evident disappointment. Jephson interpreted the look. "You think there's not much to show for your money?" he laughed.

"No, not exactly that. Of course I didn't know what to expect. Where's the mine?"

"At the bottom of the shaft and sticking out of the walls some of the way down. It's a pretty good prospect."

"Prospect?"

"Why, yes. It will take some time to find out just what you really have. Come and try our cook."

They ate rather silently. The cook hovered about with a dipper of tea and kept their cups brimming. The rest of the table was occupied by the gang, who ate noisily and voraciously. As each man finished, he pushed away his plate and departed without a word. Peter touched but little. Young Jim shot quick glances at his great frame and massive arms, for by now the wilderness had set upon him her own undefinable seal and he seemed equipped for any stress or storm. But just then the mind of Peter was full of thoughts of Winton. After supper, he would ask about his mother and perhaps worm out a word about Mary. He had seen so many real men since last seeing Symons that the latter appeared artificial and helpless among this brawny crew.

"Any letters?" said Jephson, taking out his pipe.

"Yes, a few." Symons produced the packet and handed it over. His hand shook a little in spite of himself.

The engineer sorted them rapidly. "Nothing important—all about grub and dynamite." He shot a question: "That's all?" There was a curious note in his voice.

"Yes, that's all."

Jephson said nothing more, but the flicker of a lighted match revealed a face that was strangely set. "If you'll come into the shack, I'll show you on paper just what's been done. Then we can go underground."

"In the dark?" queried Symons involuntarily.

There sounded a chuckle from the corner, where the cook stood over his pots, but Jephson's face lost nothing of its hardness. "It's always dark underground."

He spread out a plan. "There's the vein. You can see it's about twenty feet long on the surface. That's what we started with. That colored band is smaltite and native silver—three inches wide. It carries about five thousand ounces."

"Twenty-five hundred dollars?" ventured Symons, with a touch of awe.

"A little more, at the present price of silver. Now we carry this vein down in the shaft fairly persistently, and at the bottom it's wider and worth more. It does not show up in either drift to any extent, and the country rock is too disturbed for my liking. However, there's nothing as promising in the vicinity, and it looks as though Mr. Brent had found about the only thing at all worth while near here."

"But I thought that the mine——"

"It isn't a mine," interrupted the engineer coolly, "and it may never be a mine. That's all got to be proved."

"But veins not as good as this are selling for hundreds of thousands."

Peter frowned. "Then you didn't pay any too much for this."

"You took what I offered," came the stiff response.

The big man moved restlessly, and Jephson caught an angry flicker in the brown eyes.

"It's no use going back to that," he broke in uneasily. "What a property sells for has nothing to do with its value in Elk Lake. This whole show may not be worth thirty cents in six months."

"And yet you say the ore is worth twenty-five hundred dollars a ton?" snapped Symons.

"What there is of it—yes. But how much there is is a matter for the future. Don't put me down as a pessimist. I'm only anxious you should not be misled." He turned again to the plan. "We're down about seventy-five feet, and the drifts are at sixty-five. If the vein holds, we'll run the next at one hundred and thirty. There's about four tons of ore sorted now."

"Then why can't we send it out?"

"You can, but it would cost too much by canoe. Better wait for the ice."

"What would it net?" persisted Symons.

"About eight thousand. What's the hurry? Silver's going up."

"I'd like to see it."

The ore house was a pile of logs, with a heavy, tar-papered roof. A massive lock dangled from the door. Inside was a heap of small sacks. One had burst open, and on the floor was a sprinkling of dust, from which came the dull gleam of metallics.

"Lift one," said the engineer.

Young Jim stopped and tugged. "What's the matter? I can't budge it."

"Nothing. That stuff weighs about four hundred pounds a cubic foot."

"Is that all we've got?"

Jephson balanced a fragment on his open palm. "This is three-fourths silver and the rest is smaltite, an arsenide of cobalt. When that weathers, it shows what we call cobalt bloom. You may think it's a small pile, but I can tell you it would take just one thousand tons of South African banket to equal it in value."

"Ah!" Symons' thoughts flew back to Sir John Andrews. That was just what he said. Here was the thing actually demonstrated. He felt a sudden glow of pride in his ownership. It warmed him, for so far it was difficult to keep his enthusiasm alive.

"We'll go underground now if you want to. Better put on these overalls."

Symons stood on the collar of the shaft and watched the bucket go down. It dropped like a plummet, and somewhere in the abyss struck a point of rock, from which it rebounded with a clang that boomed up and struck him with a sudden distaste for this exploration.

Peter and Jephson stepped on to the rim when it reappeared. "I'll be up for you in a minute," said the latter, gripping the cable with his left hand. For an instant, Symons could see the miner's candlesticks hanging from their oilskins, then they, too, disappeared. Voices came up indistinctly, and a laugh sounded unearthly. He could hear the drip, drip of water. A bell sounded beside him, and the sheave overhead began to revolve. It stopped as Jephson's head bobbed into daylight.

"You'd better get right down into the bucket. Give me that candle. Now, don't look up or you'll get wet." His fingers closed over the bell rope that was gliding through his hand. "That's the vein; you can see it on both sides of the shaft here." The candlelight threw grotesque shadows, but Symons could distinguish a dirty gray smear on either slimy wall. "Below that it pinches out. You can't find anything but a crack." They dropped another ten feet. "It's come in again there, but very irregular; looks as though a fault had pushed it over. These veins are

just like lenses out of a telescope, set edgeways on top of each other. That's the mouth of the sixty-five-foot level. We'll go in there on the way up. And here's the bottom."

The bucket bumped on solid rock, swayed, and was steadied by Peter Brent. From the breast of the level came the sound of a pick.

"I sent a man in to scale down the roof and walls. If anything's loose, it's apt to be dangerous. Fill that pail, Peter, will you?"

The big man scraped the pail full of water and threw it across a hummock that bulged out of the floor. Across this lay a ribbon of silver gray six inches wide. The candle flame lit it into life, and it gleamed brilliantly as little streams coursed over its rough surface. Threads and wires of silver projected where a portion had been wrenched away. It was extraordinarily suggestive. It seemed like a pearl that had been revealed at the bottom of the sea. Symons stared, and his imagination followed and traced it down, down into the bowels of the earth, till it reached that amazing treasure house from which it must have come.

"Looks as if it had boiled up." Jephson's voice sounded deep and hollow. "Well, it didn't. The metals were deposited by hot solutions that circulated through these rocks at one time. The rocks were cracked and broken in cooling after they had been erupted, and the solutions filtered through the cracks and deposited the silver and cobalt. It all depends how big and how regular the crack is. Here —take a hammer and break off a piece for yourself."

A moment later, they climbed a ladder and went into the south drift. At the breast, there showed a spearhead of flame where Clark's candle hung from a seam. The floor was piled with waste from the last round, over which they clambered. There was a clear place up against the heading. Clark looked at them, spat on his hands, and went on with his work. Jephson stood next him; behind was Symons, and last of all Peter.

The engineer peered at the roof. "You can see there's nothing there. It's the same on the other side, and it begins to look as though we were in a small vertical shoot, outside of which there is practically nothing. So we may have to go a good way down to develop only a small patch of ground." Here he handed his candlestick back to Peter. "That will, of course, make it more expensive, but it's the only way to tell whether you've got a mine or not. You'd better put on this oilskin."

Symons nodded, and struggled into the waterproof. As he did so, a long envelope worked out of his pocket. Jephson stooped, wiped the mud from it, and involuntarily looked at the printed address in the corner. A frown wrinkled his brow, and he held it out.

"I beg your pardon, and it's none of my business, but don't get mixed up with that lot."

The envelope was snatched back. "Since it's none of your business, why do you mention it?"

The engineer's eyes blazed, but with one supreme effort he went on, as though nothing had occurred: "What's in sight underground, with what we've already hoisted, will yield about twelve thousand. That will pay for a compressor, drills, and necessary equipment, and, if we're going on, we ought to have it, if you're willing. I can't promise much without it."

"I suppose so," said Symons sulkily. "What else?"

The engineer's voice changed into something cold and deadly: "One other thing is: Why did you open my letter?"

The question landed like a blow.

There fell an utter silence in which one could hear water dripping in the shaft. Young Jim breathed sharply, turned pale, and glanced back. But Peter's great bulk lowered behind him in the narrow tunnel. Clark had stopped hammering, and leaned, motionless, on his pick. In the trembling candle flame, the engineer stared with adamantine eyes. "Why did you open my letter?"

A chill struck into the soul of Symons. Here, prisoned in the living rock, he faced the man he had hated and robbed—the man who stood between him and his great desire. But the coward's heart could find no answer for this grim tribunal.

"I don't know. I—I was jealous."

"Don't move!" answered the voice. "I've something to say to you."

"I'll do anything you like," yelped Symons, stricken with terror. "I'll give you an interest. I'll——" He turned, and tried to dodge like a rabbit between Peter's legs.

But the big man took him with one hand and set him lightly back. "Don't!" he growled.

"When you asked me to come up here on short notice, I didn't know why you were in such a hurry," went on the engineer, without a trace of passion in his icy tones, "but I soon found out, and I found out more than that; how you've been trying to make my girl marry you ever since."

"Let me out! I'll give her up," pleaded Symons. "I know I was wrong."

"I'll let you out when I've done with you, and then you can have me arrested, if you dare. I knew you for a liar and a trickster, but said nothing because I knew you would never get what you wanted. Now my girl writes me a letter and you see it and open and read it." The voice gradually rose till, with the last words, it trembled with passion. "You read it, you dirty thief! You read what my girl wrote to me and what no girl would ever write to a swine like yourself. I'm going to punish you now, and when I get through with you you can read what you're able to."

Symons dropped to his knees and grasped at the other man's legs. "Don't —don't! For her sake!"

"It is for her sake I'm doing it——"

At that instant came a dull cracking from the roof of the drift, and simultaneously a shout from Clark: "Get back! Get back!"

The engineer shot a swift glance upward, and jumped. Symons stood petrified. The cracking intensified, and a huge fragment of rock dropped. The corner of it hit Jephson's shoulder while he was still in the air, and landed with a crash. There followed a blast of cold wind. The candles went out, and from the blackness came the groan of a man in mortal agony.

Clark's fingers were too shaky, but finally Peter got a match and held it to the wick. It spluttered, then flamed up. Half of Jephson's body lay beneath the rock. His shoulders and arms protruded, pinned down against the pile of waste that Clark had shoveled back. His lips were moving, his face covered with blood and slime.

Symons crumpled up, and slid down in a faint. Peter did not look at him, but stooped over the massive stone. Clark stooped beside him, and together they heaved. The rock lifted slightly, then settled again, and Jephson groaned horribly.

"Make room," panted Peter. "I'll lift it."

Clark stared. "No man born can lift that. I'll chase up and get the gang."

But Peter, placing his feet firmly, had braced himself. Grasping the sharp edge of the stone, he felt its weight, then tried to straighten his back and loins. The rock did not move. Slowly he summoned his stupendous

strength. The pressure came on, and his fingers flattened, while from beneath his nails the blood started in tiny red drops. His sinews tightened, till his whole great body, acting like a lever with the thrust of his thighs, was tense and rigid. His sinews stretched, and his elbows seemed about to start from their sockets, but the rock was yielding. Finally, with one magnificent heave, it came clear, was upended, and crashed backward toward the breast of the drift.

The giant breathed hard; then, dripping with sweat, bent over the injured man. Clark was too amazed to stir, and stood blinking. Crumpled into the heap of waste, lay the distorted form of the engineer. That he still lived could only be told by the fluttering breath that came from beneath the parted lips. Presently his lids opened, and he stared dully.

Peter knelt and put his ear close to the pallid face. "Don't touch me," came a whisper so faint that it sounded like a sigh. "Get some paper, quick; I—I—can't last very—very long."

The big man took out the pencil and notebook he always carried. "What is it, old man? You'll be all right when we get you out."

A spasm of pain twisted the drawn features. "No—I'm done—for. It's my—back. Can—you—write—something?"

The bucket clanged in the shaft as Clark ascended for whisky and help. "Don't mind now. We'll get you up in a minute. I'll rig something comfortable."

"Peter—I—know." Gentle was that speech, but it was burdened with the consciousness that the end was near. There were no words with which to oppose it.

"Take this down: Darling—Mary—good-by—and remember—that—I——" he faltered, then went indomitably on: "I—loved you—better—better—than—all—the—world. The man—who—gives—you this—is—worthy of all—your——"

Peter's great hand trembled. "No—no," he whispered, "don't say that."

But there was fixed on him the ineffable gaze of a dying man. So potent was it, so charged with spiritual authority and transcendent command, that his head bowed in obedience.

"Of—all—your—heart—beloved. I think I can make a mark. Don't move—my—arm. What—makes—me feel—so cold?"

The titan shivered himself, very gently placed the pencil between the stiffening fingers, and held the page beneath, till, with an effort that caused him excruciating pain, Jephson made an almost imperceptible mark. Then he signaled Peter to bend still closer.

"Symons—is going—to do—some—some crooked—work with—the—Consolidated. They're—a—bad—lot. See—Davies—consulting—engineer—and—get posted—and stop—it. I'm—going to play—out—now—and—so is this—vein. Put your arm—under my—head. Why—is—the—light—so—bright?"

The last candle had flickered out, and the drift was black. The bucket came bumping down, and steps sounded at the mouth of the level, but Peter snapped an order, and all sound ceased. Jephson's soul was going out to meet its Maker. He whispered once, and Peter just caught the word "Mary"; then, almost indistinguishable, the word "beauty." For an instant, the maimed body stiffened. "Put—your—face—to—mine," he gasped. For a second thus, till of a sudden the engineer sighed sharply, and his frame relaxed. Came a flutter of his pulse, and he lay still.

For an eternity the giant sat without stirring a muscle, till from beside him came a terrified whisper:

"Where am I?"

Feeling in the dark, Peter laid a

hand on Symons' mouth. "Jephson is dead," he muttered. "Go up to the surface." Then, raising his voice: "Come on, Clark; it's no good now."

They laid the battered figure on a rough stretcher, and started for the shaft. A strange presentiment came over Peter that now and here the turning point had been reached. He conceived a vast desire to think the matter out near his dead friend ere they parted forever. So he had them put him down and go themselves to the surface till he called them again. They went with questioning glances, and, looking back at the two candles that sputtered near the dead man, made out the gigantic form beside him.

An hour later, the signal came up. Very reverently that which had so lately been Jephson was laid in slings and brought gently into starlight. With it came Peter, his eyes dead and lusterless. He crooked a finger at Clark, gave his orders, then stalked beside the body to their shack. Here he motioned them to put the engineer's body in his own bunk.

An hour passed. Symons lifted the latch and peered in appealingly. In spite of himself, his gaze wandered to the bunk in the corner. He was shivering, but not with fear.

Peter glanced at him contemptuously. "Come in—you can't steal anything from him now."

That night he fought it out. When daylight came, he stalked out with drawn and haggard face. But his eyes were full of a quiet resolution.

They buried Jephson that morning, and laid over him the great stone that had crushed out his life. Peter made out a report to the Elk Lake coroner, and work went on.

Through all this, Symons was silent, but when drill steel began to come up to the smithy, and the clink of hammers rang steadily from below, he mustered up courage and spoke. Peter heard him listlessly.

"I'm starting back this afternoon," he said, "and I hope you will go on with the work. What has happened is, of course, very sad, and I am more than sorry that a fit of jealousy made me do what I did. If Jephson had any one dependent on him, I'll get in touch with them at once. You had better write to—Miss Dart and tell her. Put it any way you like, and I'll stand for it. Get the machinery that's wanted and push ahead. I may deal with the property any time now. And I'll take up the option when I get back, and deposit the money to your credit."

He paused and glanced at the big man inquiringly. "Is that all right?"

Peter pondered. His plan, as laid out in the small hours of the night, was very simple. He must leave Clark in charge, go to the city and see that consulting engineer, and then hasten to Winton to warn the townfolk against whatever scheme Symons might have in his crafty mind. For all of this, the owner's absence was essential. It seemed now that the gods were favorable.

"I wrote to Miss Dart last night," he said slowly. "Here's the letter." He handed it with an inscrutable glance from his brown eyes. "I reckon I ain't told you that she and Jephson and I went shares in the property. So you can put the money to her credit, and it will be all right. I don't know that I want it now. Might as well do that just as soon as you get there."

"All right. Now I want some samples to take down with me. Just as a matter of interest."

He ransacked the ore shed, and picked out chunk after chunk of practically pure silver. "That ought to do. Now I'll get my suit case, and I'm ready. Who are you going to send out with me—Clark?"

"Clark's got a sore arm, so you'd

better take a helper." He turned to a man who had just emerged from the shaft. "Get your pack sack, Tom. You're going into Elk Lake."

Symons drew a long breath. His eyes roved around the clearing, dwelling on shacks, ore shed, smithy, headgear, and all the evidences of labor. He wanted to visualize this when he came up again, and note the progress. Presently, he glanced up at Peter. "Well—good-by, Mr. Brent. You know how I feel about it?"

"I reckon I do," said the giant coldly, and ignored the outstretched hand. "You can get the night train to-morrow, if you hustle." Then he turned on his heel.

That evening he walked to the back of the clearing where was the newly made grave. Some of the night shift had been busy, and a ten-inch corner post was standing yellow at the head. On it was cut in straggling letters: "*Bob Jephson. His claim. He was white.*"

Two days later, with plans fully formulated, and with Clark waving farewell at the landing, Peter started by moonlight for Elk City and Toronto. The water was like burnished glass. From the bow of his canoe spread a great silver arrow-headed ripple that moved gently to either shore, and his dripping paddle seemed to dip into liquid crystal. From far ahead came the unearthly laughter of a loon. Beside him, the shadowy land welled into a purple sky that mirrored itself superbly in the motionless lake, and ever as he paddled there appeared to float before him the specter of a girl who searched this breathless wilderness for a vanished lover.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mary Dart looked up in surprise when Symons opened the gate. She knew that he had gone north, and welcomed his absence as a release from a situation that began to haunt her. But, looking again, it did not seem that this was the jaunty young man of a week before. His face was pale, and his eyes sought, then avoided, her own. He suggested something ominous. A sudden terror quickened her pulse.

"What is it?" Her throat was dry and breathless.

He stood staring at her without words, devouring with a helpless hunger every exquisite feature. Fear had but made her more beautiful.

"I have bad news," he said, with difficulty.

"Not—not Bob?" she appealed.

He nodded gravely. "He had a very serious accident while I was there. There was a fall of rock in the mine."

She rose, trembling, and clutched his arm. "I must go to the mine at once. Where is he—at Elk Lake?"

"No," said Symons unevenly; "we couldn't move him."

"Then he's at the mine—without anything—— Oh, you must take me there. Take me at once."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be any use"—then he added—"now."

"What do you mean?" Mary's hands were plucking at her neck. Her lovely face had turned ashen.

"Jephson died two days ago," said Symons in a whisper. "He didn't—he didn't suffer at all."

She swayed, and he put out a hand to catch her. "Dead!" she breathed. "Dead! Bob—my Bob!"

"Everything possible was done, but it happened too quickly to avoid it. I would have telegraphed as soon as I reached Elk Lake—but——"

"Is that all you come and tell me? That he is dead. No—no, why do you say this?"

Symons' shaking hand felt in his pocket. "Brent wrote you. Here is the letter."

With uncertain touch, she tried to open it. He slit the envelope with a

ghastly vision of the last time he touched her correspondence. "I'll wait till you read it," he said nervously.

It seemed hours ere she looked up. "Mr. Brent says that—that you were all underground and that a fall of rock crushed Bob—and that he died—there—in the dark. And that he sends back all my letters but the last one. Didn't—didn't Bob get that—before he——" Her voice trailed out.

There was an instant's pause, in which Symons suddenly determined to tell all and throw himself on the mercy of that tortured breast. But in the same instant he heard a whisper that asked him why he should do anything so unnecessary. Peter had not told because he shrank from inflicting added pain on so much suffering. No one had told—why should any one tell? The thing was past and done with.

"It was too late. I'm very, very sorry."

"Where is he"—again the voice faltered—"where is he buried?"

"Under a tree near the mine. Brent read the service. They were all there. The men"—he hesitated and went on—"the men admired him very much."

"I know," she said brokenly. "When is Mr. Brent coming down? They—they were like brothers."

"Yes," he said gravely. "I heard. Brent also told me you three were partners."

At that, the merciful tears began to stream down her cheeks. She could not speak.

"Mr. Brent also asked me to make payments to you. I'm doing that tomorrow."

She stared at him dully. "Why?"

"Because he doesn't want anything out of the property. I think he'd rather you were quite independent. There's fifteen thousand in cash and about a million in shares."

"I don't want it. I wouldn't touch it. Can't you understand?"

"But I promised Brent to deposit the cash and I must do that." Then, with an electric tingle in his brain: "You can do what you like about the shares."

Her eyes like misty stars rested on him for a moment, and behind them moved her spirit writhing in pain. "Please," she pleaded, "please; I want to be alone now. Thank you—for—for——"

At the gate, he glanced back. Mary had sunk on the grass, and her head was buried in her arms. The sound of sobs reached him faintly.

Walking slowly toward his office, emotion ran riot. The sympathetic part of him, always undeveloped, began to smooth itself out, now that the most difficult job was over. He confessed to himself that never had the desire to take Mary in his arms been so strong as when she had stood before him torn with grief. But, he reflected, and the thought stimulated him, grief is not eternal, especially when it is product of the affection of two or three months. That Jephson had been so grimly removed from his path seemed, when he considered it quietly, only one phase in the train of unexpected circumstances that all made for his own success. The fly in the ointment was that he had been treacherous, not so much toward a rival, but toward a man whom the gods had appointed to die. And if, furthermore, the gods should endow him with a million in shares, who was he to rebel?

It was in this frame of mind that he met old Tom at his office door. Motioning him in, Symons started to open two canvas sacks that lay beneath the table. Then, after the glittering wares of the north lay revealed, he told the story of Jephson's death—just as he had told it to Mary.

The old man's face changed as he listened. Ever since their iniquitous contract had been agreed to, he had had strange searchings of heart that roused

him to unwanted self-examination. But when he put his better self against the greater fortune it was always the latter that won out. Living so long divorced from women's influence had resulted in a case-hardening, against which softer emotions beat in vain. And yet he loved his daughter utterly and completely. What her father did not and could never achieve was that sense of comparative values which sorts out the dross of life and extracts from it the rare jewels of existence. Now, as he listened, there came to him the thought that the perspective which terminated in fortune was clearer than ever before. Fate had removed an obstacle of which, in spite of himself, he had been afraid; and it would not be necessary for him to violate the bonds that held his daughter to him.

"It all shows that perhaps it is just as well," went on Symons. "It's horribly sudden and very sad, but it would have been worse, supposing they had been married. I can't think that a man who is exposed to that sort of thing ought to be married, anyway."

Something in his voice aroused the latent cynicism of old Tom. "Mebbe, mebbe. Seems somehow the girls are most given to fallin' in love with fellers as is exposed to danger. However, I reckon you're right. You'll be satisfied to lay low now an' let things heal up?"

Symons nodded. "Now let's talk business. Here's some stuff I brought down. There's about a hundred pounds and it's worth four hundred dollars. This flat piece is right out of the bottom of the shaft. There's ten thousand dollars' worth sacked in the ore shed, and they haven't done any work to speak of. Claims not half as good are selling for hundreds of thousands, but I've got a better scheme."

He reached for his check book. "Before we get any farther, here's that payment for Miss Mary. I told you it's on Brent's instructions. I want to be owner when I talk like one."

Old Tom scrutinized, folded, and put the slip in his pocketbook. "It'll be deposited to-morrow. By Gregory, but Mary is pilin' it up."

"Have you got an hour or so—now? I want to put the whole proposition to you."

"Reckon I kin listen."

It was, indeed, not till the end of an hour that young Jim had put the thing as he wanted it. The tale, as it was unfolded, produced a marked impression on the listener. That part of it which dealt with Sir John Andrews and the Consolidated was received with breathless attention. The fact that five other mines were to buttress Symons' property and form one gigantic dividend payer seemed fraught with potentialities. The old man chuckled and nodded, and when the narrative had reached that portion which had to do with the sale of stock in Winton, he was balanced precariously on the edge of his chair.

"Now, as to the meeting," concluded Symons rather huskily. "I saw Sir John in Toronto on the way back for long enough to make final arrangements. This is Thursday. I thought it would be best to put a notice in the post office and Haskins' store and some others and in the Dunnfield and Easterly papers, that the lists will be open for subscription in the town hall on Saturday night. Sir John has promised to come down and speak if we hold an open meeting first—which would be just as well."

"I suppose you know that Winton is all lit up, anyway. Si Haskins has cleaned out all them sour canned lobsters to folks that's tryin' to screw some news out on him. Emery Taylor has been hauntin' my place, and the new Methydist minister has preached a sermon on the benefits of the riches of the airth. I don't know but what that stock

will go quicker'n fleas in sheep dip. What you goin' to sell it fer?"

"I've only been back for two hours, and I don't know anything. I arranged with the Consolidated this morning to capitalize for two million—and——"

"Hickory! That's a pile. Suppose the mine's wuth it?"

"Maybe more—just let me finish. They will put into their company five other properties at the same figure—that makes ten million. Then our shares are taken up by them in exchange for their own. Of course, the exchange is optional as I read the agreement; and we——"

"Don't know as——"

"I'll answer any questions afterward, but let me get this off my chest. The shares will be sold for twenty-five cents, except those taken up by the directors, who will get them at ten. In other words, you make a profit of a hundred and fifty per cent the very day you buy."

Admiration undisguised spread over the wrinkled face. "I reckon that's what they call high finance. Never seen it from the inside before."

"That's not all. The Consolidated shares are to go on the London market before Christmas—and you know what that means."

The old man, knowing not at all, nodded sagely. "I've been kinder puttin' things together sence you left and got my check ready. Better take it now."

But Symons shook his head. "No, no. Wait till we appoint our treasurer, and I'd suggest Stebbins, the teller in the bank. And besides it'll make a much better impression to have you hand it in with the rest on Saturday. I've brought down some samples of ore, and we'll exhibit those where they'll do most good. Sir John will reach here in the afternoon, and you and he and Emery and I can go over the whole matter and get it properly arranged. He's a very good speaker. We can have Stebbins there to look after the subscription list. And I don't know that it wouldn't be a good idea to have the town band give us some music in between."

"Is there anything you ain't thought of?" said old Tom, with a touch of deference.

Symons laughed, laid his hand on a lump of ore, and looked at it admiringly. "We'll see at the meeting. Good night."

The old man, lost in dreams, was passing the Brents' cottage when he heard her voice through the dusk. "Come in, please, Mr. Dart; I want to see you."

He lifted the latch, and held out his hand. "Well, Marg'ret?"

"Can you tell me what has happened to Mr. Jephson? Mary is in my room crying her eyes out, and I can't make her speak."

He noted in the gloom that her face was pale and thin.

"Why—why—Jephson was in an accident up at the mine. Young Jim just told me. He got hurt bad, and didn't live hardly any time. I ain't seen Mary yit. I'm mighty sorry, 'though I ain't seen much of him myself."

"It's terrible. I've been trying to understand what Mary says. Did you forbid her to marry him?"

The old man coughed. "Well, no. But I didn't exactly give any encouragement. He didn't have anything, anyway."

"Was there any other reason?" she ventured timidly.

"I ain't used to be questioned—Marg'ret," he said stiffly. "This feller might 'a' been killed the month after they were married. That's no sort of a husband."

The widow sighed. "Well—will you let her stay here to-night? At such a time as this, I think I can help."

"I reckon you could always have helped, Marg'ret," he answered gently. "My mistake was I didn't ask you to."

She put an unsteady hand on his arm. "Uncle Tom—do you remember I used to call you Uncle Tom?—are you going into this mining business with Mr. Symons? I only ask, because my boy Peter has written me a good deal about it—and Mary heard—from Mr. Jephson."

"I reckon I am—to some extent. Looks like a pretty good thing—eh? I seen some of the stuff to-day, crippled with silver."

"How much is there?" queried the widow gently.

"'Bout one hundred weight."

"No. I mean at the mine."

"Blamed if I know. I ain't no second-sight."

"And if you don't know, how can you tell whether the mine is any good? I remember in one of Peter's letters that he said that was the first thing to find out."

Old Tom cleared his throat. "Well, Marg'ret, I may be a dum fool, an' I may not. The hull affair is in good hands, and I guess I'll take up a little stock on your account. It won't cost you a cent."

"Don't. I don't want it. Peter's interest is enough."

"Mebbe Peter ain't got no interest. I kind of suspicion he's given it all to Mary."

"Perhaps. It would be just like him. Uncle Tom, don't be angry with me, but almost every will I read in the papers speaks about mining stocks—no value—that's the way it's put, and I don't—oh, I know it sounds crazy, but I can't help saying it—I don't think things are coming out right. I seem to read it in Peter's letters. And the very fact that Mr. Jephson was killed seems part of the same thing. There's Mary inside with a broken heart. That's part of it, too."

The old man moved uncomfortably. "Things will happen, an' we can't prevent 'em, but you can't tell me that there ain't a fortune lyin' round where you can jest pick up money an' put it in a sack. Cobalt shipped fifteen million last year, and they're only scratchin' round on the surface like a hen. You jest wait till they git a little farther down."

She sighed heavily. "I don't suppose you could understand, but sometimes women feel things coming sooner than men. We may not have as much common sense, but we make up for it in other ways. I feel this coming and making unhappiness, and there's no one to stop it. You ain't angry with me, Uncle Tom?"

"Why, no. Why should I be? I guess men has their curious feelin's as well as women, but I feel a darn sight more cheerful about this business than you do." He hesitated, then added in a hoarse whisper: "English capital, an' they're the boys to follow."

"And Mary. May she stay?"

"Sure. Had I better see her?"

Margaret Brent shook her head. "I think not—she feels that you didn't like him, and now——"

She paused, and turned to the door. Mary's slight figure emerged from the house and came slowly toward them. She seemed a ghost in the shadows.

"Daughter," said old Tom unsteadily, "I'm main sorry. I——"

The girl flung herself into his arms. He was, after all, the one to whom she must ultimately turn. Margaret's eyes were dim as she watched.

After a moment, the old man spoke: "I dunno but what Mary might as well come home with me. Thank you kindly just the same, Marg'ret. Eh, Mary?" His wrinkled hand was stroking the brown hair.

The girl nodded convulsively, and they moved slowly away. Something long dead had awakened within the

father, and he thrilled to the touch of this quivering body—this legacy of distant years. The husk of him fell away, and he became again in that hour the father at whose knee a child had played. His voice floated back to Margaret Brent, quavering, cracked, and full of pity: "There, there, Mary; don't cry, girlie; don't cry."

CHAPTER XIV.

The first outward and visible sign of the Symons flotation was when Si Haskins cleared the canned tomatoes and licorice out of his front window and placed therein a large piece of silver ore. This he surrounded with a brilliant parapet of pumpkins, thus achieving a sort of union between the riches of the surface and the interior of the earth. On the ore he balanced a card reading: "From the silver mine of James Symons, Esquire." While to the farm of Emery Taylor were accredited the pumpkins.

This was but one of several exhibits. The bar of the hotel, the post office, and the drug store were also favored.

There was needed, however, no physical, concrete evidence that something was about to happen. The news of the proposed meeting was carried more rapidly than was the story of the defalcation of the treasurer of the next county three years before, with the county's money. It traveled, too, at a period when the crops were well in, and the farmers had a breathing time in which to contemplate their profits.

The Winton folk were worked up to the highest possible pitch of anticipation and relish when Sir John Andrews stepped off the afternoon Toronto train, and extended his hands to James Symons, junior, and old Tom Dart.

Whatever the forces which had been at work in the village and its vicinity, they had, without doubt, amazing results. The crowd which greeted Sir John Andrews that night in the town hall established a new record. Never had the hall been so packed; never had there been so much enthusiasm.

The building rocked with applause when old Tom rose "to introduce Sir John Andrews, of London, England, an' president of the Elk Lake Consolidated."

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Sir John easily, "citizens of the greatest empire the world has ever seen. It is a peculiar pleasure to meet you here this evening. If there is an audience I like to address, it is one in which the ladies, those admirable beings who not only share our labors, but also soothe the tortured brows of pain, are fully represented. And I would say that never have I stood before a gathering which so completely expressed that community of interest which is the touchstone of success.

"And now, gentlemen, to proceed to business without preamble, let me tell you our plans. I will put them very briefly. Mr. Symons has one of the richest mines in the north. I say this advisedly, because its future is without question. I tried—I speak quite frankly—to acquire it from him for the Elk Lake Consolidated, a ten-million-dollar company I recently formed on behalf of a few English clients. But Mr. Symons, with that sterling faithfulness which is man's greatest asset, said 'No. I think the Winton folks expect me to give them a chance, and, though I've made no promises, I'm going to do it.'" (Terrific applause and much stamping and many shouts of "What's the matter with young Jim?" and thundering replies of "He's all right!").

"He's here to do that," went on the speaker, with rising inflection, "and I say to him, and to all of you, that the Consolidated will meet you halfway and make its shares exchangeable for yours, and open the English market to the good people of Winton. A hundred

per cent is only a reasonable return from a good mine, and you will get it. Gentlemen, I thank you."

He turned jerkily and sat down, amid a storm of approval, in the midst of which old Tom bent over and shook hands with great formality. Then Symons, whose knees were trembling, forced himself to his feet, and stood uncomfortably, till the cheers that greeted him had subsided.

"I can't add very much," he said slowly. "Properties not as good are selling for hundreds of thousands. We propose to capitalize for two million and let the shares out at twenty-five cents. There will be a dividend every three months. Mr. Stebbins has the subscription forms, and will distribute them." He looked about, then sat down abruptly.

There was a little hush in which Sir John's voice could be heard: "Admirably terse."

Irregular applause ensued, and then a man got up at the back of the hall. "Do we have to pay right up? Can you take it in installments?"

Young Jim hesitated, and stooped over Sir John, who nodded vigorously and said something under his breath.

"Why, yes, as long as the balance is secured by notes."

The faint whistle of the evening train came in through the windows and mingled with the clapping. Then Stebbins walked down one aisle and up the other, pushing application forms into hundreds of outstretched hands. This took a little time, and was followed by numerous whispered consultations and a general demand for fountain pens. Presently, Stebbins, who had regained the platform and sat twisting his fingers, started, and accepted a long envelope from old Tom.

"Go ahead," said Symons jerkily; "read it out!"

The rustle of paper ceased all over the hall, and the teller stood up.

"I report a subscription of four thousand dollars from Thomas Dart."

There was a hurricane of stamping. Emery Taylor pushed his way to the front and caught the teller's eye. "Here's mine."

"Mr. Emery Taylor—four thousand five hundred." Again tumult swelled.

"Please collect them, Mr. Stebbins," shouted Sir John.

That took a little more time. The list began again with Si Haskins for two thousand and the Methodist minister for five hundred. The sheaf of papers grew rapidly. Outside applications were read out by Symons, who was by this time pale with excitement. "We'd better add them up," he concluded.

There came a laugh from the crowd. "You needn't add them. The total is——"

"Three cheers for Symons!" shouted another. "Let's do that before we get any farther."

The meeting rose like one man and took its breath. But just at that moment there was a commotion at the door. "Stop pushing!" said some one angrily.

The overflow divided, and through it forged a giant figure that parted the group as a swimmer parts the waves. His shoulders towered above them, his face tanned to bronze was unshaven. There fell a hush as he moved up the aisle.

"Peter Brent!" said a woman sharply. "He's from the mine."

There was that in Peter's face which stilled them. His eyes were cold and grim, his jaw was set, and the whole great frame of him bulked dominant and portentous. Symons saw him, and experienced a sudden, ghastly sickness that left him weak and shaky. Sir John saw him, and his stare rounded into surprise. Old Tom saw him, and bit his narrow lip in sudden apprehen-

sion. In another moment, the giant had mounted the platform.

"What are you doing here? I didn't send for you," hissed young Jim in a sibilant whisper.

But Peter, not looking at him, lifted a hand. "Stand there!" he commanded Stebbins, pointing to the rear door of the stage.

Stebbins blinked and obeyed. Sir John had turned purple, and was on his feet.

"This is very irregular, sir," he quavered. "What do you mean by it?"

"Sit down and find out!" snapped Peter. He strode to the table and laid a massive hand on the pile of papers. Symons was trying to fold and put them in his pocket. "Drop that!"

The hall began to swing before young Jim's eyes, and he leaned helplessly back. A dreadful stillness had fallen on the crowd. Old Tom's head rested on his hand; one could not see his face. Peter loomed like a weather-beaten Jove before a coming thunderstorm.

"You've all been persuaded to buy shares in a mine," he said grimly. "There isn't any mine. There never"—a growl ran through the benches, but he stopped it with a gesture—"there never was anything but a prospect with some silver. That's all disappeared, and there's nothing in the levels or the bottom of the shaft. I know. I found it, and I've been there from the start. You'll never get a dividend; you'll——"

Si Haskins sprang up. "Kill that——"

The rest was drowned in a rush of feet. Symons jumped for the door.

"Sit down!" roared Peter, his great voice booming above the tumult. "If you want to hear the rest, sit down!"

The clamor died, but the audience remained erect. It was a vista of angry faces. "Symons knew this all the time. He was warned by a man he betrayed, a man who was killed underground before he could punish the betrayer." Again the growls broke out; deeper, more menacing than before.

"I'm not done yet. You've heard this man who calls himself 'Sir John Andrews.' He isn't any Sir John. He's a liar and a thief who was kicked out of Colorado and the Yukon. He got a job in a stable in Montreal, then he thought people were easy and he'd soak them. He was tarred and feathered last year. Look at him and——" Peter paused, his voice trembling with indignation. "The Consolidated is a big steal. There isn't a cent in it. That's all. I'm through with what I came for. They can answer if they want to."

A howl of fury ran along the packed benches. The would-be Sir John recoiled and shook like a jellyfish. His face was mottled. Symons shot a lightning glance at the swaying mob and darted for the door, but Stebbins held his ground manfully.

A farmer vaulted onto the platform and made for the financier. "Tar and feather him again!" yelled the crowd, and he disappeared in a whirl of humanity. Emery Taylor dived for young Jim and made for his collar, but Peter intervened with his bulk. "He'll get punishment enough. Let him out!"

Stebbins stepped aside, and the son of old Jim darted into the darkness at the head of the back stairs. There came back the scurry of flying feet. By this time, Sir John had been half carried, half dragged, to the main door, which was only partly open. There followed a crash, and a cluster of men flowed down onto and over the stairs and formed a circle on the village green. One ran for the hardware store, and the Methodist minister dumped a mattress out of his bedroom window.

The hall emptied itself of all but old Tom and Peter. The former looked at the giant ruefully, then seized the

bundle of applications, thrust them into the long box stove, and struck a match.

"This will fix that," he said grimly. "How in tarnation did you git here?"

Peter laughed and told him. It was a queer story, with the big lamps flaring in the empty hall. The old man's lips were twitching when it ended. "That's how it happened," concluded Peter simply. "I ain't done nothing particular."

A roar of laughter sounded outside. A fire had been started, and its yellow light flickered on the panes. Peter flung up the window and looked out. Tom Dart peered beside him.

In the middle of the green, a round, naked figure was dancing grotesquely. Patches of glistening black adorned his shining skin. These widened rapidly with every slap of a broad brush wielded by a husky young farmer from the next township. A cloud of feathers filled the air, then another, till one might have sworn a snowstorm had struck that particular expanse of turf. The shouts and laughter increased, and ever above them sounded the piercing howls of the helpless promoter.

"That's enough," called a voice.

The circle parted, and, darting from its center, a strange apparition sped up the street. Sir John Andrews resembled a half-fledged robin whose fluffy feathers only partially covered his pink skin. The short legs trembled as he ran, bobbing like an automaton, through the shadows. Behind him gasped the circle, reeling with mirth.

"What's your stock worth now?" shouted Si Haskins.

Old Tom pulled in his head, and looked curiously at Peter. "Waal, he's consolidated all right. Come on; these folks will want to say thank you. I'd like to say it myself."

The big man reddened, and shook his head. "I don't want any thanks. See you to-morrow." With that, he dived down the back stairs and disappeared.

A quarter of an hour brought him opposite the cottage. A light was burning in the little sitting room, and, silhouetted against the blind, Margaret Brent stooped over her work. The giant's hand trembled as he lifted the latch.

At the sound of that step on the threshold, she looked up. He stood before her a tower of a man, his head up, his eyes shining, the whole great, powerful body of him tense with joy.

"Mother!" he said, and stretched out his arms. "Mother!"

"My Crusader," she murmured, and swayed toward him.

CHAPTER XV.

Winton moved placidly through another year. There were not many changes. The electric road doubled its service to universal satisfaction. The Symons bank, in which the ledger showed a new account of fifteen thousand dollars, had for the last eleven months been under the management of the Empire Trust Company, and James Symons, it was said, had gone East for good. The town, at any rate, knew him no more. The seasons with mellowing touch had brought a few more gray hairs to Margaret Brent and abstracted about as many from old Tom. The grocery store of Si Haskins had enlarged, and the Baptist minister married the milliner. That was about all.

But Peter, contrasting that year with the one before it, looked about at his flat and fertile fields, and thanked God for the part of his life which they blessed so benignantly. The other part of him—hidden away—had recognized that whatever women there might be there was still but one for him. He compressed his lips at the memory of her dead lover, and worshiped her all the more. Her heart, he concluded, was buried in the north, but the ex-

quisite eyes of her haunted him day and night.

They were very friendly now, and their friendship was touched with an intimacy born of the deep things of existence. She trusted him, as she always did. Margaret Brent walked with the girl, their arms round each other's waist, and many an evening his gaze wandered across the supper table to the brown hair that gleamed like copper in the lamplight. She seldom spoke of Jephson now, and when she did it was with a quaint wistfulness that had in it no touch of grief. She seemed to grow more beautiful day by day. Peter cast his spirit at her feet, and thought that the secret hunger was hidden from all else.

It was on a day when he plowed the ten-acre lot that his mother came out to him across the field. Her figure was still slim, her face still smooth and girlish.

"Peter," she said, and looked at him earnestly, "I want to talk to you. Sit down here under the maple."

She leaned against his great frame; then, after a moment of silence, continued: "Do you remember the last time we sat here?"

He nodded. "Two years ago."

"And do you remember what we talked about?"

He nodded again, but did not speak.

"My dear son, I want to talk about the same thing, but"—she smiled—"in quite a different way."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Have you noticed anything lately about Mary?"

"No. She's just the same. Ain't she well?"

"Yes, perfectly. I thought perhaps you'd noticed that—that. Oh, Peter! Don't you understand?"

He wrinkled his brows. "Understand what?"

"That she's fond of you?"

He breathed quickly. "Fond of me? Mary—why——"

"Of course she is, and you, like a great, blundering boy, never even see it."

"Don't say that, mother. It hurts too much."

"My son, would I hurt you? Mary—Mary—is only waiting for you."

His great lungs filled tempestuously, and his head dropped once again to her knees. "I'll love her till I die, but she——"

"Peter," interrupted his mother, "why don't you ask her?"

He rose unsteadily.

"Can't you trust me?" she put in gently.

"Me——" he muttered. "Me?"

Margaret Brent's eyes were suddenly misty. "She's in the garden, my son."

"Why—yes," he stammered.

He moved away as one moves in a dream. Entering the house, he slowly mounted the stairs and took from his dressing-table drawer a canvas-covered notebook. The first page was stained gray and scrawled in pencil. Then he went slowly downstairs and into the garden.

Mary was cutting roses. At the sight of him the color leaped to her cheeks, and she stood irresolute. Peter made a step forward, and halted.

Her eyes dwelt on him, toil-stained as he came from the plow. Sun and air had poured into him a magnificent vitality that expressed itself in the bronze of his skin and the massive column of his neck. His great arms hung lightly, and knotted muscles clustered above the elbows, muscles that played and curved at the slightest motion. His shoulders, broad and flat, surmounted that great chest in which his heart was pounding as never before. He was a man among men, girt with courage and superb strength, fortified for effort, armed for attack and resistance.

"Mary!" he said thickly. "Mary!"

The beauty of her left him breathless. Tall, straight, and lissom, she compassed that unnamable grace which is the priceless dower of but few women. The whiteness of her, the curve of breast with its delicate evidence of maturity, the direct appeal of her gaze, the transparent honesty and courage—all these blended into one irresistible message that checked the blood in his veins and then sent it leaping to his brain.

Straight into his eyes she looked and saw within them the soul lying prostrate before her. In that moment, she was assured that he was her defender and companion.

"Peter!" she whispered, and in another instant was lost in his embrace.

The sun had dropped far toward its green horizon when Margaret Brent stepped out on the porch and looked happily at them. Peter was just taking the notebook from his pocket.

"It's from our best friend," she overheard him say. "A message for you, but I couldn't give it to you before."

NOT AN ELABORATE DISCUSSION

A WELL-KNOWN New York writer went to an equally well-known magazine editor a short while ago and said:

"I want to write an article for you on the subject of 'Why Men Drink Whisky.'"

"All right," replied the editor, "but it must be short."

"I'll make it short."

"How short?"

"I'll promise," answered the writer, "to keep it within fifteen hundred words."

"That's exactly fourteen hundred and ninety-nine too many," objected the editor. "I can write it in one word."

"Well," argued the writer, "you know more about the subject than I do. What's the word?"

"Thirst," replied the editor—thereby destroying all chances for a perfectly good article on a thoroughly hackneyed subject.

He Who Learned

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "The Honor of the Service," "The Connemara Blood," Etc.

When Sergeant John Ryan talks you lose interest in everything else. Kyne has given us many splendid hours with the top cutter of B troop; and the gallant cavalryman is here again with a story of the taming of the company commander who couldn't understand that an officer and a gentleman may still be a warm-hearted human being; and that a big buck soldier boy, when all is said and done, is still a baby.

MY friend, Sergeant John Ryan, top cutter of B troop, —th United States Cavalry, was himself again, which, for the greater portion of the year 1915 he had not been, for his squadron, with headquarters and the band, had been stationed at the Presidio of San Francisco; and San Francisco, as all the world now knows, held an international exposition in 1915. Consequently, every man of the —th had earned every cent of his modest monthly stipend, and, in the opinion of Sergeant Ryan, was entitled to overtime.

"Glory be, but 'tis the happy man I am to have it over an' done wit'!" he confided, as he swung his immaculate legs to the top of the desk in his orderly room and bit off the tip of the cigar I handed him. "An exposition is a grand thing for everybody but the troops designated by the secreth'ry av war to add a touch av elegance to the occasion. Thrue, we'd have a quiet Sunday, but come Monday the director gineral av the exposition would be called on the tellyfome by his private secreth'ry whilst yet he was in bed.

"'Beggin' yere pardon, sor,' says the secreth'ry, 'but the envoy exthraordin'ry an' the high muck-a-muck av a Commissioner Gineral av Timbuctoo are due at the depot at twelve o'clock, in consekens av which ye'd betther get into yere long-tailed coat an' plug hat, an' welcome them to the city.'

"'Very well, me man,' says the director gineral. 'Be the way, what kind av a welcome did we give the Nabob av Ballyrag's valet when he arrived wit' the nabob's exhibit av precious uncut shtones?'

"'Wan throop av cavalry wit' their band, wan German band, a comp'ny av infanthry, a comp'ny av marines, an' another av jackies, sor.'

"'An' him only the nabob's valet!' says the director gineral. 'Begorra, me man, we'll have to spread ourselves today. Me compliments to the commandin' officer av the Presidio, an' ax him to sind over wan squadron av cavalry an' the mounted band, wan battalion av infanthry, another av coast artillery, a field batthery, a detachmint av signal corps, another av hospital corps wit' the ambulance an' field-hospital wagons, an' a dozen wagons from the quartermasther's corrals. Four fine mules to each av the wagons an' ambulances make an imposin' spectacle, an' we'll have to

give these lads from Timbuctoo a parade worthy av their rank.'

"Well, sor, no sooner said than done, an' away goes B throop down to the ferry depot to presint sabers to a pair av little Colorado-maduro civilians in high silk hats, an' divil a wan av them entitled to milith'ry honors. Sure, I'm opposed to such nonsinse, on the ground that 'tis degradin' to a soger an' crool hard worrk into the bargain. Sure, the sight av B throop on parade was so common, ye'd hear the girls all along Market Street sayin': "Sure, there's that stuck-up Sergeant Ryan ag'in, on his chestnut horse, makin' the poor animal do a cake walk just to show off his horsemanship,' whilst all the time I was under orders to make me mount do it for the binifit av the visitin' dignitaries.

"So, as I say, I'm glad 'tis over. I maintain 'twas a job that could have been divided—the arrmy wan day, the jackies an' leathernecks the next, an' the militia av a Sattherd'y. But who the divil ever heard tell av a civilian wit' a dab av respect for the enlisted men av the regular arrmy?"

The old warrior shook his head dolefully; then suddenly across his weather-beaten face a whimsical smile flitted, and he cleared his throat; whereat, I knew I was about to listen to one of his delightful reminiscences.

Shpeakin' av civilians an' the regular arrmy, he began, I am reminded av wan av the worst av the breed that I wanst had the pleasure av lickin' into shape. 'Twas long ago, in the days av the empire, as the men av the auld Eighth Corps have it—'98 to '01—an' I was a doughboy in '98 and '99. I'd been wit' the Seventeenth Infanthry t'rough the fuss in Cuba, an' finished me hitch in August av '98. What wit' a Mauser through me neck, an' a bit av fever, I thought I'd never count fours ag'in; but the minute me wound was healed, an' me carcass rid av the fever, I was off ag'in for active service. I arrived in Manila in November, an' was assigned to E, av the bloody Fourteenth, simultanyous wit' Second Lootinint Rodney William Penn, av Philadelphia, a civilian app'intmint that was wished onto a regimint that'd done its djooty an' was far from deservin' such threatmint.

Let me tell ye about Rodney—for so we called him, to his back. He was a sizable lad av twenty-five when I first clapped eye on him. Quiet an' cool an' resthrained he was, wit' a long, narrow head, a long, sad face, an' a long nose. Faith, he was bred from auld stock, an' the breed was runnin' to seed. I should judge Rodney was about the last leaf on the family tree. Educashun he had an' to spare, an' richer he were nor the Datto av Melignan, whose pearls a bull cart wouldn't hold. All his life long he'd had servants to wait on him, an' a blue-blooded auld mother that made a snob av him, an' two auld-maid sisters that had towld him no woman was good enough for him.

God knows where he got his idjeas on sogerin', although 'tis Sergeant Jawn Ryan that knows where he lost them. I suppose the auld mother thought Rodney ought to have a career, an' on account av trade bein' too vulgar, an' the professions bein' overcrowded, the arrmy was the only thing a gintlemin could go in for. In consekens, the pull was worrked, an' Rodney lit on us like a blight av locusts, for I must tell ye that in addition to his other shortcomings, whilst he was straight U. S. A. since William Penn led the Quakers into Pennsy, the long scut spoke like an Englishman!

Shall I ever forget the day he come to us wit' a hatbox, six trunks, a sword that'd been in the Penn family dear knows how long, a monocle, a pearl-handled pistol, wit' the barrel all scroll-worrk, an' finished bright in silver; a

wather bottle such as tourists use in the mountains av upper New York State; a thundering heavy pair av marine glasses, in a thick pigskin case; an' last, but not least, a big fat blubberjack av a valet, as pink as a dressed sucklin' pig. An' shall I ever forget what auld Major Milliken said six months later, in my hearin', an' him not givin' a hoot? "Colonel," says he, "there's young Penn. Look at him now an' the day we got him. Sure his own mother wouldn't know him."

An' neither would she. His brother officers had joked him so much about the hatbox an' the trunks, he'd stored them in a warehouse down in Binondo, an' the auld family sword was so long and awkward he tripped on it wan day at a dress parade on the Lunetta. Worse luck, he'd been sent out alone wit' the company that day, dependin' on the top sergeant to give him the right orders in a low tone av voice; in consekens av which he had his eye on the top sergeant, instead av where he was going, an' the sword swung bechune his legs, an' down he wint. We were passin' in review at the time, an' the comp'ny walked over him, Con Finnigan, the artificer, takin' advantage av the mêlée to put a foot in Rodney's stomach; whilst some blackguard in F company, in back of us, yells out: "The sword is mightier than the Penn."

The half av the two companies laughed out loud at that, to the great disgrace av the colonel, who bawled Rodney out in front av the regimint, an' towld him he'd prefer charges agin' him if he appeared on parade ag'in wit' that auld toad stabber. So Rodney got himself a regulation sword; an' on top av that, Major Milliken stole his pretty pistol an' filed down the firin' pin. Then he set it back in Rodney's holster, an' made approbious remarks about it until Rodney bet him a month's pay 'twould shoot farther than the regulation pistol.

There was a monkey settin' in a mango tree, thirty yards away, so Rodney shot at the monkey. The gun didn't go off, an' the monkey threw a mango at Rodney, who paid over the money to Milliken, who bought beer for the battalion wit' it; an' Rodney sold the beautiful pistol to our top sergeant for five dollars. The top fitted a new firin' pin to it, an' sold it to Major Milliken for fifteen; an' when Rodney saw the major shootin' wit' it, he wanted to buy it back—an' couldn't.

The night before Aguinaldo tackled us, Rodney's Filipino groom was called to the colors, an' quit wit'out notice, takin' the fancy water bottle an' the field glasses in the pigskin case wit' him. Five months later, I found them on his carcass, where it lay under the lip av the big smooth-bore Long Tom they tried to serve at Zapote Bridge. The water bottle had a bullet hole through it, but the glasses were as good as ever, so I carried them to Rodney.

"To the divil wit' them!" says he, an' threw them into the river. "I could shoot the well-meanin' fool that give them to me when I got me commission. Sure, the weight av them would kill a caribao on the march."

That was after I had educated him, ye mind. 'Twas not sogerin' I taught him, but a knowledge av men an' how to treat them. In the service, ye know, rank has its privileges, an' a good soger would rather accord his officer those privileges than withhold them, if he could. But be the same token, those privileges are clearly defined, an' no officer gintleman demands more. Beyant that he dare not go, unless he's for breedin' a scab on the end of his nose.

What became of his valet? Faith, an' he lost the valet, too. Rodney had been wit' us about a week when auld Johnny Packard, our comp'ny commander, met me comin' out av the canteen, afther me mornin's mornin'. "Me

man," says auld Johnny, wit' a glitterin' look in the back av the eye av him, "here's a five-peso Spanish note for ye. Spind it the way 'twill bring ye the most joy."

"Thank ye kindly, sor," says I, an' took the note, for I knew 'twas not a tip, but wages in advance—auld Johnny havin' nothin' but his captain's pay, an' not bein' the kind to spind that foolishly. "I've just come off guard, an' have nothin' to do but spind the day in riotous livin'."

"Are ye not on auld guard fatigue?" says he.

"I am not, sor," says I. "Yestherd'y, at guard mount, I was picked for the colonel's orderly——"

"So ye were," says he, "so ye were; an' 'tis proud I am to have a nate soger like you in me comp'ny. I mind, now, I saw ye standin' in the hall av the officers' quarthers at dinner last night."

"I followed the colonel up to mess, sor," says I. "He forgot to dismiss me, an' 'twas not for me to remind him ——"

"Thrue for ye," says auld Johnny. "I may be mistaken, but I thought I noticed on yere face last night a look of disgust not usual in an enlisted man."

"Sor," says I, "ye have most remarkable eyesight," for I began to have a glimmer av what he was dhrivin' at.

"There'll be a transport leavin' for home a Wednesd'y week," says he.

"God help me, I'll not be on it—more's the pity, sor," says I. "Me place will doubtless be taken be a civilian."

"I hope so, Private Ryan"—for I was a private at the time—says he. "I could almost wish I was aboard that transport meself. The officers' mess is not what it used to be. Of late we've been exposed to a nuisance."

"I noticed it standin' behind Lootint Penn's chair at dinner, sor," says I. "An' be the same token, that same nuisance has a way av lookin' down his nose at a soger, an' I don't like it. Do you arrange transportation back home for the slick divil, an' speak a kind worrd to the colonel for Con Finnigan an' me. More nor that I'll not say, since to do that same would be hatchin' a conspiracy agin' good ordher an' milit'ry discipline."

"Quite right, Private Ryan," says he. "The arrmy's no place for a windbag or a valet, an', if I had my way, I'd soon get rid av them both. Good day to ye, Private Ryan," an' he was off about his business.

Three days later, auld Johnny called me into the orderly room an' handed me a slip av paper. "Corporal Kennedy's enlistmint expired yestherd'y," says he, "an' of course he was entitled to quarthermaster's transportation back to the place av his enlistmint—which is Stubenville, Ohio, U. S. A. Afther he'd procured his transportation from the quarthermaster, I met him on the Escolta, an' towld him I'd make him a sergeant if he'd reënlist. Sure, he's too good a man to lose, an' the upshot of me eloquence was he come over to the adjutant this mornin' an' held up his hand. Consekently he'll not be afther usin' this transportation, so I took it away from him, for fear its possession might tempt him to desert."

"Give it to me, sor," says I, "an' I'll desthroy it for you."

So he give me the transportation order an' twinty dollars he'd collected among his brother officers, an' that night Con Finnigan an' I met—be accident, av coorse—Rodney's valet, listenin' to the band concert on the Lunetta. His name was Mullins, an' Con and I called him Misther Mullins, an' iifted our campaign hats to him. That flattered the fat divil, an' when the concert was over, says I to him, says I: "Misther Mullins, if ye'll pardon me presumption, an' not consider it beneath ye to be seen in public wit' two plain sogers, Private Finnigan an' meself would

be honored if ye'd jine us in a glass av beer."

Wit' an air av great condescension, he accepted, and we took him to Mateo Quejado's beno joint, just inside the west gate av the auld walled city, an' Mateo slipped five full fingers av *tuba* from Ilo-Ilo into a stein av black San Miguel beer. "'Tis a fine native beverage, sor," says Con to Mullins. "How do ye like it?"

"So bloomin' well, I'll 'ave another, if I'm arsked," says Mullins—an he did. We give him four, more bein' highly dangerous, after which we tucked him into a khaki uniform, then laid him out dacently on top av a table, whilst Con an' I sat on each side av him, drinkin' good American beer an' pokin' fun at the corpse. Faith, 'twas like wakin' the man, only there was no wakin' to Mullins, an' wouldn't be till noon av the next day, when he'd be too sick at the stomach for another twinty-four hours to wonder what had happened.

Just before daylight, we borrowed a bit av a handcart from Mateo, an' wheeled Mullins down to the beach, where we helped ourselves to a fisherman's banca we found there. The transport *Senator* was lyin' out beyant the breakwater, an' due to sail for the United States at six o'clock, but, praise be, we got alongside av her at five-fifteen. We carried Rodney's valet up the companion ladder—an' a crool hard job it was—showed his transportation order to the officer av the day aboard, an' was towld to deliver our man in wan av the bunks av the lower hold, forward, which we did. Then we wint overside an' paddled like the divil for shore, arrivin' at the cuartel just in time to fall into line av file closers an' answer to our names at reveille at six-twenty-five.

We said nothin' to nobody, an' nobody said nothin' to us, but be way av testin' the colonel's gratitude, Con thrashed a corporal that'd been naggin' him a twelvemont'. Since strikin' a noncom is a luxury forbidden a private, the top could do no less than throw Con into the hoozegow. He slept the night there, an' auld Johnny discovered his plight when he looked over the mornin' report at eight o'clock. The colonel come down to his office at nine, an' at nine-fifteen Con was released be the colonel's order. When the corporal preferred charges, av coorse they had to be heard, but upon the advice av auld Johnny, Con pleaded guilty, an' was fined twinty-five cents.

No, we never heard tell av Misther Mullins ag'in. 'Tis like the transport was halfway up the China Sea before he come on deck, an' as he had but two dollars Mex. on his person when Con and I saw him off, I've a notion he wasted no time huntin' a new job the minute he landed in San Francisco. Rodney raised ructions, thinkin' native robbers had waylaid Mullins an' kilt him, an' was for havin' the colonel order the regimint out to hunt for the body; but the colonel give him wan look, an' says he: "Thirty-five year I've been a commissioned officer, Misther Penn, an' in all that time sorra wan av me ever saw a valet standin' behind a gineral's chair at mess, let alone a shavetail's. The sight av ye wit' that valet is an offense to our democracy; a shavetail wit' a valet is like a pig wit' a goold ring in his nose. The mess has had enough av the airs an' graces av ye, an' now that the man Mullins is gone, 'tis me order that ye discard that last relic av civil life—the monocle. Have a care, would ye disobey me, Misther Penn. I'll have no monocles in a regimint av mine."

Ye'll see from that, sor, that to all outward appearances Rodney was a regular person be the time he got into his first action. Those av us that'd already had that privilege, an', in consekens, was calm enough to look around durin'

quiet moments in the fightin', kept an eye on Rodney. He was pale an' excited, an' wanst or twict his chin was seen to quiver a bit, but for all that he did his bit like a man, an' 'twas seen that wit' the help av God an' a few auld sogers he'd be a credit to the service yet.

Now, ye must know, sor, that when an arrmy goes on active service 'tis like wan big family. The officers get to know their men betther after the first skirmish than ever they knew them before. If they see their men remember in time av war the things they've taught them in time av peace, officers grow very proud of their commands. On the other hand, when the men see their officers are cool an' collected, an' will never ask an enlisted man to take an unnecessary chanst; when their officers show a personal intherest in each an' every man, begorry that, an' the something that comes av a fight agin' a common enemy, makes brothers av thim all. 'Tis for this reason that officers in the field dispinse wit' a deal av the pomp an' etiquette av the barracks. They'll have no jumpin' to attintion as they pass along the trench; if ye come before the colonel wit'out a blouse, or wit' wan button loose, or yere belt buckle unpolished; if ye turn yer back whin ye see him comin', so's not to be bothered givin' him a salute as he passes by, he thanks ye for yer forbearance. But 'twas not so wit' Rodney. Him, who had never known discipline in all his life, was a martinet for it now. When he passed along the trench, an' nobody called "Attintion!" he'd call it himself. And when somebody called it next time, faith, 'twas not Lootinent Penn that'd smile, an' say, "Keep yer seats, bhoys." Divil a bit. Down the line he'd go, wit' his chest stuck out, an' a grave, savage light in the eye av him, lookin' for the soger that didn't stand to attintion firm on both feet. Sure, the young man'd go out av his way to make a soger salute him, an' he'd have no free-an'-aisy salutes, at that. "None av yer ragged figure fours to me, sergeant," says he to the top. "Salute me like ye meant it."

"That I will not do, sor," says the top. "I'll salute the insignias av rank on yer shouldhers, an' this day three months, whin I have me discharge, God willin', I'll salute ye like I meant it—not the right-hand salute, nor yet the left, but both."

Wirra, wirra, but Rodney was the hated man! We'd been in the field about a month, when he developed a nasty habit av slippin' out through some other comp'ny's outposts an' circlin' around through the bush straight in on E comp'ny's pickets, from the direction av the enemy. 'Twas his excuse, when the sergeant av the outpost guard asked him was he lost, that he wasn't; that he only wanted to see if the outpost was on the alert. "Oh, is that it?" says the sergeant, an' an angry man he was. "'Tis well for you K comp'ny's outpost sint a man over to warn us ye were comin', an' most likely ye'd not answer the first two challenges. For the information av the lootinint, I'll have him know 'tis the custom here to challenge wanst, an' fire if there's no answer. 'Tis well for you, sor, others can take bether care av ye than ye can yerself."

It wasn't a week till he thried it ag'in, wit' little Nick Polowski, a murderous Chicago Polack, on post at the time. 'Twas bright moonlight, an' Nick could see as plain as day who 'twas; but he hated Rodney, an' wished to rid the regimint av a nuisance, provided he could do it with a good legal excuse "Bang! Bang!" says Nick. "Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend!" yells Rodney. Faith, ye could have heard him a mile away.

"'Tis the wrong place for a friend," says Nick. "But come in out av that an' let me have a look at you." So Rodney approached, an' be the same

token he had a light crease along the top of his left shoulder an' a bullet hole through his hat. Nick took a long look at him. "Oh," says he, "so 'tis Lootinint Penn. Faith, I thought it was a black skut av a boloman creepin' up to disembowel me."

"Ye scoundhrel!" says Rodney. "I'll have ye tried for this! Ye deliberately tried to murder me!"

"Try, an' good luck to ye," says Nick, the two bein' alone in the bush, an' his word as good as Rodney's at a court-martial. "The next time ye're lookin' to see if a senthry's on the alert, ye'll come onto him from the rear."

"An' if ye'll take an old soger's advice," says the sergeant av the guard, who'd come runnin' at the sound av the shots, "ye'll stay in the rear av the skirmish line in action. I have known an officer to be hit in the back be an excitable rookie before now."

Rodney did not prefer charges agin' Nick Polowski. He thought better av it, after talkin' it over wit' auld Johnny. "Young man," says Johnny, "you, a second lootinint, have found it necess'ry to do with my men what I, their captain, have not—an' that is to spy on them. I'm ashamed av Private Polowski—him wit' a marksman's medal, an' missin' ye at that range, in the moonlight! I'll give him a week av fatigue for that!"

Well, sor, time passed, an' Rodney did no more spyin' on the outposts; but, knowin' he was not popular, he took to naggin' the men at every opportunity. Praise be, we were sogers that knew our business, an' we gave him small excuse to pick on us, but for all that the breach kept widenin', wit' neither side doin' anything to patch it up, an' Rodney was at the height av his popularity whin we tackled a town up in the Laguna de Bay counthry, back av Santa Cruz—an' there we had our innings.

We were advancin' be rushes acrosst a wide paddy field, an' in the open, bechune the amigos an' us, a she-caribao was feedin'; an' what wit' the rush av the regimint, the wail av the shells from the jackass batthery in back av us, the shootin' an' shoutin' an' wild excitement, an' maybe the sting av a bullet not meant for her, the auld cow tossed up her head, give a loud, angry snort, and commenced to run backward an' forward a bit, wondherin' which side to tackle—the amigos or us.

Finally she made up her mind, an' charged E comp'ny, we bein' strangers in the counthry, an' she not likin' the smell av us. She come like a comet, blind wit' anger, an' the line opened an' let her pass through—an' be the same token, Rodney was in the rear av the line, an' she made for him! He saw her comin' an' leaped backward, lit in a bit av a depression, an' sprawled on his back; an', whilst ye'd be sayin' Jack Robinson, the cow was beside him, her head cocked to wan side, whilst she felt for him wit' wan av her long, wide horns.

Rodney had sinse enough to know he was safest lyin' down, so he watched her feelin' for him, an' just as she got her horn undher his short ribs, an' was for gorin' him, he gave a smart flip an' turned over—an' she missed. That made her mad, so she concluded to butt him, an' in a twinklin' Rodney had her nose bechune his long legs, an' the legs swung up an' gripped tight around her neck, whilst wit' both arms wrapped around her great horns, he held the cow to his heart. She was helpless now to hook him, an', be the same token, since a cow cannot step on her own lip, she was helpless to trample on him. But she could do the next best thing, an' that was to press down on him an' rub his rear into the paddy.

Divil such a sight have I ever seen in action before or since. E comp'ny was for breakin' the skirmish line an' forgettin' the charge, to cluster around the superior attraction, but auld Johnny,

afther wan look, saw that Rodney had the situation well in hand. "Privates Ryan an' Finnigan will fall out an' lift that she-caribao off the second lootinint!" he yells. "Forward, the rest av ye, an' no lookin' back!" An' away they wint, hell for leather acrosst the paddy, leavin' Con an' me to a full enjoymint av the spectacle they'd left behind.

"Wirra, now, but did ye ever see the like av that wather buffalo, Ryan?" says Con. "How well she knew enough to tackle the meanest man in the outfit!"

"Thrue for ye, Con!" says I. "The instinct av the lower animals is a wonderful thing. Have a care would ye hurt her!"

"What!" says Con. "Hurt the daughter av the regimint? Shame on ye, Ryan. Do you take her be wan hind leg, whilst I lift her off fore leg, an' together we'll deposit her gintly on the ground. We will then sit on her head whilst little Rodney makes his getaway."

"Ye villains!" says Rodney, for he could hear every word we was shoutin' at each other. "Shoot this bloody beast an' pull her off me!"

"Ye forget she's private property, sor," says I, "an' be the colonel's orders a private soger may not take liberties wit' private property." An', with that, I made a grab for her hind leg, an' got a kick in the commissary for me pains. But what happened next was wort' it. Findin' herself attacked in the rear, the cow whirled, an', as Rodney dared not let go, he was swung in a fifteen-foot circle, an' set down on the paddy ag'in wit' a thump that all but broke his tail bone.

"Three cheers for auld Dhrinnen Dhu!" says Con, grabbin' her be the tail an' twistin' it. She whirled ag'in, an' Rodney got another thump that made him shout bloody murdher. Her head was now facin' Con, an' her tail wit'in reach av me, so I grabbed howld.

"Comp'ny! Right turn! March!" yells Con; an', at the command av execution, I twisted auld Dhrinnen Dhu's tail, an' she executed the movemint like the grand auld soger that she was. This brought her tail in front av Con ag'in.

"Divil a day did this wan ever spend in the awkward squad," says he, and takes hold av the tail, whilst I give the commands, and treated Rodney to another thump that fair jarred his wisdom teeth.

"Shoot her!" screams he. "She's breakin' me back!"

"Faith, an' we'll break yer heart before we're through wit' ye," says Con. "Sure, if the amigos an' Nick Polowski couldn't kill ye, auld Dhrinnen Dhu, wit' the aid av Ryan an' meself, will send ye before a medical board to be examined for retiremint."

"Nothin' less than total disability, Con," says I, an' gives her tail another twist. Away sailed Rodney, an', as luck would have it, wan av the bullets that'd been dhroppin' in flocks around us connected wit' the poor misfortunate man. 'Twas but a slight flesh wound, but it struck him in a divilishly fleshy spot."

"I'm shot!" wails Rodney, an let go the cow's head. He was hurled off at a tangent, ten feet into the tall grass, an' whilst I side-stepped auld Dhrinnen Dhu's charrge Con gave her tail another twist, an' at that she lost heart an' run off, uttherin' low moans av rage an' discontint. Con an' meself walked over an' picked up Rodney.

"Did ye kill her?" says he.

"We did not," says I. "Didn't I tell the lootinint wanst that caribao was private property?"

"Then what's become av the divil?" says he.

"Meself an' Private Ryan twisted the tail av her, an' she run off, av coorse," says Con. "If ye'd only let go the first time we twisted it, ye'd have saved yerself many a bump. Faith, ye clung to the beast like clibbereens to a sheep!"

"The lootinint thought she'd get dizzy, what wit' her whirlin', an' fall down," says I. "Are ye hurted, sor?" says I, an' rolled him over. "Glory be, Con," says I, "but this must never be found out. D'ye mind that man in M comp'ny that was struck similar to the lootinint? Sure, he slept on his stomach, an' took his rations standin' up, for a month; an', what wit' the fun they poked at him, he transferred to the cavalry so's he'd have a saddle bechune him an' danger."

"'Tis a terrible disgrace," says Con, "although God knows the lootinint couldn't help it. Shall we tell the men ye were gored in action be a water buffalo, sor?" says he kindly. "'Twill account for the blood."

Rodney curses us for villains, an' says he: "I'll get even wit' ye for this day's work!" An' he got up an' started afther the comp'ny.

"There's gratitude for ye, Ryan," says Con. "'Twas only our knowledge av she-caribaos saved the lootinint's life, an' his bitther curse is the thanks we get."

"Have shame to you, Private Finnigan!" says I. "Lootinint Penn is an officer an' a gintlemin."

"So he is," says Con, wit' a grin. "How could I have forgotten it?"

"He's made ye salute him often enough to have impressed it on yer thick skull," says I.

"Oh," says Con, "I know what made me forget it. I remember now."

"What was it, avic?" says I.

"Private Polowski touched him lightly on the shouldher, an' the cow caribao reached him a minute ago, an' yet, wit' a scar top an' bottom, he didn't get either wan whilst leadin' betther men nor himself into action."

"Thrue for ye, Con! Thrue for ye!" says I. We'd been walkin' beside Rodney as we conversed, an' he'd heard every word. Sure, what did we care? Divil a hair. We hadn't laid violent hands on him, nor addressed approbious language *to* him, an' 'twas our God-given privilege to discuss him bechune ourselves, if we saw fit, an' cared to take the chances.

"I'll have ye both bobtailed for this!" says Rodney.

"D'ye mind, Ryan," says Con, "the time I thrashed Corporal Schults? I was released from the guardhouse on the colonel's ordher, an' the regimental trial officer fined me twinty-five cents."

"And do you recall, Con," says I, "the pay day I was absent wit'out leave for a week, an' was mildly reprimanded be Captain Packard?"

"Shall I ever forget it?" says Con. "When he asked ye where ye had been, ye towld him ye were out lookin' for Lootinint Rodney's man Mullins. 'Very well, Private Ryan,' says he, 'since ye failed to find him, I'll forgive ye this time. Go to ye're quarthers, an' thry to behave yourself in future.'"

"Silence!" screams Rodney. "Not another word out of ye two wretches!"

"That bein' a direct command, sor," says Con, "we'll obey it." An' we did.

Well, sor, for reasons best known to himself, Rodney said nothin' further about his adventure wit' the caribao, although I saw to it that auld Johnny had all the facts in the case. We could hear the offiers laughin' long an' loud at poor Rodney around the colonel's bivouac that night, an' in the midst of the fun auld Johnny spoke up, an' says he:

"Penn, it strikes me you're ungrateful to Privates Ryan an' Finnigan. To my mind, however, they showed rare executive ability, for 'tis not every enlisted man that can deal so well wit' a caribao runnin' amuck. They're cool, careful men, I'm tellin' ye, an' since E comp'ny's lost two corporals this day, begorry I'm goin' to recommind Ryan an' Finnigan for the vacancies."

"Announce the app'intmints at reveille, Packard," says the colonel; an'

another roar wint up. An' that's how I got me first chevrons—for conspicuous gallantry in action wit' a wather buffalo, as auld Johnny announced at reveille, in the presince av Lootinint Penn.

Well, sor, when we finished in the lake provinces we come back to the lowlands in the south ag'in, an' the wet season found us tucked away, all by ourselves, in the wet, swampy counthry beyant Imus. We was four mile from any other outfit, an', the rains havin' brought the campaign to a halt for the time bein', we took possession av a barrio we found deserted on the edge of the bosque, an' went into quarthers for the wet season.

There was seventy-odd av us, an' we had to hold our own, if attacked, against from five hundhred to a thousand amigos. The dear Lord knows how many av them was out forninst us in the bush, but we did not worry. 'Twas our djooty to keep an eye on them, an' hold what ground we'd gained, an' we did it. We had plenty av food, wather, an' fuel, an' we dug ourselves in around the barrio in such a manner that only heavy artillery could get us out if we were attacked—an' the amigos had no artillery. Moreover, if attacked, we could hold our own until the sound av firin' brought reinforcements down from Imus. So we were as happy as you could expect wet sogers to be, until auld Johnny got down wit' typhoid malaria, an' had to be sint in to hospital at Manila. The first lootinint we'd not had wit' us for months, he bein' on detached service, so wit' auld Johnny gone to hospital we knew Rodney would take command av the comp'ny, an' it worried us. I was first djooty sergeant by this time, an' actin' top sergeant whilst the top was recoverin' from a wound at Corregidor.

Auld Johnny sint for Rodney, an' my ordherly room bein' the next nipa shack to his, I could hear every word he had to say. In fact, I've often thought since auld Johnny did it on purpose.

"Misther Penn," says he, "I'm a sick man, an' I'm goin' to hospital, bekase if I stay a week longer in this hell hole I'll die. I'm goin' to l'ave you in command av the comp'ny, an' whilst I hesitate to hurt your feelin's, I will be frank, an 'tell you I could die happy if I was l'avin' my bhoys in charge av a betther man. I have no doubt av the courage av ye, young man, but yer judgment is not av the best, an' ye are not popular wit' the men. I trust that whilst I'm gone ye will not fail to remimber yer responsible for seventy-three betther men nor yourself, an' that if ye lose wan av them through yer own carelessness or inefficiency ye're as guilty av murder as ever a man can be. I have a sneakin' impression that as a master av men ye need a lot more trainin', an' maybe the best way to acquire the educashun is to give ye the command an' let ye make the best av it.

"Just remimber this much, Misther Penn: The best officer is not the reckless man, who dies gloriously at the head av his command. Remimber it takes time an' a lot av money to make a good officer, an' to kill him needlessly is a loss ye should guard against. Be a stickler for discipline, but not too much av a stickler for etiquette. In other words, don't take yourself too seriously, for ye're only a shavetail. Think first av ye're men. They're like babies. Keep them full, warm, an' dhry, an' never forget ye owe a djooty to thim. I'm the daddy av this comp'ny, an' Jawn Ryan, the actin' top sergeant, is me favorite child. He's a wild, wicked, godless divil av an Irishman, but he's my idjeal av a soger. We understand each other, an' unofficially he's a friend av mine. He's quite the finest soger you or I will ever meet, an' ye need have no fear av demeanin' yerself by seekin' his advice an' bein' guided by it in ticklish situations. You are new to the

arrmy, Misther Penn, an' new to men like E comp'ny, so if there are any mistakes to be made you'll make them. My bhoys never make mistakes. I've trained them meself. I know them like a book. I've borrowed money from some of them, an' I've loaned money to all of them at one time or another. I know the brand of chewing tobacco each one uses. For instance, Ryan likes his thin and extra sweet; Marlowe's is thick and strong. I've sampled both, and I do hope, Misther Penn——"

"But my dear Captain Packard," says Rodney, "surely 'tis jokin' you are about the chewin' tobacco! You could not possibly condescend to ask an enlisted man for a bite out of his chewing tobacco!"

"Why shouldn't I—if I'm short av tobacco meself?" snapped auld Johnny. "There's no harm in it. It doesn't hurt discipline in the least, an' it only brings me closer to my men wit'out havin' them take advantage av me. An' that's what an officer needs when he's stuck out in a wild strip av counthry like this an' left to shift for himself. I've never earned a medal av honor, Misther Penn, but I've taken my bhoys into many a nasty bit av a row an' brought them out safe ag'in—or at least wit'out needless loss. Reasonable wear an' tear is all they've had from me, Misther Penn, an' that's all they can hope for. So they trust me. But when I'm gone, they'll not trust you, Misther Penn; they'll look to Jawn Ryan, an' you'll be a mere figgerhead until you win their affection an' confidence. I want you to strive to earn both, Misther Penn; an' should you be attacked, take counsel at all times wit' Sergeant Ryan, an' you'll not be liable to go wrong."

"I think I undherstand you, sor," says Penn very coldly.

"Very well," says auld Johnny, wit' a bark in his voice that towld me he knew Rodney didn't undherstand him at all, at all. "That is all. Ye will take command av the comp'ny at retreat this evenin'."

Well, sor, Rodney had us about a week when he comminced to show his teeth. He disliked the shack he was livin' in, so he ordhered out the comp'ny an' marched us down a mile to a fine new nipa shack some pacifico had built, an' never lived in. He had us lift this shack up by the roots an' carry it back on our shouldhers to camp, an' we were dead wit' exhaustion by the time we'd got it set up ag'in. The men were grumblin' an' growlin', for 'twas no part of an enlisted man's job to provide fancy headquarthers for Rodney. Auld Johnny would never have asked it av us; he would have taken his chances like the rest av us, whereas Rodney ordhered it done. An' he took to inspectin' us an' pokin' around at all hours in our private habitations; he was that lonesome an' unhappy he couldn't stand for a bit av jollification in the men, an' whenever we'd laugh an' carry on he'd send over word to stop that noise. But the climax come when he settled on little Ben Daniels for his dog robber.

What is a dog robber, say you? Well, sor, he's an enlisted man that works for an officer as a body servant; he gets ten or fifteen dollars a month for it, an' doesn't do a lick av the work for which he dhraws his money from the governmint. The officers call him a shtriker, but the enlisted men have but wan name for him. He's a dog robber. The inference bein', as ye'll guess, that such a man'll go to any lin'th for his master, even unto the theft of a dog.

With throops situated as we were, 'tis hard, av coorse, to have an officer's mess, an' nine officers out av ten will feed wit' their men. Daniels was a handy lad with a skillet; he could cook things the comp'ny cook couldn't, an' didn't have time to cook, if he could; so, out av respect for auld Johnny, I'd detailed Daniels to do the cookin' for the officers. 'Twas in no sinse a dog

robber's job, but a labor av love, for, as I said before, rank has its privileges, an' a little delicate cookin' to an auld captain is wan av them. So what wit' fresh caribao milk, a few canned goods, a chicken now an' then, an' a few fresh vegetables purchased from the natives, wit' money auld Johnny give Daniels for the purpose, we'd managed to take care av our captain as he should be took care of. An', av coorse, since we couldn't make fish av one an' fowl av the other, Rodney got in on the special cookin' whilst auld Johnny was wit' us; but the day auld Johnny left, Daniels, who hated Rodney worse nor the divil hates holy wather, threw up his job, in consekens av which 'twas governmint ration straight the comp'ny cook sint up to Rodney be one av the coolie kitchen police.

The third meal av this, an' Rodney come down to the kitchen. "What's wrong wit' me rations, cook?" says he.

"Nothin', sor, that I know of," says the cook. "Ye're gettin' the same as the men."

Rodney bit his lip at that, for he saw the lay av the land, an' he come over to me. "Sergeant Ryan," says he, "detail Private Daniels as me private cook."

"Very well, sor," says I, an' passed the word for Daniels. When he come up, says I: "Daniels, hereafther, an' until further notice, ye will cook the company commandher's meals."

Daniels turrned an' looked Rodney over. "Is the company commandher aware," says he to me, but lookin' at Rodney, "that it is not within his power to detail an enlisted man to any personal menial service? Does he realize that I enlisted in the army to fight for me counthry, an' not to cook for any officer?"

"Quite so, Private Daniels," says Rodney, "but you overlook the p'int entirely, me man. I'll pay ye fifteen dollars a month an' relieve ye from ail djooty wit' the comp'ny."

"I wouldn't do it for a million a month, sor," says Daniels. "Would ye make a dog robber av me, an' have me l'ave me djooty as a soger for a cumrade to do?"

"Ye cooked for Captain Packard," says Rodney.

"I did," says Daniels, "an', please God, I'll cook for him ag'in when he comes back from hospital; but I cooked for him for love, sor. He knows me too well to offer me money an' make a flunky out av me.' '

"I order ye to cook for me," says Rodney. "Do ye hear me? I order ye!"

"An' I refuse djooty, sor. Thry me for insubordination—if ye dare!"

He had Rodney foul, an' Rodney knew it; but he was not yet licked. "Sergeant," says he, an' his voice was quiverin', "you will detail Private Daniels to permanent kitchen police."

"Very well, sor," says I, an' detailed him. Kitchen police bein' in the line av milit'ry djooty, Rodney was well wit'in his rights, an' to the kitchen Daniels went, to wash up dhirty pots an' pans, rustle firewood an' water, peel onions, an' work like a slave sixteen hours a day over an open fire in a steamin' wet counthry. 'Twas far from bein' a nice job, an' I saw what Rodney was up to. He was thryin' to break Daniels' spirit so's he'd cook for him, an' that was the long an' the short av it.

"Be the Rock av Cashel," says I to Con Finnigan, "but I do not like the actions av that young man, an' 'tis meself that'll break *his* spirit, or know the reason why!"

"How so?" says Con.

"By silence," says I. "He's wan officer wit' a comp'ny av men that hate him. He thinks it beneath him to speak to wan av them except in the line av djooty—so we'll none av us speak to him, even in the line av djooty. Pass

the word, Con, that when he speaks to wan av the men, in the line av djooty, that man is to nod an' salute, but not speak back. Tell them all to keep away from the vicinity av his quarthers, so he'll not hear the sound av a human voice, an' keep all natives out av the camp, for fear he'll take to practicin' the native lingo on them. He's out av American-made cigarettes already, an' smokin' native leaf, an', like all the rest av us, he doesn't like it. He has nothin' to read but the mornin' report; he has no equals to talk to, an' will not whilst the rainy season is on; he has no place to walk but around the camp——"

"Bully for ye," says Con. "I'll attind to it. Before thirty days is up, we'll have that lad talkin' to himself, or I'm a nagyur." An' away he wint to spread the news.

Well, sor, 'twas a week before Rodney discovered he was in a state av siege. "'Tis devilish quiet in camp," says he to me, when I come to his shack wit' the mornin' report for his signature. "What's got into the men? Sure, they go around like a lot of mice!"

I shrugged me shouldhers, but divil a sound did I make. "An' what's the matter wit' you, Sergeant Ryan?" says he. "Have ye not a tongue in yer head?"

I looked him fair in the eyes for five seconds, an' then I nodded. I could have laughed at the look av rage that come over his long, cowld face, as he signed the mornin' report an' almost hurled the book at me. I clicked me heels together, give him the big figure four, took the mornin' report, an' wint out; an', as I passed through the door, he cursed me.

Afther dinner, he come b'ilin' over to my quarthers. "What's come over that cook?" says he. "The garbage he's sindin' me for me meals is unfit for a pig."

Wit'out a word, I reached into a pigeonhole in me field desk an' handed him a slip av paper. 'Twas a bill: *"Lootinint Rodney William Penn to the comp'ny fund, debtor. To subsistence at comp'ny kitchen, fourteen days, at fifty cents per day, seven dollars."* An' at the bottom av the bill the quarthermaster sergeant had written, in red ink, the word, *"Overdue."*

The color came an' wint in Rodney's face. "Oh-ho!" he says. "So yer chargin' me for me subsistince, are ye? An' who does that bit av graft go to? You or the quarthermaster sergeant?"

As silent as a pussy cat at a rat hole, I took out the comp'ny-fund books an' p'inted to an enthry showin' where he'd been charged wit' the subsistince an' the comp'ny-fund account credited. He looked at the enthry, an' knew there could be no graft about it.

"'Tis divilish small av ye to sind me this bill," says he. "Not another comp'ny in the regimint does it. While well I know an officer has to furnish his own subsistince, an' that ye have a right to make a charge for the benefit av the comp'ny fund when I ate wit' the men, still 'tis unusual. Ye never sint a bill to Captain Packard whin he ate wit' the men."

I nodded at that, an' wint rummagin' in me field desk ag'in. Out I come wit' another bit av paper. 'Twas a note from auld Johnny to the top sergeant, sint the precedin' Christmas, an' I handed it to Rodney, who read:

MY DEAR SERGEANT: I am sindin' fifty pounds av imported plum puddin' for E comp'ny's Christmas dinner. Me compliments to all av ye an' the merriest av Christmases. Sincerely, JAWN PACKARD.

"So," says he, "that's the way av it, eh? Well, let me tell you this much, Sergeant Ryan, if E comp'ny was hangin' be the heels till I sint them a pleasant smile, the blackguards' brains would run out through their noses before they got it." An', wit' that, he laid seven

dollars on the desk, an' I credited the sum to him in the cash book, receipted the bill, an' wrote acrost the bottom av it: "Thank you, sir."

He wint out wit' his head hangin', an' when I looked at him ag'in he was sittin' in his nice new nipa shack, wit' his chin in his hands, lookin' out acrost the wide paddy fields at nothin' but drippin' green jungle an' wet, sodden fields, an' the gray sky beyant. An' there he set till retreat, when he had the men lined up in the pourin' rain, forninst his shack, whilst I called the roll an' reported the comp'ny to him, sittin' there in his house as snug as a bug undher a chip. He gave me a salute through the window, an' ordhered the comp'ny to stand to attintion. "Sound off," says he to the buglers, an' they did. "'Tis a pity we have no flag to haul down an' fold up in this ilegant rain," says he. "'Tenshun! Port! Hums! Open chambers an' magazines!" He held us there a full minute, watchin' the rain pelt into our pieces before he ordhered the chambers an' magazines closed an' dismissed us; an', as we wint to our quarthers, to clane our Krags, many's the deep currse was hurled at Lootinint Rodney William Penn.

As I was detailin' the men for outpost that night, I noticed little Munson, our bugler, among the detail. Ordinarily, the buglers didn't do outpost, a six-shoother an' a bugle bein' their sole arms; but what wit' all the men we had in hospital, djooty was fallin' heavy on us, an' I'd issued a Krag an' two hundhred an' fifty rounds to both buglers, an' bade them do their outposts like the rest av us. As I stood lookin' at Munson, I had a bright idjea.

"Munson," says I, "do you take your bugle wit' you, an' at daylight to-morrow do you walk over beyant that far strip av bamboo an' blow first call at six o'clock sharp. Five minutes later, do you blow reveille, an' five minutes afther that do you sound assembly. Thin wait fifteen minutes, an' sound mess call."

"As Lootinint Penn would say, I believe I apprehend," says he.

I was up next mornin' at a quarther av six, an' promptly at six the sound av Munson's bugle come floatin' across the fields, a mile away. The next I heard was the squeakin' av Rodney's field cot as he sprang out in a hurry an' run to the window to see could he get a glimpse av the troops that'd moved into his neighborhood durin' the night. He stood be the window, in his pajamas, watch in hand, an' faith 'twould have done ye good to see the look av relief in his face whin Munson blew reveille. He glanced down, an' caught me lookin' at him.

"Sergeant," says he, "do ye know what troops is that over beyant the jungle?"

I shook me head, an' moved off for fear I'd laugh in his face.

Well, sor, immejiately afther breakfast, Rodney buckled on his sword an' six-shooter, slipped into his poncho, an' started straight acrosst counthry. "There he goes, sarge," says Con Finnigan, "thinkin' he'll find wan av his equals wit' them imaginary troops, an' spind a pleasant day talkin' with him. Sure, the poor divil's that lonesome his heart's breakin'. The only human voice he's heard in a week is your own, Ryan, callin' the roll."

In about two hours, poor Rodney come back, walkin' slowly, his head on his breast, an' him wet to the skin; an', as he passed, each enlisted man give him a sweet an' knowin' smile. He returned to his shack, an' sat in the window, wit' nothin' to smoke wort' smokin', nothin' to do wort' doin', nothin' to say wort' sayin', nobody wort' knowin' to say it to, nothin' to read, nothin' to look at save the wall av wet, green jungle, an' nothin' to think av save that Gawd A'mighty had cursed him.

An' another week passed. 'Twas a

savage week. Rodney, settin' safe an' dhry in his house, lined us up in front av his window, in the mud, an' rain that never quit pourin', an' there he give us settin'-up exercises an' bayonet exercise an' roll call an' inspection an' the manual av arms, until the monotonous sound av his own voice, repeatin' the same ordhers over an' over, fair drove him crazy, for not a noncom would take the trouble to repeat them to the men. An', wan an' all, we looked at him like he was somethin' queer an' strange, an' not av sufficient importance to waste a curse on. But for all that, if there was fat pork in the kitchen, Rodney got no lean; if the beans was burned at the bottom, then from the bottom Rodney was served. For him, the comp'ny cook, at Ben Daniels' suggestion, warmed for supper the coffee that'd been left over from breakfast, an' when Rodney grew tired av stewed peaches, an' ordhered them dried, 'twas Daniels that searched through the case until he found a dhried peach wit' a worm in it to turn poor Rodney's stomach.

At the ind av the second week, Rodney quit his persecution av the comp'ny. Divil a foot did he stir out av his house, but left everything to me. So passed the third week of silence, an' then wan mornin' the camp guard come to me an' reported he'd heard Rodney sobbin' in the middle av the night.

"Very well," says I, "the break'll come soon, now. There isn't a man undher heaven that can be an outcast among seventy-three men, in this wet jungle, an' not go mad in thirty days. Snob an' aristocrat that he is, he could kiss the feet av the human bein' that'd talk with him this mornin'."

I was right. An hour later, whin I come to him wit' the mornin' report, he stood up in the middle av the floor an' he looked at me. I looked back at him, calm an' cool, an' a bit contimptuous, an' his chin comminced to quiver, but not wit' rage, for his eyes were dead in his head.

"Was everythin' quiet on the outposts last night, Sergeant Ryan?" says he, very calmlike. Well he knew all had been quiet on the outposts, else he'd have heard the sound av firin'. I was not to be trapped into openin' me mouth to him, so I nodded—an' at that he wint to pieces.

"In God's name, man, speak to me!" says he. "Jawn Ryan, have ye no soul? I'm goin' mad wit' the weight av sivinty-three men's hatred! 'Tis like a stone crushin' the sowl out av me! An' if ye don't speak to me, here in this wet jungle, wit' naught but the smell av wet men an' wet equipment an' wood smoke an' decayed vegetation, I'll not be responsible for me actions." He put his two hands on me shouldhers, an' the big tears come into his eyes. "In pity's name, be kind to me," says he. "I have enough enemies. I want one friend. Tell me what to do to make the men think av me as they think av Captain Packard. If 'tis tobacco, if 'tis beer, if 'tis exthra rations, money is no object. I'm wort' a couple av millions —an' I'd give it all for wan hour av genuine human companionship. Tell me, Jawn Ryan, for the love of Hivin, how can I get the confidence an' respect av E comp'ny?"

"Well, sor," says I, "to begin wit', ye might smile at the men an' nod as ye pass by. 'Twill do ye no harm when ye pass the quarthers av Private Gilman, that's had the chills an' fever this three weeks past, to look in on him an' say, 'Well, Gilman, me boy, an' how do ye find yerself this mornin'? Bether, I hope.' "

"But I didn't know the man was sick," says poor Rodney.

" 'Tis yer business to ask, sor," says I; "although, sure anybody but you would have known Gilman was dyin' on his feet be the look av death on his face. An' 'twould do ye no harm to bid the

comp'ny clerk good mornin' when ye come into the ordherly room. When ye learn the difference bechune a field soger an' a barrack soger, ye'll be learnin' the difference bechune aise an' sufferin'. An officer an' a gintlemen, sor," says I, "may still be a warm-hearted human bein', an' a big, buck soger bhoy, when all's said an' done, is still a bit av a baby. More I cannot tell ye, sor. If ye cannot figure it out for yerself, the army's no place for the likes av you." An' I saluted an' wint out.

Ten minutes later, Ben Daniels come into me ordherly room. "I'm returned from permanint kitchen police to djooty wit' the line," says he. "The C. C. has lifted the embargo. He come down to the kitchen, apologized for persecutin' me, an' turned me back to djooty."

"An' what did you do, Daniels?" says I.

"Nothin' yet, sarge," says he; "but if ye'll give me a couple av pesos from the last paymint Rodney made ye for his subsistince, I'll lay in a stock av such delicacies as the counthry affords, an' feed that misguided man the first good dinner in a month. A young fried chicken, some banana fritters, hash-brown potatoes, dried-apricot pie, an' some real coffee will bring a smile to the long face of him."

"Daniels," says I, "if ye do that wanst, 'tis yer steady job, or I'll make hell look like a summer holiday to you. Rodney's coming around nicely, an' if you spoil me handiwork, I'll spoil your face."

"Arrah, give me the money," says he, "an' don't be puttin' dogs in windows."

I give him the money. "Send Con Finnigan to me," says I, "an' mind the chicken ye buy is young an' tindher."

Con Finnigan reported at the ordherly room. "Con," says I, "ye will call upon the comp'ny commandher, an' presint him wit' a small bag av American cigarette tobacco an' a book av papers, together wit' my compliments, an' this auld magazine. Has the comp'ny barber a copy av the *Police Gazette*, ye gossoon?"

"He have," says Con.

"Tell him to report to the comp'ny commandher, an' ax him would he like a look at it. Is the comp'ny quartet in practice?"

"How could they be," says he, "whin they haven't sung in t'ree weeks?"

"Then bid them practice," says I, "in a spot where Rodney can hear them. Tell Marshall an' Pease to report to me as ye go out.

"Now, then, lads," says I to Marshall an' Pease, "I have a job for ye," an' I reached into the field desk an' dhrew out the two-ounce gloves we kept wit' us always for settlin' disputes wit'out abuse. "Last night the lie was passed bechune ye. For twelvemont' ye've been achin' for a go at each other; so, accordin' to custom, ye'll settle it wit' the gloves."

"Delighted," says Marshall. "Give me the gloves," says Pease, "an' I'll teach this blackguard Marshall some respect for his betthers."

"Who'll be the referee?" says Marshall.

"The comp'ny commandher," says I. "Go over an' ask him if he'll be good enough to oblige ye——"

There was a step on the bamboo stair, an' Rodney stood in the doorway. "There'll be no fightin' among the men in this comp'ny whilst I'm in command av it," says he, in a cool, dignified voice. "There's been ill feeling enough in it already. Pease, shake hands wit' Marshall."

"But he said I was a liar!" says Pease, drawin' back.

"That's a strong word to use agin' a cumrade, Private Marshall," says Rodney. "Is it not possible ye believed he was mistaken, rather than thriflin' wit' the truth—or did he lie outright?"

Marshall hung his head. "Shake

hands wit' Pease, an' tell him yer sorry," says Rodney. "If not, I'll fight ye meself, an' give ye the finest b'atin' a man ever had."

They shook hands, an' Marshall apologized for callin' Pease a liar. "Now, then," says Rodney, "what did you call Marshall?"

"Never mind what he called me, sor," says Marshall. "'Tis none av the lootinint's business. 'Tis all right, whatever he called me."

Rodney smiled at the pair av them—the first smile he'd lavished on an enlisted man since he come among us. "Sergeant Ryan," says he, "ye will issue a three-day pass to Marshall an' Pease an' Corporal Finnigan, an' tell them to take a bull cart, load Private Gilman on it, and bring him to hospital at Bacoor."

He stood pullin' the end av his long nose an' thinkin'. "I was wondherin', Jawn," says he presintly, "if the men would take it amiss if I provided a return load for that bull cart. There appears to be a betther spirit prevailin' all around. I can feel it in the air. What would you say to a barrel av American beer to dhrink to a betther undherstandin'?"

"L'ave be!" says I. "Ye'll be shp'ilin' the divils before ye know it, sor."

NO RUSH

(The Old Hand Speaks.)

TAPER off, kid, taper off.
What's the use of all this hurry?
You ain't got no train to catch;
You got time, so—you should worry.
I don't mean for you to shirk
While the busy drills is drummin';
But remember, while you work,
There's another shift a-comin'.

You can't shovel *all* the rock;
When you're gone there'll still be plenty.
They'll be diggin' in this mine
Fifteen years from now, or twenty;
So there ain't no call to strain
Till your muscles starts to numbin',
Keep this thought within yer brain
—There's another shift a-comin'.

Do yer work an' earn yer pay,
I ain't askin' yuh to soldier,
But—don't drive yerself to death,
Just remember what I told yer;
Taper off, kid, now an' then,
You can't always keep a-hummin';
Leave *some* work fer other men,
There's another shift a-comin'!

BERTON BRALEY.

The Phantom Cougar

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Piano Jim," "Raw Gold," Etc.

A weird story of a nine-foot cougar who showed himself at no greater distance than fifty yards from the hunter and then mysteriously disappeared. He did not run for cover. He was there, switching his tail, otherwise immobile. And then he was not there

MY first hint that the Punch Bowl had acquired a bad reputation came when I landed in Ashcroft. If I had outfitted at Lytton, the natural point of departure for the Punch Bowl country, I would not have had a tantalizing sense of mystery to start out with, and the course of things might have been altogether deflected. But I did go to Ashcroft, purposely to renew acquaintance with a few people I'd known as a youngster. And I met Bill Hayes there. Bill started the ball rolling.

In the first place, he was the only one of the old crowd I ran across. The rest were scattered. Eight years work many a change. Here the change was mostly personal, human. The bald, dry hills, the encompassing sagebrush, the far-off sentinel clumps of jack pine on the higher levels, were pretty much as I remembered them. Ponderous freight wagons still rumbled in and out of the old Cariboo Road. The single dusty street, upon which fronted the major portion of the town, stood unmarked for better or worse by time, a new building or two, perhaps; no more. The plank sidewalk ranging along past the Grand and the Palace still maintained its ancient unrepair. The same type of men, white-hatted, booted, shirt-sleeved, sat in rickety chairs before these two hostelries, making the same periodic pilgrimages to the respective bars.

But they were not the men I knew. Bill Hayes was the last of the old guard —the others had surrendered to changing times, retired, died, moved on to other economic battlefields. Bill told me why.

"They're railroadin' the country to death. See that new grade? That's the Canadian Northern. Two hundred miles north there's another transcontinental cuttin' through the heart uh the province. Speculators has grabbed the best of the public land, and they're gettin' rich peddlin' it to farmers, to folks that think a hundred and sixty acres means independence. Farmers. Huh! There's bunches of 'em starvin' to death on land that used to grow fat beef steers for your dad an' me. You can't run stock on fifty-dollar-a-acre land."

"The old burg *looks* the same," I ventured.

"She ain't," said Bill. "She's blinked out. There's a line of auto stages shootin' settlers back into the hills, an' there's still some freight goin' into the Cariboo. Outside uh that there's nothin' here no more. Nothin' but a few dead ones here in town, an' a few poverty-stricken mossbacks in the hills. When this railroad work's done, the freight an' transportation business'll be done like the cow business. All we'll need'll

be somebody to come along with a shovel an' bury us. But say, you look as if the world had used you pretty good, Sam. Tell us about it. What you been doin' since you growed up?"

Bill is a privileged character. He was a trail partner with my father twenty years before I was born. So I did not resent his curiosity, nor his slighting reference to my juvenile state at the time I left Ashcroft. If I was not then "growed up," I thought and felt that I was—particularly since I had reached the age of twenty-two, stood five foot eleven in my socks, and was full of an implicit faith that the world at large was my particular orange, waiting to be squeezed. I had made good, in a way. From a country kid with no experience and a lot of vague ambitions I was well on my way to top rank with one of the biggest motion-picture producers in the country. I didn't boast to Bill. I merely told him that I had laid up enough to keep the wolf from the door for a while, that my job was worth five thousand a year—and that I had a four weeks' vacation on my hands; the first one in three years.

"Lucky—you ain't more'n started to live," Bill commented. "What you goin' to do with yourself in this blasted country?"

"Hunt," I answered tersely. "Hunt in the Punch Bowl."

"Huh," said Bill—grunted, rather. He eyed me sidelong, stroking his gray beard.

"You still got the old ranch?" I questioned.

"Uh-uh;" he shook his head. "Sold out five years ago. The farmers got to crowdin' me. I built me up a ranch in the Punch Bowl. But I sold that last spring."

"Up in the Bowl, eh?" said I. "So you had a ranch there. Lord, I wish you still had it. That's where I want to hunt."

"Well, I'm plumb separated f'm the soil," he remarked.

"Then," said I, an idea popping into my mind, for old Bill was a camping partner after my own heart, "I'll organize a pack outfit, and you and I will go make us a camp at those springs on the north slope of the Bowl and get us a bear or two and some venison. Eh? How about it?"

But I couldn't work him up to any enthusiasm for such a jaunt. Which struck me as odd. I remembered old Bill as one who would leave bigger matters go hang to hunt in congenial company. I pressed him for a reason—a long time before he gave me any satisfaction. Then he took my breath away.

"I'm scared uh that place," he blurted out. "I wouldn't go hunt in the Punch Bowl on a bet."

"Why?" I demanded naturally. Bill Hayes, as I knew him, was utterly unafraid of anything that walked, flew, or swam. He was, in fact, a tolerably hard old citizen, and had seen all kinds of wild West in his time. Graduates of that strenuous school don't scare easily.

"Come 'n' have a drink 'n' I'll tell you," he volunteered.

We had the drink, all right, but that was as far as the promised revelation went. We stood at the bar, smoking, and when I prompted him, he reneged on his own proposition.

"Darn it, I can't tell you," he said. "It would sound plumb loony. You'd only laugh. Go on into the Punch Bowl if you want. Maybe you'll sabe. Maybe you won't. But darned if I'll go."

That was all I got out of him. I was no wiser when I left Ashcroft. All I knew was that for some mysterious reason, hard-bitten old-timer as he was, Bill Hayes had sold a good ranch in the Bowl in order to get away from the place, and neither love of sport nor any consideration whatever would in-

duce him to go there with me or anybody else. It was tantalizing. Very. What sort of jinx was on the Punch Bowl? Bill only shrugged his shoulders and bade me go see.

I found something further against the Punch Bowl when I came to Lillioet—the jumping-off place for hunters of bear, goats, and *ovis montana.* There live guides, red men and white, and some in whose veins both sorts of blood mingle, tough, able outdoor men, willing to go anywhere, any time, if the price is right. But none of them wanted to go into the Punch Bowl. They didn't say why. They put me off with one excuse and another, tried to tell me of better hunting grounds. But I knew where I wanted to go. The Bowl is a game preserve, far enough out of the beaten track to be left alone—and there have not been enough hunting licenses issued in B. C. to deplete its resources.

One thing I will say for my own kind, the white guides were all out. The men I tried to hire were, without exception, breeds or pure native. I grew rather peeved the second day, and, hunting up the local deputy game warden, asked him bluntly why the Punch Bowl was taboo. He scouted the notion.

"Rats," he said vigorously. "I guess they've got too much money. It's been a good season. Still it's funny they turn down a snap job. I never heard anything against that country. There's a professor of some sort been living in there two years, a queer old hermit with a stone house, they say. And the feller that bought out Bill Hayes is holding down a ranch at Sheep Springs. I don't know why these fellers don't want to go in there. Course, Siwashes are queer."

I didn't tell him about Bill Hayes' provokingly incomplete avowal. In fact, I didn't tell him anything except that I wanted a man to pack and cook and be company, and that I couldn't hire one for love nor money—not to go into the Punch Bowl. I suppose it rather amused the game warden. He seemed to think I was a genuine tenderfoot.

The upshot of it was that I hired two horses, saddled one, packed my bed and there weeks' grub on the other, and headed for the Bowl alone. I'd been over every square mile of it when I was a kid, and if there was anything in there to scare out a man like Bill Hayes, I was inordinately curious to know what it could be.

II.

There's a trail leading north from Lillioet to a half-baked mining district. Thirty miles out my way branched westerly, and, a little north, two dim wheel ruts winding through the open hills. The Punch Bowl sits fairly high on the eastern slope of the Cascades, a great circular pit, as its name implies, fifteen miles across the floor, level and parked with grassy meadows between groves of black and lodge-pole pine. Great peaks invest it like a ring of forts.

It is a beautiful spot. There are springs ice cold under the hottest sun, grass that sweeps to a rider's stirrup, trout in the one good-sized stream that threads its area, game in every wooded cañon, on every precipitous slope that lifted to a rocky timber line. I knew the Bowl like a book. My father summer ranged many a big herd in there. There was no ranch in the Bowl then. We lived under canvas from the spring drive till we went out with the first November snow. We never considered wintering in there. We had the whole country to pick from, and there was a milder climate lower down, and less snow. But I had often thought that if I could make a pile of money some way, I'd like to come back and build up an old-time Western ranch in the Bowl, have a little isolated principality

where I could run a couple of thousand head of stock, and be a benevolent despot, after the way of the old cowmen.

When I dropped over the rim of the Bowl at noon next day I sat on the crest and looked about me with a pioneer's exultation. It spread below me, majestically girdled with its mountains, peaceful, very still, green pines surrounding like a mantle, the grass of the bottoms waving like ripe wheat, yellow in the eye of a September sun. I drank it in avidly, alone without being lonely, forty-five miles from anywhere, and glad of it. The contrast to crowded streets, to elbowing throngs, moved me to further gladness. I was getting back to first principles—some of us, I dare say, are more primitive than others.

Still, one is by instinct social. I wished mildly that I had some one along to enjoy that vista, the caressing touch of winds freighted with piney smells, the perfect blue of the sky that roofed the Bowl. But unless he was the right sort, I knew I was better off alone. I say "he." Probably in a more sentimental mood I might have changed the gender. Only I wasn't much given to that sort of moods. Women hadn't played much of a part in my life. Not for lack of propinquity, either. In eight years of urban living I had been thrown in contact with plenty of women, all sorts and conditions of them. Somehow I had never reacted violently to their emotional stimulus. No single one of them had ever cut much figure in my scheme of things. I don't know why. It just happened that way. So I was heart-whole and fancy-free as I dipped down the sloping side of the Bowl, intent upon sport with rod and gun, my mind on camp and my own primitive cooking and a bed under the stars. There were, I knew, two separately peopled establishments in the Punch Bowl, but I was not particularly interested in them.

I was, though, whenever I thought of it, inordinately interested in what manner of thing, person, or occurrence had driven Bill Hayes out, had made him genuinely afraid to come back. What possible foundation *could* there be for such an attitude? I might have thought Bill was "stringing" me—only for those Lillioet guides. They gave no reason. They simply backed out when I told them where I wanted to go. Why? I craved to know the answer.

Queer how a thing which, considered logically, is essentially absurd has the power to so excite a man's curiosity. I lay awake half that night speculating vainly upon the matter. I had absolutely nothing to go on. That was what made it so tantalizing.

Partly because of that, partly because I was on an expedition where I could roam as the mood dictated, I saddled up next morning and rode over to take a look at the ranch Bill Hayes had built and sold. I knew the spot well enough. I'd made many a camp there. Where the professor mentioned by the game warden was located, I didn't know, and cared less. But it happened that I came on this gentleman's place first, and perceived that it, too, had its base on Sheep Springs.

Viewing it from a couple of hundred yards' distance, I didn't need to be told that it wasn't the Rayes Ranch. There was nothing of a ranch flavor about it. One building loomed on the summit of a low knoll, a square box of a house with a little tower on each corner, and a high, glass-paned cupola rising from the center of the flat roof. It was built wholly of stone, gray sandstone, roughly masoned, a thick-walled, massive structure. Narrow windows slotted the four sides. More like the miniature copy of some feudal castle it seemed than a dwelling in a hundrum stock country. Outbuilding, stables,

sheds, corrals, and fences there were none. Just this somber bulk of stone. Yet not so somber, after all. When I rode closer I saw that a bright border of flowers ran along the foot of each gray wall, that on the main entrance climbing vines reached above the door arch. And a middle-aged man in a black skullcap and red leather slippers, with a short, pointed beard of gray and thick pince-nez astride his nose, looked inquiringly up at me as I rounded the corner. His eyes were a bright, piercing blue, and they regarded me with just a perceptible narrowing of the lids.

"How-dye-do," I greeted.

"How do you do," he responded—very precisely, but without the least shade of expression, hospitable, hostile, or otherwise, in his tone.

In town one would never think of halting in a stranger's dooryard and striking up a conversation. Out there it is different. I grew up in that country during a period when every ranch house welcomed passing stranger and invited guest alike. No man passed another on the trail without hearty greeting unless his haste was great. Once more in the same environment, I found myself easily adopting the old habit, naturally anticipating the old hospitable attitude. I slid sidewise in my saddle and made a fresh start, as much in a spirit of perversity as from any other impulse. My graybeard rather nettled me with his cool indifference—as if I were but part of the local scenery instead of flesh and blood. I remarked upon the singular quality of his habitation, told him I was returned to that region after a long absence, commented on the beauty and isolation of the Punch Bowl. He replied in frigidly courteous monosyllables, but he did not ask me to get down, nor how far I had come, nor if I were hungry, nor in any wise did he rise to the occasion as the custom of the country dictated. He maintained a surprising degree of aloofness. And since a little of that went a long way with me, I shook up my horse and rode on.

"My friend of the skullcap and the four-towered house of stone is evidently all sufficient unto himself, even if he does live forty miles from nowhere," I reflected. "What he ought to have is a fence around his house, and a 'no-trespassing' sign posted up."

I didn't waste much thought on him, however, for, close at hand, some few hundred yards distant and about a hundred feet lower, spread a typical ranch layout of the kind common in the early days. Log house, log stables, stacks of hay inclosed with a pole fence, corrals, a little horse pasture. On the flat beyond, a few head of stock grazing. It looked good to me, I can tell you. It looked like home. Perhaps the knowledge that Bill Hayes had built most of it served to spur my imagination. You can graft a range-bred man on a city, but the memory of open spaces, of wide horizons, and of friendly folk at the end of every trail stays with him a long time. I could almost fancy that familiar faces would peer through the windows as I rode in, and well-known voices yell hearty greetings at me. Those were purely fantastic notions. Nevertheless, it pleased me to entertain them.

Instead, a girl came out on the porch as I drew up my mount. Perhaps I stared rudely. I hadn't been quite prepared for a woman. Certainly not of that type, in that place. I cannot say even now what sort of dress she wore. It was something soft and cream-colored. Her hair was blue-black, a cloudy mass above a pale oval face, and the red of her lips was like a dab of carmine on old ivory. She looked at me out of big gray eyes unwaveringly. I am not much on figures of speech, but she stood out against

her background like some strange tropical flower. Ranch women, as they loomed in my youthful experience, ranged naturally in two divisions; the middle-aged and prematurely old, weather-beaten, wearing their burden of toilsome years in a rut with dull patience—and the young, who were buxom and tanned, rudely vigorous as their environment. This girl looked like a vitalized Sargent portrait. Her voice when she spoke to me served to heighten that impression, soft and clear and musical in its inflection.

"How do you do," she said. "Are you——"

She broke off short. The natural pallor of her face turned to a dead white. Her gaze struck past me, fixed and fearful. I turned in my saddle and smiled to myself, understanding her fear and discounting it even as my hand reached for the rifle slung under the stirrup leather. It was nothing. Sufficient to frighten a woman, a woman unused to prowling wild beasts. One might come unexpectedly on the like anywhere in the Punch Bowl, though the brutes came seldom so boldly to a ranch. Nothing more than a long-bodied, catlike beast, the cougar of the Coast Range—own brother to the panther of leather-stocking days. They range the length of the Rockies and Cascades, predatory brutes where game and stock is concerned, slinking cowards before man. This was an extra-fine specimen, eight or nine foot, I judged, from nose to tail tip. He stood in plain view, at no greater distance than fifty yards, tail weaving slowly from side to side, lips parted to show white, gleaming teeth. I pulled down on him with a cougar pelt as a trophy—in my mind.

Then the beast was gone.

Gone with my eyes full upon him, the foresight just drawing on his gray shoulder. I cannot describe the amazing feature of his disappearance. He did not leap for cover. There was no cover within sixty feet. I cannot even say that he moved. He was there, switching his tail, otherwise immobile. And then he was not there.

III.

I sat my horse, staring, dumfounded. The thing was incomprehensible, impossible. I had clean forgotten the girl. Her voice recalled me. She had come down the steps and stood looking up at me now, with one slender hand pulling at a wisp of my horse's mane.

"What did you see?" she asked tensely.

"What did I see?" I echoed blankly. "Good Lord, wasn't it plain enough? Don't you know a cougar when you see one? What *I* want to know is where did he get to so quick."

"I thought—I thought——" she was whispering, and swaying a little on her feet. "I was afraid it was a hallucination."

She put both hands to her face and fell against my horse. I grabbed for her and got a firm enough hold on one shoulder to keep her from falling, while I dismounted. She hadn't fainted, but pretty near it, and I, without stopping to think of the etiquette applicable to such occasions, picked her up bodily and carried her into the house.

The door opened into a big living room, as different from the ordinary ranch interior as the girl herself was different from the ordinary ranch type, inasmuch as it was furnished and arranged with a degree of comfort bordering on luxury. On one side of a big stone fireplace stood a piano, on the other side a broad leather couch. I laid the girl on this. She was conscious, but apparently the strength had all gone out of her.

"Shall I get you a drink?" I asked.

She nodded. I started through an archway into what I could see was a

dining room, on the supposition that the kitchen would be off that.

A sideboard, with a decanter and glasses on a tray caught my eye. Investigation of the ruby liquor proved it port wine. I poured a stiff drink of that and took it to her. She was sitting up by then and she swallowed the wine with a wry face. As a bracer it proved speedily effective, or she was one of those rare women who react at once from any sort of nervous let-down, for presently she shrugged her shoulders and said to me, with a faint touch of color showing in her cheeks:

"What a silly thing!"

"Which?" I inquired.

"Me," she smiled. "Getting wabbly like that. Did you *really* see that animal?"

"Well," I answered dryly, "if he'd lingered a second longer I'd have had his pelt. I can't quite understand where he went so suddenly, but I suppose that's subject to explanation. Did it frighten you so much as all that?"

"Well, yes, I must admit that it did," she said slowly. "You see I've been here alone for three days—and it has sort of got on my nerves. My brother is in Ashcroft, trying to hire a man or two for the ranch. When you rode in, I was hoping you might be one of them. But I can't quite make you fit the part."

I grinned. That last was a trifle ambiguous. Whether I failed to measure up or down to the typical B. C. stock hand, I had to infer for myself. I did begin to feel a wholly unjustifiable resentment against the absent brother for leaving a girl like that three days alone in a desolate area like the Punch Bowl. And I remember thinking, in the same breath, how queer it was that I should develop so instantaneously a well-defined protective instinct. I felt that that girl needed looking after, and that the job properly belonged to me. I suppose it hits some men that way.

"No," I admitted. "I can't plead guilty to being the new hired man. I just happened to wander in."

From that I went on to tell her who I was and what brought me there, and how the Punch Bowl happened to be familiar ground. She brightened perceptibly during the recital. I learned that her name was Durand.

"Won't you put up your horse and have lunch?" she said presently. "It's almost noon."

"Thanks," I accepted gladly. "That sounds like the old days, when everybody kept open house."

"Hospitality ought to be the rule in this country, where a passing stranger is a social event," she smiled. "I thought it was."

"It used to be," I observed. "But they don't all practice it now."

I went on to tell her of my casual call at the four-towered house of stone.

"Mr. Applegard is something of a character," she said. "I've met him twice. He's a recluse, almost. Nobody knows anything about him."

Mr. Applegard certainly was a character, I reflected, as I went to the stable with my nag. His manner as well as his dwelling certified to that. I didn't consider him an added attraction to the Punch Bowl.

The small stream flowing from Sheep Spring made its way along a shallow course between house and corrals. All the flat area immediately surrounding the buildings was beaten to smooth dust by the hoofs of stock, saving only a fenced plot of green behind the house. I took thought to myself as I moved. I had marked the spot where the cougar stood. I was very curious about that beast. I wanted to know by what means he accomplished the vanishing act. On the dusty level his tracks would lie as if in new-fallen snow. I led my horse

over there, stopped, looked, looked again, finally left my nag stand while I circled slowly in widening casts.

I came back to him all up in the air. There were no cougar tracks. Not a solitary pad mark. The loose dirt spread unmarked, save for unmistakable hoofprints of stock twenty-four hours old. I glanced back at the house, and thought to discern the girl's face at a window. But I could not be sure of that. I began reluctantly to feel myself the victim of what Miss Durand had mentioned—a hallucination. And I went on to the stable in rather a mixed state of mind, in which incredulous amazement chiefly predominated. It was the sort of experience commonly and jocularly accredited to a man with about a quart of Scotch under his belt. But—the girl had likewise shared the experience. Manifestly, then—— At this stage I mentally threw up my hands and stalked back to the house. I couldn't find any explanation.

IV.

I was aided in turning my back on the incident by circumstances. In the midst of our lunch Tom Durand drove up, with a Chinaman in the buggy seat beside him, and, jogging in the rear, two stock hands, swarthy-faced young men with a touch of Siwash blood in them, which manifested itself not only in their complexion but in a sort of barbaric splendor of riding gear. They turned their saddle stock into the pasture along with Durand's team, and the quartet invaded the house in search of food.

I found Durand a pleasant young chap, four or five years older than his sister, black-haired and gray-eyed like her. But the poor devil was touched with the White Plague. His cough and the hectic flush over each cheek bone betrayed his trouble. I could understand without much telling why they were there, bucking a game that was wholly strange to them. And I learned, during the afternoon, that my conjecture was right. They were up in the high, dry country, all their eggs in that ranch basket, to give Tom Durand a fighting chance for his life. They were as much out of their accustomed element in the stock business as I would be in command of a full-rigged ship. Tom had been something in a brokerage firm in New York, and his sister—well I gathered later that she had turned her back on a promising musical career. Between them they'd raised enough money to buy the ranch and cattle as it stood. They'd got a bargain, if they had only known something about the business, and I wondered more than ever why old Bill Hayes had let go his last foothold on the range with beef steadily soaring skyward in price.

Even with that, I considered their venture unwise. I might be a trifle rusty, but I knew local conditions. I knew what a man had to do to handle cattle successfully in the Punch Bowl. Tom Durand didn't. He was full of enthusiasm, and about as practical as a small boy with his first watch. But he was a wonderfully likable sort. Both of them seemed to regard me frankly as a social dispensation not to be easily relinquished. Isolation makes short work of formality. When mid-afternoon rolled around and I bethought me of my camp five miles distant and my pack horse still on a picket rope, they jointly insisted that I make the ranch headquarters during my stay in the Bowl.

I didn't hesitate much about accepting. Different reasons influenced me in spite of the fact that I had planned to spend the time wandering about the Bowl, making my camp wherever the spirit moved me. I might as well frankly admit that Emily Durand was the chief reason. Perhaps that indi-

cates extreme susceptibility. I don't think so. No one ever accused me of being mushy. Neither am I in the habit of trying to delude myself about anything, particularly my feelings. There was something about her that drew me strongly. I don't think that many men can clearly define the reasons why any given woman attracts them. There's something that stirs the emotions, rouses the masculine desire to possess, fans to a flame instincts that may always have smoldered. Not being versed in sex psychology, I do not attempt to explain the whys and wherefores. Something about Emily Durand appealed mightily to me. I didn't stop to consider whether my personality made a like impression on her. I merely recite that I was glad to jump at a chance to see a great deal more of her. It may have come into being rather suddenly, that feeling. I couldn't honestly deny its existence, and I couldn't play the hypocrite with myself.

We didn't say anything to Tom about the cougar. I hadn't even mentioned to her the mysterious absence of cougar tracks. I thought about it now and then, with a good deal of perplexity. But as she didn't speak of it, neither did I. It might have been a mutual illusion. I let it go at that, anyway.

Tom and Emily rode with me to my camp, and paid me some extravagant compliments on my skill as a packer. They'd been in the country since early spring, and neither of them had fathomed the possibilities of the diamond hitch. It seemed to them quite an achievement for a man to pack three weeks' grub, his bedding, and sundries on a horse's back, and so lash it with forty foot of rope that it would ride forever. My pack horse was a fractious brute, but once the diamond hitch was on that pack all his antics were futile. We were home by sundown. The chink was in command of the kitchen, and, judging by the dinner he served, he knew his business. Afterward Tom dug up some cigars a lot better than mine and we adjourned to the porch. The two stock hands sat playing seven-up in the bunkhouse doorway.

"Isn't it a peach of a place?" Tom Durand said to me. "I never was strong on scenic effects, but this gets to me. And the air. It goes to my head almost like liquor. I wish I'd had sense enough to get out and hunt a place like this two years ago. Aside from the health question, I don't think I'll ever be satisfied in town again."

The scenic effect was there, all right. The Punch Bowl lifted its towering rim high above us, one side in creeping shadow, the other a yellow blaze in the slanting sun rays. Purple and misty peaks lifted farther still. White ribbons of spraying water split the green cañons. A bunch of wild cattle came stringing out on a ridge, two hundred strong, black and red and spotted beasts, heads high, the sun flashing on their curving horns. Nearer, a saddle horse outside the pasture tinkled his bell musically as he grazed. Otherwise there rested upon the Bowl a restful silence, an atmosphere of untroubled peace.

We walked out a little way on the grassy slope. I turned from a casual survey of the odd, towered house of stone standing Sphinxlike on its little eminence, to catch a curiously intent look on the girl's face—as if she were watching for something. And her gaze was fixed on that bare, dusty area between house and corrals. Her expression changed when she saw me look. She smiled. But it was a forced smile. Tom had moved off a few steps, staring at the moving herd with a field glass.

"Looking for that phantom cougar?" I bantered.

It seemed to startle her.

"Phantom?" she echoed. I seemed to discern a quiver to her lips.

"What's the matter?" I asked lightly. "Nerves?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in a low tone. "I've always despised women with nerves. And still I seem to be approaching that unaccountable condition myself."

"Why?" I asked. "Surely not because a wild beast happened to stray into your dooryard? Probably you fretted a lot when you were alone so long."

"I'm sure I don't know," she said—but in a manner far from convincing, as if she knew but was reluctant to tell; which was natural enough, seeing that I was a comparative stranger. It ran in my mind that something more than the nervousness that comes of being lonely troubled her, but we didn't follow up the subject, for Tom joined us again, and we went back to the house.

I turned in early. I knew a berry thicket three miles above Sheep Springs where, at that season, bear were apt to be found, and I wanted to be on the spot at daybreak. I'd made it a condition of accepting their hospitable offer that no one was to fuss about me. So I rose quietly in the little hours, made free with the kitchen stove for coffee and a strip of fried bacon, and set out.

It proved a fruitless hunt. Tracks and torn bushes attested Bruin's presence, but I failed to sight one, or even a deer. Philosophically consoling myself with the fact that I had a good many days yet to garner a grizzly's pelt, I turned homeward, getting into the ranch about eleven.

Tom and his men were out on an expedition after cattle, Emily told me. The Chinaman set me out a lunch. Afterward I was content to stretch my legs in a grass chair on the porch and talk. The morning's tramp had been a hard one, and I was pretty soft.

Again, and repeatedly, I surprised that queer, expectant look on Emily Durand's face. No matter what the subject, her eyes would presently turn questioningly over that bare, dusty foreground. I couldn't help noticing. If I'd known her more intimately I would have asked why. As it was, I took it out in wondering.

My wondering didn't last long, for suddenly her hands tightened on the arms of her chair and her face went slowly white. But her gaze remained steadily fixed, and, following its direction, I got a jolt myself.

There was the cougar again—in the same spot—switching his tail as before.

"Good Lord!" I made involuntary exclamation. "I'll fix you this time."

My rifle stood in a corner of the porch. As I rose to get it, the girl put out her hand. Her voice was shaky.

"It's no use to shoot. I tried it—twice."

"What!"

"Every day of the three days that Tom was gone," she whispered, "that thing appeared there at about the same time. I shot at it. It doesn't mind bullets. It isn't real."

I had the rifle now.

"We'll see," I muttered, "whether he's bulletproof. I never saw a cougar yet that was."

I'm a pretty fair shot with a rifle. It wasn't over sixty yards. On a bet I could have plunked the brute in his thick, cat-shaped head. As it was, to make sure, I drew a bead on his reddish-gray shoulder.

The dust flew when I pulled trigger. But the cougar stood there undisturbed, his long tail weaving slow from side to side. He didn't even turn his head. I fired again deliberately—without result. And as I looked down the barrel a third time the beast seemed to be

there in such plain view that I could see the white teeth between his parted lips—and then I was looking at dry, dusty earth. He didn't fade from sight, or leap away. He was there, and then he was gone.

I drew a long breath and set my rifle down. Irrational, impossible, preposterous, what you please. I tell it for what it's worth. I didn't need to be reminded that I'd looked for tracks the day before and found none, but I took my gun and walked out there, and Emily Durand followed. There wasn't a mark in the loose dirt. Only the fresh furrows my two shots had plowed.

I don't remember that either of us said anything. We stood staring blankly for a minute, then turned back toward the house. I'm not superstitious. Logically, my mind refutes all the ancient myths of spook and phantom, of disembodied spirits and haunted places. At the same time, I will admit that I took each step fighting an unseemly impulse to look back. Emily, keeping step with me, did glance over her shoulder. The second or third time her head turned she gave a suppressed little cry and caught me by the arm. I whirled. There the beast stood again. I tell you it was uncanny. I didn't lift my rifle. The fatalistic conviction seized me that jacketed bullets would not dispel that illusion—or whatever it was. The thing couldn't be—yet, paradoxically, there it was. I think I hurried a little, even, to gain the porch, when Emily loosed that frightened grip of my arm. She brushed back a vagrant lock of hair as we faced about to view our mysterious beast, and straightened her shoulders defiantly.

"Silly," she breathed. "But it does scare me. Can you explain that, Mr. Cross?"

I shook my head. It was a phenomenon I couldn't classify, and commonplaces didn't seem to fit the occasion. The Chinese cook appeared in the doorway just then.

"You wantum—ah——" he began to address Miss Durand, breaking off when his roving black eye fell on the cougar stationary in his pose except for that swaying tail.

"Klooga—klooga," he pointed excitedly. "Why you no shoot um?"

"Shoot um twice," I answered casually as possible. "No hit."

"I shoot um," he said eagerly.

He went pad-padding in his slippers hurriedly to the rear. In a few seconds he was back, a long-barreled Colt of the frontier model in his hand. Chinamen aren't much on gun play, as a rule, but this fellow went about it as if he knew his business. Perhaps he'd served his apprenticeship in a tong war or two. He was an oldish fellow, spare built, very wrinkled.

Pow! went his first shot, and the dust flew. He snarled some Oriental malediction and let go again. And just as had happened to me while he squinted over his gun, he found himself suddenly gazing at nothing.

I hadn't reckoned on coolie superstition. That Chinaman's face blanched. The skinny hands that held the Colt actually vibrated. His mouth opened wide and round and remained so for full half a minute. It would have been laughable to see him, under different circumstances. Then he backed silently into the house, never once looking at us, his sloe eyes wide and unwaveringly on the spot where the cougar had been.

Within five minutes we heard the clump of shoes on the back porch. We glanced around the corner, and there was Lung Chong making off, his bundle of belongings slung across his narrow shoulders.

"Lung," the girl cried sharply, "where you go?"

"I go Ashcloft," he whined over his

shoulder, never halting. "No stlay heah no mo'. Velly bad place. I go all same quick."

V.

"Well, we've lost a perfectly good cook," Emily said, in a flat, expressionless tone. "I suppose the men will see something and go next. There must be a curse on this place."

"Forget it," I said slangily. "It's the queerest thing I ever heard of, much less saw. But every effect has its natural cause, if we can only locate the cause. Has Tom seen anything like this?"

"I'm sure not," she answered shakily. The thing had strung her up to the snapping point, I could see; but she was pretty game. "The two men he had here must have seen something, for they quit in a hurry one day, without any known reason, and they acted funny. That was why Tom went to town. I'd never noticed anything, not till I was here alone. Then I began to see things. Not only the cougar—although he appeared every day."

"What else did you see?" I asked.

"It sounds incredible," she said slowly. "The first day I saw the cougar—and shot at him twice. The next day, about noon, he came again, and kept coming and vanishing for an hour. About three o'clock I was sitting on the porch here, and three men on horseback appeared in the yard. They looked like cowboys. I thought at first they were hunting cattle, and I started for the corrals, to speak to them. Then they seemed to have some sort of quarrel. One pulled his gun and shot, and the man he shot at fell off his horse. It frightened me, of course. I didn't dream it wasn't reality—until they blinked out just like the cougar does. Afterward I recollected that while I saw the puff of smoke from the revolver, I heard no report. Nor did I hear a sound, although they seemed to be yelling at each other. Then, a little after that, there was an Indian, all paint and feathers, standing right by the porch steps, making gestures with one hand. *He* seemed real enough, too. But he went out like the rest, when I was about ready to scream. Oh, it must sound perfectly crazy. I've been trying to persuade myself that I must have been light-headed—or dreamed all this. But I didn't. They kept coming and going for two hours, going through the same performance. Didn't I look at you sort of queer when you rode in?"

"Well, perhaps," I admitted.

"I couldn't tell whether you were a reality or just another vision till you spoke," she said. "If I'd been here alone another twenty-four hours, I believe I should have been clean out of my mind. I can't fathom it. It gives me the shudders. I've got so I watch all the time for something to appear, and every time I see anything it's a shock. I never believed in ghostly appearances. Do you?"

"No," I said bluntly, "I don't. No intelligent person does. I'm stumped, all right. But I don't admit the supernatural. These aren't the conventional apparitions, anyway, such as the Society of Psychical Research investigates and prints learned brochures about. They appear only in broad day."

"Then what lies back of these appearances?" she demanded tensely. "What mysterious agency controls them? What are they?"

There she had me. I knew no more than she; less, for I had not seen the same number of manifestations.

"I don't know," said I frankly, "but I'm in on it whatever it is, if it can possibly be fathomed. The only thing we can do, though, is to stand pat and see what comes next. Better tell your brother, so he won't get a jolt when *he* sees something."

"He'd think we were insane," she declared. "I don't know what to do. You saw how that Chinaman took it. Other men, comparatively ignorant and full of native superstition, won't act very much different. I don't know that I could go on staying here myself if this sort of thing continues. One would never know what was real and what wasn't. It frightens me, in spite of a real determination not to be frightened."

I could very well understand that state of mind. But having had only the comparatively mild sample of the vanishing cougar, I thought that, after all, perhaps overstrung nerves might account for the more elaborate appearances. You see, I was still highly incredulous. It simply *couldn't* be anything but some trick of the vision. But I could understand her reluctance about telling Tom such a staggering yarn. Even I, who'd had ocular demonstration, doubted the actual appearance of three mounted men and a painted savage. I didn't doubt Emily Durand's word—I merely doubted the accuracy of her observation.

So we decided to keep it to ourselves until such time as these queer manifestations occurred before the others. It would be time enough to talk then. As to what we should do more than talk—well, to me action appeared a futile consideration, like a man proposing to abate an earthquake or control the tides. No man can deal with phenomena whose factors are totally unknown.

We loafed watchfully on the porch most of the afternoon, seeing nothing. Tom Durand came in and bestowed a hungry man's blessing on the departed chink. We didn't have to devise any explanations for his exit from the scene. A Chinaman's actions aren't often explainable from a white man's point of view. Tom was chiefly regretful because it put a burden of housework on his sister. But we got around that by all pitching in on the cooking and dishwashing, breed riders and all. Then we went to bed early, I to lie awake a long time puzzling over this most puzzling thing. I fell asleep, wondering if such weird happenings lay behind Bill Hayes' reluctance to hunt in the Bowl. He had sold a perfectly good ranch for two thousand below the market price. Did visions scare Bill away? Unaccountable apparitions would be about the only thing that could possibly shake old Bill Hayes' iron nerve. I wished I could get hold of him, and find out what *he* knew.

VI.

Daylight found me awake, but I didn't go hunting. I had the feeling that there was bigger game closer at hand. Every man worth his salt yearns to solve a baffling mystery when it confronts him. How it was to be solved was beyond my comprehension. I didn't even know what had to be solved. It seemed to be a case of sit tight and look on. I wondered if our neighbor in the imitation fortress had observed any unaccountable appearances. I mentioned this to Emily after Tom and his men set out on another stock-hunting jaunt.

"If he did," said she, "I dare say he would merely adjust his glasses, gaze at the thing, and say that it was rather peculiar."

"Why, I wonder," was my next idle speculation, "is a man like that burying himself in a place like this? He must certainly appreciate solitude."

"I should imagine so," Miss Durand replied. "He walked by here once armed with a butterfly net and a camera, and stopped a few minutes. He seems to be an educated man, with a fondness for his own company, natural history, and chemical experiments. He asked us to drop in. We did, a few

days later. He was so preoccupied that he was barely civil. He has a Chinese house servant, and he hasn't been out of the Bowl this summer. Once a month a wagon brings him supplies from Lillooet. There you have all the particulars, as I know them. Isn't it an odd-looking house? He had it built two years ago, they say. I don't think anything spooky would get on *his* nerves. He'd likely view them with cold-blooded scientific interest."

"I wonder what sort of demonstration's on the program for us to-day?" I said lightly. "I'm rather expectant."

She mustered up a wry face.

"I'm more concerned with the why," she said.

That, of course, was also my chief concern, but one can't elucidate a mystery without a single key. So we set about to kill time, and succeeded so well one way and another that eleven o'clock rolled around in short order.

"Goodness, I'll have to get busy in the kitchen," Emily declared. "Tom said they would be in about noon."

She disappeared into the region of pots and pans. I lit a cigar and cocked my feet upon the porch rail, and had barely made myself at ease, when I heard the unmistakable buzz of an automobile.

Now, I had come over the only road into the Punch Bowl two days earlier. As I remembered grades and curves, it was no road for a car, no trip a man would undertake with a motor except of absolute necessity. This had no more than flashed across my mind than the machine rolled into sight, a dusty driver at the wheel, two passengers in the tonneau. There was nothing phantomlike about them. But they surprised me mightily by their presence, nevertheless, for I knew them both. My first feeling was of amazement to see them on such a pilgrimage. I might have thought them out on a hunt if I hadn't known they were the sort of men who did most of their hunting on Broadway.

I sat pretty well back in a shady corner. It wasn't my ranch. I didn't feel called upon to do the honors. In fact, I didn't think about it—I was too busy conjecturing why Fulton Berry and John T. Slade should be in the Punch Bowl at all. Fulton Berry was chief mogul in the American Photoscope—next to the company I was hooked up with, the biggest motion-picture concern in the United States. Slade was his right bower, a sort of general utility man, a versatile beggar, who could do anything from playing a lead in photo drama to wrecking a million-dollar competitor. In my own capacity as a company representative I'd bucked up against that gentleman before. And the Punch Bowl region was so utterly out of *his* natural orbit that I had a license to wonder why he was there.

Slade opened the door and clambered stiffly out as soon as the brakes set. Emily Durand came out on the porch. Slade doffed his hat with an impressive bow.

"Is this where Mr. Tierney Applegard resides, may I ask?" said he, in his very best manner.

"No. Mr. Applegard lives in that stone house on the hill," she replied.

"Ah! Thank you."

But he didn't climb back in the car and go about his business, I noticed. He stood smiling his heavy-jawed sweetest at Miss Durand. Right there, quite on impulse, I injected myself into the proceedings. Not that Emily Durand wasn't quite equal to squelching a regiment of his caliber. But I never did like that gross type of man, anyway, and I felt a hot wave of dislike for Slade's frankly sensual stare. Probably he thought he had run across a remarkable good-looking country girl. It's an obsession of the Slade type that they're personally irresistible to the unsophisticated female. I dropped my

chair legs with a thump and leaned over the porch rail.

"Hello, Slade," said I. "You're a long way from the bright lights. Some fine roads for touring in this section, eh?"

He looked up at me, and I was quite sure that with recognition he grunted something profane. But his business smile remained on the job.

"Why, how-de-do, Cross," he responded affably. "That road thing supposed to be a joke? A bit off your own circuit yourself, aren't you?"

"Oh, no," I returned. "I was raised in this country, so naturally I come back here when I draw a vacation."

"Oh, I see," Slade commented. "I see."

He looked at me shrewdly and was, I think, on the point of speaking further, when Berry reached and tapped him on the shoulder. Miss Durand had vanished within. Slade cast a fleeting glance after her as he turned to Berry. They exchanged a few sentences in a discreet undertone. I had no personal acquaintance with Fulton Berry. So I was a little surprised, to say the least, when that eminent personage—eminent, that is, in the producing end of the moving-picture world—called me by name and asked me to come down. I didn't want to seem churlish, so I went. Slade climbed into the seat beside his superior.

"Mr. Cross," Berry addressed me bluntly, "we've had our eye on you, and your record with the International indicates that you're a valuable man. The American Photoscope wants young men with ability. The International pays you five thousand a year. We'll give you seven thousand five hundred, with a three-year contract—and a bonus of five thousand cash to sign up and get into harness at once."

I suppose he meant to take my breath away, to sweep me off my feet with this offer of big money—and he pretty near succeeded. But not so that I swallowed hook, line, and sinker. Not quite. In the first place, I felt a certain loyalty to the International. In the second place, I neither liked nor trusted the Berry-Slade combination. There was a joker somewhere in that offer. I knew where I stood with the International. This impromptu holding out of a bonanza from a competing organization smelled fishy to me, and, on the impulse of the moment, I answered Mr. Fulton Berry as bluntly as he had put his proposition to me."

"What do you want?" I asked. "The executive ability I may happen to have—or something you think I know, that you want to know?"

That last was purely random. I couldn't think of any knowledge of International affairs in my possession worth a cash bonus of five thousand to the Photoscope people. If unwittingly I had such information, I felt that I owed it to my own concern. I had never found them lax in appreciation, monetary or otherwise.

Berry eyed me narrowly.

"Well," he drawled, "both. You understand, I think."

"Maybe I do," said I shortly. "But you've pushed the wrong button. I'm not selling out. If I were, I'd seek a more reliable market than the American Photoscope. I don't know any kind of contract you fellows wouldn't break if you wanted to. You've done it before. I prefer to stay with a sure thing. A bird in the hand, you know."

Berry leaned forward, scowling, and pointed a fat forefinger pistolwise at me.

"You're a fool," said he. "You're passing up a chance to make a good rake-off. We'll beat you to it, anyway."

"Maybe you will," I returned carelessly. "But you've never put over anything on us yet. Not in a legitimate

way of business. And that's the only kind the International deals in."

That was our last word on the subject, for Berry gruffly ordered the chauffeur to drive on, and they went rolling up the slope toward Applegard's stone house. I resumed my seat and cigar, and did some tall thinking. What in Sam Hill did those fellows think I knew that was worth a bribe of five thousand dollars? Queer? Exceedingly so. The Punch Bowl was proving a region of manifold surprises.

That train of thought caused me to look up, to glance over the yard questioningly. What I saw drove the Berry-Slade combination out of my mind for the time being. The cat had come back! Yes. There was my cougar switching his tail in the same old spot. Only for a few seconds, though. Then he blinked out. And he didn't reappear, although I watched eagerly until Emily called me to lunch when Tom and his men rode in. I glanced up at the stone house and saw the big car drawn up at the door and sundry figures standing about where Applegard had his chair the day I stopped there. When we came out after lunch, the machine was gone.

No visions came to disturb us that afternoon. Somehow I labored to persuade myself that it was all an illusion. And I decided to go hunt the berry patch again. It lay southeast of Sheep Spring, so that I passed close by the stone house on my way. It was just beginning to break day, and the square stone building loomed vague and silent on my right. And I saw another funny thing that morning. Neither more nor less than the machine which had brought those two into the Bowl wheeling south toward the wagon trail, with Berry alone in the tonneau. They were not going from Applegard's, either, but from a point where the Bowl pitches up to its mountain rim. This in that gray hour between dawn and sunrise. I wondered what had become of Slade, if he had remained as Applegard's guest, and, if so, why the machine bore away at that angle so early in the morning. Then I concluded that it was really none of my business, and rode up to my hunting ground.

I had a little better luck this time, inasmuch as failing to connect with a grizzly I potted a fat buck deer with a notable spread of horn. So that I rode in to the ranch, about ten-thirty, quite pleased with myself.

I found a considerable to-do there. Tom's men had their private stock saddled and beds packed to hit the trail. Durand himself was hotly expostulating when I arrived.

"Say, Cross," he turned to me. "Did you ever hear of such damned nonsense? These guys have seen a ghost —a whole flock of ghosts. Ghosts in broad daylight. Suffering Cæsar! They're going to jump the ranch like a couple of scared rabbits. What do you know about that?"

He was grinning derisively, and mad as a wet hen, besides. I quite understood his predicament. He was behind with his winter preparations—I had drawn on my own local experience to point that out to him. Fall was coming on. And men were hard to get, to say nothing of the time wasted in getting them. The two stood shamefacedly before him, one scraping uneasily in the dirt with his boot heel. The other addressed me.

"It's all right to talk," he growled. "We ain't the first to see queer things around here. I didn't believe what folks told me. But I sure do now. I wouldn't stay here if you'd give me the blamed ranch."

"What do you think you saw?" I inquired curiously.

He cast an uneasy glance about the yard as he replied:

"Three men sittin' on their horses right here by the corral. Plain as the

nose on your face. They're havin' a row. One pulls his gun. I could see her smoke when she went off—an' not a sound. Then they weren't there. That's plenty for me."

"Did you ever hear of anything so crazy?" Durand broke in.

"Maybe not so crazy as yuh think," the half-breed retorted sullenly. "There was a feller shot here not so awful long ago. There always was somethin' queer about this Punch Bowl. The Injuns never would stay in here."

Durand went at them sarcastically about childish belief in apparitions. I held my peace although I felt like telling him to save his breath. Your comparatively illiterate citizen with a touch of native blood has a superstitious streak that lies close to the surface. I knew those part-Siwash stock hands like a book. They're not very far from their primitive ancestors on the maternal side. What they can't understand they easily ascribe to supernatural causes, and it frightens them. These fellows had the tribal influence of implicit belief in legend of good spirits and bad. Durand hadn't seen anything, and, therefore, couldn't take any stock in what they saw. I had. I could grasp their mental shrinking. I hadn't been wholly immune from disturbing emotions myself. I knew that such sights as that vanishing cougar or the three riders—which had once appeared to Emily—would drive half-breeds and many a white man headlong from the spot. Durand's arguments were quite useless. He came to that conclusion himself, presently.

"Hit the trail, then, confound you!" he snorted. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, doing the baby act like that. Ghosts in the middle of the day! No respectable ghost ever shows himself before midnight. Be sure you don't forget your nursing bottles."

The two men flushed all over their dark-skinned faces, but they swung silently upon their horses and rode away. Durand sneered after them.

"Well, that's about the limit," he said disgustedly. "There sure must be some jinx at work."

We hung up my deer in the smokehouse and walked over to the porch. Durand planted himself in a chair and began to smoke a cigarette—which he was not supposed to do. I didn't say anything. I didn't know where to begin. He was in a resentful, incredulous mood, anyway. So I excused myself on the plea of getting a drink, and dodged back into the kitchen. Emily was standing staring hard out a window. She had been crying.

"Oh," said I, as cheerfully as possible, "you've evidently observed the latest."

"Yes," she said. "I saw them again. So did those men, apparently. They've left, like the other two, and the Chinaman."

"Yes," I admitted. "They got scared and jumped the job. But you don't want to let that worry you. I've seen breeds quit a place because a black cat crossed the trail ahead of them. Isn't it odd your brother never sees any of these queer things?"

"Maybe *we* don't see them, either," she muttered. "Perhaps we only think we see them. But even if we could stand seeing them ourselves, I don't know what we'll do. We can't do anything with this ranch without help."

"There must be some rational explanation for these apparently unaccountable things that we see," I remarked.

"Perhaps," she admitted. "But that doesn't make them any the less disturbing. It does frighten me when I see them. I can't help it. Goodness! What's that?"

"That," my ears told me, was the sharp thump of Durand's chair legs striking the porch floor. There followed closely his voice lifted in a single,

crisp exclamation. I trotted hastily through the intervening rooms, Emily at my heels. Tom was on his feet. He looked at us with staring eyes.

"Say," he whispered, "I must be going off my head. I saw the very same thing those fellows claimed they saw—just as they described it. Look! There they are again."

VII.

He pointed. There wasn't any need. No one could have helped seeing. Myself I gazed incredulously at the mysterious trio. One rode a bright sorrel horse, one a chunky gray, the third a rangy, deep-chested black. Every detail of their rig, the angle of their hat brims, the silver conchos on bit and spur leather, printed themselves indelibly in my mind. I knew there was nothing there, yet I could see three mounted men, see the uneasy movements of their restive mounts, the abrupt gestures of the two riders who enacted that tragedy already described to me. There was the swift upflinging of the gun, the puff of smoke from its barrel, one rider sliding limp from his seat.

Then they were gone. They didn't dissolve or fade from sight with ghostly deliberation. They were there, palpitating with life and action, and then they were not. With their passing Emily Durand pinched my arm. There was our cougar, switching his long tail.

He didn't tarry long. Tom Durand saw the beast come and go, blink into view and vanish thence, and he neither spoke nor moved a muscle. And it seemed that for his benefit there was to be a phantasmagoria of the unnatural, the incredible, the impossible—which, nevertheless, transpired before us. They followed fast, beasts and men, here and there. A gray wolf stalked across the yard. A group of men stood by the pole corral. A great antlered buck followed by two does bounded with great leaps out of nowhere and vanished likewise. A Chinaman leered at us from a distance of forty feet momentarily, an animal-faced coolie in overalls.

Last of all, at the very foot of the porch steps, there flashed before our wondering eyes the figure of an Indian, a primitive savage garbed only in a breechclout and a gorgeous headdress of eagle feathers. There was a rawhide quiver of arrows slung over one shoulder. He stood with one end of a long bow resting on the ground. Slowly he lifted his left hand and swept it in an imperious gesture.

That, taking it altogether, was a little too much for Durand. He'd had no warning what to expect, and those things were enough to shake a stronger man. At any rate, with a half-articulate cry, he leaped down the steps and swung a clenched fist at the barbaric figure. Believe me, it was a jolt to see his arm apparently pass right through the feathered apparition's head. The force of the blow, checked by nothing, swung Durand clear off his balance, and he fell, striking his head against a sharp-edged stone hard by the steps. He lay there quite still, blood streaming from mouth and nose. Above him towered the bronze figure, feathers fluttering in the noon wind, arm outstretched imperiously.

I went down to him, reluctantly I admit. I knew there was no reality, no substance in the thing, yet it seemed sinister, full of menace. I dreaded to go near, much as one who has never seen death dreads the clammy touch of a corpse. But I did go down to Tom Durand, and his sister crept after me slowly, her gray eyes wide with horror. When she pillowed her brother's head in her lap, I stood up. We were within arm's length of the Indian. I touched him. I mean to say I put out my hand and tried to touch

the ruddy flesh. My fingers closed on nothing. I did not expect it to be otherwise, when I reached. The motion was involuntary.

But I made an odd discovery. I happened to step back. Immediately the warrior, eagle feathers and all, lost all form, all outline—became a vague luminosity. I moved around to face him. There he was, perfect, headdress aflutter. So much, thought I, a little gratified that with the uncanniness of the thing I could still bring logic to bear. This aboriginal phantom lacked one dimension. And as I stepped around to confirm this deduction, he vanished altogether.

I turned my attention again to Durand. The blood flowed strongly, far more than should have resulted from mere concussion. He gave no sign of returning consciousness.

He wasn't much of a weight, only the mere husk of a man. And I picked him up, carried him in, and laid him on his bed. We bathed his head with cold water, propped him up on pillows. The cut on his head didn't amount to much. But we couldn't quite stop that deadly hemorrhage from his diseased lungs. It continued slightly, even after he regained consciousness.

"Did I dream all that stuff?" he asked huskily. "Oh, I remember now. I took a swing at the Indian and fell. I must have had a touch of d. t.'s. This bleeding is fierce, isn't it? I feel weak as a cat."

He was a lot weaker before it ceased. But it did eventually stop, and he fell asleep.

"Has he been subject to those hemorrhages?" I asked Emily.

"Only once before that I know of," she said. "The doctor warned him against overexertion or excitement until he got stronger. I did hope so that this dry atmosphere and high altitude would help him. Oh, dear!"

She broke down utterly, which wasn't much to be wondered at. I did my best to cheer her up, and so far succeeded that presently we were busy in the kitchen, preparing a meal for ourselves and some chicken broth for Tom when he woke up.

Neither of us had any inclination to discuss the amazing phenomena we had witnessed. We had talked it over before, talked ourselves up against a blank wall. But I didn't stop thinking, little as I had upon which to base theories even of the wildest nature. I couldn't entertain a supernatural basis for those manifestations. There was no room for disembodied spirits in my philosophy of life. That was unthinkable. But—oh, well, I was simply all at sea, the evidence of my vision and the operations of my intellect at war with each other.

There was nothing further to stir me up. I kept my eye out, you may be sure. But from the time Tom Durand hurt himself and the Indian vanished there was nothing more. The ranch area lay bathed in the warm sun, somnolent, undisturbed. One might have thought some malignant power had been at work bent upon mischief, content to let matters stand when some ill had been wrought. I didn't voice any such thought. The whole thing was too incomprehensible for offhand speculation.

Tom woke up about four o'clock, still very weak, but normally hungry. We discussed the disturbing visions casually enough while he had his broth, and we were still talking about them when Emily Durand jumped off her chair with a cry. Tom's bedroom window faced the Castle, as we had dubbed Applegard's stone house with the towers.

"Look!" she said excitedly. "Oh, look!"

I had only to lift my eyes. The air was full of sticks, timbers, flashing bits of glass. The many-windowed

cupola in the center of the flat roof had rent and scattered itself like a spraying fountain. The distant roar of the explosion followed close. Then smoke and flames.

"Good Lord!" said I. "Your scientific friend has blown himself up."

Tom Durand raised himself on one elbow.

"He surely has," said he. "And his house is burning, with no fire department to call out. Maybe you could do something, Cross. Run up! My horse is standing in the stable, all saddled."

I wasted no time. Durand's gray nag fairly burned the earth with his flying hoofs between the two places. But there was nothing I could do when I got there. The front door was locked. I tried to kick it in, and didn't succeed till I took a heavy stone for a battering-ram. Then a puff of hot black smoke struck me in the face. No entry there, except for a salamander. I could hear the ominous crackle of fire within. Already it was licking out the side windows. If Applegard and his Chinese servant were inside, it wasn't in my power to rescue them. I ran around the house. It was the same on all sides—heat bursting windowpanes, flames licking through, a great banner of smoke curling up from the roof. I got back on my horse and circled at a little distance.

And presently I got another surprise in this day of surprises, for, in the edge of a clump of low brush, I rode upon a man sprawled on his stomach. I dismounted hurriedly and turned him over. His clothing was scorched and torn, hair and eyebrows badly singed, sundry slight cuts and abrasions on both hands and face. Nevertheless, he was recognizable. It was friend John T. Slade, general utility man for the American Photoscope. And while he was not unconscious, he was badly dazed.

I looked at him and then at the Applegard house. It must have been a tinder box inside, for the roof had collapsed and the area within the four walls was a red-hot furnace, shooting flame forty feet in the air. I could do nothing in the face of that. So I steadied Slade to his feet, boosted him upon the horse, and led him down to the ranch.

We didn't get anything out of him till the next morning. He growled and complained about his hurts to the exclusion of all else. Without doubt the man suffered considerable pain. When, along toward evening, liberal applications of baking soda had drawn the sting from his superficial burns, he fell asleep.

But he was up, like the rest of us, with daybreak, and his first move was to head for the stone house. Tom, Emily, and myself joined him, more to view the ruin than with any hope of finding Applegard mourning over his destroyed premises—for Slade had told us that both Applegard and the Chinaman had been in the cupola when the explosion came. We might find a charred bone or two. No more.

That is practically all of them we did find; a relic or two gruesome enough to indicate that both had perished. There was nothing but a bed of hot ash littered with heat-warped bits of metal within the thick stone walls. Even the outer bed of flowers was scorched brown by the heat.

"Clean sweep," Slade remarked tersely. "Not a scrap of paper nor a bit of apparatus. A genius and his work wiped out."

"Wiped out clean enough," Tom agreed. "Poor devils."

"What was Applegard's particular bent of genius?" I asked curiously.

Slade eyed me a second.

"No object in trying to string me now, Cross," he returned.

"You take a queer tack," I retorted.

"I'm not trying to string you. Why should I? I only asked a simple question."

"What are you here for?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm here on a well-earned vacation," I responded impatiently. "Is there any other personal inquiry you'd like to make?"

"And you weren't trying to make terms with Applegard?" he said, with what struck me as genuine incredulity. "Do you mean to tell me you have no idea what he had—what he was working on?"

"Cut out the mystery, Slade," I replied. "I'm here on a holiday. The man was a complete stranger to me. I know nothing of him or his affairs."

"Well, I'll be hanged," Slade grunted. "Then you must have thought Berry was setting a high value on you with his five thousand bonus. We figured you were on, and that we could use you. And, by thunder, you must have thought there was black magic at work down in your yard yesterday, eh?"

"What do you mean?" Emily Durand cried. "Those phantoms——"

"Phantoms nothing," Slade mourned. "Pictures. That's all. Just pictures. This old eccentric had worked out the biggest thing of the age. Screenless projection in natural colors. You get me? Screenless projection. We offered him a million cash for his process —and it would have been dirt cheap at five times the price. We'd have put the ordinary motion-picture machine in the museums as a historical relic. And it's all gone up in smoke."

And there you are. Slade told us about it in detail—all he knew, which wasn't much. The American Photoscope people had somehow learned what Applegard was working on. Berry and Slade had come to investigate. Not so much to investigate, either, as to confirm their information. Applegard had shown them enough to absolutely convince. But he wouldn't talk business, which was their primary object in coming. He didn't need financing, like so many inventors. All he wanted was to be left strictly alone until he had perfected certain details. Then he proposed to burst on the public spectacularly. He had visions, as well as being a creator of them. He had indulged in some frankness with Berry and Slade. He had turned down their offer of a million dollars because he had an ambition to dominate the motion-picture business of the world himself, single-handed.

No doubt he could have done it. He could film and project objects in natural colors and in their natural size up to a distance of six hundred yards. He showed them that he could do it. The method, of course, he didn't discuss, his apparatus he didn't exhibit. All Slade knew was that it was mainly located in the cupola on the roof.

So he stayed behind to spy. That was the sum and substance. If they couldn't buy, perhaps they could filch. It galled those two commercial brigands to see a big thing like that unavailable for their exploitation. Slade had managed to secrete himself on the roof, to spy, shortly before the explosion came. All's fair in love and war—war, in Slade's lexicon being a synonym for business. Luckily for him, he was blown clear off the roof. Applegard perished, and with him his secret.

It seemed amazing, yet amazingly simple. I'd felt all along that there must be some rational explanation. Applegard was a crank on seclusion. Perhaps that was why he scared old Bill Hayes out of the Bowl, why he tried to do the same with the Durands. He may have wanted the beauty and peace of the Punch Bowl all to himself. Or perhaps it afforded him some perverted form of amusement to

frighten people with his uncanny phantoms.

I can't begin to describe the sensation of relief that came to us three. And, as if to set us wholly at rest, to furnish corroboration of Slade's statement, as we circled slowly about the house, Tom himself picked up from the grass a bit of film with figures on it—blown, I suppose, clear of the apparatus or off its reel. The images were of an Indian in breechclout and feather headdress—the selfsame savage who had stood imperiously gesturing at the foot of our porch steps.

Perhaps some student of the problems of refraction and reflection will hit upon Applegard's method again. Scientific miracles are a commonplace nowadays. I could scarcely credit the explanation at the time; even with that strip of film as material evidence. I found myself wondering if those phantoms would ever cross the Durand yard again.

Of course, that was absurd. Nevertheless, I professed to be scientifically interested in their possible return. That grew to be a standing joke among us. I kept staying on and staying on, until one day, in jest, Tom offered to sell me a half interest in the business. I took him up seriously, but I made it contingent upon—well, the upshot of the matter is that Tom Durand and I are partners in the stock business, and Emily and I are partners in the more serious business of life.

Not that we take life very seriously. Far from it. We don't have to. As I said in the beginning, you can graft a range man on a city—but there is no assurance that he will take root there, not contentedly. He likes elbowroom. He knows what it is to fill his lungs with clean air off a mountainside. He's pretty primitive under his tailor-made clothes. That's me.

So I, at least, feel that the phantom cougar did us all a good turn. We're pretty snug and independent in the Punch Bowl these days. Tom Durand will soon have as good a pair of lungs as anybody. And, in conclusion, if any doubting Thomas will take the trouble, he can get ample proof of this wild yarn's truth. There are at least four Siwash stock hands, to say nothing of old Bill Hayes and a Chinese cook, still circulating around in this country, who will swear on a stack of Bibles that the place is haunted. Screenless projection doesn't mean anything to them.

TOO MANY PICTURES

THEODORE H. TILLER, now president of the National Press Club in Washington, arrived in Washington ten years ago from the backwoods of Georgia. At that time he had never been to a theater. His first day in the national capital was used up in visiting the Congressional Library and the Corcoran Art Gallery.

That night a friend of his took him to the theater. They arrived early and had nothing to look at but the curtain and the few people who were straggling in. The curtain represented what was called "Psyche at the Throne of Venus," and it was good.

After several minutes, Tiller turned to his friend and said, in a manner that was a mingling of boredom and indignation:

"Let's get out of this place! There's nothing to do here but look at that picture—and I've seen enough pictures to-day to last me all my life."

The Treasure Juggler

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "The Man Who Could Do Everything," "The Brick," Etc.

The Syrian who has once visited Coney Island returns to his native land with a vocabulary that is weird and wonderful. Judge of Najib, the Damascene whose exploits with a lone American in the shadow of Mount Nebo, are set forth here

EVERYBODY—at least everybody from Damascus to Jaffa, from Jaffa to Arabia Petræa, from Arabia Petræa to the Land of Moab—knew about the Seti Abbas treasure.

Everybody had known about it; years before Logan Kirby came back to Syria to manage the Cabell Smelting Company's antimony mine; years before Logan Kirby's lonely childhood in his American parents' Syrian mission house at Nablous; years before Logan Kirby's parents had been born; years before the grandfather of the present Padishah—on whom be bliss!—had become Sultan of Turkey.

In fact, the tale of the Seti Abbas treasure had long since become an established stone in the topless wall of Syrian legend. Fully a million folk knew the story of the treasure. Almost a thousand knew just where the treasure was buried. Or, rather, they knew almost a thousand authentic places where it was buried. For it was hard to find two people who would agree on its location.

And no one—so far as Kirby could learn—had tried to verify or to disprove the truth of any of these sites. There was a most excellent reason for this inertia. For a fairly salubrious land there are perhaps more things that it is unhealthful to do in Syria than in any other country of its size on earth. It is unhealthful for a Syrian to be too rich; it is unhealthful for a Syrian to be too poor. It is unhealthful for a Syrian to talk politics; it is unhealthful for him to remain mysteriously silent when politics are the topic. It is unhealthful for him to show a fondness for the *Feringhee*—foreigner—and in these degenerate days it is unhealthful for him to prove his Islamic zeal by murdering them. But the most unhealthful of all the horde of unhealthful things a Syrian can do is to find buried treasure.

By Turkish law, in the days whereof I write, the sultan's government claimed fifty per cent of any treasure-trove. The remaining half—minus the baksheesh, taxes, imposts, et cetera—went by law to the finder. So artistically were these taxes, imposts, and other levies graded that the aforesaid finder usually came out of the transaction several hundred piasters in the government's debt. Or, if his share were large enough to stand the levies, he had a quaint way of disappearing. In Turkey there is no capital punishment. Under the sultan's benevolent rule offenders merely vanish.

So it is that few Syrians care to dig for treasure. There is almost no sport less popoular with the masses. Treasure hunting can never hope to become a national pastime. Yet from the site of Ahab's Ivory Palace in Samaria to

the caverns behind the Dog Rocks where Sennacherib's war chest is supposed to be entombed—there is scarce a square mile of ground that is not the reputed resting place of buried wealth.

Logan Kirby, from babyhood, had heard treasure yarns. Then he had gone to America to be educated, and had promptly forgotten them all in that matter-of-fact country. But since his return to Syria as a mine manager he had begun to hear them again, chiefly from his native mine superintendent and personal factotum, Najib. Najib was a Damascene who had spent two glorified years with a show at Coney Island and who was vastly proud of the English he had mislearned there. He vented this lingual lore on Kirby, pridefully refusing to talk to the manager in any other language.

Najib had a way of coming deferentially to Kirby's tent in the early evenings when the day's work was done, and, squatting at the manager's feet, beguiling him into conversation. The lonely American rather encouraged this habit of his henchman's. And three evenings out of four the native's talk would soon or late lead to buried treasure.

Najib honestly thought himself to be the only living man who knew the hiding place of the Seti Abbas hoard, and, according to his belief, that hoard lay buried not twenty miles from the mine camp in a cave-honeycombed slope of Mount Nebo. Their nearness to the treasure was ever in Najib's mind and usually on his tongue. He thought of the hoard as hopelessly as an honest pauper might think of the Kohinoor.

"It is of a truth, howaji," he was saying one night for perhaps the seventieth time as he sat curled on the ground in front of the camp fire and close beside the deck chair in which Kirby sprawled. "It is of a truth, I say. And also and likewise I can prove it. My father's grandsire—may the houris spread his couch in *es Semme!*—was the private Kavass of Harun Effendi, the Bashaw of Jer-u-Salem, as perhaps I have maybe told you, and he——"

"I know," yawned Kirby, refilling his smelly little black pipe. "I remember. And he sneaked into the Pashalik archive room one day and read——"

"Not 'sneaked,' howaji," disclaimed Najib, with some heat. "He was a person who would think foul scorn to make a sneak to any place was my great grandfather. He went into the archive room on an official duty, if I remember the tale arightly. For some honorable purpose of an assuredly. And, if he read—why, what is the blame to him? It is given to but few men to know how to read. And those who know how must of a duty lick up all the wiseness they can find by reading all that is written. What says the blessed Koran? 'He who seeketh not knowledge——'"

"Quite so," wearily assented Kirby. "And you were going on to say that this disreputable old ancestor of yours, in the pursuit of pure knowledge, read in the archives an account of the story of Seti Abbas and the hiding of his treasure? Well, he wasted his time—and his eyesight. He could have heard the story much more entertainingly told in any one of a hundred bazaars."

"But not the location, howaji," protested Najib. "Not the location. That was government secret. No one but government knew where. Government itself did not know *just* where. Only that it was in the mongst of the eastern Moab Mountains. Preferringly among Mount Nebo. Thousand mejidie they spend looking for it. Likewise, and also and furthermore, many months of time. It is not to find. But why, I inquire of you, howaji? But *why*, I inquire of you with respect, is it not

to find when the government look for it?"

"Well, Mr. Bones," queried Kirby tolerantly, "*why* is it not to find? But I'm pretty well rehearsed on the answer. So let's pass dreamily on to the next cage. The Kohl shipment for——"

"Why is it not to find?" persisted Najib, in no way minded to be cheated out of this most cherished of his oft-told tales. "I will tell you, howaji; while you hearken."

And he told.

Kirby did not bother to listen. From many hearings he himself could have repeated the story backward. But he did not care to hurt his henchman's feelings by thwarting the Oriental love for eternal repetitions. So he lay back, eyes half shut, the dottle purring softly in the bottom of his black pipe as he thought his own thoughts and let the stream of recital trickle on, unheard.

Above brooded the solemn black Syrian night with its huge white stars. From among the brown mountains that encompassed the camp came faintly the rhythmic "Ykk! *Ykk!* YKK!" of the hunting jackal pack, punctuated now and then by a hyena's hysterically gasped "laugh" or the howl or snarl of wolves that fought over some choice bit of carrion far up among the peaks.

In the hollow between the manager's tent and the mouth of the little mine blinked the line of camp fires around which sprawled the two dozen tired *fellaheen* who furnished unskilled labor in digging and crushing and smelting the silvery antimony. One of them was just now singing a tuneless minor-key native song whose words, in any civilized region or language, would have sent their author to prison and their singer to coventry. Yet for an Arab ballad the ditty was rather mild. Syria is a place where every one sings, and where nobody knows how to. A place where the most deplorable barroom ballad of America would be considered tame and colorless.

At a separate fire duly remote from the *fellaheen's* lounged the twelve Turkish soldiers rented out by the pasha—at grievously high rates and as a legalized form of graft—to the Cabell Smelting Company as an honorary guard. The soldiers, by the way, guarded nothing; stole everything that was not nailed down; gave themselves insufferable airs of superiority over the peasant laborers; let their guns and their clothes go uncleansed; and ranked second only to the monstrous native fleas in Kirby's list of daily discomforts.

To the left of the fireside groups the half-extinguished tiny smelting furnace breathed forth a horrible smell of chemical fumes that poisoned the mountain freshness of the night.

There was little in the scene to stir poetical fancies. And Logan Kirby's mind began to wrestle with various problems connected with the mine. Najib's excited voice served only as an accompaniment to the unhearing manager's thoughts. And yet the tale of treasure was not without interest. Here is its gist in a mere mouthful of words:

In the eighteenth century's early years one Seti Abbas was Turkish ambassador to France. There he hobnobbed with Philippe, the dissolute regent. And was boon comrade to John Law, the genius whose luckless "Banque Royale" and "Mississippi Bubble" scheme were so soon to wreck French finance. Seti was enormously rich when he went to France, and he was reported immeasurably richer through speculation when he came back.

Thinking, perhaps, that his wealth would be safer at a distance from Constantinople than in an avid sultan's closer neighborhood, he settled in Jerusalem, planning there to pass his declining years. There were no such years to pass.

The sultan presently issued a *firman,* declaring, on a palpably trumped-up charge, that the former ambassador was a traitor to the majesty of the Sublime Porte and that both his life *and his goods* were forfeit to the state. They arrange these things readily in the East.

A friend at Yildiz Kiosk sent word to Seti Abbas. The message arrived a week before the sultan's mandate. Seti Abbas had never felt toward his imperial master that simple faith which the poet says is so much better than Norman blood. He had half expected something of this sort. And his arrangements were all made in advance.

Just what those arrangements were the government could never learn in detail, although Seti's favorite wife and his steward were later tortured to death in a very picturesque way in hopes of wooing the truth from them.

All definitely known was that the doomed man had sworn the sultan should not profit by his death. He boasted that he had put the bulk of his vast wealth in such compact form that he could carry it about; he placed it in a leaden casket, and, accompanied only by the aforesaid favorite wife and the steward, fled eastward from Jerusalem by night into the Land of Moab. He also took along two camel loads of provisions, the wife and the steward acting as camel drivers.

The desolate wilderness swallowed up all trace of the trio. A few days later the two impromptu camel drivers returned to Jerusalem without their lord and master. To anxious inquiries —backed by Oriental torture—they said that Seti Abbas had led them to a spot near the base of Mount Nebo and there had bidden them farewell, giving them certain rich presents—which the sultan's officers promptly seized—and telling them he was going to repair with his treasure and his provisions to a secret cave he knew of; there to hide until it should be safe to take ship from some obscure port to Europe. He had also sworn them both to secrecy.

All this the torture victims told very frankly. But the exact position of the cave—in that bourne of a myriad caves —they could not or would not tell. The sultan's agents scoured Nebo's sides and hunted through every mountain for miles around.

But no trace was to be found of Seti Abbas nor of his treasure casket. For full twenty years every port was watched in vain. At last the government concluded that Seti Abbas had been bitten by a serpent or stricken by illness in his cave, and had died there —with his hoard. But the cave itself had remained annoyingly unfindable.

"The reason that cave is not to find, howaji," finished Najib, "is the most simple. My grandfather's sire was a wise man. And he said it. He visited the mountain with the searchers. On Nebo is always likely to be most naughty landslides. Down the slope they landslide till they are estopped by obstacle. Three or four places on sides of Mount Nebo he saw where of recent year or less there had been a landslide. From some earthquake. There is a plenitude of earthquakes hereabouts. One of those landslides had perhaps hit on a shelf in front of a cave—the cave where hid Seti Abbas —and it had blocked up the cave's mouth with over than five trillion tons of rock and dirt. This I believe. From my grandfather's sire I believe it. The entrance was not to find. And in the cave—wherever the cave was—Seti Abbas have perished quite sadly. There to-day he lie, he and his hidden casket of treasures. But that is why the Serailik searchers could not find where——"

"Oh, by the way, Najib," broke in Kirby, coming suddenly out of his business reverie, "to-day's the fourteenth,

isn't it? That new donkey engine ought to be landed at Jaffa by the fifteenth, if some miracle should make the *Messagerie* boat touch there anywhere near on time."

"Yes, howaji," replied Najib, impatient at the interruption. "But as I say to you, those Serailik searchers, they——"

"I know, I know," said Kirby. "But this is important. We want that engine the second we can get it. We need it badly. You'd better start for the coast to-morrow morning. As early as three o'clock, if you can. Ride Berkri, and take Naami along as led horse. I can't spare any of our own men or mules to go with you. So you'll have to hire porters and a mule caravan at Jaffa to bring the engine's sections back here. It'll be cheaper in the end. And it'll be quicker, too. For you can save time by riding to Jaffa alone. With the mules and the tackle it would take you ten days. Berkri ought to get you there in four—bar accidents. And with any sort of luck the old *Messagerie* tub won't be more than three days late from Brindisi. So you'll probably find the engine waiting for you at the customs. Hustle, and get back here with it inside of a fortnight if you can."

Najib fairly writhed with joy at prospect of the mission. Even Kirby's foolish Occidental ideas about haste could not wholly mar his bliss. Here among the silences of the pink-brown mountains life was deadly stupid. The more so for a man of the world, who had spent two divine years at rackety, glittering old Coney Island; at Coney Island, where Najib had picked up his wonderful knowledge of English, and where, too, he had learned many bits of that beautiful American slang which the howaji so cruelly forbade him to use.

The trip to the coast promised one long vista of delight. Najib, while he listened with half an ear to Kirby's instructions, was already busy tabulating the ecstasies of the trip.

These ecstacies were manifold. They would begin at the ford of the Jordan, just this side of Jericho, where he knew of an expatriate Greek who sold delicious Shtora wine; wine sticky with resin and so sharp that it scratched the throat like a file and sent a glorious glow as of molten fire from stomach to brain.

Then, at Basraoul's Khan, near the Damascus gate of Jersualem, they knew how to prepare a dish worthy of the Prophet's own praise. A dish of stewed chunks of lamb aswim in pints of Lebanon olive oil and thick with barley sugar and fragrant with garlic and stiffened with rank lentils. Oh, a dish fit for the houris in paradise! Topped by a cucumber stuffed with fried goat flesh and raisins. And tamped down by numberless glasses of the fiery white *mastic* that tempts a man to say things of no wit and to much unseemly laughter.

Also, on the mole at Jaffa, dwelt Abounasif Krikoriani, Najib's dearest friend, a man of wealth, to whom he had taught the mysteries of that weird American sport, the game of crap play, and who now loved to play it whenever he and Najib met. A man of much sporting zeal and no luck.

Yes, Najib would seek out Abounasif the moment he should reach Jaffa. They two would shake hands, thumbs upward; then embrace; then start in forthwith upon a session of the fascinating crap play—a game at which Najib always won his friend's money, being able to make up new rules as he went along to guard himself from loss. Abounasif would——

Overhead—or underneath—passed a mile-long invisible truck laden with rattling steel rails. Kirby's deck chair was overturned by an upheaval of the ground below it, and Kirby was de-

posited gently on his back in the tent-side dust.

Najib, who was already squatting in the dust, was merely toppled sidewise. From the camp fires came a chorus of surprised yells, followed by silence.

"An earthquake!" gasped Kirby, scrambling dazedly to his feet. "Good Lord, it's an *earthquake!*"

The rumbling had ceased. The rumble was become a faint echo amid the farther hills.

The natives, after the first shock of astonishment, had fallen at once into a stoic calm. Had they been forewarned of an earthquake they would have fled in stark terror, shrilly squealing as they went. But now that it had occurred and might perhaps occur again within a few seconds the eternal fatalist apathy of the East gripped them to dull carelessness. So almost always, at the last hopeless moment, the Oriental faces death.

Logan Kirby's Western nerves made him less placidly stolid than were his subordinates. He set off at a run toward the mine mouth, calling to Najib to follow. As they raced along, Najib obediently at his master's heels, Kirby said again:

"Don't you understand, man? That was an earthquake!"

"Malaish!" (Never mind) philosophically responded Najib, stress making him for once relapse into his own language.

"But there may be a second one!" went on Kirby as he ran.

"Inshallah!" (As God wills!) coolly returned the Syrian.

"If it caves in our shoring——" began Kirby, but paused as he reached the mine.

The opening was undisturbed. A flare from his pocket lamp showed him the shoring was intact.

"Good little old mine!" approved Kirby in relief.

"Oh, thou kiddo!" duly chimed in Najib, drawing on Coney Island memories for an apt rejoinder as he, too, apostrophized the mine.

"Najib," said Kirby, with much sternness, "how many times must I tell you to leave Yankee slang alone? I can't prevent you from murdering ordinary English. But remember our slang is sacred. Don't maul it."

Two hours before dawn, Najib set off upon his joyous pilgrimage to Jaffa. Two hours after dawn, Kirby rolled out of his blankets and climbed a little hill to the camp's spring and cistern for his morning sponge bath. On the knoll's crest was the spring, and water flowed from it through a jointed pipe to the cistern just beneath.

The spring this morning was bubbling as usual. But the enormous cistern was empty, and had a jagged crack across its concrete bottom. The earthquake had been at mischief here, and had robbed the camp of many thousand gallons of precious water. For hours the pipe had been idly pouring water into the bottomless pit made by the broken concrete. For hours, it seemed, the thirsty dry soil had been absorbing the water gallons.

Kirby hurried down to the mine in search of men to stop up the great leak. And there a second setback met him.

The miners, who should at this moment have been as busy as a fly-papered puppy, were loafing idly about the mouth of the pit. The Turkish soldiers, who ordinarily scorned to encourage manual labor by so much as a glance in its direction, were also clumped about the mouth, peering interestedly down into the depths. As Kirby came toward them the fat sergeant hailed him with this side-splitting witticism:

"Feringhee, we were sent to guard a mine. We have no orders to patrol a lake."

Kirby swarmed down the shaft as the shortest way of learning what was

amiss. One minute's inspection showed him both the mishap and its cause.

The bottom of the little mine was deep in water that backed into and filled its low tunnels. One of the geological freaks that are the despair of all engineers had prevented the cistern water from sinking harmlessly into the ground, and had sent it gushing along a troughlike rock flaw from the knoll above straight into the pit. It was still rippling merrily downward through this natural pipe as fast as the spring's overflow could supply it.

Kirby groaned in spirit. Not that the misfortune was irremediable or even serious. A gang of American mine laborers, with decent apparatus, could have had the place pumped dry in a very short time.

But Kirby had only a primitive type of pump, and his laborers were of a type that loves to intersperse hard work with dreamy indolence. He could foresee in spirit just how they would set about the job of emptying the water from the mine. He could look forward to at least a week of drowsy pumping on the part of increasingly somnolent shifts of men. Meantime, all regular mine work must of course be held up. And an ore shipment was due to go to Damascus in three weeks —a shipment that would need full three weeks to make ready.

Kirby climbed out of the shaft and led a half dozen men with the needful equipment to patch up the cistern leak. Then he returned to his tent. He knew every eye in camp was upon him; to see how the Outlander would take this grievous delay. But his face told them nothing. He had not spent his childhood in the East in vain.

Presently he emerged from the tent, holding in both hands with infinite care an oval object about three inches long —an object that was translucently golden red and through which the morning sunshine played lovingly.

This thing Kirby bore to the mine mouth, treading cautiously and holding it far in front of him as a page might hold crown jewels. And, as before, every eye in camp was fixed upon him. This time in open curiosity.

Kirby reached the mouth of the pit, and stood above it, arms outstretched, lovingly clasping the brightly translucent oval and staring at it. Now the nearer men could see that the oval's surface was scored by hieroglyphic characters. Quickly they muttered this fact to those beyond them. Here was magic. *Feringhee* magic. Workers and soldiers pressed closer.

"My brothers," said Kirby reverently, "this charm in mine own land is allpotent. Nor shall it prove less powerful here. By its omnipotence—and by help of Allah the Most High—I shall draw from the mine every drop of water! Behold! But speak not while I weave the spell."

Moving his arms to left and right, and occasionally varying the motions by bowing his head as in veneration before the oval, he began to speak. In excellent English—which none of his hearers understood—he declaimed slowly and solemnly the ensuing ritual:

"Antimony is a metal, or element, whose chemical symbol is Sb. It is used primarily for alloys, for cardiac depressants, for pigment. It is friable and—Lord, what drivel! And what in blue blazes comes next in that government report of mine? Old Jones was fond of his whisky straight and every night he'd stay out late. Some folks said he ought to try the gold cure for his love of rye. When the matter was brought to the captain's attention he was very much astonished at what had been done, and he made Big Bill a second lieutenant and put him in charge of the starboard gum. There was a young lady from Exeter——"

As he had intoned, his voice and ges-

tures had momentarily become more and more violent.

Now, at the shouted word *"Exeter,"* the shining oval bounded out of his wildly waved hands and fell plumb down the shaft, where it landed with a splash in the water below.

With a howl of abject horror at his loss, Kirby made as though to hurl himself headlong after it. As his men restrained him he shrieked in frenzy:

"My priceless talisman! My charm of charms! I have dropped it. Five thousand mejidie to the man who recovers it for me! Five thousand mejidie reward will I give. By the Triple Oath, I swear it!"

The men knew Kirby. They knew he did not make vain promises. The extravagant woe of their wontedly cool manager impressed them of his terrible earnestness.

Five thousand mejidie!

Miners and soldiers jostled and scratched each other in their effort to be first down the shaft. But Kirby stopped them.

"No, no!" he wailed. "Water is its element. In water it is invisible and intangible. You might search for a thousand years to no purpose. Not until the water has subsided and the mine bottom is dry again can it be seen or felt. That is its magic. To the man who returns it to me then I swear I will pay five thousand mejidie. But——"

His last words were lost in the scramble to fit the pump in place. Soldiers and *fellaheen* fell to with frantic eagerness, battling for positions on the pump's handles, forming auxiliary bucket lines. Like madmen they toiled, the still air vibrating with the minor-key working song that in their fervor they now fairly bellowed, instead of droning it as usual:

"Alla-haly, 'm alla-haly!"

For the first time since the *corvée* dragged them, weeping, from behind beds and out of mud ovens to serve in the sultan's army the Turkish soldiers worked themselves well-nigh to death.

In an unbelievably few hours the mine was pumped and sopped dry. No, the oval talisman was not found, and the five-thousand-mejidie reward was never paid. For the talisman was a cake of toilet soap. And toilet soap melts fast in water. But the mine was pumped dry in record time. Which was what Kirby most desired. He knew the East.

Yet, as he sat before his tent in the early afternoon, revising a monthly report for the directors, he looked up in eager hopefulness as the fat sergeant of the guard waddled across from the mine and stood puffing before him.

The sergeant's dirty hands were raw. The sergeant's unwashed face was apoplectic, and asmear with the sweat of honest toil.

"Feringhee," he panted—being an officer and a leader of men, he could not stoop to the respect term, "Howaji"—"Feringhee, may the dews of heaven ever water the desert dust in front of your tread!"

"Bimbashi!" courteously answered the American. "More blessed to my heart is your countenance than all the refreshing dews."

The cast-iron rule, compelling folk of breeding to begin every colloquy with at least a brace of compliments, being thus honored, the sergeant went on:

"We have labored like dogs and like infidel *Feringhee*. Yea, like the mad in their dancings have we labored. We have pumped. We have also used buckets to hasten the task. We have mopped dry the flooring of that hell-accursed pit with our own garments, until every drop of water is gone. Yet the precious talisman we have not found."

"Oh, *search!*" pleaded Kirby.

"Search yet again, I implore! Search, O brother of giants! Father of eagles, search longer and with more heed. Even if the reward be as nothing to you, yet for my life-happiness' sake, search on!"

"There is not so much as a flake of mud that we have not examined," grunted the soldier wrathfully. "The talisman is not there. Allah had deemed it too precious a thing for an infidel to possess and he has snatched it away. It is of the reward that I am come hither to speak."

"The reward—*aiwa*, the reward!" exclaimed Kirby. "Earn it, I beseech you!"

"We have earned it—as nearly as mortal man—even true believers—can. Is there no extra pay for what we have just done?"

"Oh, *bimbashi*," argued Kirby, "oft have you read the placards: 'Horse stolen. Reward for his return.' Tell me, O brightest star of the Padishah's invincible armies, doth each man who reads that placard and each man who searches for the horse receive the reward; or only he who returns the horse?"

"But——"

"The Prophet—on whom be the ages of the ages!—commandeth men to win paradise," pursued Kirby. "Doth he grant the bliss of paradise to all who hear that command or only to those who obey it?"

Nevertheless, when the disgruntled soldier had at last shuffled away to his equally disgruntled mates, Kirby had the grace to be just a little ashamed of himself for the trick he had played. Then he called to memory the insolence, the general worthlessness, the million petty thefts of the soldiers, and the maddening laziness of the *fellaheen* laborers. And he could not wholly blame himself for luring the whole miserable lot of them into doing at least one honest day's labor in the course of their dreamy lives.

Yet he still felt mildly remorseful and a little afraid. Men who live long in the East get odd notions—and get plenty of reasons to back them. Kirby had long since grown to feel that a mysterious law of compensation governs human actions—that a good or an ill deed will soon or late be rewarded in kind. And he fell to wondering in what fashion he must some time pay for the false hope whereby he had scourged the lazy natives to triple work.

He dismissed the idea as morbid, and turned back to his reports. But in less than three minutes came a new interruption. Up the *wady* galloped a native rider, led horse pounding along beside him. It was Najib—Najib who, by all rights, should have been fourteen hours on his road toward Jaffa.

The factotum jumped from his horse and ran over to the wondering Kirby. Before the manager could speak, he broke feverishly into a torrent of alleged English. Shorn of embellishment and of its wealth of gesture and tensely falsetto oratory, Najib's tidings were that he had ridden as far as the hither slopes of Nebo that day, and as usual had taken a roundabout route at the base that he might cast a speculative eye upward toward the caves.

He had there seen that the earthquake had shaken loose a great mass of débris which had for long years lodged against a mountainside bowlder. And behind the spot whence the tons of débris had been dislodged was an opening. An opening that, except for one obscure angle, was quite hidden from view by the jutting face of the bowlder.

Stark curiosity had prompted Najib to dismount and to climb the almost clifflike side of the slope to this cavern orifice. He had entered the cave, and had found his passage barred ten feet from the opening by a thin slab

of rock that had become dislodged from the roof and had fallen transversely, shutting off all passage to the rear of the place.

"A slab, howaji," he prattled on, with growing incoherence, "that two strong men could of an assuredly push down. Also and likewise, even *one* man, perhaps, with a crowbar for lever. But not with bare hands. So I am returned back for you."

"Because you found a new cave on Nebo," fumed the wrathful Kirby, "you throw away a whole day that we can't spare, and you ride a good horse half to death—just to come to me with this fool story! Najib, if you had had *any* early mental advantages, or a Montessori course of brain culture, you might perhaps have become almost half-witted by this time. But——"

"Howaji!" blurted Najib in grieved surprise. "You do not comprehend. You do not perceive the full meat of it? Not even yet? The treasure! The *treasure*, howaji! The treasure of Seti Abbas!"

Kirby reached for his riding whip. He was beginning to see red. He even forgot for an instant that while a foreigner may beat or kick an Egyptian at will he can do nothing of the sort to a Syrian. Najib's asinine behavior had racked the manager's temper to the explosive point.

"You doubt, howaji?" rushed on Najib. "Then *look!*"

From under his *kumbaz* he drew a roll of damp cloth and spread it out on the deal table at which Kirby had been writing. The cloth proved to be a prayer rug, stained, rotting, yet very evidently of ancient and costly make. Kirby knew enough of such things to realize that, while decay had robbed the rug of most of its value, it must once have sold for well-nigh its weight in gold.

"Just in front of the rock slab I apprehended this carpet," Najib was explaining. "It was lay careful near entrance to cave and cattycornered so it face due east. Place where men place a rug to make the morning prayer on. You do not yet comprehend this same, howaji? That was hiding cave of Seti Abbas. He put his provisions and his sleeping place at the very back of cave—as cave people do. And likewise and also, his *treasure*. He live back there. His prayers he must say facing El Mecca, and, as near as can, to open sky. That is the law of the Prophet—praise be to his——"

"Then——"

"So rug is in front quarters of this cave," continued Najib bubblingly. "Also his fire. I see its black ashes. Howaji—Seti Abbas' body and—*and his treasure*—lies at back of cave *now;* behind that rock slab. Just where landslide shut him up, and falling roof rock closed him in, near two hundred years."

Into the skeptical Kirby's heart as he listened crept a coal of fire; the fire of treasure lust that smolders banked in every human being; the fire that makes boys—of ten and of ninety—gloat over "Treasure Island"; that makes a gaping throng follow a guarded gold-shipment wagon on its journey down Broadway to the subtreasury.

"Nonsense!" sneered Kirby. "It's all absurd, man, and—and—and—keep your mouth shut about this, Najib! Don't blab to the men. We'll start at dusk. You and I. There's no moon, but the horses know the trail. Tell the *fellaheen* that we're going a half day's ride to look for the engine caravan. By the way," he added, trying piteously to force his blazing mind back to cooler and more normal channels, "we were flooded by the earthquake. I'll tell you how I got the mine pumped dry again."

At a few minutes after midnight, Kirby and Najib squirmed upward along the all but sheer brown sides of

Nebo toward a bowlder that bulked shadowy and monstrous against the starry sky above their heads.

Najib carried a spade and mattock strapped to his back. Kirby helped his own upward ascent by a crowbar that he used as an alpinstock. On his back were tied two naphtha torches. His mouth was dry, his flesh was fevered, his throat was rough. He was more wildly excited than he had dreamed he could be.

He tried—as he had tried steadily for the past ten hours—to calm himself; to persuade his own senses that there was nothing to get stirred up about; that he was in all probability on a wild-goose chase. Yet always something within him said he was on the right track; the presence of the prayer rug was ample proof that Seti Abbas' hiding place was at last found.

The treasure, so ran the olden story, had been in a leaden casket which the doomed man had carried on his person. Seti Abbas had put all his vast wealth in portable form. In the East "portable form" means jewels. A casket of jewels! And diamonds to-day were worth several times as much as in Seti Abbas' century.

For more than a century no one had looked for this treasure. It was a safe venture, this midnight quest of his. He could trust Najib. He was certain he could. He——

Once more Kirby wrenched his mind back to less crazing thoughts. He forced himself to dwell on the memory that this mountain he was climbing was sacred Nebo, from whose summit Moses had looked down upon the Promised Land. One of these hillside caves had doubtless served as Moses' "unknown sepulcher."

Diamonds were going up in value nowadays at about ten per cent a year. A casket of diamonds would mean a fortune of——.

"It is *here,* howaji," interrupted Najib, swinging himself around the corner of the bowlder.

Kirby's pocket flash light revealed the half-hidden cave opening. He turned the white sword of light into the cave. There on the damp rock floor was the oblong of lighter rock where the prayer rug had lain for nearly two hundred years. Near it was a scar of charred ashes where once Seti Abbas had built the fire that warmed his hiding place. Just ahead was the irregular slab of sandstone, barring the way to the cavern's father recesses.

In the actual presence of the crisis, Kirby suddenly found himself as cool and as unconcerned as though he were auditing a batch of assay reports. Appraisingly he inspected the slab, estimating the best direction for it to fall, planning the master positions whence he and Najib should attack it without danger of being caught under its collapse. Briefly he gave his orders.

The naphtha flares were lighted and placed; the crowbar and mattock were braced against rock fulcrums.

"Heave!" commanded Kirby, with no sign of emotion, and again at intervals: "Heave! *Heave!* HEAVE!"

At the fourth double wrench the slab tore free from the moss and earth that cemented its edges, and fell outward with a resounding bang into the front of the cave. The naphtha flares were extinguished by the slap of air that went forth with the flat rock's fall.

Kirby restrained Najib's fierce eagerness, and made the fidgeting and sputtering native relight the flares. Then, the cavern's whole interior being clearly alight, both men moved forward to the rear.

Face downward, head against the spot where the slab had rested on the flooring, huddled a distorted thing, at sight of which Najib began to pray. It was a skeleton in the swirl of rotting clothes.

The cloth had disintegrated above

one arm. Under the white forearm bones, Kirby caught a glimpse of a dark object over which the bone fingers were still gripped.

He stooped and gently lifted the skeleton that crumbled tinklingly to a score of chalky bits in his grasp. Then from under it he took what the fingers had so piteously guarded.

"The casket!" croaked Najib as Kirby bore to the light a blackened box perhaps ten inches square and six inches high, heavy and dirt-crusted.

Kirby glanced at the Syrian. The latter's hand had mechanically gone to his knife hilt. His face was battleship color. His eyes, bulging and bloodshot, were devouring the leaden box, even as his fingers twitched cravingly at the handle of the belt knife.

"Give me your knife!" said Kirby, with quiet authority, adding: "I want it to pry open this casket."

Najib obeyed—a little reluctantly, Kirby thought. And the American set himself to breaking the old-fashioned lock. At last—a long last—he felt the rusty hasp give way. Holding lid and box tightly together with one hand, with the other he inserted the curved knife blade to its full length. Then, with a sharp twist, he deliberately broke the blade short at the hilt.

"Safety first!" he muttered dryly.

After which, with the longer fragment of broken steel, he pried open the cover. Najib cried aloud as in pain. For at first glance the box seemed empty. Instinctively the Syrian broke into the dismal minor-key Wail for the Dead:

"Selem-ala-ahali! Selem-ala-ahali!"

It was a hideous dirge, there in the flare-light abode of death on the barren mountainside. It echoed and reechoed through the night.

But Kirby's eyes were keener than Najib's, and his nerves stronger.

In the very bottom of the casket he spied a discolored sheet of paper. He pulled this out and held it to the light. A glance showed it to be an official document and in French. Kirby little by little deciphered the faded lettering, Najib staring blankly at it over the American's shoulder.

The paper was dated May 24, 1719. It was a draft on *"La Banque Royale de la France, John Law, Directeur-General"*—a draft for fifteen million two hundred thousand francs.

Vaguely, as he read, Kirby began to remember what he—and all the world—had heard of this John Law bank—the bank that floated the "Mississippi Bubble," the bank whose shares were one year worth billions of dollars—on paper—and which, a month after the bubble burst, were not worth their paper and ink.

"What says the reading, howaji?" demanded Najib, whimpering with thwarted eagerness.

"It says," answered Kirby, and his voice was dead, "it says, in effect, that John Law was a mighty financier whose failure 'broke' France and wrecked French credit. It says that one of his big investors was his crony, the Turkish ambassador, Seti Abbas, and that Seti Abbas tied up nearly all his wealth in Law's unlucky *Banque Royale,* receiving a sight draft for the money. Here is the draft. Incidentally it's the fabled treasure of Seti Abbas. And it's just exactly as valuable at present as a check for the same sum, signed by Rameses II., would be. And," he went on bitterly, "I don't think I need lie awake wondering how I'm to be paid back for the measly trick I put up on those chaps at the mine to-day. Good old Stepmother Nemesis is working on nonunion hours for my benefit. Get the idea?"

"I—I acquire you, O Stephen!" blubbered the heartbroken Najib.

And for once in his life, Logan forbore to reprove him for manhandling sacred Yankee slang.

The Gold Trail

By Henry De Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Macquart, an adventurer, meets Houghton, an Englishman, in Sydney, Australia, and offers him a chance to join a treasure-hunting expedition. Houghton accepts and is told that it means a trip to New Guinea and plenty of risk. This does not daunt him, and he learns that the treasure belonged to John Lant, sea robber, who had made a fortune in plunder in the South Seas. The Dutch commandeered Lant's ship, the *Terschelling*, but he managed to get away and sailed up a New Guinea river. He cached his treasure ashore and married a native wife and had a girl baby, Chaya. Later the ship was burned with her crew aboard, only Lant and one other escaping. Lant was murdered, and the surviving sailor had to fly for his life. All this happened fifteen years before, and Macquart declares that the treasure is still lying where Lant cached it. Macquart gets a fellow named Tillman to introduce him to business men of Sydney. It results in a hard-fisted wool merchant called Screed, backing the enterprise of going after the gold. Thus, Houghton, Tillman and Macquart sail for New Guinea aboard the *Barracuda*, and Screed puts aboard a Captain Hull to keep tabs on Macquart. Without mishap the ill-assorted company reaches the mysterious river of New Guinea. Macquart guides the *Barracuda* to a hidden lagoon and recommends that they tie her up there and push on into the interior. The treasure they seek is buried somewhere along the river shore, according to Macquart. Both Tillman and Houghton have come to doubt Macquart as much as Captain Hull does, and they suspect the wily adventurer of treachery. Nevertheless, all of them go up the river, and within a few miles come upon a village of Papuans and Dyaks. Stationed there, they find Wiart, a rubber agent, who appears to be more of a drunkard than anything else. Chief of the Dyaks is an old woman, the widow of Lant; and her only child, Chaya, has grown into a beautiful creature. Houghton falls in love with her. Meanwhile Macquart has decided upon the spot where the treasure is buried, and at night the party of white men begin digging, but they unearth nothing.

(In Four Parts—Part Three)

CHAPTER XVII.

SAJI.

THE Dyak village, situated about a quarter of a mile from the Papuan village, constituted only a miserable remnant of what it had once been. There were scarcely forty members of the tribe that ages ago had come here from Borneo, Saribas Dyaks, sea plunderers and fishermen, who had found the river, and fixed themselves here, well sheltered from pursuit of enemies, yet within touching distance of the sea.

Even in the days when John Lant had come here and settled down, marrying the mother of Chaya, the tribe had been in decadence.

When Lant died, his wife had been chief woman of the tribe. She was still.

The mother of Chaya was a full-blooded Saribas woman, with all the instincts, all the pertinacity, all the ferocity, all the tenacity of her race.

She was not an old woman in years, but she was old in appearance, with a farseeing and fateful look in her face that was daunting.

Her husband, whom she had loved, had been murdered. The murderer had done his work so skillfully that in a civilized community no suspicion

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would have been attached to him, and no process of law could have been put in operation against him.

But the mother of Chaya knew that the father of her child had been murdered, and, though the murderer had escaped her and made good his escape, she knew that he would come back.

Even civilized people have "feelings" that amount to sure knowledge. Chaya's mother, with an inherited instinct for men and events preternaturally developed, had the sure feeling that the murderer would return.

On an everyday basis, that event might have been predicted, for he had gone without the gold for which the crime had been committed. Chaya's mother did not know where the gold was buried, she only knew that it was somewhere in the vicinity of the river; the man would come back to the river, and for fifteen years she had waited.

The fishing Dyaks of the tribe—there were no pirates now—had always been on the watch to give her news of strangers arriving. It was part of their business in life, and had turned into a sort of religious observance.

The *Barracuda* had been observed even before she had engaged the reefs, and Saji, one of the youngest of the fishermen, had tracked her up to the lagoon. Hiding his canoe, he had observed everything to do with her berthing in the lagoon, and then, when Macquart and his companions had taken the boat and come up to the village, Saji had followed. It was his canoe that they had found tied up to the landing stage when they came out of Wiart's house.

Saji had obeyed not only his orders and his own natural tracking instincts, but the desire to please the chief woman of the tribe.

Saji was in love with Chaya.

The tribe had fallen into that condition which scarcely allows for grades of rank; Saji, as one of the best fishermen, though he had no special rank or standing, was as likely a suitor for Chaya as any of the others. He was eighteen years of age, straight as a dart, well formed, and even to a European eye not bad looking, but he was a pure-blooded Saribas, his dress was little more than an apron, and, in the eyes of Chaya, he did not exist as a man.

The white traders had shown her the edge of civilization, and her instincts inherited from John Lant raised her above the level of the tribe. To complete the matter, Saji had let her perceive the nature of his feelings toward her. Besides being a good fisherman, he was a skillful metal worker, and he had, only a month ago, constructed a bangle of copper, beating it out from a copper rod with infinite pains and care; taking his courage in one hand and the bangle in the other, he had approached Chaya with the gift—and she had refused it.

"Give it to Maidan," she had said.

Maidan was one of the tribe girls, and the least good looking of them.

Though disdaining him as a lover, Chaya did not show any dislike for him; she allowed him to accompany her in the woods, and it was his half-naked form they had glimpsed the day before amid the leaves. He had led her to show her the strangers just as an hour before he had sought her mother to tell of the new arrivals.

Last night, when the party were digging on the spit of the river bank, Saji led the old woman to inspect them. In the full moonlight, she had seen the face and form that her eyes had been aching to see for fifteen years.

Revenge was at last in her grasp, and, as they returned to the Dyak village after watching the fruitless work of the diggers, she said to Saji:

"You shall have Chaya."

"Aïe," whined Saji, as he trotted beside her. They were going full speed

down the jungle path to the village. "But she cares nought for me."

"You shall have Chaya, on the word of her mother, and the gift you will bring her will fetch her to your feet."

"What gift?" said Saji.

"That I will tell you soon. You have each stranger clear in your mind, so that you would know each, even in the dark?"

"Aye, I could tell each by his spoor or his smell."

"Then watch them all, but more especially the one I pointed out last—the others do not count."

They spoke in the Saribas dialect.

At the village, they parted, Saji returning to keep a watch on the newcomers, even as they slept.

That watch was never relaxed.

Fortunately for Houghton, he was not the man specially pointed out to Saji as the man never to be lost sight of. Otherwise his meeting with Chaya might have been observed with disastrous consequences to him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOUNDINGS.

When Houghton got back to the tent, he found Tillman waiting for him. Hull was down by the boat, attending to some matter or other.

"Macquart is in there in the house with Wiart," said Tillman. "They seem to have chummed up very much. There they are smoking cigarettes and drinking gin and water."

"I don't think Macquart is a man to drink much," said Houghton.

"No, he's not; but there he is with that soaker. I wonder what they're talking about. I went to the door, and the smell of the place nearly knocked me down. Wiart asked me in, but I excused myself—said I had business to attend to."

"Oh, I don't think there's anything dangerous in it," replied the other. "Wiart has his business here to attend to, and between that and drink, his hands are pretty full."

As a matter of fact, Houghton's mind was so filled by Chaya that he did not want for the moment to think of anything else.

Had he frightened or offended her? He could not tell, but he cursed himself for his precipitancy and stupidity. He went down to the landing stage and sat watching Hull, who had baled some water into the boat to prevent the seams opening, and who was now engaged in overhauling some of the gear. But he did not see Hull. He was looking at the mental image of Chaya, listening to her voice.

One of the fascinating things about her was the manner in which she used gestures and pantomime to express her meaning. He was beginning to understand the great fact that, whereas, love in many cases is the child of long acquaintance, in others it is born instantaneously, and is the child of first sight. There are natures that fly together at first approach, just as the elements of some chemical compounds fly together.

It seemed to him that he had been wanting Chaya all his life, and that she had been waiting for him in these mysterious forests, of which he had never dreamed, of whose existence he had been absolutely ignorant.

He was deeply disturbed, not really because of the idea that he might have given her offense, for some instinct told him this was not so, but because of the general situation.

First, there was his own poverty. How, even if she loved him, could he ever take Chaya away from here? He had no trade, no resources, the expedition seemed to be turning out the wildest of wild-goose chases. How, even supposing that he could get away with her, could he ever take her to Sydney, beggared as he was in the goods of the world? To remain here with her

was an impossible thought. To live here, even with Chaya, would not be to live but to die to the world.

The place lay heavy on his soul, filled him with a vague terror; the languorous, heat-laden atmosphere, the very forms of the trees, the sluggish, oily-flowing river, the very superabundance of life and of life in its most terrible forms, all these had created around him that vague atmosphere of nightmare that the tropics can alone create.

Then, even supposing that the cache really existed, there was Macquart and his threatened treachery.

Macquart was a terrible man. He was beginning to recognize that fact even more fully now. A man who worked always for some hidden purpose and always underground. A wolf that was yet a mole. It is only given to human nature to incorporate in itself the properties of diverse animal natures, and sometimes this gift produces most strange monstrosities. He remembered that morning of his first meeting with Macquart in the *Domain* of Sydney; even at that first meeting, something predatory in the make-up of his new acquaintance had struck him. Since then, and by slow degrees, the nature of the man had been half showing itself, and the evidence against him accumulating. Houghton had been keen enough about the object of the expedition all through, but now he was doubly keen; it was not only the gold that was at stake, but Chaya. And he could do nothing but wait, nothing could be done to hurry matters.

Houghton's keen psychological sense had given him some glimpse of the extraordinary mentality of the man upon whom everything depended. He guessed in Macquart some of those qualities that go to form the foundation of madness. Not that Macquart was mad in the least, never was there a man more coldly sane; but it seemed evident to Houghton that here was a man who would destroy everything, even his own chance of success, rather than allow success to a man he hated.

And Macquart hated Hull with an ungodly hatred. To Houghton, now, it seemed clearly demonstrated that Macquart's original plan was to bring the *Barracuda* into the lagoon, where, without doubt, the treasure was cached, and not to come up here to the village at all. Macquart had meant to run straight, at least till the gold was on board the *Barracuda;* after that, who knows what he might have done; but he would, at least, have used his companions for the purpose of shipping the treasure.

The advent of Hull changed all this, and the way in which Hull had managed to arm himself and his companions while disarming Macquart.

Finding his plans destroyed and his enemy on top of him, Macquart had evolved new plans, which were now in progress.

What were these plans?

It was impossible as yet to predict. It was only possible to say that to gain time for some purpose, Macquart would keep them digging every night at the place where there was nothing to be found.

The hopeful part of the situation was embraced by the fact that he knew nothing of their suspicions, and the only plan of campaign for the present was to give him a free rein.

Hull presently relinquished his work on the boat and came up and sat down beside Houghton, complaining of the heat.

"Where's Mac?" said he.

"He's in there in the house, smoking and talking to Wiart," replied Houghton.

The captain lit a pipe.

"I don't know what's in me when I'm near that swab," said he. "I always want to lay him out. I do so. He raises my gizzard. Now, mind you, he

played me a low-down, dirty trick that time fower years ago, but it's not that makes me want to flatten his head in with a shovel; it's himself. Sometimes I feel I could let up on the whole of this show just for the sake of givin' that mud turkle a rap on the shell that'd finish him. Funny, ain't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Houghton. "I feel pretty much as you feel, sometimes; but he's the goose that lays the golden egg, and it's better not to think of him."

"That's what I can't help," said the captain. "*I* believe the chap's bamboozling us."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Houghton, alarmed at the idea that Hull was sniffing at the truth and at the idea of the possible consequences. "Why should he fool us over the business? He has just as big a stake in it as we have, and he's no use without us."

"I don't know why he should," replied the other; "but them's my feelings. We ought to have struck the stuff last night; we sure ought to, if it's there. If we don't strike the stuff, well, all I've to say is it's Mac that'll be struck, and struck hard. You'll see!"

"Look here," said Houghton, "promise me one thing; promise me to say nothing to him *ever* that will make him think you suspect him, without first consulting with me and Tillman. This is a serious matter, captain, and, supposing for a moment he is bamboozling us—which doesn't seem probable—we must act accordingly and all together, to find out his plans."

"Oh, I won't say anything," replied the other, "or I'll have a talk with you two before I do. You tell me one thing. If the stuff was cached on that bit of bank, the ship it was took from, if they sank her, would be layin' close by. The river is only three fathom deep off the stage—I've took soundings—I don't believe it's much deeper up there, so they'd have sunk her in only eighteen foot of water. Why, she'd draw 'most that!"

"She would," replied Houghton.

"Let's go and take soundings off the bank up there," said the captain. "It'll be something to do." He went to the boat and fetched the sounding lead, and they left the stage and walked along the river bank, upstream, till they reached the spot.

The captain looked at their excavation work of last night.

"It's lonesome enough to work by day up here, without nobody knowing," he said, "only maybe that blighter of a Wiart might see us goin', and suspect. I reckon perhaps Mac's right—unless he's foolin' us."

He made a cast with the lead from the bank edge at the base of the spit; it showed two and a half fathoms or thereabouts, then he went to the apex of the spit. The depth here was nothing, till one got well away from the bank.

"I'd have to bring the boat up to get correct soundin's," said Hull; "but what we've got will do. You see for yourself. There ain't anywhere just here a vessel could be moored to and sunk at her moorin's, and that was the way of it, accordin' to Mac."

"You're right," said Houghton. "The only thing one can suppose is that the river has altered in the course of fifteen years."

"*I* don't see what's to alter it," said the captain, looking at the river. "No, sir, unless there's some deep pool near here we don't know nothing of, that ship was never moored to no bank of this river."

It seemed astounding to Houghton that Hull should not have thought of the lagoon, and should not have connected the idea of the old, burned ship in the lagoon with the *Terschelling*, but a moment's reflection told him that Hull had not seen the burned ship as they

saw it, and also reminded him of the fact that the human intellect works in very narrow circuits. Hull's mind was held by Macquart's story to the village and this bit of bank; he was utterly lacking in imagination, and the lagoon, away down the river, never once occurred to him as the "deep pool" where the bones of the *Terschelling* might be lying.

They turned from the pit, and made back through the trees toward the tent, and they had scarcely gone a hundred yards, when something white moving amid the tree boles drew Houghton's attention.

It was Chaya.

She had not been following them, evidently, for she was coming toward them, though not in the line of their path.

"There's the gal we saw yesterday," said Hull.

Houghton's heart sprang alive in him like a struggling bird.

It was only a couple of hours ago that she had evaded him. He would soon know now if she were angry or not.

She had a basket in her hand, and was evidently going about some business or other, and she had seen him, he could tell that. But she did not alter her direction. She kept straight on, and, passing them ten yards away, she turned her head, caught Houghton's gaze full, and smiled.

He could only tell that she was not angry, that she was, in fact, quite friendly, but it seemed to him there was the faintest, faintest trace of mockery in that smile. The mockery of a child that has just escaped its would-be captor.

Then she was gone.

"She give you the glad eye," said Hull. "She did shore! Funny things them females are; she hadn't no eyes for me. I never did hold with wimmenfolk, and never took up with them much excep' maybe now and then when I've had more money in my pocket than wits in my head."

"You were never married, cap—were you?" asked Houghton, asking the question more as something to say to hide his jubilation than for any other reason.

"Yes, I were," replied Hull. "Took in by a female that used to live in James Street, Frisco, down by the Chiney docks. Westhouse her name was, and she took in washin'. Ran a la'ndry. She weren't more than twenty-five year old, and she weighed near two hundred. I sighted her first when she was punchin' a Chow in the eye. He was one of the la'ndry hands, and he'd cheeked her, and she let out and laid him flat. She was in a ragin', tearin' paddy, and when I complimented her on her fist work, she let out and nearly downed me, too. Never you go nigh an angry woman, even to praise her, a woman in that state isn't accountable, she wants somethin' to hit, and she'll hit anythin' in sight. I didn't care. I on'y laffed, and then she began to laff, too, and we went and had a drink, and that day week we were spliced, and she were makin' all of a hundred dollars a week clear profit.

"I reckoned to give up the sea, and live on the profits, but she didn't. Oh, Lord, no! She reckoned to make a la'ndry hand of me, and spend my wages on booze. She drank dreadful. But the drink didn't bust out in her till after the weddin'. She kep' on celebratin' the occasion, so to speak, till the la'ndry began to turn itself from a la'ndry to a stack of empty bottles. Then I let go all holts, and took my hook, and when I came back to Frisco a year after she was married to a nigger, and the la'ndry was in full blast again, with the nigger doing the drinkin' and she doin' the workin'. It's my 'xperience when folks get married it's either the man or the woman drinks,

and the one that takes to drink the first and keeps at it consistent has the best time of it."

This unlovely story was only half heard by Houghton, whose thoughts were engaged on a more pleasant subject.

When they got back to the tent, they found Tillman talking to Macquart.

Tillman was seated on the ground, with his back to a tree, and Macquart was seated near him. The discussion, whatever it was, between the two, was being conducted with vigor, to judge by the gestures of Macquart.

"See here, you fellows," cried Tillman, as they approached. "Here's something new."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEW MOVE.

"Well," said Hull, taking his seat on the ground near Tillman, "what's up now?"

"Everything," said Tillman. "Ask Macquart."

"It's not as bad as that," said Macquart. "In fact, as far as I can see, things are looking better than they did when we knocked off work last night, but I'm beginning to have more than a suspicion that we have been 'done.'"

Houghton saw Hull's big hand clench itself as it lay beside him on the ground. Fearing that the captain might take up the questioning of Macquart, he moved close to him, and manage to nudge him, unseen by the others.

"How do you mean?" he said. "Who has 'done' us?"

"The natives, I believe," said Macquart. "It's this way: When we struck nothing last night, when, in fact, I saw that the marking trees were gone, I began to suspect. I began to say to myself, 'Can it be possible that the stuff has been removed?' I thrashed the thing out in my own mind. I said to myself, 'Fifteen years is a long while; can white men have been here, and taken the stuff off?' Then I saw at once, arguing from common sense, that —outside miracles—the thing could not be. No white man in the world had track of the position of the thing but me."

"Say," exclaimed Hull, speaking despite the warning nudges of Houghton, "wasn't you goin' round the world huntin' for a chap to put up money for this expedition? Why, God bless my soul, you told me about the thing fower years ago in Frisco. Well, if you told it to me, you told it to loads besides. How do you know that one of them chaps hasn't been to the money box?"

The enmity of Macquart to the questioner shot out in his glance.

"How do I know? I know because I wasn't such a complicated fool as to give any man a hint that would bring him within two hundred miles of the thing. Have you any more questions to ask? Well, then: I said to myself last night, no white man has been here, but how about natives? The Papuans are out of court; they are too stupid. How about the Dyaks? They're clever; they may have ferreted out the stuff; and, if they did, they'd know it belonged to John Lant, and they'd maybe move it to some other place more safely hid than the river bank. They're full of superstitions, and if any bad luck had been happening to them, or if they'd been unlucky at fishing, or if one of their wise women had been dreaming things, they might have taken it as an indication, if they knew the stuff was there, to move it. Anyhow, those were my thoughts. Then, to-day, when I was yarning with Wiart, I managed to hit on some news.

"Two years ago, there was a big disturbance here, and the Dyaks stopped fishing for a week. They were desperately busy about something, carting mat baskets through the woods. Wiart

was very busy just then with the rubber, and he didn't notice things much till near the end of the powwow, when, one day, he was out prospecting in the forest, and he came on the thing the Dyaks had been carting their baskets to. He followed one of the basket carriers to it, in fact. It was a sort of temple hut, and he didn't go farther, for he didn't want to be seen prying into their affairs. He never thought that the stuff those chaps were carting might be gold; he thought it was earth from the riverside, and they had some religious reason for bringing it. He thinks so still. I haven't said anything to make him think different. Well, I believe that's where the stuff is. I believe they cut the marking trees down, though maybe the trees fell of their own accord. Anyhow, that's the position, and Wiart knows where that hut place is in the forest; he said he could go there quite easy."

"Well," said Hull, "if that's so, we'd better yank him out and make him lead us there."

"I believe there's something in this," said Houghton, with an air of conviction; "but we must go cautiously."

"There mayn't be anything in it at all," said Macquart. "It may be a wrong scent entirely, but it's worth inquiring into."

"If it's true, our difficulty will be this," said Tillman. "If the Dyaks have hid the stuff, you may be sure they'll not let us take it off without a word or two."

"And how about our rifles?" cut in Houghton. "And our six-shooters? Seems to me the argument on our side will be the stronger."

"If it comes to that," said Macquart, "I'll make the Dyaks do the hefting, I'll make them carry that stuff right down to the *Barracuda,* and not bother about the boat. And there's another point: You three are armed; I've got nothing but my naked hands. If we are to carry this thing through, we must all be armed. I've got to have a six-shooter."

"That's perfectly right," said Houghton; "and you'll have mine the moment we touch the stuff."

Macquart said nothing, but began to fill a pipe, then he lit it. He seemed satisfied with Houghton's promise; at least, his mind seemed to have traveled to some other subject.

"We'd better go on digging to-night," he said, "on the chance that some shock of earthquake may have deepened the stuff, though I don't think that's very probable. Anyhow, we'd better make plumb sure the cache is gone. I believe I'm right in supposing it is, but we can never be quite sure in this world. Then, to-morrow, I can fix it up with Wiart to take us to that place."

"Why not call the chap out now and let's talk it over?" said Hull.

"If you like," said Macquart; "only I'd advise not. He suspects nothing of what we're after, and if you leave it to me he'll go on not suspecting till we're dabbling our hands in the yellow boys."

"You're right," said Houghton. "Hull, we'll better leave this thing to Macquart, he's cleverer than the whole of us."

"Oh, I don't pretend to be clever," said the other; "I struck on the idea by chance, and it was the merest chance that I sounded Wiart on the matter. That's all there is to it."

"Well, let's say nothing more till we've had another try to-night," replied Houghton. "If we draw a blank, then to-morrow we can make arrangements with Wiart."

Half an hour later, Tillman, taking Houghton for a stroll down to the landing stage, broke silence.

"Do you think Macquart is in earnest?" he asked.

"Not a bit," replied Houghton; "he's cooking some dog's trick to play on us.

I believe he has roped that scamp of a Wiart into his scheme, as a cat's-paw, of course. He intends to take us into the woods, and do for us. Notice the way he made the bid for arms."

"Yes, and you promised him your revolver."

"When we touched the stuff. The stuff is not in the woods."

"Well, for heavens' sake, why should we go with him? I'm not a man to funk, but when we know or suspect he's going to do for us, why not tackle him at once?"

"If he was an ordinary scoundrel, I'd put my revolver to his head and threaten to shoot him if he didn't show us where the cache was," replied Houghton. "But he's not. The threat wouldn't have any effect on him simply because he'd rather be shot, I believe, than show that stuff to Hull. There's the faint chance that this yarn *may* be true, and that his plan is to get us to help move the stuff before doing us up, and there's the chance that he may lead us into some trap. Now, if I could once convict him of that, and escape the trap, *then* I'd make him show us the place we want even by torturing him. But we've convicted him of nothing, and you can't torture a man in cold blood—I can't. So we'll just have to lay low, not care a darn for danger, and be ready to pounce."

"I'll be ready to do the pouncing," said Tillman, "if I get the chance."

After supper that night, and just before moonrise, they stole off again upstream to the spit.

Four hours' digging showed no result beyond a hole in which, to use Hull's expression, they could have buried a church. Then, depressed but not dispirited, they returned to the tent.

Hull and Houghton retired to rest, but Tillman, according to his arrangement with Houghton, slipped off, armed with a rifle, to keep watch on the boat.

CHAPTER XX.

A PICTURE IN THE FOREST.

It was noon next day when Macquart, who had been in the house with Wiart having a long talk, drew the others together for a consultation.

He led them among the trees to a spot where a clearing had been made by nature, a regular room of the woods roofed with blue sky and walled with the liquid shadow of foliage. Macquart took his seat on the trunk of a camphor tree long fallen, Tillman sat down beside him, while Hull and Houghton remained standing.

"Well, I've fixed it," said Macquart. "He's open to lead us to the place, not to-day, because he has to look after the rubber chaps—it's pay day—but to-morrow."

"Will he be sober, think you?" asked Hull.

"He's off the drink. When we landed, he was just at the end of a spree. He'll be right enough now for a couple of months, and then he'll have another. He's that sort."

"Well," said Hull, "I guess you know more of the fellow's clockworks than I do. I can't stomach the blighter nohow. Them whiskers of his sticks in my gizzard. I never could abide whiskers on a man—them pork-chop style. If a man's a man, let him grow a full face of hair or stick to a mustache. Them sort of whiskers is unholy, and I don't mind a drinkin' man that takes his drink proper, but that chap don't. He's a last night's drunk goin' about in trousers. By Jiminy, boys, if we don't hit the cache, we'll export him as an objec' lesson! Them temp'rance guys would give a hundred thousand dollars for him to take round the States; they would so!"

"Well, he's our last chance," said Macquart, "and I pin my faith to him, I do so. You mayn't like him, but don't

say anything to rile him; he's the key to this proposition."

"We won't do anything to rile him," said Tillman. "Where's Houghton going?"

Houghton had walked off, and was away among the trees.

"It's that gal," said the captain; "she was peekin' at us from the trees, and he's gone after her. She's after him, too, or my name's not Hull. We only wanted a cage of turkledoves to add to our top-hamper, and, b'gosh, I believe we've got one!"

Houghton had glimpsed her, a white glint among the trees. She had been looking at them. He knew quite well that, if he had not been of the party, she would not have been there. Forgetting the others and heedless of everything, he made toward her. Seeing him coming, she evaded him without taking flight, allowing herself to be glimpsed every now and then, and every now and then vanishing completely from sight.

This was the edge of the great and mysterious forest that throws its cloak far and wide over New Guinea. The trees just here were not very closely set, but swinging lianas, tufted with growths and huge shrubs with foot-broad leaves, gave ample cover for any one pursued. Not wishing to call out, half laughing, half vexed, hit in the face by leaves and clutched at now and then by thorns, he continued the pursuit till now, where the trees were denser and the gloom more profound, he stood lost and without sight of her, surrounded on all sides by a barrier that on all sides was the same.

Parrots were crying in the treetops, and the push of the wind against the foliage came as a deep sigh, the voice of leagues of trees sleeping and half disturbed in their sleep.

Then came a scuttering in the branches up above, and a nut hit him on the shoulder, and, as he glanced up, another nut caught him a sharp blow on the cheek. He was being pelted by little monkeys, swarms of little monkeys, skipping from branch to branch, hanging by their tails or by one hand. He was wiping his cheek, when a laugh sounded almost at his elbow, and, turning, he saw Chaya. She was pushing back the leaves that hid her, to peep at him, and before she could escape he caught her.

He held her hands, and, as he drew her toward him he felt as though he were drawing toward him the very soul of the mysterious forests, the very spirit of this tropical land, unknown and strange. She looked straight and deep into his eyes, and for a moment the prisoner and the captor changed places; then, breaking the spell, he released her hands, to seize her to him, and he seized only air. She had eluded him again, and he found himself face to face with nothing but swaying leaves. She had vanished as completely and suddenly as though the forest had snatched her from him—the forest that was her accomplice and of which she was the true child.

He pushed the still-swaying leaves aside, thought that he perceived a glimpse of her, and pursued it, to find —nothing. Then, after half an hour of fruitless wandering, he broke into an open glade, and found himself close to the Papuan village. There was a great commotion in the village. One of the rubber gatherers had been brought in. He was lying on the ground, turning from side to side, crying out, and, to all appearances, delirious.

As Houghton approached, the unfortunate man ceased his outcries, raised himself with a supreme effort nearly to his feet, and then fell back. He was dead. The natives, seeing the white man, pointed to the corpse, and seemed trying to explain matters. Then one of them shook something from a mat basket, pointed to it and to the corpse.

The thing he had shaken from the basket was a scorpion, rather smaller than the one from which Chaya had saved Houghton. It had bitten the unfortunate man only half an hour ago, and here lay the result.

Houghton shivered at the thought of what he had escaped. It was like an object lesson of what this country held for the unwary, a picture of its dangers for all who tread the paths of life or love.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT THORN BUSH.

Saji knew nothing of the meetings between Houghton and Chaya. Had he done so, Houghton's story would have come to a very abrupt end. Saji was a being who moved entirely in blinkers, with a more than vivid view of his immediate objective, but with great darkness on either side of him. So we might fancy the tiger to move through the jungle.

Having received his commission to watch the strangers and especially Macquart, he fulfilled it to the letter. The reward of his obedience would be Chaya; that was sufficient to blind him to everything else but his work.

Hull and his companions had found themselves unobserved and alone. The interest of the Papuans in them seemed to have died out, and the Dyaks showed no evidence of their existence. In reality, the newcomers made scarcely a movement that was not noted. Saji, unseen, was always with them. He had followed them to the second digging at the spit, and he had lurked behind Wiart's house, listening to the conversation between Wiart and Macquart through a hole in the boarding of the wall.

He knew very little English, but enough to make out that a new move was in progress, and that same night, coming back with his report through the forest glowing green to the moon, he met the mother of Chaya, and delivered his report.

"They have done no digging tonight," said Saji. "They are all now asleep, but they start to-morrow with the rubber man."

"Where?"

"I do not know where, or for what. The rubber man and he whom you told me to watch have been with their heads together for a long time, talking in one another's ears. They mean no good to the others."

"How?"

"I do not know, but I smell death in all their talk. I see that five will go away into the forest and only two return—the rubber man and the other."

The old woman said nothing for a moment. She seemed listening to the wind in the trees and the night sounds of the forest.

In that vague, green light, she seemed unutterably sinister and old, and Saji, his naked body glowing in the vague light, seemed the incarnation of the spirit of the Punan stabbing spear he carried.

It was like a conference between Age and Destruction.

Then she said:

"You must follow them, even if they lead you to the Black Waters, and you must deal with the one you know at the very moment when you find him alone. Should you fail to get him alone, you must deal with him in the presence of the others, even though you die. Do you promise?"

"I swear!"

Chaya came out from amidst the trees. She had been with the old woman, and had left her before the meeting with Saji; then, looking back, she had seen the meeting, and had returned to listen. Saji had been watching her all the time, as she listened, and the fervor of his words seemed derived from her presence. The

old woman did not seem to notice her, nor to care whether she was listening or not.

"At what time do they leave?" she asked.

"I do not know," said Saji. "But leave when they may, I will be with them unseen."

Without a single word more, the old woman turned and made for the village.

Saji and Chaya found themselves alone. These two, despite the fact that Chaya was indifferent to him as though he were a dog, had long been companions in the forest. It was Saji who had taught her to use a blowpipe, so that she could kill a monkey or a bird at ten yards' distance; he had taught her woodcraft from the time when they had been children together, and she had once gone in the fishing prahu with him, and had seen the sea breaking on the reefs, and the trepang gatherers at their work, and the great gulls fishing, the sailor brothers of the forest birds, and as different from them as the foliage is from the waves.

She had gone with him on his hunting expeditions in the forest. Saji was a great hunter of small game. He would have been equally great after big game, had there been any to hunt, but here, in these forests, you might travel days without meeting anything more dangerous than the little monkeys and the climbing kangaroos. Occasionally, as though bursting in upon the last haunts of primitive man, the native hunters would open some glade to discover the great monkey of Papua, more close to man than the gorilla, almost as big, and infinitely more rare. But Saji had never encountered this brute, though once, in a green glade, he had seen it cross from tree edge to tree edge, followed by a figure equally monstrous—its mate.

"You are going hunting, then?" said Chaya, in the singsong voice to which the Saribas' dialect inclines.

"To-morrow," said Saji, without raising his eyes, which he had lowered at her approach.

"In the forest?"

"In the forest."

"You have told me of the big man ape, but to-morrow you follow the little man ape, the one with the beard."

"There are two bearded man apes in that party," said Saji, falling into her vein.

"But your game is the least," said Chaya. "I know. He was the slayer of the white man who was my father. He must surely die."

"It has been said."

"But the others," went on Chaya, "must not die."

"Who knows?" replied Saji. "The forest is very full of death, he will lead them to it. His purpose is set more straight than a spear shaft, than the flight of an arrow."

"I will go with you and see this thing," said Chaya. "It will be better to see than the killing of little monkeys with the blowpipe, or the trapping of fish in the nets. I will be with you at daybreak, and I will bring my spear."

Saji, for the first time, looked up at her. His eyes burned in the gloaming, then he glanced swiftly down.

"As you will," he said.

Meanwhile, the man in the tent and the man in the boat by the landing stage and the man in the frame house slept. The whole complicated and intricate conspiracy, now vaguely shadowed forth, lay in balance, watched only by Saji, hiding near the tent, and Houghton, who, to-night, had taken Tillman's place, and was hiding near the boat.

Macquart, whose able mind was engaged on whatever plans he had made against his fellow adventurers, had not the slightest fear of the past, or suspicion that a hand was stretching out to feel for him.

Macquart was in the position of a man who leaves a village, spends years

of adventurous life in distant countries, and returns, fancying himself forgotten, forgetting the fact that memory lives long in quiet places and among small communities.

With the exception of one or two of the fishing Dyaks, he had not seen a member of the tribe, and he slept now the sleep of the unjust, which is often more peaceful and profound than the sleep of the just.

Saji, hiding near the tent, had not the slightest notion that Chaya, who was to accompany him on the morrow, had any interest in the expedition except the interest of the killing there might be to see. Saji judged Chaya by himself, just as Macquart judged the memory of the tiny Dyak village by the memory of the great civilized cities.

Hull, unconscious of everything, and Tillman, suspicious, but tired, slept so that the sound of their snoring might have been heard by the two watchers, Saji by the tent, and Houghton by the river.

Then, as the color of the sky, the voice of the forest, changed with the breaking dawn, and the river, that had held the stars in reflection, showed to the increasing light ghost spirals of mist that clung to the mangroves with wreathy fingers.

Then a golden glow came over the forest, and the sky above the green of the trees deepened in distance, and where the stars were but a moment ago, there was now the blueness unutterable of the tropic dawn.

Hull came out of the tent and stretched himself. Houghton had released himself half an hour ago from his duties as sentry, and was engaged in shaving himself before a mirror fastened to the tent canvas, and now Jacky and Macquart showed themselves coming up from the riverside.

Lastly, Tillman made his appearance.

"We'd better get breakfast, and then set to work to pack the provisions," said Hull.

"We won't want to take too much," put in Macquart. "The expedition won't last long, and we can always shoot as much as we want for food."

"Maybe," replied the other, "but I ain't goin' to trust to no roast monkeys for my grub. Here comes the sleepin' beauty."

It was Wiart who had appeared on the veranda of his house.

Wiart had improved very much in appearance since they first met him. He had been then at the end of one of his periodical drinking bouts, and he would be all right now till the next attack. His face looked more healthy and more human, despite the whiskers that gave such great offense to Hull, and he had a rifle under his arm and a bandolier of cartridges slung across him.

He came toward the party by the tent, for he was to breakfast with them.

Hull stared at the coming figure with a frown on his face.

"Hi," said he, "what's that? What are you doin' with that gun and them ca'tridges?"

"Doing," said Wiart. "Nothing; carrying them."

"Well, then," said Hull, "you'll just oblige me by carryin' them back and leavin' them in the house. This is a picnic; it ain't no huntin' party."

"But what are you talking about?" cried Wiart. "I always go armed in the woods."

"Not with me," said Hull. "I'm meanin' no offense, but I don't go walkin' with armed strangers in no woods. I'm as sure as certain you're an amiable man, but you're a stranger to me, as the lady on the Frisco car said to the gentleman whose foot was on hers. Now, do you take me, or do you don't—my ultimatum is no armaments."

"Then you can go without me," said

Wiart, grounding the butt of the rifle and half turning away.

"One moment, son," said Hull. "I can *not*. You've contracted to lead this party, and it's up to you to finish the contrac'."

Whether he received some sign from Macquart it is impossible to say, but the Rubber Man gave in suddenly and unconditionally on the point of arms, put the rifle and cartridges back in the house, and sat down to breakfast.

"I don't blame you for being cautious," said he, "though this seems caution run mad, if you'll excuse me for saying so, 'specially as the whole lot of you are armed. However, let it stand at that. I don't mind."

He understated the case. This was much more than caution run mad; it was, perhaps, the most deadly insult that one white man could put on another in that place. Hull did not care in the least. If Wiart had attempted to back out of leading them he would, as he said, have taken him along by a halter. Instinct had warned him against Wiart. He knew absolutely nothing of the suspicions that filled the more cultivated and sensitive minds of his companions, but he did know that not on any account would he trust himself in lonely places with the Rubber Man, if the latter were armed. There is no doubt that, in his subconscious mind, Hull had worked out the sinister possibilities of any collaboration between Macquart and Wiart, but he was unconscious of the fact.

When breakfast was over, they began to pack up the provisions, Hull supervising.

"We don't want no tent," said he. "There ain't no skeeters in the forest to speak of, and we can light a smoke fire to keep 'em off if there are. Jacky can carry the pick and shovel. Now, then, if you're ready, h'ist your bundles."

They streamed off, Wiart and Macquart leading, Jacky and Hull coming next, and Tillman and Houghton following. Wiart had a pocket compass, and Hull had another, though, as Wiart said, his knowledge of the road was so intimate that compasses were unnecessary.

They went down the glade, past the Papuan village, and struck into the trees where the glade ended.

It was like passing into a house; the damar, cutch, and camphor trees around them flung their branches to make the roof, a roof supported by a thousand pillars.

Just as the outline of the Tartar tents can still be seen in the outline of the roofs of the Chinese pagodas, so in the pillars of the cathedral we can see a vague sketch of the forest, that first home of man, and, in the gloom of our cathedrals, some tincture of the gloom of the great cathedral that God created for the first worshipers.

The forests of the north have a solemnity all their own, and the forests of the tropics a mystery incommunicable to those who have not experienced it.

Here in the twilight, that seems the twilight of the birth of things, vegetable life appears still clinging to its first and most extravagant forms. It moves. Like that convolvulus in the Botanical Gardens of Caracas, that grow at the rate of an inch an hour, here, in the forest of New Guinea, the lianas lengthen themselves almost perceptibly, vines fight the trees and kill them, trees fall and crush the vines. The orchids are everywhere. They seem the furious attempt of the vegetable world to enter the kingdom of the birds and butterflies and insects. That bird clinging to that rope of liantasse is a flower, that butterfly is an illusion, that insect an orchid.

That bursting crash is a tree that has been falling for a year. The forest kills itself, and recreates itself eter-

nally; it is a community where the vegetable is king, and where the vegetable wars with the animal and the insect, sets traps for flies, and thorn entanglements for animals, and mazes to bewilder and destroy men.

Houghton was alive to these impressions, Tillman less so.

"I've fixed up with Hull," said he, "to keep those two chaps always in front of us; they can't do any harm then."

"I'm not afraid of them and their tricks, unless we find the cache," said Houghton. "You see, while we are like this, we can always guard against them, but should, by any chance, this lead of Macquart's be a real one, and we touch the stuff, then, in the excitement of the business, when we aren't thinking, they may get their blow in."

"You needn't worry about that," said Tillman. "This lead is a spoof. I'm dead sure of that. Mac has some black joke up his sleeve. D'you know, I've got to that condition now that the gold is less to me than the chance of downing Macquart, if we catch him playing tricks; that chap has got on my spine. I'm beginning to hate him!"

"I'm feeling like that," replied the other. "It's the strangest thing. At first, I liked him; he seemed better than a fairy tale; and slowly I've got to feel like you. Yet he has never given me offense. Hull hated him all along. You see, he knew him better, and, besides, he's a chap that moves by instinct. Did you notice the grouch he's got on Wiart?"

"You mean on his whiskers. Hull's a rum chap, and somehow he's hit the thing about Wiart that seems the bull's-eye. A chap must be a beast to grow a pair of things like that on his face—lost to all sense of decency."

Houghton laughed, and they said no more.

The work was becoming heavy. They were crossing a boggy patch, where tall nipa palms grew—the nipa palm loves the water—and their feet sank ankle-deep at every step.

Beyond, lay clear ground, except for barrier lianas sagging so low that sometimes they could be stepped over.

Where the trees grew denser, beyond this patch, the monkeys began to give them their attention. Swarms and swarms of little monkeys, scurrying through the leaves above like a breeze, pursued them and circled them, pelting them with nuts and bits of stick and other ammunition, till Tillman, losing patience, raised his rifle, sighted one, and brought it down.

Then the brave bombardiers ceased their work, and the party pursued their way till, at noon, Hull called a halt in a clearing, and they set to on the provisions.

In cutting Hull out of their councils, Houghton and Tillman had made a mistake. They had considered him too volcanic to trust with their suspicions; they had forgotten that he had a mind of his own, and that the working of that mind, unchecked by them, might be prejudicial to their plans.

Hull, as he ate now, was thinking. The working of the jaws in mastication stimulates some brains, just as the contemplation of the ideal stimulates others. Hull, as he chewed his bully beef, began to think that he had never made full inquiries of Macquart as to the extent of Wiart's knowledge of their real business or his compensation, if they were successful.

"Look here," said he, to Wiart, "you know, I s'pose, that you're not takin' us on this traverse for the sake of our health."

Wiart glanced at Macquart, who at once chipped in:

"Oh, I've told Wiart we're not hunting for that place the niggers carted the baskets to for nothing. He's quite ready to lend us his assistance without prodding too deep into our affairs."

"All the same," said Hull. "I'm a man that takes nothing from no man for nothing, and if we strike what we're lookin' for, I'm not goin' to deny his dues to him who brought us to it."

"There's no use in talking of that yet," said Houghton hurriedly.

"Oh, yes, there is," said Hull. "It's better to settle jobs like these right off at the start, then there'll be no quarreling at the finish, and if we hit what we're lookin' for, I'm up to give Mr. Wiart two hundred pound for his work in directin' us. A man can't say fairer than that."

Tillman, who was looking at Wiart, thought that he saw a momentary gleam of mockery in his eye.

"Oh, that's all right," said he. "I'm not bothering about rewards. I can see plain enough what you gentlemen are after, and I'll not deny that I guessed it from Mr. Macquart's questions, and what he let fall. Well, if it's treasure, then, and you strike it rich, I'm not indisposed to take what you offer. I came on this expedition for the fun of the thing, and to get away from that confounded rubber plantation for a day or two; that's what riled me when you objected to my carrying a rifle. That's maybe why you objected. You thought in your mind, this man may make trouble——"

"Wait a bit," cut in Hull. "I only put in my word against arms because I didn't know you, and because you were a bit thick with Mac, here. You'll observe, Mac doesn't carry a gun. Mac and me has differences at times, don't we, Mac? And I objects to any chanst of us quarrelin'. Now, if Mac's friend had a gun, Mac might borrow it, mightn't you, Mac?"

Houghton jumped to his feet.

"Come on," he said. "There's no use in sitting here, talking. Let's be doing."

He began to pack up the things; and the others, rising to their feet, helped him. Then they got under way in the same order of procession.

At four o'clock, they arrived at a part of the forest which goes by the native name of the Great Thorn Bush.

CHAPTER XXII.

MACQUART'S THIRD TRICK.

It is the chief wonder of this part of the forests of New Guinea. Square miles upon square miles of Wait-a-Bit thorn, six feet in height, cut into a thousand intersecting roads, and presenting a maze all the more intricate from the fact that the roads are sparsely occupied by trees.

Where the thorn is, there grows nothing but thorn, forming a terrible wall, impenetrable as a barbed-wire entanglement.

"There's a bad bit of stuff in front of us," said Wiart, "but we can get through before sundown; the way through winds a bit, but I know the road, and, if I should miss it, the compass will put us right."

"Heave ahead," said Hull.

Wiart, Macquart, and Jacky led the way, the others following. Hull had closed up with his two companions, and, as they went along, Houghton proceeded to take him to task for his indiscretions.

"It was no good of you opening that question with Wiart," said he.

"What question?" asked Hull.

"Good Lord! About the payment we'd give him. Two hundred pounds —what's two hundred pounds to the amount we're expecting to find?"

"And how's he to know what we're expectin'?" asked the other. "My idea was, if we nosed the stuff, to get rid of Don Whiskerandos before we carted it off, pay him a lump sum, and get him drunk. He don't know what we're expectin'."

"How do you know he doesn't?"

"Who'd tell him?'

"How do you know Macquart hasn't told him?"

"He's not such a durned fool as that," said the captain. "Where'd be the sense of lettin' another chap into the know?"

"Well, it's this way: Tillman and I have been suspecting that Macquart is up to some trick to bunko us three, and he's pulled Wiart in. Of course, it's only suspicion, but if there is any understanding between them, and if Wiart does know what we expect to find, the offer of two hundred will only strengthen his determination to help Macquart. He'll say to himself that, with such a measly offer, it's worth risking everything to go against us. I think we'd better let Wiart into the whole thing, and make him a partner, and see if we can get him to peach on Macquart if Macquart has been doing any plotting. I could take him aside when we camp to-night, and sound him if you fellows agree."

"Let him in!" said Hull. "You'd better let the whole of New Guinea in while you're about it, *and* put up placards when we get back to Sydney, statin' the job we've been after, and the amount."

"I think Houghton is right," said Tillman. "It's better to lose a bit than lose all. Macquart is a rat, and he hates you, Hull, and would be only too glad to serve you some dirty trick."

"Listen," said Houghton.

They were pursuing their way along a thorn alley in sight of Macquart and the others, who were leading the way, and now, seeming to come from far away behind them, they heard a voice as though some one were hailing them.

A girl's voice evidently. Then it ceased.

They looked back, but they could see nothing beyond the distance of twenty yards or so. Though the trees were so sparsely placed that walking between them was easy, in the aggregate they made an obstruction to the eye, to say nothing of the fact that the path was irregular in its course.

"Come on," said Hull, "or we'll lose sight of them chaps in front. It's a bird, maybe; anyhow, it's no consarn of ours."

They resumed the way and their argument, till at last Hull gave in.

"Well, if you chaps are set on it," said he, "I'm not goin' to stand against you, and Mac will have to pay the blighter out of his share. He's fooled the business up to this, an' he'll have to pay for his foolin'."

They had reached a part of the great thorn bush now, that was simply a maze of alleys. This maze extended over many square miles, how many no man can say, for no man has ever mapped it or measured it. The whole of this district is hated by the natives, and feared as the abode of evil spirits; small wonder, for nothing can be more sinister than this intricacy of paths hedged by the mournful thorn.

Macquart and Wiart and Jacky, going steadily ahead, disappeared round an angle of the way, and, when the others reached the angle, they found bending paths leading from it in every direction, but of Macquart and Wiart and Jacky not a sign.

It was as though the earth had swallowed them.

"Hello!" cried Hull. "What's gone with them blighters?"

"They've given us the slip," said Tillman. His face had suddenly turned pale, and his lips so dry that he had to moisten them.

Houghton, putting his hands to his mouth, shouted out. Not a sound came in reply.

"Quick," said Hull. "Drop everything and after them."

He cast his bundle down, as did the others, and started off down the broadest of the paths before them; it split into three ways, and, dividing, they

each took a path, calling all the time to keep in touch.

They found nothing, and, after a while, fearing to lose company, each began to return along the way he had come, only to be confronted with the fact that he did not know the way; all sorts of feeding ways and side cuts, passed without thinking, formed now a problem more dark than the problem set by the Sphinx.

Keeping in touch by calling, they managed at last to reunite, but they were now utterly mazed, without the least idea in which direction to go—and the precious bundles were lost.

Dusk would soon be falling suddenly, like a shut lid, and they were without food.

"Oh, *cuss* that swine!" cried Hull. "I oughter 'a' put a bullet through his carciss. This is the third fool trick he's played me. It's my fault; I oughter 'a' known."

"That beast Jacky must have played up to him," said Tillman.

Houghton said nothing for a moment. Then he spoke:

"There's no use in abusing them, or thinking of them till we're able to catch them. What we've got to do is to get out of this infernal place; we've got a compass, and, if we strike consistently in one direction, we will be all right. That river runs north and south; well, we must strike west, or at least take the most westerly paths we can find."

"Well, I'm blest if I didn't forget the compass," said Hull.

He opened the box containing it, got it level, and found the west.

The path directly opposite to where he was standing led due west, and, with a load removed from their minds, they started down it. It was only now, with safety in sight, that they began fully to realize the horrible situation from which they were escaping. The thorn tangle had a personality all its own, wicked and malevolent; its intricacy seemed the intricacy of an evil mind set on their destruction.

The path they were on led them in a straight line for some few hundred yards, and then bent to the right, leading due north.

"Fitchered, b'gosh!" said the captain. "We're done!"

"Come on," said Tillman. "There's no use stopping, and the light won't last long."

They hurried ahead to a point where the path broke up into three ways, one leading due west.

They struck down the westerly path, and it led them bravely till a curve came in it, and they found themselves facing due south.

Tillman felt the sweat standing out on the palms of his hands.

The most terrible result of a maze like this is its demoralizing effect.

Hull, with a movement of exasperation, flung away the compass; it fell into the thorn wall on the right of them, and stuck there.

Then he folded his arms.

Tillman and Houghton glanced at one another; then Tillman recovered the compass, and put it in his pocket.

"I ain't used to it," said Hull, as though he were addressing some fourth and viewless party. "I ain't used to it. It ain't fair on a man, a lee shore ain't in it—cuss the carciss of that onholy blighter; and to think I had him in reach of the grip of my fist—an' let him go!"

Tillman took him by the arm.

"Come on," he said. "There's no use in talking. Our only chance is to keep moving. We'll get out somehow, and then we'll deal with Macquart."

This latter idea seemed to restore the captain to his senses, and they started off.

But now, with the suddenness of the tropics, night was on them.

It seemed to rise up from the earth

like a mist, and then the stars were shining above.

They kept blindly on; there was sufficient light to let them see their way, but a terrible tiredness was coming on them. Since morning, they had been traveling, with only a break for the midday meal, and the excitement which had made them fight their tiredness was now having its own effect.

Tillman stopped where a tree had fallen lengthways in their path.

"We'd better stop and rest," said he. "Here's stuff for a fire; it'll be company. Lend us a hand to break some of the branches."

The tree had been dead long enough to make the branches brittle without rotting them, and in a few minutes they had collected enough sticks. Houghton produced a box of matches from his pocket; the flame of the first match caught, and, in a moment, the fire was crackling and blazing.

Then they sat down round it.

It is not till you are in the wilderness that you know the value of a fire.

A fire holds much more than brilliancy and warmth; to men and to dogs it recalls in the subconscious mind the camp cooking and evening rests from the million years when we were nomads. The dead Past lives in a fire, just as it lives in music. It was not round a tent pole, but round a fire, that the first home was built.

The effect of the fire was greatest on Hull, who, producing his pipe, filled it and lit it. Houghton, by the firelight, had perceived a prickly pear growing among the thorn, and he was engaged in cutting some of the fruit off with his knife, taking care to avoid the prickles.

"See here," said he, "we won't starve, nor die of thirst; there's lots of this stuff about. I saw several bushes as we came along. It's the only thing that seems to grow here beside this beastly bramble stuff; have some?"

Tillman took one, and, having got rid of the prickles, ate it and found it very good, but Hull refused food just at present; he was content with tobacco, and he was busy in his mind with Macquart. His extraordinary intellect seemed to have eliminated Tillman and Houghton from its purview; it was as though all this business concerned him alone, and he seemed to be reviling Fate as well as Macquart, though he never named the lady.

"It's cruel hard," said he, "cruel hard—— No, I don't want none of that prickly stuff; if I can't get man's food, I'll leave it be; I'm not goin' to fill my inside with sich garbige—it's cruel hard to be laid be the heels like this with a bramble hedge givin' one the turn at every p'int. It's playin' it pretty low down on a sailorman to set reefs before him like that a-shore. And to think I had a good gun in me hand and didn't put a bullet through the skin of that blighted scarecrow when I had the chanst. It's the same trick he served me outside the 'baccy shop in Sydney. In I went to get a seegar, and out I come to find him gone. Saw him through the winder as I was lightin' the seegar, and, before I'd blown the match out, he'd gone. I ought to 'a' known the chap wasn't a man; he's a conjurin' trick on legs worked by the devil, that's what he is, and I ought to 'a' spoiled him when I had the chanst. It was the same fower years ago; left me doped in a pub, he did, and slid off with me money."

"Did he take much?" asked Houghton, more for the sake of saying something than from any interest in the question.

"It's not s'much what he took," said the captain evasively, "as the way he took it; left me on a mud bank, stranded, he did. Never clapped eyes on him again, till I sighted him at Sydney."

He had let his pipe go out, and he was

relighting it now, when, of a sudden, he dropped the match and started to his feet.

Some one was hailing them.

The very same voice that Houghton and Tillman had heard that afternoon came again, clearer this time, and closer.

"Hi—hi—hi!"

Hull made answer.

"Hello!" he roared. "Where are you? Who are you? Hello!"

Again came the hail, closer now, and away down the path, shown by the starlight amid the trees, they glimpsed a figure, white, like a ghost.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOST.

All through that day, Macquart and the party he was leading to their destruction had been followed by Saji, intent on Macquart and his doings, and with Saji had been Chaya.

It was nothing to them to pursue without being seen, and it was indicative of the mentality of Saji that on a business like this, Chaya, his main desire in life, although she was at his side, was obliterated for him by the immediate objective.

As I have said, his mind wore blinkers. When he was hunting, he was a huntsman pure and simple, and he had no view of anything else but the quarry. Chaya might have been a dog, for all the attention he paid her on this business.

At noon, when the expedition paused for the midday meal, Saji and Chaya kept watch through the trees, and when the expedition started again, they followed.

Saji had quite a clear understanding of the fact that Macquart was in partnership with the Rubber Man for the purpose of destroying his companions. Had you sifted Saji's evidence before a court of justice, or, rather, had you sifted the evidence that satisfied Saji about the murderous intentions of Macquart, you would not have obtained a conviction. All the same, from what he had observed, from what he had heard, Saji, with his unerring dog instinct, was convinced of Macquart's intentions.

But he did not know how Macquart was going to carry them out. He thought at first that Macquart, relying on Wiart's knowledge of the forest, was going to lead his companions into one of the pit traps dug by natives for wild animals, but when they arrived at the great thorn maze, everything became clear to him. Wiart had explored this place, and been through it twice with perfect security, owing to the fact that he had blazed his way. Wiart, when the drink was not on him, was an enthusiastic forester, and his knowledge of the rubber plant and its habitats was equaled by few. He was also a naturalist. The thorn maze had interested him, as it could not fail to do, and Saji, now faced with it, perceived at once the gist and meaning of this expedition. But he would not enter it. He had no need to, for one thing. Instinct told him to get back to the river at once, to hide near Wiart's house, and to await the return of Wiart and Macquart. They would come back alone—of that he was certain. Then he could continue his tracking of them, for it was no part of his scheme, laid down by the mother of Chaya, to deal with Macquart till that person arrived at the end of his tether, and disclosed the place where John Lant's treasure was really hidden.

"I go back," said Saji, when the party had disappeared into the thorn bush. "The Rubber Man and the other are leading them there to lose them; then they will come back; I go to meet them quicker than you can follow."

"Go," said Chaya. "I can return alone."

Next moment, he was gone.

Chaya knew all about the thorn maze, though she had never entered it; she knew that it was a haunt of evil spirits, and the Dyak blood in her veins, and vague old traditions in her mind, made the place repellent to her. But Houghton had gone in there to his death, and, without hesitation, she followed, just as the iron filing follows the magnet.

Chaya knew nothing about love; she had never even considered the name of the thing. When Saji had shown his feelings toward her, she had repelled his advances, as she would have repelled the fawning of a dog; he had never pressed them.

Once, and once only, he had stroked her arm, and she had flung his hand away, angry at his action, but not knowing in the least the real cause of her anger. With Houghton it was different. Since first seeing him, he had never been out of her mind. He was something quite new. A man like Wiart, or the rubber traders, who had sometimes come to the village; but, somehow, absolutely different. Wiart had also made advances to her. Wiart, in fact, had once tried to kiss her, and she had repelled him just as she had repelled Saji, and just as unconsciously and without knowledge of the evil she was repelling.

But Houghton seemed to her a different being from these, not only on account of his good looks, which pleased her, but on account of his personality and his power to call her to him, and hold her thoughts.

The thought that he was in danger raised in her a feeling of dread as though the danger threatened herself—as to what became of Tillman or Hull, she did not care in the least.

When she entered the thorn tangle, the others had got far ahead. The path she was on showed no traces of them, and before she had gone very far she was confronted with the choice between two paths so alike that they seemed twins.

She chose the wrong one, pursued it for a while, paused to listen, and fancied she heard voices. The thorn bush is full of illusion to the person who is alone and listening.

Then she called out several times, but received no answer. It was her voice that Tillman and Houghton and Hull heard. Had they replied to it, things might have been different, but they went on to their fate, and Chaya, receiving no answer, went on to hers.

She followed the path till it divided into three ways, chose one of them haphazard, and pursued its winding course till she was lost as surely as the person whom she was trying to find.

And still she kept on, not trying to escape, but endeavoring to find.

She had no thought at all of her own danger; she did not consider in the least the fact that if she found Houghton, they would be both in the same position—lost.

She just sought for him, filled only by the tremendous passion that only now was beginning to declare itself in her breast.

Something great as the sea, as reasonless, as powerful.

She would find him in this terrible place if she kept on. If she did not find him, she might die—it would be the same thing.

She kept on.

Then, all at once, she found a meeting of the ways, and on the ground three bundles. They were the bundles that Hull and his companions had been carrying. She had watched them packed that morning, she had watched them unstrapped at the midday meal, and here they were, lying on the ground.

What did it mean?

She sat down beside them. What could it mean? Had Macquart and the Rubber Man slain the others, then? There was no sign of a struggle, no blood. The bundles were just lying there, where they had been cast without a sign to tell of the reason why they had been abandoned.

She listened intently, and now, sitting there alone, she heard in the utter stillness the voice of the thorn maze, the murmur and drone of a million insects inhabiting this green and treacherous sphinx.

For five minutes, she sat without moving, waiting, watching, listening. Then she rose to her feet, looked in every direction, and then, stooping and picking up the bundles, she resumed her way, taking without choice the path she was facing.

The bundles were not too heavy to carry, but they were awkward; she cast one over her shoulder by its strap, held one under her right arm, and the other in her hand. She did not feel the weight, nor did their awkwardness trouble her; she had only one thought —the man she was looking for.

Then the darkness came.

This was a terrible moment for Chaya; the gloom filled her mind just as it filled the world, vague terrors rose up before her. Death, starvation, injury, even the terror that lies in entanglement, could not influence her, or make her turn from her object, but the terrors of darkness daunted her soul. Ghosts of all sorts of superstitions and beliefs that had once haunted the brains of her ancestors awoke in her mind, and walked there, paralyzing her thoughts. She wished to hide, but there was no play of refuge. Then, as though the darkness were a heavy load bearing her down, she crouched on the ground beneath the stars.

On this, as on nearly all the paths, there were trees sparsely set, and the branches above, moving slightly to the faint night wind, now obliterated the stars, and now let them peep through.

How long she had been crouching thus she could not tell, when something reached her, rousing her from her half-dazed state, as a person is roused from sleep.

It was the smell of burning wood.

One of the results of living in the jungle, as Chaya had lived, is the power to translate the messages that sounds, sights, and smells bring one, from the language of the jungle into the language of human thought, or into thought pictures.

The smell of burning instantly produced in Chaya's mind the picture of a camp fire.

She sprang erect, and then slowly turned with head half cast up, testing the air in every direction. You could have noticed that she did not "sniff" the wind; she breathed quite naturally, and then, assured of the fact that a fire was lighted somewhere about, and that the scent of the burning wood was coming on the light breeze, she picked up her bundles, and came along the path in the direction she had been going before terror and the darkness had overcome her.

Arrived at dividing ways, she chose the one that led most nearly in the direction of the quarter the wind had come from, and then, at a point where it split, she was rewarded.

Away down the left-hand path, she saw the glow of the fire.

She instantly hailed it, and at once came Hull's answer. She replied, and came along, clutching the bundles tightly, walking swiftly, scarcely breathing; laughing to herself with joy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE AMONG THE THORNS.

"Why, it's a gal," said Hull.

"She's got our bundles," said Tillman.

Chaya advanced straight into the firelight, so that the red glow lit her to the waist; she did not seem to see Hull or Tillman, she dropped the bundles one after the other, and still, without speaking, and with her wide, dark eyes fixed on Houghton, held out both hands to him.

"You!" said Houghton, taking her hands in his. He could say nothing more for a moment, and the others stood by, waiting, while in the stillness, against the far murmur of the forest, could be heard the faint crackling and flickering of the fire.

"I followed," said Chaya, "fearing the man would leave you to be lost. Then I lost myself looking for you."

She explained, pointing to the bundles as Houghton released her hands, and then they began to understand the bitter truth that this joyful vision was a prisoner like themselves, a butterfly that had managed to get imprisoned with common flies in this huge vegetable fly trap.

But she had brought the bundles and pushed starvation away from them; they were saved for the time being, and as for water, they could never actually die of thirst while they had the succulent fruit of the prickly pear, to say nothing of pitcher plants, which they had noticed yesterday attached to some of the lianas that hung between the sparsely set tree boles of the paths.

They sat down, Chaya and Houghton rather apart from the others; and Hull, putting some more sticks on the fire, opened his bundle and produced some food. The captain had become quite cheerful again. It was indicative of his mind that he did not seem in the least interested in Chaya, or the problem of how and why she had followed them. The bundle and its contents filled all his thoughts.

"Well," said he, "I never did think I'd have set my teeth in a piece of beef again. Them as likes prickly pears may eat 'em. I can't get on with garbige, nohow. They tell me there's chaps that lives on green stuff, like rabbits, and enjoys it, chaps with money enough to buy beefsteaks. I'm not beyond likin' a good cabbidge in its place, but it has to be in its place, and that's a long way behind a piece of steak. Lord love me! I'd give half my share of that there cache for a steak and taters and onians *now,* and a cup of corfee."

"Well, you're not likely to get it," said Tillman, who was also engaged on the contents of his bundle. "If you even smell a beefsteak again, you'll be lucky—you're not eating, Houghton."

"I'm not hungry," said Houghton.

He was sitting so close to Chaya that their arms touched, and he had just captured her hand, which was lying on the ground beside him, as if waiting to be captured.

He felt the firm palm, and then he felt the fingers close upon his thumb, the most delightful embrace in the whole world.

He knew that she had followed him all that day, and that she had risked her own safety by entering the maze in an attempt to save him. He knew that she was lost now, just as he was, and that death was literally standing over them. The thought did not trouble him, or troubled him just as little as it troubled her. Love is so tremendous a power that death, unless it means separation, has no force of way against it. It becomes the little thing that it really is, just as that inflated phantom, the centipede, becomes withered leaves under a destructive blow.

Tillman, who had now finished his supper, began to question Chaya. She described her wanderings among the thorn. She had never been here before, always avoiding the mysterious place, which had the reputation of being haunted.

The reason of this reputation lay in

the fact, perhaps, that some natives who had come in here had never returned. One of its names in the Papuan was the Place of Confusion.

"A jolly good name, too," said Tillman, "but you say the Rubber Man has been here several times; how does he know the place so well that he leads us here, yet escapes himself?"

"He is, perhaps, known to the evil spirits," said Chaya.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tillman. "He's well enough known to Gin, anyway. Oh, the skunk! If I ever get hold of him."

"What I want to get hold of," said Hull, who had lit his pipe, "is them whiskers. I wants to sit comfortable on that chap's chest, and play with them whiskers. I wants a pair of tweezers, and no help from no razor. I wants to talk to him, same as a barber does, between the pulls. Show him each hair, as I plucks it out; any one else may scalp him as wants to, I only wants his whiskers."

"He won't have much hair left if we ever catch him," said Tillman. "The thing that gets me is that they are most likely now at the cache, digging it out like rats. Hull, I didn't say anything about it to you before, but you remember that old burned ship Houghton and I told you we saw in the lagoon?"

"Aye, aye," replied Hull, "what about it?"

"Well, I believe that was the *Terschelling*."

"The gold ship?"

"The same."

"But the gold ship weren't burned," said Hull. "Mac said she was sunk at her moorings."

"He lied. She *was* sunk, but she was burned first, burned with all aboard her."

Hull pondered on this for a while. Then he burst out:

"But how the mischief was the stuff cached by the river——"

"It wasn't; it was cached by the lagoon, somewhere on the bank. Macquart brought us all up the river for the purpose of finding a chance to do us in. He can get the *Barracuda* out with Jacky."

"Oh, the swab!" said Hull.

The mildness of his language was indicative of the depth, below oaths, in him that was stirred.

"There's one comfort," said Houghton, who was still holding Chaya's hand, unobserved by the others; "Wiart is sure to be done up by Macquart, if they manage to get the *Barracuda* away. The only live men of those three to be left will be Macquart and Jacky, and Jacky will get his dose after he has been paid off at Sydney. I am firmly of opinion that Macquart is not a devil; he is the Devil."

"O Lord! O Lord!" said Hull, groaning like a person with the stomach ache. "To think of that chap fillin' his pockets with the boodle, and us three sittin' here, not able to lift a finger. Did any man ever hear the like of that? Us with the guns and pistols, and them unarmed."

"It shows you what trickery can do," said Houghton grimly; "what one man plotting and planning for a definite end can do against three men who have acted like fools. I'm not speaking against you, Hull, so much as against myself and Tillman. We suspected the chap, and we should have tied him to us before coming into this place. Well, it's done, and there's no use in grouching. There's just the chance left us that we may get out of this before Mac gets off with the yawl."

"Yes," said Tillman, tapping the ashes out of his pipe, "and we won't be able to do anything unless we're fresh," he yawned, stretched himself on the ground, and in a minute his deep breathing told that he was asleep.

Hull, in a few minutes, followed his

example, lying face down, and with his head on the crook of his arm.

Houghton turned to Chaya. Her face was close to his, and in the vague light of the moon that came across the thorn bushes and tree branches, her dark eyes gazed at his, then their lips met.

They had never spoken a word of love one to the other, yet they had told each other everything.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHAYA FINDS THE WAY OUT.

They awoke at dawn. Chaya had fallen asleep, with her head resting on Houghton's shoulder. She was the first to awake. Houghton had not slept at all. Holding her to him with his arm around her waist, feeling the warmth of her body through the warm girdle of brass beneath her robe, breathing the perfume of her hair, he did not sleep; he dreamed the dream of his life.

She awoke suddenly, raised her head, saw Houghton, and then, raising her hands, seized him by the arm, as though to push him away from her —only for a moment. The remnants of sleep still clinging to her had vanished, and her eyes, losing their wild and bewildered expression, grew soft, human, and filled with love. The Chaya who had laughed at the battle between the scorpion and the centipede, the Chaya who had led him that day into the outskirts of the forest, to laugh at him and elude him; the Chaya who had tracked them yesterday with Saji, not knowing in her own heart the real reason of her care for Houghton, had vanished. This was a new being, a rapturous, warm, living woman. The savage had vanished entirely, the beauty of the savage remained, lending a supreme, indefinable fascination to the beauty of the woman.

"Chaya," whispered Houghton, holding her to him, "all my life I have been waiting for you—listen, before the others wake up—you are mine, and never will I let you go."

Chaya sighed deeply. Then she put her arms round his neck. She did not speak one word. She raised her perfect lips to his, and the eyes in whose darkness and depth lay the mysteries of the forest and the sea.

Hull, awaking from sleep, saw nothing. While he was rubbing his eyes, they had drawn apart; he touched Tillman with his foot, and the latter, awaking with a start, sat up.

"Good Lord!" said he. "I dreamed we were out of this and back on the *Barracuda*. What's the time?"

"There ain't no time here," said Hull. "It's after sunup, and time to be movin'. Oh, cuss that swab! I dreamed I'd got him by the short hairs, and here I am, still on my beam ends." He yawned and yawned, stretched, and then sprang to his feet, rubbing his fingers through his hair, and again stretching his back as if to make sure of its strength.

Hull was very much of an animal man, and the animal in man never appears more surely than in the act of eating or the moment of awakening from sleep.

"Well," said Tillman, "we'd better have breakfast before we make a move. It's the biggest mistake to set to work on an empty stomach."

They set to on the provisions. Chaya cut some prickly pears and picked some small, red fruit from a bush that grew low down among the thorns. She would touch nothing else.

She watched Hull eating. He seemed to fascinate her and amuse her at the same time. One of her greatest charms was a childishness and gayety which even their desperate position could not destroy.

She ate her breakfast, seated beside Houghton, furtively feeling for his

hand now and then, looking at Hull, and listening to the conversation which she could not always understand.

They were discussing ways and means of escape as futilely as children discussing the meaning of an algebraical problem, when Tillman, catching sight of something away down the path, drew their attention to it.

A small, dark figure was disporting itself on the ground, approaching them, yet hiding itself as it came behind the tree boles.

"It's a monkey!" cried Hull.

Chaya, who had sprung to her feet, and who was standing shading her eyes, laughed.

"It is mine," said she; "it is Mitu." Saji, a long time ago, had killed a monkey on one of his hunting expeditions. The monkey had been carrying a baby monkey in its arms, and Chaya, who had been with Saji, rescued the baby and brought it up. It was her pet, and it followed her always at a distance, mostly springing along the branches of the trees under which she walked.

On starting with Saji yesterday morning, she had tied Mitu up. It must have escaped, and, picking up her traces, pursued her.

She told her companions this in a few words, and then went forward to meet her follower. But Mitu was shy. The sight of the white men evidently did not please him. He took to a tree, and Chaya, standing beneath it, began to talk to him in the native.

"Blest if she ain't talkin' to it same's if it was a human," said Hull.

"Leave her alone," said Tillman. "It may be that the beast can lead us out. It followed her all the way from the village, and it has found her. If it did that, it can find its way back."

They saw the monkey under the blandishments of Chaya drop from branch to branch. Then it dropped on her shoulder, and sat with one arm round her head and its eyes fixed on Hull and his companions.

Chaya continued talking to it, as if explaining things, slowly approaching the others as she did so.

"He may lead us," said she. "I do not know. It may be. But I have nothing to tie him with."

Mitu had on a grass collar, and he had evidently broken or bitten through the cord that had tethered him. Tillman understood her meaning at once, and, searching in his pockets, found six or seven feet of lanyard.

He produced it, and Chaya, sitting down and taking Mitu in her lap, fastened one end of the lanyard to his collar.

Then she let him play about for a while to accustom him to the constraint of the string, and then, standing up, spoke to him again.

Mitu, looking preternaturally wise, listened, and then started off, taking the way he had come by. Chaya followed him, and the others, picking up their bundles, followed Chaya.

"Well," said Hull. "I never did think I'd be condimned to follow a monkey. We only wants a barrel organ to make the show complete. Look at the brute. It's for all the world as if it had five legs."

Mitu's legs were not unlike his tail. He was going on all fours, and his progress was not rapid. He would stop to sniff at the leaves, and every now and then he would whisk up a tree bole as far as the lead would permit.

Chaya, recognizing that he would lead them more swiftly if he were released and allowed to take to his own element—the air—untied the lanyard from his collar, and let him loose.

Next moment he was swaying from branch to branch; where the trees were too sparsely set, he would take to the ground, and though the progress was sometimes slow, it was sure.

On one of the paths along which he

led them, they came on a strange thing, the skeleton of a man half overgrown with ground vines. Some native trapped long ago in this tangle, and dying of starvation, or, perhaps, simply from fright, had left these bones.

They did not stop to inspect the dismal thing. They hurried on.

"I don't like meetin' that skillington," said Hull. "It ain't lucky."

"Nonsense," said Tillman. "There's no such thing as luck."

"Ain't there!" replied the captain. "Well, if there ain't, there's such a thing as bad luck, and it seems to me we've struck it. No such thing as luck! Why, I've seen it. You take a ship and alter her name, and you'll see it, too, if you go for a cruise in her. Why, there's nuthin' else *but* luck in this here world, and you'll know it, me son, when you've seen as much as I have."

An hour later, after Mitu had led them, hither and thither, and seemingly in all directions, they came on the ashes of the camp fire. The monkey had brought them back to the very point they had started from.

Chaya sat down and buried her face in her hands; the others stood by speechless, and paralyzed for the moment.

It was only now, really, that they began to recognize the appalling effect of the maze upon the mind. The feeling of being held—by nothing, baffled—by nothing.

Here they had air, light, liberty, and speech, yet they were tied and bound by a viewless conjurer as surely as though he had tied them with visible ropes and thongs.

Hull, the pessimist, was the first to break silence.

"Well, we've got to get out," said he. "I reckon that skillington has spent itself, now we've come back from the place we started from. There's no use in the gal takin' on; she did her best, but I'd like to put a bullet into that durned monkey. I didn't put no store by that monkey."

"Yes," said Tillman. "There's no use in complaining. Let's make a new start and trust to chance."

Houghton was kneeling by Chaya, and talking to her in a low tone. Then she rose up. She had been crying, but now she dried her tears, put her hand in Houghton's, and followed the others on the new start-off.

They had not been an hour on the new endeavor when they were startled by a cry from Chaya.

They turned, and found her kneeling by a tree. Houghton was standing beside her, and she was pointing to something on the bark.

On the bark, about four feet up from the roots, was the mark of an ax blow. A piece of bark had been cut right out. It was an old injury, inflicted on the tree possibly months ago, but it was definite and purposeful, and Chaya knew at once its meaning. She rose up and hurried along to the next tree ahead. It showed nothing. She examined tree after tree, and then again she cried out.

When they reached her, she was pointing to another mark, similar to the first, only slightly higher up. Tillman saw the whole thing at a glance.

"She's struck the blaze," said he. "Can't you see, Wiart, or maybe some native, has made it—she's saved us."

They followed her as she hurried along. Her keen eyes, trained to observation, required only one glance at a tree to tell whether it was blazed.

She had no difficulty at all at cross-roads, for here every tree was blazed till the right direction was indicated. On straight paths, the blaze was rare; it was not really required, yet it was there sometimes, as though the man who had made it was so impressed by the possibilities of this terrible place that he determined to leave his mark as often as possible.

The depression and anguish of spirit that had ridden them up to this now completely vanished, and the renewed feeling of life and elevation of spirit showed itself in each man according to his temperament. Tillman whistled. Houghton walked silent, erect, with a brightness in his eye that spoke of a soul relieved from torture. He had suffered more than any of the others. Hull was flushed and swearing, threatening Macquart, and making fantastic promises to himself with regard to Wiart's whiskers.

They had not far to go. Less than a mile the blaze led them, and then vanished where the path of a sudden broke up and delivered them to the forest.

To find the thorn no longer on either side of one was to experience the feelings of a man who escapes from the clutches of a malevolent giant. The atmosphere of the forest was quite different from the atmosphere of the maze, a blind man could have told the difference. There the air seemed stagnant and like a prisoner. The life of the forest avoided the place, all but the insect life that buzzed and droned amidst the thorn.

Here the parrots were shrieking and chattering, and the little monkeys scurrying amidst the branches, and the wind stirring the leaves, and bringing with it the perfume of the camphor and cutch trees, and a faint fresh something that was, perhaps, the breath of the sea.

"Thank God!" said Houghton.

Chaya, with the faithful Mitu on her shoulder, looked around her. She was now in her own home, she could find her way in the forest by instinct, possessing that unerring sense of direction more sure than the pointing of the compass.

She led the way now, Houghton beside her, and the others following. It was half an hour after noon, and they had still almost a day's journey before them ere they could reach the river.

It was now a race for the gold; but just as in the maze they were the prisoners of Confusion, so here, in the forest, they were the prisoners of Distance. They could not run, nor could they advance fast; the journey required that they should husband all their energies. Barrier lianas sometimes lay in their path so thickly that they had to be cut through, and it was absolutely necessary for them to halt every now and then for a short rest.

They flung away their bundles, retaining only in their pockets a few morsels of food, and they would have flung away their guns and ammunition, had it been possible.

Sometimes, when they rested, they talked. Hull grumbled.

"If them two blighters went back to the river," said he, "they'll have taken the boat, sure, to reach the lagoon, and then where'll we be?"

"We'll have to tramp it," said Tillman. "Make down the river bank as hard as we can pelt, but the chances are they'll have struck for the lagoon through the forest. Wiart seems to know the forest pretty well."

"How long will it take them to unload the cache, I wonder?" said Houghton. "It makes me boil to think that we may reach the lagoon only to find the *Barracuda* gone, and we stranded here, and those two and that infernal Jacky making for Sydney."

"Don't think," said Tillman. "There's not a ha'pporth of use thinking. We can only do our best, and we're clear of that thorn tangle. Come, let's be getting on."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The fourth and last installment of this story will appear in the April 7th issue of the POPULAR.

The Mirrored Hand

By George Woodruff Johnston

Author of "The Painted Lip," "Whom the Glove Fits," Etc.

The doctor who solves this murder mystery had two clews to work from: the reflection of a hand seen in a glass, a white hand holding a revolver; and a cipher message, a puzzling thing to the layman's view, but the doctor insists that no man ever yet constructed a cryptogram that could not be translated into plain English.

"I DID not see the hand—only its reflection in the mirror." Miss Jacinth shuddered. "It made me think of the hand of death!"

"Dora! Dora!" soothed Doctor Paget, wagging his wise old head in kindly reassurance. "Don't give way, my dear! Tell Doctor Dannart and me all about it, of course; but slowly, calmly! Now, as to the hand you speak of. When did you see it? Where were you at the time?"

"When? Why, just before I sent for you," Miss Jacinth replied excitedly. "Friends of mine had been dining with me. It was late when they went away, and I'd gone up to my dressing room to get ready for bed. I was sitting at my toilet table. My maid, Mary, had been brushing my hair. Then, suddenly, I looked up—I heard no sound; it must have been a premonition—and there, in the glass before me, was the image of a hand!"

"Yes; but the hand itself——"

"When I first saw it, it was pushing apart the heavy curtains of the window behind me. I can't describe it—how it stole into the room like—like—something pale, deadly! Then it disappeared. In an instant it was back again. Now it held a pistol—a pistol which it leveled carefully—oh, *so* carefully!"

"At whom?" queried Doctor Paget.

"I couldn't tell whether it was pointed at Mary or at me. I tried to warn her, to save myself. But I could do nothing, could only sit there petrified, staring into the mirror, watching the white hand stiffen its hold on the revolver—the finger close down upon the trigger——"

Her voice broke and trailed off into an indistinguishable whisper. She shivered and drew closer about her the silk and laces of her bedroom gown. As I looked at her, it was hard for me to realize that this girl, so small and dainty, so young and supple, was the vivid emotional actress, Dora Jacinth. But there was nothing theatrical in her manner now. The terror which gripped her was genuine and overmastering.

"Did you notice," I asked, my interest in the case aroused, "whether the hand you saw was the right hand or the left?"

With an effort, she got herself under some sort of control. "It was the right hand," she said decisively.

"And twice you've called it 'white.'

In your opinion, was it a man's or a woman's?"

Miss Jacinth shook her head. "I can't say. It seemed—well, possibly, more like a man's. But I'm very far from being sure."

"Did you see nothing else?" I persisted. "Did you get no glimpse of a face, of a bit of clothing, a ring—of anything that would, at least, have pointed to the sex of the person concealed behind the window curtain?"

"Nothing!" she answered. "I saw absolutely nothing but the reflection of a hand with a pistol in it. And in a moment even that was gone. There was a flash, a deafening explosion, a cloud of smoke—and it was over!"

"Then——"

"Then—I don't know what happened. Let me see! There was Mary, poor thing! She lay on the floor, gasping, bleeding! In falling, she must have knocked over my toilet table, for the mirror was splintered into fragments. Broken glass was scattered everywhere about—and blood!"

There was a pause. Miss Jacinth sank back upon the sofa on which she had been sitting. Doctor Paget, his hands clasped behind him, his silvery head bent forward, took a turn or two about the room. Then he stopped abruptly and asked this question:

"Where, precisely, *was* Mary at the critical moment? Can you tell me, Dora?"

"I'm afraid not," she murmured weariedly, perplexedly. "She was somewhere near me—I could feel her nearness. But all I *saw* was the hand."

"Well," the old doctor observed; "it's clear she wasn't standing behind you; for then her body would have intervened between the hand and the mirror, and there could have been no reflection of the one in the other. She must have stood elsewhere—alongside you, perhaps. But in that event she would not have been in a direct line between the carefully sighted pistol and yourself; and—here's the point I want to make—it is almost inconceivable that at a range so short as the width of your dressing room, she should have received a shot intended for you. No, my dear! It was at Mary, and not at yourself, that the weapon was aimed and fired. Don't you think so, Dannart?"

"But who could have wanted to harm a girl like Mary Naseby?" interposed the actress impatiently. "That shy, faithful creature!—she have an enemy! I can't believe it!"

"Do you know anything of her private life?" I inquired.

"Not a thing! My former maid fell ill about a year ago and had to stop work. While I was without one, I employed Judic, the hairdresser, a good deal, and it was he who recommended Mary to me. I just now told my housekeeper to telephone him to send some one of her relatives here, if he knew of any. It would be dreadful, I should think, to die without a soul you love beside you. But you will do everything you can to save her, won't you; no matter what the trouble or expense?" Miss Jacinth cried impetuously. "Poor Mary! She always seemed so lonely, somehow; so pitiful, so downtrodden. I've grown immensely fond of her. I believe I'd rather have been shot myself than that she should suffer!"

"Come, come, Dora!" Doctor Paget protested. "You are altogether too impulsive, too generous. Why, bless my soul! How do you suppose your countless friends could get along without you, even for a day?"

Miss Jacinth turned to me with a weary smile. "Doctor Dannart, you mustn't believe all Doctor Paget says. Because he brought me into the world, and has been my physician and father confessor ever since, he considers himself privileged to flatter me—yes, and

to scold me, sometimes. But, seriously, it is about the many 'friends' of whom he speaks that I am thinking at this moment. There are two Dora Jacinths, doctor. One of them is the property of these 'friends,' that is to say, the public; the other longs with all her heart and soul for privacy, for the peace and quiet of home life. But the public will not let her have them. She must live in the spotlight always. There was a time when she positively enjoyed this sort of notoriety. But now she can't stand it any more, really! It sickens her, makes her wretched. Yet here it is again threatening her. Think of it! Dora Jacinth's maid mysteriously shot! The police! The reporters! Oh! And the Sunday papers gushing and thrilling over me and 'The Mirrored Hand'!"

"'The Mirrored Hand!'" I echoed. "What is that—a play?"

"Yes, a photo play in which I was starred and which was recently released. One scene in it is curiously like the tragedy just acted out in my dressing room—is almost prophetic of it. The newspapers would note the likeness in a moment. And if the story of this, the real tragedy, should get about—now, after all this worry and excitement—I believe I should grow frantic. And yet the person who tried to kill Mary *must* be found and punished! Won't you help me do this, Doctor Dannart? *Please!* I've heard of your skill and tact in the clearing up of mysteries. Mary is nothing but a servant, I know. But you will not refuse me on that account, will you?"

Overburdened with work as I already was, I should have positively declined the case. But the appeal of her fresh young beauty, and that strange personal charm which had been the main cause of her success on the stage, and which, since she had appeared in the "pictures," had made Dora Jacinth probably the most popular and highest-paid actress in the world, were too much for me, and I succumbed almost without a struggle.

"I'll do what I can for you," said I, with as good a grace as possible. "But, first, Doctor Paget and I must take a look at our patient."

Mary Naseby lay in one of the spare bedchambers of Miss Jacinth's house, whither she had been carried by some of her fellow servants who had hurried to their mistress' dressing room at the sound of the shot. The bullet had struck the maid—a tall, well-built, pretty girl of twenty-two—at a point a few inches below and behind the right armpit; and had it not there encountered and been partly deflected by a corset steel, would doubtless have killed her on the spot. Having been called in consultation by Doctor Paget, I had operated upon the desperately injured woman about half an hour before, aided by my young assistant, Doctor Arc, and by two nurses he had brought with him on the rush from my private hospital.

As Paget and I now entered the sick room and caught a glimpse of the sufferer, the old man stopped short. "Dannart!" he muttered. "Look at the girl's face!"

I had already done so. It was as white as the uniform of the nurse standing at her bedside. But the gripping thing about it was the terror and despair that racked it.

"Ah!" sighed my colleague, with relief, after a brief examination of the maid. "It's only an ether dream, after all, and——"

"Listen!" I interrupted, my finger raised warningly.

The blanched lips had parted, and now the girl moaned faintly: "Don't make me do it! It's wrong; it's wrong!" Her voice was urgent, beseeching. Like her face, it was filled with fear and hopelessness.

"'It's wrong!'" Paget echoed, in a whisper. "What's wrong? Do you suppose, Dannart——"

"S-s-h!" I cautioned.

As I spoke, the maid's lips moved once more, and again the same words fluttered forth, and yet again the same, and so on and on in dreary repetition.

I waited, intent upon every whisper. At length her moaning ceased abruptly. She started. "I am punished!" she cried aloud; and thereupon her eyelids flew apart, she stared about her wonderingly, and winced with bodily pain. A moment passed, and then, "Water!" she supplicated feebly. "Water!"

She had now recovered consciousness, and my frail hope that in her stupor she might reveal some coherent clew to the crime of which she had been the victim had come to nothing; while any attempt to question her, ill as she was, would have been both cruel and useless.

As Paget and I walked away from the bed, there came a tap at the door. I answered it, and found standing in the hall a rosy, bright-eyed, clever-looking woman, who stated that she was Miss Jacinth's housekeeper and bore a message from her mistress.

"Miss Jacinth would be obliged," said she, "if you and Doctor Paget would speak with some one who has just called to see Mary. She's quite worn out—Miss Jacinth is, and is lying down. She asked me to excuse her to you and to Doctor Paget."

II.

In a room on the first floor, we found the visitor—a tall, thin man, with a long, pale face, and close-cropped black hair. As we entered, he was nervously pacing the floor and glancing about him furtively.

"My name is Titus Prowl," he began at once, in a meek, ingratiating voice.

"Well," said I, "we represent Miss Jacinth; at least, for the moment. This is Doctor Paget; I am Doctor Dannart. What do you want?"

"I just heard about Mary, and——"

"What did you hear, and from whom?" I interrupted.

"That she'd been hurt, was ill, or something," Prowl replied. "Judic couldn't understand what the trouble was exactly. Mrs. Firth telephoned him, but I didn't get the message from him until a few minutes ago. What *is* the matter? If she's bad off, I'd like to see her. In fact, I've got to!"

His voice had now become peremptory, irritating. "You've *got* to see her, have you?" I challenged. "I'm not so sure of that. Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Mary's uncle," Titus Prowl announced.

"Oh! Then I suppose you'll have to have the truth. She's been shot."

Prowl's white face turned whiter still. "Shot!" he breathed. "Shot? Who did it?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," I answered.

"But—where was it? Tell me!"

"In the right side," I explained.

"No! I don't mean that," he burst out nervously, rubbing the palms of his hands with a handkerchief and rolling it into a ball. "It's the whereabouts I'm after. Was it here, in Mrs. Firth's house, or where?"

I glanced at my colleague, puzzled. "Who is the man talking about, Paget? Mrs. Firth? Who is she? I thought Miss Dora Jacinth——"

"They happen to be one and the same person," mumbled the old physician. With this perfunctory answer, he dropped the subject as though he found it awkward, and hurried on to tell Prowl of the recent tragedy and of the operation I had performed.

Meanwhile, the latter's shifty gaze roamed about the room. "This job'll

cost something," he said, at length; "something considerable, I'm afraid. Won't it, with two doctors, and the nurse, and all?"

"Don't worry!" Paget consoled. "Miss Jacinth will attend to that, I'm sure."

Prowl breathed a sigh of relief. But immediately his brow clouded and he grew fidgety again. After a swift look at me, he asked: "Mary didn't say anything, did she, when she was under the ether? People are apt to get off a lot of nonsense then, I'm told."

Before I replied, I studied the man a little more critically. He was palpably worried. Yet the extent of the girl's injuries, and the chances for and against her recovery, were matters concerning which he had so far shown not a semblance of curiosity or feeling. This seemed so odd that I grew doubly cautious.

"Yes," I responded to his last inquiry; "under anæsthesia, patients often do say silly things."

"Did Mary chatter much?"

It was the second time he had asked this question, and I mentally noted the fact.

"No; only a little—a word or two, perhaps," I answered, with assumed indifference. "I've no idea what they meant. Have you, Doctor Paget?"

"Not the faintest!" the latter declared.

Prowl's manner gained assurance. He became voluble.

"That's good!" he exclaimed. "It would mortify her to death to learn that she'd babbled a lot of trash. She's so sensible, you know, so long-headed about everything. Here's what I mean; here's something she worked out all by herself: When she came from the country, three years ago, I said to her, says I: 'Mary, you're my dead sister's child, and I'll help you all I can. I'll get you a nice job in a shop or a factory, somewhere.' But do you suppose she took me up? Not much! 'Uncle Tite,' says she, 'a poor girl like me makes more money and lives better as a servant with good, kind folks than she does working around shops and factories.' And she was right! See what Mrs. Firth's doing for her now—her being taken care of here like a queen, and it not costing her a penny!

"And Mary's been saving money, too," he added. "She's nearly paid me back what I advanced to have her taught the ladies' maid business—hairdressing, manicuring, and all that. It came to a good deal. But I wanted to do the square thing by the poor girl; I wanted her to learn right while she was at it."

"Very generous of you, I'm sure," remarked Doctor Paget. "And your story is most interesting. But Doctor Dannart and I have still much to do, and if you'll excuse us——"

"But you'll let me see Mary, won't you?" Prowl appealed to me anxiously. "I must! I must!"

"If Doctor Paget agrees, I have no objection. But no talk, no excitement in her presence! Remember that!" I cautioned.

As we three tiptoed into the sick room, the nurse switched on a shaded light, and I observed that the injured girl lay in a half doze, her eyes partly open, her expression dreamy and placid. But presently she roused up, and the instant she caught sight of Prowl's face, that same look of terror and distress which she had displayed just as consciousness was returning to her again distorted her pale features.

Immediately she turned her head aside. "Go away! Go away, uncle!" she muttered despairingly. "I can't do it any more; it's wrong!"

Without more ado, I quietly hustled Prowl from the room. Outside the door, I backed him against the wall.

"It's mighty singular that your niece should be so afraid of the good, kind uncle you pretend to be. Why is it?" I demanded.

"I give it up," the man stammered. "It's the ether, maybe. You said yourself that people often talk silly——"

"Nonsense!" I broke in. "She's out of the ether long ago. You made her do something wrong. What was it?"

"I swear——"

"Don't lie! That girl is too sick to know for certain whether she's alive or dead. She's telling the truth now, and she's acting it, too, even if it's for the first and only time in her life. She thinks this shot was somehow a punishment for the evil thing you forced her to do, whatever that was. She practically said so. Who fired it? Whose hand was it that Miss Jacinth saw in the mirror? Come, you blackguard! You are mixed up in this affair in some way. I suspected it from the first moment I set eyes on you. I can read it in your ugly face. Tell me the truth, or I'll wring it out of you!"

Prowl grew surly, vicious. "Try it!" he sneered. "Try it, and see what a hornet's nest you stir up!"

"That's what I'm hunting for—a hornet's nest!" I retorted, grabbing him by the collar; "and you'll come along to Mary's room, and help me find it!"

III.

The maid's bedchamber lay on the top floor of Miss Jacinth's dwelling. As we entered it, I signed to the housekeeper, who had shown us the way thither, to shut and lock the door behind us.

The room itself, though comfortable enough, looked as bare of the individual touch as an empty bird cage. There was absolutely nothing visible within its four walls to suggest a motive for the recent crime, or even to furnish an inkling of the character or tastes of the occupant; and the girl's few personal belongings, which, upon my request, the housekeeper brought to view, were equally lacking in significance. Apparently everything in the room was accessible; but if the maidservant had buried her possessions at the bottom of the sea, she could not have caused them to shed less light upon herself.

"In the year she's been here, I don't believe Mary's had company come to see her once," the housekeeper explained, in answer to my inquiries regarding the girl's habits; "and she never went out except on Sunday nights, and then only in case Miss Jacinth had no one to dine with her. Where did she go? I've no idea. In the house she had no enemies that I know of, and no friends but Laurent."

"Laurent?"

"Yes; Miss Jacinth's chauffeur."

"Sweet on him, was she?" I asked.

The housekeeper smiled, and her rosy cheeks grew rosier still. "A little; but it was rather the other way about. Gracious me! If I ever saw a lovesick man, it's been Laurent. You see," she added, more seriously, "Miss Jacinth had guests to-night—last night, I mean," she corrected herself, after looking at a noisy clock, standing on the mantelpiece, which marked twenty minutes after two, "and Laurent was off duty and went home early. When he finds out——"

The woman stopped speaking and shot a questioning glance, first at me, and then at Prowl, who sat glumly on a chair, his eyes roving restlessly about the room.

"Go ahead! Say what you please!" I reassured her. "Mr. Prowl is as deeply interested in this affair as we are."

"When Laurent finds out what's happened," the housekeeper resumed, "he'll do something dreadful, I'm afraid. He's frightfully jealous."

"Of whom?"

"Of Judic, the hairdresser."

"Why?"

"Because Mary worked for him before she came here, and because she gets letters which Laurent suspects are from him. The chauffeur tells his troubles to any one who will listen. I've often heard the servants gossiping over them."

"Is this letter from Judic?" I demanded, holding out an envelope I had found while the housekeeper was talking. It had been carefully tucked betwen the pages of a tablet of cheap writing paper that lay beneath a towel covering the bottom of one of the bureau drawers. This envelope was addressed in a strong masculine hand: "Miss Mary Naseby, Cf. Mrs. Frederick Firth, 4 Jefferson Square, City," was postmarked "Station C," and had been mailed the day before.

"I don't know," the housekeeper declared, after scrutinizing the object in question. "But I'll say this much: The mail for the servants is first delivered to me, and every letter that Mary has received has been directed in this same handwriting. Besides, Judic's place is near Station C."

Observing that Prowl was watching me in obvious suspense, I eagerly opened the envelope, which had previously been neatly slit, and drew out of it a folded piece of tissue paper. This I cautiously unfolded, and disclosed—a hair net!

A hair net! Again it had seemed that I was on the edge of a discovery that would throw at least a side light on the case, and once more I had suffered disappointment.

Crestfallen, I idly picked up the sheet of paper in which the net had been wrapped, and observed that some figures had been jotted down upon it. Scribbled in lead pencil, they were arranged in columns like an example in addition, the sum being noted under a line drawn at the bottom, thus:

321
182
362
122
211
162
352
222
202
152
201
142
82

141,191

As I peered at these rows of numerals, I became dimly conscious of something irregular, and, at the same time, of something familiar, in their appearance. The first applied particularly to the sum total set down at the foot of the columns. Quickly I took a pencil from my pocket and sought to verify it, and no less rapidly detected how false and absurd it was. The aggregate should not have been 141,191, but 2,713.

Instantly a light burst upon me, and I realized that here, at last, was a possible clew to the murderous assault made upon the girl. Turning my back on the others, I ran, page by page, through the tablet in which I had discovered the envelope, and on the very last page of all there came to view another column of figures, longer than the first, written in a different hand, and since no summing-up line appeared below it, probably unfinished.

I tore out the leaf and stuffed it in my pocket. Then I swung round and faced Prowl.

"You bungling idiot!" I cried. "If you were set on using a cipher, why did you not choose a better one than this? No man ever yet constructed a cryptogram that could not be translated into plain English, and this one is simplicity itself. Moreover, it is not even original. So long ago I had almost for-

gotten about it, I solved this particular cipher in the case of a confidential stenographer who was utilizing it to betray to competitors the business secrets of the firm which employed her.

"See, Paget!" I went on, drawing a number of circles on the margin of the sheet of tissue paper. "Here it is in a nutshell! The cipher is based on the arrangement of the keyboard of a typewriter, which, like every one familiar with the touch system, I, of course, know by heart; and in this instance it is the keyboard of a machine with thirty-eight keys. Take, for example, the first amount here set down—three hundred and twenty one. The thirty-second key, counting always from the left, is the letter 'c,' and the numeral 'one,' which follows, is merely an indicator, specifies upper case, or a capital letter, and in this place signifies the beginning of a sentence. The next sum, one hundred and eighty-two, represents key eighteen, lower case, or the letter 'o.' And so it goes down to eighty-two, at the bottom of the column, which is key eight, lower case; that is to say, the figure nine. There you have it! That's the solution of your famous cryptogram, Prowl! It reads: 'Come Sunday at nine.'"

"*My* cryptogram!" snarled Prowl. "How do you make that out? I never saw the thing before!"

Paget and the housekeeper looked at me with some concern, as though they feared I had been caught napping.

"Never saw it before?" I challenged. "Why, that's odd. You signed it! Here is 'Titus Prowl,' or, at least, your initials, 'T. P.,' plainly denoted in the numerals one hundred and forty-one and one hundred and ninety-one at the foot of the column."

The shadow of fear fell across Prowl's long white face, and again he took to wiping the palms of his hands with his handkerchief.

"Well, what of it?" he blustered. "Is there any harm in a man's asking his own niece to come to see him? And whether he writes in English or Chinese—what is that to you?"

"Oh, no!" said I; "there's not a bit of harm in an affectionate uncle wishing to see his niece, or in his sending her word to that effect in any language that pleases him. But you! You haven't a trace of natural feeling for Mary. When you learned she had been shot, you showed that you didn't care a picayune whether she lived or died, so long as she did not give you away while under ether, and her operation and nursing cost you nothing. No! You got this poor, downtrodden country girl into your clutches on the pretense of being kind and helpful to your dead sister's child. You can't deny it; you've told us so yourself. And what did you do with her? You had her taught typewriting, for one thing. You had her trained by Judic—evidently your crony and go-between—to become a ladies' maid. That touching story of yours about her wishing to be a servant was false from beginning to end. You were fitting her to be an eavesdropper, a talebearer, a betrayer of trust; and when a chance to use her came, you sent her into this house to spy upon the generous and impulsive woman, who soon became attached to her, and who now insists that nothing be spared in the effort to get her well. Mary was to stay indoors; she was to get into the good graces of the chauffeur that she might keep posted as to her mistress' goings and comings, and, lastly, she was to report to you what she saw and heard. And when her soul revolted at this dirty work, and she pleaded with you that it was wrong and she could not do it, you bullied her and browbeat her, perhaps, or tortured her in some other cruel fashion, until the mere thought of you—even in her ether dream—became a horror!"

"It's you who's having an ether

dream now!" Prowl mumbled. "Mary a spy? What are you giving us?"

"The truth! Here's one of her reports! Shall I read it?"

With this, I whipped out of my pocket the leaf I had secretly torn from the tablet, and gave Prowl a fleeting glance of the long columns of figures inscribed upon it. He tried to grab the paper, failed, and dropped back in his chair, white with rage.

"No, no, no! Don't read that thing till I've seen it!"

"It smells too strong of blackmail, eh? Is that the reason?" I chuckled. "What is your business, anyhow, you scoundrel? Just plain spy and blackmailer, or something worse?"

Prowl made no answer.

"Come! Tell me!" I demanded.

Still he remained silent, glaring greedily at the paper in my grasp.

I asked the housekeeper a question. She nodded and left the room, but soon she came back, bringing with her a city directory. I opened it at the proper place, and read aloud:

"Prowl, Titus, Private Detective, Rooms 1014-1015 Ashe Building. Confidential cases a specialty."

"Private detective!" exclaimed Paget, in amazement. Then he laid a hand on my shoulder and led me as far as possible away from the others. "But, Dannart, this is simply incomprehensible!" he whispered. "Dora Jacinth! Why, there's nothing in her house that needs to be concealed any more than in my own. I'd stake my reputation on it! A spy here! For what purpose, I should like to know? For whose benefit?"

"Evidently for the benefit of Prowl's employer," I answered.

"Naturally! But who on earth could that person be?"

"Tell me that, and I will name the owner of the mirrored hand. They are one and the same individual."

"You astound me!" Paget ejaculated. "How do you make that out? Oh, I see! Mary's report——"

"Mary's report!" I echoed, with a wry smile. "Let's thank our lucky stars, doctor, that Prowl did not take me up when I offered to read it aloud. That was a bluff. To be frank, I don't know of whom it speaks. I can't make head or tail of it!"

IV.

After Prowl's identification, I could get nothing further out of him, no matter how much I coaxed or bullied. I felt certain he was somehow implicated in the recent crime, yet without tangible proof of it I dared not detain him longer against his will. But I could have him watched; and to this end I telephoned my young assistant, Doctor Arc, to hurry around to Jefferson Square and shadow him when he departed.

Soon thereafter, I let Prowl out of the maid's room, and accompanied him down to the front door. It was not yet dawn, but along the deserted street the electric lamps were burning crisply in the chill autumn air; and presently I saw Arc slip out from among the bare trees of the square opposite and take up the trail. Then I returned upstairs, and, with Paget and the housekeeper, began that necessary search of the scene of the tragedy which a succession of incidents had so long delayed.

Miss Jacinth's dressing room had two French windows opening upon a narrow stone balcony. This balcony was too high above the street to be readily accessible from it; but it communicated, by means of similar windows, with other rooms and a hallway on the same floor. It was evidently through one of these that the criminal—whether a member of the household, or some one who had entered the dwelling on the ground floor—had reached the balcony. It was then merely necessary to step

through the partly opened window directly back of Miss Jacinth's toilet table, insert a hand between the curtains, fire the pistol, retrace the road already traveled, and, finally, escape during the excitement, or hide till it was over. This, obviously, was what had been done. There had been no occasion to set foot in the dressing room or to touch anything but the window hangings. Hence, it was not surprising that the guilty person had come and gone without leaving a trace behind. And yet, in one respect, the felon's acts were significant. They betrayed a familiarity with the arrangement of the house and with the habits of its mistress.

Defeated in other directions, I next made shift—with the aid of Paget, the housekeeper, and a fresh mirror—to reconstruct the scene of the actual shooting, and had practically finished my task, when the door into the adjoining bedchamber opened and Miss Jacinth appeared on the threshold. Pale and weary looking, she peered about her with blinking eyes.

"I've been lying down, but couldn't sleep, and thought I heard my name called. Did you want me, doctor?" she asked.

"Not yet," I replied. "But—well, perhaps I'd better tell you this: Your maid was in the service of a private detective, and has been acting as a spy and informer in your house. Furthermore, the shot which nearly killed Mary, was aimed, not at her, but at you."

"At me!" Miss Jacinth cried, clutching at the door for support.

"Yes; I am convinced of it. I can imagine no reason on any one's part for doing away with the girl; but, on the contrary, a dozen for wishing her to live. In brushing your hair, she must have stepped within the line of fire at the instant the pistol went off. Whether she did this accidentally, or, seeing your danger, impulsively threw herself in the way, to protect you, she alone knows. In either case she would have received the ball intended for you; and that, I feel sure, is what happened. Shall I show you how?"

"No; no!" Miss Jacinth protested, her glance wavering about the bloodstains and litter of glass upon the floor. "I can't stop in this room another second! Come in here with me—you and Doctor Paget!"

We followed her into her bedchamber, where, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, she paced the floor nervously.

"Now, what is this about Mary being a spy?" she began immediately. "You can't mean it! If she were that kind of a girl, why should she try to save my life at risk of her own?"

"There's no doubt as to the main fact, Dora," Paget insisted. "Doctor Dannart has a report of hers in his pocket."

"Let me see it!"

"It's in cipher, Miss Jacinth," I explained. "I can read the words, but the rest is sheer guesswork. For one thing, it's unfinished. For another, I happen to be absolutely ignorant of the circumstances. But it *seems* to refer to some sort of trap that was set for somebody last night—a trap that could not be sprung because you had more than one guest at dinner."

"A trap? I don't understand."

"Nor do I. Yet—could it be possible that the intention was to embarrass you, to compromise you, in some false and tricky way?"

"Me! For what purpose?" the actress asked.

"To extort blackmail," I suggested.

"I hardly think so. In my whole life no one has ever tried to blackmail me."

"Well," I hesitated, "such sorry evidence is likewise employed—sometimes—in divorce suits——"

"But, my dear Dannart," Paget demurred, "the time for evidence of any kind is long past. The decree has been handed down, has been made permanent."

Until an hour before, I had not thought or cared whether the actress, whom the world knew only as Dora Jacinth, was married or not. But the persistent use of her maiden name since I had been in her house, the fact that she lived alone, Paget's reticence when Prowl had spoken of her as Mrs. Firth, and, lastly, the little I had been able to gather from Mary's report—had, together, hinted at how the land lay. But my colleague's last statement had come to me as a distinct surprise.

"When was the divorce granted?" I inquired.

"Nearly a year ago."

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Firth," Paget replied, after an appreciable pause.

Miss Jacinth stopped in her walk and faced me. "I see what you have in mind, doctor. But there was nothing 'sorry,' as you term it, about my separation; nothing whatever. Mr. Firth's conduct has always been without reproach, and so has mine. We parted simply and solely because we differed as to how our married life should be led. It was the old, old conflict between marriage; that is, wifehood and the artistic career. I have told you how my own views have changed in this respect. I believe now that Mr. Firth was right and I was wrong. But I did not find that out till too late. At the time, we couldn't agree. My husband was stubborn; he demanded that I give up my profession. I was just as obstinate, and would not do it. We soon reached a deadlock. Life together was no longer possible—and I left him. This house in which we had stayed for a few months after our marriage, while Mr. Firth's was being altered, belonged to me, and I returned to it. Later on, he sued me for divorce on the ground of desertion and abandonment. I made no defense, and the decree was given him. That's the whole story.

"The entire subject is intensely disagreeable to me," Miss Jacinth went on, resuming her restless pacing of the floor. "And I know it must be without interest to you. I have mentioned it merely to show that you will have to look elsewhere for an explanation of this tragedy. Our divorce could have nothing to do with it, and, consequently, neither could Mr. Firth. Why should he have tried to manufacture evidence against me? Not to use in his suit, for he had already won it. Not with the object of persecuting me; for he had secured the one thing he wanted —his freedom—and, by introducing no defense, I had actually helped him to obtain it."

Without making answer or comment, I waited until Miss Jacinth, in her tour of the room, passed directly in front of me. Then I suddenly asked this question:

"Who dined with you last night?"

She halted and surveyed me in astonishment, as though I had hit upon something which at that moment occupied her own secret thoughts.

"Mr. and Mrs. George Rodney, Amy Archer, and—Mr. Trant," she answered slowly.

The Rodneys I knew slightly—quiet, artistic people, with a fondness for the theater. I inquired who the others were.

"Miss Archer? Mr. Trant? Why they were my support on the stage, and are now with me in the films."

"You said a while ago, Miss Jacinth, that your guests stayed late. Did they all leave the house together?"

A subtle change had taken place in the actress' manner. It seemed to have lost its frankness; and she delayed her answer so long that I was forced to repeat my question.

"Mr. Trant remained after the others had gone—a little while after the others had gone," she finally conceded.

"Did he have a part in your play, 'The Mirrored Hand'?" I queried?

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"He was, first, my lover; afterward, my husband," she admitted reluctantly.

"And off the stage? Did he, by any chance, ask, last night, to be given the same rôles in the future—in *your* future?"

Miss Jacinth stared at me, embarrassed, a little frightened. "I see I can hide nothing from you. Yes—Mr. Trant—and it hurt me to say 'No'; he seemed to take it so hard. Do you suppose—— I'm ashamed to put it into words—what I've been thinking—but he's so hot-headed! Oh, what a mix-up it is! There's Amy Archer. She loves him. It may sound conceited, ridiculous, yet she's jealous of me—actually! I've noticed it for some time. It was particularly apparent last night, at the table; and later——"

A rap at the door interrupted her, and, in response to her call, the housekeeper entered the room.

"Mary is worse, and wishes to see you, Miss Jacinth," said she. "And the nurse wants the two doctors at once."

When we reached Mary's bedside, the girl took Miss Jacinth's hand in hers and feebly laid it against her cheek.

"I've done wrong by you," she murmured. "But he made me do it—I was *so* afraid of him!"

"Poor thing!" Miss Jacinth soothed, after I had told her, in as few words as possible, about Prowl.

"Forgive me, won't you?" Mary pleaded. "Until you do, I can't die in peace. And I want to die."

"No; no! You shan't. The doctors will not let you. Soon you will be as well as ever."

"I know better than that. I feel it coming." Then, presently, she said: "You were always good to me, and maybe what I did at last will make up for some of my wickedness. I saw the hand—the pistol pointed at you—I stepped in the way—— God told me to do it. Do you think He will pardon me the rest?"

"I am sure He will, even as I do," the actress comforted.

The tide of life had turned against the girl, and she was making no effort to stem it. Time was passing; every moment was precious.

"Mary," I asked, "whose hand was it that held the pistol?"

"I couldn't see," she answered weakly.

"But you know for whom your uncle made you do those things, don't you; the things you didn't want to do?"

"No!"

Her voice had sunk into a whisper; her eyes were drooping; the shadows were closing in upon her. I took her hand gently.

"Mary, have you *nothing* to tell us?"

"I'm almost afraid," she muttered. "I don't want to do any more harm, only to help all I can. But—there was a lady across the street—waiting—waiting till Mr. Trant came out. It may have been *her* hand."

"Who was it?" I begged, leaning over to catch the words that were now nothing more than sighs.

"Miss—Amy——"

The girl's lips were stilled. She had lapsed into unconsciousness. And in the gray light of the dawn which stole into the silent room, I saw upon her face the look of those who have willed to die, and whom, so often, there seems no possibility of saving.

A little after ten o'clock, her life ended. Drab it had been, and shabby and muddled, but not altogether futile. She had risked it to save another, and what remained of it she had given

willingly in expiation of her faults. Though her frail, timid spirit had cringed before her uncle, at the supreme climax it had risen above things earthly, and triumphed.

V.

Mary Naseby's death at this particular juncture altered the entire situation, and brought out a crisis in an inquiry already sufficiently baffling. It was now no longer possible to evade or prevent the publicity which Miss Jacinth so much dreaded. Paget and I would be compelled to summon the police and the coroner. This might be deferred, but only briefly. Nevertheless, I asked that it be done. I felt there was a bare chance that in a few hours I *might* be able to turn over to the authorities a completed case, and thus, at least, spare Miss Jacinth a host of disagreeable experiences. There was only one way to accomplish this. I must ruthlessly discard the many promising clews that offered, and rely solely on my knowledge of human nature. I should be obliged to stake all on a single throw. But, if I judged rightly, Prowl, with a little encouragement from me, would, after all, be the one to cast the dice.

"Well, it's now a quarter before eleven," said Doctor Paget sleepily, fumbling his fat gold watch. "I suppose we might delay notifying the coroner till one." It had been a trying night for the old man, and he had sunk wearily into an easy-chair in the library, whither he had come after leaving Mary's deathbed.

"Until one? Good! That will give me ample time," I agreed.

But my colleague did not hear me. He was already dozing, his silvery head resting on a cushion Miss Jacinth had placed for him.

I left Jefferson Square in my car, and in ten minutes was at the Ashe Building, where I found Arc reading a paper at the news stand in the ground-floor corridor.

"The man came straight here from Miss Jacinth's," he began, as soon as we had squeezed ourselves into a telephone booth, from which we could watch all who used the elevators. "He went up to his office, and his light burned till daylight. At five, when the scrub women went away, I listened outside his door for a while. He seemed to be trotting around a good deal and tearing up papers. He hasn't left the building yet."

"That's lucky! We weren't ready for him. Now we are. And if he's the man I think he is, we'll have no trouble in getting him out of his hole."

Thereupon I called up Miss Jacinth, and asked her to telephone Prowl that his niece was dead. If he inquired for me, she was to say that as yet no trace of the murderer had been discovered, and that I intended a little later to inform the police.

This device succeeded beyond my hopes. In less than five minutes the man himself shot down in an elevator and hurried past us, into the street. We were close behind him; and as we pushed through the revolving doors, we saw him hop into a taxicab and make off uptown at high speed.

"Quick, Arc!" I urged. "Take my car! Don't lose sight of him on your life! I'll trail you, not him. He knows me—might look back. But you're safe."

Arc got away without delay, and I hailed another taxi and followed him. But although I kept a sharp lookout and knew the appearance of my own machine, it was no easy job to keep track of it in the hurly-burly of the business streets; and twice I nearly lost it before we got into the residence section of the city. There the chase went better. Yet sometimes Prowl's car and then Arc's would swing round a corner, and I would hold my breath till I,

too, made the turning, and discovered that my assistant had not wholly disappeared.

At one of these turns—into Marlborough Avenue, it was—I saw Arc slow up and then sweep round and come back along the side street, toward me. The chauffeur of my machine stopped, and I jumped out. So did Arc, and we met on the pavement.

"He went into the third house, on the south side!" he exclaimed excitedly. "His taxi's waiting halfway up the block."

"Know who lives there?"

"No, doctor!"

"I believe I can guess," I ventured.

As I hastened toward the house in question, I told Arc to dismiss my taxi, and, in my own car, to remain within call lest I should need him. Then I ran up the steps and pushed the electric bell. Almost immediately a manservant opened the door.

"Mr. Prowl hasn't come yet, has he?" I began at once, moving past him into the hall.

"Yes, sir," the man replied.

"Don't tell me that!" I grumbled ruefully. "I was to meet him here, and promised him faithfully not to be late."

The unsuspecting servant hastened to reassure me. "It's not many minutes behind you are, sir. He's in the library. If you'll come this way——"

He preceded me along the hall. At the end of it, he opened the door of a large, sumptuously furnished room, lined with books; and when I had stepped inside, he closed the door softly behind me.

I found two men in the apartment. One of them was Prowl. The other—whom, so far as I could recall, I had never seen before—was tall, handsome, and strongly built, but with a weary sag about the shoulders and in the muscles of his face. They stood at opposite sides of a huge table, confronting each other, glaring into each other's eyes, pale, trembling, voiceless. They did not see or hear me. Their passion was too hot. It blinded them; dried up their words.

Not till I reached the table end did they become aware of my presence. Then they both whipped round and stared, Prowl aghast, the stranger uncomprehendingly.

"How did you get in here?" the latter challenged sharply. "And who are you—what do you want?"

"Dannart's my name. I'm acting for Miss Jacinth, and I want this scoundrel, Prowl, for complicity in the murder of his niece!"

"Take him! You're welcome to him. He came here——"

"Yes, I came here to get money you owed me!" Prowl broke in furiously.

"You lie!" the man shouted back at him. "You were after blackmail. But you got into the wrong shop. I'll see you dead before I pay you a penny!"

"Blackmail!" I cried, egging the man on. "That's like Prowl. I believe it. The only thing that puzzles me," I added, with mock ingenuousness, "is how he happened to light on you."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "The very question I was asking him when you came in," said he.

"Because *he* did it! *He* murdered her!" Prowl screamed at me, shaking his fist impotently across the table at the other.

"I!" ejaculated the latter. "*I* kill this chambermaid, or whatever else she was? What the devil should I do that for? I never laid eyes on the girl in my life! Prowl, you're a raving lunatic!"

"It's you who are the lunatic!" the detective flung back at him, beside himself with rage. "You pestered your wife to quit the stage and drop everything and everybody for you—kept at it till you drove her away from you; and then, no sooner had you divorced

her than you went crazy with jealousy. You're a regular dog in the manger, Firth; that's what you are. You didn't want her, wouldn't have her; and yet, after you'd got rid of her, you'd go wild if any other man came near her; at the bare thought of her marrying again. Nothing would suit you but that I must set Mary to keeping tabs on the goings-on in her house. Then, there was no satisfying you. What you heard only made you hungrier for more. You! You're the limit! You've acted like a boy with a sore finger that he's simply got to touch every once in a while, just to see if it still hurts."

The affair was turning out precisely as I had hoped it would. And now, to keep the men at white heat, I threw a little fresh fuel on the fire of their anger.

"Goings-on!" I echoed. "I see that Prowl has been working you both ways, Mr. Firth. There have been no 'goings-on' at Jefferson Square."

Firth spun round and faced me. "What do you know of it?" he demanded harshly, losing all semblance of self-control.

"Mrs. Firth has honored me with her confidence," I replied. "And, aside from that, I have Doctor Paget's word for it."

"You're easy!" the man sneered. "How about that pink-faced doll, Trant?"

"Trant!" I laughed. "Your former wife is as likely to marry Prowl as Trant. She told me as much herself."

"So? And what do you call what happened there last night?"

"I call it a scheme to get Mrs. Firth into some awkward fix or other. It was doubtless concocted by Prowl to give you something to feed your grouch on, and thus enable him to extort more money from you. But the plan didn't work. In fact, *nothing* happened!"

"What!" cried Firth.

"Here's the proof of what I say—Mary Naseby's report!" I took the paper from my pocket and held it out to him. He grasped it with his left hand, I noticed, gazed at it long and steadily, and then flung it on the table.

"Ah, I begin to see!" he burst out. "Yes, now I understand it all. Prowl, you said the reports you've been sending me right along for a year were from your niece. They weren't! I never saw this handwriting before! What you got from her, you suppressed. What you sent me, you doctored; made up out of the whole cloth, maybe. And what you told me early last night was a lie—a lie like all the rest! Own up, you devil, or I'll rub you out!"

"Hold on!" I commanded, stepping between the two infuriated men. "Let me say a word, will you? I've felt sure from the beginning that Prowl's employer and the owner of the mirrored hand were identical. Whether Prowl knew him to be the murderer, or merely suspected him, I could not discover. But, in either case, I was confident that as soon as he heard the girl was dead, he would scurry to that employer, would pretend that he knew all about it, would stick him up for hush money, and then skip before the police could get him as an accessory or as a witness. That's why I had Mrs. Firth telephone him the news. That's why I dropped every other clew and followed him from his office. And that's precisely what he has just done.

"But he did more than betray the criminal. He instigated the crime. He played on your preposterous jealousy, Firth, until he got you frantic, insane. The rotten lie he told you about last night was the final straw. You could not stand for that, and you went to your divorced wife's house and tried to kill her—the very woman whom time had changed to your way of thinking about marriage and the stage, and who, in her present frame of mind, could

easily be induced, no doubt, to give up her profession."

Firth sank into a seat beside the table. The anger had died out of his face, leaving it gray and tired looking. He peered at Prowl—always at Prowl—between half-closed lids. On his lips there was a faint smile, cunning, cynical.

"You went to your wife's house," I repeated. "You had lived there, knew its arrangement, very probably had a latchkey, and were acquainted with Mrs. Firth's habits. You must have been familiar with a play in which she appeared, called 'The Mirrored Hand.' What took place in her dressing room, I am told, was an exact reproduction of a certain scene in that drama, and it was this scene that suggested to you the way in which the crime you intended might be committed. It was a fatal suggestion, for the reflection of *your* hand in the looking glass has finally clinched the proof against you. Mrs. Firth said that what she saw was a right hand. She forgot that in a mirror the two sides of an object are reversed, and that which seems to be the right hand is actually the left. I observe that you are left-handed, and that your skin is very white. Nothing further need be said. But you should remember this: The fact that you did not kill the person you shot at, but somebody else, will not save you from punishment. The law will find you guilty of willful and premeditated murder all the same. And your good friend, Prowl, will come in handy as a witness against you."

"Don't drag me into this, Doctor Dannart!" the detective implored. "Don't! It'll simply wreck my business. I suspected Firth of killing Mary; but, honest, I didn't know a thing about it till you got after him."

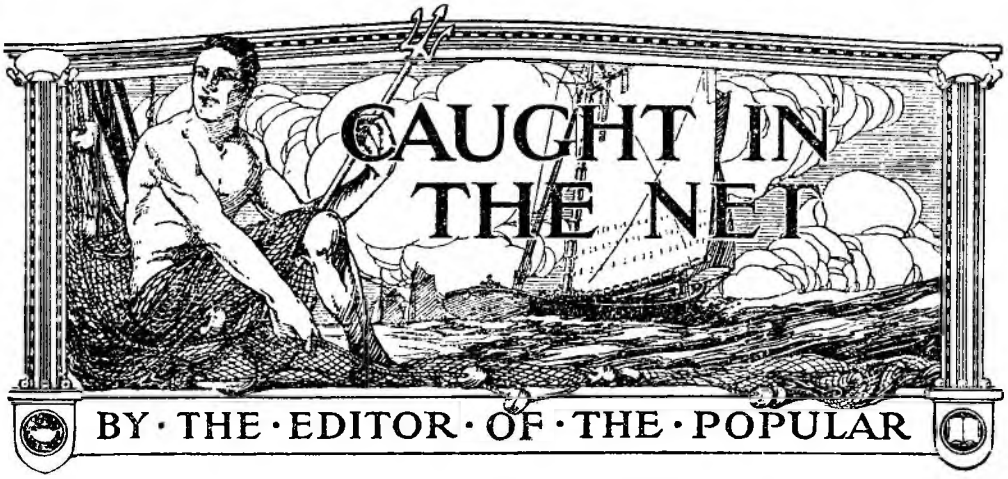
"You needn't worry, Prowl," said Firth composedly, the cold, satirical smile still playing about his lips. "Your business may suffer in the future, but not because of what you testify on the witness stand."

I pushed a bell button on the wall, and when a servant appeared—the same who had let me in—I told him to find Arc and send him to me immediately.

"Very good, sir!" the man returned, and was about to close the library door and depart on my errand, when, at that instant, an explosion occurred that seemed to crack the silence of the room into splinters. I swung around. There was Prowl, sprawled grotesquely across the table, his dying fingers clutching convulsively at the books and papers which cluttered it. Opposite him sat Firth, a smoking revolver in his hand, his features twisted into that same icy, derisive grin.

The servant and I, with one accord, sprang toward him, but immediately there was another ear-splitting crash, and Firth pitched forward, face downward, on the table, his arms interlocked with those of the man who had ruined him.

I picked up the pistol which had dropped from his hand to the floor. Three chambers were empty. The bullets that remained were of the same caliber as that which I had extracted from Mary Naseby's body.



INFLUENCE OF COAL UPON CIVILIZATION

OFFHAND, you would not say, perhaps, that coal was the most valuable mineral in the world. It is. And peculiarly so, when you consider that its use implies its destruction. Deposits of coal, when discovered, act magnetically upon population, and it has been proved that the fuel causes greater migration than any other known economic factor. The coal fields of Great Britain, Germany, and Pennsylvania attest this fact. Furthermore, not only population is affected by the coal resources of a country, but also its wealth per capita and its civilization. The heaviest coal-producing nations lead in culture and progress, and commercially they are supreme. Even the factors of area or geographical position yield in importance to that of coal resources. All of which, and more, was the outcome of the investigation of the Twelfth International Geological Congress, held in Canada to study this far-reaching subject. The congress devoted three ponderous volumes to its findings.

It was also ascertained that the bulk of the world's supply of coal is deposited in the continental areas of the northern hemisphere, and that North America and Eurasia hold about six-sevenths of the total amount. The fuel is distributed most abundantly in the northern half of the Western World. South America, so far as is known, has comparatively little coal, and this condition insures to North America predominant economic importance in industrial relations with its southern neighbors; at least, so long as coal is not superseded by some other fuel, and that does not appear likely at present, for, while oil is being employed more and more as fuel, it cannot yet be classed as a rival to coal. Absence of coal in a country has generally hampered manufacturing development. California is a case in point. Despite its favorable geographical position and wonderful climate, industrial progress was delayed until oil and long-distance electric-power transmission became feasible.

Approximately, seventy per cent of the estimated tonnage of coal in the world is stored up in our Western Hemisphere, and two-thirds of the whole supply is to be found in the United States, located between the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians. The coal in Eurasia is principally distributed in the British Isles, in Germany and Belgium, in France, in India, in Japan, in Russia, and in

northern China. Broadly taken, the Eurasian coal fields may be divided into two major districts—Atlantic and Pacific fields. The Atlantic fields, to the west, have been drawn upon enormously, while the Pacific fields are practically untouched. It is predicted that this condition will bring about a shifting of population within a generation, an exodus from the west to the east; China's immense resources of coal especially will exert a powerful influence upon the European peoples, attracting them thither, and the civilization of China will thus undergo complete revolution.

Finally, the Twelfth International Geological Congress estimated that the annual consumption of coal at present in the world amounted to something like 1300 million tons, and at that rate our aggregate supply will last for centuries. Following is a table of the estimated coal reserves of the world in million tons:

Continent	Anthracitic Coals	Bituminous Coals	Sub-bituminous and Lignitic Coals	Totals
America (North and South)	22,542	2,271,080	2,811,906	5,105,528
Asia	407,637	761,217	113,220	1,282,074
Europe	54,346	693,164	36,682	784,192
Oceania	659	133,161	35,108	168,928
Africa	11,662	45,123	1,054	57,839
Totals	496,846	3,903,745	2,997,970	7,398,561

SPRING FEVER

SPRING fever is not an attack of laziness. It is young Spring's effort to make one quit what he is doing and play with her a while. It is comforting to know that medical men and psychologists have discovered there is no laziness. It is overwork, or lack of nourishment, or the hookworm, or a trait inherited from grandfather on Uncle Jake's side of the family.

To a man with a trace of the race's primitive youth in his veins—and what man does not feel it at times?—the rising of the sap brings a restlessness that makes his daily work seem as stale and insipid as last year's vegetables that have been kept in the cellar all winter. The insidious call of budding things in fields and woods comes creeping into the dim, half-forgotten chambers of his consciousness like the soft, clear voice of a million flutes stealing in under the roar of traffic.

He leans back in his chair and yawns. A far-off, lazy look comes into his eyes; the affairs of the world seem rather insignificant; and one of his associates remarks: "Jim, you're taking the spring fever."

Jim grins rather sheepishly, yawns again, says "I guess so," and pulls himself forward to the work in hand.

He has heard the call of Pan. He has smelled the wild plum blossoms, he has seen a stretch of green wheat, heard the trill in the robin's song, and felt the lazy warmth of the spring sun on his back. He may be city bred, and would not know wheat from dog fennel, or a robin from a blue jay; but no matter. Even if he must go back four generations to a wandering ancestor, he has felt the call that Nature makes in the spring for her children to come out of doors.

But even while the rising sap and glistening light call as a million soft-toned flutes in his subconsciousness, Jim shakes himself, and remarks apologetically: "Yes, I'm really getting the spring fever. I believe I'm getting lazy."

OUR BUSINESS

A YOUNG man who had worked his way through Manual High School at Kansas City applied for a job with a wholesale jeweler. He was taken on as shipping clerk at ten dollars a week.

In three months he was promoted. For two weeks after his promotion, some time every day he went back to his old department to show the new man how to do his work. While the new man was grateful for the assistance, he had not asked him to do it, neither had the manager.

"What do you do it for?" asked another employee. "That department isn't your business any more."

"Every department is my business," replied the young man. "Good work anywhere by anybody in the house helps all of us; and bad work hurts all of us."

And yet the other employee is still wondering why this young man has been promoted seven times in three years, while he has not been promoted once in five years.

MINING WITH AMERICANS

THE Joplin-Webb City mines, which are supplying much of the lead and about one-third of all the zinc used by the Allies—and at the same time supplying a big share of the American market, have one unique distinction.

In these rushing days, when zinc ore sells at a hundred dollars a ton or more, there are over twenty thousand miners at work in this district—and not one of them is a foreigner or a negro.

Everybody, from ground boss to "screen ape," speaks English. Not even a brogue is heard. Most of the miners are natives of the Ozarks, who came originally from Kentucky, Virginia, and the Carolinas. The purest American strain.

There has rarely been a strike—only one, we believe, in twenty-five years. There has never been any violence. They are not organized, but they have such a concerted, deep-rooted prejudice against foreign labor that the one or two attempts to bring Italians or other aliens into the mines have ended precipitately.

"JUST A COUNTRY DOCTOR!"

EVERY issue of this magazine, we confess ourselves in sympathy with open-air folk—with those who prefer the roof of the sky to one of lath and plaster. In our urban minds, we picture the open-air people as lovers of Nature and seekers after her hoards of hidden wealth. But the man of whom we would speak here loved nature much, but loved his fellow man more, and he sought the inexhaustible stores of health in Nature's broad bosom rather than her wealth. It is to Doctor Edward Livingston Trudeau we refer, whose

death last November marked the passing of one of America's noblest men, a man whose name is blessed by thousands of individuals throughout the world.

Going up to the Adirondacks to die, some forty years ago, he lived to fulfill the great destiny of bringing life to others when only death seemed possible. When he arrived in that mountainous region, in 1873, tuberculosis had ravaged his lungs beyond all repair, it was thought. Six months of life was granted to him at most. Through an accident, he discovered that the hardships endured in a frightful blizzard had no bad result, and indeed the rigors of the cold seemed to make him feel better. The experience set him thinking, and he became intensely interested in the theory of Brehmer, then new, which set forth the curative force of cold air upon diseased lungs. Doctor Trudeau decided to experiment on himself by living entirely out of doors in all kinds of weather, warmly wrapped and inactive. Many physicians and most of his friends tried to dissuade him against this foolhardy undertaking. He persisted, however, and his restoration to comparative health and strength astonished everybody. From that hour dated the revolutionary method of treating tuberculosis which we have come to recognize as one of the supreme benefits conferred upon mortals.

Being a physician, and the region having made him whole, Doctor Trudeau began practicing medicine among the scattered and sparse population of the locality. And, besides administering to the natives, he prescribed for their horses and cows. He rode about in a ramshackle rig, no matter what the weather, and brought cheer and healing to the sick, and his fees were either trifling or nothing at all. "Just a country doctor," he said of himself, and was content to be so considered.

Within a few years of his remarkable cure, Doctor Trudeau began expounding his open-air specific for tuberculosis. He aroused interest and hope in the hearts of the despairing. His real life work began with two patients in a little red shack in the neighborhood of Saranac Lake. Success came to him. Patients and quarters increased until the former numbered thousands, while his little red shack became the center of an aggregation of buildings that soon took on the appearance of a town! Such was the origin of the world-famous Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, which has been, and is, a Mecca for consumptives.

Doctor Trudeau's work was philanthropic to a degree. A patient was expected to pay for treatment in full, if possible, but in other cases only what could be afforded. By means of his enthusiasm and personality, Doctor Trudeau somehow managed to make up yearly deficits from the pocketbooks of rich men. For personal gain he never looked, and continued to go about in his ramshackle rig like "just a country doctor" until friends forced him to accept a new and more befitting equipage.

We are inclined to think that Doctor Edward Livingston Trudeau, apostle of the open air, deserves a place beside Father Damien in the ranks of those strong, sweet, unselfish spirits who gave their lives to bring healing to mankind.

Doubloons

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Homeward Bound," "The Wall Between," Etc.

A fine old sea dog at Falmouth gets his chance for real romance and adventure when the man from Broadway turns up a pirate's chart indicating that one of the islets in the St. Lawrence was used by the buccaneers of bygone years as a safe-deposit vault for their stolen doubloons. Nothing so very extraordinary in the old skipper's starting out for the buried doubloons, but the extraordinary happens when a university professor starts out on the same quest. When the twain meet, the fur begins to fly. A comedy of errors.

(In Two-Parts—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN JOSEPH KEMPTON had commanded one of the last of the stately square-rigged ships that flew the Stars and Stripes on blue water. It was the ignoble fate of this *Endymion* of his to be dismantled and cut down for a coal barge while still in her prime. No more would she lift topsail yards to the breath of the Pacific trades or nobly storm across the Western Ocean. In the battle for trade, she was unable to survive the rivalry of sooty tramp freighters that roamed for cargo everywhere.

In such ships as this had her master learned his trade and served his years. He was left without a calling, a man hale and efficient, but too old to begin again in steam. His savings amounted to a few thousand dollars, not enough to live on, besides which idleness was hateful to contemplate. At length he found a berth as watchman or caretaker in a nautical graveyard on the New England coast, where vessels no longer worth repairing found their last resting place, to rot, or to be burned for the metal in their hulls, or broken up for junk.

It was a rather melancholy haven for one who loved the sea and ships and had briskly lorded it on his own quarter-deck. There were times when Captain Kempton winced and sighed at the sight of the nodding, rusty funnels and shabby deck houses beside the weedy wharves, and the gaunt fabrics of abandoned schooners resting on the mud flats. He was a brooding, disappointed man, but the bright presence of his daughter saved his thoughts from bitterness.

At nineteen, Eudora Kempton viewed life as anything else than a finished chapter, and this nautical graveyard was less sad than romantic, a place for dreaming dreams adventurous or pensive. Gifted with a serene optimism, she found contentment in her duty, which was to make the white cottage by the harbor as pleasant a home as possible for her father. These two

comprised the household. There were estimable young men in the port of Falmouth who would have been glad to make other arrangements for Eudora, for they thought her exceeding fair; but she declared that her heart was fancy-free.

This was a feminine evasion, pardonable enough because it would never do to let a certain Dan Sloan think anything else. He was Eudora's problem, to be handled with care. She dared not reveal too much, by a smile or a glance, for a masterful wooer was this mate of the big seagoing tug *Endeavor* which fetched the coal-laden barges coastwise from Norfolk. Stalwart, alert, and a native gentleman, he had a fine reputation afloat, but, alas! a somewhat tempestuous one ashore. Plaintively he recited his troubles to Eudora, but she was not easily persuaded. Other young men of twenty-three were old enough to behave themselves and avoid rows and ructions. It was always Dan Sloan who had whipped three sailors or blackened the eye of a policeman. In short, the impetuous mate was severely on probation, and his footing with Eudora was that of a rather precarious friendship, nothing more.

It was on a day in early summer when a visitor sought this picturesque corner of the harbor and wandered among the untenanted vessels. Curiously he scanned them, halting now and then to scribble in a notebook. His appearance suggested neither a seafaring man nor a dealer in marine junk, and his behavior interested Captain Kempton, who was enjoying a pipe on the porch of the cottage. He was about to saunter to the wharf and accost this harmless trespasser when Eudora, who was plying a hoe in her flower garden, paused to remark:

"You might think he owned the place. Such a grand manner! Please find out who he is and what he wants."

"A summer boarder from along shore somewhere, most likely," said her parent. "But I can't make out why he is so infernally busy with a pencil. An artist, maybe; but they are rigged different."

Eudora turned to her flowers, which were much more important than a mere man, and the captain moved in the direction of the water front. A closer view disclosed to him that the stranger was thirty or thereabouts, rather heavy-featured, and of a portly figure. His complexion was florid, his taste in dress slightly so. As the shipmaster approached him, he clambered down from the hulk of a river steamer and heartily exclaimed, with hand outstretched:

"Captain Kempton? They told me about you in Falmouth this morning. I want to ask you a lot of questions. Bully stuff, this!"

"An unsightly mess, it seems to me. I get tired of looking at it," was the friendly reply. "What can I do for you?"

"Tell me the stories of some of these relics, and something about your own career," smiled the other. "Mannice is my name—William Marmaduke Mannice. You may have seen some of my signed features in the Sunday sheets. I got wind of this salt-water bone yard of yours, and ran up from Boston to look it over for a special story. Color and human interest! I doped it out right. It's all here."

Now this happened to be a true statement, but Mr. Mannice had often found it inconvenient to tell the whole truth. Several metropolitan editors could vouch for his talent as a reporter, but they preferred not to discuss him otherwise. Their language was apt to become heated. In their milder moments, they called him lazy and unreliable and foresaw his finish. So accurate was this prediction that the gifted William Marmaduke Mannice, again dismissed for cause, had been forced into the ranks of the unemployed. His exit

from New York had been hastened by the failure of an attempt to raise funds which skirted too near the edge of blackmail, and he uneasily surmised that he had not heard the last of it.

With a very few dollars, he was marooned in Boston, a free lance who had to peddle his stuff from one office to another until he could find a chance to employ his wits to better advantage. The trip to Falmouth was in the nature of a foraging expedition. With photographs, and done in his breezy style, here was a story that ought to sell.

His type of man was unfamiliar to Captain Joseph Kempton, who had the sailor's fine simplicity of character. Shrewd in his own domain, he had dealt mostly with those who hit straight from the shoulder, whose vices and virtues were plain to read. This affable journalist made a pleasant diversion in the monotony of his existence, and it was flattering to have him display an interest in the career of one of the last of the true-blue Yankee shipmasters.

Vivid were the episodes he was moved to recall, with the tang of briny seas and strong winds, as they lingered upon the wharf, and Mr. Mannice was a sympathetic listener. At length they boarded a forlorn wooden hull whose shapely prow still bore the white figurehead of some chaste goddess and whose name, "*Wanderer*," was discernible in a gilded scroll.

"A sister ship to my *Endymion*," said Captain Kempton. "They were launched from the same yard in Bath, and my uncle sailed this one in the China trade. I raced him from Shanghai to Liverpool once, and we finished six hours apart, for a bet of a thousand dollars. It was a record passage. We both carried away all our spare spars and lost men overboard, several of them."

Mannice glanced at the well-knit, keen-eyed mariner, so mild of mien and quiet of speech, and found it difficult to realize that he belonged to a vanished era of splendid endeavor. What he had seen and done thrilled one's fancy, and the reporter was genuinely sincere as he said:

"People have forgotten, and they don't care if the English and the Germans have crowded our shipping off the high seas. To find a man like you, with this background and all that—well, there is more of a punch to it than I could dig out of a barrel of statistics."

"Why not come up to the house and sit down?" said the captain, greatly pleased. "I'll be glad to have you stay for dinner, Mr. Mannice. It's quite a walk to a hotel in Falmouth, and we can talk at our leisure."

Possibly because he had caught a distant glimpse of Eudora, the visitor accepted with instant alacrity. Misfortune had not dulled a belief in his prowess with the ladies. The captain's daughter was singing in the kitchen, for she was an old-fashioned girl who enjoyed the fine art of cookery, nor did she whisk off the white apron as she went to meet the guest. Courteous was her welcome as a hostess, but Mr. Mannice noted that her gaze was fearlessly direct and that she was trying to appraise him for herself. Always at ease, he made himself agreeable, taking no pains to hide his admiration. Eudora's lovely color was all her own, and the years of her girlhood at sea in the *Endymion* had given her fine figure a carriage singularly graceful and reliant.

While the trio sat at dinner, the guest was reminded of a fantastic sea tale which had been going the rounds of the newspapers. It concerned a buried treasure, a lonely Pacific islet, and an expedition fitting out at San Francisco.

"I presume you ran across these legends during your voyages, Captain Kempton," said Mannice. "Odd that people should take stock in them, don't you think?"

"I see nothing odd in it." And the

reply was unexpectedly emphatic. The mariner straightened himself in his chair, his strong face glowed with feeling, and he was like a younger man as he continued: "The pirates and the buccaneers hid their hoards, no doubt. Their booty was immense, more than they could have squandered. The Captain Kidd tradition is a myth, exploded long ago; but in many other instances ——"

"You have started my father off on a hobby of his, Mr. Mannice," laughingly interrupted Eudora. "He has been collecting material for years. Perhaps he will show you some of his rare books and prints."

"A fascinating subject," replied the reporter, scenting another marketable story. "Do you mind telling me, sir, where some of this plunder is buried?"

"Fourteen millions of it is on Cocos Island, saved from the sack of Lima," promptly answered the shipmaster. "I once sighted volcanic little Trinidad off the coast of Brazil, where more of the Spanish loot was left, but the sea was too heavy for me to send a boat ashore. Why, in twenty ports, from Manila to Rio, I have heard yarns like these, too circumstantial to be waved aside. They can't be pure invention, or sane men would not be spending fortunes every year to send out vessels to search for treasure."

"We are ever so much more sensible," came from Eudora. "Father and I dream our treasure finding right here at home and then plan how we shall spend it."

Captain Kempton silenced her with a gesture of annoyance, as though this were a theme too serious for jesting. She regarded him a little anxiously, and would have talked of something else, but Mannice persisted:

"But did those gay old cutthroats really leave any charts with the crosses and compass bearings all marked down? And if they didn't, how the deuce does anybody know where to look?"

"There are such charts," seriously affirmed the skipper. "They have been handed down from survivors who were not drowned or hanged. I have heard of one or two perfectly well authenticated. A party that chartered a schooner out of Havana three years ago had one of them. I knew the men they hired as master. He wrote me about it."

"And did they find the stuff?" queried the incredulous Mannice.

"If they did, they would keep mum. It might be claimed by some government or other as treasure-trove. But if they didn't, the chart might not have been to blame. Landmarks change or vanish in two or three centuries, and the sea may shift a coast line beyond recognition."

"And it's a good gamble that somebody will turn up the jewels and the pieces of eight if they dig long enough?" cried the reporter, who was becoming excited.

"Provided they are equipped with a proper chart," and Captain Kempton smote the table with his fist. "Why, if I were lucky enough to stumble on a document of this kind, I wouldn't hesitate a minute to spend some money on it—go take a look, I mean."

"And put us in the poorhouse?" chided Eudora, who had returned from the kitchen to stand at his elbow like a guardian angel. "There would be a mutiny in this family."

"I'm not joking," asserted her father, addressing himself to Mannice. "I know what I am talking about. I have enough laid by to fit out a vessel, and a man might as well stake it all on one throw as to molder his life away with the other hulks in this graveyard."

Mannice stared, and was silent. He had stirred unsuspected currents of emotion. It was easy to read that the captain was in rebellion against his

tragic destiny and hoped to find some way of escape. His mind unoccupied, his normal activity thwarted, he dreamed of treasure and adventure for lack of anything more tangible. This made the story so much the better, reflected William Marmaduke Mannice, whose attitude toward his fellow man was essentially selfish. While Eudora washed the dishes, he sat on the porch and smoked with Captain Kempton, who needed no persuasion to pursue the same subject. At his fingers' ends was an amazing amount of lore and legend, of facts that denoted a profound historical research, of conclusions worked out with the utmost ingenuity.

Reluctantly, at length, the journalist asked the time of day, for a pawn ticket reposed where his own watch should have been. Another half hour and he must think of taking a train to Boston. Eudora was among her flowers, and he desired to know her better before departing. His heart may have been calloused, but there was no denying the fact that it beat a trifle faster whenever he looked at the captain's winsome daughter. He became aware that he was still capable of an infatuation.

Eudora greeted him with a certain dignified aloofness, and appeared more interested in the weeds in the pansy bed. This he laid to feminine coyness. It was a way the pretty creatures had, but trust a man of the world to play the game with patience and finesse. Blandly, he exclaimed, hat in hand:

"May I beg a few forget-me-nots for remembrance, Miss Kempton? This has been one of those days—well, a sort of inspiration."

"Yes, my father can be very entertaining," she crisply replied, disregarding his plea. "Tell me, do you intend to put him in a newspaper?"

"Er—he appeals to me as a striking personality. Yes, I should like to describe him."

"Oh, I don't mind what you may say about his life and service. I'm sure it will please him, Mr. Mannice. But about his lost-treasure hobby—I forbid that, you know. He takes it too seriously now, and he mustn't be encouraged."

The journalist hesitated, and plausibly lied: "Your word is law. I could promise you anything if you would let me come to see you again."

"Again? You didn't come to see me to-day," quoth the unsatisfactory Eudora. "By the way, you are not allowing yourself any too much time to catch that train. You are rather stout for rapid walking."

This was an insult deliberate and cutting. Mr. Mannice turned quite red, bit his lip, and for once was taken aback. With a low bow and a murmured farewell, he clapped his hat on his head and passed grandly from the garden. Eudora smiled, and overtook her parent, who was pacing the path to the wharf.

"An uncommonly pleasant visitor," said he. "He woke me up a bit. Able in his own line, I should say. How did you like him?"

"Not as much as he likes himself," was her analysis. "He impressed me as the least bit gone to seed. His clothes were not really shabby, and I couldn't call his face dissipated, but—perhaps I'll have to call it intuition. A cable length would be far enough to trust Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice, I think."

This seemed to ruffle Captain Kempton, usually so affectionate, and he hastily retorted:

"That sounds critical and unkind, Eudora. I don't agree with you at all. Really, I have so few pleasures, and——"

"And it is horrid of me," she peni-

tently broke in. "It was lots of fun. Did you give him your photograph?"

"Yes. My old friends will be glad to see it published. I shall want some extra copies of the paper. I urged Mr. Mannice to drop in again."

"He will," was the verdict of Eudora, who had her own private opinion. William Marmaduke was an admirer not easily suppressed.

CHAPTER II.

It was in a Boston lodging house by no means luxurious that the accomplished journalist sat down at once to arrange his notes and write three columns of swinging prose in praise of Yankee ships and sailors that sail the seas no more. The image of Eudora was somewhat distracting, but there was no time to waste, for he needed the money. With the untiring facility of long training, he drove at his task until far in the night, and was nearing the end when a brilliant idea occurred to him. He had a fatal weakness for improving on the facts. Putting it more bluntly, he felt no scruples over faking a story when he thought he could get away with it.

In this instance, he hesitated, reluctant to offend Miss Eudora, but he might be adroit enough to explain it away were he to meet her again, and sentiment must yield to necessity. For an extra fifty dollars in his pocket, he was prepared to take chances. He dared not tarry much longer in Boston. It was not far enough away from New York.

Here was this Captain Kempton, he said to himself, with the buried-treasure bee in his bonnet. Why not counterfeit a pirate's chart, in exact imitation of the real thing, clever enough at least to fool a Sunday editor? There was the old clipper ship *Wanderer* rotting at the wharf. While poking about in her forecastle, so Mannice swiftly evolved the story, he had dislodged a board that was about to fall from its rusty nails above one of the bunks. Behind the board was a small space in which he discovered what looked to be an ancient, sea-stained document. It proved to be a chart, roughly drawn in ink upon a square of parchment. Some seaman had hidden it there for safe-keeping perhaps a half century ago.

So far so good. Mr. Mannice began to feel the satisfaction of an artist. The really dramatic touch, the situation, was to be in the alleged fact that he, a random visitor, should have stumbled upon this strange old chart while the custodian of the *Wanderer*, Captain Joseph Kempton, was dreaming his days away in the hope of discovering this very thing.

"A Sunday editor ought to fall for it," thoughtfully reflected the scapegrace, "provided he isn't wise to my past."

From his trunk, he brought out several large envelopes filled with newspaper clippings, and dumped them upon the table. They had been saved from time to time as possible suggestions for special articles, grist for the mill, an assortment of odd or striking news paragraphs and the like. Recalling one in particular, he made a hasty search, and was delighted at finding it. Briefly, it referred to a certain industrious pirate, Peleg Peterson by name, who harried the New England coast in the eighteenth century and had buried his treasure on one of the Seven Islands in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, west of Anticosti, and northwest of Cape Gaspe.

"Peleg Peterson is the boy," cheerfully observed Mr. Mannice. "And now I know where to plant his stuff. Watch me fake a chart to-morrow that will fool Captain Kempton himself when he sees it reproduced."

The first errand was to procure a

piece of genuine parchment in a little shop on Cornhill. Then, with the skill of a born forger, he inked in the crude outline of a very small island, avoiding too much detail. A tree and a big rock and a small bay served as marks, so many paces this way and so many that, according to the compass, all noted in one corner of the chart as set down by the sprawling fist of the illiterate Peleg Peterson.

Then, with candle grease and coffee stains, cobwebs and dust, did William Marmaduke Mannice proceed to age and disguise his handiwork, even to spilling rum on it, as suggested by his boyhood acquaintance with Billy Bones and other literary worthies of this ilk. The result was gratifying. It would not have deceived an expert in old manuscripts, but for the purpose intended it was amazingly clever, and Mr. Mannice virtuously commented that he had the *Wanderer* and Captain Kempton around which to build the narrative. They actually existed, beyond a doubt.

Plausible, self-assured, with never a pang of conscience, William Marmaduke Mannice swaggered downtown to vend his wares. While crossing Washington Street, he suddenly halted, as if detained by an unseen hand, and was almost run over by an automobile. Retreating to the pavement, he vanished into a café and ordered a cocktail while he wrestled with the inspiration that had come like a bolt from the blue. It was big—something worth while.

"Boob!" he bitterly addressed himself. "A little more and you would have sold this perfectly good chart for a song. And there is a fine old sea dog at Falmouth who yearns to get his hands on it."

It was the spirit of Broadway that spoke, the spirit that tolerates the man who lives by his wits and regards the easy mark as fair prey. The scheme of hoaxing Captain Kempton with this bogus chart appealed to Mannice for several reasons. He hoped to share the dollars which the father of Eudora had said were ready to be staked on a treasure expedition, and he was exceedingly anxious to disappear somewhere until matters in New York looked less hostile. It was anything to tide over the crisis, to save him from being broke and stranded. Besides, he foolishly sighed to be near Eudora, and if he could not dip into the father's little fortune by means of the treasure-hunting scheme, he might possibly feather his nest in marrying the daughter.

The plot had this charming feature —it might be full of ethical flaws, but there could be no way of enmeshing Mr. Mannice as obtaining money under false pretenses. This he was careful to elucidate to himself. It was a speculation in which he could not lose, and he saw a chance to win. As for Captain Joseph Kempton, it was doing him a kindness. He would be happy looking for treasure, whether he found it or not. People who went daffy over this sort of thing ought to be given an opportunity to get it out of their systems.

Mr. Mannice drank another cocktail, and carefully counted his cash reserve. He was near the end of his rope, but there was enough for another trip to Falmouth. He moved promptly, taking a train which landed him in that sea port shortly after nightfall of this same day. Cautiously, he made his way on foot to the corner of the harbor where the forsaken vessels lay in a row, and passed wide of the captain's cottage. The place was unwatched at night, and, unobserved, he stumbled out upon the dilapidated wharf at which the *Wanderer* was moored.

A pocket flash light enabled him to find his way into the musty forecastle which he had previously explored with Captain Kempton. It was not difficult to pry aside a decayed bit of the board-

ing behind a tier of bunks and shove therein the crumpled parchment. Assuring himself that it looked as if it had long lain there undisturbed, he replaced the board and hammered it fast. After looking about, to make certain he had left no traces, the guileful intruder stole out of the *Wanderer* and sought the darkened highway to Falmouth. There a small hotel sheltered him until morning, when he prepared to call at the cottage of Captain Kempton as though just arrived from Boston.

Shortly after breakfast, Eudora bethought herself of an errand, and she took the longer road to a neighbor's house in order that she might overlook the harbor bar and the flashing sea beyond. Perhaps she would not have confessed it as a reason, but the powerful steel tug *Endeavor* had been reported as passing the cape, inbound from the southward, and Dan Sloan was the mate. Eudora gazed in vain, shrugged a shapely shoulder as if it made no difference whatever, and continued on her way.

Captain Kempton had gone down to the beach to oversee a gang of men who were scrapping the engines of a small steamer when Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice, having found the cottage empty, discovered him and advanced at a gait more hurried than usual. The visitor wore an air of suppressed excitement, rehearsed beforehand, and to the captain's cordial greeting he replied:

"You're not half as surprised as I am, my dear sir. I didn't expect to give myself the pleasure, but a most extraordinary thing has happened—if you are too busy for a chat, I'll wait, of course."

The mariner's curiosity was piqued, and he withdrew a few yards from his workmen as he said:

"I am glad you found an excuse to run down again, Mr. Mannice. Shall we sit down here on the bulwark?"

Mannice glanced to right and left, and lowered his voice. It was enough to give the interview a flavor of mystery.

"It is a matter between us. You will understand when I explain. I would rather not run any risk of being overheard."

The captain looked puzzled, but nodded, and moved in the direction of the cottage. Mannice made no disclosures, discussing the weather and politely inquiring about Miss Kempton and her health, until they had come to the porch. The shipmaster was a man who had learned to keep his own counsel, and he awaited the import of this second pilgrimage. An ugly customer to hoodwink and be caught at it, even though his hair was silvered, reflected Mannice, as he scanned the resolute profile and glanced at the sinewy hands. But there was no hint of misgiving in the young man's demeanor as he smoothly began:

"Your yarns of buried treasure interested me so much that it was hard for me to think of anything else when I returned to Boston. It occurred to me that among my clippings there might be something worth sending to add to your collection. I had saved very little treasure stuff, and could dig up only one item. I must have put it away several years ago, and it was badly torn. But I pieced it together and made a typewritten copy. It's queer, awfully queer, Captain Kempton, a hundred-to-one shot, but——"

"Perhaps I have heard it from some other source," was the quick interruption. "Most of those newspaper reports are sheer moonshine."

"True enough," handsomely agreed Mannice. "My only reason for paying any attention to this was what you might call a coincidence. It seems that

a very old man died in a Liverpool hospital, leaving a rambling statement to the effect that he had sailed before the mast in the deep-water trade. During one of his last voyages, the deuce of a while ago, I presume, he had been laid up with yellow fever in Valparaiso. The man in the next cot, another English sailor, was almost dead, but before he cashed in he gave this chap a little packet wrapped in canvas and told him to keep it for himself. It had come down from his grandfather and was the real goods, said the owner, straight from one of the crew who had sailed with a pirate known as Peleg Peterson."

"A chart, of course," exclaimed Captain Kempton, springing from his chair to stride the porch. "The story has a familiar sound, but you never can tell. Please go on. There was a Peleg Peterson, a lively rascal. He was hanged at Execution Dock, with five of his men."

The narrator felt increasing confidence, and he resumed more weightily: "This sailor lived to get out of Valparaiso in an American clipper ship. His mind weakened in old age, or sickness impaired it. At any rate, he was unable to remember the name of the ship. He did remember, however, that he had tucked the chart away behind the planking over his bunk in the forecastle, hoping some day to go looking for the treasure. He was badly smashed up in a storm on the homeward voyage and lugged ashore with a broken leg. The ship sailed away without him, and he was never able to run across her again. And so he lost his precious chart."

"The ship may have been lost after that, Mr. Mannice. An American clipper, did you say?"

"Yes. He could recall that she was very fast and quite new at the time."

"Anything else? What port she hailed from?" came the eager questions. "On one of his last voyages? He may have been afloat until he was sixty or more. Those old shellbacks are hard to kill. It's not impossible that the ship is still knocking about; there are a few of them left—my old *Endymion* and——"

"And the *Wanderer!*" exclaimed Mannice, choosing the right moment to drive the suggestion home. "I thought of her at once. That's why I came to tell you about it. The odds are all against it, of course."

Their eyes sought the wharf and the graceful hull of what had once been a queen of all the oceans. Captain Kempton's hobby made him credulous, ready to expect a coincidence. And every man bred to the sea has beheld impossible things come true.

"Let me find an ax," cried he. "We'll rip out that fo'castle in a jiffy."

He checked himself, and put a finger to his lips. Secrecy was the word. Already the lure of pirate's gold worked in him like a potent poison. Mannice smiled assent. They would keep this fascinating business to themselves. Almost by stealth, they fetched a circuit and gained the wharf from the other side, screened from the men at work on the beach. It was a zestful adventure for the mariner, and Mannice flattered himself that his stage management was excellent. Once in the forecastle of the *Wanderer*, he so maneuvered it that the search should be prolonged, suggesting an attack on the walls where he knew nothing was hidden. Timbers and planking flew like kindling. The captain was in a mood to hew the ship to pieces. The eager Mannice aided with a bit of iron as a crowbar. In a twinkling, they demolished a row of bunks.

Meanwhile, Eudora had come home, and was absorbed in the daily routine of keeping the cottage so neat and trim that the most exacting shipmaster could find no fault. Broom and dust-

ing cloth were dropped as she descried through an open window her father and the important Mr. Mannice ascending the path. No wonder their aspect amazed her, for they were as battered and disheveled as a brace of tramps, collars wilted, trousers torn, coats begrimed. Some sort of elation made them gesticulate and talk with tremendous gusto. Eudora knew her father too well to suspect the demon rum, unless he had been somehow led astray by this Mannice person, and she waited with lively apprehension.

At sight of her, they paused, put their heads together, and exchanged confidential speech, as though something highly important was to be shared between them. This nettled Eudora, and her unfavorable impression of Mr. Mannice flamed into active dislike. He dropped behind, and permitted the captain to announce to his vigilant daughter:

"An old crank, was I? A rainbow chaser? I have found a pirate's chart, Eudora, and it was hidden right under my nose. Doubloons, my dear, and rings for your fingers."

She received the tidings calmly, but her head was in a whirl. Her eyes narrowed a trifle as she surveyed William Marmaduke Mannice, who stepped forward to add, with his jocular suavity:

"A fairy tale right out of a book, Miss Kempton, but they do come true now and then. Luck, pure luck, that couldn't happen again in a thousand years. I stumbled on the clew, and we ran it out, tucked away in the old *Wanderer,* the last will and testament of Peleg Peterson, gentleman rover."

Eudora's intelligent face expressed a variety of emotions, but those that were uppermost she managed to dissemble. Her father seemed hurt that she failed to display enthusiasm, so she lightly replied:

"How perfectly gorgeous! I choose the rubies and emeralds, if you please, and the tall candlesticks of beaten gold from the cathedrals on the Spanish Main. But you have to find the treasure first, don't you?"

"Unless somebody else has beat us to it, we are apt to turn up something with the pick and shovel," declaimed Mannice. "But it's mighty unlikely that more than one chart was left behind by this Peleg Peterson."

"Oh, you are already planning to look for it?" asked Eudora, a reflective finger on her chin. "You take my breath away. May I see the wonderful chart?"

"Not now. It must not be exposed to the strong light," testily explained her father. "The ink may fade, or the parchment crumble, and then where are we?"

Something told Eudora that he was not wholly frank. They were unwilling to show her the chart for fear she could not keep a secret. She flushed, but held her temper, and demanded, with a laugh:

"You must tell me the whole story, every word. I am dying to hear it. Here I ran away for a little while and missed the most exciting thing that ever happened. Tell me, first, daddy, are you honestly going to sail in search of it? And how far away is it hidden?"

There was a note of anxiety in her voice, for a quick glance had caught Mannice unawares, and she detected on his florid lineaments a look greedy and intent before he could mask it.

"Not so far away but what I can afford to fit out a small schooner," promptly answered the captain. "Mr. Mannice will go along, naturally, as a partner, and at my expense. This is no more than fair, for the chart really belongs to him."

"Oh, indeed! He was very honest about it, wasn't he? He might have sneaked aboard the *Wanderer* in the

night without saying a word to you, and kept the treasure all to himself."

"He has behaved handsomely," affirmed the captain.

"But this expedition will cost a great deal of money," protested Eudora, "and you may have to give up your position as caretaker. It seems like a sort of summer madness to me. What is your opinion, Mr. Mannice?"

"I merely helped Captain Kempton find the chart," he replied, with a shrug. "The rest of it is up to him."

"Let's go into the house," broke in the mariner. "I will show you to my room, Mr. Mannice. You want to wash and brush up, I'm sure."

Alone with her father for a few minutes, Eudora plied him with questions blunt and insistent. He had another excuse for withholding the chart from her, and would disclose nothing more than that the treasure was buried in the Seven Islands.

"You are afraid I'll tell Dan Sloan and he will go after it himself," she impetuously exclaimed. "I hate the whole idea. It has changed you already. And I distrust this Mannice from the bottom of my heart. I can't tell you why. A woman's reasons, I suppose. He didn't ring true to me when he was here before. Forget this absurd chart and let him keep it and the treasure, if he can find it."

"You had better leave the decision to me," he firmly replied. "I have been studying this thing for years. Let this go by, refuse to take a fling? I should never forgive myself. It is for you, my dear girl."

"I am happy without it. Then, if you are bound to go, leave Mannice behind and give him his share later," she argued. "I can't make myself clear, but he has put a sort of spell on you. And if you insist, I go, too, to look after your interests as best I can."

"I thought of leaving you with your aunt in Portland," he awkwardly returned. "S-ssh! Mr. Mannice is coming downstairs."

Eudora promptly fled the room, and scurried across the lawn to the road that led toward the outer harbor. Perhaps she was a goose to interfere and spoil her father's ardent enjoyment. He was hard-headed and experienced, seldom swayed by impulse. However, her heart leaped for gratitude when, around the southward headland, came into view a red-funneled tug hauling her barges in from sea with a certain quiet and massive strength. Not as a lover, but certainly as a friend in need, she would welcome Dan Sloan, for she knew not where else to turn.

CHAPTER III.

No sooner had the *Endeavor* passed her hawsers to the wharf at Falmouth than the stalwart young mate leaped ashore and struck out for a white cottage as his journey's end. His ruddy cheek was freshly shaven, and the blue serge suit was smartly cut. A very proper figure of a sailor and a man to steer clear of in a quarrel, he looked fit to fight Eudora's battles as well as his own. She had decided to forewarn him of the situation, but to say nothing in prejudice of William Marmaduke Mannice. Let Dan form his own judgment and then advise her.

They therefore met in the road near home, quite by chance, of course, because he must not think she had come to look for him. Wistfulness shadowed his engaging features, for he hoped that absence might have made her fonder, but she gave no sign beyond a gracious friendliness as they shook hands and moved toward the cottage.

"Yes, I am truly glad to see you, Dan," said Eudora. "A good run, was it, from Norfolk?"

"Fair. We lost a barge in a squall off Cape Cod, but picked her up again,"

said the resonant voice. "Snatched her off the shoals just before she bumped. A line parted and knocked me overboard. How goes it with you? Whew, but the days do drag when I'm away! It's worse every voyage, Eudora."

"Pooh! They say you have a girl in every port, Dan."

"They lie," exclaimed the mate, "and you know better. I'm making a good record these days. Won't you give me any credit for it?"

"Indeed I do, and there are times when I'm proud of you," was her sweetly candid assurance. "But we must talk about something else just now. My sensible father has decided to go roaming off to find a buried treasure, and I am completely upset."

"He has talked that foolishness until he believes there is something in it?" was the cheerful query. "Well, we'll just have to talk him out of it. A restless fit, I presume. He wants some excuse to go to sea again. What touched him off?"

"A man named Mannice, who found a pirate's chart in the old *Wanderer,* Dan. He is some kind of a newspaper writer. Father has taken a great fancy to him."

"A young man, is he?" And Mr. Sloan scowled. This exhibition of temper seemed to please Eudora, who smiled demurely as she replied:

"Fairly young, and quite captivating. Don't look so wrathy, please. I am only quoting his opinion of himself. I don't like him, and I wish that father had never laid eyes on him."

"Some kind of a crooked game in the wind, Eudora?" briskly demanded Dan, who was clearing for action.

"I don't know. There is nothing that I can put a finger on. But I feel uneasy and helpless. They won't tell me anything definite. Father and I have always been so chummy. Now he won't even consult me."

"About this chart," slowly remarked Dan. "Have you seen it? Can I get a squint at it? This Mannice rooster knew where to find it?"

"He got on the track of it, yes. I'm sure they will refuse to tell you anything about it. So please ask no questions when you meet them. It would only make it harder for me."

"I see. I might be able to give you some idea of what the chart amounts to. Your dad is a first-rate navigator, but in a case like this his judgment is befogged. It's easy for a man to believe a thing when his mind has a slant that way. He actually talks of sailing somewhere?"

"They are planning it now, Dan. In a vessel of their own. It will cost a lot of money."

"Well, it will take some time to charter and outfit, and all that," the sailor soothingly suggested. "Meanwhile, the skipper may wake up from this pipe dream. And I can look up this Mannice proposition. I'm acquainted with ship-news reporters from Boston to Baltimore, and if there is anything wrong with the man, they will be glad to run it out for me. I'll stand by, Eudora."

"I know you will," she softly told him, and the intonations moved him beyond words. They seemed to be drawn closer together than he had hitherto dared hope for. His hand sought hers, but she eluded him, and a moment later they were turning in to the cottage. Mannice and the captain walked a path arm in arm, as though the little garden were their own quarter-deck. When Eudora appeared with the mate of the *Endeavor,* the two treasure seekers halted in their tracks and seemed a trifle startled. It amused Eudora, who had never seen her father look so like a naughty boy caught in the act. Evidently he regarded Dan Sloan as an untimely intruder, but he recovered his hearty manner and presented his friend, Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice.

The latter gentleman had a voluble greeting ready, but he inwardly wondered who the devil this Sloan fellow might be and in what relation he stood to Eudora. They disliked each other at sight, and the feeling was more than primitive jealousy. Mannice was afraid of this clean, virile sailor who looked him straight in the eye, while Dan was conscious of a rising contempt. The contrast between them instantly impressed Eudora, and she discerned in Mannice, for all his ingratiating airs, a soul that was flaccid and furtive.

"A newspaper man, I understand," said Dan, coming to the point at once. "What owners are you signed with at present?"

"Unattached, Mr. Sloan," smiled Mannice. "It pays me better to write on my own hook. My name has some value, don't you know."

"Ah, yes. I haven't happened to come across it. Have you found any interesting material in Falmouth? Fond of the sea?"

"In a literary way," replied the other, glancing at Captain Kempton. "Some great stuff here."

"I have persuaded Mr. Mannice to make us a visit, Eudora," said the skipper. "We can easily find room for him."

Dan glowered at this, and yearned to eject the trespasser, but he had promised to live down his cyclonic past. It was obvious that nothing was to be said to him about the treasure quest. He determined to talk with Captain Kempton alone at the first opportunity and beg him to do nothing rash until Mannice could be investigated.

Just then there sounded from the direction of Falmouth six long blasts of a steam whistle, deep and sonorous. An interval and they were repeated. The mate of the *Endeavor* looked dismayed as he explained to Eudora:

"The recall signal from my boat. Hurry orders to coal and put to sea. And I expected to have several days in port. Well, it's good-by. Will you come as far as the road with me, Eudora?"

He turned quickly, with a farewell nod to the others, who showed no signs of sorrow. In fact, William Marmaduke Mannice displayed a beaming countenance which, luckily for him, the sailor failed to observe. Eudora went a little way with him, and he stood, reluctant, as he told her:

"This is hard luck for me. I ought to be on hand. I don't like the looks of things, but it may clear up without me. Don't worry any more than you can help, and be sure to write if you need me."

"But you don't know where you are going, Dan," ruefully cried the girl.

"I'll send you a note from Falmouth to-day before we sail. A letter in care of our agents will find me without much delay. Bless your heart, I'll jump ship anywhere if you send me a call."

"Don't do that, Dan. Duty first. God bless you. I will let you know just what is going on, and you may be back in port to-morrow for all we know."

His hard, brown hand clasped hers with a lingering caress, and he left her gazing after him as he broke into a swinging trot and hastened to rejoin his vessel. In a low-spirited mood, Eudora turned toward the outer harbor and waited until the *Endeavor* passed out to sea, trailing a long banner of smoke. At home, she found a brief message, scrawled in pencil and delivered by a boy:

> Big steamer in distress with a broken shaft. A hundred miles off shore. Will probably tow to Boston. As always, your faithful DAN.

The captain and his companion were not to be found, nor did they return until supper had been waiting for some time. Eudora heard her father say as he crossed the porch:

"Much better luck than I expected. The schooner was chartered for the fishing season, but there was some trouble over terms, and she has been lying idle for two months. We are getting her dirt cheap, and she can be made ready for sea in a few days."

"A crew and provisions, and it's 'once aboard the lugger——'" blithely returned Mr. Mannice.

"You had better run into Boston and get your things together. It's short notice for you, of course, and whatever cash you need, why, we'll drop into the bank in the morning."

Eudora, an indignant eavesdropper, perceived that matters were moving much faster than she had anticipated. Dan Sloan was out of reach, and it was futile for her to fight lone-handed. She therefore did the next best thing, which was to announce, in her pleasantest manner:

"Please reserve the most comfortable stateroom for me and a one-third share of the treasure."

"Delighted, Miss Kempton," exclaimed Mannice. "A true viking's daughter. I should refuse to sail without you."

"If she insists, there's no stopping her," said the captain, who comprehended that Eudora had made up her mind.

"I'm sure I can handle a shovel with either of you," she observed, looking hard at the poorly conditioned figure of Mr. Mannice. "The Seven Islands! You were kind enough to tell me that much. May I ask where they are? If I am to get my clothes ready right away, I should like some idea of the length of the voyage."

Her father was grimly taciturn, and left it to Mannice to say: "Mum's the word, Miss Kempton. You know how it is with a treasure expedition. The merest hint, and away they all go after you. As a partner, you are entitled to know all about it, but the captain has put the lid on until we leave port. It will be a short voyage on this side of the Atlantic, say two or three weeks. None of the tropical stuff, palms and coral reefs and brown-skinned natives."

Eudora picked up spirits at this. Dan Sloan would not seem so hopelessly far away as she had feared. Her father felt relieved that she had turned tractable and made no more effort to dissuade him. For Eudora another ray broke through the cloud when he informed her:

"I crossed the hawse of old Harvey Mattoon in Falmouth this afternoon and coaxed him to join as cook for a sort of yachting cruise, as I called it. He will make it seem like the days gone by in the *Endymion*."

"Is he still tending his lobster pots? Why, he sailed with you when I was a little girl, and you never had a more faithful man. I'm so glad. And the rest of your crew?"

"Four Falmouth lads will do, fishermen ashore. I'll round them up to-morrow. I shall carry no mate."

For three days thereafter, the two adventurers were prodigiously busy and seldom at home. Mannice went to Boston, and was intrusted with the purchase of sundry supplies at a ship chandler's in that port. Captain Kempton, wrapped in mystery, inspected his schooner, mustered his crew, and looked after a thousand and one details. He enjoyed it all, and was much happier than Eudora had seen him in years. His training came back to him, and he drove the work without bluster or flurry, a man supremely competent at his own trade.

Hearing nothing more from Dan and the *Endeavor*, Eudora waited until the last day before the schooner was to flit from the harbor. Then she wrote, with a sorely troubled mind:

MY DEAR FRIEND DAN: Father is carrying me off to-morrow in the *Challenge* for

parts unknown. It is a coastwise voyage—I know that much. I never got so much as a peep at the chart. Does Seven Islands convey any meaning to you? I am more and more convinced that Mannice is up to something, although I can't fathom it at all. He had no money. A lot owing to him and no time to collect it, said he, which seemed to satisfy poor dad, who couldn't sleep for impatience to start. For fear folks might think it queer and ask questions at seeing Captain Kempton fitting out a vessel, he has let Mannice pose as the financier, and, I am afraid, given him some of the funds to handle.

I shall keep my eyes open every minute. Mannice has been courteous enough to me, but he knows I suspect and dislike him, I am sure. I will write again, Dan, if we touch at any port. I wish you were in the party. I should feel ever so much easier about the venture. Please don't worry. Father will take the best of care of me. My anxiety is on his account. I shall think of you very often. Isn't it nice of me to say that much?

EUDORA.

CHAPTER IV.

In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the slim schooner *Challenge* was standing on a long tack to fetch a group of islets which had lifted from the horizon like tiny dots. Captain Kempton was at the wheel, his gray hair bared to the sun, his shirt sleeves rolled up to disclose the tattooed pattern of a mermaid. Dapperly clad in white flannels, William Marmaduke Mannice stood at the rail and aimed a pair of binoculars at the distant Seven Islands. Eudora was in the cabin. It was confoundedly odd, but whenever he appeared on deck she found something to do below, and vice versa; and he was sure of meeting her only at meals. He had expected to make more headway during the voyage, but for once the irresistible suitor had encountered the immovable maid.

Now, however, he forgot the chilling indifference of Eudora in contemplating a problem even more serious. There were the Seven Islands, right enough, but they seemed to be no more than so many naked rocks. In this event, the skipper might turn about and sail straight home again, which meant that Mr. Mannice would shortly be turned adrift to shift for himself. Anxiously, therefore, he stared at the blue sky line and watched the black dots grow larger. The captain shouted an order. The men shortened sail and dropped the sounding lead as the schooner crept to leeward of the southernmost pinnacle of the group. Eudora came on deck, shaded her eyes with her hand, and exclaimed to her parent:

"I suppose I ought to apologize for being such a horrid little skeptic. The Seven Islands really exist, but they look dreadfully skimpy. We shall have to dig one at a time or crowd each other overboard."

"We are not close enough to get the lay of the land," he replied, with a nervous gesture. "The admiralty chart shows one island a mile or so long, but much lower than the others. We shall get a sight of it presently."

Mannice felt much better. The chart of Peleg Peterson was vague enough to fit almost any island big enough to land on. And Captain Kempton was not apt to be too critical. All he desired was the sand and a shovel. The breeze held until the schooner had picked her course so near the largest island that the party could see a strip of white beach in a notch of coast and the land behind it strewn with bowlders and thinly covered with a stunted growth. It was a desolate bit of landscape, but charming to the eyes of Captain Kempton, who ran to the companionway to unfold the chart of Peleg Peterson and jubilantly impart:

"A pocket of a bay, precisely as the rogue set it down, and those thundering big rocks were what he took his bearings from. Hooray! Mannice, my boy, we're on the right track."

Mannice matched his enthusiasm, saying to himself that this was his lucky day. He had drawn a bay on the chart, of course, for most islands had them, and how else could a pirate put his boat ashore while his low, rakish craft lay in the offing? Eudora, poor girl, was in a confused state of mind. She was no less mistrustful of the dashing Mannice, but he did seem to know his business when it came to directing this singular voyage. She would suspend judgment for the present.

There was sufficient water in the bay for the schooner to swing at a sheltered anchorage. It was in the afternoon when she rested with canvas furled and a boat was dropped from the davits astern. It had been decided, so long as the weather should be fair, to erect a shelter ashore for use during the day, and to return aboard at night. There was a large amount of material to disembark—tools, tarpaulins, wheelbarrows, and so on, and this preliminary task was lustily undertaken by all hands, barring the cook, Harvey Mattoon. A venerable man was he, gnarled and tough, with despondent views concerning human nature. Confidentially, he croaked to Eudora as they watched the seamen load the yawl:

"I never would ha' thought it of your old man. Did it take him sudden, or was there any previous spells by way of warnin'?"

"It attacked him all at once, Harvey," she laughed. "Then you don't approve?"

"A-racketin' off at his age to cut up didoes like this? It's awful. Seems as if he had more sense than to tie up to a human sculpin like this Mannice. I'd pisen his grub if I dared."

"Then you and I think the same way, and we'll have to stand together," said Eudora; "but we must keep very quiet about it."

The cook went grumbling to the galley, manifesting no interest in the thrilling scene. No sooner had the captain finished his work on the beach than, regardless of the supper hour, he unfolded his precious chart and endeavored to find the marks and bearings as recorded by the wicked Peleg Peterson. Mannice dutifully accompanied him, and kept a straight face while the honest mariner trudged from one bowlder to another and painfully studied a pocket compass.

It was a puzzling quest, but your treasure seeker is swayed by his imagination, and the captain steered his course by the precious chart with all the confidence in the world.

"'*From ye Grate Rock forty paces to ye Shoare, S. S. E.,*'" he solemnly quoted from the dingy parchment which Mannice kindly helped him decipher, for the pirate had been a villainous hand with a pen. "Here we are, my boy. The biggest rock on the island. No doubt of it. Now for '*ye tall oke tree.*' Gone, confound it, but perhaps we can find the stump. It's not essential. We'll turn up every inch of the beach before we quit."

Breakfast was served at daybreak next morning, and only the cook was left on board the schooner. The seamen had been promised extra wages, and they were eager to make the sand fly. Eudora lent her encouraging presence, deciding to save her energy until later. At the indicated spot, the party opened a trench above high-water mark, while the summer sun climbed higher from a windless sea, and the heat became uncomfortable.

Conscious of Eudora's scrutiny, Mr. Mannice labored valiantly, an example for the others. Sweat ran from him in rivers, and his unaccustomed muscles ached acutely. He grunted as he raised the shovel, and stifled a curse whenever he straightened himself. He dared not loaf. He had to go through with the thing, or the captain's daughter might denounce him as a fraud. A day or so

of this, however, and the captain's frenzy would abate. There was no sense in digging themselves to death.

The end of the day found all hands so weary that they crawled into their bunks immediately after supper, Mannice falling asleep at the table. Eudora sat on a bench outside the galley with old Harvey Mattoon and listened to his droning memories of vanished ships and seamen. Soaked with the superstitions of his kind, he told of things incredible, until the listening girl turned to ask: "Then why don't you believe in pirates' gold, Harvey? It's not as wild as this yarn of yours that the ghost of the bos'n swam after the ship for days and days."

"Pirates there was, and mebbe they hid it," said he, with a rusty wheeze, "but all the gold we'll see this voyage comes out of the old man's pocket. Mannice is a Jonah, I tell ye. He instigated suthin'. I feel it in my bones."

"He worked like a man in earnest to-day, Harvey. I almost pitied him."

"Don't do it. Pity is akin to love, and it 'u'd be a dreadful mistake. Yep, he worked, but his heart wa'n't in it like the rest of 'em. I watched him. And I heard him swearin' to himself through the skylight when he turned in."

"Oh, dear, I wish I were home," sighed Eudora. "This is a blind alley. You are a great comfort, Harvey. I used to tell you my troubles when I was a wee little girl and we were shipmates."

Next day, the excavating was resumed with unflagging zest, although Mr. Mannice had to ease his blistered palms at frequent intervals. Eudora offered sympathy in which he detected a mocking note, and offered to wield his shovel while he rested. Tiring at length of his company, she walked along the shore, and climbed the rocks beyond the bight of sand. A small schooner was bowling straight toward the islands, with the wind behind her, and the girl gazed, idly interested, expecting to see the craft pass on her way.

Soon, however, the sails were flattened, the course changed, and the schooner appeared to be making for the bay in which Captain Kempton's *Challenge* rode at anchor. A quick hope made Eudora's pulse flutter. It would be like her headstrong knight-errant, Dan Sloan, to come speeding to the rescue as soon as he received her plaintive message of farewell. Bright-eyed and breathless, she watched the schooner veer closer to find the winding passage until the people on deck were plainly visible. Alas, they were all strangers! Not only disappointed, but puzzled, was Eudora, for this vessel could not be on fishing or trading business bound. There were passengers aboard, one of them a woman, and from an open hatch two of the crew were hoisting what looked like rolls of tents and other camping gear.

Eudora tarried no longer, but picked a path down the rocks and ran along the beach to tell her father. He dropped his shovel, and the other toilers joined him to watch the mysterious schooner float gracefully into the entrance of the bay and heave to a few hundred feet from the *Challenge*. This was an intrusion, resented by all hands, and their mood was far from cordial.

The most conspicuous figure of the schooner's company was a middle-aged man very accurately clad for roughing it, khaki clothes, leather puttees, campaign hat, a water bottle slung from a strap. He was thin, and stooped a little. His spectacles flashed in the sunlight, and the brown beard was nicely trimmed to a point.

His energy dominated the crew, who continued to drag out of the hold an astonishing amount of equipment. Presently he assisted into a small boat a short-skirted woman of a substantial, more deliberate aspect, and they were

rowed ashore by two sailors. Captain Joseph Kempton advanced to meet them at the water's edge, muttering something about a dashed interloper. The gentleman thus designated appeared rather excited, and his wife was plainly endeavoring to calm him. As the boat grounded in the ripples, he stepped out, took three long strides, and found himself confronted by Captain Kempton, who nodded curtly and exclaimed:

"How do you do? May I ask what it's all about? Without meaning to be rude, this beach seems to be pretty well occupied."

The stranger was undaunted. In fact, he smiled in a condescending manner as he wiped his spectacles and replaced them to gaze over the captain's shoulder at the piles of freshly dug sand and the group of laborers. Carefully modulated were the accents as he replied:

"I am Professor James Hyssop Bodge, of Hemphill University. May I ask who you are, sir? It is easy to perceive what you are doing here. Amusing, very."

"I don't see the joke," said the mariner. "I'm Captain Kempton, retired shipmaster, and I was here first."

"Permit me to present Mrs. Bodge," politely returned the professor. Her plain, wholesome features indicated amusement as she spoke up:

"My husband doesn't seem so awfully pleased to meet you, Captain Kempton, but perhaps we can arrive at some understanding. We have come to find a pirate's treasure. And you are at this same game? How extraordinary!"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, madam," said the skipper more graciously, "but there isn't the slightest use in your bringing your stuff ashore. I have the only authentic information about this treasure, and I propose to keep it to myself."

"Nonsense! Please let me talk to him, Ellen," firmly quoth Professor Bodge. "He is laboring under a delusion. We possess the only clew to the whereabouts of Peleg Peterson's hoard. These other people are merely wasting time and money."

"And you are wasting your breath," snapped Captain Kempton. "You propose to land anyhow, do you?"

"Have you any authority to prevent it, sir?" And the spectacles glistened. "Does this island belong to you? If not, have you obtained exclusive permission from the owner?"

"It belongs to nobody, so far as I know," answered the skipper, who was a bit nonplused. "I didn't think it necessary to look up any owner for this God-forsaken, wind-blown patch of real estate. Have you any papers to show?"

The professor was stumped in his turn, but he logically flung back:

"No, sir, and for the same reason as yours. You have no right, therefore, to dispute my possession."

"But you haven't a glimmer of a chance of finding any treasure," obstinately pursued the other. "You will only be in our way. You've been misled somehow."

"Ridiculous!" cried Professor Bodge, whose ire was rising. "What's that, Ellen? I am perfectly composed, my dear. This poor man is chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. We shall proceed exactly as was planned."

He called to one of the sailors, who splashed ashore with a surveyor's measuring chain, a bundle of stakes, and a sledge hammer. Paying no more heed to the captain, Professor Bodge stalked across the beach and entered the sparse undergrowth among the bowlders. Mrs. Bodge considered it her duty to go with him, although she had spied Eudora in the background and desired to make her acquaintance. The professor was seen to be poring over some kind of a document on his

hands and knees. Then began a methodical exploration which led him some distance away from the landmarks chosen by Captain Kempton. No more than a half hour passed before he appeared to have found what he sought, for the whack of the hammer was heard as he drove in the first stake by which to guide the measuring chain.

Meanwhile, Captain Kempton had decided to hold a council of war with his partner, the amiable William Marmaduke Mannice, but the latter had strayed to a secluded corner of the beach, leaving word that the sun had given him a severe headache and he needed rest. This was partly true, for his wits were in a scrambled state. While listening to the statements of Professor James Hyssop Bodge, his mouth had hung open for dumb, distracted amazement. There wasn't any treasure, of course, and he had faked the only chart in existence, yet here was another party with another chart which might be the real thing, after all.

"This guy with the Vandyke beard certainly has me up in the air," lamented Mannice, who was breathing hard. "Dear, dear, what a tangled web we weave when we try to slip one over. And now what? Bluff it out! Show a firm front, William! You're living on somebody else's money, and there's a pretty girl in sight. You should worry!"

Now, Eudora had beheld the singular effect of the Bodge interview upon Mr. Mannice, and she drew her own conclusions. He was a man far more frightened than surprised. Guilt of some sort had openly betrayed itself. When he returned, and her father began talking with him, she joined the conference as a partner determined to be heard. Summoning his bravado, Mannice said, with a laugh:

"Why not let them amuse themselves? They'll soon tire of it and go away. Their silly bearings and marks have led them a couple of hundred yards up the beach. They won't be in our way."

"I am sorry to see an intelligent man, a college professor, make such an ass of himself," gravely quoth the father of Eudora. "You may be right, Mannice. I want to avoid a clash, if possible. They are harmless lunatics. We'll mind our own business and watch them break their backs for nothing."

"Now can't you see yourself as others see you?" impulsively exclaimed Eudora. "Our expedition is as crazy as Professor Bodge's. Your chart is as worthless as his. This ought to cure you. Why not sail for home to-morrow and let them have the island to themselves?"

"And leave these infernal trespassers to finish our excavation and find the treasure that belongs to us?" retorted the obdurate mariner. "It's out of the question, Eudora. There is more reason than ever for us to stick to it if we have to lay here all summer."

"And you agree to that?" she hotly demanded of Mannice. His eyes wavered and evaded hers as he answered:

"Most certainly. We have the winning dope. This Bodge outfit is a merry jest, pure vaudeville."

Eudora turned her back on them, sick at heart. Day by day the cost of this folly was eating into her father's slender fortune, and, worse than this, he was a man changed and warped, as though the ghost of Peleg Peterson had bewitched him. Sadly she went out to the *Challenge* and watched Professor Bodge send his freight ashore and the white tents rise against the somber background of rock. At supper, the captain announced:

"We shall move ashore to-morrow and stay there. It's wiser to be right on the ground every minute. That rascally professor may try to steal a march on us. His information is pure buncombe, and, when he finds it out, he's

likely to crowd closer to our diggings and try to beat us to the treasure. And, by Judas, I don't propose to give an inch!"

"What if he should find the treasure? Would you try to take it away from him?" asked Eudora.

"It belongs to us," blazed her father. "I'm as mild a man as ever commanded a ship, but I'll fight before I'll let any goggle-eyed shrimp of a professor cheat me out of my lawful rights."

CHAPTER V.

The situation was strained, but actual hostilities were not foreshadowed until two days later. Captain Kempton's crew encountered a granite ledge five feet down which barred their progress in one direction. For this reason, they dug more and more toward the part of the beach where the minions of Professor Bodge were creating an immense hole. Unfortunately, he discovered an error in his calculations which caused him to shift operations considerably nearer the captain's excavation. It was inevitable that, in a short time, the rivals would have shoveled themselves into such close proximity to each other that there must be a clash. The well-known law that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time was bound to apply to treasure seekers. Eminently respectable men at home, Captain Joseph Kempton and Professor James Hyssop Bodge had suffered a sea change. The quest for lawless loot had gone to their heads, and they had broken the bonds of decorous habit. In spirit, they were fast relapsing into buccaneers. If it came to the issue, Kempton would not cringe nor Bodge budge.

Poor Eudora was so thoroughly alarmed that she defied her father, who had forbidden her to become friendly with the enemy. Watching the opportunity, she overtook the professor's wife, who had rambled some distance away from the camps. The worthy woman greeted Eudora like a long-lost daughter, kissed her on both cheeks, slipped an arm around her waist, and cried:

"I have been simply dying to have a talk with you, my dear child, but the suggestion annoyed my husband."

"My plight exactly, Mrs. Bodge. It has made me feel forlorn and homesick to look at you from our camp. Perhaps they won't miss us."

"I say we walk to the other side of the island, where they can't possibly see us," replied the older woman, leading the way. "Tell me, do you enjoy this enterprise? I fancy not. You have appeared rather unhappy."

"I abominate it," fiercely exclaimed Eudora.

"And the florid young man who seems to be such an important member of your party? I had an idea at first that I had stumbled on a romance."

"I detest him. He is at the bottom of all the trouble."

Mrs. Bodge was pleased as she said:

"I'm so glad he hasn't taken you in. I put him down as a bounder. A pretty kettle of fish, isn't it? I was dragged into it, too. I had to come along to look after my husband. Between us, my dear, while we're talking it out, it's my money he is spending, and I wouldn't care a rap for that if I thought it was a proper sort of vacation for him. But his nerves can't stand excitement, and I'm sure he will go to pieces if I can't coax him away from here, and he is on the edge of a private war with that stubborn father of yours. There's no telling what they will do to each other. Gracious! I wish that wretched old pirate of a Peleg Peterson could be hanged over again. How in the world did the red-faced young man get you people into it?"

"He found a chart in an old, abandoned sailing ship, Mrs. Bodge," sighed

Eudora. "And it was all up with father."

"My deluded husband came home with a chart, but he refused to tell me where and how he had discovered it," vehemently confided his wife. "And it was all up with James. He teaches mathematics, but he has rested his mind for years by reading about gory pirates and bags of doubloons. Your chart is the only genuine article, I presume. So is ours."

"I don't know. It makes no difference. Is there anything we can do to cure them?"

"Nothing short of an earthquake or finding the wretched treasure will pry James off this island."

They were silent for a while, for the walking was rough and awkward, and they had to help each other cross bits of quaking bog and stretches of densely tangled brushwood. Coming at length to an open space and a slight rise, Eudora halted, stared, and rubbed her eyes. Nestled in the lee of a great bare rock by the shore was a little hut, gray, low-roofed, clinging close to the ground, scarcely distinguishable from its surroundings. A thin streamer of smoke curled upward from the chimney.

"But nobody lives on this island," gasped Mrs. Bodge. "I'm sure I heard my husband say it was deserted."

"They were all too busy and greedy to look around and make sure," sensibly observed Eudora. "But it seems strange that nobody saw the smoke. Shall we investigate?"

"Most assuredly. I am very anxious to meet the owner of this island. It is our only hope of escape."

Unhesitatingly, the robust woman preceded Eudora, and marched down to the weather-beaten dwelling which had been built of wreckage stranded from lost ships. Smartly she rapped on the door, and shuffling feet moved within. Timidity took hold of Eudora, but the professor's wife grasped her hand, and a moment later they faced an elderly man, who threw up his hands in astonishment and burst into a fit of coughing so violent that Mrs. Bodge pounded him between the shoulders.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," he sputtered. "I swallered my quid, ladies bein' unexpected, teetotally so, you might say. Was you blown ashore or hung up on a reef? I'd ask you to walk in, but the sheebang is chuck-full of smoke from that dratted stove."

"It is very pleasant outside," said Mrs. Bodge, surveying the hermit's costume, which consisted of sea boots, ragged overalls, and a shirt patched in many colors. His features were somewhat begrimed, but not in the least forbidding. He led them to a rude bench, explaining:

"I've been over to the mainland for a fortnight—had a few kegs o' salted fish to sell and needed groceries—landed no more'n an hour ago, and ain't had a chance to look around."

"There are two parties on your island, Mr.—Mr.——" the professor's wife hesitated, and he informed her:

"Elmer Stackpole, at your service, ma'am. Two parties on my island? I thought I saw masts in the bay, but my sight's failin'. And what might they be doin' of?"

"Seeking buried treasure," answered Mrs. Bodge. "It was left here by a legendary pirate, Peleg Peterson, although I don't take the slightest stock in it myself."

"How interestin', not to say curious," drawled Mr. Stackpole, risking a fresh quid. "A pirate called Peterson? Never heard of him. He must ha' flourished before my time. Diggin' up his treasure! Well, well! I'll be scuppered!"

"That expresses my emotions," said his interviewer. "Now, Mr. Elmer Stackpole, I propose to talk business with you. I am the wife and this

lovely young creature is the daughter of the misguided persons responsible for the invasion of your peaceful island. For their own good, they should be evicted at once. I assume you are the owner."

"I guess so, ma'am. Nobody ever disputed my title. Drive 'em away? How many is there?"

"It is not a question of force. You have only to threaten them with the law and summon the authorities from the mainland."

"But what harm are they?" he queried, unmoved. "It seems sort o' sociable to me. And I was just thinkin' about levyin' a tax on 'em."

"But I intend to make it worth your while. I will give you more money than you can extort from them."

Mrs. Bodge spoke bravely, but her confusion was manifest. It occurred to her that the professor held all the available funds, and she could offer no more than a promise to pay, as good as gold, but difficult to negotiate with Elmer Stackpole.

"How much will you lay down in cash?" said he, and there was a covetous gleam in his faded blue eye.

"I shall have to send it to you. Will five hundred dollars be satisfactory?"

"A bird in the hand is my motto, ma'am. You're a stranger to me, and wimmen is apt to be fickle about money matters. I'd love to oblige, but I like the notion of collectin' ten dollars per day as rent from each of them parties of yourn for all rights and full permission to dig 'emselves clean through to Chiny."

"You are heartless and mercenary, and I'm sure you haven't washed your face in a week," indignantly cried Mrs. Bodge, and they left the wretch to gloat over his windfall.

Eudora was quite downhearted, but her vigorous companion asserted that the darkest hour was just before dawn and that such a human being as this unkempt hermit was another argument for woman's suffrage. Somewhat fatigued, but comforting each other, they recrossed the island, and emerged near the populous beach. The camp of Professor Bodge was in violent commotion, and Eudora for the moment, feared that war had been declared in her absence, but the shouts were those of joy, not anger, and the sailors were brandishing their shovels in a kind of jubilant dance.

The professor ran to meet his wife, and in his hand was a metal object which age had incrusted and overlaid with verdigris.

"A big brass buckle, Ellen!" he shouted, his voice unsteady. "The pirates used to wear them on their shoes and the knees of their baggy breeches. You've seen the pictures."

"And you think one of them lost it when they were burying the treasure, James?" she commented. "Perhaps he had no wife to sew his buckles on."

"Either that, or he was knocked on the head by Peleg Peterson," dramatically suggested the professor. "Dead men tell no tales. His bones would have crumbled by this time."

"This is very bad for your nerves, James. Your color is bad, and your hands are shaking. Why not lie down for the rest of the afternoon?"

"Never felt finer in my life," cried he. "We are going to take turns digging by moonlight."

"You will do no such thing. I shall have you to take care of. Not much! How did you happen to open that trench straight toward Captain Kempton's hole in the sand? Why, you pushed it yards and yards farther while I was gone?"

"We discovered some fragments of old timber," he rapidly exclaimed, "and so we drove ahead like fury. Spanish oak, you know, is what they built their treasure chests of. It lasts for hundreds of years under sand and water. Captain Kempton be hanged! What

if we do get in his way? We have the chart. We are the heirs of Peleg Peterson, by Jove, and this brass buckle proves it."

After supper, the obstinate shipmaster mustered his men for a conference. It was time to act. This unscrupulous fool of a Professor Bodge had gone too far. The sailors of the *Challenge* were hard-fisted lads from the Falmouth water front, as ready for a fight as a frolic, and they were loyal to the last hair on their heads. Their sunburned features expressed the liveliest elation as the captain explained his plans. This day's work had made it evident that Professor Bodge had no more conscience than a pirate. He must be firmly dealt with. The sailors cheered, but Mr. William Marmaduke Mannice looked anxious, and suggested arbitration. The stratagems of peace were much more to his liking, and he had a high regard for his own skin.

His cowardice annoyed the skipper, who told him to mind his own business, and went on to say that, without doubt, they would have discovered the brass buckle and the old timber for themselves. The professor had conducted his operations in such a way as to invade their territory as marked and bounded. And because he was used to bullying a lot of college boys in a classroom, he thought he could do as he pleased on the beach. The captain had handled a mutiny or two in his time, and he guessed he could protect his interests against this shameless gang.

"A show of force will be enough," said he. "We'll throw up a bank of sand right away to-night, square across the beach from high-water mark to the bushes, like a line of breastworks. That will stop the professor from coming any farther our way. And to prevent his working at night, which he is liable to do from now on, a sentry will stand watch. While I mean to avoid bloodshed, the sight of a shotgun and a rifle and my old pistol that saw service aboard the *Endymion* may convince the pin-headed professor that he is on the wrong tack."

"Put me down for sentry duty," exclaimed one of the sailors. "It sounds like a lark."

"You lads need your sleep, Tom. You have to dig all day. The cook will bear a hand for one. He has time to snooze between meals."

The shrinking Mr. Mannice caught the captain's eye, and he added:

"An easy job for you. Four hours on and four off. You're too fat to do much with a shovel, and your hands are badly blistered."

"Thank you, sir," was the feeble reply. "You don't honestly expect any rough-house, shooting and all that?"

"Not a bit of it. A display of firmness will be plenty."

The moon serenely silvered the strip of beach when the willing sailors, refreshed by food and smoke, began to throw up the breastworks at the very brink of the professor's excavation. They made a speedy job of it and were unmolested, the Bodge forces withdrawing for a conference. Captain Kempton gave the shotgun to his cook, and told him to hold the fort until midnight, when Mr. Mannice would relieve him.

Discipline held old Harvey Mattoon dumb, but he was now convinced that his commander had gone clean daft, and his leathery lineaments were sorrowful as he sat himself down on the rampart of sand, the gun between his knees. Presently he opened the breech and extracted the shells, pensively soliloquizing:

"This dummed play actin' has gone far enough. Somebody's liable to get hurt before they finish with it, but they don't ketch me aidin' and abettin'."

From the door of his tent, Professor Bodge spied the dejected figure of the sentinel, and his anger was intense.

This was positively the last straw. His emotions may seem preposterous, but family feuds have begun over so trifling a matter as a boundary fence or a stray pig. In a great flurry, he exclaimed to his wife:

"Look yonder, Ellen! An armed man posted to prevent us from working at night. And they will attempt to get into the hole where we found the brass buckle. This Captain Kempton is absolutely lawless."

"Let the armed man amuse himself by looking at the moon, and please go to sleep, James," she wearily advised him. "The captain will soon tire of it if you pay no attention."

"I shall sit up and play at this sentry game, too," he declared. "Does he think he can bluff me out of my boots, when I am on the very point of finding the treasure? This is not a woman's affair, Ellen."

"I wish to Heaven it were, James. The captain's daughter and I would dispose of it in a jiffy."

He snorted, dived under his cot, and appeared in the moonlight with a rifle, which he clutched in gingerly fashion.

"Tut, tut, Ellen! Don't try to hold me back. You will tear my shirt. The weapon isn't loaded. I merely wish to display it."

At a loping trot, he made for the bank of sand, intending to take a position near and opposite to the hostile watcher. Harvey Mattoon uttered a dismal cry and scrambled to his feet. He was too steadfast an old salt to retreat without an order from the quarter-deck, but the empty shotgun wabbled in his hands and his wits were at a loss. At this critical instant, Professor Bodge stumbled over a shovel and sprawled headlong. His spectacles flew one way, and the rifle left his hands to fall upon a wheelbarrow. There was a flash, a startling report, and Harvey Mattoon dropped from sight, his hands clasping his right leg.

"I didn't shoot him," wildly yelled Professor Bodge. "I tell you I didn't! The rifle wasn't loaded."

"They never are, James. That is how so many accidents occur," replied his common-sense wife, as she dragged him to his feet. "Come with me and find out if you have killed him. Oh, if you had only listened to me!"

Wan and speechless, he followed her. The stricken sea cook sat gazing at a patch of blood on his duck trousers, below the knee. Deftly Mrs. Bodge ripped a slit with her husband's pocketknife, disclosed the wound, and stanched it with her handkerchief.

"Clean through the calf. Nothing serious," was her verdict. "Stay with him, James, while I run back to the tent for the antiseptic and bandages."

In both camps there was a great stir by now; and the captain's crew, who had been sleeping like the dead, came buzzing out like hornets. The row was on, they assured each other, and they picked up whatever weapons were handiest. To the aid of the professor rushed his own gallant men, but he waved them back and hurriedly explained the situation. They were to keep cool while he held a parley with Captain Kempton. It was a deplorable accident, and further bloodshed must be avoided at any cost short of dishonor.

"Winged my cook, did you?" roared the shipmaster, as he advanced to the front.

"It is the unhappiest moment of my life," faltered Professor Bodge, expecting to be exterminated in his tracks. "I had no idea of potting the poor old duffer, I give you my word."

"And I wouldn't believe you under oath. Where did he drill you, Harvey? Hurt bad?"

"Mrs. Bodge says I'll live, sir. I suppose he's sorry he didn't blow my head off."

"Carry him to camp, boys, as soon

as the lady has finished tying him up. Thank you, ma'am. You have a kind heart. It's a great pity you are spliced to this murderous bookworm."

"I am prepared to offer an apology and pecuniary damages to the victim," interposed the professor. "And I advise you to keep cool, Captain Kempton, or I shall be unable to restrain my men."

"A flag of truce? I'm willing. We have to consider the women, for if my lads once jump in they'll wipe your camp clean off the map."

A growl from the group behind Professor Bodge implied that this was open to argument. He pacified his followers, and was about to address the captain when Mrs. Bodge stepped between them and laid down the law:

"You are to postpone all this until morning. We two women have received no consideration whatever. My patience is exhausted. If you wish to put these ridiculous sentries on guard, it will do no more harm, so long as you give them no guns. They can stand and make faces at each other. James, go to bed! Captain Kempton, put your pistol away and march yourself into camp!"

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE POPULAR ON SALE APRIL 7TH.

CONCERNING LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

WHEN the Honorable David F. Houston, secretary of agriculture, compiled his last annual report, he directed one of the subordinates in his office to make an abstract of it for publication in the newspapers. The subordinate, having had much and painful experience with the fact that newspapers dislike to print long articles, took hold of the document, which treated of everything from how to scare a field mouse to death to how to make a grain of corn swell up like the fat woman in a circus. He condensed the whole thing into about one thousand words.

Mr. Houston, who is extremely solemn and wise looking and has gathered diplomas, degrees, and medals from many universities, added to the abstract a whole lot more words.

"Now," he said to one of the clerks in his office, "send this not only to the newspapers but also to the magazines."

He meant, of course, the magazines devoted to agricultural interests, but the clerk sent the material to nearly every magazine editor in the United States. In the course of time Mr. Houston received a letter from a magazine editor in New York, saying:

"The fact that we are returning your manuscript does not indicate that we do not appreciate your excellent literary style. We have read this contribution with unusual interest, but, to increase the cordial relations between yourself and us, we want to tell you that the things we are particularly anxious to have are novelettes of not more than thirty thousand words, short stories with a snappy, unexpected twist to them, epigrams with a somewhat startling sting in them, and poems either serious or comic."

Mr. Houston has not yet established in his department a bureau to encourage the growth of literary genius.

Chance

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

SIXTY miles from a homestead, with plenty of room to see,
We camped in the Deadwood foothills, lookin' for color—gold:
Three of us in the outfit; the burro and Chance and me;
Chance wasn't more than a pup, then, goin' on two year old.

Town folks called him "The Killer," and I reckon that they was right;
Deep in the chest, wolf-muscled, and quicker than fire in tow,
But one of the kind that never went out of his way to fight,
Though he'd tackle a corral of wild cats, if I gave him the word to go.

There was more to him than his fightin'—he was wise. It was right good fun
To see him usin' his headpiece when the sun was a-fryin' eggs;
Trailin' along with the outfit and cheatin' the desert sun
By keepin' into the shadow right close to my burro's legs.

Say, he was a friend worth havin'; but the desert she don't wait long:
Hosses and dogs and humans, none of 'em get too old;
Gold? Looks good in a story and sounds right good in a song,
But the men that go out and get it, *they* know what they pay for gold!

Camped in the hills that mornin', I was blinkin' to shake a dream,
And Chance was sleepin' beside me, breathin' it long and deep;
When my eyes got clear wide open, I felt I was like to scream,
For there laid a big, brown rattler, coiled in my arm, asleep.

Move—and I knew he'd get me. Waitin', I held my breath,
Feelin' the sun get warmer, wonderin' what to do,
Tryin' to keep my eyes off that sudden and shinin' death,
When Chance he lifted his head up—and slow came the rattler's, too.

"Take him!" I tried to whisper. Mebby I did—— I know
Chance's neck was abristle, and his eyes on the coiled-up snake,
With its head just a-movin' gentle like a weed when the south winds blow,
When Chance jumped in . . . The Killer . . . Do that for a pardner's sake?

I'd like to think that I'd do it! . . . Up there in the far-off blue
Old Marster he sits a-judgin' such things . . . Can you tell me why,
Knowin' what he had comin', he went at it fightin' true;
Tore that snake into ribbons, then crawled to the sage to die?

Never come nigh me after; knew that he'd got his call;
Howcome I went and shot him. God! I can see his eyes . . .
There where those pointed shadows run down that cañon wall,
That is his tombstone, stranger, bigger than money buys.

The Boob

By H. C. Witwer

In the expression of the underworld Filkins was an eighteen-carat "boob." He couldn't understand it himself, not even when the race-track tout led him straight into the most flagrantly apparent come-on game he had ever worked

H. EDGERTON FILKINS picked up a pair of wicked-looking forceps, used for the extracting of defunct teeth from suffering humans, removed the cover from a box of metal polish, and sighed deeply. He was about to commence the daily rite of imparting a luster to the tools of his trade—not that they needed it, but it gave him about the only chance he got to manipulate them, patients running something lower to the acre than the proverbial hen's teeth. Also, it afforded him opportunity to think of his past and plan out his future—the atmosphere created by the rubbing of the chamois on the metal had the same effect on him as does the whittling of sticks, the chewing of tobacco, or the snaring of fish on others. Filkins could easily have reviewed his career from the cradle up to any given morning, while polishing, say, two forceps and one drill.

As the ornate sign outside his window assured an indifferent public, Filkins was a dentist by vocation—by nature he was one of the great army of mortals who send the money for the Spanish gold, purchase the paste diamond from the itinerant confidence man, and believe vaudeville stars get what the press agent names as their weekly wage. In the expressive language of the underworld, Filkins was an eighteen-carat "boob."

When he had first come to Centerville and opened up his dental parlor, Filkins had, among other things, a partner and a thousand dollars—shortly afterward he was bereaved of both, and by an odd coindence they went away from Centerville and Filkins at one and the same time. So Filkins found himself confronted with many pressing bills for dental supplies, the prospect of losing his office in the near future if they were not paid—and—four patients. He made his scant practice fairly steady, though, by stuffing evil-smelling cotton in the sundry crevices of their teeth, thus making it imperative that they come back frequently for more temporary relief.

When the instruments had been polished until they dazzled the eye, he laid them down in a neat row on a glass-covered table, surveyed them proudly for a moment, donned his professional white duck coat, and picked up a newspaper—and then the little buzzer over the door buzzed long and loudly.

He strode to the door with some reluctance, because he knew it was either the inevitable collector or the landlord—it was too early for patients, most of Centerville being abed. Nothing happened in the early mornings *there* that any one would miss by sleeping late. So, like a musician trying a tentative bar or two, Filkins called to mind a few words of his reason for not having any money, and opened the door.

After the first gasp of delighted sur-

prise, his downcast attitude swiftly changed to one of eager solicitude, for, instead of the uncompromising countenance he expected, he gazed upon what was undeniably, by all outward signs, a patient!

"Walk right in!" he invited breathlessly.

To any but Filkins, who saw only a possible life-saver, the picture the other presented would have been highly amusing. He stood a scant inch over five feet, and appeared about as heavy as a fair-sized straw hat. A dazzling suit of white checks covered his thin, wizened body—the body of an undersized child, yet his deep-furrowed face and cold, hard eyes were those of a hardened roué of sixty. His head was almost completely swathed in an improvised bandage, made of a silk handkerchief, and one would have thought he had concealed a football in the right side of his cheek. That he was in great pain was evident from the perspiration that stood out on his forehead under the edge of the handkerchief.

The now-alert Filkins conducted him to a large dental chair in the center of the room, assisted him to be seated, and, putting his foot on a lever in the rear, hoisted the upper part a few feet, his visitor meanwhile facing him and going through the motions of pulling a tooth. Filkins nodded understandingly, and pulled over the table containing the glistening forceps, which the other gazed at in some trepidation. A sweetish, sickening odor came from a jar as Filkins took a wad of cotton from it, unwound the bandage, and peered in at the other's swollen jaw. The patient sniffed suspiciously, and jerked his head away quickly.

"Don't give me none of that dope!" he commanded. "I don't want me left leg taken off; just this here tooth—get me? You ain't goin' to put *me* to sleep; I want to see what's goin' on!"

"But, my dear sir," began Filkins indulgently, "that's not 'dope,' as you call it——"

"Say!" interrupted the other testily; "I been around horses all me life, and I've seen more of that stuff used than you *ever* will—I can tell the smell of the old hop a mile away, with the wind blowin' three ways!"

With a shrug of his shoulders, Filkins turned away and busied himself preparing for the business at hand. As he selected the various instruments, he got warmed up to his work, and went about it humming a little tune. The other watched, with ill-concealed impatience, emitting stifled moans as the nerve took a fresh jump, and Filkins turned cheerfully.

"Hurt much?" he inquired.

"Cut the comedy, and get on the job, will you?" retorted the other angrily. "What are you stallin' around for? Gimme one of them monkey wrenches and I'll pull it myself!"

Filkins came swiftly to his side, tilted the chair back suddenly, and pried open the patient's mouth. He jabbed a thin wire into the aching molar—and nearly lost a finger, for the victim's jaws closed with a snap, suggestive of a steel trap, on his hand. Filkins quickly pried open the viselike jaws and stared in again at the tooth, while the other glared at him in impotent fury, and groaned with pain.

"Why," declared Filkins, with a little laugh, "this is a splendid tooth, merely an exposed nerve. You don't want this extracted—I'll put in a filling and——"

With a wild yell, the patient almost leaped from the chair.

"You won't fill nothin'!" he cried. "Don't give me none of that stuff—you ain't goin' to send your son to college by makin' me come back here fifty-eight times at a dollar a throw. I know you guys! Pull it out, pull it out, you boob!"

His voice trailed off in another moan.

"Well," Filkins put in hastily, "of course, if you really want it out—but that's a tooth you're going to miss! Now, I would suggest that a little——"

He broke off suddenly, impelled by the terrifying expression on the other's face, and quickly picked up the forceps, muttering sadly under his breath. Probing for a grip on the tooth, he coughed apologetically, and appraised the diminutive figure in the chair—and then a sudden thought striking him, he remarked conversationally:

"Eh—you are one of the jockeys at the race track, aren't you?"

The effect of this casual sentence upon the apparently pain-racked occupant of the chair was as instant as it was remarkable. A sudden gleam of anticipation shut some of the anguish out of his eyes as he twisted away from Filkins, and glanced searchingly around the room. He pushed back the startled dentist, and straightened up in the chair.

"You said it!" he returned fervently. "I'm one of the jocks—and I got the greatest good thing for to-day that ever started on a race track! Now, if you want to make a piece of money for yourself——"

"But how about your tooth?" broke in Filkins, thinking the other had gone insane from the pain.

"Hey? Oh, sure! Pull it out, and I'll tell you about this gold mine—hurry up!"

He slunk back in the chair, and Filkins, with an amazed shake of his head, clamped the forceps over the tooth.

One hour later, Filkins bowed his patient out of the office—richer by one dollar in money, millions in anticipation, and the acquaintance of "Shorty" Buchanan—the man who was going to make him rich at the expense of the helpless bookmakers at the local race track.

Shorty told him so!

"There's only one way to beat the ponies," Buchanan succinctly remarked to "Blondy" Edwards, a business associate, as they stood in the paddock of the Centerville race track early in the morning of the last day of the meeting there.

"I sure wish you'd tell *me* that way, Shorty," returned Blondy sarcastically, "or you might let *yourself* in on the secret—I'm gettin' up a list of people that have beat the ponies, and I'm waitin' for the first name yet!"

"The way I'm talkin' about," Buchanan grinned back, "the only way *I* know of beatin' them—is over the head with a club!"

"You said somethin'!" agreed Blondy, slapping the other on the back appreciatively. "But it's a darn good thing for us that only you and me believe it! As soon as all the boobs find it out, we're goin' to starve to death!"

"Well," rejoined Shorty, "don't let it keep you awake—because just about the time that guys stop bettin' money on horse-racin', the water will run the other way over Niagara Falls!"

He made some notations on a program he carried, and then turned abruptly to the other.

"Say!" he said slowly. "That reminds me of somethin' I wanted to tell you before. Did you see that guy trailin' around here with me yesterday?"

"That long, narrow-lookin' citizen with the glasses?" asked Blondy, becoming interested at once.

"Right-o!" said Shorty. "Well, that person is a live one for your life—he belongs in the burg, here, and pulls teeth for a livin'. I brought him down here yesterday and laid him on a winner. Right about now he thinks playin' the races is the softest way of makin' money ever invented. I guess that's enough, isn't it?"

"Plenty," agreed Blondy. "Has he got any money?"

"Do you think I'd waste a whole day on a bum?" inquired Shorty indig-

nantly. "Sure he's got it—I'll bet he's there with ten thousand dollars, if he's got a nickel. He carries his change in a dinky little pocketbook; you know them guys; that's the tip-off every time."

"All right," said Blondy; "you handle him and I'll stay away—you can slip me my bit in the next town—unless you want me to play the wealthy owner or the stableboy or somethin' like that. I'm willin' to do everything but start in the race to help you take this roll, because I'm as clean as a whistle myself!"

"I don't want you to do nothin'," returned Shorty. "I'll take care of this bird myself—but tip the gang off to let him alone, in case he wanders away from me to-day—you know what I mean; some of these rough workers might steal his collar or somethin', and then he'd be leary of me!"

After delivering this admonition, Shorty left his partner in the paddock, and made directly for the office of H. Edgerton Filkins, with much the same anticipation as the lions approached the human offerings of Nero right before they became martyrs.

Shorty Buchanan had graduated from the School of Experience with high honors, and was now at the stage where he was qualified to become a member of that well-known institution's faculty. In fact, Shorty's business in life was to aid such fellow beings as came his way, to matriculate at that school—they received their degree, their A. B. standing for "A Boob," while Shorty gathered in the tuition fee. His motto, "Do others; they do you!" never left his perspective for a moment.

He had started in life—at least it was not long after his birth—as a jockey, but his unfailing habit of failing to finish in front with favorites, when they were heavily played by the masses, soon brought the frowns of the powers that be on him, and when he deliberately ran an odds on choice in the fence one day, after all other methods of throwing the race had failed, the stewards ruled him off as a rider—reluctantly, but firmly.

Having lost his original means of livelihood, Shorty gravitated instinctively to the only other he knew, and the day after he lost his license as a jockey he appeared on the track as a tout.

Although the modus operandi of his new profession was childishly simple, it required some technique. His business day started perhaps an hour before the field went to the post for the first race, when, looking over the throng with practiced eye, Shorty would carefully select his victims. It would indeed be an incredulous person who would think there was any uncertainty about the race when Shorty got through discussing it—he knew what horse was destined to win, and for a consideration he'd whisper the name—or, if high-class work was unnecessary, he'd consent to act as betting commissioner, glibly explaining that he could obtain better odds than the victim through his acquaintance with the bookmakers. He would then rush madly into the swirling vortex of money-mad humanity in the betting ring, "to make it look good," as he would put it, and once out of sight of the bettor, the "bet" would find a resting place in his shoe—which was Shorty's safe-deposit box. If the horse won Shorty would be harder to find than an honest faro game, but if it lost he'd bob up with a woebegone expression and assure the victim that it was practically impossible to "beat 'em all"! This would be followed up by the promise of an absolute certainty—in the next race.

Shorty had one rule he never violated—he never under any circumstances bet his *own* money on anything!

H. Edgerton Filkins was sitting at

the little desk in his office, engaged in a pleasing pastime that had been denied him for some time past—he was carefully counting a roll of yellow-backed bills. There came a sudden imperative rapping on the door, but before he could answer or conceal the money the door was flung open and Shorty Buchanan entered the room. One swift, comprehensive glance took in the situation.

"Howdy!" he greeted breezily. "Countin' up the little old bank roll, eh? Well, you'll have more money tomorrow than you ever saw in your life—what do you think of that, eh?"

"You know of another horse that will win?" inquired Filkins eagerly.

Shorty held up a silencing finger. With a caution that any but Filkins would have found laughable, he strode to the door and closed it carefully, then he tiptoed around to the side of the desk and bent down over Filkins.

"Say!" he breathed. "I've got the surest thing that ever started on a race track to-day—everything is ready, and this bird will win on the bit!"

"Fine!" answered Filkins. "What's the horse's name?"

An inscrutable smile spread itself slowly over Shorty's face as he moved toward the door.

"You meet me at the track at two o'clock," he returned, ignoring the other's question. "Bring the bank roll—as who's this says, the more you bring down the more you'll take away!"

Filkins followed him to the stairway—the gleam that Shorty hoped for was in his eyes.

"There's no doubt that this horse will win?" he demanded, laying a hand on Buchanan's shoulder.

"He'll win by nine city clocks!" assured Shorty. "They'll never know which way this one went the minute the gate goes up—this here is a chance to run a shoe string into a tannery—you can hock your tooth foundry here and bring down the ticket!"

And with this parting reassurance he was gone.

For a long time afterward Filkins sat at his desk in blissful contemplation. The day before, after he had removed Shorty's aching molar, he had accompanied him to the race track, finding it impossible to resist the picture of affluence awaiting him, as sketched by the voluble Shorty. He had gone home that night richer by one hundred and fifty dollars and convinced beyond any possible doubt that before the meeting was over he'd have a respectable fortune. It is that thrill which Filkins was experiencing which makes the ten-dollars-per shipping clerk and the fifty-thousand-dollar executive risk their all as devotees of the Sport of Kings.

Shorty had made no demands on Filkins for a division of the day's winnings, for the reason that he was, in the vernacular of the track, "ribbing him up for the big show." He was certain that Filkins, flushed with the first day's success, would bring every cent he could command to the track on the following afternoon and give it to him to bet—and then Shorty would steal out of the race track via the loose boards in the paddock fence and go away from Centerville.

At the old fair-grounds track which had been repainted and overhauled until it bore an almost metropolitan appearance, Shorty, on the outskirts of the crowd, was subjecting the arriving street cars and other conveyances to a scrutiny that would have won him fame as a detective. Suddenly the scowling expression on his face lifted, and, dodging nimbly through the press, he jumped on the running board of a street car in the long line drawn up outside the race track. Filkins was in the act of alighting from the car when Shorty almost yanked him to the street.

"Here at last, eh?" was his greeting. "Now, come on—I got to get busy!"

Swept along by the mob to the entrance, Filkins deposited a dollar at the little window, receiving in exchange a gaudily colored pasteboard badge, and when, inside, he turned to look for Shorty he saw him in animated conversation with two flashily clothed individuals, who shot furtive glances in his direction.

Shorty was impressing on a couple of his business associates that Filkins was "his man" and threatening them with dire reprisals if any attempt was made to separate them during the afternoon. But Filkins was blissfully unaware of this as he stood drinking in the atmosphere of quickly gotten wealth about him. The surging, noisy crowd —their strained, worried faces, the incessant dinning venders of everything from sure winners to peanuts—all combined in a bedlam that sent an exhilarating thrill through his veins. A thoroughbred being worked out for the first race galloped past, and a few glanced perfunctorily at the number on the saddle cloth—Filkins watched with glistening eyes until horse and rider had completed the circuit of the track.

It was Shorty who brought him back to earth with:

"I had to see the owner of this horse —get a couple of programs, will you?"

Obediently Filkins produced a quarter, and Shorty took it, hurrying off to return with two programs, one of which he gave to Filkins.

"Now listen!" he commanded. "I'm goin' in the bettin' ring to get the openin' prices. You stand right here, understand, and don't move till I get back! Don't let anybody tell you *anything*—and be careful, there's a lot of cheap crooks here to-day!"

Filkins watched him disappear into the yelling, gesticulating mob, admiring the dexterity with which he inserted his diminutive body through the tightly packed outer circle. If he could win five hundred to-day he'd be able to pay the most insistent of his creditors—more than that meant—well, there was a girl back where Filkins came from who was waiting for a certain registered letter, and——

Shorty stood before him.

"Say, come here a minute!" he began hysterically. "I want to talk to you private."

Filkins followed him expectantly to a corner of the lawn back of the grand stand, where Shorty, after an exhaustive scrutiny of the horizon on all sides, halted.

"How much will you bet to-day?" he asked, without preliminary.

The suppressed eagerness escaped Filkins, who answered, after some hesitation:

"Well, maybe a hundred dollars."

"Is that all the money you have on you?" exclaimed Shorty, as if he doubted his hearing.

"That's a lot of money——" began Filkins half apologetically.

"Oh, a terrible roll!" broke in the other sarcastically. "If Morgan had that much he'd retire! I told you this morning to bring some real money down here, and you're there with about enough to get your laundry out! How much did you win yesterday?"

"I think it was a hundred and fifty, but——" began Filkins.

"Well, where's mine?" demanded Shorty, laying a hand on his arm.

"Yours?" returned Filkins, in unfeigned surprise.

"Sure, mine!" exploded Shorty angrily. "What do you think I'm doin' this for—love?"

Filkins considered him curiously for a moment.

"How much do you expect?" he asked finally.

"Half!" snapped Shorty promptly.

An expression of absolute bewilderment spread itself slowly over Filkins' face as he looked down at the angry countenance of the other.

"Do you mean to say you want me to give you seventy-five dollars?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"You said it!" shot back Shorty. "Didn't I make you win it?"

"But the bets were made with my money——"

Shorty savagely cut off the other's retort, waving his arms angrily before him.

"Of course it was your money!" he grated. "Who'd you think was goin' to bet—the horse? Didn't I lay you on winners? You'd have lost the band around your hat if it hadn't been for me! What's the matter with you? This is my livin'. I wasted a whole day on you yesterday, sent you home a winner, and now you want to welsh on me, eh?"

Filkins received this tirade with rapidly growing amazement—he backed nervously away from the threatening Shorty, gazing at him reproachfully.

"Why, I thought you did that for me out of friendship!" he blurted out.

The effect of this evidence of trusting faith had a remarkable effect on the other. He snatched off his hat and pranced around in front of Filkins as though he had suddenly gone insane.

"Friendship!" he shrieked, his voice quivering with anger. "Friendship! Why, I never saw you in my life before yesterday—you big boob! Where do you get that friendship stuff? Are you tryin' to kid me?"

The alarmed Filkins, glancing about him, saw that Shorty's lusty shouts had attracted a circle of interested spectators who were peering in at them anticipatingly and that Shorty himself was shaking a lilliputian fist in the general direction of his face. He hastily thrust a hand into his trousers pocket and withdrew it, clutching a bunch of keys, some silver, and a five-dollar bill.

"Here!" he urged Shorty, who was watching him eagerly. "Here, take this and don't holler so loud!"

He extended the bill, and Shorty gazed at it, at the giver, and at the rapidly swelling audience. His little face appeared about to burst from some strong emotion that he was making a heroic effort to control. He stepped forward suddenly, tore the bill from Filkins' hand, stuffed it in his pocket, and strode off, his face working curiously.

It was late that afternoon, a short time before the last race, that Filkins met Shorty again. Left to his own resources, the disillusioned dentist had wandered about the lawn until, worn to the point of exhaustion by the physical exertion and the mental torture of the golden opportunity that had fled with Shorty, he sat down wearily on the steps of the grand stand. Fearful of his own judgment, he had kept far from the betting ring, and the hundred dollars he brought to the track still reposed safely in his pocket.

Shorty came upon him, and, after a contemptuous survey of his drooping figure, walked over and stood facing him.

"Are you beatin' 'em?" was his dry salutation.

Filkins started at the sound of the familiar voice—but after the first quick upward glance he drew himself up proudly. Unabashed, Shorty sat down beside him on the steps.

"Say!" he began, ignoring the other's frigid attitude, "you don't want to mind me. I didn't mean nothin'—that's just my way. Why, I been lookin' for you around here ever since. Now I'm goin' to declare you in on this good thing I was tellin' you about this mornin'—and it won't cost you a nickel! What do you think of that, eh?"

The expression on Filkins' face was an eloquent answer.

It was Shorty's proud boast that no one had ever "put one over on him,"

as he phrased it, without getting as good as they gave or better in return, and he had no idea of letting Filkins be an exception. According to his lights, Filkins had done him an irreparable injury by failing to fall an easy victim to his trap, and Shorty felt that this sort of thing must be discouraged. Also, Shorty, cheated of his due, wanted revenge.

So he ransacked his brain and brought forth the name of a horse entered in the last race—a noble animal which in his opinion had less chance of winning on form than the tortoise appeared to have in the memorable race with the hare. He informed the eager Filkins that there was "no way on earth for this horse to lose!"—and implored him to bet everything he possessed on it, not stopping at his clothing, should the contingency arise.

Shorty stood to make nothing financially on the bet, but the blissful satisfaction he'd feel when Filkins stood before him penniless would be fuel enough for his vicious mind for many a week to come.

A few minutes later Shorty parted from Filkins and set off in search of fresh prey. Filkins went directly to the betting ring, his heart beating madly with revived hope. The human maelstrom surging up and down in the bookmakers' inclosure under the stands swallowed up Filkins for a moment, and then cast him, breathless and dishevelled, up before a bookmaker's booth—like a shipwrecked mariner being spat out by the sea. He crunched a fifty-dollar bill tightly in one hand and stood staring up at the board displaying the odds on the horses entered in the race. At the very top he saw:

Heart Pang. 100-40-15.

There were other names and figures, but that was the only one that interested Filkins—the other horses didn't matter; Shorty had said they were merely entered to make it look like a race.

The bookmaker, glancing down, observed Filkins and smiled. He reached a glittering paw downward, deftly caught the protruding corner of the bill, and beamed on Filkins.

"All right, old top!" he said jovially. "Who do you like?"

"Heart Pang," answered Filkins promptly.

"To win?" inquired the layer of odds, elevating his eyebrows sharply.

"Certainly!" nodded Filkins.

"Heart Pang is five thousand to fifty!" called out the other, leaning back in the booth.

The bare mention of this sum of money set the blood tingling through Filkins' veins, but the imperturbable ticket writer handed him the piece of cardboard with barely an upward glance. As he moved away, the bookmaker turned to his sheet writer.

"Who *is* that guy?" he growled.

"Search me!" rejoined the other laconically. "Looks like a boob to me. I guess he belongs in the town."

"Well," rejoined the bookmaker, apparently relieved, "he sure picked a fine one to run for his fifty—Heart Pang won't be among the first nineteen! The winner of *this* race was elected at that special meeting last night. We got to let Harris win this one with Gold Toes, because he was ready to let out a squeal if he didn't get his get-away money!"

An elongated, roughly garbed individual hopped up on the little platform at this juncture, cutting off further discussion. He smiled familiarly at the bookmaker, and, diving into his sweater, produced a greasy roll of bills.

"Heart Pang to show!" he said hoarsely.

"What! *Another* one!" exclaimed the bookmaker, taking the money with a show of reluctance. "You don't mean to say they're trying with that one to-day, do you?"

"I don't know what they're fixin' to do," the newcomer responded cheerfully. "I just naturally believe that bird is goin' to be in the money!"

"Well, I'll take a chance!" retorted the other. "Because they couldn't win with Heart Pang if the others all fell down! You guys will have a hot time if you're tryin' any double cross—the county sheriff is one of the judges at the finish, and he's shootin' the works on Gold Toes!"

The newcomer made no response to this information; but, jamming the ticket in his pocket, he jumped off the little platform, and was swallowed up in the crowd.

Meanwhile, Filkins, succumbing to an uncontrollable desire to see Heart Pang in the flesh, had wandered into the paddock, and even as he passed in the gate he collided with an unkempt individual, jostling a pasteboard square out of the latter's hand in the collision. It fell directly at his feet, and he stooped apologetically to restore it. Passing it over, he saw it was a ticket much like his own and bore the name—Heart Pang.

To bridge the embarrassing glare with which the other favored him, Filkins murmured confidentially:

"I have a small bet on him, too."

"Heh?" said the man, stepping close to him. "Bet on what?"

"Heart Pang," answered Filkins.

"What do you know about him?" questioned the other sharply, eying him with interest.

Filkins made a ludicrous attempt at imitating Shorty's air of cunning.

"Mr. Buchanan told me all about it!" he returned meaningly.

"Who's he?" queried the other; then, without waiting for an answer: "Here, let's see your ticket!"

Filkins withdrew a hand from his coat pocket and held the cardboard in front of the other.

"This here Mister Buchanan has been slippin' somethin' over on you," he announced, after a quick glance. "I hope and trust as they say that Heart Pang gets in the money, because I won't eat any more if he don't. But askin' him to *win* the race is like electin' Bryan president—he'll make a good showin', but he won't be first to-day! You better play it safe and get somethin' on him to show before they scratch the price."

A great fear gripped at Filkins' heart, but his brain worked quickly.

"What do you mean by getting something on Heart Pang to show?" he asked eagerly.

The man stared at him curiously.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me you don't know what straight, place, and show means?" he ejaculated. Then, with elaborate sarcasm: "Did you ever *see* a horse race before?"

"I'm not joking!" exclaimed Filkins, seizing the other's arm. "I'm in deadly earnest. If Heart Pang loses this race I'll lose everything I own. Why, I'll have to leave the town—I—— It would take too long to tell you, but—tell me, what does show mean? I'll tell you frankly, I never was at a race track in my life until yesterday!"

There was something in Filkins' strained features, the intensity of his voice, that made an obvious impression on the other man.

"Well, I don't know what your stunt is," he said, after a slight pause, "but I'll fall! Bettin' on a horse to show is bettin' he'll finish no worse than third. If he wins, runs second or third, you win. Got that?"

"Yes," answered Filkins, "and thank you!"

He reached into his pocket and fingered the other fifty-dollar bill. Then he set off at a brisk pace for the betting ring, while the other, hands on his hips, stared after him in silence. At length he drew a long breath and turned into the paddock.

Ten minutes later, Filkins was jammed tightly against the rail in front of the grand stand, his eyes glued to a point on the other side of the track, where twelve prancing thoroughbreds faced the barrier. There came a sudden, great, swelling yell from the thousands around him—he saw the confused blur of color on the far side of the track take instantaneous motion—now it began to assume vague shapes—the babel of sound became louder and more incoherent. A man standing next to him seemed to have gone suddenly insane. He hurled his cap in the air and pounded Filkins on the back.

"Come on with Horizon!" he implored, in a shrieking wail. "Come on with him, jock!"

On the other side of Filkins another apparent maniac was beseeching Orlando Girl to "roll home" in an ear-splitting voice, while over his shoulder some one was announcing jubilantly that "Gold Toes gets all the money"!

If there was any mention of Heart Pang, Filkins did not hear it, though every other entry in the race seemed to have at least a score of iron-lunged supporters. Then some one away up in the grand stand yelled in a voice of wonder:

"Look at that long shot! O you Heart Pang!"

Filkins came out of his trance like a man who has suddenly been awakened in the dead of night and informed that his house is afire. He leaped to the rail, unheeding the angry protests of those he elbowed aside.

"Come on, Heart Pang!" he screamed hysterically, his voice rising over the others, his nails biting deep into his palms. "Come on, you horse!"

A flying, dust-hidden kaleidoscope of brilliant color shot past him, the pounding hoofs audible over the roar of the crowd.

A man near Filkins climbed down from the rail, mopping his brow vigorously—he flicked away his ticket disgustedly, and Filkins pounced on him.

"Who won?" he demanded, his voice sounding hoarse and strange.

"Gold Toes got it!" returned the man sourly, "but if that jock had started a little sooner with the long shot, he'd have busted up their little frame-up. As it was, this Heart Pang was third by a mile. Why—— Hey, what's the matter?"

For Filkins had suddenly keeled over in a dead faint!

When he opened his eyes he found himself surrounded by a group of curious onlookers—from out of their confused mutterings he heard a familiar voice.

"Aw, the boob lost half a buck, and the shock killed him!"

There was an appreciative snicker, and the little circle around Filkins moved off, with knowing smiles. He sat up to find himself looking in the face of Shorty Buchanan.

"Oh, you come to, eh?" he heard dimly. "Well, the next time treat your *firends* on the level, you welsher!"

And Shorty dodged away through the crowd.

Filkins braced against the rail, searched his pockets feverishly until he brought forth two little pasteboard squares, one of which he tore across, after a regretful glance. He sighed—fifty dollars thrown away! Then he regarded the other lovingly, the color coming back to his face. It read:

Heart Pang. Show—$750-$50.

Filkins arose and brushed off his trousers. He was humming a little tune—the one that aroused Shorty's ire when he called to have his tooth pulled. As he started for the betting ring a sudden thought struck him—he frowned perplexedly.

"I wonder what Shorty meant by calling me a boob?" he muttered, half to himself.

South of the Line

By Ralph Stock

III.—THE ISLE OF DREAD

YOU will charter a small private cutter for an indefinite period, and take the Papia division first, touching at every island in the group. Employ your own means, but the ground must be covered thoroughly. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then that is all. Good-by."

The official mask fell from the chief's face as he shook hands.

"Try and get back for the cricket match against the Native Department," he added eagerly; "they've got a ticklish bowler in young Symes."

Doctor Crofts nodded gravely, and passed out into the humid glare of Victoria Parade.

For some time, he loitered about the wharf, oblivious of the turmoil about him, his keen, rather melancholy, eyes passing in rapid review the medley of small craft anchored in the harbor basin.

"*Margaret,*" he read on the bows of a trim, white cutter of perhaps twenty tons; and this seemed to satisfy him, for, after making a few inquiries of the harbor master, he strolled leisurely up the pestiferous hill to the Fiji Club, and ordered a whisky and soda.

Brend was sitting in a far corner, devouring his mail with a two months' appetite.

Crofts waited until he had finished with his letters, and started on the illustrated newspapers, then crossed the room.

"The owner of the *Margaret,* I believe?" he suggested suavely.

Brend looked up with unconscious impatience. His thoughts had been exactly fifteen thousand miles away.

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"The sole owner?"

"Yes."

"And are you open to charter?"

"It depends."

"Of course it does," smiled Crofts, and took a chair.

They talked for upward of ten minutes, by which time Brend had learned that he was required to supply his cutter and his services for an indefinite period and at a surprisingly good figure, to a depressed-looking scientist of the name of Crofts, for the purpose of studying "coralite formations" in the Papia group.

It was not inviting. Brend had only dropped anchor that morning after an arduous copra contract; then it was on the fringe of the hurricane season, and —he did not like the look of Crofts. It may be mentioned that few people did, except when he was playing cricket. But the "surprisingly good figure" turned the scale, as it is apt to do when a young man has taken it into his head to "catch up" with some one—and that a woman—who is doing rather better than himself.

See, then, the *Margaret* a week later,

This series began in the February 20th issue of POPULAR.

dodging the reefs and islets of the Papia group—a splash of white on a sea of indigo—and John Brend at the tiller bored to extinction. Crofts had proved to be one of those men who fail to develop on acquaintance. "You may come so far," his somber eyes seemed to say, "but no farther," and Brend, as the employee, obeyed. He longed for the society of even Johnnie, his native "boy," but Crofts had been quite firm on this point, as on every other; no crew was to be carried.

Already they had touched at quite forty insignificant islets, and, with brief instructions to await his return, Crofts had explored beach and bush sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for an entire day. At first, Brend had been content to row him ashore in the dinghy and leave him to his own devices, but gradually the mystery of the man took hold of him, and he found himself wondering more deeply as day succeeded day. One thing was certain, he was no more interested in coralite formations than he was in bush pig, and, considering his statement in Suva, he was at little pains to hide the fact.

Once Brend followed him—at a safe distance, and with a twenty-two rifle to give the appearance of pigeon shooting. Crofts took a well-worn bush track to the inevitable village of grass houses. Here he went systematically from house to house, talking fluent Fijian with the inhabitants, and occasionally taking a photograph. He seemed well liked by the natives, and in the evening, when the women returned from the taro patches, the Buli held a *meke* in his honor. That was all, and Brend returned to the cutter with the guilty feeling of one who has peeped through a keyhole.

II.

About midnight, Crofts returned, escorted by the Buli and a procession of natives bearing torches. He bade them farewell from the deck of the cutter, and went below.

"Hello!" he said, looking round the cabin. "Didn't you get any?"

Brend looked up from the book he was reading.

"Any what?" he asked.

"Pigeon."

Crofts stood at the side of the bunk, looking down on him with his melancholy eyes.

"Pigeon? Oh—ah, no," faltered Brend, and flushed under his tan. "They're shy."

"Really? That's because you came too near the village. Farther out, they hardly know what fear of man is. But I don't believe in 'twenty-twos'; give me a good shotgun. By the way," he added, sliding into his pajamas, "don't forget to come along whenever you feel like it. I imagined your heart was buried in the *Margaret,* and that traipsing from village to village would bore you stiff."

"Thanks," mumbled Brend.

It was the last time he followed Crofts.

The daily routine continued—from island to island, village to village. The man's thoroughness was stupendous. Even uninhabited hummocks of volcanic rock the *Margaret* visited, and Crofts explored them as though he were hunting for a dropped pin. That was it, Brend decided; he was hunting for something, but whom or what or why constituted a problem that never came an inch nearer solution.

Then came a puff from the fringe of the hurricane season, as Brend had feared, and the *Margaret* heeled over and ran neck and crop before a shrieking wind and mountainous, following sea.

She was heading southeast by south; that was all Brend had time to notice in the next five hours. All of him—nerve, brain, and muscle—was concen-

trated on the struggle with enraged nature. There were reefs, headlands, shoals, to be avoided—if possible. It was like steering a runaway car through hummocky country, and all the while Crofts was in his bunk horribly ill. Whatever else his mysterious passenger might be, he was no sailor, Brend decided.

At last the *Margaret* left the maze of islands behind her, and her owner heaved a sigh of heartfelt relief as the sea anchor pitched overboard, and, tautening its hawser, held the cutter head on.

"Where are we?" asked Crofts, when Brend went below to make himself a cup of tea.

"Haven't the least idea," he answered. "Somewhere southeast of the Papias and drifting."

"Can nothing be done?" Crofts raised himself on an elbow, presenting a woeful spectacle.

"Nothing except drift and trust to luck," said Brend. "We're hove to. It'd be sheer madness to run in front of this." Crofts subsided, and lay staring stonily at the skylight.

The little cabin resembled nothing more closely than the interior of a bouncing India-rubber ball, and still the wind shrieked and the *Margaret* drifted.

III.

About midnight, and with extraordinary suddenness, there came a lull, yet seemingly quite close the wind could be heard still tearing on its way. It was as though the *Margaret* had been hurled from a whirlpool into some sequestered backwater.

Brend hurried on deck, and stood for a moment spellbound at the immensity of his luck. The *Margaret* had drifted into the lee of land—real solid earth not a quarter of a mile distant—without so much as scratching her paint. It was little short of a miracle in the reef-strewn islands, and Brend took advantage of his good fortune by creeping closer and dropping anchor. It held in a few fathoms.

Crofts was determined to camp on shore that night, despite every argument to the contrary. He frankly admitted that after his recent bucketing it was necessary for the peace of both his mind and stomach.

As it happened, a landing was effected without much difficulty, the tent pitched by the light of a hurricane lantern, and, after Brend had satisfied himself that the cutter was safely inside the barrier reef, both men turned in.

It is a strange thing to fetch unknown land at night. To set foot upon it, and await the revelations of dawn. Brend lay staring through the tent flap at the storm-driven sky, wondering what the morrow would bring. The wind had died down as suddenly as it had risen, and black banks of cloud split asunder, revealing the eternal stars.

The silence was intense. The world seemed resting after a pitched battle. Brend was on the verge of sleep when something awakened him, a sound so mellow and faint as to be hardly audible, yet in that deathly stillness distinct as a bell. It continued, a long-drawn, reedlike note, developing into a series of runs and tremolos, then drifted off into a defined air. For a full minute it baffled Brend, then burst upon him in a flash—Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," played on—either a flute or a clarinet.

It was so incredible that he woke Crofts.

"Listen!" he said. "Am I delirious, or is that——" He broke off as the clear notes gathered volume, filling the night with music.

"Gad!" was Crofts' verdict. "That fellow can play."

"On a rock in the South Pacific, if

you please," commented Brend. "Ah, 'The Mikado'——"

The two men lay silent, alternately wondering, and drinking in well-known airs, until the music ceased, and sleep closed their eyes.

IV.

It was with a lively curiosity that they set out after breakfast the next morning, and, following a beach of volcanic rock, came suddenly upon a well-appointed bungalow, set far back among the coconut groves.

No one has a bell or a knocker in the islands. Crofts mounted the veranda steps and waited. There was no sound or sign of life about the place. Brend followed him, and they passed into the living room. It was plainly, but comfortably, furnished in island fashion, and through an open doorway beyond they caught a glimpse of the green cloth and polished woodwork of a billiard table.

They entered, and went from room to room. There was quite a good library, and a bathroom to make one itch to discard clothes.

In the kitchen, a spacious outhouse, as all tropical kitchens should be, the interlopers received a shock. A native girl was standing with her back to the door peeling taro.

"Sayadra," said Crofts, and, receiving no answer, touched her on the shoulder. She started as though stung, and turned, revealing the comely face and soft eyes of a Samoan girl of perhaps eighteen.

There was nervous apprehension in her every movement as she signed that she was both deaf and dumb. Brend took out pencil and paper, then made the few letters of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet that he remembered, but she still shook her head, smiling wistfully.

"I think we'd better get back to camp and wait," said Crofts.

This they did, and Brend rowed out to the cutter for his sextant and charts.

"It might be any of these," he said, indicating a sprinkling of dots to the southeast of the Papias. "Unnamed rocks for the most part. I doubt if this is more than half a mile across. You notice we're a good three hundred miles out of our course; I thought it blew a bit."

They spent the rest of the day in exploring the island. It was nothing more than the summit of a small, extinct volcano thrust up through the ocean and long since covered with vegetation.

In the evening, they paid another visit to the bungalow, but the owner was still absent. A further interview with the native girl elicited the information in dumb show that some one had sailed away from the island.

"Then would you mind telling me where the clarinet solo came from?" demanded Crofts, when they had returned to camp.

"Can't imagine," Brend confessed; "but, after all, is it any of our business?"

Crofts regarded him steadfastly with his piercing eyes.

"I mean," Brend went on rather lamely, "isn't it rather cheeky to stroll through a man's house and—and—question his servants?"

Crofts still regarded him fixedly.

"If you remember," he said, "I invited you to accompany me on these expeditions—if you wanted to. If you don't, there is no necessity."

Brend had discovered that, on occasions, his employer had the knack of making him feel uncommonly like a child.

"Very well," he answered shortly.

"And now you're annoyed," said Crofts, with exasperating suavity. "I'm sorry, but you see I don't believe that girl is deaf and dumb; I don't believe the owner of this island has left

it; and I *do* believe that for some reason he is hiding from us. I find it interesting, don't you?"

"Certainly," Brend admitted. "I merely pointed out that I don't see what it has to do with us."

Crofts shrugged his lean shoulders.

"What has anything to do with anybody, if it comes to that?" he said, and stretched himself at length on his camp bed.

In the morning, he suggested a stroll over the island, and Brend accompanied him. But he soon realized that this stroll was developing into a search, the same thorough, systematic affair that Crofts had carried out at every other port of call.

The curious part of it to Brend was that the other's enthusiasm was infectious. He found himself involuntarily entering into the spirit of the chase, though he had no idea as to the nature of the quarry.

Methodically, and almost in silence, they patrolled the island, passing through a miniature coconut grove that filled the shallow crater, along the beach, and over a bald slope of volcanic rock; but they discovered no nook or cranny where so much as a fox could hide.

"The music must have come from somewhere near here," mused Crofts as they stood on the summit of the cone looking down the wooded slope to where the *Margaret* rode at anchor in the lagoon. "If it had come from the far side, or even out of the crater itself, I doubt if we should have heard it."

"Perhaps the girl plays," Brend suggested inanely.

"'The Mikado?' Hardly," Crofts answered, with perfect gravity. "Besides——" He broke off, but Brend knew the rest. He had searched the bungalow for a clarinet.

On the slope of the cone nearest camp, the inspection became doubly minute. Crofts even went to the length of testing some slabs of volcanic rock as though he suspected a secret passage. The island was certainly not more than half a mile in circumference, peculiarly free of underbrush, and toward evening the two men had covered it almost yard by yard.

They were returning to camp, tired and silent, when Brend caught a momentary glint of white through the trees. Before he had time to move or speak, Crofts had bounded from his side, and was running like a hare for the edge of the bush.

Presently he returned, perspiring and breathless, but with a new light in his eyes.

"The girl," he announced laconically. "Taking him food. We're hotter, much hotter. Only a matter of time."

He looked round on the darkening bush as though loath to abandon the search, but finally turned toward camp.

V.

That night, Brend sat outside the tent flap thinking his own thoughts. The hunt had interested him, as hunting does most men. The mystery of this clarinet player who sought concealment on an isolated rock of the South Pacific was strangely fascinating; but now that the quarry was practically run to earth, Brand found all keenness gone out of him. In the first place, his sympathies instinctively went out to any man—whoever he might be and whatever he had done—who found himself at Crofts' mercy. Then, too, he felt that there was something vaguely unsporting in taking advantage of the accident of a man's love of music, for it was this that had set Crofts on the trail.

A dank mist rolled down from the hillside, hovering over the bush like a hot, moist blanket. The tiny island lay silent and desolate under the stars, and

somewhere upon it a hunted human being with a soul for music lay dreading the dawn. Brend shuddered involuntarily.

It was only a matter of time, Crofts had said, and this proved to be the case. He explored the island no longer, but spent the whole of the next day behind a lantana bush, watching, waiting, like some stealthy, relentless creature of the jungle. His patience was extraordinary, for this continued three days and two nights. On the third, Brend joined him from sheer boredom.

"She may have taken him food for a month," he told Crofts.

"Perhaps," said the other, "but I doubt it. In any case, I don't think she could stay away from him, knowing he was in danger."

"You mean she is his wife?"

Crofts nodded.

It was in the early hours of the morning, with a brilliant tropical moon riding high in the heavens, that Crofts tugged at Brend's sleeve and pointed toward the bungalow through a gap in the lantana. The figure of a woman stood hesitant in the moonlight, then sped like a flash across the intervening space, and was lost in the bush. A moment later, the two men saw her darting from tree to tree like a flitting moonbeam. Brend experienced an insane desire to shout a warning—to do anything to save this loyal woman from betraying the man she loved; but, remembering his place, he held his peace.

She stopped not fifty yards distant, at the foot of a clump of trees where an uprooted palm had crashed into the dense foliage of a dilo tree. Casting one quick glance about her, she sprang nimbly onto the sloping palm trunk, and, mounting it with the dexterity of a cat, disappeared among the branches.

"Thanks," murmured Crofts, with the smile that Brend had come to loathe.

He waited until the girl had descended and passed from view in the direction of the bungalow, then returned to camp.

The night passed without reference to the subject that was naturally uppermost in both men's thoughts, and, after breakfast the next morning, Crofts set out.

Without haste or hesitation, he walked to the leaning palm, scaled it, and passed from sight. Brend followed. He found it a physical impossibility not to see this tragedy to its bitter end.

What he expected to see, after wriggling his way through a network of branches and thrusting his head through a square aperture in a neatly contrived platform of bamboo, it is difficult to say. Possibly a wretched creature with the hunted look of a trapped animal, cringing before the indomitable Crofts. But what he actually saw was a middle-aged man, with a keen, sensitive face, a close-cropped beard, and expressive hands, talking and laughing in one breath, while Crofts listened with his usual imperturbability.

"Come up," called the stranger cheerily, catching sight of Brend.

"This is my skipper," said Crofts, "Mr. Brend—Mr. Cunningham."

They shook hands. It was the strangest introduction Brend had ever experienced. He looked about him, and saw that they stood on a platform perhaps ten feet square, composed of bamboos lashed together with sennit, high among the treetops. The elevation and absolute security from observation gave a strange sense of remoteness from the world outside, even the tiny island world that lay below. Brend noticed an artist's easel in one corner of the leafy bower, and a clarinet lying on a pile of finely woven mats in another.

"I was trying to apologize," Cunningham continued, with a hurried, rather clipped, utterance. "I'm inhospitable, rude, anything you like, but I'm a pro-

fessed hermit, and you must make allowances."

"Every man to his taste," said Crofts. "I must say, as a studio, this is unique." He looked about him, and, as he looked, Brend saw Cunningham's eyes change. Something in them quailed. They were the eyes of a man who longs to flee, but dares not. "Perhaps we intrude?" Crofts added, with his intolerable suavity.

"Not now," smiled Cunningham. "I've finished. I find I can work up here," he added apologetically. "I can get away from myself, but I never start a thing without finishing it at a sitting —if I finish it at all. I'm now entirely at your disposal."

Crofts launched forth on a glib account of his tour in search of coralite formations, and the storm that had carried the *Margaret* out of her course, but Cunningham was clearly not listening. Again, Brend fancied he could see the workings of a troubled mind reflected in the man's face. Cunningham was uncertain about Crofts—horribly uncertain.

VI.

On the way to the bungalow, whither he invited the visitors, Brend noticed that he walked with a pronounced limp.

"Cut my foot on the reef the other day," he explained, when apologizing for his slowness. "Nasty stuff, coral. Touch of blood poisoning, I'm afraid."

"I don't think I told you I'm a doctor," said Crofts, looking straight before him. "Perhaps I can do something."

Cunningham turned, and Brend saw sudden terror in his eyes. He mumbled his thanks, but assured Crofts that there was no need to trouble.

As they approached the bungalow, the girl emerged from the lean-to kitchen, and stood for a moment staring at them, wide-eyed. She, too, was afraid. Brend hated Crofts, hated himself at that moment. What right had they to inflict their obviously unwelcome presence on these two kindly people who wished nothing more than to be left in peace? He was soon to know.

The evening passed very pleasantly. Cunningham proved himself a charming host, entertaining his guests to an excellent dinner, and to still more excellent music afterward on the veranda. Moonlight on the Pacific and the "Intermezzo" on the clarinet make an excellent combination, and, as the pure notes floated out into the night, Brend succeeded in forgetting for the moment all save the beauty of the night and the music.

Later, Cunningham talked. With the sensitiveness of the hermit, he seemed to find it incumbent upon him to propound his creed, to glory in it, and apologize in one breath.

"It's slow sometimes," he confessed, "but at such times I try to remember what life was for me, back there on the other side of the world, and that comforts me. I was nearly always ill. I could get no enjoyment out of things that seemed to satisfy other people. I was alone, far more alone than I am here." He indicated his moonlit little island with a wave of the hand. "Worst of all, I couldn't work; and here——" He paused, and smiled apologetically. "Well, I think I'm turning out something worth while. No artist has touched these islands yet, and the material! It's almost overwhelming."

Crofts listened in stony silence, and every now and then Cunningham shot him one of his quick, apprehensive glances, as though appraising the effect of his words.

They parted at midnight. Cunningham showed his guests into two airy adjoining rooms, and stood at the doorway of Crofts' lamp in hand.

"You're sure there's nothing you want?" he suggested.

"Nothing, thanks," said Crofts. "Only I wish you'd let me have a look at your foot."

It was as though Cunningham had received a blow between the eyes. He flinched, and seemed to shrink; then, recovering himself with a palpable effort, gave a travesty of a laugh.

"Oh, that's all right, thanks," he said. "Good night." And, turning, passed down the passage.

A mosquito-proof door slammed in the distance, and the bungalow was still.

Brend looked up from unlacing his shoes to see Crofts standing in the doorway that connected their rooms. He was one of those men who have the power of forcing others to speak first by merely remaining silent himself. Brend succumbed to the influence now.

"Splendid fellow, our host," he commented, at the same time feeling it to be an inane remark.

"Quite," said Crofts, and still remained standing in the doorway. Brend did not look up, but he felt that the man was smiling. Crofts was very near the end of his search, Brend told himself.

"Eccentric, certainly," he went on, because he felt that he *must* go on. "Consumptive, I should think, poor beggar!"

Crofts gave a short laugh, and turned back into his room.

"No," he said, "I don't think he's consumptive."

He paced his room very softly for perhaps two hours, then Brend fell asleep.

He awoke with a start to the sound of distant cries. Crofts' room was empty, and Brend hurried down the corridor.

Beyond the mosquito-proof door, the passage still continued, but on the left there was another door, wide open, revealing a comfortably furnished bedroom, lit by a single oil lamp upheld in Crofts' hand. His back was turned, and beyond his silhouetted figure Brend caught a glimpse of Cunningham—Cunningham struck dumb with terror.

"I'm sorry," Crofts was saying, in his suavest tone, "but you'll have to come."

"Not to Keba!" babbled Cunningham. He was no longer a man, but a stricken, abject thing. "What harm can I do here—what harm?"

"I'm sorry——" Crofts began again, but got no further. Something leaped out of the shadows, something that Brend seemed to remember now as having seen huddled against the wall, uttering strange little sounds. It was the deaf-and-dumb girl. She seemed to fasten on Crofts' shoulders, tearing and biting like a panther, the very force of the impact bearing the man to his knees.

It took all Brend's strength to tear her away, and even then she struggled madly to be free, until, by a sharp command, Cunningham caused her to fall back, panting and quivering with hate.

"Very well," he said, turning on Crofts with sudden dignity. "Am I allowed to stay in my own house tonight?"

Crofts bowed and withdrew.

Out in the passage, he held a handkerchief to his throat.

"Can I do anything?" Brend asked.

He shook his head with a ghost of a smile, and, going into his room, shut both doors.

He was late in rising, and wore a neat bandage about his neck. Cunningham did not appear at breakfast; and Brend, obeying an impulse that had been with him ever since entering the bungalow, left it, and, rowing out to the *Margaret*, prepared himself a meal in her clean, homely little cabin.

The tragedy, whatever its nature, was a matter that concerned others; he had no wish to be implicated, but he could not help thinking—thinking. And

the more he thought, the deeper grew the mystery that shrouded this somber rock of the South Pacific.

About noon, Crofts hailed him from the beach, and he rowed ashore.

"We sail for Suva to-morrow morning," his employer told him. "Can you manage to strike camp and stow away alone?"

He looked tired and ill.

Brend nodded, and got to work. It was a relief to have something definite to do.

VII.

Crofts came off at sunset, and expressed his intention of sleeping aboard. But it was late before he left the bows of the cutter, where he had been sitting silent and motionless, staring along the pewter pathway that the moon had patterned on a jet-black sea; and then it was not to sleep. He took his fishing tackle into the dinghy and pushed off.

Brend found it impossible to sleep. He felt that he never would until the shadow of that dreary island was left far in the *Margaret's* wake.

Something splashed, seemingly close to the cutter. At any other time, Brend would have put it down to a leaping fish, or Crofts returning, but to-night his nerves were on edge, and he hurried on deck. A few yards from the cutter's port side, the water was disturbed. It still swirled and eddied where something had come to the surface and dived, probably a turtle.

By the very absurdity of the alarm, Brend knew that further attempts at sleep were futile, and he took his pipe from his pocket. In the distance, dimly silhouetted against the moonlit sea, he could see the dinghy, riding almost motionless, and in her a white figure, equally still. A lighted match was at the bowl of his pipe when he heard the cry—a man's startled expletive—followed by a single splash, so that he saw nothing until his eyes became again accustomed to the darkness. And then—it was the dinghy, empty, and rocking violently.

There was no time to think.

Brend dived cleanly from the bows into the lukewarm water, and swam as he had never swum before. He had no idea if Crofts could swim, but rather doubted it. He found the dinghy once more at rest, riding lightly on an even keel, and swam around it in ever-widening circles; but there was nothing to be seen on the oily surface of the sea. He trod water and shouted, but there was no answer. He dived, and continued diving, but without success. Then he clambered into the dinghy, exhausted, and tried to think.

He pictured every conceivable way in which a man could pitch overboard and drown with but one cry and a single splash. He had heard of such a thing happening, but it was hard to believe, especially in the case of Crofts. No, the other alternative was far more likely, and he felt that he must *know*. He rowed ashore, and, beaching the dinghy, walked up to the bungalow.

Cunningham, fully dressed, was sitting on the veranda. He started up at Brend's approach, and limped to the steps.

"Where is your wife?" Brend asked curtly.

"I don't know," he babbled excitedly. "She was in her room not an hour ago, and now—— Why? What has happened?"

Brend looked him steadily in the eyes and saw that he spoke the truth. Nothing less than the truth was written in the twitching muscles of Cunningham's sensitive face.

"Crofts is drowned," said Brend.

Cunning stared at him, aghast.

"No!" he breathed. His voice rose to a wail; his arms were upstretched in invocation: "Why in the name of Heaven can't they leave me alone?

What harm am I doing to a living soul? All I ask is to be left alone—*quite* alone, if need be. Why must they track me down?"

It was the voice of a hunted animal. In after years, Brend found it the most painful of all memories, this cry of a tortured soul. He steeled himself against it now.

"That is what I should like to know," he said.

Cunningham turned on him in a flash.

"Do you mean to say you *don't* know?" he demanded. "He never told you?"

"No," said Brend, "he never told me anything."

Incredulity and doubt struggled for mastery in Cunningham's face. Then he burst into raucous laughter.

"Oh, that's too good!" he railed. "You must be dense, Mr. Brend. But perhaps you have never heard of Keba?"

"Never."

"If only men knew of their good fortune!" Cunningham went on. "If they only knew! Never to have heard of Keba, when Keba, Keba—nothing but Keba has hovered before my eyes, dinned in my ears for three—or is it a hundred?—years."

He paused, then continued in a lower tone, as though communing with himself:

"They want you at Keba. They send out men to find you and take you to Keba. And in the end you'll go to Keba—whatever you do, wherever you go. They would bring you back from hell if they could—to take you to Keba."

Suddenly he turned and confronted Brend.

"You will tell them, I suppose? It is your duty."

"I have nothing to tell," said Brend. He spoke as though humoring a child. "I know nothing—except that Crofts is drowned."

"But you *will* know." Cunningham had come nearer. Brend could see his eyes blazing in the darkness. "And when you know, you will tell them?"

Brend turned his face aside, and looked out over the tiny island bathed in moonlight. It was a home, a refuge for two human souls that for some reason, of which he was still ignorant, he had it in his power to snatch from them. He looked on Cunningham's face turned to his in an agony of suspense, and gave the promise—blindly, almost involuntarily.

"No," he said, "I won't tell them, even when I know."

Cunningham stood tense, motionless.

"I take your word," he said, in a hard voice, "and I know how to repay." Then, quite suddenly, he collapsed.

The girl was at his side in a moment, and, as she knelt to lift his head, Brend saw that her hair was still wet.

He left them there, and rowed out to the cutter.

The *Margaret* was heeling over to a stiff Southeast trade, and Brend was listening to the ever-welcome music of water rippling past her sides, when remembrance came to him in a flash.

Keba, Keba, of course! He remembered a chance acquaintance showing him round Suva.

"That?" his companion had said, as they stood opposite Government House, looking seaward, to where a dark-blue patch broke the sky line. "Oh, that's Keba, the leper settlement."

The fourth story in this series, entitled "The Beetle," will appear in the POPULAR, on sale April 7th.

A Doctor to Mammon

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Sweeny Stories," Etc.

Between conscience and ambition. The temptation that came to young Doctor Loring when he was shown the skeleton in the closet of the biggest man in Wall Street

DOCTOR PHILIP LORING came out of his patient's room, his grave, serious face showing confidence, not unmixed with anxiety. He was a tall, slender man, in the early thirties, with the square chin of determination, and dreamy, brown eyes, suggesting creative ability and, perhaps, unreliability. A clever reader of people would suspect him of being erratic, and know at a glance that he had a brilliant mind.

A girl of twenty hurried toward him. When she spoke, her voice was unsteady, as with strain.

"How is father?" she questioned.

The young doctor's response was reassuring.

"He'll have to put up a good fight, but I'll pull him through. For a time, Margaret, I'll have to make your house almost my second home." He smiled away the alarm that was widening her eyes. "You see, at this stage of pneumonia, constant observation of the patient is necessary. But don't worry."

The girl searched his eyes, as if for something not brought out by his words. Then, apparently satisfied, she said confidingly:

"I know you'll save him, Philip."

Doctor Loring, flattered by her tribute to his skill, threw back his well-set shoulders and looked at her with a fondness that made him appear to be patting himself on the back. It was the expression of a gem expert who has come across a rare pearl. For Margaret Deering was an extraordinary girl, inasmuch as she had a beautiful face and form, together with intelligence. Her blue eyes, set wide apart under heavily fringed lids, were alive with expression. Her lips were exquisitely curved, and red with vitality. There was a hint of aggressiveness in her nose, but her sensitive nostrils and a dimpled, doll-like chin betokened that she was very feminine, and was on earth for the express purpose of being loved. She was slim and graceful; her feet were small and carefully shod; her hands terminated in the tapering fingers of the artist.

Loring had taken this invoice many times. Now, after he had exultantly gone over it again, he caught the girl in his arms. She yielded with a contented sigh.

"I know you'll save my father," she repeated happily, while he caressed her reddish-brown hair. "You must, for he is all I have in the world."

"Don't I count?" teased the man.

She snuggled closer and glanced at a diamond flaming on her betrothal finger.

"He's my father, Philip; and both of us must think of him a little in our new life. He's old. And we've struggled along together during the past two years, trying to fight those terrible business reverses, until we're more

than father and daughter. We're pals."

"What a very serious little person!" There was an indulgent smile on the doctor's face.

"It seems that way to me. See how I plead for his life?"

"A very foolish little person, too. Here we are, almost arguing; and there is no reason for it. There are things I do not forget, dear. One of them is that Amos Deering, robust and rich, loaned me the money for my medical education. Now I find him, broken in health and fortune. And I find his wonderful daughter, who has promised to marry me, making brave speeches for him. It is all so silly, adorable one." Notwithstanding the convincing nature of the man's words, there was an unmistakable flippancy in his tone, as if he were talking to a child. The girl seemed to feel this, for she at once freed herself, and looked into his face with interrogation in her eyes.

"Somehow," she said, "I am not sure of you. The day is coming when you will be a great man."

"Certainly it is; I feel it." This was said with the sublime confidence of genius.

"Then it won't matter so much."

"Nonsense!" He laughed.

"You will meet the most beautiful, the cleverest of girls. Then you'll forget me."

Doctor Loring studied her seriously.

"Did you sleep well last night?" This with a brusque, professional air.

"I did not sleep at all. I was so worried about father."

"You must sleep. You are highly nervous. That's why you talk to me as you do."

"But I can't sleep. It's impossible."

The physician took a case from his pocket. It contained a small, shiny cylinder and several tubes of tablets, which bore various labels. He shook a tablet into his hand from one of the tubes and placed it on the edge of a chair.

"Take it when I am gone," he ordered.

"What is it?"

"Something to induce sleep and quiet your nerves."

"But I've never taken medicine. I've always been just the least bit afraid of it. You see, I don't know what it is to be ill."

"That one little tablet won't harm you. It will only bring the sleep you need so much, and ease the tension of your nerves. Take it."

"I promise."

"Very well. Now I'll give some serious consideration to what you said about those exceptional feminine creatures after I've made my mark. My dear, I meet a fairly decent class now. Old man Pringle advertises me as the greatest doctor alive. He's a power in the business world, and he has taken a great fancy to me. I often dine at his home."

"Yes; you've told me about that."

"He's what we doctors call an alcoholic, but I've kept him from drinking for a month. That is why he swears by me."

Admiration leaped into Margaret's eyes.

"You wonderful man!" she exclaimed. "I should think you'd love that work. You'll do so much good."

"I intend to specialize in that line—alcohol and drugs. So many people seem to want to be set right in those respects these days. There's a big popular demand for a physician who can successfully handle such cases. I go from here to old man Pringle's house." He caught her in his arms again, and kissed her. "And if he should happen to have every girl he and his family ever knew lined up for inspection, not one of them could compare with you!"

"Say it again," she whispered.

He laughingly released her.

"When we have more time," he promised, "I'll say it a thousand times, and throw in some others that I'm crazy about saying. Now, I must go. As soon as I have helped old Pringle to fight John Barleycorn through another day, I shall return."

"And, in the meantime," she put in uneasily, "is father all right?"

"Yes. The nurse has her instructions. Within an hour, I'll be on watch with her. Don't worry. And be sure to sleep."

She followed him to the door, where he paused to appreciate the pretty poise of her dainty figure.

"You'll be sleeping when I return," he reminded. "Just doze away into dreamland, with absolute confidence that your father will be getting every attention while you are recuperating." He left her, and walked, with a quick, enthused step, to his snappy roadster, at the curb. The starter whirred the motor into action, and within ten minutes he was in the presence of the great Pringle.

The patient was visibly agitated. He was a chunky, coarse-grained man, with a fat face, little, greenish eyes, a hard jaw, and the mouth of a sensualist. Doctor Loring found him pacing up and down in the library.

"Waiting for you, son," clicked out the man of finance. "Get the little gun."

"My dear sir, you don't need morphia. You haven't had any since the first day——"

"I know what I need. Big thing on. Nerves shot to pieces. See that!" He held out his right hand, which was violently trembling.

"I'll give you something to stop it."

"Well, be quick about it. Saxe is down and out; you and I must do some quick and clever work, and then you're a made man. Do you get that—a made man!"

Loring gave his patient a tablet.

"Sit down," he said, "and take it. You'll be quiet within a few minutes. I'm bound to confess, though, that your meaning is not entirely clear to me."

The aged man swallowed the tablet, and sank into a deep armchair.

"You're going to get it in a minute, son. To-morrow, you'll see your name spelled big in all the papers. You're made."

The young doctor seemed bewildered. Pringle, already feeling the soothing effect of that little white pill, which science had been able to extract from coal tar, grinned shakily. "Nice little doctor!" he commended. "What did I get that time?"

"A very good substitute for a habit-forming drug. I don't believe in using the needle unless it is absolutely necessary. But you were explaining something to me——"

"Yes, yes; about my old friend, Murray Saxe. He's the man behind the gun, the power behind the throne, the biggest figure in Wall Street. Know who I mean?"

Of course Loring knew. Everybody knew the name of Murray Saxe. It was something to conjure with in the financial district. The man was said to be the most brilliant of the financiers. Great banking houses blatantly put through gigantic deals; but even the most ignorant office boy knew that Murray Saxe had provided the brains. It was a settled belief in the world of gold that, some day, Murray Saxe would step into the shoes of the advertised dominating spirit, and publicly enjoy the supremacy which was really his. In fact, this idea was so deeply rooted that columns had been written about it in the newspapers.

"I've read much about Mr. Saxe," said Doctor Loring.

"Sure you have! Well, he's upstairs"—Pringle chuckled—"all ready to fight if a brigade of street sweepers comes after him. He came in a taxi

about a half hour ago, and asked me to hide him from those fellows. Believes they are going to put him to work, and slave drive him to death. Saxe is a sick man. I've been trying to get you on the telephone ever since he came here."

"I'll go right up."

"Get him quiet, then come back. We must work together, doc, in this. Very delicate situation. When you come down, I'll tell you more." Pringle roared at the top of his voice for one Jim, who immediately appeared in the person of an English servant.

"Show the doc where Saxe is," came the order. And Doctor Loring was led out into the hallway and up the stairs. He found the Wall Street wizard in a lamentable condition, and some little time passed before the patient was stowed away in bed and in a passive state. Then Doctor Loring went downstairs, leaving the man Jim in the room as guard.

"Well?" snapped Pringle, as the physician entered the library.

"He's asleep now. But one never can tell what will happen in a case like this. Does he do it often?"

"Skeleton in the closet," grinned Pringle, "that never got its picture in the papers. Not many people know Saxe's failing. He's crafty and sly about his deviltry. Knows it would hurt him in a business way, if the public got on. It's up to you and me to keep this thing quiet."

The doctor smiled.

"The mobs in the streets will scarcely invade your home on a man hunt for Saxe," he exclaimed.

Pringle made a gesture of impatience.

"Don't be a fool!" he snarled. "The absence of Saxe from the Street must be accounted for. I shall keep him here, because something might leak out at a hospital. You and I, doc, have a little game to play. Understand?"

"I believe I do."

"Let's make sure. We give it out that Saxe has pneumonia. You take charge of him, and I'll have the papers notified. You are made! Quite clear?"

"Made?"

"Exactly. We announce that our man has been suffering from a hard cold. He was my dinner guest last night, and became ill with pneumonia. That disease, son, will look well in print, because it is the easiest thing, aside from dissatisfaction, to get in New York. Now, listen; here's the rest of it: Doctor Philip Loring, personal friend and family physician to both myself and Saxe, was called in, and is now in charge. Saxe in a bad way. Can't see anybody. Daily bulletins. Great Scott, man, you'll jump, overnight, to rank with the biggest doctors in New York, because of the company you keep! Don't you call that being made?"

The young man listened attentively until Pringle had finished, then he paled as the possibilities of the situation suddenly came to him. He would loom big in the public eye, owing to his intimate association with men of great affairs. The confidence imposed in him by those who were financially able to command the most highly skilled medical services; the selection of him by men who were considered wise enough to choose the best, would have tremendous weight with the public. The necessity of accounting for Saxe's absence from business, through the press, would advertise the young doctor as few men of his profession are advertised. Almost any young practitioner would barter his very soul for such an opportunity. Doctor Loring sat as one in a dream until the sharp voice of Pringle awakened him.

"I'll have a room fixed for you. This will be your home for a while."

Loring started. The words brought him to his senses. There was a thing called Duty.

"Mr. Pringle," he said; and it was the professional, manly Doctor Loring who spoke, "I cannot take this case. For the moment, I forgot that I have a patient who really has pneumonia. He is in a critical condition, and may not live if he is neglected. I cannot take this case."

Pringle bounded to his feet.

"You must look out for Saxe. You must! Hear what I say? Send another doctor to your man."

"Impossible!"

"You must. There is too much at stake. I know from experience that you thoroughly understand alcoholism. I've had dozens of doctors, son, and you are the only one who knew enough to tackle the thing right. Saxe can't be risked with any one else. He's got to have a doctor who can absolutely deliver the goods. You take this case!"

"I can't do it; my conscience won't let me. I——"

"Bosh!" yelled Pringle. He began to walk back and forth before Loring, taking small, excited steps. "Let me tell you something. If Saxe should die, the whole list of securities would be affected. He's engineering that tremendous Consolidated Railways merger, for one thing. I'm in it with him. In it up to my neck. I would lose—a million, anyway! You've got to save him!"

"You wouldn't ask me to let my patient die?"

"Get him another doctor. Any doctor can handle pneumonia, but it takes a genius to coax back into shape a rum-poisoned old system like old Saxe's. You've got a special gift for understanding a case like his, and doing the right thing at the right time. Call another doctor on the telephone." Pringle's eyes narrowed. For a moment he studied the face of the young man before him with the piercing, analyzing look that had uncovered many vulnerable points in men with whom he had dealt. Then he began a purring play to his listener's imagination which lasted for fully a quarter of an hour. He dwelt upon the easy and quite legitimate way out of responsibility to the other patient—the substitute doctor. Following this, he pictured Loring's wonderful future, if he chose the Saxe case. He mentioned the bulletins to be issued day by day, signed "Loring, M. D." Reporters would camp about the place in a death watch, and there would be stated hours during which a few of them would be admitted to the house for a confab with the eminent practitioner in charge. They would demand his photograph, and it would be published through all the land. Cunningly Pringle lured his man, using his deep knowledge of human nature, his crafty eloquence, his dominating personality, and his ability to handle people, until he drew from his victim the words:

"I'll stay!"

Pringle smiled. He sat down abruptly.

"Now you're showing sense," he commented. Doctor Loring's eyes were fixed on him as if he were an object of awe and dread. Deep lines began to show about the physician's mouth; the color gradually left his lips. His head sagged forward between his shoulders as he went to the telephone and called the office of another doctor. A woman's voice responded. She took down a request that Amos Deering be visited and given the required attention.

Two hours later, a mob of reporters charged the Pringle home, demanding to know whether Saxe were going to live or to die. Doctor Loring received them, his face flushed with his own sudden importance. He told the young men, in confusing medical terms, that his patient was ill with pneumonia, and that the outcome could not be predicted with certainty. When the rush was over, old Pringle gripped the doctor's hand.

"Fine, son!" he congratulated. "You're a born actor, all right. There isn't a man Jack in that crowd that will even guess at the real state of affairs. They're a clever lot, too. How is Saxe doing?"

"I don't look for any trouble. That man has a wonderful constitution. I'll keep him asleep for a while, and feed him up well. He'll come out of this all right. In the meantime, we'll get night and day nurses, because he must be watched constantly."

"Go the limit!" ordered Pringle. "Get a whole hospital, if you think it will come in handy. Nothing's too good for Saxe. Nobody round here even knows how to spell 'expense.' Pull him through, son. That's all."

Doctor Loring sent for the nurses, and then retired to his patient's room. He seated himself, and gazed unseeingly at the sick man, his chin resting in his palms. Once he started up, resolve written on his face. He would telephone to Margaret, and explain. But he sank back again. He had broken his promise to her, and he could not bring himself to listen to the hurt that he knew would sound in her voice. Something within him accused with accursed persistence. He tried to justify himself. In deserting Margaret, was he not acting for her future welfare? Was he not making a name in which she would rejoice? Soon it would be hers. She would be far happier as the wife of a celebrity than the wife of an unknown. However, the accusations persisted. He was glad when the two nurses came. They brought his mind back to the work at hand. One of them smiled grimly when he explained the nature of the case. The other giggled.

Afterward, came days of newspaper publicity, of bulletins signed "Loring, M. D.," of interviews, of photographers besieging this young physician to Mammon, to pose. There was scarcely a minute when the man was not in the limelight. The leaders of the financial world called; and old Pringle cunningly permitted the person who, through him, had become overnight a personage, to do the talking. Doctor Loring, with his accouterment of medical phraseology, was a much more convincing liar than Pringle, who had but a common-school education, and, therefore, could not befuddle alert minds with anatomical verbiage. During the first week, Loring succeeded in making deep impressions on more than one man of wealth, position, and importance. More than that, the newspapers had advertised him to the populace and the thousand and one obscure millionaires of Manhattan and its suburbs. Doctor Loring was Some One. He was made. Also, he was miserably unhappy.

Toward the end of the week, he summoned up enough courage to telephone to the Deering home. There was no answer to his call. Thereupon, he rang a number of times, always with the same result. This puzzled and worried him. At length, he concluded that Amos Deering was very ill, and that the telephone service had been suspended, so that the buzzing of the bell would not disturb him. This reasoning seemed sound, because Doctor Loring wished it so. He did not like to reckon with the idea that telephone service is a very handy thing in a household where a man lies ill.

There followed, then, days when hopeful bulletins were issued from the Pringle home. Doctor Loring was much petted and congratulated by the mighty ones of the land. Men told him to his face that he knew his business. They intimated that whenever they needed the services of a physician, they meant to call in the man who was so cleverly pulling Saxe out of a bad hole. This sort of talk flattered and cheered. Doctor Loring began to contemplate his future more than the situation

which had arisen between him and Margaret. And on the day he shipped Saxe home, he was as big-chested and satisfied as a playwright who has just scored a success.

However, once the tension was relaxed, he gave himself over to a period of deploring his desertion of Margaret Deering and her father. At the end of it, he drove his car to his former patient's home, determined to submit himself to the girl's scorn, if only he could reëstablish himself in her good graces. In his new egotism, he reasoned that there would be a scorching half hour, then reconciliation. A girl who loves, forgives much.

The door of the Deering home was opened by an old woman. She had been scrubbing an empty house. Quite without emotion, she informed the caller that Amos Deering had been dead for some time. Neighboring servants had told her so. The furniture had all been removed.

Cold with shock and trembling with apprehension, he drove to the nearest telephone pay station and called the doctor to whom he had given the case. The information he received was brief and to the point.

"I had to discharge that office girl of mine," complained the doctor. "She made so many mistakes. I never received any message from you, Doctor Loring. I am sorry."

II.

Doctor Philip Loring was in his library at nine o'clock one evening, translating a sheaf of scrawled notes into a readable paper. The library opened into his modern and costly office suite, which contained a consultation room equipped with much sanitary glass and porcelain paraphernalia calculated to impress the lay mind. During the two years which had passed since his spectacular attendance upon Murray Saxe, he had become highly successful. He was constantly in demand by the rich, the influential, the powerful of Manhattan's social fabric. And not a little of his success was due to his willingness to furnish soothing drugs to men and women of prominence, who should have been in institutions which specialize in treating the drug habit.

As he was beginning a new page, a tall, coldly beautiful woman entered. There was a smile of disdain twitching at her mouth. Doctor Loring looked up. Then he scowled.

"Well?" he sharply questioned.

The woman laughed.

"I am planning a vacation," she said. "I think I shall take our little boy and go to California."

"Any particular reason?"

"A very good one: Our home is not a good environment for a child."

Doctor Loring scowled again. His wife went on:

"Neither is it good for me. My emotions alternate between pity and contempt."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am going to California for an indefinite stay. If I should learn that you are carrying on a legitimate practice, I shall return. But I cannot longer remain under a roof which daily shelters those pitiable wrecks of men and women—that Drug Line, I might say. How I pity those poor people! You could cure them, if you would. But because they are rich, you encourage them in their wretchedness. You supply them with the drugs that have enslaved them; and you send them enormous bills. No decent person can feel anything but contempt for you. Some day the law will——"

The physician's face went hard.

"That is enough," he interrupted. "Go to California—go anywhere. But stay out of my part of the house when you are in a mood to talk about things

which you don't understand. My practice is thoroughly legitimate."

Mrs. Loring's lip curled scornfully.

"Your practice——"

"Enough, I said! I am now writing an article for a medical magazine. The editor asked me for it because I am an authority on drugs. I have discovered a highly successful treatment for drug victims. You know that. I give much of my time to superintending the administration of it in the best-known hospital here. You know that."

Mrs. Loring thoughtfully gazed at him for a moment. Then she abruptly left. The doctor resumed his seat, and, apparently unruffled by his wife's visit, went on with his writing. He drove his pen across the paper for perhaps ten minutes, when a servant entered and announced a visitor.

"A lady to see you, sir."

"Tell her to come in."

Through the door came a young woman. She wore a big, floppy hat that had seen much wear. Her clothes, while fashionably cut, were of cheap material. The heels of her shoes needed straightening. She advanced across the big room, which was illuminated only by a green-shaded desk light, until she was directly in front of the doctor. He turned the shade so that the light flashed full in her face. Then he leaped to his feet.

"Margaret!" he exclaimed. His features contorted in horror. She noted the expression, and smiled faintly.

"You doctors can always tell, can't you?"

"Margaret!" again he pronounced the name. But this time he stammered.

"Am I such an exception?" she queried. "Don't you see people like me every day?"

"But—but——" Doctor Loring's self-possession had left him. With his left hand, he groped for a chair arm, and, when he found it, he sank down.

"Please take that chair," he told the girl, indicating one near him.

"You're looking fit and prosperous," she said carelessly, as she seated herself. "I wish I had your health."

The man was trying to pull himself together, but the horror still lingered in his eyes. They were fixed on Margaret's countenance. It was not a bad face, as faces go. There was still much beauty in it; and the old-time intelligence had not died out. In fact, Margaret Deering was a woman who would attract attention anywhere because of her face and figure. But the specialist had, at a glance, detected the characteristics of the morphine addict. Any doctor could have done that.

"Where—have you been—all these years?" he managed to ask.

"On the stage. They took me because I made a good appearance. I'm the littlest show girl on Broadway. My stage name is Lucille Dupree. Isn't that ridiculous!"

"But why——"

"Oh, that's quite a little story, Philip. You see, I knew a doctor once, whom I considered a very fine fellow. In fact, we had made up our minds to marry." Margaret leaned back and lazily regarded Doctor Loring with eyes half veiled by drooping lids. Her attitude was catlike, as if she possessed some crushing power which in due time she would use. The man stared at her, the horror in his eyes giving way to something that was very much like fascination. He attempted to speak, but she anticipated him.

"It's an unusual story, I think," she continued. "You see, this doctor was attending my father during a critical illness. He gave me his promise that he would stand by me and my father. And then he went away to attend a tremendously wealthy man, and never came back. I read a great deal in the newspapers about him. His association with men of big affairs started him

off on a wonderful career. The day he began his career, he started me off on one. He gave me a morphine tablet." Margaret ceased speaking, and her eyes wandered about the luxuriously furnished room. Doctor Loring suddenly clapped a hand across his eyes, as if to shut out a terrible vision.

"Good Heaven!" he gasped. "Am I to blame for—for—you?"

"The drug," she went on, "sent me off into a sleep which lasted about eight hours. When I awoke, I didn't feel so nervous. The nurse came into my room and said that she didn't like the way things were going with father. I told her that everything was all right—that the doctor would soon be with us. When she told me what time it was, I convinced her that the doctor must have been unavoidably detained. She went away, and I dozed again.

"Later, she came back, very much alarmed. I dressed then, and went in to see father."

Loring slouched farther into his chair.

"I telephoned to another doctor," he mumbled defensively. "I told him to attend your father."

"No one came," calmly said Margaret. "The nurse and I waited for you all night. My faith in you was supreme. I loved you, and nothing could convince me that you would not come. I was a fool. The nurse was a fool, too. A thoroughly competent nurse would have overridden me. She would have taken things into her own hands. But my nurse didn't. She sat up with me, waiting. Now and then she would look at father and tell me that he was growing worse. In the morning, we called in another doctor, but it was too late."

Loring mumbled again.

"I knew nothing of all that. I did what I thought was proper, in view of the circumstances."

She ignored this.

"The newspapers told me why you hadn't come. You sacrificed father for a career." She sat more erect, and her eyes opened wider.

"It is in my heart, now, to denounce you," she said, with some spirit. "But I shall not do so. There is something you can do for me, if you will."

"Anything!" the man cried, straightening up.

"But first let me tell you the rest of the story. You knew how father's affairs were involved? If he had lived, he might have saved much out of what was once a neat little fortune. But when he died, everything collapsed. I found myself with a great deal of furniture and an income that was quite insufficient. It was scarcely enough to buy drugs——"

"But that one tablet didn't give you the habit. You didn't even know what it was!"

"The nurse guessed. She took pity on me, and stayed several days just to keep me company. I think I was not in my right mind for a long time after your desertion of me and father's death. The nurse gave me little tablets to quiet me. They were the same as the one you ordered me to take. I grew to depend upon them. Then I discovered a place where I could buy them, and in time I became a slave to them."

Margaret took a five-dollar note from her purse and placed it on the doctor's desk.

"Give me that much worth of—of what I need."

The man hesitated. The horror came back into his eyes.

"It's this way," the girl explained. "The laws have become so strict and the newspapers are doing so much talking about drugs, that it is almost impossible to buy them any more. The man who ran the place where I used to get what I needed was arrested a few days ago. You are in a position to

help me, and I hope you will be kind enough to do it."

"I could cure you," said Loring. "I would like to do it——"

She interrupted him with a harsh laugh.

"I don't want you to cure me. I want the thing that is necessary to my existence. You know very well the torture I shall endure if I am deprived of it. Please give it to me. There is nothing else you can do for me."

He sat for a moment in silence, apparently considering the matter. Then he suddenly arose, passed through the door leading to his offices, and returned with a large jar of the drug. Taking a long envelope from a drawer in his desk, he filled it to the bulging point. After sealing it, he gave it to Margaret.

"I know," he said. "Take your money. I can't bring myself to profit by your misfortune."

"I cannot accept charity," she told him, arising. "However, I thank you for what you have done." She moved toward the door.

"Come back when you need more," said Loring.

"You are very kind." She went out, and the doctor flung himself into his chair, and his head went forward on the desk in his arms. Almost immediately he sprang up to face three men who were rapidly approaching him. One of them ran forward and caught up the five-dollar note which Margaret had left.

"It's marked, doc," he said. Margaret stood in the doorway, swaying unsteadily.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Doctor Loring.

The men laughed. Two of them came close to him, one on each side.

"It means," explained the man who had taken the money, "that you are caught with the goods. You sold morphine to the lady back there." He produced the envelope, and held it up with the five-dollar note. "This is the evidence, doc. And the little lady will testify that she asked you for the stuff because she had the habit, and that you gave it to her. Get your hat, and come along!"

Doctor Loring stared into the faces about him.

"Am I under arrest?" he inquired.

"That's the situation," admitted the spokesman of the three. "And if I am a good guesser, the law will hand you something to think about. We've been trying to get you for a month. You see, some of those full-dress Johnnies from the silk-stocking belt have been telling their show-girl friends about you. You're famous, doc. The little lady who helped us to pull this off came along so willingly that we accused her of having a reason. She told us her little story."

"Philip," Margaret broke in, "a long time ago you destroyed every shred of respect, every kindly emotion I ever felt for you. You killed my father, and you gave me what has almost wrecked me. As I see you, you are a human monster, who should be prevented from ruining other lives."

The doctor said nothing. One of the men snapped a handcuff on his wrist and its mate on his own. The spokesman addressed Margaret:

"Tell him the rest of it."

"Very well." Margaret's voice was strong now. "A very fine man, whom I recently met, has persuaded me to undergo your treatment. I made the arrangements this afternoon, and tomorrow I shall enter the hospital. When I am myself again—and a very competent doctor has told me that the result in my case is certain—this man and I are to be married."

"That's enough," broke in the spokesman. The man to whom the doctor was handcuffed, moved.

"Come along, doc!" he said.

A Chat With You

TWO weeks ago we said that we would have something interesting to announce in this number. It is a new long story by Bertrand W. Sinclair—the biggest and best thing he has done since "North of Fifty-three," and by many good judges who have read it in manuscript and proof pronounced to be even better. It is called "The Way of the North." It is a longer story than "North of Fifty-three," and its sequel, "The Rest of the Story," put together. It will appear in four big parts in THE POPULAR. The first part will appear in the next issue. In a little over six weeks from its first appearance, you will have read the whole story.

WE suppose we have already said enough to interest you thoroughly and make you want the next number of the magazine. That, however, is not the purpose of these talks. We are fairly sure that you are going to want the next issue, anyway. An experience of a decade or so has taught us that more and more people want the next issue from time to time. We dare say that we might be much better self-advertisers than we are, and that these "chats" might be turned into a perfectly wonderful advertising medium for the magazine. In fact, we have been told so. But that isn't what they are for. These pages are just for a talk about things that interest us all. We take them up as they come to us, and let the magazine act as its own advertisement. We don't talk about any story unless we feel like it. We do feel like saying something more about "The Way of the North."

GIVEN the ability to tell a story and the experience from which to draw the tale, what makes an author good or otherwise is his mental and spiritual personality, his attitude toward right and wrong, his notions of what things are admirable in human character and what the reverse. If there is one thing in the world that Sinclair has a good eye for, it is strong, rugged manhood. You saw that in Roaring Bill, and you will see it still more plainly in Fyfe, the big, dominating character in "The Way of the North." To tell the difference between a real man and a good-looking imitation is not the easiest thing in the world. Sinclair shows you the difference in Fyfe and Monohan. So many people, when they try to create a heroic figure in fiction, picture forth a man who has lost all semblance to humanity. A man who talks stiltedly, who seems to pose his way in attitudes through the book, a man who would be an insufferable snob if we met him in actual life—this man appears again and again in the pages of manuscripts that are submitted to us. We have grown to know him better than you, for we hope his matinée-idol face seldom smirks at you from the pages of the magazine—and we are sorry to say we have grown to hate him. Everybody has faults and everybody has virtues. The good man is the man with the major virtues and the minor faults, and our really favorite type is the man who has a lot of sterling qualities and thinks about them and himself so little that he disguises rather than exhibits his good points, and that we have to know him well to find out his true worth.

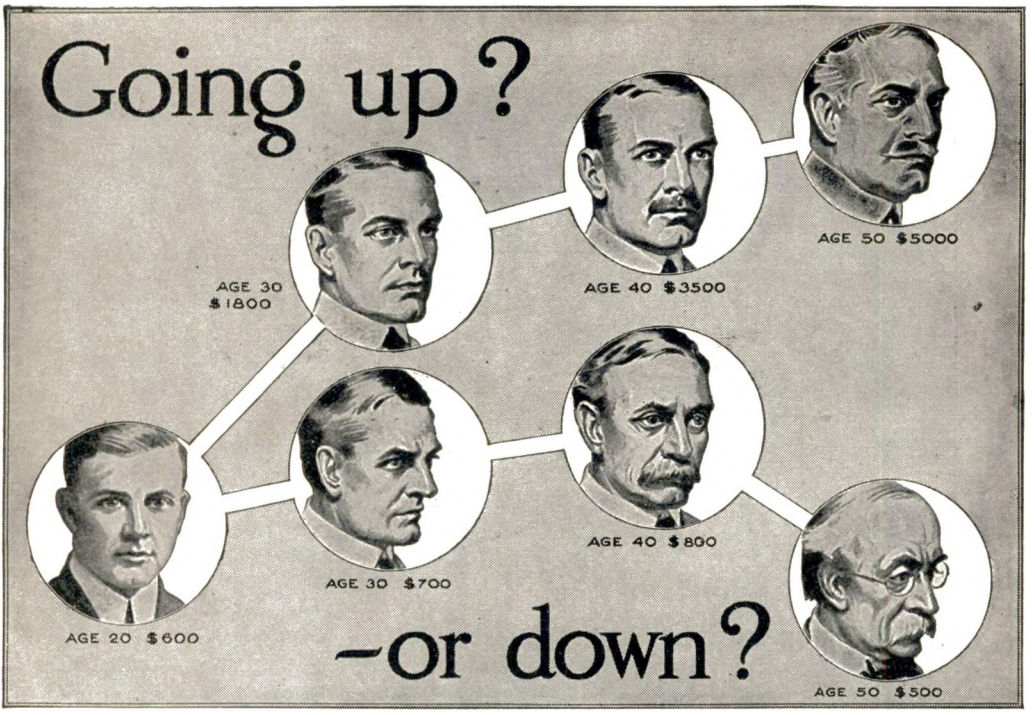
JACK FYFE, in this novel of Sinclair's, it is a true specimen of that type. He is not a kid-glove hero. He has no idea of being a hero at all, but is a great deal more interested in the things he is trying to do. The story is something of a novelty for THE POPULAR in that you first see the principal figure through the eyes of a woman; that it is a story of a woman as much as of a man; and that the love affair, which stands out, here and there, from the incidents of business and adventure, is unlike anything you have ever read in this magazine. The girl goes to a lumber camp to live with her brother. She has been luxuriously bred, and knows nothing of the woods or of the men in the camps. In fact, she has a lot of false ideas of men generally. Her brother turns her into a sort of a drudge, cooking for a whole camp of lumberjacks who are working at top speed. The life is killing her. She is in a sort of slavery, and her only escape is by way of marriage to a man for whom she has no feeling of love and whom she knows but little. She is attracted to him in an odd sort of way, but that is all.

Sinclair's lumbermen are real people. They are not monstrous brutes, as writers who have never seen the people of the outdoors love to picture them. Nor are they sentimentalized out of their rough humanity. It is a great story. You will find that out for yourself. All this is not to convince you that it is good, but just to give you beforehand some idea of what it is like.

DID you ever try to run a gas engine —marine or otherwise? Just read "Some Correspondence About a Gasoline Motor," by David Henry Day, in the next issue of the magazine. It is sure to strike a responsive chord in your heart, for the best mechanics in the world have their troubles now and then, and all engines seem to get streaks of downright perversity at times. You will probably find that the man who writes the letters knows less about the engine than you do—but that doesn't spoil it at all. It is short, but it is funny.

SOMETIMES, in other pages of THE POPULAR, we try to give you an idea of the great, untapped, natural resources of the United States, only waiting for the men to develop them. The fact that there are still lots of open range in the way of opportunity and natural resources is one of the best points about being an American. Even if a man just reads about them and still sticks close to his desk or farm or factory—as most of us do—it is a good sort of background to have in one's mind. It generates a little more independence, and, in moments of discouragement or temporary failure, it illuminates with a ray of sunshine one way out of the prison walls of circumstances. The novel that opens the next issue of the magazine is the description of an attempt to unearth some of the untouched natural wealth of Florida. It is a splendid mystery story, as well. It was written by George C. Shedd, who wrote "The Princess of Forge" and other novels. These are three good reasons for reading it, and there are others.

THE final and most thrilling installment of Stacpoole's "The Gold Trail," an animal story by Ernest Thompson Seton, a South Sea story by Ralph Stock, the other half of Paine's two-part mystery story, a moving-picture story by Ullman, and a sea story by James J. Walsh, are a few of the things in the next issue that go to explain why THE POPULAR *is* popular.



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Telephone Expert	ILLUSTRATOR
MECHANICAL ENGINEER	DESIGNER
Mechanical Draftsman	BOOKKEEPER
Machine Shop Practice	Stenographer and Typist
Gas Engineer	Cert. Public Accountant
CIVIL ENGINEER	Railway Accountant
Surveying and Mapping	Commercial Law
MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	GOOD ENGLISH
Metallurgist or Prospector	Teacher
STATIONARY ENGINEER	Common School Subjects
Marine Engineer	CIVIL SERVICE
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Contractor and Builder	AGRICULTURE
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FIELD-TRAP AND TARGET

THE PILOTS OF THE FOREST.

START the average New Yorker at Union Square with instructions to meet you at Broadway and Forty-second Street and, sans accident, he will reach the rendezvous easily. Locate that same individual in the heart of a forest—or the Sahara Desert, for that matter—tell him to travel due south, and dollars to doughnuts an hour after you will find him traveling about in circles, with no idea of direction. All of which leads to a thought relative to the skill of the old guide and his ability to ferret out the unknown trails and read the hidden book of nature.

To us— as a cliff dweller in a modern ten-story uptown apartment— there has always been something wonderful and mysterious in this almost uncanny intelligence.

We have tramped all day at the side of our trusty guide through many of the hidden highways and byways of the densest forests. We have gone trustingly on, with no sun or wind to guide our footsteps, and not an inkling of a trail, and yet we have reached our destination safely on time and with not an atom of confusion.

We have listened with rapt admiration to our guide's explanation of almost invisible footprints of various animals whose paths crossed our trail. Their direction, age, and a hundred and one other little details not given the city-trained brain to understand were all an open book to him.

One instance looms up distinctly in our mind— and it's a thing which even to this day is somewhat baffling.

We had been outside of civilization for several days. There had been no rain for weeks. The leaves on the trees hung in almost deathlike stillness. The grass was seared and yellow. The air was laden with the stifling heat of a sultry midday sun. It was too warm to travel—too warm, in fact, to cast a fly—and so, with packs unstrapped and guns beside us in the grass, we lazed away the afternoon.

We were quietly watching the lazy flight of a hawk in the sky, when old Pete, the guide, brought us suddenly back to earth with a remark that "it was goin' to rain."

There was nothing to our unpracticed eye that would denote the fact, and so we questioned the veracity of the statement.

"Pete, old boy, where did you get that dope?" we asked?

"Easy," he remarked, stretching luxuriously. "See those leaves on yonder tree? See how they sort o' turn their backs to the sky? They say just as plain as day that it's goin' to rain. See the way that duck lets the water trickle down from her bill over her back, and hear the chirp of the tree toad and the croak of the frogs? They all say rain. Hear the birds in the trees, and that sort of soft moaning up among the branches? And did you notice the way that hawk just flew over the treetops? Why, man, everything around us just naturally says rain. We'll get it before morning, so I reckon we'd better start now to fix up for it."

And, sure enough, with the dawn came the refreshing sound of raindrops.

Offhand these and many other things may not seem so extraordinary to the average reader. You may lay it to familiarity with condition and environment. You may find its answer in many devious theories, but to us as we muse over them in the nar-

row confines of our editorial office they bring back the thought that knowledge is not all gained from books.

Incidentally, just about now, when the sun seems to be growing a little stronger, and there is just a wee touch o' the spring in the air, we are sort o' hankering to hit the old trail again.

THE DOUBLE KILL.

ONCE in a while there comes to our hands a photo that is of exceeding interest to the lovers of the shotgun. The picture reproduced here fulfills that mission. Mr. George High, the man who is responsible for its origin, writes that only after great difficulty was he able to secure it, and it is our impression that the same is one of the best exhibits of its kind that we have seen.

TRAPSHOOTING A SAFE SPORT.

WHATEVER else may be said of trapshooting, it must be admitted that the sport is thoroughly clean. In fact, it stands in a class by itself when viewed from this standpoint, and this is said with no desire to deprecate any other pastime.

The average gun club fairly teems with the spirit of true democracy. It holds no clans or cliques, and favoritism is a word unknown. Only the man's individual score is a record of his prowess, and Bill Jones, the plumber, stands on the same platform with J. Bentley Robinson, banker.

Furthermore, trapshooting is a safe sport. Some enterprising chap with a fondness for figures has compiled the death statistics resulting from various sports for the last decade, and has shown, much to the surprise of many, that nearly one thousand people have died from injuries or overexertions in the various pastimes during that period.

To be exact, nine hundred and forty-three have crossed over the Great Divide in all lines of sport, yet not one of these deaths can be traced to trapshooting, notwithstanding the popular fear in the hearts of many as to the danger of handling a gun.

On the other hand, baseball is shown to be an even more dangerous sport than football. This hardly seems possible, yet the figures show that 284 deaths are chargeable to baseball during the last ten years. 215 died from football injuries or after effects. Automobile racing gathered in 128 victims, boxing 105, cycling 77, horse racing 54, wrestling 15, and basketball 14. The remainder is made up of deaths chargeable to hockey, tennis, golf, bowling, Marathon running, and other minor sports.

This safe sport ought to be encouraged, particularly in the high schools of America. Many of the high schools have rifle clubs, and the teams show high degrees of efficiency in target practice.

When the last pin rocks and sways,
Hesitates for a breathless second
And falls with slow reluctance—
You turn with kindling eye
From *that* "lucky strike"
To your waiting pipe—aglow with
The cheery, hearty fellowship of

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