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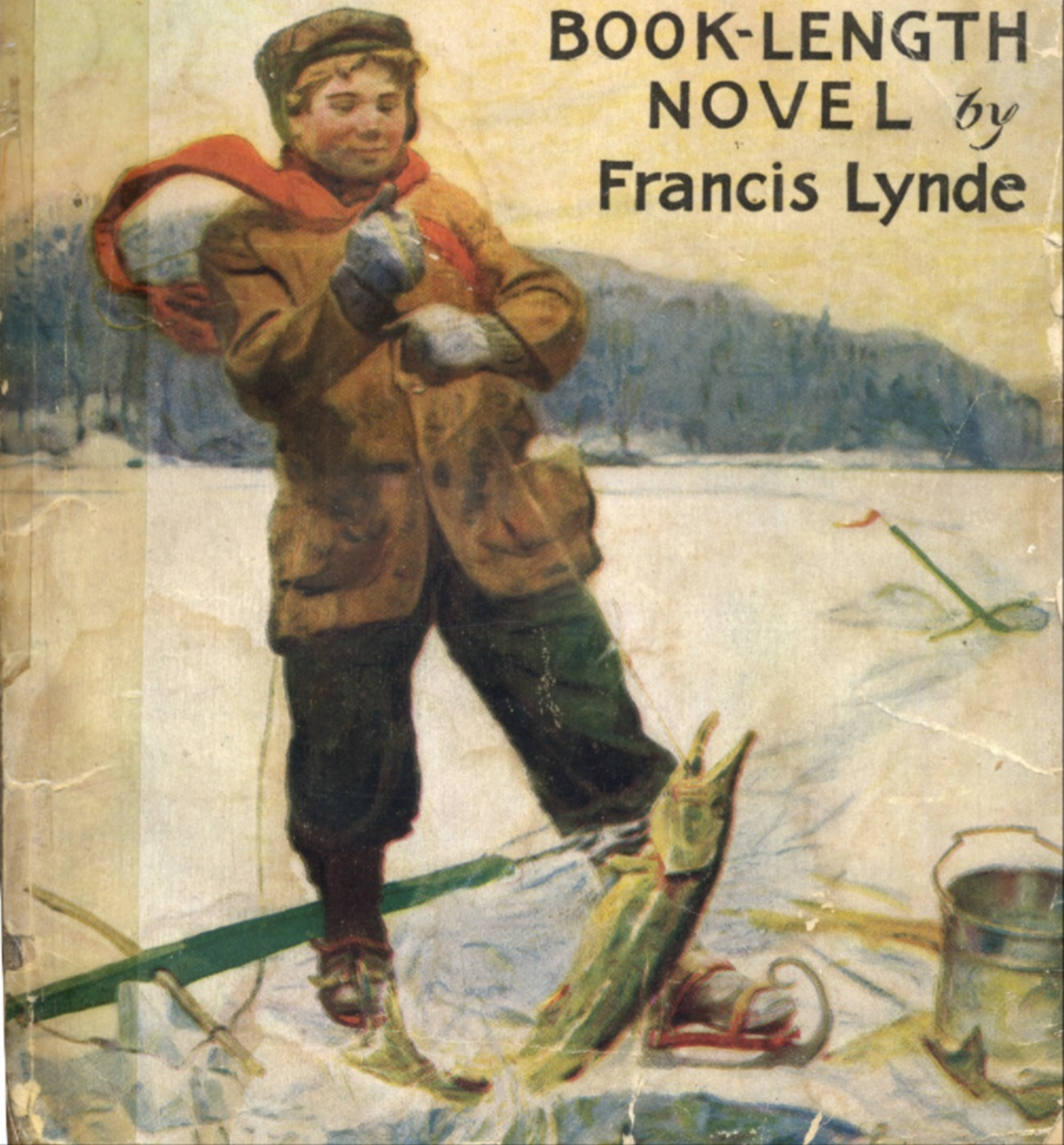
The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED FEB. 23, 1915

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL by Francis Lynde



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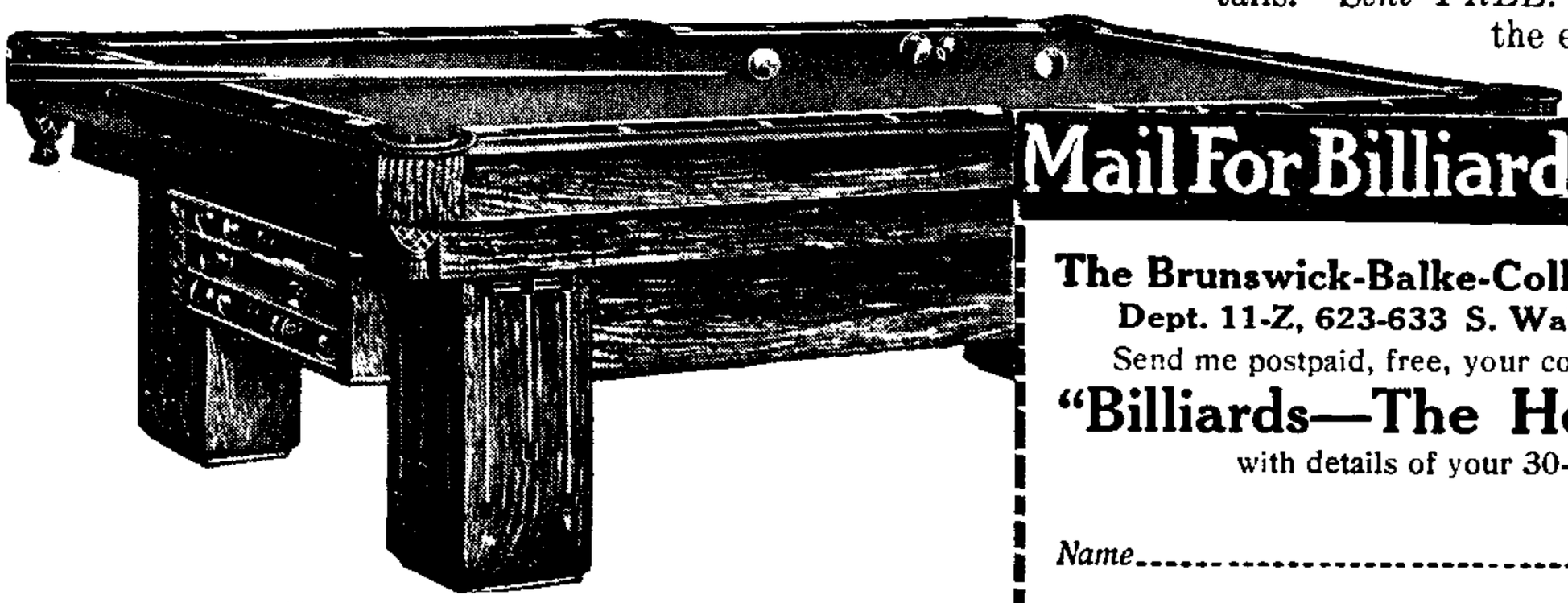

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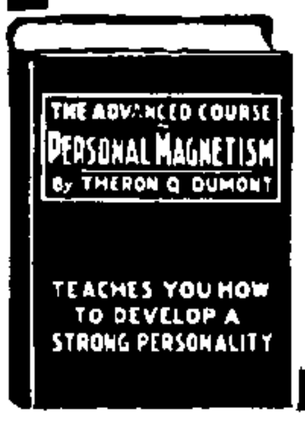

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VOLUME XXXV NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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FEBRUARY 23, 1915

Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH and GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors. Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $3.72. Foreign, $4.44.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXV. FEBRUARY 23, 1915. No. 5.

Dead Man's Chance

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "The Fight for the G. V. & P.," Etc.

The world has little use for a dead man; and by all accounts the man in this story had been dead for two years. Nevertheless he comes back, but the difficulties of beginning all over again are almost unsurmountable. Luckily there comes to his assistance Sprague—"Scientific" Sprague, whom you have met in other stories by Lynde. He is the Government chemist whose hobby is the detection of crime. Reasoning of the high-grade kind is the key he applies to the unlocking of mysteries

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE BIG GAP.

SOMEWHERE in an old book that I read when I was a boy there was a story of a man who died and came to life again merely to spite a lot of relatives who were sitting around waiting to get a hack at the bunch of money he had assembled. Taking it up one side and down the other, I believe I have that man pushed so far off the map that he could never find his way back. Let's see if I can prove it.

In the first place, my name is, or was on the other side of the big gap, Jimmie Shurtleff. I was brought up —"raised," as we say in Missouri—by two uncles; one who was always spoken of in my hearing as a sort of broken-down mining speculator in the Colorado gold camps, and the other—who did the principal part of the "raising" —a fairly prosperous Missouri farmer.

If Uncle Silas gave me the warm end of it, making me work pretty hard on the farm for what schooling I got, and giving his son, my cousin Monty, a good bit better show, I had no kick coming. My father had left no property, and I guess I was a sort of "poor relation," anyhow. Let that go. I grew up like other boys, got what a small-town school could give me, and was about to drift into farming for a life job when Uncle Perkins, the mining speculator, wrote a letter from some place down in Mexico and came across with a check big enough to give me four years in an engineering school.

Where Uncle Perkins got so much money all at one time was a mystery to everybody in the Missouri farm

town, but that doesn't matter. Uncle Silas grumbled a little about losing my help just as I had grown big enough to do a man's work in the field, but he gave me the money and let me go; and, a year or so later, not to let the family get lopsided in the matter of education, sent his son Monty to—Yale, I think it was.

That's enough of the family history. In due course of time I got my college sheepskin, found a job toting a transit and making field notes on a railroad survey in Montana, knocked about on various and sundry engineering projects all over the Western country, and finally brought up, just after I had turned twenty-five, as assistant engineer on the G. V. & P. while that road was an independent line under the Cavanaugh management. My headquarters were in Green Butte, and that is where I met Mabel Carothers.

If you had known Mabel about that time, you'd guess what happened and do it with both eyes shut. I thought she was just about the prettiest thing that ever came down the big road, and she was; slate-blue eyes, hair like a golden aureole when she had it fluffed out, a mouth that a man couldn't dare to look at for more than a half second at a time, and a figure that had all the old Greek maidens backed off into space.

By the end of the first month she was letting me buy seats for two to all the good shows that came to Green Butte, and by the middle of the summer we were beginning to take Sunday evening walks past a neat little cottage in the Green Butte suburb where most of the young married couples bought or built. Then came the thing that dug the big gap.

I have said that I was assistant engineer on the G. V. & P. Milligan was my chief, and he was the man who, meaning to give me a lift, put me in charge of the construction on a new track-shortening proposition in the Juniper Hills, away down at the lower end of the line.

It was a good job and a boost. It gave me a step up, the salary was a raise, and, since the mails ran regularly, I could chuck the daily letter into the postal car for Mabel. Besides, the Junipers are only a couple of hundred miles from Green Butte, and once in a while I could, and did, give myself a week-end to run up to town and walk Mabel out to the cottage in the suburb.

Just the same, there was a small fly in my pat of butter. About a month before I got the boost, my cousin, Monty Gershom, had turned up in the Butte. Uncle Silas had spent a good bit of money on him, and was still spending it, I inferred, since Monty opened up a real-estate office in town, furnished it regardless, and bought him a motor car.

Naturally, since he was my cousin, about the first girl he met in the new town was Mabel. They went chummy right from the jump; just a thin little shaving too chummy, I used to think sometimes—and after thinking it I'd go off and kick myself for being a narrow-minded ass. For by this time, you see, Mabel was wearing my ring, and that usually settles it—or ought to settle it—with any girl worth worrying about.

It was one of the week-end trips that blew my little candle out. For the sake of getting a full night in the sleeper I was in the habit of leaving the job in the Jawbone Narrows at six o'clock on the Saturday evening, and riding down to Copah on one of the construction engines. This gave me about eighty miles more ride than I needed to take, but it also gave me the sleeper at nine o'clock, where otherwise I should have had to go to Grass Valley and catch it after midnight.

On the evening in question one of my construction engines, with Mickey Donovan at the throttle, shot me down

to Copah—our junction with the Pacific Southwestern—and I had a bath, a shave, and got my supper in the station dining room. At eight-fifty the P. S-W. flyer came in from the east, bringing the Green Butte sleeper; and I shall remember the name of that car, the *Katinka,* as long as I live.

Our G. V. & P. northbound was ready to pull out as soon as the through sleeper should be coupled on, and I went down the platform to be ready to climb on and go to bed. While I was waiting for the car to be shoved up, I heard McCormack, the P. S-W. yardmaster, telling a couple of his men that there was an excursion train following the "flyer," and that it was to go north on the G. V. as second section of our train. A little later, as we were pulling out across the Pannikin Bridge, I saw the headlight of this special coming down the cañon and heard the engineer whistle for the Copah stop.

Having had my supper and a smoke, I didn't sit up very long. My berth was a middle lower, and the car was only about half filled. The passengers were all men; at least, I didn't see any women or children. While I was sitting half in and half out of my berth to undress, the fellow who had the opposite lower was also getting ready to turn in. I remarked him particularly because he was doing the same stunt that I was doing—stowing his clothes, as he took them off, in the unoccupied upper berth.

I didn't notice much else about this opposite of mine except that when we stood up together in the aisle I saw that he was about my height and build and that the clothes he was tucking away in the upper berth were a sort of rusty brown—a color I have always detested since my boyhood days when Uncle Silas used to make me wear brown jeans on the farm.

These were merely passing impressions, and I am jotting them down to show that up to the turning-in time my brain was working all right, and things were recording themselves with perfect clearness. From noting the brown-clothes man to crawling under the blankets and turning off the berth light didn't kill more than a couple of minutes, I should say, and I fell asleep about as soon as my head hit the pillow.

The next thing I remember is a horrible dream. In it I was at work on the track-shortening job, and I saw everything just as it was. The big gang of shovelers was working in the cutting, and Duxbury, the foreman, was making ready to fire a heavy blast which was to take out a good half of one of the obstructing hills. It was all perfectly natural; all but one thing. The holes were all ready to be fired; I saw Bixby, the electrician, connecting the firing wires—which is never done until the last moment, but as yet nobody seemed to have warned the gang working in the cutting.

While I seemed to be looking on, the frightful thing climaxed. I thought I saw Bixby taking hold of the handles of his electric firing machine to send the spark into the dynamite. I tried to open my mouth and yell to the men in danger; strove in a mad frenzy, and found that I couldn't make a sound. Then the great blast went off with a noise like a world cracking in two, and I awoke, dizzy, half nauseated, and bathed in a cold sweat, to find our sleeper off the track and bouncing and lurching to a wreck stop on the cross-ties.

Of course, there was a crazy panic. By the time the Pullman had successfully smashed its running gear and had come to a stand, it was leaning far over to one side and seemed to be toppling for a fall into the ditch. With everything torn up underneath the car, there were no lights, and the dozen or more men of us were crawling out into the tilted aisle and groping frantically for

our clothes. I remembered that I had put mine in the upper berth, and in the scramble I thought I was finding them. The man in the opposite lower was also out and groping, and he was scared silly. We bumped into each other in the darkness, and I could hear his teeth clicking together as he chattered: "Oh, God! Oh, God!" like a man in the last stages of a bad case of the rattles. I tried to ask him if he were hurt; was asking him, in fact, when the end came along.

I didn't realize at the time what it was; though, having heard the Copah yard talk about the second section that was to follow us, I might have guessed. A bright light, coming from the rear, suddenly enveloped the wrecked car, shining in for a fraction of a second at the broken windows and through the deck transoms. Then there was an ear-splitting crash—and that was all.

CHAPTER II.

FROM THE FAR SIDE.

We often hear how a man with death snatching at him gets a sort of moving-picture series in one short reel of everything he has ever been or done—particularly the bad things. I wouldn't go so far as to say that other people who have been up against the big jump in the dark, and have come back to tell about it, are mere frilly liars; perhaps they're not. But when the light glare and the crash came, I dropped out as quietly as a blind kitten does when you hold its head in a bucket of water. I was killed so neatly that I never knew—don't know to this good day—what hit me.

I say "killed" because that is the only word that will come anywhere near fitting. Jimmie Shurtleff died right then and there in that smashed Pullman, and, if I am to believe what other folks tell me, he stayed dead. The man who woke up about a million years farther along in a log-built bunk shack, with his head bandaged and his arm in a clay plaster cast, was an entirely different human proposition, owning no part of Jimmie Shurtleff save a bunch of Jimmie's recollections—absolutely nothing else.

Realization didn't come all at once to this new man. There was a dull headache to muddle things. The shack interior was fairly well defined, but it was as much as a minute before I made out that the thing hanging over me was the face of a man; a kindly old face, lined and seamed and sunburned to a rich mahogany, and masked to the eyes by a thick, gray beard. Out of the beard thicket came a gruff voice, and it said:

"Hello, Bobby; air you workin' round to the good old daylight ag'in?"

I blinked and gasped and tried to get the fuzzy blanket edge, or whatever it was, away from my mouth so that I could say "I guess so." You see, I've got to go on using the "I" and "me" simply because the language makes no provision for the big gaps. Then I asked a question of my own: "Were the others all killed?"

"Which-all others d'you mean?"

"The other passengers in the Pullman, of course," I returned, weakly irritated at having to explain what ought to have been the most obvious thing.

The man who had called me "Bobby" shook his head.

"You're chasin' lightnin' bugs ag'in," he said, with a sort of gentle sadness in the gruff voice. "There warn't no passengers, an' no Pullman."

"But I say there were," I insisted. "There was an accident, and the Pullman had jumped the track. Then the following section came along and smashed into us." This deduction, which, as I have said, didn't occur to Jimmie Shurtleff, came to me now as clear as day.

The old man's head wagged slowly again, and he puf out a big-knuckled hand to straighten the blanket covering.

"That'll be all right, Bobby, son," he rejoined, a good deal as a mother might try to soothe a restless child. "You'll just have to keep quiet a spell longer, I reckon, an' then the crooks an' tangles'll get lost in the shuffle. You was hurt bad, mighty bad, when that shot went off. We-all allowed you was sure goin' to pass out—and with the neardest doctor plumb forty mile away acrost the top o' two ranges. Cassie an' me, we made out to sot the broken arm best we could; but we couldn't do much f'r the busted head."

It was just here that I made an incredible discovery—which had been belated, I suppose, because my wits were still struggling for a foothold among the amazing newnesses. Following the fashion of the day, I—the Jimmie Shurtleff "I"—had always gone smooth shaven. The discovery was that the woolly blanket edge I had been plucking at with my free hand, and which kept getting into my mouth and tickling my nose, was my own beard and mustaches—a good, thick thatching of both.

The shock of finding all that hair on my face was the same as a man might have if he were coming downstairs all nice and easy, and suddenly the stairs should be jerked away to leave him falling into space. I looked my patriarchal nurse squarely in the eye.

"Tell me," I said; "how long does it take a man to raise a beard like mine?"

His gentle smile told me that he still thought I was safely out of my head. But he answered my question:

"I allow it might take a good while. I dunno how long it took you. You've always had a beard sence you've been with us."

He was telling the simple truth, and I knew it. He was not in the least the kind of man who could be suspected of inventing things as he went along. But that didn't help out any. I recalled the evening spent in Copah—"last night" it still seemed to me—and the bath and the clean shave bought and paid for before I went to supper in the station dining room.

"How long have I been here?" I asked.

He misunderstood me. "On your back in the bunk, you mean? It'll be three weeks, come Friday, sence you got yourself blowed up in the mine."

"Blown up? In what mine?"

"Our'n—the 'Chance.'"

I set my teeth hard and said: "I don't believe you are crazy, and I'm trying mighty soberly to believe that I am not. How did I come to get hurt in a mine?"

"Same as every other miner gets it, sooner 'r later, if he keeps on a-monkeyin' with the dannymite. You loaded a hole an' cut the fuse too short; leastwise, that's the way we put it up—Cassie an' me. It was just afore supper time, an' you was in the drift alone. Whatever happened, the shot ketched you afore you could get out o' the headin'."

Again I took a look at the shrewd eyes of the old miner. They were as unquestionably sane as they were truthful.

"You say I was working in your mine: how long ago was it that I took the job?"

Once more I got the head wagging of compassion.

"It's risin' two year sence you blew in here an' asked f'r a job," he said. "Don't you ricollect it?"

It occurred to me suddenly that if I didn't want to be set down for a hopeless maniac I must be crafty—exceedingly crafty.

"Naturally I am a good bit muddled—with this broken head," I replied. "Just go over it slowly, and I'll see if I can't pull myself together. You say I came here and asked for a job. I don't seem to get that quite clear in my mind. Where is the Chance?"

"The Chance is in the western Junipers, about forty mile from nowhere.

It's all straight about your blowin' in here and askin' f'r a job, but you never would tell us—Cassie n'r me—where you come from, n'r how you got here. Your head was bad hurt at the time—plumb in the same spot where the rock hit you two weeks ago last Friday—an' we thought mebbe that was how come it you couldn't ricollect."

One more time I set my teeth and tried to get a grip on the bewildering muddle.

"You've called me Bobby twice in these last few minutes; is that the name I gave you?"

"No, but you've always answered to it. You took crazy sick the day after you got here, an' we thought, Cassie an' me, that you was sure goin' to pass out. We hunted in your pockets an' found an empty onvelope with your name on it in typewritin'—'Robert Jones, Denver.' First chance we got we put a notice in the Denver papers, but nobody never answered it."

"I see," I said, though I was as far as ever from understanding, or even beginning to understand. "And after I got well, you gave me work?"

The old man's head wagging this time was in deepest pity.

"It sure does hurt like Sam Hill to have you lay there an' ask me sich things—it do, f'r a fact!" he protested. "Yes; we was glad enough to have you stay an' make one of us. I told you straight out there was no money in it, less'n we should happen to strike it big rich in the mine—not even day pay; but you said that didn't make no differ'."

"And I never told you anything about being in a railroad wreck?"

"Nary single word."

I had it all now, or enough of it to last me for a good while in the way of having something to chew on and think about. If my old man was telling the truth—and I couldn't doubt this for a moment—Jimmie Shurtleff had been dead for two years and goodness only knows how much more; dead and buried and probably forgotten. And in his place there was a broken-headed, broken-armed mine laborer calling himself—or letting himself be called—Robert Jones; a man who owned nothing belonging to Jimmie Shurtleff save a badly mixed tangle of acute memories.

"Since you know my name, I suppose I ought to know yours," I broke in, after a longish pause. "I hope you'll forgive me if I confess that I can't just now call it to mind."

"Don't you worry none; that's the busted head ag'in. You been callin' me 'Dad' f'r about two year—Dad Crockett. Want a drink o' water?"

I drank deeply from the tin cup he held to my lips, wishing with all my heart that the water were the magic kind that would enable me once more comfortably to forget and lose the whirling muddle of things which were doing the imp dance in my brain. If Jimmie Shurtleff had weakly "passed out," as the old man put it, handing his bunch of memories on to some one of the myriad Joneses, he deserved to be forgotten. Nevertheless, there was a sharp sting in the tail of that, too. Jimmie Shurtleff had left some pretty important things hanging up in the air when he dropped out, and at the moment I was too weak and sick to take them up and try to straighten them.

"Reckon you could sleep a while if you had a chance?" Crockett asked, after I had fallen back and closed my eyes; and when I said I'd try, he went away and left me to grapple with the new set of nightmares and to fling them into the pit of sleep if I could.

For some little time the effort was fruitless. My head ached like the mischief, and the broken arm felt as if it were dead and gone to join the vanished Jimmie Shurtleff identity. Besides, the strange environment asked to be noticed. There was a small window at the head of the bunk, and I

could look out upon what appeared to be a deep valley, with high mountains everywhere, and a brawling stream making a noise down below and out of sight from the window.

The window outlook gave the impression of considerable height, as if the cabin were situated upon the flank of one of the mountains; and when I raised my head the impression was confirmed by the sight of the crest of a big dump beginning almost at the cabin door—the spoil from the mine.

With my own bewildering mix-up oppressing me, I didn't dwell very long upon the surroundings. How had I contrived to escape from the wrecked Pullman, leaving no trace for Milligan or any of the railroad people to follow up? And, escaping alive, how had I managed to wander off into the mountains, wounded and out of my head, existing in some way for weeks, as it seemed—since my beard had grown in that interval—and finally bringing up here in this place, "forty miles from nowhere"?

I was still wrestling with the hopeless tangle when I fell asleep. The time, judging from the angle of the sunlight streaming in through the square window, must have been about noon.

When I awoke, the sun had gone behind the mountains, all out-of-doors was bathed in a purple light that was heavenly, and, to make the celestial simile fit all the way around, an angel stood beside my bunk bed. It was a woman angel. She had a clean-scoured biscuit board for a tray, and on it there was something warm and steaming in a cup.

CHAPTER III.

CASSIE CROCKETT.

The woman angel smiled at me and dragged up a three-legged stool to make a table of it for the biscuit-board tray. Having the Jimmie Shurtleff memories fresh and clear cut—counting them, and being obliged to count them, as memories of no longer ago than the yesterday—Mabel Carothers was still the standard by which all other women were to be measured on the score of looks.

This young woman who was calmly getting ready to give me my supper was a striking contrast, in every way, to Judson Carothers' daughter. I have said that Mabel was pretty, and I'm not going to take it back. She was more than that—she was beautiful. But this slender, brown-eyed girl sitting on the edge of the bunk and waiting to feed me was altogether a different proposition.

For one thing, she wasn't pretty, in the conventional sense; not at all. Her mouth was bigger than Mabel's, and it had stronger lines, which were helped out by a well-rounded, resolute chin. Her eyes were brown, as I have said, and they were too honest and frank to have in them the alluring little tricks which had always enabled Mabel to wind men around her fingers. Also this girl's hair was dark, to go with the brown eyes and the outdoor tinting of her skin, and she had the thick masses of it done up in a way that would have given Mabel, who ran to fluffs and Marcel waves, the shivers for its very simplicity.

When she spoke, her voice made the contrast still stronger. Mabel cooed when she wanted to get the best of a man; but at other times her voice was rather high-pitched, and a little, just the least little bit, inclined to be sharp if she were crossed. But this girl of the mountains talked in music.

"Dad tells me that you've come back to us, Bobby, dear; or partly, at least," she said—or sang, whichever you like—as she began the feeding process. "We were miserably afraid you'd never pull through. It has been very dreadful, with nobody within reach to help or tell us what to do for you."

"You are Cassie, I take it," I mumbled between spoonfuls. Then: "I've apparently known you and been indebted to you for two whole years—at least, so your father tells me—and yet I am just meeting you for the first recognizable time. Did you ever hear of anything more absurdly ridiculous than that?"

"Daddy tried to explain, but I don't understand," she said, with something of my own former bewilderment. "Can't you remember anything that has happened during the two years?"

"Not the first living thing," I denied. "It is gone as completely as if it never was."

At the moment I couldn't begin to account for the warm red that surged up under the pure flesh tints of her neck and cheek; for this or for the two tears trembling in the brown eyes; though the "Bobby, dear" ought to have told me. But an instant later I found an answer that nearly made my heart stop beating. Evidently, only too evidently, this man Jones had been a scoundrel of the sort that makes love to the nearest woman.

"Tell me what you do remember," she encouraged, winking the two tears back into the places they had come from.

I began resolutely telling her the story of Jimmie Shurtleff's last night on earth, and she went on feeding me quietly while I was doing it. Most of the time her hand—it was a mighty pretty hand—was steady enough; but now and then I thought I could see it trembling a little.

"You can see that I am sane, can't you?" I pleaded. "I am, really. There *was* a man named Jimmie Shurtleff, and I am that man—or what is left of him. How I came to drop two years out of my life to go around masquerading as Robert Jones, I don't know; possibly I never shall know."

The light wasn't quite as good as it had been, but I had a notion that I saw the two tears again trying to get out.

"Of course you are sane!" she agreed, looking a little away from me as she spoke. Then: "What you have just told me explains many things—things that never had any explanation before."

"Like what?" I prompted.

"You didn't seem certain about your name. After you began to get well, two years ago, daddy showed you the envelope we had found in your pocket and asked you if the name on it was yours. You looked puzzled and said you guessed it was."

It was just here that I got a glimpse of the Jones origin.

"What sort of a coat was I wearing when I came here?"

"A brown one; that is it, hanging up over there in the corner."

I twisted my head and looked. There was still light enough to show the color of the coat. Instantly I recalled the man who had occupied the berth opposite mine in the wrecked Pullman, the man with the brown suit; and my new name was accounted for. In the confusion following the derailment we had got our respective locations mixed. The other man had dug into my upper berth, and I had got his clothes instead of my own. The darkness and the frantic hurry had made the exchange the most natural thing in the world.

"I think I know who the real Robert Jones is, or was," I said; and I was about to explain when a perfectly stupefying thought came to choke me: What if the mangled and possibly wholly unrecognizable body of Jones had been found, in my clothes, and had been buried for me? If it had, there was no need to ask why Milligan and my other railroad friends had apparently made no effort to trace the crazy wanderings which had led me to "Dead Man's Chance."

"You were saying that you thought you knew the real Robert Jones?" she

prompted, after my choking pause had strung itself out to a dead silence.

"It's only a guess, but I'm mightily afraid it's the right one," I faltered. Then I told her of the man in the opposite berth, and of the probable exchange of clothing. "You see, it is quite possible, and probable," I ended. "If there was enough left of him to gather up, he was doubtless buried as Jimmie Shurtleff. Let's talk about something else. What have I been doing here since you and your father nursed me alive two years ago?"

"You have been living with us and working in the mine."

"As a crazy man? How did the others take it—the other miners?"

"There were no others," she returned, with a sad little smile for my utter lapse of memory. "Dead Man's Chance is only a 'prospect,' you know. David Shelby discovered it and worked it for a time; and then daddy came and worked it alone until we found you."

"Dead Man's Chance," I mused. "What a miraculously fitting name for the mine a dead man should wander into! How did your father ever come to pick a name like that?"

"He didn't; it was named before we came here. A good many years ago two men who had grown up as boys together back in the States drifted out here to turn prospectors. One of them was daddy, and the other was David Shelby. They prospected together for a long time, and made money and lost it. Then they separated, and for years Uncle David, as we called him, was never heard from. Don't let me tire you with all this family history."

"You couldn't tire me if you should try. Go on!"

"When Uncle David finally turned up and found us again, he was sick and dying. He had discovered this gold vein, and had been working here alone for a year and a half, knowing, all the time, that he wasn't going to live. That is why he named it Dead Man's Chance. When he couldn't work any longer, he came out to die—and to tell daddy to come here and take the mine for his own."

"Is it a paying mine?" I asked; but I needn't have asked if I had remembered that she had said it was only a prospect.

She shook her head. "In some places it is quite rich, but we are so far from a railroad or a smelter that we can't market the ore in any quantity."

"But how do you—how do we live?" I asked.

Again I got the pitying smile.

"When we need things to eat, we load the two burros with a few sacks of the best picked ore and 'pack' it out across the two mountain ranges to Swansea, on the Pacific Southwestern. It gives me the queerest feeling to be telling you these things, when you've known them all so intimately for two years."

"You forget; it was Jones who knew them; and most unhappily, I'm afraid, Jones has lost out for good and all."

She looked away from me. "Why do you say 'unhappily'? I should think you'd be over—overjoyed to have found yourself, your real self, again."

"I'm not so sure about that," I returned doubtfully. "The world has little use for a dead man; and by all accounts I've been dead for a long time. Haven't you often heard people say that they'd give anything if they could switch off short and start in all over again? I've got that chance now, and, all things considered, I don't know but it will be wise to take it—as Robert Jones."

There was a look in the brown eyes that I couldn't begin to fathom when she turned them upon me and said: "Was this Jimmie Shurtleff you've been telling me about such a bad man that you don't want to take up his responsibilities again?"

"Oh, not exactly what you'd call bad," I hastened to say. "But I'm afraid he

left things in a horrible muddle; in fact, I may say I know he did."

"You needn't tell me if you don't want to," she offered, and her way of saying it would have told me, if I hadn't already suspected it, that Robert Jones had been getting pretty close to her. This was a thing that would have to be flailed out, sooner or later, and I was never much of a hand to stand shivering on the bank when there is a cold plunge that's got to be taken.

"I am going to tell you," I averred; "but not until after you've answered a question or two of mine. This Jones person—how has he been behaving himself toward you and your father?"

"Robert Jones has been a good son to my father, and—and a good brother to me."

"Half of that statement I'll believe, and the other half I can't believe—the brother half."

"Why can't you?"

"Because it's against nature. Robert Jones wasn't your brother." Then I took the plunge. "In all the history of mankind there have perhaps never been two people situated just as we are, and we've simply got to be frank with each other." I lifted her left hand. On the third finger there was a curious ring which looked as if it might have been hammered out of a piece of virgin gold. "Who gave you this ring, Cassie?"

This time the two tears would not be restrained.

"You did," she admitted, in a tone scarcely above a whisper. "In one of the rich pockets in the mine there was a lump of pure wire gold. You made the ring out of it and gave it to me one—one evening when we were sitting out on the Jumbo waiting for the moon to come up behind the Saddleback. Oh, dear, it breaks my heart to think that you don't remember it—to know that you will never remember it again!"

The truth was out at last, and if I didn't feel like a bigamist it was no fault of the circumstances. What could I do? What could any man do? Clearly something had to be done. Owing more than any one man can pay to two women, I could at least try to square things with one of them.

"Listen, Cassie," I said; and then I told her the exact truth—about Mabel; how at the time of the railroad accident we had been engaged and were waiting only until I should get another step up in my profession. "Now you know it all," I said, when the brief story had been told. "For two years I have been a dead man; dead and gone to all who used to know Jimmie Shurtleff; dead, too, to myself, so far as the Jimmie Shurtleff past was concerned."

"Yes," she acquiesced; "but nothing is really changed. You are yourself again, now, and you must take up your responsibilities. When you are well and strong, you must go back to Green Butte and to—to this other girl."

"Wait a minute!" I interposed. "It can't be settled offhand in that way. It is only fair to consider the other girl and what may have happened to her during the two years. Death cancels all obligations, and you couldn't expect a girl to go into permanent mourning for a man who so far forgot himself as to die before the wedding day. You remember the cousin of whom I spoke a little while ago; he would have made love to Mabel if we hadn't been actually engaged. I am sure of it. If Mabel and Monty are not married long before this——"

She stood up and leaned over to straighten the bedcovers.

"The two years must be as if they had never been—for both of us," she said softly. And then: "You loved this other girl, didn't you?"

It seemed passing curious at the moment that I couldn't answer the straightforward question simply and directly. If there had been no railroad smash-up and no big gap, it would have answered

itself. I should have married Mabel, and if the love hadn't been the one only consuming passion that colors a man's entire life, I should never have known the difference. But now there was a difference, wholly undefinable but exceedingly real.

"I guess I did; at least, I thought I did," I replied, as she finished tucking me in. "But now I can't help seeing and feeling the huge chasm that the two years have dug. I don't want to go back to Green Butte and find my little house of cards knocked into smithereens and dumped into the chasm. You mustn't make me do that, Cassie."

"Wait!" she counseled quietly. "You are not strong enough yet to think straight or to talk about it. When you are well again, you will see what is right and fair, and you will do it. I must go now and get daddy's supper. Try to sleep some more, if you can, and don't make yourself worse by trying to think. Daddy will be in again by and by to see if you are needing anything."

And with that she was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN.

From the awakening to a full realization of things on that sunlit day in June in the small log-built bunk room at Dead Man's Chance my recovery was rapid. In the course of time, Dad Crockett removed the clay plaster cast, and the broken arm was found to be well set, promising to be as good as ever. The skull wound, which had apparently been made by a flying fragment of rock, and which had cut squarely across the scar of the older hurt, healed more slowly, but I was up and around long before I had the bandage off.

Naturally, as soon as I could get out, I became a curious prowler, poking around and trying to familiarize myself with surroundings which, though I had lived in them for two years, I was now seeing for the first time with the Jimmie Shurtleff eyes.

As I had gathered from my bunk-room outlook, the mine was situated on a high bench of the mountain, with a steep trail leading down to the noisy torrent in the little valley. The house, to which the bunk room was a newer addition—built by my own hands, they told me—stood on the bench a short distance to the west of the mine opening.

The mine itself was a wonder in the way of hard-work accomplishment. David Shelby had worked in it a year and a half, Crockett had dug in it a year before my advent, and together he and I—the Robert Jones "I"—had more than doubled the development. My engineering education—and the succeeding years of mining-country experience—had given me some knowledge of mineralogy, and Dead Man's Chance looked pretty good to me. The ore ran unevenly as to values, but there was a world of it in quantity.

As I have said, I prowled around like a cat in a strange garret and got my bearings during those weeks of convalescence. Crockett and his daughter were mighty good and kind to me, and after that first evening there was no reference made to anything that could stir the mud for me in the bog into which I had tumbled. If Dad Crockett suspected, from his daughter's actions or mine, that the revived Jimmie Shurtleff wasn't living up to the Robert Jones grade mark, he was like most American fathers: he never said a word to me about it. And Cassie——

The girl puzzled me until my head swam. Enough had been said in that first talk to make it perfectly plain that Robert Jones had been an accepted lover. But now she was evidently regarding it as a case of false pretenses—innocent enough in the circumstances, but none the less false. She was good and kind to me, but I could never get

her alone long enough at a time to make her talk again of the dropped subject.

On a certain moonlight night, after I had grown well enough to either go to work or go away, I sat with Dad Crockett on a flat bowlder which marked the boundary of the Dead Man's Chance claim. It was the rock which had been named "The Jumbo." Cassie was washing the supper dishes, and the old man and I had gone out to smoke our corncob pipes in the open.

For a while neither of us spoke. Crockett was at all times the least talkative of men; and as for me, there was a whole heartful of disturbing things to be set in order before I could say what I had been putting off from day to day. But the thing had to be said, and I finally broke the long silence.

"I guess we've come to another turn in the road, Dad," was the way I began. "I've been trying to make up my mind what to do, and it isn't easy."

He knew what I meant, and his voice was even gentler than usual when he said: "I allow you're goin' to do just about what you think is right to do, Buddy." He had quit calling me Bobby after that first day, and, finding it rather impossible to twist his tongue to the new "Jimmie," had compromised on the Southern man's house name for a son. "It'll come some like pullin' teeth to have you go away," he went on, "but I reckon that's about what you'll want to be doin'."

"I'm trying to decide," I said. "Jimmie Shurtleff is dead and buried, as you know, and it may be the greatest possible kindness to all concerned to let him stay dead. On the other hand, it's the keenest sort of a temptation for me to stay right here and help you work the Chance out to a paying proposition —as Robert Jones. I suppose I could go back and crowd myself into the world again, but I am not at all sure that it is worth while."

"Oh, I reckon you'll find it worth while," he deprecated. "You've got folks of your own to be thought about, and it don't seem just right to let 'em go on a-mournin' for you."

"My nearest living relatives are two uncles, one of whom I haven't seen since I was a boy," I replied. "Whatever mourning they've thought proper to indulge in has been done and forgotten long ago."

I said this with a definite purpose, wanting to find out if Cassie had told him anything about Mabel. She evidently hadn't, and her loyal reticence set the blood dancing in my veins. After a bit more of the corncob-flavored silence, Crockett spoke again:

"In the nature o' things you'll want to be goin' back; I ain't so old that I cayn't onderstand that, Buddy. We're buried up here, good an' plenty, Cassie an' me; an' workin' in a mine that cayn't be made to pay is a mighty little tin-basin trot-around f'r a young feller that knows how to do somethin' bigger an' better. We're goin' to miss you a whole heap, but I reckon you'd ort to go."

It's funny, but the more he talked that way, the less I wanted to go. I hope I wasn't too disloyal to Mabel at that stage of the game, but I couldn't get it out of my head that I was going to find her comfortably married to Monty Gershom, and I had imagination enough to see what a fierce mix-up I should precipitate by suddenly coming to life in Green Butte. Yet the prompting to go and see how it would feel to drop in upon people who had been left for two years on the other side of the big gap was strong.

"If I do go, I shall have to borrow a little money of you, Dad," I said. "I don't suppose there was anything of value in the pockets of the brown coat I was wearing when I came here."

"Nothin' but that one onvelope," he returned. And then he made the way easy for me. "Needn't to make no talk o' 'borra'in',' Buddy. We ain't skinners,

Cassie an' me, to let you work here two year for your grub an' clothes, an' then turn you away hongry. We'll load the burros with some o' the picked stuff, an' you can drive 'em over to Swansea an' sell the ore at the smelter. That'll give you a stake."

"I suppose there is a plain enough trail so that I can find the way?"

He looked at me curiously.

"Sounds sort o' funny to hear you talk that-a-way, when you've made the trip over an' back three times in the two year you been here."

"That wasn't me," I reminded him. "It was Jones."

"That's so, Buddy; I keep a-forgettin', an' I cayn't seem to he'p it. 'Bout findin' the way; Cassie'll give you a map 'at she made—'r, f'r that matter, the burros'll keep to the trail. You can leave 'em at Swansea, an' I'll get 'em when I go out f'r another grubstake."

"I'm not gone yet," I put in. "But if I should go, it will be partly on your account and Cassie's. You've got a little bonanza here in the Chance, Dad, if there were only some way to get the ore to market."

"Reckon so?"

"I'm sure of it. Your smelter reports on the samples you've taken out show it. If I leave you, it will be pretty largely to see if I can't figure out some scheme to help you get on your feet. I owe you that much—and a great deal more."

Crockett rapped the ash from his pipe.

"Hain't told Cassie nothin' about your goin' away, have you?" he inquired, half as if he were afraid he was intruding where he had no right to intrude.

"Not yet. I wanted to talk to you about it first."

He made no comment upon this, and the subject seemed to have exhausted itself. Crockett refilled his pipe, smoked it out, and then went over to the little blacksmithing shed to make a fire and sharpen some drills. A little later Cassie came out of the cabin, and, after a word or two with her father at the forge, crossed to the flat bowlder and sat down beside me.

"Dad says you've been talking to him about your future," she began, without any preface. "Have you decided what you are going to do?"

"No," I replied.

"There is but one way to decide," she said, looking down. "You must go back to those who are thinking they have lost you."

"I am not entirely convinced of that."

"It is the only thing to do," she interposed quickly. "You owe it to them; or at least to one of them."

"Do I?"

"Indeed you do. It's a duty, and duty always comes first. And you will find the inclination going hand in hand with the duty after you have taken the first step."

"Again I can't be sure, Cassie," I objected. "Duty is sometimes a many-headed beast. I told your father a few minutes ago that my chief object in going back to civilization would be to devise some scheme for the marketing of the Chance ore. I am putting the sentimental part of it wholly aside. I have no more idea than the man in the moon that I shall find Mabel waiting for me to come back to life and marry her. It's absurd."

"Nevertheless you owe it to her to go and find out. Not all of the widows have been married first and widowed afterward."

"You don't know Mabel," I protested. "She isn't at all that kind."

"How do you know?" she flashed back. "You said you loved her."

"I can't explain just how I know. In some ways—in nearly all ways—the two years here are a blank to me. But somehow they seem to have given me a sort of perspective that I didn't have

when I was Jimmie Shurtleff. It is as if I had grown two years older in a single night. I'm wiser now than I was yesterday—the yesterday that lies on the other side of the big gap."

"No," she returned definitely; "you are not wiser, Buddy"—she had adopted her father's name for me—"you are more generous; so generous that you are in danger of forgetting to be just. I shall never forgive myself for letting you see how matters stood between Bobby Jones and me. If I hadn't been so silly, so wickedly foolish——"

"Let us be frank with each other, little girl," I said. "It may be for the last time. I don't blame Jones; and you mustn't blame yourself. He couldn't help loving you any more than he could help breathing. I have listened patiently to your talk about the duty part of it, but it doesn't go. I'm safely dead to Mabel Carothers, and I'm alive only to you, Cassie. Say one little word, and I'll never go near Green Butte again as long as the world stands."

"I like you least when you talk that way," she said calmly. "If I wasn't sure, beyond all doubt, that it is only an excess of loyal generosity—the generosity that is telling you it is a shame to let a foolish girl's love be wasted and thrown away—I could almost find it in my heart to hate you—the Jimmie Shurtleff you, I mean."

"The Robert Jones me was a better man, you think?"

"Much better, in some respects; he was sincere and innocent and simple-hearted."

"And you think Jimmie Shurtleff isn't? I'll show you."

"There is only one way to show me, and that is by going back and doing all the things you ought to do."

"You mean that if I shall find Mabel a 'widow,' as you put it, I shall marry her?"

"Of course. You promised to, didn't you?"

I knew she wasn't half as cold-blooded as she was trying to make me believe she was. And just at that instant I found myself attempting to imagine Mabel in the same boat, sending the man she loved away to marry another woman merely because it was right. Somehow the thing wasn't imaginable.

"I did promise her, yes; but we can let that go. If I find her married to Monty Gershom, as I make no manner of doubt she is, what then, Cassie?"

"I suppose you will have to make the best of it."

"So I shall. I shall come straight back to Dead Man's Chance."

"No, you mustn't do that!" she countered quickly.

"But I say I shall. You have promised to marry me, you know."

"No, I didn't; my promise and my love were given to another man; oh, quite another man!"

For all her apparent coldness she wasn't fooling me for a single minute. I saw what it was costing her to say such things; saw that she wasn't going to be outdone in what she was mistakenly calling "generosity" by any such newfangled Rip van Winkle as I was, At the same time, I couldn't help feeling that she had the big end of the argument. If I could calmly turn down a girl who might possibly—just possibly—have been mourning me as dead for two years, this other girl was entirely justified in seeking to pull me out of her heart as unworthy of her love.

Dad Crockett was banging away on his anvil, and for a little while neither of us out there on the flat bowlder spoke. When the old man thrust his drill into the fire again, and the clack and pur of the bellows took the place of the ringing hammer blows, it was the girl who broke the silence.

"You must go—and go soon, Buddy," she urged, speaking low and softly for the first time in that hard-hearted in-

terview. "And you mustn't think of me as my silly lack of self-control in those first few minutes we were together after you came to yourself gave you a right to think. I am the widowed one now. The man I loved—the man who made this ring and put it on my finger—is dead, and I shall never see him again." She sprang up quickly and gave me her hand. "Let us say good-by here and now, Buddy. It will be easier than to put it off until you are leaving. That will be to-morrow morning, won't it? Please say it will be. I—I can't stand this any longer."

Dad Crockett was still poking his forge fire, and there was only the moon swinging high over the Saddleback to look on. Perhaps your truly good man would have crushed his natural feelings into a crumpled little wad and thrown them over the slope to be drowned in the brawling creek at the mountain's foot; would have remembered his sacred obligations, and all that, and would have respected Cassie Crockett's utter defenselessness.

But I make no claim to any such high-planed and heroic virtue. What I saw was the most lovable, the most winsome, the most desirable woman in all the world of women standing there and begging me to go away because her heart was breaking for love of me. I stood up and took her in my arms, and for an ecstatic minute she let herself go—let me kiss her breath away. Then she twisted herself free and fled; and thus the final milestone in the Dead Man's Chance wandering flitted into the backward-reaching distances.

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO EARTH.

It was with feelings about as mixed and mingled as a man ever owns to, I guess, that I made my going-away preparations a little after daylight the following morning.

Dad Crockett got up with me at the break of day, sacked the ore which was to be my grubstake, and loaded the pack animals, giving me road directions as he worked. The trail to the smelter town on the P. S-W. was a fairly good one, it seemed. All I had to do was to follow my nose and it, dad said, and in the afternoon of the second day I would be crawling down the final mountain to Swansea.

I didn't enter the cabin until after Cassie had come to the door to tell us that breakfast was ready. It was a pretty solemn meal. Dad Crockett never said much at table at the best of times, and this time he did not open his face except to feed it.

Cassie talked a little; "made talk," I should say; and I helped her out as I could. But a blind man could have seen that it was a sort of funeral breakfast all around. I had come to life for myself, but it was plain to be seen that I was dying for those two people whom I was leaving behind. I haven't the slightest idea that either of them ever expected to see me again.

The actual leave-taking made it seem even more like a death in the family. The loaded burros were at the cabin door, and, when the meal was over, the girl jumped up, said "Good-by!" most abruptly, and darted into the little room which her father had boxed off for her at the side of the cabin, shutting the door behind her.

Crockett went out to the dumphead with me, wrung my hand until the bones cracked, and told me, with a queer huskiness in his gruffly gentle voice, to be good to myself. Fifteen minutes later a crook in the trail shut the cabin and the mine out of sight, and a new lap in the little ant gallop which we call life was begun.

The forty-mile trip over the mountains proved uneventful. At nightfall of the first day I camped at the foot of the second range on the bank of a creek

that Dad Crockett had described for me; and at about three o'clock in the afternoon of the next day I had topped the range and was looking down upon the little smelter town in the broad valley to the south.

There had been nothing in the long tramp at the heels of the pack animals to evoke the slightest memory—a Robert Jones memory. I had to take Dad Crockett's word for it that I had been over the trail half a dozen times in the two years. True, I had had no trouble in finding it, but that proved nothing. It would have been plain sailing for the rawest tenderfoot; and my various engineering jobs as Jimmie Shurtleff had made me a fairly good mountaineer.

It was pretty nearly shift-changing time at the smelter when I reached the town and halted the burros at the door of the assay-room office. A keen-eyed young fellow whom I took to be the superintendent came out to meet me.

"Hello, Bobby Jones!" he called. "Got a few more sacks of choice samples from the Chance?"

Just here I made the first of a string of mistakes, but it seemed entirely excusable at the time. I didn't explain anything to Hobbs, the superintendent. It didn't seem worth while to go into the statistics with him, and I let him go on calling me Jones. We made the dicker for the ore. It was to be ground and assayed and sampled by the night shift, and I was to have my money in the morning.

"You can have the check as early as you like," said the young superintendent, adding: "I suppose you'll want to be buying your grubstake and starting back pretty soon after sunup?"

"No," I told him. "I'm not going back to the mine this trip. I'm going out to see if I can't cook up some scheme to turn the Chance into a producing shipper."

"Good man—that's the talk!" he exclaimed. "We'll make you attractive figures when you can give us the ore in quantities. There is a midnight train east, and we'll rush things so you can get your check in time for that, if you like. The commissary will be closed, but I'll arrange to cash it for you."

I thanked him and told him that would hardly do; that I'd have to make some purchases—clothes and the like—before I could leave town. At that he pulled a thick roll from his pocket and skinned it twice for me.

"You're all right, Bobby; you and Dad Crockett can have anything you want out of this wikiup," he said. "Will that be enough of an advance to let you buy the glad rags while you wait? You can have more if you need it."

I assured him it was enough and more than enough, and thanked him again. Supper of a sort was ready at the tar-paper-covered hotel across the street, and, after I had eaten, I rigged myself out with a suit of ready-made clothes at the town's one "emporium," bought a suit case and stuffed it, bought a bad cigar and smoked it, and an hour before train time I had cashed my check for the balance due on the ore, blinking a little at the bigness of it when I saw the figures.

"Surprise party, eh, Bobby?" laughed the superintendent. "The Chance lode is getting a good bit richer as you develop it. If you've got much more running as high in values as this packload we've just ground up, it will pay you and Dad to put on more burros and make a business of jack-freighting it over the hills. You don't need any railroad."

The cash-in was for eighteen hundred and forty-five dollars, and I knew exactly what Dad Crockett had done. He had sorted the ore down to the finest possible point, putting in only the richest specimens he could find. It touched me very nearly, this bit of leave-taking

generosity, and I felt as though I ought to leave at least half of the money on deposit for Crockett when he should come over after the burros. It seemed hoggish to take it all.

But on the other hand I clung stubbornly to my determination to consider the money merely as a loan, to be paid back, dollar for dollar, if I shouldn't be able to make it help in some way for the developing of the mine. So when I boarded the eastbound train at midnight, I had most of the eighteen hundred-odd dollars in a money belt next to my skin.

Breakfast time the following morning found me changing trains at Copah, with an hour and a half to wait before I could take the local going north on the G. V. & P. Here I found plenty of surprises. Copah was—and still is—a division station on the P. S-W., and in former times, on the other side of the big gap, I had been fairly well acquainted in the division headquarters of this our south end connecting line.

But the West changes pretty rapidly. There was a new division superintendent, and he had brought in a new outfit with him. All of the office men I had known best were gone; but McCormack, the homely faced Scotch yardmaster, was still a fixture. I found the yardmaster on the platform after I had bolted a hasty breakfast.

"Hello, Mac!" I exclaimed, offering to shake hands.

As I have said, the yardmaster was Scotch, canny Scotch at that; and he put his hands carefully behind him.

"No, ye don't, my buckie!" he growled. "I'm not the brither of yer old friend back on the P. D. & Q., or some ither road that nobody ever heard of, and I've got no money to lend."

I laughed in his face simply because I couldn't help it. He hadn't changed a particle, and it didn't seem possible that I had changed so much as to be entirely unrecognizable to a man who had known me so well.

"Take a good look at me, Mac, and see if you can't place me," I urged. "You ought to be able to."

He squinted his little gray eyes and bored me through and through.

"Nothin' doing, my lad!" he grunted, at the end of the sharp scrutiny.

"But there ought to be," I insisted. "Two years ago you knew me well enough to call me by my first name."

"And what might that be?" was the suspicious query.

"Jimmie—Jimmie Shurtleff."

"Of all the brassy liars that was ever spawned!" he snorted contemptuously. Then: "I'll just save you from ever tellin' that one again. Poor Jimmie Shurtleff's dead and buried these two years, man!"

"How do you know he is dead and buried?"

"How do I know it? Why shouldn't I know it? Wasn't I the boss of the wreckin' crew that went up from here to help clear the G. V. track the night he was killed? More than that, I was the one that found him in the burned wreck o' the Pullman. Put that in yer pipe and smoke it, ye lyin' blastoderm!"

"You'd swear to that, would you?" I demanded.

"Of course I'd swear to it; and not only me but a dozen ithers—Mr. Milligan himself in the dozen. He was there. Why should there be any doubt of it, I'd like to know?"

"It seems to me there ought to be a doubt."

"Well, there isn't—more's the peety. The poor lad's face was smashed and burned till his ain mither mightn't have known it, but that made no manner of difference, d'ye see. He was wearin' his ain clothes, and the papers and letters in his pockets would have told us. What is it ye're tryin' to put across on me, anyhow?"

I didn't answer direct. There was

something gruesomely fascinating in thus hearing of my own death and identification.

"You buried him?" I asked.

"He was buried in Green Butte. Milligan took charge of all that. There was a girl he was engaged to; they said she was like to go mad wi' grief. But tell me, ye scamp; how was it you took Jimmie's name to play wi' and claim for yer ain? Ye'd ought to be jailed!"

Again I refused to answer. There would be others who would not be so hard to convince—Milligan for one.

"You'll find out, some day, what a blind old ass you are, McCormack," I said. And then: "Have you seen Mr. Milligan lately?"

"That shows what a blunderin' hobo ye are!" the yardmaster scoffed. "Milligan's been gone from this a year and more!"

"Milligan gone? Has he left the G. V. & P.?"

"There isn't any G. V. & P., as ye'd know if ye knew anything! It was leased to the Transcontinental a twelvemonth since, and it's operated as a branch of the big line the noo. Ye'd better get posted a bit before ye run around takin' a dead man's name and tryin' to bilk his friends for a handout! Ye'll jump the next train out o' this, my buckie, or I'll be handin' ye over to the police!"

It was laughable, in a way; and in another way it was a trifle unnerving. Was I going to have the same difficulty with others? Mac had known me well; if I should get a clean shave and be sufficiently persistent in recalling myself, would I be able to convince him finally that I was not an impostor? One thing held me back, and that was the crass impossibility of making a man of McCormack's caliber believe in the two-year blank; and to explain at all, I should be obliged to tell of the blank.

While I was hesitating, a young fellow, one of Hobbs' clerks in the smelter office at Swansea, came sauntering down the platform and spoke to me.

"Hello, Mr. Jones!" he said. "You didn't know that I got on the train with you at Swansea last night, did you? I'm on my vacation, and I'm going up to Grass Valley to see my mother."

McCormack was still eying me in suspicious hostility, and he snapped at the clerk's salutation like an angry collie barking at the heels of a sheep stealer.

"So ye're 'Jones' to this man, are ye? And ye'll be 'Smith' to the next, maybe. If ye're here after the next train leaves, ye'll be jugged, for ye're not needed in Copah." Then he turned upon the smelter clerk. "If ye'll take an old railroader's advice, ye'll not be mixing much wi' 'Mr. Jones,' laddie. He's a crook of the first water, and he'll be doin' ye out o' yer pocketbook."

Naturally the clerk shied away from me at this; and a little later I saw him talking excitedly to McCormack, telling the yardmaster, no doubt, what my name and standing was, or had been, in Swansea. Still later I saw the boy dodging into the station telegraph office; but even then I did not suspect the size of the landslide I had set in motion by the attempt to identify myself to McCormack, or how the upcoming of the Swansea clerk to call me Jones was going to turn the landslide into an avalanche.

In due course of time the northbound train backed down to the station, and the express and baggage truckmen began to trundle their stuff out over the platform. A glance at the train equipment proved that McCormack had been telling the truth about the change in operative ownership. Cars and engine were lettered "T-C. R.," and I saw no familiar faces in the crew. With the loss of my identity I had also lost my old railroad environment. The G. V. & P. was apparently a thing of the past, and its place was taken by the Transcontinental "branch."

When I got aboard and took a seat in the smoker, the smelter clerk from Swansea got up and moved out to another car. McCormack's warning had evidently taken hold, and the young man meant to run no risk of mixing it up with a confidence man. I smiled at the little incident, but quite possibly the smile would have gone into innocuous desuetude if I had known that the big, black-mustached man who followed me into the smoker and took the seat opposite mine was a special officer in the T-C. R. secret service; a man who had been hastily summoned by phone from his uptown headquarters in Copah, and had had ten minutes' talk with McCormack before he boarded the train.

This shadow business came as an afterclap, and, being unsuspected, it didn't trouble me at the time. During the two-hundred-mile run to Green Butte, I was chiefly interested, as a man coming back from the grave, in trying to set things in their proper places, trying to make the two-year interval account as it might for the many changes.

There were changes enough, goodness knows! The entire country seemed to have suffered an unaccountable blight. There were fewer trains on the road, and the towns were dull and quiet. I saw my track-shortening job as we passed over it. It had been completed on my plans, but the lining up and ballasting seemed to point to a lack of interest, or of money, toward the last.

I marked a few rememberable faces along the line, but only a few. Many of the station agents had been changed, and I saw no recognizable man in the various train crews. The T-C. R. had made a clean sweep in taking over the line, as changing managements usually do, and I was a stranger in a strange country. I thought it would be better in Green Butte, though my acquaintance in the headquarters city—outside of our own railroad staff—had not been extensive. But here, again, I reckoned without my host.

Late in the afternoon the slowly jogging local train clanked over the switches in the Green Butte yards. By this time I had formulated a plan of action, of a sort. I had already blundered twice: first in not explaining frankly to Hobbs at Swansea, and again in making a beginning on the suspicious old Scotch yardmaster at Copah. Very good; taking a fresh start, I would be cautious and look twice before I leaped once, bearing in mind the fact that to people who have actually seen a man dead and buried, a resurrection of the man is going to seem like a poor joke.

Following out this idea, I went straight from the train to the principal hotel—the Inter-Mountain. At the registry desk I was up against another phase of my problem. If I should register boldly as Jimmie Shurtleff, the fight for reinstatement would be on at once, before I could have time to turn around and get a fair squint at the field.

Having determined, as I said, to be cautious, I guess I overdid it. I signed "Robert Jones"; and as I did it, the big man who had ridden all the way from Copah in the smoker seat opposite mine pushed up to the counter and stood waiting for the pen. When I finished and gave it to him, he wrinkled his bulldog nose at me.

"Jones, of Dead Man's Chance, eh?" he rasped gruffly. "Queer name for a town, what?"

"It isn't a town; it's a mine," I answered, taking his butt-in for a bit of ordinary Western freedom. But he was already ignoring me.

"Any wire for me?" he asked of the clerk.

The man behind the counter let me wait for my room assignment while he shuffled the pack of telegrams.

"Nothing for you, Mr. Allen."

"All right; give me my old room, and

if anything comes, shoot it up to me, quick!"

The clerk fixed him up out of his turn, and then got time to attend to me. As he was looking over his room index to see where he could put me, I glanced around the lobby to see if there were any familiar faces. I saw none, but among the strangers there was a man who was remarkable enough to make me look twice at him.

He was large, ponderously large, with a smooth-shaven face that was almost boyish. He was wearing a wide-brimmed soft hat and a Prince Albert coat, and was smoking the biggest, blackest cigar I had ever seen between a man's teeth.

When I first noticed him, he was sitting in one of the lobby lounging chairs with his eyes fixed absently upon the great pendant electrolier swinging from the center of the lobby dome. But while I was telling the clerk that I must have a room with a bath, this big man got up and sauntered across to us—to ask for his key, as it turned out.

"In just one moment, Mr. Sprague," said the clerk, who had already put me off once to wait on the butt-in Allen; and then the big man turned to me.

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Jones, I'm sure," he said, smiling good-naturedly. "I didn't know that Gilman was still waiting on you. Take your own good time and make Gilman give you exactly the kind of room you want. I'm in no hurry; people of my avoirdupois can't hurry, you know."

I had no more idea than a goat how this big, good-natured stranger had my sham name down so pat, and I guess the little shock of surprise wrote itself out in my face. Gilman was still conning his room list, and the man he had called Sprague went on talking easily.

"You have an exceedingly readable face, Mr. Jones," he remarked. "It tells me that you are wondering how I came to know your name. After a man has been an analytical chemist as long as I have, he learns to use his eyes. You registered a minute or two ago, and another gentleman registered immediately after you. Therefore the next to the last name in the book must be yours."

Now this explanation was of the kind that doesn't explain. The registry book had been reversed and pulled across to Gilman's side of the counter after Allen had signed his name in it, and the swift glance I shot at it in its new position made me almost certain that my signature couldn't have been read upside down by anybody standing beside me—that is, anybody whose eyes were less than telescopic.

"I used to know a man named Robert Jones, of Omaha," the big man went on, half as if he were talking to himself. "But I don't believe he ever saw Dead Man's Chance." Then I had a shock that nearly paralyzed me. "How did you leave old Dad Crockett and his pretty daughter Cassie, Mr. Jones?"

"You know them?" I blurted out. "I—I left them very well, indeed; no longer ago than last Tuesday morning."

"Fine old citizen, Dad is," observed this remarkable giant. "It's a thousand pities his mine isn't within shouting distance of some good transportation line." Then, entirely without warning: "Don't you remember me, Mr. Jones?"

Before I could reply, or even get my breath to reply, the clerk was giving me my number and calling a bell hop.

"Front! Show Mr. Jones up to 566. Dinner at seven in the dining room, Mr. Jones; or you can be served à la carte in the café any time you wish."

The giant in the soft hat and the Prince Albert, who had asked me in such a pleasantly offhand way if I didn't remember him, waved a huge hand in genial dismissal.

"Never mind me and my foolish

questions, Mr. Jones; go up and get the bath you're honing for—you've had a long ride and a dusty one. We'll get together a little farther on, if you like, and I'll see if I can't explain to you why you really ought to remember me. Suppose we make it a café dinner at half past six? You needn't be afraid. Gilman, here, will tell you that, whatever else I may be, I'm not a confidence man. So long; see you later!"

CHAPTER VI.

MONTY GERSHOM.

I kept the dinner appointment with Mr. Sprague, partly because I didn't see just how I could very well dodge it, but more, perhaps, because I had a hunch that, as a man who had lost his identity, I was on the edge of what might prove to be a pretty lonesome little *jornada* in this vale of tears—which the same vale is rocky enough at times, even for those who have stayed in it continuously.

From the consommé to the pastry Sprague was merely a good table companion, chatting easily about everything under the sun, save and excepting the extraordinary incident of his recognition of me as Robert Jones at the hotel counter.

Among other things, he talked quite freely of himself. He had been a government chemist, he told me, specializing in soil analyses for the agricultural department. This work had taken him all over the West, and, though he no longer did it as a steady thing, he gave me to understand that he still accepted an occasional assignment from the department as an outside expert.

He was lately in from an extended trip into the region beyond the Junipers, he went on to say. There was an irrigation project on foot for some of the arid lands west of the Little Junipers, and he had gone in as the government expert to make a report on the fertility of the soils. He was telling me about his trip and its results when he jumped suddenly from the technicalities to things personal.

"From the Caliente Desert and the Little Junipers we can climb pretty easily to Cryolite Creek and Dead Man's Chance, Mr. Jones," was the way in which he made the jump. "An irrigation project presupposes a water supply, and the Cryolite is one of the streams which the engineers will probably utilize. I wanted to see what it looked like at its headwaters, so I took a little hike up the cañon."

"The Cryolite? The name is strange to me," I asserted.

"That's odd, since you have lately been living within sight and hearing of the stream for some time," he put in quickly. "Didn't Crockett ever tell you the proper name of the torrent which pours through his happy valley?"

Now it was entirely possible that the name of the torrent had been a matter of common conversation between Robert Jones and Dad Crockett, but that did me no good in my present individuality.

"I don't seem to recall the name," I returned evasively. "It seems to me we always spoke of it as 'the creek.'"

Sprague was drilling me through with a pair of eyes that could be made to bore into the remotest corners of a man's brain when their owner so desired. But his good-natured smile took the edge off of the shrewd scrutiny.

"The name of the stream is only one of the things you can't recall, Mr. Jones," he said knowingly. "And it is chiefly because you don't recall them that you interest me. Less than three months ago I spent a number of days at Dead Man's Chance, sleeping, in fact, in a spare bunk in your own room; and it has been clearly evident from the moment of our scraped acquaintance at the hotel counter that you have totally forgotten me."

I laughed uneasily.

"Perhaps I am a crook, Mr. Sprague, and don't want to remember you," I suggested.

"No; that is the singular part of it—or one of them. Though the casual observer—the fictional detective, for example—might jump to the conclusion that you are dodging the law, I am very well convinced that you are not the criminal you are suspected of being."

"What!" I demanded. "Who says I am a criminal?"

"Nobody has said it yet. But I may say that you are, as the phrase goes, 'under observation.' Turn your head slowly to the left and tell me what you see."

I obeyed mechanically. The café was not more than half filled, and most of the diners appeared to be easily typical of time and place. But diagonally across from our table for two I saw the man with the heavy black mustaches; and he was evidently dividing time pretty evenly between his dinner and the job of keeping a close watch on our table.

"You see," said Sprague, reading the direction of my gaze with the smiling eyes which seemed to miss nothing. "You are looking at Mr. Cornelius Allen, a railroad detective of the common or home-grown variety. He has doubtless followed you here—from Copah, perhaps, since he registers from there. You are not a criminal, Mr. Jones, as we have just now agreed. But why, otherwise, a curious person might ask, is 'Con' Allen shadowing you?"

"You can search me!" I declared.

"Nevertheless, there is a small mystery about you," the big man persisted gently. "To that mystery, as I have said, you owe my present interest in you. Notwithstanding your perfectly excusable evasion of a few moments ago, it is patently evident that you don't recall me or my visit to Dead Man's Chance."

I saw at once that there was no use in trying to keep any obvious thing hidden from this big-bodied reader of secrets.

"You are quite right, Mr. Sprague," I confessed. "I don't remember a single thing about you or your visit."

"Strange!" he commented, half absently. "It is the most curious of the many curious things which have presented themselves to me in an experience which has been singularly rich in difficult problems. May I ask if you remember anything at all connected with your stay at Crockett's mine?"

I could not make up my mind to be entirely frank with him. His was the most engaging personality I had ever known, but yet he was still a stranger. I simply couldn't tell him poor Jimmie Shurtleff's story as a whole.

"Perhaps I can explain a little," I offered, taking a new line of evasion. "Some four or five weeks ago I was blown up in the mine by the premature explosion of a blast. A piece of the porphyry hit me on the head, and the Crocketts tell me that I was unconscious for three weeks. When I finally came to myself, there was a pretty big blank behind me, Mr. Sprague."

"Thank you," said my table mate, as kindly as if I had made him a present of something valuable. "Now, if you could go a step farther—but I suppose that is impossible. You can't very well go back of the record which was broken by the flying piece of porphyry."

"What farther step would you wish me to take?" I asked.

"You were not altogether the simplest problem in the world before the bit of porphyry knocked you out, Mr. Jones," was the grave reply. "During my visit at Dead Man's Chance I found you intelligent, unquestionably sane, a man of good parts who had evidently enjoyed the advantages of a thorough technical education. Am I clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Yet you wouldn't, or couldn't, tell me anything about your former life or

experiences. I asked you, I remember, if you had been a mining engineer, and you evaded me. A number of similar questions touching your past, your boyhood, and early manhood met with the same rebuff."

"You doubtless thought I had something to conceal in my past?" I ventured.

"To be quite frank with you, I did, at first. But afterward I was convinced that this was a mistake. As a chemist—purely as a chemist, you understand—it has come in my way to study critically the most intricate chemical combination on earth—the human being. It was at that time that I decided that you were not a criminal in hiding at the out-of-the-way mine in the Junipers. In other words, I was convinced that it was sheer inability, and not unwillingness, which was making you dodge these friendly questions of mine about your past."

"I can't help you there," I put in, still determined not to tell him Jimmie Shurtleff's story.

His smile was the expression of an insight that was almost uncanny.

"You mean that you won't help me—on such a short acquaintance as the present one." Then he looked me straight in the eyes. "You can't say truthfully, now, that you don't remember your boyhood, Mr. Jones."

It was no use, but I was resolved to yield only as I was compelled to.

"I wouldn't attempt to say it. I do remember my boyhood, and it was as commonplace as that of thousands of other boys. I was raised on a Missouri farm by an uncle; and another uncle gave me an education. For some years I was a field engineer in various capacities, and in the course of time I drifted over into the Junipers and stumbled upon the Crocketts, father and daughter. Does this bring me sufficiently up to date?"

"It proves that you can lay down a plan of action and stick to it with some considerable fidelity," was the good-tempered rejoinder. "Never mind; for reasons of your own, which doubtless appeal to you as being good reasons, you have determined not to be entirely frank with me. It is all right; I am far from wishing to force your confidence. Later on, perhaps, you will give me voluntarily what I have no notion of trying to extort by any third-degree methods. Let us drop that part of the problem and come to another part. Why is Con Allen shadowing you?"

That was a question which I could answer truthfully and without the slightest reserve.

"As I have said, I have no more idea than the man in the moon."

"Yet the fact remains. After you went upstairs this afternoon, Allen came down and asked Gilman a lot of questions about you, none of which, of course, the clerk could answer. Later he got a telegram, and was careless enough to sit in the chair next to mine while he read it. It was from Swansea, a little smelting town on the P. S-W., and it was signed 'Hobbs.' Would you like to know what it said?"

"I certainly should, if it concerns me."

"It read something like this:

"Jones is employee or partner Crockett Dead Man's Chance Mine. Came in yesterday with small lot picked ore which we bought. Left burros and took night train east to make arrangements for developing mine, he said. We paid him without written order from Crockett, but have done so several times in past. Don't arrest till you hear further from us."

Sprague finished the quotation with a smile. "How does that strike you?" he asked.

"It strikes me that this man Allen is a meddlesome crank who ought to have his head punched!" I broke out. "Dad Crockett gave me the ore and told me to sell it for my own account. It's nobody's business but his and mine."

"Very true," was the suave rejoinder. "But Allen is the kind of man who will make a case if he doesn't happen to find one ready-made. However, even that kind of a man has to have some sort of a starting point. You are not ready to tell me just now what you have done to earn Allen's attentions, and it doesn't matter. So long as you live here openly and aboveboard, he can't annoy you."

"Perhaps he can," I answered, remembering that it might be difficult to communicate with Crockett and so to prove my right to the money which had been paid for the picked ore.

"If he becomes too officious, let me know, and perhaps I can persuade him to quit," said Sprague.

I was trying to thank my new-found friend for his offer of help when a thing happened that shot the thanking business up in the air and left it hanging there like Mahomet's coffin. There was a vacant table just across from us, and while I was speaking a couple, a man and a woman, came in to take seats at it. The man was young, gray-eyed, and he wore little curling blond mustaches with the ends twisted cunningly into the latest barber's fad; and the young woman——

I looked again and gasped. The natty young man with the curled mustaches was my cousin, Monty Gershom. And the round-armed beauty who was putting her dimpled elbows on the table opposite to him was Mabel.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE PERKINS' LEGACY.

For a moment I was dumfounded, though I don't know why I should have been, since I was expecting to meet these two sooner or later. It wasn't twenty feet across to the table where Monty and the girl had taken their seats, and they couldn't help seeing us if they looked in our direction. While Monty was giving his dinner order, I had a chance to catch my breath and to get ready for the inevitable. It didn't come. The dinner order given, Monty glanced up and recognized Sprague with a nod. I don't believe he saw me at all.

"One of our rising young men," Sprague informed me, in low tones, after he had returned the nod.

"And the girl?" I queried.

"She is Miss Mabel Carothers. Her father is the cashier of the Security Bank."

"Then they are not—not married?"

"Not yet. But they are engaged, I understand. It is a good match—especially for the young woman."

I grappled frantically for a decent measure of self-control. It would never do to let Sprague suspect how vitally interested I was.

"She is beautiful enough to make it appear the other way around; as a good match for Ger—for the young man," I remarked.

"I spoke in terms of dollars, which is the modern definition of eligibility," Sprague qualified, with a wry smile. "The young man has lately come in for a fortune, and it is whispered about that Carothers, the bank cashier, has been making some investments which, with a pretty extravagant family, will make him practically a poor man."

I nodded. "I see. But you say the young man has a fortune? What is his line of business?"

"He is a real-estate speculator, but his fortune didn't come out of the speculating. It was left him by an uncle."

Once more I had to grapple for handholds. There was only the one uncle—Monty's and mine, Uncle Perkins, the mining broker, whose "broking," according to the home gossips, had been altogether of the bucket-shop variety. It was unbelievable that Uncle Perkins had had a fortune to leave, and still more incredible that he should have left

it to Monty, for whom he had always entertained a most cordial disliking.

Sprague saw my grapple. I don't think he could have helped seeing it.

"You look surprised," he said. "Do you know Gershom?"

"He looks something like a man I used to know," I rejoined. "Is he still in the real-estate business?"

"He retains his offices in the Trotter Building. They are on the same floor with my temporary laboratory. But I fancy he doesn't do much in a business way; he is too much occupied in devising ways and means of spending his income."

The couple at the other table had been served, and I could not take my eyes from them. Mabel hadn't changed a day's worth in the two years or more; and if she were mourning for me, or for anybody, she didn't show it to any marked extent.

I caught the gleam of a diamond on her left hand—a much bigger diamond than mine had been; and she was wearing a necklace that must have cost a small fortune. She was evidently on the best of terms with herself, with the world, and with her dinner companion, and if poor Jimmie Shurtleff figured as a regretful memory I was ready to swear that it was a mighty dim one.

Sprague had finished his small coffee, and was taking one of the huge black cigars from his pocket case.

"Shall we adjourn to the lobby and burn a little incense?" he asked; and since I had no reasonable excuse for lingering, I rose with him.

I don't know whether it was by accident or design that he led the way past the two at the other table; but anyhow he did it. Following him, I passed so close to Mabel in going behind her chair that I caught a whiff of the perfume she had always used, and it brought on a rush of foolish memories that pretty nearly made me faint.

But that wasn't the only dramatic touch. At the critical instant Monty looked up and saw me as I hesitated, for the barest fraction of a second, behind Mabel's chair. They were drinking champagne, and he had just lifted his glass. One wild-eyed glance he gave me, and then the wineglass stem broke in his fingers, and the fragile bowl fell to smash itself in his plate.

I was wondering if Sprague had seen Monty's stare and guilty start, after we had found a quiet corner in the lobby and had lighted our cigars. I was not left long in doubt.

"I'm afraid our friend Gershom has been hitting a rather rapid gait since he came into his fortune," was the big man's half-absent remark. "Did you see him drop his glass as we passed?"

I made the sign of assent.

"A bad case of nerves, you'd say," Sprague suggested. "He looked as if he had suddenly seen a ghost." Then, after a longish pause: "Do you suppose you were the ghost, Mr. Jones?"

I grinned inwardly. It was a sure thing that my cousin had seen a ghost, and, since he had taken the ghost's place in the affections of the ghost's fiancée, there was ample cause for the case of "nerves."

"I may have been," I answered. "Possibly he saw in me a fancied resemblance to somebody he had known."

Sprague's laugh was silent, but it ran in waves over his big body, shaking him as if the bottled-up risibility threatened an explosion. I didn't see exactly where the joke came in—not even after my companion had explained.

"It was well worth the price of admission," he said, chuckling again. "Young Mr. Monty Gershom is usually so cocksure about everything that it is positively refreshing to see him go to pieces once in a while. The more I think of it, the more certain I am that he must have seen a ghost. That is the way the seers always act in the story-

books, isn't it? Now I am wondering how he contrived to square himself with Miss Carothers in response to her scared 'Why, *Monty!*'"

I, too, had heard the girl's half-frightened exclamation, and I was magnanimous enough to be glad that Mabel had not seen what Monty had seen. Mixed up with that was a feeling of satisfaction. It was perfectly clear that Monty had recognized me at once, in spite of my beard; and if he knew me, there was a good possibility that others would. Just the same, I saw that my cousin had promptly taken the alarm, and I had a large hunch that in him I was going to find the biggest obstacle to my attempted resurrection of the Jimmie Shurtleff identity. His present relations with Mabel would answer for that.

Beyond this, the Gershom incident as a talk topic dropped out of its own accord, and Sprague gave me another demonstration of his abilities as an all-around conversationalist. Through two of the long cigars and the better half of a third he told me entertaining stories of his experiences in the chemical field, many of which had more than a touch of expert detective work in them.

As he went on, it became evident that while his business might be purely and technically scientific, his hobby was this same detective field, in which he had worked with more or less enthusiasm for a good while. Reasoning of the high-grade, sublimated sort was the key he applied to the unlocking of all the hidden doors; and his methods, as he described them, were about as far removed from the ordinary thief catcher's as light is from groping in the dark.

It was ten o'clock when he finally got up and stretched his great body, yawning like a sleepy boy.

"By Jove, look at the time, Mr. Jones!" he protested. "You'll have to forgive me for boring you so incorrigibly. When I get started on my pet subject, and find a patient ear, I never know when to stop. You've had a long journey, and you must be tired. I know you want to turn in, and we'll say good night and hope for another day. Go to bed and sleep up, and don't dream too hard about the ghosts our friend Monty Gershom spills his wine over."

Left to myself in the still well-peopled lobby, I was minded to take the good advice. Just where I was to begin in the task of reidentifying myself as a dead man come to life I could not yet determine; but at all events there was nothing to be done before another day. What the day might bring forth was a question that only the day itself could answer; and with this thought to put the cork in the bottle, I went over to the desk to get my room key.

It was while I was waiting my turn at the key window that I once more became disagreeably conscious of the espionage of the man Allen; knew that he had materialized out of some out-of-the-way corner to follow me across the lobby. In other circumstances I should have had it out with him in short order, but the cursed foolishness which had led me to sign "Jones" instead of "Shurtleff" in the registry book tied my hands. Until the mask which had been so idiotically assumed could be thrown aside, I could not fight in the open. Realizing this, I took my room key and ducked for the elevator, counting it as a small victory that Allen didn't follow to shadow me upstairs.

With the door of my room closed behind me and the electric lights turned on, I could smile at the nervousness with which I had chased down the long upper corridor. But the smile was short-lived. Before I could turn around twice some one tapped at the closed door; and when I went to open it, anticipating nothing more formidable than a tip-hunting bell boy, my cousin Monty walked in without a word and jerked my hold on the knob loose to shut the door with a slam.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONTY'S ULTIMATUM.

They say that the temperament that goes with light hair and gray eyes, and runs to foppishness in clothes and the barber-shop adornments, is seldom dangerous. But my cousin Montmorency certainly did resemble a fierce little weasel at bay when he jerked the door out of my hand and slammed it.

"You are not going to get a single half inch the start of me, you crook!" was the way he opened up on me. "I know who you are, and what you're here for; and if you don't drop it and get out of this town by the first train, you'll land on the rock pile!"

I pointed to a chair, and sat down. This was a brand-new rôle for cousin Monty, and I wanted to see how far he could carry it. Besides, a sort of slow anger was boiling up somewhere inside of me. I assumed, of course, that he had recognized me in the glass-shattering instant in the café, and it made me hot to think that he, the only kinsman I had in Green Butte, should be the first to run in and try to cut my throat.

"I always knew you were a little villain, Monty, but I didn't suspect until now that you could be a great one," I said, when he had dragged up a chair and planted himself on the opposite side of the small writing table. "What's your object in coming here and jumping onto me in this way?"

"You'll find out if you try any of your funny business with me, you dirty blackmailer!" he ripped out. Then: "You've got gall enough to swim in—calling yourself by the name of a man who has been dead and buried for over two years!"

I couldn't help grinning across at him. Here was a man of the kind you read about: the pin-headed blunderer who will promptly hang himself if you will only give him enough rope.

"You've given yourself away, cousin Monty," I retorted. "The name I wrote in the hotel book is 'Robert Jones,' and you are the only person in Green Butte thus far who knows my real name."

"I don't pretend to know how many names you've got!" he snapped. "But I do know this: that no longer ago than this morning you tried to palm yourself off on a certain man in Copah as my cousin, James Shurtleff, who was killed in a railroad accident over two years ago. I don't know why you sprung the imposture on the Copah man—unless it was because you wanted to try it first on the dog."

This took a little of the edge off the assumption that Monty had recognized me immediately in that one glance across the café table, and was here because he had done so; but it did not remove the assumption entirely. His knowledge of the McCormack incident proved that he had been talking to Allen, the railroad detective, who had doubtless got his information direct from the yardmaster. But this did not prove that Monty's dinner-table shock was not genuine. It was more than likely that the shock had preceded the talk with Allen by some little time. In other words, Monty, after he had recognized me, had been digging for information wherever he could find it.

"Monty, I can prove conclusively to you that I am James Shurtleff, and you know it," I asserted. "There are a thousand things that passed between you and the boy you grew up with on your father's farm in Missouri which couldn't possibly be known to anybody but yourself and that boy. That being the case, I can't understand why you should be making a needless ass of yourself."

"I'm not here to argue with you!" he broke out.

"But listen a minute. Why should you deny me the right to live and own my own name? You've got it all, haven't you—the fortune that Uncle

Perkins might not have left to you if he had known that I was still alive; the money, and the girl I was going to marry? In Heaven's name, what more do you want?"

"Jimmie Shurtleff is dead, I tell you. I saw him and helped to bury him!"

"But won't you give me a chance to at least try to prove to you that he isn't dead?"

"Yes, by Jupiter! I'll give you a chance—a dead man's chance!"

"Consider a little," I urged. "Suppose that, by the rawest kind of a miracle, Jimmie Shurtleff wasn't killed in that accident in Two Horse Gulch; try to imagine, just for the sake of a hypothesis, that the man you helped to bury, and who was so badly disfigured that nobody could be positively certain of his identity, wasn't Jimmie Shurtleff at all; put yourself in Jimmie's place and see how you'd feel if the people you knew best should turn you down."

I had no idea that any sort of an appeal would move him, but I took a sort of malicious delight in making his turndown of me look as hard-hearted as it really was. How far I could have carried it I don't know. But he shut off all the appeals with a brittle accusation and a threat.

"You are a rank impostor, and the minute you go to calling yourself Jimmie Shurtleff in this town I'll have you pulled and prosecuted!"

"You'd do that, would you?"

"Yes, that and more; I'll shove you until you land where you belong—in the penitentiary!"

"And you won't give me a chance to try to prove to you that I am really Jimmie Shurtleff? You know very well that I couldn't do it as an impostor."

"As I told you a minute ago, I'm not here to argue with you!" he stormed.

The slow anger was blazing up now, and I had hard work to keep my hands off him. I don't believe my worst enemy ever accused me of being vindictive, but Monty's vicious hostility was stirring up a feeling akin to that which prompts the average human being to hunt forth a stick or a stone when a snake coils itself in the path and begins to run its tongue out and hiss.

"You talk as if the scrapping was going to be all on one side, Monty," I put in quietly. "Isn't there a bare possibility that you might provoke me to hit back?"

"You try it!" His upper lip was twitching to show his teeth under the carefully barbered mustaches, and the face wrinkling was like that of a dog getting ready to bite. "You try it on just once, and I'll show you where you're due to get off, you blackmailer!"

"Hold on, Monty!" I interposed. "That is twice you have used that word. If you say it again I'm going to hit you. Now listen once more; you assume that I can't get back at you. What about Mabel? You are engaged to her, they tell me. What is going to happen in that quarter when she learns that Jimmie Shurtleff is still alive?"

That touched him. He bounded out of his chair, and for a minute or two gave a lifelike imitation of the at-bay weasel hunting for a good biting place under the wing of the eagle that has nipped him. When he stopped tramping up and down, and came to fling himself into his chair, his face was ghastly.

"You are up in all the tricks of your sneaking trade," he said hoarsely. "I can't stand for anything like that, and you know I can't. How much is it going to cost me to hire you to fade away into whatever hell it was that you came out of?"

This was the final straw. But still I was calm enough, or angry enough—whichever way you like to put it—to draw him on.

"How much would it be worth to you?" I asked.

"A thousand dollars, cold cash?"

"So much as that?" I sneered. "Is your chance at happiness worth all that money?"

"Two thousand, then."

"Two thousand dollars I am bid for a choice bit of silence and absence," I retorted, mocking him. "Going at two thousand——"

"Make it five."

"Going at five thousand; do I hear the ten?"

"You devil!" he hissed. "There's another way, and——"

Monty was always pretty quick-motioned, but the way in which he whipped a thirty-eight automatic from somewhere in his clothes and covered me with it was simply lightninglike.

"Now!" he gritted. "You'll get money enough to pay your fare to South America or to hell, and that's all you will get! Say your say and do it quick or I'll drill you!"

I don't know as I have mentioned the fact that Jimmie Shurtleff played three of his four years in college on the football team, but he did. And I don't believe Monty was a particularly bright and shining light in athletics at Yale—or wherever it was that Uncle Silas sent him. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. Things happened pretty rapidly at the pistol flashing. For one, a decently husky ex-half back went headforemost over the little table at the weasel; and for another the pistol was quickly wrenched loose and flung under the bed.

Cousin Monty's collar and necktie were somewhat disarranged when he picked himself out of the wreck of the spindle-legged chair in which he had been sitting, and he was working his jaw like a swimmer out of breath.

"I'll get you for this!" he gasped. "Let me out of here!"

"The door is right where you left it when you came in," I suggested.

"I'll get you!" he repeated. "I don't want you to go away now; I want you to stay right here and give me a chance to show you up! For every time you call yourself Jimmie Shurtleff you'll get one more year in the pen. I've got money, and I'll spend every dollar of it shoving you to the limit! And if you go near Mabel Carothers I—I'll kill you!"

"The door is still available, but perhaps you'd rather try the high dive from the window," I hinted, making a grabbing motion in his direction.

That settled it. One jump took him to the door, but when he was halfway through it he turned and cursed me like a pickpocket, vanishing only when I made another dive to pin him between the door and the jamb.

CHAPTER IX.

BLIND TRAILS.

Since excitements of any kind are poor soporifics, my first night's sleep in Green Butte wasn't particularly restful. With Monty for an enemy the thing which had looked so easy from the Dead Man's Chance point of view bristled suddenly with difficulties. I had confidently expected to find him and Mabel safely married, and, in the circumstances, I should not have looked for a very hearty welcome from either of them. But I had not looked for open enmity or a fight.

None the less, as it appeared, the fight was on. I knew my cousin well enough to be sure that he would stick at nothing if he thought his chances with Mabel were endangered; and I was mean enough, or human enough, to be willing to give him as much trouble as he meant to give me. And since the first move in the trouble giving was to resurrect Jimmie Shurtleff for those who would have no ax to grind in keeping him dead, I went at the job immediately after breakfast the following morning.

I wouldn't wish my worst enemy to

have a more dismaying experience than those forenoon hours gave me. Starting in with the railroad colony, I drew a string of blanks that was simply appalling. Not one man of the old G. V. & P. staff was left on the road which was now a branch of the T-C. R. My former associates were scattered to the four winds. Milligan, they told me, was locating a new railroad in British Columbia. Tobey and Mike Jorkins, his second and third assistants, were in Honduras. Varick, office man and map maker, had gone with Milligan. And so it went, straight on down the list.

In digging out these facts I made frequent inquiries about one James Shurtleff. Some few of the railroad men with whom I talked remembered him—by hearsay. He was killed in an accident, wasn't he? Oh, yes, now they recollected; it was a rear-end collision down below Grass Valley. Shurtleff seemed to have left a good taste in the mouths of those who had heard of him; an "all-around good fellow" was the phrase I heard oftenest; and then my informant would go on to tell me what a rousing funeral the railroad boys had given him.

After the railroad blank drawing I took to the streets of the city. Here I learned something that I had never before realized; namely, that the average man has a good many casual acquaintances whose faces and names are familiar enough, but about whom he knows nothing intimately, and who are in the same fix regarding him. In other words, the number of people who are on an intimate footing in any man's life is strictly limited.

I saw many familiar faces in the streets, and in some instances I could recall the names. But when I would make some sort of an excuse for talk, and begin to ask about Jimmie Shurtleff, I was always promptly met with an: "Oh, yes; poor old Jimmie! He was killed in an accident about two years ago. Did you say he was a friend of yours?"

Not to any of these people would it have been safe to assert that I was Jimmie Shurtleff come back to life. They were all too complacently sure that I was crumbling to dust in the Green Butte cemetery. I could see in imagination the shock of surprise that such an assertion would produce, and how it would be instantly followed by a freeze-up of suspicion and incredulity. So I didn't attempt to make myself known; not even to Judson Carothers, into whose bank I dropped just before noon, ostensibly to open an account with my money-belt wad, but really to see if the old man to whose daughter I had been engaged wouldn't recall me without having to be told who I was.

He didn't. He looked me full in the face and told me, as all of the others had, that Jimmie was dead: "Sad; very sad, Mr.—er—what did you say your name was? It was a great blow; almost like losing a—er—a son, in my own case, you know. If you were a friend of Jimmie's you will probably know that he and my daughter were engaged to be married."

You can judge for yourself what a temptation it was to blurt it all out to Carothers, taking all the chances of being set down as a madman or an impostor. Apart from the fact that he was Mabel's father, I had always liked him in the old days. He was a harassed little man, prematurely old and gray, devoted to a frantic chase of the dollar, not for his own use, but to keep his wife and daughter in the swim; and Sprague had told me that he was now in deeper water for the same reason.

The temptation was strong, but something kept me from yielding to it. Since it was the noon hour, Carothers was substituting for the receiving teller, who had gone out for his luncheon. To open an account I had to have a name, and when Carothers shoved the identifica-

tion book out to me for my signature, I hesitated only for a fraction of a second, then signed—"Robert Jones."

While the old man was making out my pass book he asked me where I had known Jimmie Shurtleff. I told him, truly enough, that I had known him in college, had eaten, slept, studied, and recited with him. At this he evinced a greater interest in me.

"Dear me!" he said, peering through his glasses at my freshly written signature; "so you were a college classmate of Jimmie's? I thought as much when you began to ask about him. You are much like him, in a way, too; there is a sort of resemblance about the eyes. How does it come that you didn't know he was dead?"

"I—I have known very little about him for some years," I stammered.

"Of course," he agreed. "We all drift so dreadfully after the college years. But you bring your credentials when you come as Jimmie's friend. We must know you better, Mr. Jones. Perhaps you would like to call at the house some evening—520 Ute Avenue. We were all very fond of poor Jimmie, and I am sure any friend of his would be very welcome. And perhaps you would like to go to the cemetery. We—that is, a few friends of Jimmie's, Mr. Milligan among them—had a little stone put up, so you'll see that he isn't forgotten."

I broke away by main strength and awkwardness after a time, and was recalled from the door to get the pass book which, in my confusion and haste to get away, I had left behind. At the second attempt to escape I bumped into a man on the sidewalk, and at a backward glance I saw that it was Allen, the railroad detective. At first I thought he was going to follow me, but he didn't, and I was disappointed. At that moment I think I should keenly have enjoyed a free fight with somebody.

Sprague was at the hotel when I got back for a late luncheon. I didn't want to talk to him or to anybody else just then, and tried to dodge. But he nailed me.

"Gilman told me you hadn't been in yet, and I determined to wait a few minutes on you, Mr. Jones," he said, with the boyish smile, adding: "By which you may infer that you are still interesting me. Shall we try the café again? It's so much more homelike than the dining room."

I was half wild to get off by myself somewhere to think over the fresh snarl I had just been adding to my tangle. Carothers would be sure to speak of me to Monty; would say that I had opened an account as "Robert Jones"; would be told by Monty that I was an impostor, and, as an officer of the bank, would promptly raise the hue and cry.

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me this time, Mr. Sprague," I began; but the big-bodied chemistry expert was not to be put off so easily.

"No, I shan't excuse you," he laughed. "Your face tells me that you've been having adventure this morning, and I am positively stagnating for a little excitement. Beyond that, I may have something of interest to tell you—another detective story, for example."

He was pushing me along toward the café as he talked, and presently I found myself sitting opposite him at the table we had occupied the previous evening.

"I'll give you my story first," my captor began, after the waiter had taken our order. "I think I mentioned last evening that Mr. Gershom's offices happen to be on the same floor of the Trotter Building with my own temporary den, didn't I?"

"You did."

"Very good. They are not only on the same floor; they chance to be in the next suite. There are three rooms in each suite, and the rear one in mine—the one I use for my workshop—has a

door communicating with the third room of Gershom's three. The door is locked, of course, and it has no transom. But the door itself must be made of some very curious kind of wood. It has the property of transmitting sound waves almost as clearly as the earpiece of a telephone. Did you ever hear of anything like that?"

I said that I hadn't, and made no comment. I was too full of my growing dilemma to understand what he was driving at.

"Well, it is a fact, and I have often wondered if, in the strictly ethical view of the case, I oughtn't to warn Gershom that he hasn't any very great degree of privacy in his third room—which happens to be his private office; at least, not when any one chances to be occupying my workshop. On the other hand, I have been arguing that it is none of my business to guarantee his privacy. How would you look at it?"

"I am not interested in Gershom's affairs," I broke out irritably.

"No?" he said inquiringly. "That is a bit odd—when he seems to be so deeply interested in yours."

"I know he is," I retorted. "He had the nerve to come to my room last night after I went up to go to bed. He began by calling me hard names, and wound up by pulling a gun on me and getting himself thrown out."

"Ah!" said my table companion. "The plot thickens. Now we may put two and two together with a little better grace. Mr. Gershom had a number of callers this morning, among them our friend Allen, the railroad detective. With that treacherous door at my ear I couldn't very well help overhearing the talk. Mr. Gershom, as I gathered, was offering large rewards to Allen, and to others of like kidney, for your scalp, Mr. Jones; for evidence of any kind against you which would serve to clap you in jail. You are to be carefully and systematically dogged, and the first trap you walk into will be made to snap you by the leg."

"If you have heard that much, you have heard more," I said, looking him squarely in the eye.

"I have," was the even-toned reply. "But I'd much rather have you tell me about it yourself."

"All right; you shall have it cold," I rapped out. "Have you ever by any chance heard of a man named James Shurtleff?"

"Yes, indeed; he was a young civil engineer in the service of the G. V. & P., a cousin of Gershom's, and was engaged to be married to Miss Mabel Carothers. Happily, or unhappily, as you may choose to view it, he was killed in a railroad accident before the orange-blossom episode came along."

"What else have you heard?" I demanded.

"Nothing much that could concern Mr. James Shurtleff, dead. Something like a year and a half after the sad event, or, to be exact, on the twenty-sixth of last December, an uncle of Shurtleff's, and likewise of Gershom's, died in Batopilas, Mexico, leaving a considerable fortune. It seems that he hadn't kept up very well with the family history, for he left his money by will to his nephew James, with a reversion to his nephew Montmorency only in case James should no longer be in the land of the living."

I have often wondered since how Mr. Calvin Sprague could sit there and calmly beat up the vinegar and oil in a spoon for his salad dressing while he was telling me a thing that was equivalent to sticking a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder.

In a flash the whole tangle, so far as Monty Gershom was concerned in it, straightened itself out with a snap. Monty had taken my fortune, as well as my girl. Maybe he had believed me to be dead, but a big doubt, even of

that, was beginning to loom up in the background. Anyhow, he had recognized me in that glass-breaking instant the night before, and it had been with deliberate criminal intent, the intention of bullying me and driving me off, that he had come to my room after his interview with Allen.

"Mr. Sprague," I said, when I could control my voice, "I am going to ask you to believe the unbelievable. I am James Shurtleff."

He nodded as coolly as if I had merely remarked that it was a pleasant day.

"Of course," he rejoined. "I had arrived at that conclusion some little time ago; in fact, I was beginning to reach it after I had met and talked with you at Crockett's mine some months ago. Tell me the rest of it."

I did it, going over the whole thing circumstantially from the beginning, and omitting none of the details so far as I could recall them. When I came to the end, Sprague was nodding thoughtfully.

"It's a beautiful case," he commented. "An evil fate seems to have stacked the cards on you at every turn. You snatch the wrong clothes in the wrecked sleeper, and another man gets yours; you disappear completely, and the other man, wearing your clothes with your papers in the pockets, is so badly disfigured that the clothing and the papers are the only means of identification. Added to all this, you suffer a total loss of memory for two entire years. Everything is supplied; nothing is lacking to make you dead and to make you stay dead."

"Now that I am on this side of it, it is blankly incredible, even to me," I admitted desperately.

"It needn't be. There have been other and similar cases of the memory loss. Many years ago a sea captain in a storm off the coast of France was struck on the head by a falling spar while he was in the act of giving an order. His skull was crushed, but he lived to be taken ashore and to become a patient in a Paris hospital. Perhaps you've heard of his case?"

"No," I rejoined.

"He recovered; became as well and sane as he had been before the accident. But he suffered a complete loss of memory; didn't know who he was or anything about himself. Three years after the accident a daring surgeon operated on him and lifted the section of depressed skull bone. At the relieving of the pressure on the brain cells the captain went on and finished the order he had been giving three years before in the midst of the storm."

"And at this recovery he was unable to recall the events of the three-year interval?" I asked.

"Completely so. The three years were a total blank. The case is of record, and it excited a good bit of comment in the medical journals of the time. However, this is merely by way of illustration. Your involvement is singular, but, as you see, it is not unparalleled. We may dismiss the academic side of it. Innocently, or knowingly, your cousin has deprived you of your fortune. Do you want to get it back?"

In the old days I had never cared too much for money—big money. But now there were new motives cropping up. I wanted to help Dad Crockett, and if I could do it with my own money, so much the better. Beyond that, a huge anger flamed up in me. There was still a possibility that Monty had not robbed me consciously when he became the alternative inheritor under the terms of Uncle Perkins' will. Maybe he did believe I was dead, safely dead and buried, at the time. But now he knew I was alive and he was determined to hold on—to Mabel and to the money as well.

"Yes; I want the money," I said gratingly.

"Very good. Now we can go on from where we left off a few minutes ago. As I was saying, your cousin has been colloguing with the detectives to-day. You are to be dogged and driven out of Green Butte, or persecuted if you persist in staying here. I don't pretend to know what curious twist of your mentality prompted you to register in the hotel as 'Robert Jones,' but——"

"I don't know myself," I interrupted.

"But we'll credit the prompting to your good angel, if you like," he went on. "It was most fortunate in every way. I hope you haven't been spoiling it by going about this morning and trying to make people remember you as James Shurtleff?"

I told him what I had been doing, and how I had been withheld from announcing my true identity, even to Judson Carothers.

"More of the good angel," was his laughing comment. "For the time being you must continue to be Robert Jones, and if any one accuses you of the Shurtleff identity, you must promptly deny it."

"I don't follow you now," I objected.

"I didn't suppose you would, but I think I can make at least two points clear to you. In the first place, Gershom has either robbed you consciously or he hasn't. If he did it consciously; that is, if he knew you were not killed in the accident—or rather, let us say, if he knew that the man who was brought here and buried was not James Shurtleff—how are you going to prove it?"

"There is only one way to prove it conclusively," I admitted. "That is by making Monty admit it himself."

"Ah, yes! But under the law the poorest criminal is not required to incriminate himself, so we are up against obstacle number one. Number two is still more insurmountable, though in another way. You have absolutely nothing by which you can tie the James Shurtleff of two years ago to the James Shurtleff of the present. There is what the metaphysicians call 'a solution of continuity.' The Crocketts knew you for the greater part of the interval, but only as 'Robert Jones.' But a certain other part of the interval is totally unaccounted for. James Shurtleff disappears at the wreck. Some time afterward, a time long enough to account for a good growth of hair on his face, a man turns up at Crockett's mine, forty miles from the scene of disaster. Do you see what I mean?"

I did see it very clearly. The record was broken; hopelessly broken, it seemed to me.

"Still, I can't see what is to be gained by waiting and living under an assumed name," I objected.

"Perhaps there isn't anything to be gained, but it can do no possible harm. On the other hand, if you make an open fight you'll be defeated. The courts will refuse to give you the benefit of the doubt, and the chances are that you'll be branded as an impostor and dealt with accordingly."

"I'm all at sea," I confessed. "What do you advise me to do?"

"For the present, nothing; and even less than nothing. Go on living quietly here at the hotel as Robert Jones. If you want some ostensible reason, you have it ready to your hand. You are interested in a mine down in the Junipers; your business here is to interest somebody with capital to the end that the mine may be made productive."

"But where will it all end?"

"That is a future," was the smiling retort. "Though you may not appreciate it, you have enlisted the services of the one man in Green Butte—but I mustn't brag. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

He was rising from his chair, and I rose with him. As we were leaving the café he turned upon me suddenly.

"Did you happen to bring that brown coat with you from Dead Man's Chance?" he asked abruptly.

I told him I had; that it was up in my room.

"That's lucky," he said. "Let's go up and get it now before somebody else beats us to it."

I hadn't the slightest idea what he meant, but I went with him to the desk for my key, and afterward to the elevator. At the snapping of the key in my room-door lock, I began to understand—just a little. The room looked as if a cyclone had hit it. My grip had been broken open and my belongings were scattered all over the place.

CHAPTER X.

MABEL.

"A disinterested onlooker might suggest that we spent too much time over our luncheon," was Sprague's good-natured gibe at the torn-up room. "Evidently your cousin doesn't believe in skipping any bets. Suppose you take an inventory and check up the losses."

I gathered up my scattered raiment. There wasn't much of it because I hadn't cared to buy much in Swansea. Oddly enough there seemed to be nothing missing, though the search for whatever it was that the room thief had been after had apparently been thorough.

Sprague picked up the worn brown coat, which had been flung into a corner. The pockets were turned out, and I saw him examining one of them with the help of a small magnifier. "See here," he said. On the inside of the turned breast pocket there was the tailor's tag; a bit of white cloth upon which the lettering showed dimly. I deciphered the words while Sprague held the glass for me:

MADE FOR

R. Jones

By Z. Zwigler, Omaha.

The first and last lines were printed, but the name, "R. Jones," was pen-written in indelible ink. In one corner of the tag there was a diagonal arrangement of figures that looked like a compound fraction. It was the date. The coat was made in the March of the year of the summer wreck in Two Horse Gulch.

"Have you ever seen that before?" Sprague inquired.

I said no; that it had never occurred to me to examine the coat closely. Sprague sat on the edge of the bed and propped his head in his hands.

"I am trying to find some logical explanation of their failure to take the coat," he said, after a time. "The only one that suggests itself is that they were in so much of a hurry that they didn't stop to read that tailor's tag."

"But why should they take the coat?" I queried.

Sprague pointed to the turned pocket and the tag.

"For that reason, if for no other. Consider a moment. No matter what your cousin has been believing for two years past, he knows now that you are not dead. But he also knows that a man wearing your clothes was brought here to Green Butte for burial. The deduction is plain. If you escaped from the wrecked Pullman you were wearing somebody else's clothes. That tag, on a coat that looks fully old enough to fill the bill and has its date written on it, points inferentially, at least, to the man you exchanged with."

"Well, what of it?"

"Don't you see? That tag gives us a clew which your cousin would be quick to remove. He knows now that some other man was buried under your name, and that if you attempt to prove an alibi for yourself it will be highly

necessary for you to prove conclusively the identity of the man who had usurped your place in the Green Butte cemetery. This tag is your clew. It is reasonable to conclude that it would have been destroyed if it had not been overlooked."

"You are going upon the supposition that Monty did this rummaging himself?" I offered.

"Quite so. There was a possibility that you might have papers or other proofs of your identity as James Shurtleff. Your cousin took the short cut to prevent your using them. He made the search in person because he alone would know what to look for; also, if the proofs were to be found, he wouldn't care to trust the finding to anybody else."

It was along about this time that I began to acquire a large and growing respect for Mr. Calvin Sprague's reasoning machinery. It ground right along without a hitch, and its output was always as logical as a demonstration in mathematics.

"You spoke of the rummagers as 'they' a moment ago," I suggested.

"Of course; there were doubtless two of them—one to stand guard in the corridor while the other did the searching. Your cousin has plenty of confederates; he hired them this morning."

"He always had a mean streak in him as a boy; I am beginning now to believe that he is a criminal with intent, Mr. Sprague."

"He has given one indication of it here by overreaching himself, as criminals usually do. Just the same, you will have to be careful. It is evident that he means business. He knows his fortune is at stake and he is going to fight for it. Will you wrap this coat in a piece of paper and let me take it with me?"

I got one of the lining papers from a bureau drawer and made a package of the brown coat.

"You don't mean to say that there is any possibility of tracing our particular Robert Jones through this thing?" I demurred.

"Stranger things have happened," he returned soberly. "You are telling yourself that there must be some thousands of Robert Joneses in the Western Hemisphere, and there probably are. Quite possibly, too, the one who had this coat fitted in Omaha is not the only one of the name who has bought clothing of Mr. Z. Zwigler. But once in a blue moon the chapter of accidents permits itself to be reckoned with. Three years ago, while I was crossing from Denver to San Francisco, I made a number of acquaintances in the smoking room of the Pullman. Among them was a machinery salesman by the name of Robert Jones, and he told me he traveled out of Omaha."

"Great goodness!" I exclaimed. "Do you remember all the men you meet in the Pullman smokers?"

"Oh, no; not all of them, of course. But I am blessed—or cursed, as you may choose to put it—with a fairly retentive memory for names and faces. I can recall this man quite clearly; perhaps because he told me such a pitiful story of his loss of a wife and three children in the course of a single year. Those things make an impression and stick, you know."

I had rearranged my belongings, and was ready to go down. But the big man still sat on the edge of the bed, nursing a knee in his locked hands.

"There is one other small matter," he resumed, looking past me at the garish figure of the wall paper. "While we have a bit of real privacy, perhaps it would better be spoken of. You can snub me down if I go too far. It concerns the young woman in the case."

I laughed at that and told him he might go as far as he liked.

"Meaning that you are no longer interested in that quarter?"

"Meaning that she is wearing another man's diamond, and is probably as deeply devoted to him as she was to me."

"That sounds a bit cynical, and cynicism is a poor dog in any kennel. You mustn't be too hard on Miss Carothers. She was sufficiently grief-stricken at your funeral, as I can assure you."

"You were here at that time?" I asked in some surprise.

"Yes. I had been up in the Quaretaro country, making some soil surveys for Senator Blount. That was the year before I went to Egypt with Mrs. Sprague."

"Mabel has consoled herself," I said, sticking to my text.

"Which is entirely justifiable, in the circumstances, as you must admit. You couldn't expect her to remain a maiden widow indefinitely. And that brings me to what I wished to say. You mustn't make the young woman suffer for Gershom's sins, Shurtleff. If you do I'm out of it."

"I had no intention of doing so; none whatever."

"No; but you are going out to the house to renew your acquaintance with the family—or rather to begin another one. You tell me Carothers has asked you—and you'll go."

"I don't know why you should be so certain about it, when I haven't yet made up my mind myself."

"That's all right. I know human nature, my boy. You couldn't stay away from 520 Ute Avenue if you should try. Go, if you like; but give me your promise as a gentleman not to mess or meddle with Miss Mabel's sentimental affair. You'll be tempted. Your cousin has set you the bad example of unfair fighting, and you'll be telling yourself that there is a possibility—just the barest possibility—that the girl hasn't totally forgotten James Shurtleff."

It was as true as if he had read my thoughts. Moreover, as you may remember, I had already threatened Monty along that line. My sense of honor wasn't quite as keen as this big man's, but I gave a qualified promise.

"I shan't begin it," I asserted. "I am not even sure that I shall go to the house. But if I do go it will be as Robert Jones."

I thought he ought to be satisfied with that, but he wasn't.

"Tell me one thing," he adjured me gravely. "Are you still in love with the girl?"

"I don't know; I guess not."

"You ought not to be," he flashed back.

"Why?"

"Because, during the two-year interval, you have been making love to another girl."

"That was Robert Jones," I evaded. "But how do you know?"

"Good Lord! It was plain enough. I was three days at Crockett's mine, but three hours or three minutes would have told the story. I am your friend, Shurtleff, partly because you need help, but partly also because a certain little girl down in the Junipers—a girl well worth a dozen Miss Mabels—believes that the sun rises and sets in you. You've got to play fair with Cassie Crockett."

"Cassie Crockett knows the whole story, and she sent me here—to marry Mabel, if Mabel should be still so minded," I replied doggedly.

"Of course she did; that is exactly the kind of girl she is. I wish I could be as confident of what the other one will do."

I shook my head.

"You needn't borrow any trouble about Mabel Carothers, Mr. Sprague. Monty has the money, and, for all she knows, he is likely to keep it. It's a

mess, any way you look at it. I owe Mabel something for having died on her hands. If I swipe Uncle Perkins' legacy from the man she is intending to marry, it's going to look a little like adding insult to injury. If I could find some way of helping the Crocketts to realize on the value of Dead Man's Chance I don't know but I'd be content to drop out and let Monty keep what he has, or I should if he wasn't so spitefully vindictive about it."

Sprague grinned up at me, looking more than ever the good-natured, overgrown boy.

"Wait until Mr. Montmorency Gershom hits you one good lick between the eyes; then you'll change your mind pretty suddenly, my dear fellow. All I ask is that you won't take it out on the girl. But this won't do for me. I've got to get back to my workshop. If you're ready we'll go down."

Sprague left me in the lobby, but at the key-returning moment he spoke to Gilman, the clerk.

"You want to discharge your man on floor five, John," he said quietly. "He lends his master key to the wrong people. Will you do that, and see to it that a trusty fellow is put on in his place? Thank you."

With most of the afternoon left on my hands I tried to carry out Sprague's program—the one he had laid down for me—scraping a few acquaintances in the lobby to whom I could talk mines and mining, writing a long letter to Cassie Crockett, addressing it in care of Hobbs, at Swansea, to be given to Crockett when the chance offered. Past that, I wrote to Hobbs himself, explaining, or trying to explain, the disturbance that Allen had kicked up; telling him, not too specifically, how the wire hullabaloo had grown out of a poor joke I had tried to play on an old railroad man in Copah.

While I was in the writing mood I wanted to send a letter to Milligan, whose probable British Columbia address had been given me by one of the T-C. R. men. But here my assent to Sprague's demand for a complete incognito got in the way, and I had to let Milligan wait. Later, at dinner time, I looked for my big-bodied friend, and when he did not put in an appearance, I ate alone, wrestling like an athlete with the temptation which was trying to get an underhold and throw me in the direction of Ute Avenue.

In the end the temptation won out, just as Sprague had said it would. My Swansea-bought "store" clothes were hardly fit for an evening call, but I had money, and there was an outfitting shop across the street from the hotel. By eight o'clock I was togged out in a passable evening suit of the fit-you-as-you-wait kind and was boarding an electric car for the well-remembered suburb.

With all this, I came mighty near turning back from the gate of the familiar two-story brick house in the avenue. The mere lifting of the latch brought a rush of memories that sang and stung and bit and made my heart jump and my brain whirl. But when I realized that they were only memories I marched up the walk and rang the bell, praying rather desperately that Judson Carothers himself might be the one to admit me.

Of course the prayer worked backward. When the door opened it was Mabel who turned the knob and stood smiling up at me with the old-time man-melting look in her eyes. Instantly she put out her hand and gave me my welcome.

"This is Mr. Jones, isn't it?" she said sweetly. "Papa was telling us about you at dinner; about how you had once been poor Jimmie Shurtleff's closest friend. Come in and let me take your coat. Mamma and papa have both gone out, but papa will be back in a few minutes."

CHAPTER XI.

ACROSS THE GAP.

When Mabel said that her father and mother were out, I would have given my new bank pass book, and anything else in sight, for a chance to duck and run. A solitary tête-à-tête with the girl who had once been my fiancée, and who was now Monty Gershom's, was a lot more than I had bargained for. But there was no possibility of escape.

I supposed, of course, that she would take me into the family sitting room and make formal "company" of me, but she didn't. Instead, she led the way through the hall to her father's den, a cozy little snuggery which Judson Carothers seldom occupied, and which had been tacitly surrendered to us two in the courting days of that bygone summer. The evening was chilly enough for a handful of fire in the grate, and the fire was there, with two easy-chairs wheeled out before it.

I sat in one of the chairs and held out my hands to the bit of blaze.

"This is immensely comfortable," I began, dreading nothing so much as a silence that might lead to the Lord only knew what.

"Yes," she returned, curling herself kittenlike in the opposite chair. "The nights have been remarkably cool this summer. But perhaps you have been in Green Butte long enough to find that out for yourself."

"This is my first day in Green Butte," I hastened to say.

"And you came from the East?"

"No; from the South—from the mountains. I am a mining man, as I think I told your father, or perhaps I didn't."

"He didn't speak of that," she said, and I saw right away that this line of talk was going to peter out in a minute or two and leave me stranded high and dry.

"No; we talked chiefly of Shurtleff," I broke in, taking the plunge which I knew must come sooner or later, and wishing very heartily that Carothers and the mother would come back and relieve the hair-raising situation.

"Poor Jimmie!" Mabel cooed softly, with her eyes on the fire. "Of course, you know—you have been told——"

I nodded, and because there was now no hope of wading out I plunged still deeper. "I have been told some of the circumstances, but not all. It was a railroad accident, wasn't it?"

"Yes. He was coming home for his week-end. It was a terrible shock. Please don't make me talk about it. Tell me about the Jimmie you knew—in college."

Here was an opening, of a sort, and I took it gladly. For the better part of an hour I told stories of college life in which Jimmie Shurtleff figured as my classmate and roommate. It isn't so frightfully hard, after you once get started—this telling of your own story at secondhand; it merely requires the step aside and the detached point of view which every fellow gets now and then when he pulls up to take a look at himself impersonally, so to speak.

All through the story-telling I was watching her as a cat watches a mouse. From first to last she sat staring into the fire, prompting me now and then with a question, and always sympathetically. Along toward the end I found myself talking desperately against time. The little bronze clock on the mantel was pointing to ten minutes of ten. Would Carothers and the mother never come back?

"You knew Jimmie very intimately, didn't you?" she said, when I was just about talked to extinction on the college score, adding: "I know you must have, because so many of these things are things that he told me himself years ago." Then: "Did you keep in touch with him after you left college?"

"Pretty well, up to within the last few years," I replied, thinking I could go that far with safety.

"I suppose we all idealize our friends more or less, after they are dead and gone," she remarked, still refusing to let me see her eyes. Then: "You have made Jimmie live again for me in this little talk, Mr. Jones. It was a perfect idyl—our love affair. I can speak freely of it to you who knew him so well. We were both young, and—and dreadfully foolish, I suppose, but it was very precious while it lasted."

I could hardly help smiling. This was so like the Mabel I knew best; to put the best foot forward and to fling a pleasant little glamour over the past.

"You have no cause for regrets, I dare say," I put in boldly. "Jimmie Shurtleff, as I knew him, was a good bit of an idealist, and the idealists are never able to make much of a show as money getters."

"No," she agreed, with naïve frankness. "And money is so exceedingly necessary in this world we live in. Jimmie would always have been able to command a good salary, I suppose, but nothing more."

"And that isn't enough for the woman who doesn't wish to make her own clothes, you would say?" I suggested.

She looked up quickly. "Let's not quarrel, Mr. Jones," she began, and then, in the turning of a leaf, I saw an instantaneous change sweep over the pretty face; the ripe red lips paled, the slate-blue eyes became fixed and staring, and the next thing I knew she had faded away—fainted and fallen back into the depths of the big chair.

Now that the mischief was done, I was cool enough to be myself again. In times past I had known my way about the house, and I found a pitcher of ice water in the dining room; that, and a table napkin. There was a leather-covered lounge in the fire-lighted den, and when she came to I had her lying down and was dabbling her face and hands with the cold water.

"Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie Shurtleff—how could you?" she murmured, with her first little gasp of returning consciousness, and then I knew that the mischief was done, good and plenty and with a vengeance.

"I didn't mean to," I returned, with more truth than kindliness, perhaps. "It's the last thing on earth I meant to do. Other people haven't recognized me, and I supposed you wouldn't."

"Monty has," she interposed quickly. "Last evening in the Inter-Mountain Café. I had the strangest feeling when I saw you at table with that big man, Mr. Sprague." And then, with a queer little smile: "I don't like the beard, and I thought the Enoch Ardens were all in the storybooks. Haven't you been dead at all?"

I took my cue instantly.

"I have been—and still am. Jimmie Shurtleff vanished something over two years ago, and from present indications he is going to stay vanished. I came here to-night as Robert Jones, and presently I shall go away as Robert Jones. I didn't come back to Green Butte to smash things for you, Mabel."

She sat up, and I gave her a dry corner of the napkin to wipe her face.

"Then you don't love me any more?" she queried, and I saw then what I hadn't been able to see in the more girlish Mabel—that no matter how many men there were she couldn't let go her hold upon any one of them.

"That issue is out of print," I told her plainly. "You are promised to another man, and I have neither the right nor the wish to interfere."

"But you have interfered," she put in promptly. "Do you think things can ever be the same for me as they were before—well, before this evening?"

"I'm sorry if I have made them any

different. You are going to marry my cousin, and——"

She nodded half absently.

"Monty is nice to me; nicer than you were, Jimmie. He hasn't any of your masterful ways. He lets me do just as I please."

"That's better," I said.

"But I am going to make you pay for giving me such a horrid shock. I know what is the matter: you've found another girl somewhere, wherever it is you've been hiding all these years. If I wanted to I could make you forget her."

This was still more like the Mabel I had known, and I drew a good deep breath of relief. It wasn't any very badly broken heart that was palpitating so visibly under the cobweblike evening thing she was wearing.

"I'll pay," I promised, trying to match her new mood. "How much is it going to cost me?"

"That will depend. You are going to be awfully nice to me, now that you've come back. I don't know but what you are going to show Monty that he isn't the only man in the world, after all."

The daring audacity of such a suggestion made me gasp.

"But you are forgetting that Monty knows who I am!" I exclaimed.

"No, I am not; that is what makes it so deliciously exciting. *He* knows, and he doesn't know that I know. You may continue to be Mr. Robert Jones to me and to everybody else, you know —just as long as—well, until you do something to make me tell on you."

The thing was more than incredible; it was a nightmare. That she, or any right-minded girl, would want to play fast and loose in that way with the man she had promised to marry was unbelievable.

"I'm afraid you can't count me in on any such deal as that," I protested.

"Very well, then; I shall tell everybody I know that you are not Robert Jones at all; that you are Jimmie Shurtleff come back to life. You wouldn't like that, would you? For some reason best known to yourself you want to let Jimmie stay dead, don't you?"

"Yes; at least, for the present." Her bald directness fairly buffeted the truth out of me.

"I thought so. Now we shall get on better. As I say, you are going to be nice to me, and I'll be nice to you —so nice that when you come to think it all over you'll be sorry for me and you won't want to spoil my life a second time by fighting with Monty over——" The doorbell tinkled, and she sprang up hastily. "That's papa, and it will be better if you are just leaving as he comes in, an engagement that you've got to keep or something of that sort, you know. You can come again when we are all at home."

I had met Judson Carothers at the door, had shaken hands with him, and made my excuses, and was going down the walk to the gate before I realized how deftly Mabel had shunted me out of the way. But for another reason than her father's home-coming, as it presently appeared, my escape was made none too soon. As I turned the corner toward the car tracks an automobile came tearing up the avenue to stop with a squeal of the brakes at the Carothers gate. There were three men in it when it passed me, and two of them jumped out almost before the car had come to a stand. The two made a quick rush for the gate, and the street arc lamp identified them for me. They were Allen and my cousin Montmorency. Allen had shadowed me and had gone to fetch his principal.

There was no electric car in sight when I reached the other street, and I walked on townward, meaning to let the car overtake me. My head was in a good bit of a whirl yet, and I was trying as best I could to fit the Mabel

I had just left with the girl I had known—or thought I had known—on the other side of the big gap, when a thought came to fairly knock the breath out of me.

In a flash I saw what her sudden change of mood had meant; what she herself had meant in that last sentence which had been broken by the ringing of the doorbell. She knew that Uncle Perkins' money had been left to me, and not to Monty, and she was going to play her hand for all it was worth to keep me from taking the money away from the man she was going to marry.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE ATHLETIC CLUB.

When I met Sprague at the breakfast table on the morning following my adventure in Ute Avenue, he asked me no questions and I told him no lies. Later, he introduced me to a man named Hughes, a fine upstanding young fellow in charge of one of the government reclamation schemes in the northern part of the State.

"This is the gentleman I was telling you about last night, Gordie," said Sprague to my new acquaintance. "Carry him off to camp with you, if you like, and show him what's in your mind about that Juniper project."

The government engineer laughed. "Are you good for a few hours on a broncho, Mr. Jones?" he asked, looking me over, as I thought at the time, rather curiously.

I said I was, but that I wasn't sure my business in Green Butte would sanction a vacation just then.

Sprague gave me a glance that was as full of meaning as a nut is of meat.

"That is exactly the point," he put in. "You are applying yourself too closely to business. A few days in the hills will do you a world of good."

I understood by this that for some one or another of his inscrutable reasons he wanted to get me out of the city for a time, and that the suggestion was, in fact, an order to go. Hughes backed it up cordially, and after I had given a sort of halting consent, he went out to order the horses. Sprague broke it off short with me when we were alone together.

"You are quite right," he said, reading my thoughts as usual. "For a number of reasons I want to get you out of the way for a few days. Take your trip and have a good time with Gordie, who is of the salt of the earth. Give me an even week, and then come back."

I grinned. "I never was much of a hand at playing blindman's buff," I said. "Can't you give me a hint?"

"Two of them, if you like. I need time; I've got to have time. I don't want you around under foot, with your handsome cousin feeling for a grip on your windpipe, while I work—it distracts me. I've set a rumor afloat that you've taken a job with the government and are going out with Hughes. That will serve to kill off the shadow business for the moment."

"I see," I said.

"The other hint is strictly personal to you. Hughes is likely to have charge, as chief of construction, of the reclamation project in the Junipers. He's got a notion in his head that may appeal to you. Get him to talk about it; he'll do it when he finds out that you have put in two years at Dead Man's Chance."

If I wondered a little at what Mabel would think of my sudden drop-out I didn't let it worry me. In fact, I was rather glad than sorry that I was going to be safely out of her reach for a few days. A fool man is a mighty curious proposition where a woman is concerned. Knowing, as well as I wanted to know anything, that Mabel was going to play a deep little game of her own, with Uncle Perkins' money for the stakes, I wasn't at all sure that

she wouldn't contrive to make me sit in with her—with my eyes wide open.

An hour farther along Hughes and I had taken the northward road together, and we gave the bronchos a loose rein all day, with a single stop for horse bait and a bite to eat at a ranch house. Nightfall found us at the reclamation camp, and I was given the freedom of the outfit; with the privilege, which I hadn't enjoyed for many a day, of sitting in at a camp-fire circle with a bunch of men of my own trade and swapping stories over the tobacco. It was good to be in the swing of it again, and when the time came for bunks and blankets I slept the sleep of the just and the weary.

With such an auspicious beginning my vacation week went on wings. Hughes had a considerable problem on his hands in the dam building, and I put in the days, most of them, on the job with the staff, enjoying every minute of the time. Mail came from Green Butte every two or three days, but there was nothing for me; nothing to break the spell of the wholesome change to the clear, sane atmosphere of the great hills. It was not until my last night at the camp, after we had outsat all the other members of the mess at the smoke fire, that Hughes spoke of the Junipers and his "notion."

"Sprague tells me you have spent a couple of years on Cryolite Creek—and he probably told you I was to have the job of construction on the Caliente project," was the way he began. "He also mentioned the fact that you were interested in Crockett's mine."

I looked up quickly, and caught him, as I had a number of times before, regarding me curiously.

"You know Crockett's mine?" I said.

Instead of answering, he looked straight at me and said: "I've been letting you take your own time for a week; don't you remember me?"

I knew at once that it must be another of the "Jones" lapses, but of course I was perfectly helpless.

"Ought I to remember you?" I asked.

He took time to consider. "I don't know as you ought," he qualified at length. "It's nothing very singular if you don't. Let's let it go and get back to Crockett and his mine. You are interested, aren't you?"

"Yes," I rejoined; "but only as a friend of Crockett's. He's got a big thing in the Chance, but it's safely bottled up, as you know—no transportation."

The engineer nodded. "We're in the same fix on the irrigation project, but there is a profitable scheme in sight if I could only find and convince some practical railroad engineer who could influence a little capital. It's this way: we've got to have material, a lot of it; cement, steel, dimension timber, to say nothing of our machinery. Our nearest railroad point would be Laputo, on the P. S-W., sixty miles away by the trail over the range, or forty-two miles through Coyote Cañon."

"I know the cañon," I volunteered. "I ran a preliminary survey through it about four years ago for Mr. Ford, president of the P. S-W."

"The dickens you did!" Hughes exclaimed. "Then it was your stakes that we found last summer?"

"Yes. Mr. Ford was negotiating at the time for the purchase of a coal field in the Little Junipers, but the deal fell through—some trouble about the land titles, I believe."

"I've got you going!" said Hughes exultantly. "Could you interest Mr. Ford again in that coal proposition?"

"I don't know; maybe I could. Why?"

"Because the department investigations have cleared that title muddle up, and the coal lands are for sale at a bargain."

"Lay out your scheme."

"It's this. To get our material in for the dam at Caliente, we'd have to build a wagon road through Coyote Cañon. A very little more work would make it a practicable grade for a narrow-gauge railroad. The railroad could tap the coal field at Chipeta; and from Dead Man's Chance to Chipeta a hauling road or an overhead transmission line would provide an outlet for Crockett's ore."

"By Jove—I believe you've got it!" I exclaimed. Then my enthusiasm went out as suddenly as it had flared up. "Either a wagon road or a bucket line from Chipeta will take a pot of money, and Crockett hasn't any. Neither have I."

The young government man looked up quickly.

"I must have misunderstood Sprague," he remarked. "I thought you were well fixed."

"Oh, no," I replied. "I'm only a workingman like yourself. But I can pull for your railroad, anyhow. I'll write Mr. Ford as soon as I get back to the Butte."

"That's mighty good of you," he returned heartily. "We government men are handicapped in that field, you know; we can't turn a wheel when it comes to promoting a private enterprise, even when the enterprise is going to serve us more than it will anybody else. And perhaps the mine matter will dovetail in somehow when we get the railroad. Also, perhaps, the day will come some time when you'll remember where you saw me last. Pipe out? Shall we turn in? It's getting pretty late—for a pair of workingmen."

I left the camp in the hills the next morning at daybreak, and Hughes was up to see me off. There was nothing more said about the Caliente railroad project or about the other thing, but nothing more needed to be said. Hughes promised to see me again before long in Green Butte, and so my vacation ended and I took the return road to civilization.

Having made such an early start, I reached town by the middle of the afternoon, returned the hired horse to the livery stable, and went to the hotel to get a bath. In the lobby I found Sprague. He was writing at one of the small desks in an alcove, but he got up and came across to the counter while I was shaking hands with Gilman.

"Back again, are you?" he said cheerfully. "Feeling pretty fit after your week in the open? That's good. Gordie Hughes is a fine fellow, as I'm sure you have discovered for yourself by this time. You're pointing for a bathtub, I suppose. I've ridden that trail a few times and I know how dusty it is. Wouldn't you enjoy a good swim just about now?"

"Sure, if I could find a tub big enough to swim in," I laughed. "I've been eating dirt since five o'clock this morning."

"Would you really enjoy it—the swim, I mean? If you would, just send your bag upstairs and come along with me over to the Athletic. I'll put you up as my guest and we'll take a dip. We've got the finest swimming pool this side of the Missouri River."

It struck me as being a sort of an odd invitation to be extended to a man just in from a hard trip, but my short acquaintance with Mr. Calvin Sprague had led me to look for oddities in him. I said something about taking a bath first and going with him afterward, but he overrode the suggestion with his usual genial masterfulness, and the upshot of the thing was that I went with him to the Athletic, which was only two blocks away and around the corner.

On the way the big-bodied one talked a blue streak, asking me a thousand questions about Hughes and his work, and the kind of a time I had had, and never by any chance giving me an atom

of a show to wedge in a question about how things had been going on in Green Butte during my absence. At the club it was the same way. We chatted for a few minutes with the man at the desk while Sprague was registering me, and presently got a couple of locker keys and went down to the big gymnasium.

While we were stripping in the locker room I had a small revelation. Sprague was such a whale of a man that I had gotten the idea that he was fat. He wasn't; I don't believe there was an ounce of superfluous fat on him. He was simply the picture of an athletic giant, whipped and corded with great muscles that stood out in rolls and folds all over him.

"Gosh!" I said, in honest admiration. "You are certainly a man's man, Mr. Sprague! Did you ever play football?"

"Played on the team four years and coached two more," he laughed. "That's why I hitch up to an athletic club wherever I happen to be stopping over; I like to keep myself fit."

"I used to play myself," I remarked; "but I guess I never was in your class."

"Yet you made a very creditable record. That game you played with Indiana in your last year wasn't anything to be ashamed of."

"What do you know about the Indiana game?" I queried.

"Not much about the game maybe, but a good bit about you," was the smiling rejoinder. "You see, I've had a full week in which to get a line on you since we had our last talk. Are you ready? Bet you a dollar I beat you to the lower end of the pool."

His splash into the ninety-foot basin was like the fall of a house, and he did beat me in the race for the dollar by two good lengths. We had a glorious swim. I was in fairly good condition myself, but this whale of a man could do all the stunts that I could, and then some. After a half hour of it I climbed out, glowing. Sprague rallied me a bit on cutting it so short, but he followed me to the shower room, and was only a step or so behind me when we went back to the lockers.

I was toweling myself vigorously when the singular thing happened. Sprague had been whipping his back with a clubbed bath towel, and was diving into his locker for his clothes. Suddenly the rather dark basement room was flooded with a blinding light, and there was the snap and hiss of a small explosion.

"Catch that beggar!" roared my companion, and when I spun around I saw the curious spectacle of the big man, still stripped to the buff, dodging in and out among the rows of lockers, apparently in eager pursuit of somebody.

The pursuit was seemingly fruitless since Sprague came back in a minute or so, panting and laughing.

"Wasn't that the nerviest thing you ever heard of?" he gasped.

"I don't know yet what it was," I returned.

"Somebody took a flash-light snapshot of us, possibly for some sort of an advertisement of 'before and after taking,' or something of that sort. I call it pretty cold nerve. They'll change the faces, of course; but even at that it was an outrage."

I took my turn with the laugh. Whoever did the thing wasn't after me. It was my gigantic companion's picture that was wanted.

"I'm safely out of it—with my face, at any rate," I chuckled. "The flash came from somewhere behind me. You'll take it up with the club manager?"

"I'll do better than that; I'll lay it before the board of governors at the next meeting. It's a pretty how de do if a man can't bring a friend here for a quiet little swim without running the risk of getting his picture, *au naturel*,

into some yellow newspaper. I never heard of such a thing!"

He was still fuming, only half good-naturedly, I fancied, over the snapshot incident when we passed out through the club office, though he said nothing of it to the manager. But on the way back to the hotel he broke out laughing and showed me a pocket camera.

"It isn't so bad as it might have been," he explained. "The fellow dropped his box in his hurry to get away, and I captured it. That's why it didn't seem worth while to say anything to the manager. Come around to my workshop this evening after dinner and we'll develop the film and see what he got. Fine swim, wasn't it? We'll do it again the next hot day that comes along." Then, with a nod to a young fellow in brown duck and a cowboy hat who was passing: "I quit you here; I've got a little work to do before dinner. See you in the café at half past six. If you beat me to it, just reserve our corner table. So long."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CALM LIGHT OF REASON.

Sprague was on hand to share the café dinner with me, as he had promised to be, and, as on a previous occasion, we secured a corner table, with a fair degree of privacy.

"You'll have a very natural curiosity to know what's been going on in your absence," was the way my enlightenment began after the waiter had taken our order. "But by way of an appetizer before the full meal, I hope you'll let me say that you did an extremely foolish thing on the evening preceding the day when I hustled you into the background with Gordie Hughes."

"Calling on the Carotherses, you mean?" I queried.

"Calling on Miss Mabel Carothers and letting her discover your identity," he said definitively.

"How do you know she discovered me?" I demanded.

"If you had specialized in chemistry in your technical course you wouldn't ask such a question as that," he returned in jocular reproach. "One of the first things an analyst learns is not to let any step in the experiment process go unnoted. Never mind the means in the present instance; let it be sufficient to say that I do know. A witness who could have no motive for distorting the facts was looking in at a convenient window when the lady fainted and you went to get a pitcher of ice water."

"Call it a bad break on my part and I'll admit it," I put in.

"It was imprudent, to say the least; and it had prompt consequences. Your cousin was on the spot almost immediately after you left the house."

"I saw him drive up in an auto with Allen," I said.

"Exactly. Your cousin is a man of some considerable acuteness. He knew you had been there, and I fancy he was able to draw his own conclusions as to what had happened. You can't blame him much if he took it as a bold challenge; an open declaration of war on your part. Up to this time he had been content to set spies upon you, meaning to prosecute you as an impostor if you should declare yourself. But that very night changed his plans."

"Did your telephonic door tell you so?" I inquired.

"It did," said the big-bodied one, with his grave smile. "There was another late-hour conference in the private office which has no privacy. I was in my workroom, thinking—in the dark. I can always think better with the lights turned off. There were four men talking in the adjoining room; your cousin, two others whom I took to be operators from a private-detective agency, and Allen. Your cousin opened the discussion by saying that he now had proof that you were a dangerous criminal, and

that you must be brought to justice before you had a chance to do any more harm."

"*Pro bono publico,* of course?" I laughed.

"Oh, certainly. He didn't hint that he had any personal interest in the matter, farther than to say that you were preparing to impose upon some friends of his. Allen immediately reverted to your sale of the ore at the Swansea smelter, and gave it as his conviction that you had boldly stolen the rich samples from Crockett. That would be grand larceny, and if Hobbs, the smelter man, could be persuaded to swear out a warrant, you could be arrested and taken to Arroyo County for trial."

"But in that case it would be Crockett's quarrel, and not Hobbs'," I interposed.

"The smelter company would be liable if it paid you money without a proper authorization from Crockett, and it would do the prosecuting. Your cousin accepted Allen's view and jumped at the chance of laying you by the heels, not doubting for a moment, it seems, that you were really guilty of the ore theft. The two private detectives were to keep you under surveillance, and Allen was to make a quick trip to Swansea to see Hobbs and get him to start the legal machinery."

"Whereupon you decided that it would be prudent to get me out of town for a while," I suggested.

Sprague nodded. "For that, and for other reasons, I wished to have an uninterrupted week," he said. "We have agreed, you and I, Mr. Shurtleff, that you are not a criminal; but, not to let the enemy get a touchdown on us, I sent a trustworthy young fellow down the railroad to ride in to Crockett's from the nearest point on the Burnt Hills Extension. My emissary, and Allen, your cousin's, returned on the same train last evening, and now we know exactly what we are up against."

"Which is the little end of nothing, of course," I put in. "Crockett gave me the ore outright, and Hobbs wouldn't swear out a warrant unless he knew what he was doing."

Again the big-bodied expert gave me a glimpse of the grave smile flickering at the corners of his eyes.

"Your reasoning isn't at fault, but it doesn't take into account the perversity of that thing which our forefathers used to call fate," he rejoined. "Allen interviewed Hobbs, and the smelter manager, very properly, refused to take any action until he had communicated with Crockett. A range rider was sent in over the trail with a letter to Crockett, and Allen waited at Swansea for the reply. Hobbs' messenger and the young fellow I had sent in by way of the Burnt Hills Trail reached Crocketts' mine on the same day, and they both made a rather astounding discovery. The mine mouth was bulkheaded, the cabin was locked, and the place was deserted."

"Crockett and Cassie gone?" I gasped. "Where, for goodness' sake?"

"There wasn't anything to indicate where they were gone, or for what purpose. The mine was posted with a proper notice, and that was all. My young man was prudent enough not to betray his purpose in visiting Dead Man's Chance; he told the other messenger that he had 'just happened along.' They rode out together over the Swansea trail. My young man—his name is Tarbell, and he was the window watcher who saw Miss Mabel faint when she recognized you that evening a week ago—made himself invisible in the smelter town and saw and heard what went on after Hobbs' range rider had made his report."

"Go on!" I pressed impatiently.

"Allen, being the garden variety of detective, jumped at once to a conclusion which was not altogether unwarranted. You had sold a lot of valuable

samples and had decamped with the money. The range rider's discovery made it more than probable that there was a double murder behind the ore theft. Hobbs was urged to take action at once, so that you could be held on the charge of theft while the disappearance of the old miner and his daughter was being investigated."

"Heavens!" I ejaculated. "That man Allen has missed his vocation. He's a freak!"

My table companion's smile was wholly lenient.

"Suspicion is the stock in trade of the Allens, you must remember," he went on. "It never occurs to them that the reasoning ability is the only one which counts for much in the detection of crime. But to continue: Hobbs was in a dilemma. Without more than half accepting Allen's view of the case, he allowed himself to be overpersuaded. The warrant for your arrest was sworn out, and Allen has brought it here with him."

"It's absurd—a ridiculous mare's-nest!" I protested.

"Easy, my dear boy; we musn't emulate Mr. Cornelius Allen's ready facility for jumping to conclusions," was the big man's caution. "Suppose the Crocketts can't be found. You didn't murder them, to be sure, and we hope nobody else has. But if they can't be promptly located, your cousin's purpose will be handsomely served. You will be held in jail in an out-of-the-way county, and he will have time to marry Miss Carothers, turn his Green Butte property into money, and lose himself and the money in the big crowd."

I saw at once that this cool-headed giant was right. Monty had but to press the button and the law would do the rest. The facts were all against me. I had sold the ore on my own say-so, and Allen and the old Scotch yardmaster, McCormack, would swear that I had tried to change my identity and my name the very next day in Copah.

"Well?" said Sprague, when the silence had grown overlong.

"I guess I'm backed into a corner," I said. "I don't see why Monty doesn't pull the string and spring his trap. What is he waiting for?"

"Up to this afternoon he has been telling himself that he was merely waiting for you to return from Hughes' camp. The trap is ready, and, as I happen to know, Allen is growing a bit impatient."

"Well, why doesn't Monty get a move?" I persisted.

For the third time Sprague let me see the grave smile.

"Every man has his limitations, my dear boy, and your cousin is no exception to the general rule. I told you on a former occasion that he had given one evidence of criminality by overshooting the mark. Within the past two days he has given another and even more convincing proof that his hands are not entirely clean. The Psalmist would class him as one of those who are afraid of the arrow that flieth by day."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just this: Mr. Montmorency Gershom has learned, from various and sundry sources, that somebody is looking up his record; tracing him, step by step, through the mazes of a somewhat devious path that he chose to walk in on a certain mournful occasion two years in the past. He is like a man with his finger on the firing key of a loaded mine which may have ramifications entirely unknown and unsuspected; which may possibly shoot the wrong way when the spark is applied."

"In other words, you've been scaring him out?" I suggested.

"Something of that sort maybe; just the barest hint, you know. To be entirely frank with you, there is no evidence against him—not a shred. Rea-

son, the calm logic which disentagles a knot thread by thread or fiber by fiber, if need be, is the only enemy he needs to fear. If he has committed any criminal act in the past, I can assure you definitely that it can never be legally proved against him save by his own confession."

"You are miles beyond me now," I protested. "Can't you put it in words of one syllable?"

"No; but I can put it in a sentence. Every discovery that has ever been made has been based upon a hypothesis. Previous to the discovery somebody's mind has groped out ahead in the darkness feeling for the facts which his reason has told him must exist. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Very good. I have formed a hypothesis based upon the knowledge that, within certain well-defined lines, the human mind moves from cause to effect almost mechanically. In other words, if there is a certain object to be accomplished, ninety-nine men out of a hundred will go about it in the most obvious way, one step leading logically to the next, and so on to the end. Really, it is only the starting point which is hypothetical in the tracing of these steps. Reason itself carries the process on once it is given the tracing thread."

"You have discovered what Monty did two years ago?"

"No; I have merely projected his line of action as a logical supposition. Thus far there is no evidence that he did any of the things I am supposing him to have done, and yet the line of reasoning is so clear that I am perfectly convinced that he did do them."

"And what have you learned about me?" I inquired.

"All that I needed to know. When you come into your fortune, or *if* you come into it, you will have a good-sized telegraph bill to pay, with possibly some other expenses which needn't be particularized now."

"Did you succeed in tracing the brown coat?"

"Easily. It was made for the Robert Jones whom I once met in a Pullman smoking room, as I have related—the machinery salesman. And that isn't all. Singularly enough, this same Robert Jones disappeared, with the Omaha tailor's bill for the brown suit still unpaid, it seems, something over two years ago, and has never been heard of since."

"And no search was made for him?"

"Oh, yes, a rather earnest search. Like many traveling salesmen, he had authority to make collections for his house. At the time of his disappearance he had several hundred dollars of the company's money in his possession. He was last heard of going west on the P. S-W., and, though he had always borne a good reputation, his employers reluctantly concluded that he had yielded to temptation of some sort and had left the country with the money, though the sum was so small as to make the conclusion almost untenable."

"Robert Jones is buried in my own personal grave, and the money was doubtless burned in the sleeping car *Katinka,*" I said.

"Even so," said Sprague. "But my investigation did not stop quite as short as the one which was instituted, two years ago, by the Omaha machinery company. When the proper moment arrives, we can prove that a man answering Jones' description, and even bearing Jones' name, since he wired ahead from a town in the southern part of the State for his reservation, boarded the sleeping car *Katinka* at Copah on the night of the disaster."

The leisurely dinner was over, and Sprague was fingering one of the huge black cigars.

"I'd like to stay and smoke with you,"

he said, "but I can't this evening. I have another engagement."

"But you haven't told me yet what I'm to do," I put in, leaning upon him as I think all men did when they came to know him.

"I am trusting confidently in that small limitation of your cousin's," he remarked, with the good-natured chuckle. "Sooner or later he will acquire the courage of his convictions and hit out at you; but he hasn't acquired it yet. Go along quietly in your own way, and don't give him any fresh provocation. I need a few days more, and after that perhaps we can make a small move of our own. I think that's all, for the present."

We parted in the lobby, Sprague saying nothing further about his offer to take me to his laboratory to see the snapshot film developed. Left to myself, I was minded to go to bed early. With the long ride from Hughes' to account for three-fourths of it, it had been a rather strenuous day.

Going across to the clerk's desk for my key, I found an envelope in my box. Secured and opened, it proved to be the cover of a note from Mabel. The note was undated, but the freshness of the ink showed that it had been lately written. This is what I read.

You are not keeping your part of the bargain. I saw you on the street this afternoon with Mr. Sprague. There is to be a little dance this evening at Butte Springs, and I am inclosing an invitation which I have persuaded Mrs. Calthrope to give me for you. Don't you think you'd better come and make your peace with me?

The note was signed "M," and, as I have said, was without date or superscription. I thought it over for a moment. It was plainly a small "dare." I knew the Mrs. Calthrope bunch. Calthrope was the president of the Security Bank, and, while the set with which his wife and daughters used to go was not exactly what would be called fast, it was given somewhat—or it used to be in my time—to late suppers and automobile parties and road-house dances.

Mabel had run with this set more or less in the old days, and it had adopted Monty right from the jump. It had had small use for a working engineer on the railroad, but Mabel had dragged me into it now and then, in spite of all I could do. I realized that she was trying to drag me in again, and quite probably for some selfish purpose of her own. With Sprague's story and his caution still ringing in my ears, I ought to have had more sense than to think of taking Mabel's "dare." But it is not only little children who are fond of playing with forbidden fire. At the end of it I went upstairs to change my clothes.

Half an hour later I was back at Gilman's desk, asking him to get me a cab. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred there would have been no mention made of the purpose for which I wanted the cab, but, luckily for me, this proved to be the hundredth time.

"Just for a town drive?" Gilman asked, and I said: "No; I want to go to Butte Springs."

The rig I got was a taxi. A few minutes later the mongrel motor car was whirling me out of town on the Springs Road, and I was in for whatever lay in front of me, going at it bullheaded and telling myself easily that Monty, knowing me for what I really was, wouldn't dare to spring his trap.

But, as it turned out, the only sensible thing I had done since parting with Sprague was that telling to Gilman where it was that I wanted the taxi to take me—and that was merely a happen-so.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT BUTTE SPRINGS TAVERN.

Butte Springs Tavern, a wayside clubhouse summer resort in the hills behind the outpost mountain which gives the city of Green Butte its official

name, was—is yet, for that matter—a big, rambling house with broad porches and a spreading roof to give it the appearance of an overgrown bungalow.

Though it was no later than nine o'clock when my hired taxi set me down at the porch step, Mrs. Calthrope's dancing party had already taken possession in force. There were a good many automobiles in the pine-groved yard, and the big, brilliantly lighted clubhouse was overflowing, the overflow showing up in groups and couples mixing and mingling under the Chinese lanterns on the porches.

Telling my driver to consider himself engaged for the evening, I was making my way to the door when I saw Mabel in one of the porch groups. She saw me at the same instant, and came up as I was giving my coat and card to the man at the door.

"I thought you would come," she said, giving me her hand and a bright smile to go with it. Then: "Still wearing that dreadful beard?"

"Yes, and still answering to the name of Jones," I reminded her.

"I don't like either the beard or the name," she retorted, with a pout of the pretty lips; "but if you'll keep your promise to be nice to me——"

The interruption was the upcoming of a man who had separated himself from a little knot of cigarette smokers at the porch rail. I felt, rather than saw, that it was Monty. Mabel rose to the requirements without so much as the quickened quiver of an eyelash.

"Monty," she said sweetly, "let me introduce you to Mr. Robert Jones, the gentleman who was your cousin Jimmie's most intimate friend in college. Mr. Jones, this is Mr. Montmorency Gershom."

Notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, civilization and the common conventions have really done a little something for us in the way of toning down the purely barbaric impulses. Monty's nod wasn't very cordial, to be sure; and we didn't shake hands or pat each other on the back. But I doubt if the most observant of bystanders would have taken us for a pair of sworn enemies, each feeling figuratively for the other's throat.

Mabel made talk out of nothing for a minute or two, and I helped out as I could. Monty said nothing, and I could see a malignant little devil in his eyes watching us both to mark the first slip that might betray either of us. I must admit that Mabel carried it off splendidly, with a cool daring I had never in the older days suspected her of possessing.

"I want you two to be real good friends," she bubbled; "especially you, Monty. Mr. Jones is a stranger in Green Butte, and you know everybody. He has a claim on us for poor dear Jimmie's sake, you know." Then she excused herself lightly to Gershom and laid a hand on my arm. "Let me take you in and start you right with Mrs. Calthrope and the honorees. Mamma isn't here, but that doesn't matter, in our own set." And Monty didn't stab me in the back as we turned away, which may count one more for the humanizing influences of our day and generation.

In the big reception hall Mabel did the honors with as neat a grip on herself as she had shown in that perfectly volcanic situation on the porch. To Mrs. Calthrope and her daughters I was presented as "a lifelong friend of poor dear Jimmie's, you know," and when Monty came in, a few minutes later, with a cast-iron smile on his handsome face and bloody murder in his eyes, I had been cleverly passed on to one of the Calthrope cousins, who was trying to find a vacant number for me on her dancing card.

I called it a little respite and made the most of it, knowing blessed well that Mabel wasn't through with me yet; that she hadn't taken the trouble to get me

out to Butte Springs merely to give me a chance to shake a leg on the clubhouse dancing floor. Things went on smoothly enough for a while. The Calthrope cousin gave me one dance, and a young woman, whose name I lost the minute after it was handed to me, gave me two more. There were familiar faces aplenty, and some few of the names I remembered as those of people whom I had met on the other side of the big gap. But there was never a gleam of recognition for me, or rather for "poor, dear Jimmie," in any eye that met mine.

I noticed that Mabel danced with Monty just often enough to take the curse off—their engagement being announced. He paid no attention to me, looking straight over my head if we happened to meet. But the malignant devil was still lurking in his eyes whenever I managed to get a sight of them; and before long I began to wish myself safely out of this fresh and wholly unnecessary tangle into which I had walked with my eyes wide open.

A little farther along I had a shock like that of a small boy caught with his fingers in the sugar bowl when I saw Sprague shaking hands with Mrs. Calthrope, and apparently apologizing for his late arrival. In the circumstances he was about the last man on earth that I cared to meet, since I was expressly disobeying his instructions. So, being without a partner at the moment, I slipped through one of the open French windows to the porch.

I didn't mean to make the dodging retreat a gumshoe proceeding, but I guess it figured that way for the couple occupying a porch seat just beyond a big potted shrub flanking the open window. The two were Mabel and Monty, and they were talking about me. It didn't seem prudent to show myself, and I couldn't go back without taking a chance of running into Sprague. So I stood still and made believe I wasn't playing the eavesdropper willingly.

"I tell you, Mabel, I know what I am talking about!" my cousin was insisting angrily. "The man is a double-dyed scoundrel. He hadn't been in town six hours before he was trying to play a confidence game on me, and it was bolder than the one he is playing on you and your father!"

"He hasn't been trying to get any money out of us," was the calm reply.

"He is working the social graft on you," Monty gritted. "You say he poses as one of Jimmie's college friends. What would you say if I should tell you that he braced me with a threat to produce Jimmie himself, alive and well, if I didn't make it worth his while not to?"

"I should find it rather hard to believe."

"It's true. By some underhanded means he has learned a lot about Jimmie and about Uncle Perkins' will. He is a thief, a blackmailer, and quite possibly a murderer. I don't want you to have anything more to do with him."

"How would he go to work to 'produce Jimmie' when we all know that poor Jimmie has been dead and buried for more than two years?" the girl asked, apparently ignoring the criminalizing epithets.

"I'm no mind reader; I can't tell what infernal fairy tale he has got up his sleeve!" was the impatient retort. "But I wouldn't put it beyond him to impersonate Jimmie himself, if he thought he could scare me into being blackmailed. Such things have been done, and in a new country like this it isn't so easy to show an impostor up. All the people who knew Jimmie best—his railroad friends and the like—have left town, and if this fellow's got a story ingenious enough to make it appear that Jimmie is alive when we all know he has been dead and buried for over two years, he might make a horrible scandal if he couldn't do anything worse."

"You mean that he might take the

property matter into the courts?" came in the low voice of the girl.

"Yes; only he isn't going to get that far along."

"In that case they would be sure to call upon me, wouldn't they? They'd say that I would know the real Jimmie Shurtleff if anybody would."

"Certainly they would. I shouldn't wonder if that is why he's trying to make up to you now. He's getting pointers on the way things stood between you and Jimmie in the old days so that he may throw them into your face on the witness stand."

There was silence for a moment, and then the girl's voice came again:

"You are a foolish boy, Monty, dear. I believe you are more than half afraid that this Mr. Jones might bully me into believing that he really *is* Jimmie Shurtleff come back to life."

There was another silence, and I fancied Monty broke it only under compulsion:

"I can't tell what you'll do; no man can ever tell what a woman will do. You played it pretty fine that night a week ago, after this fellow had called on you, but you didn't more than half fool me, Mabel. You were holding something back, and I knew it. Tell me plainly: Didn't Jones try to make you believe that he was Jimmie?"

"He did not." The answer was positive and unhesitating.

"That's good, as far as it goes. You mustn't believe it, no matter what he says or does."

"It all seems very absurd—his threat to you and your fear that he might possibly carry it out," said the girl. "How could he have any chance at all if he wasn't telling the truth?"

"He wouldn't take a dead man's chance. He doesn't seem to know that Jimmie always went clean shaven. There is a slight resemblance about the eyes, as you may have noticed. If he should take off his beard, tell a plausible story, and talk long enough and loud enough, he might get a good many people to believe in him, and we both know sheeplike human nature well enough to be sure that he would get some. I'll be frank with you, Mabel, girl. When I saw all the possibilities; how he might drag you into court and all that, I—I offered him money to go away. He wanted more—too much more; and when I refused, he threw me down and choked me. It was in his room at the hotel."

My legs were getting pretty tired, and every muscle in my body was aching from the sustained effort to efface myself in the shadow of the potted shrub, but I couldn't have moved if my life had depended upon it. Man and boy, as I had known him, Monty had always had a yellow streak in him, but he was breaking all the records now.

"You wouldn't let him fool you? He couldn't possibly fool you, could he?" he went on. "You saw Jimmie when they brought him here for the funeral, and you *know* he is dead."

"I know that you are a foolish boy, also that your name is on Minnie Willside's card for this next dance," was the temporizing rejoinder, and then they got up to go in.

For a second I was half paralyzed for fear they would come around the potted plant and so catch me redhanded, but they went the other way. But before they were out of earshot I heard Monty's final confidence.

"Now that I've told you so much, I'll tell you a little more," he said, lowering his voice. "Jones is a criminal, and I have the proof. He has stolen from a man down in the Juniper country, and there is a warrant out for his arrest. There is also good reason to believe that he committed murder to make the theft possible. You will probably see a notice of his arrest in to-morrow morning's paper."

I guess there is a good deal of hu-

man nature in all of us. At first I had been rather sorry for Monty; sorry that it was going to come in my way to claim the fortune that had really been left to me. But now I was glad, just plain humanly glad that it was up to me to put him out of the game.

There wasn't any sentiment about it; not an atom. I saw Mabel for pretty much what she was—neither all bad nor all good; just an ambitious little beauty who was cold-blooded enough to make sure that her nest was going to be well feathered—and the sight sent every thrilling love nerve in me scuttling into space, to whatever corner of it was holding the girl who had been too honorable to listen to a love word which might possibly be due another woman.

I wanted to be away from it all; to be back in the peaceful mountains; to be sitting on the big flat bowlder at Dead Man's Chance with Cassie and telling her that her sacrifice and mine were as unnecessary as a new ordering of the stars in the heavens. With that flying-away-to-be-with-you-love idea in my head, I stepped down from the porch and strolled across the bit of greensward to the pines. Only one side of the grove was given up to the parked cars. At the other side there were rustic seats and paper lanterns hung in the trees.

I dropped into one of the seats, and was feeling in my pockets for a cigar when I heard a faint swish of clinging skirts. When I looked up, the house lights blinded me. Then a whiff of the perfume I had known so well in the other years came to my nostrils, and I twisted around quickly to find Mabel sitting beside me in the tree-shadowed half of the rustic seat.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WOMAN OF IT.

With the poorest possible ear for music, I shall never hear that particular piece the dance orchestra was playing without getting a sharp memory picture of a starlit night in a pine grove and a girl sharing a rustic seat with me, and a mingled fragrance of pines and crushed violets making the still night air heavy and half intoxicating.

"Do you know you haven't asked me for a single dance this whole evening?" was the way Mabel began on me.

I laughed and said that I didn't know I was expected to.

She turned to face me in her end of the wooden seat.

"I wouldn't be as cold-blooded as you are for millions of dollars, Jimmie Shurtleff!" she burst out reproachfully. "Don't the old days mean anything at all to you?"

"Yes, they mean precisely as much to me as they do to you."

"That is simply boyish, and barbarous, Jimmie, and you know it. Did you expect to come to life after being dead for two whole years and find me still waiting, like Mariana in the what-you-may-call-it Grange?"

"Of course I didn't. I expected to find you safely married to Monty."

"And you are disappointed because you didn't find me that way? You may as well say it as think it."

"Disappointed isn't just the word," I objected. "'Curious' hits it off better. How have you contrived to stand Monty off so long?"

She let me see her eyes. The man-melting light had gone out of them for the moment, and a sort of age-old wisdom had taken its place.

"Until quite recently, you know, Monty hasn't been such an overpoweringly desirable match," she countered coolly. "He's nice to me most of the time, but he has a frightful temper."

"You shouldn't talk that way about the man you have promised to marry. Don't you know that?"

"You think I ought to be sentimental? I had my little fling at that two years ago, Jimmie, and I can't afford to

take another. It's too—well, too exhausting."

"Then you are marrying Monty for his money?" I queried, more than a little shocked at this newest revealment of the girl I had once thought I knew so well.

"I certainly shouldn't marry him without it," was the calm reply. Then: "That is why I asked you to come out here this evening. Are you going to take the money away from him, Jimmie?"

Now sordidness is a sufficiently unlovely thing in a man, but in a woman ——

"I can't somehow seem to place you in this new light, Mabel," I blurted out. "It's horrible!"

"Oh, no," she temporized. "You have the conventional point of view, that's all. Sentiment is all right in its place; and I suppose everybody has to be really in love—once. I know I was, and I thought at the time that you were. It was a mistake, I guess—or wasn't it, Jimmie, dear?"

By this time she had me grappling for handholds. Was she deliberately trying to stir alive a fire that had been cold ashes for two long years?

"As things have turned out, it was aiming to be about as miserable a mistake as two people ever tried to make, wasn't it?" I rejoined. "You've got to call it either that or a tragedy."

"Perhaps it was a tragedy, or at least half of one," she said, speaking softly and with her face turned away. "You don't love me any more, now, Jimmie, and for that reason you can see only the unlovely part of me—the part that has grown up like an ugly weed on a grave. You are saying to yourself that I have changed frightfully in the two years, but so have you—or haven't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I have changed," I admitted. "Even my name isn't the same."

She looked up quickly. "Why did you change that?"

"It was changed for me. It's a long story, and you wouldn't believe it if I should tell it to you. Jimmie Shurtleff has really been dead most of the time. He came alive again only a few weeks ago."

"You were hurt in the railroad accident, then? You have been out of your mind all this time?"

"Something like that, yes."

"I knew it—knew it the moment I recognized you in daddy's den that night a week ago. Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie!"

I think at that moment I would cheerfully have given another two years of my life if I could have found myself safely back in my room at the Green Butte Hotel. The situation was simply impossible, and it was growing more so every minute. If Monty should happen to stumble upon us there would be a murder—and a not entirely unjustifiable one, either.

"It's all past and gone now, and neither of us can help it," I hastened to say. "As I have said, I expected to find you married to Monty, and, of course, I didn't know anything at all about Uncle Perkins' money. I didn't come back here to make trouble for you, Mabel."

"Then why did you come back at all?" she flashed out.

It didn't seem as if the plain truth could make things a single atom worse than they were, so I told it.

"I came back to Green Butte to keep the promise made to you two years and a half ago—if you were unmarried and still wanted it kept."

"But you have changed your mind since you came," she put in quickly.

"Yes, I have. You are engaged to another man, and——"

"And you are as good as engaged to another woman," she retorted, hitting out at me with what I knew was only a blind blow in the dark.

"That is true, too," I confessed.

She leaned over and her breath came in little gasps.

"Did you tell her about me, Jimmie?"

"I did—when I came to myself."

"What is she like—this other girl?"

Somehow it seemed like a profanation to be talking of Cassie Crockett to a woman who had just admitted that she cared more for money than for the man she had promised to marry, and I refused to be dragged into that ditch.

"We've been dodging all over the lot and getting nowhere," I said. "What do you want me to do, Mabel?"

"I told you a week ago: I want you to be nice to me."

"If you were an empty-headed schoolgirl, trying to throw one man at another man's head, I might understand you," I returned. "As it is, you'll have to make it a bit plainer."

"I want time; give me a little time to think, won't you, please, Jimmie, dear?" she pleaded.

It came to me like the smack of a blow that she merely wanted time to see how things were going to turn out between Monty and me. If Monty could make good and shove me to the wall, she would marry him. But if I should win out——

"Wait a minute!" I interposed. "Let's stand this thing squarely upon its feet. You asked me why I came back, and I told you. If, in defiance of all the probabilities, I should find you still true to a memory—to a dead man—I meant to do my part. You don't want me, Mabel, and you don't particularly want Monty. What you do want is Uncle Perkins' money."

Even at that she wouldn't let go.

"You are bullying me now, Jimmie—just as you used to in the old days," she faltered, with the proper little catch in her voice. "I was foolish enough to admit that I—that I—haven't forgotten. . . . If you were only the same as you used to be—if that other girl hadn't come between——"

Something had to be done if I didn't mean to let this pretty web spinner wind me up into a hopeless, helpless mummy, and I got up on my feet.

"It was the other girl who sent me back here to do my duty," I broke out roughly. "But she doesn't expect me to be Monty Gershom's understudy, and I'm not going to be, Mabel. This is one time when you can't be given the chance to run with the hare and hold with the hounds."

It was brutal enough, in all conscience sake, but it seemed to slip from her like rain from a duck's back. When she stood up and shook the creases from her gown, she was smiling sweetly.

"You used to eat out of my hand once, Jimmie, and perhaps, before long, you'll wish you had a chance to do it again," she said, quite amiably. "I came out here to tell you something—something that concerns you rather vitally. But since you persist in pushing me over to the other side——"

"You can't tell me anything that I don't already know. Monty will fight, and he won't be very particular about the weapons he chooses," I retorted. Then I added the capstone to the pyramid of foolishness: "You may tell him from me that I know what he is planning to do, and that I also know he is too big a coward to do it. Shall I take you across to the house?"

She made a little sign of dissent and went alone, choosing, I noticed, the streak of shadow lying between two of the light beams pouring from the house windows. After she was gone I had a chance to look over the battlefield and count the dead and wounded. There was one small gain, at least. If there had been any lingering illusions, they were dead now—as dead as Pharaoh. But, on the other hand, I had given Monty Gershom an ally who was twice

as quick-witted as he was—and infinitely more reckless of consequences.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HE WHO FIGHTS AND RUNS AWAY——"

I didn't feel much like going back to the house and pretending to enjoy myself with the dancers after I realized that I had just sharpened a spur which might goad Monty into sudden action. So I found that cigar I had been searching for when I discovered Mabel sitting beside me, lighted it, and dropped into the rustic seat to wait until things should clarify themselves a bit.

The cigar ash had grown to be a couple of inches long when I saw a gigantic figure making its way toward me among the trees. It was Sprague, and he, too, was smoking. Though he appeared to be strolling without any particular object, he came straight to the sheltered seat and sat down beside me without a word. I thought I'd let him start the merry-go-round, and, after a minute or so, he did it.

"You seem to have a most unhappy faculty of climbing out upon the high tree limbs and sawing them off between you and the trunk, Mr. Shurtleff," he began, in gentle deprecation. "Whatever possessed you to come out here tonight?"

"The devil, I guess," I answered.

He looked around, fixing me with that steady eye of his.

"This is an invitation affair; how did you get your card?"

There was never any use in trying to dodge him, so I told him the bare truth.

"I thought as much," he returned, half to himself. Then: "What did she want of you?"

I told him the truth again.

"I don't know but what you have earned all that is coming to you," he commented, after another little pause. "Have you forgotten what our friend Billy Congreve, back in Queen Elizabeth's time, said about a woman scorned? You have made an enemy who has more resource in her little finger than your cousin has in his whole body—and who isn't lacking that last little fillip of nerve which drives the knife home and twists it around in the wound."

"I'm an ass," I agreed, and he took me up in a flash.

"But in the present exigency you must run like a giraffe. It's lucky Gilman was able to tell me where you had gone when I went back to the hotel." He looked at his watch, holding it up to the light of one of the paper lanterns. "It wants a quarter of eleven. There is a train north on the G. V. branch to Castleton at eleven-fifty-five. Can you make it?"

"I've got a taxi," I said.

"All right. We mustn't let them arrest you—at least not before the Crocketts turn up. I've seen men buried for life on circumstantial evidence no whit more convincing than that which your cousin is preparing to pull down upon you."

"You mean that Monty has at last acquired the courage of his convictions?"

"I mean that the young woman has pushed him over the edge. A few minutes ago she told him privately, as she no doubt thought, that if he had any evidence against you now was the time, and it was his duty to act at once. He hung off a bit in deference to those limitations I have spoken of, and then went to the telephone and called up the Green Butte police headquarters."

"Then the officers must be already on the way. Will they come in a car?"

"Most likely. You have no time to lose. Go in and say your leave-takings to Mrs. Calthrope—and do it quietly. Then get your coat and hat and slip out through the conservatory. I'll be waiting for you."

I went at it promptly, following Sprague's instructions to the letter. I found the banker's wife in the refreshment room, said the needful platitudes, and got out without meeting either Monty or Mabel. At the parked-car end of the grove the big-bodied chemist was holding the door of the taxi open for me.

"I have given your driver the hurry order," he said. "In with you; and don't show yourself in Green Butte again until you hear from me!"

"But how will you know where to reach me?" I asked, clambering in in obedience to his curt command.

"I'll take care of that," was the brief reply. "All you have to do to-night is to disappear neatly." Then, with an abrupt change that seemed almost ludicrous in the circumstances: "Do you shave yourself?"

"Yes, I used to on the other side of the big ditch."

He thrust a small black pocket case upon me. "Take that and use it when you get a chance," he directed. "And when you take the beard off, scrape the name Jones off with it. That's all. Good-by." He shut the cab door, and the next moment the taxi was spinning along the gravel driveway to gain the road.

It was a mildly exciting get-away, with all sorts of possibilities hanging in the air, and my driver made it more so by speeding up like the mischief after he had warmed his machine, and some way his back didn't look quite familiar, though I couldn't make him out very well in the starlight. After a while I saw what made the difference: my man had worn a derby hat on the way out, and the fellow at the wheel was wearing a soft hat which was pulled well down over his eyes.

You would say there was plenty to keep me awake on a twenty-mile dash to the city. Doubtless we were due to meet the police machine somewhere on the road, and the thought occurred to me that the officers might possibly stop my man and make him show me up.

In spite of this disquieting suggestion, however, the rhythmic drumming of the motor began presently to make me drowsy. You'll recollect that I had been up before daybreak at Hughes' camp, and had put in ten solid hours of this high-speed day in the saddle. With the hum of the motor in my ears, I fell asleep, and for aught I knew I might have been out of the game for one hour or five when I was awakened by a sudden stopping of the car.

The driver slid the front window and skewed himself to face me.

"Bust up o' some kind," he announced briefly, adding: "And I guess I'm sort o' off the road."

I opened the door and got out. There was no road of any kind, so far as I could see. We seemed to be in a broad valley, with mountains on all sides, and the only sign of human habitation was a small, cabinlike house looming darkly at the right. The taxi engine was still running, and I asked what was the matter.

"Broken clutch, I reckon," was the grumpy reply. "S'pose you go and rout 'em out at that cabin and see if they can put us up f'r the rest o' the night."

I was beginning to get a little wider awake now, and the incongruities were asking to be heard.

"How does it come that you got off the road?" I demanded. Then I looked at him a little more closely. "You're not the man who drove me to Butte Springs."

"Who said I was?" was the counter-demand. Then: "We're stuck, all the samee. You go over to that house and holler f'r a bed."

It was at this point that I began to suspect something crooked, but the strange driver didn't give me time to do much suspecting. Before I realized what he was about, he whipped out a

gun, and in the uncertain light it looked as big as a cannon.

"I told you to hump over there and rout that house out!" he barked. "I ain't goin' to sit here all night waitin' f'r you."

I was completely dazed and dumfounded when I obeyed mechanically. How had my civil derby-hatted jarvey got himself exchanged for this drunken maniac who first lost his way on a plain pike road and then menaced his fare with a deadly weapon? The mysteries were crowding in so thickly that I began to wonder if I were really awake or only dreaming. The cabin had no door on the near side, and I went around to the other side. There was a door here, and before I reached it I saw that it was standing wide open. In a flash it came to me that the house was uninhabited, and that my strange taxi driver knew it.

Stopping short, I wheeled and ran back, meaning to have it out with the gun-toting bully if it should take a hand-to-hand battle to clear up the mystery. But I wasn't quite quick enough. When I had made the half circuit of the cabin in reverse, the taxi was gone, and the drumming of its motor was no more than a fading murmur on the night wind.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST MOUNTAIN VALLEY.

With the taxi gone and no hope of overtaking it, I turned back to the cabin. Luckily I had matches, and, after calling at the open door to make sure that I shouldn't be shot for a night marauder if there should happen to be an occupant, I entered and struck a light.

The flare of the first match showed me a bare interior, with a rough sleeping bunk, a stool, a long benchlike table with little heaps of rusty earth on it, a cupboard contrivance in one corner, and a rude fireplace. A second match gave me a glimpse of a candle stuck in a bottle on the bench table, and I was able to make the light permanent. The better illumination revealed nothing more hopeful. There were no signs of any very recent occupancy of the cabin, and nothing to indicate the purpose for which it had been built and used.

The bunk was mattressed with fir twigs, and these were withered as if some time had elapsed since their cutting. There was a pair of cheap blankets spread over the twigs, and in the corner cupboard I found what I took to be the remains of a prospector's grubstake: canned meat, beans, and tomatoes, a sealed tin of ship's biscuit, a piece of salt meat in which a field mouse or some other rodent had begun to make inroads, and half a dozen extra candles.

On the clay hearth there was an armful of chopped wood, and the sight of the wood made me realize that the night was cool almost to frostiness, which would argue that the lone cabin must be high among the hills, at a much greater altitude than that of Butte Springs.

I pulled out my watch. The time was half past two. I had left Butte Springs at eleven or thereabouts. The taxi, even on mountain roads, would be good for at least twenty miles an hour. Therefore I might be sixty miles or more from the Springs, and, if the flight had been to the westward—as the mountain surroundings seemed to indicate—eighty or more from Green Butte.

Putting the candle aside, I knelt to make a fire in the clay-daubed chimney. With a cheerful fire going, I pulled up the stool, filled my pipe, and started in on the mysteries. There could be but one explanation for this imprisonment in the wilderness. Monty's nerve had failed him, even after he had taken the final step of telephoning the police. Until he could find out why he was himself under surveillance and investigation, he couldn't muster up the courage

to fire the mine which, however surely it would efface me, might also kick back and blow him up.

What then? I figured it that he had changed his mind between the match scratching and the powder lighting and had invented a rough-and-ready alternative. He had bought off my driver and substituted one of his own paid villains. I was not to be murdered out of hand; I was merely to be kept on tap, so to speak, until it should be safe to produce me and turn me over to the Arroyo County authorities.

I had a quiet little laugh at Sprague when this solving of the mystery had established itself. For once he had been handsomely outwitted, I thought. Burrowing so deeply that Monty had no inkling of the identity of the investigator who was prying into his past, he had left the inference wide open that *I* was the one who was behind the prying. That being the case, if Monty had anything to conceal he would be afraid to give me a chance to talk to a bunch of police officers.

At the end of the pipe smoking I chuckled again, this time at the idea that a well man, used to knocking about in the mountains, could be confined for any length of time within four hours' automobile run of a city and a railroad. A little later I took that thought to bed with me, and rose up with it in the morning when the sun, lifting above the eastern valley rim, looked in at the open door and woke me. I had only to make a pack of the provisions somebody had so opportunely left in the corner cupboard, and tramp till I got somewhere.

The notion was carried out—partly, at least—as soon as I had made a fire and warmed me a bite of breakfast. With the remains of the canned-goods grubstake slung over my shoulder in my bagged top coat, I cut a figure which would have made a wooden Indian laugh. I was still in evening clothes, you'll remember, which were by this time much the worse for having been slept in. But the killing feature of it was my shoes, which were dancing pumps.

It was the pumps that knocked me out. Arguing that the night flight must have been westward, I ignored the taxi tracks, which ran in exactly the opposite direction, and struck out for what seemed to be a pass at the upper or eastern end of the valley. Picking my way in those cursed dancing shoes, it was fully noon before I came to the mountains themselves. There was no road, no trail, but there was the stream which ran beside the cabin to follow, and I followed it.

By the middle of the afternoon I was done up. Beyond the hog's-back range there were mountains and still more mountains, some of the higher peaks showing snow balds above timber line. It was no use. Those fool dancing slippers had practically crippled me, and I was getting nowhere; had evidently taken the wrong slant from the start. There was nothing for it but a return to the cabin, and I made it, hobbling and resting alternatively, and getting back away deep in the night, sodden tired and half murdered by my swollen feet.

None the less, after a few hours' sleep, I crawled out of the fir-twig bunk determined to try again. It was another perfect day, neither too hot nor too cool. But at the breakfast-fire-making moment I made a discovery that took the hurry out of my plan for a fresh attempt to break jail. The corner cupboard door was half open, and the shelves, which I had stripped the day before to fill my tramping pack, were restocked with a supply of everything that a hungry man might need.

Two conclusions came to me with the dispatching of a hearty breakfast conjured out of the new stores. One was that I wasn't to be immediately starved to death, and the other was that my kid-

napers, whoever they might be, were confidently counting upon my inability to scape unaided, or at least without shoes, from the lost valley. I had no means of knowing when the fresh supplies had come: whether it was during my absence of the previous day, or in the night while I had slept. But, anyway, they indicated that the cabin was to be my base, and that it was supposed that I wouldn't stray so far away from it as not to be able to get back for something to eat.

During that second day I slept a good deal and gave my feet a chance to rest up. In the waking intervals there were opportunities to think and speculate. But nothing came of the mental gymnastics. Every query that propounded itself hung, like the Prophet's coffin, between heaven and earth.

Toward evening the waking intervals grew longer, and I began to feel the drag of the loneliness and isolation. More and more the whole fantastic business was taking on the characteristics of a nightmareish dream. Was I Shurtleff? Or was I Jones? Part of the time I wouldn't have sworn to either identity. Monty had said he would give me a dead man's chance. Putting one thing with another, it was measurably certain that I wasn't getting a live man's.

Out of these reflections came a recrudescence of sanity, of a sort. I had been a donkey to allow myself to be led by Sprague or anybody else into the maze of indirection and concealment which had finally landed me in this out-of-the-world hole, barefooted, as you might say, and wholly at the mercy of a trumpery little villain who hadn't the honesty to give me back my money or the courage to kill me off out of the way. If I should ever get back to civilization again——

I was sitting before the blaze of pine knots, chewing over the different things that I was going to do to Monty Gershom if I ever got another hack at him when I heard the unmistakable squeak of a motor-car brake and a subdued murmur of voices. The short twilight had faded, and the open cabin door framed a square of inky blackness. My first thought was that my captors, whoever they were, had come for me; but you could certainly have knocked me out with a feather duster when I looked up and saw the natty figure of my loving cousin framing itself in the black doorway.

"No bad breaks, if you please!" he growled shortly, when I started to my feet. "The other time we talked you choked me and took my gun away from me; but this time another man is holding the gun on you, and you'll be drilled if you don't keep quiet."

I thought it was a bluff, but it wasn't. As he came in and sat down on the edge of the bunk, I saw the muzzle of a rifle peeking at me around the edge of the door jamb. I wasn't committing suicide just then, so I sat down again.

"It was right good of you to look me up, Monty," I said. "Have you come to tell me that you are ready to turn Uncle Perkins' money loose?"

The cursing I got in return for this needn't be set down here. It wouldn't look well in cold type. It didn't hurt me any, and it did Monty a lot of good to be able to sit there in perfect safety and turn his abusive machinery loose on me. He had a good vocabulary—Yale, or whatever college it was he had gone to, was responsible for that—and he worked it hard.

Not knowing how long the sulphur geyser was going to spout, I began to refill my pipe.

"You didn't come all the way from Green Butte over a mountain road just to swear at me, did you?" I asked, when he stopped to take breath.

"No, I didn't!" he snapped. "I came to tell you what you're in for, and to give you one more chance to save your"

—more of the unprintable adjectives—"hide! I told you a week or more ago what I'd do to you. You are a criminal. You stole a lot of rich gold samples from an old miner in the Junipers, and it's an even bet that you killed the miner and his daughter to get the chance. There's a warrant out for you, and it's in the hands of the Green Butte police."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Yes. If I take you back with me to-night—I've got the men here to do it if we have to hog tie and gag you—you'll go down country to stand trial for the robbery, and perhaps for murder. How does that strike you?"

I grinned across at him, forgetting for the moment the menacing gun muzzle at the door.

"It might make me nervous if I didn't know you so well, Monty," I told him. "You never could quite rise to the killing point unless you'd assured yourself, over and over again, that there wasn't going to be any back kick. You must remember that Jimmie Shurtleff grew up with you and knew you like a book. Your short way out of it was to have pulled the trigger on me that night in my room at the hotel, but you couldn't summon the nerve. Two nights ago you had another chance when you called up the police from Butte Springs Tavern. But once more the thing got your goat and you ran me off here."

He sat back and locked his hands over one knee.

"There is at least one thing I can do," he gritted. "I can leave you right here until you rot. You've been trying to walk out—your shoes prove it. You couldn't do it in a month of Sundays; and when your grub's gone you'll starve."

"In that case I suppose you've come to propose some sort of an alternative. What is it?"

"It's this: I've got a car here, and by driving all night we can reach Camelot, a cattle station on the Northern Central west of Castleton. At Camelot you can take a train for the Pacific coast, and a man will go with you to pay your fare and see to it that you keep your mouth shut. At San Francisco your passage will be paid to any South American port you may name, and when the steamer is ready to sail you'll be given enough money to see you through the next few years without work."

I grinned again. "You say I am an impostor, and you've given me to understand that you believe I am a criminal on some other counts. Doesn't it occur to you that in making this offer you're showing your hand pretty badly, Monty?"

"No!" he snarled.

"It does to me. If I am the criminal you say I am, it is your plain duty to turn me over to the courts and be rid of me and done with it. Instead of that you're trying to bribe me to leave the country, just as you might if you really believed I am the man whom you have deliberately robbed."

"I've robbed nobody!" he broke out. "Jimmie Shurtleff is dead, and you can't prove that he isn't if you swear yourself black in the face!"

Have you ever noticed how a critical peril delayed sometimes makes for utter recklessness of it? I could still see the gun muzzle at the door jamb, and I had faith to believe that the man behind it was some unscrupulous assassin of Monty's hiring who would kill me in cold blood if Monty should give him the signal. Yet I couldn't keep back the crowning insult.

"I had a rattling good chance to prove it two nights ago, when Mabel Carothers slipped away from you and came to me in the pine grove at Butte Springs Tavern. She knows who I am, Monty."

He was white and trembling when he got up from his seat on the bunk and moved toward the door.

"You've settled it for yourself. I'm going to starve you to death for saying that," he said, and he was so furious that he was able to say it quietly and without an oath. "You are forty miles from the nearest ranch, and if you climb the range you'll do it on your hands and knees."

"But I'm going to have the last word," I retorted. "You have known all along that I wasn't dead, Monty Gershom; you knew it at the funeral, and you knew it when you signed the papers and took over the fortune that belongs to me. You know it now, when you are hoping to buy with the fortune the woman whom I could have taken away from you two nights ago if I had chosen to hold up a finger and say Come. I may stay here and rot, as you say, but I'd rather do that than to go back to the world and live the life you are going to live from this time on."

He clenched his fist, and for an instant I thought he was going to strike me, under cover of the pointed rifle. But at the deciding second he wheeled and ran out, and a moment later I heard the roar of a starting motor, and I was alone.

For more hours than I cared to count I sat before the embers of the dying fire, smoking pipe after pipe and passing in review the fantastic happenings that had led up to this incredible climax in the solitary mountain wilderness. With the day's experience before me, I couldn't help seeing that Monty's threat was not altogether an empty one. Many a hidden gulch or valley in the mountain solitudes can show the whitening bones of some poor gold hunter who has let his grubstake run too low before he would consent to turn his face toward the peopled plains; and without shoes or food my finish would come, in the course of time.

When my watch told me it was past midnight, a sort of sardonic thought seized me. My overcoat had been thrown across the benchlike table, and I saw in one of the pockets the black leather case Sprague had given me at the moment of the Butte Springs getaway. I took it out and opened it. It was a safety-razor shaving set, with soap and brush and a tiny square mirror framed in the lid of the box.

I took an empty bean can and stumbled out in the darkness to find the rushing torrent that was drumming over its bowlders a hundred yards below the cabin. With the water for the one thing lacking, I lighted a couple of the spare candles, and, after five or ten minutes of hacking and scraping, I saw the face of the Jimmie Shurtleff I had known on the other side of the big gap looking back at me out of the square of quicksilvered glass.

Why did I do it? I don't know as I could explain the motive, but perhaps, back of the outer shell of prompting, there was a feeling that when the searchers should find me, if they should find me at all, I should like to have them find the clean-shaven Jimmie Shurtleff instead of the bearded Robert Jones.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEHU TARBELL.

As you would imagine, in the light of a new day, after a few hours' sleep on the spicy fir tips, and a breakfast—with hot coffee made on the coals in the fireplace—that lacked nothing but good company to make it a feast of reason and a flow of soul, all that midnight nonsense about starving to death figured as mere bosh.

Monty may have thought that he had me by the leg, and an indoor man in my fix might have had some excuse for sitting down to eat himself out of the chance of tramping back to civilization. But I had no such excuse, and I could laugh when I saw how Monty's visit, or the mysteries, or my sore feet, or all

of them together had conspired to give me a fit of the midnight blues.

After the good breakfast, I went about the business of breaking jail with a little more judgment than I had exhibited the first day. Discarding the wretched dancing shoes, I made Indian wrappings for my feet out of strips torn from the bed blankets. Back of the cabin to the southward there was a bare mountain which looked as if it would be easy to climb, and also as if its summit would command the view that ought to enable me to locate myself, or would at least show me the road by which other people found it so easy to get an automobile into my trap.

Accordingly, with a couple of the ship's biscuit for a midday snack, I hiked for the outlook mountain, taking it easy because I expected to spoil the day anyhow, and meaning to save myself as much as I could for the longer tramp that would lie beyond the pathfinding.

Over on the lower slope of the south mountain I found the reason for the lone cabin in a series of shallow holes dug in a stratum of red marl. I recognized the marl at once as the stuff in which the metal tungsten is found. Evidently my predecessor in the cabin had been a tungsten prospector, and hereupon one of the mysteries vanished. Sprague had told me that Monty's real-estate operations had included deals in mining lands. He had doubtless visited this out-of-the-way valley as a prospective buyer of, or broker for, the tungsten claim, and so had learned its location and the road that led to it.

The outlook mountain gave me a harder climb than I had bargained for, and it was past noon when the summit was topped. As I had hoped, there was a good view, though the cabin location itself was cut off by a wooded shoulder of the mountain lower down. To the northward and eastward, and rearward to the south, the sky-pitched ramparts of the valley were fairly unbroken, and the passes, if any there were, lay high above timber line. But to the westward there was a gap. In the distance it looked like the upper portal of a cañon, and since the stream ran that way there seemed little doubt that the outlet was at the distant western extremity of the valley.

With the trail thus marked out for me—in precisely the opposite direction from which one would naturally look for it—I determined to go back to the cabin, load up with what food could be carried, and make the start at once. Night would overtake me, of course, before the distant cañon could be reached, but that would make little difference, since the long tramp would have to be broken by a number of night camps before I could hope to find my way out of the labyrinth.

From the summit I saw that I had taken the hard way to climb the lookout mountain, and that the descent could be made more easily by rounding the wooded shoulder to the east. Accordingly I chose to go down that way, and, since the forest extended almost to the little plateau where the cabin stood, I got no further view of the valley until I broke cover out of the wood a hundred yards or so back of the cabin site.

There was a stunning shock awaiting me when I issued from the forest thicketing. For the last half mile I had fancied I was smelling smoke, and the cause lay before me as I shuffled out of the wood. In my absence the cabin had burned to the ground, and there was nothing but a heap of charred and smoldering logs to mark its site. And what made the disaster a catastrophe was the fact that the fire had devoured my overcoat, the blankets, and the precious food supply which was to have provisioned the fresh attempt to walk out of the trap.

At first I thought I had only my own carelessness to blame. To be sure, I

had covered the embers of the breakfast fire before leaving the cabin, but I remembered now that the chimney was built of sticks mud-daubed, and that it was a risk to leave any fire in it at all. Then suddenly I got another angle. Monty had promised to starve me. Had he left one of his hired assassins behind to hurry things a little by burning me out?

I don't recall the events of the next few hours very clearly. The conviction that my cousin had deliberately destroyed my last hope of escape made a vengeful madman of me for the time being, and I had but one furious impulse—to find and kill with my bare hands the fire-setting fiend who, as I argued, must still be in hiding and not far off.

Of course, the search was fruitless. The wood on the slopes of the south mountain was the only possible hiding place, and I had worn myself out quartering it back and forth before reason reasserted itself, assuring me that the incendiary, if there had been one, would have no object in staying to see what I might do. Reason also told me another thing. It reminded me that in all my trampings, on this day of catastrophes and the other, I had seen no game of any kind save an occasional jack rabbit and a few prairie dogs.

It looked like a starving proposition, safely enough, when I finally wandered back to the site of the burned cabin. This was along in the shank of the evening, when the sun was poised like a great ball of fire over the summits of the western range. Already I was beginning to feel the first gnawings of hunger, having had only the two biscuits for a midday meal. There were fish in the river. In the still pools I could see them plainly. But they might as well have been in heaven for all the chance I stood of catching them.

I don't much like to recall the thoughts of the hungry night watch that followed, after I had dragged together a few of the smoldering cabin logs and made them blaze again with dead branches from the forest. More and more the nightmare theory thrust itself upon me, and the rank incredibility of all the resurrection incidents seemed fitly capped by this grotesque immurement in the solemn wilderness.

To all appearances poor Jimmie Shurtleff's effort to struggle up out of his grave was destined to figure as a shocking example for those who have once been safely killed off and laid away under the sod. Monty was safe, as safe as a house. He could go on enjoying his stolen fortune, and he would lie to Mabel, telling her that I had at last consented to take his bribe and vanish. That lie would be cleverly passed on to Sprague, and the big, good-natured expert in qualitative analysis, who liked to play with the detective puzzles that came in his way, would drop the puzzle which, he would say, had lacked a man of sufficient honesty of purpose to make it even mildly interesting.

It was that thought of the likelihood of Monty's smug escape from all the pains and penalties due to his villainy that kept me from turning my face toward the distant cañon in the west and tramping until the engine should stop for lack of fuel. Sooner or later Monty would come back to make sure that there was no mistake, this time, about my blotting out, and in the nature of things he would be likely to come alone. If I could only contrive to keep life enough and strength enough in me, and sense enough to hide and spring upon him for the final grapple, I thought I should die better satisfied.

Mixed up with these vindictive longings there was a thought to provoke a grim smile. Does death ever overtake a living soul whose various jobs are all completed and the accounts comfortably closed and balanced? I guess not.

Once before I had left a number of things hanging in the air, and now, having what few people ever get—a second shy at it—the abandoned, or about to be abandoned, muddle was even worse. Cassie Crockett would be left more truly a widow than Mabel was ever capable of being, and I had struck no lick on the job of helping Crockett to realize upon his mine.

This last was the bitterer pill to swallow, because, from what Hughes had told me, it had appeared that I was the one man who might hope to persuade President Ford to build the coal road up Coyote Cañon. I had promised to write Ford, forgetting for the moment that I would first have to convince him that I was still in the land of the living; and now the chance was gone.

I don't know just how the dreadful night wore itself out between thinking and dozing before the charred-log fire. Like most outdoor men, I had always been a hearty eater, and I suppose that is the reason why the hunger gripped me so fiercely in those first few hours. After the sun came up and I had drunk at the stream and had crawled back to the shelter of the forest, it was not so bad. If it had not been for that grim determination to wait for Monty's coming, I thought I could have made a good few miles along the road toward the westward cañon, and so I might have.

But the resolve, born in the night, was stronger than ever, now that I realized the full cold-bloodedness of my cousin's purpose. A chill wave of discouragement submerged me at the fear that he might come too late to give me my chance for vengeance. If the fire had been accidental, if it had not been due to his agency, he might confidently figure that I had days to live. On the other hand, if he should come soon, I should know beyond doubt that the cabin burning had been incendiary—a knowledge, I thought, which would nerve me for the final grapple if nothing else would.

Not to take any chance of being caught unawares, I chose the day hiding place on the rib of the mountain shoulder, where I could see down the valley for a long distance. Hour by hour the day dragged on. My watch had stopped because I had forgotten to wind it, and there was no measure of time save the advancing shadows of the trees. Slowly the sun swung to the meridian and began to decline, and, with the missing of what was practically the fourth meal, I was glad I had the account-squaring thought to keep me from dwelling too continually upon the faintness which had now succeeded to the hunger pitch.

There was still about an hour of daylight left when a moving dot came into view far down the valley. I staggered to my feet to get a better outlook. It was a motor car, coming on at the head of a comet's tail of dust of its own raising. Early in the day I had picked a broken tree limb for a club. I groped for the weapon, and, as I found it, the car, a big, stripped roadster painted gray, shot up and made a skidding stop within a few feet of my hiding place.

If I had waited for a second glance at the khaki-clad young fellow who was swinging himself from behind the steering wheel, I might not have made that madman's charge upon him with the club upswung. He did not see me at first; I think he saw only the charred and blackened ruins of the cabin. But he heard me in time to wheel and ward the blow, and for the next minute or two we managed to keep each other pretty busy in a hand-to-hand tussle that ended in a clean fall for the husky driver of the gray car.

"Quit it!" he commanded, as I vainly tried to free myself and kick him off of me with a clumsy foot; and then: "What in Sam Hill's the matter with you, anyhow? You ain't got no fight comin' to you with *me!*"

"Damn you!" I gasped. "Gershom sent you to see if I was dead, did he? Let me get up and I'll show you!"

"Gershom nothin'!" was the cool reply. "Mr. Sprague was the one that sent me. Quit your frothin' at the mouth, and I'll let you up."

Some glimmerings of reason were beginning to return by this time, and when I quieted down the stalwart young fellow helped me to my feet. The scrap, short as it was, had got me, and I had to sit down on the running board of the car.

"They—they burned me out, and I haven't had anything to eat since yesterday forenoon," I told him, when the dizzy fit had passed.

"Sure!" said my late antagonist. "That's why I'm here. Mr. Sprague got onto the little arson play right after dinner to-day, and he told me to get a car and burn the wind. I been lookin' f'r you all along the road; thought maybe you'd try to hike out." Then, with a good-natured grin: "You look a heap more like yourself, with all that stubble stuff off your face."

"How do you know how I ought to look?" I demanded.

"That's how," he returned, fishing a card photograph from an inner pocket of the khaki coat and showing it to me. It was a copy of a picture I had had taken in one of the Green Butte studios for Mabel in the long ago, and I had forgotten that it was in existence.

"You're Tarbell, aren't you?" I queried, and he nodded.

"Used to be a cow-punch', but I've been with Mr. Sprague now f'r a couple o' years, off and on. He's the biggest man this side o' kingdom come—in more ways than one. Gettin' your nerve back a little?"

"As much as I can hope to until I can put a square meal under my belt. Did Gershom actually give orders to have me burned out?"

The young man dragged a fat silver watch from his fob and glanced at its face. Then he reached across me and got a paper-wrapped package from some hiding place in the bowels of the gray road car.

"Chem 'em sort o' slow," he cautioned, stripping the paper and giving me a couple of meat sandwiches. Then: "Yep, I reckon the little cuss sure did give the order. It cost him five hundred plunks and a ticket to Seattle f'r the tinhorn that did it. That's how Mr. Sprague caught on. Take it easy on them sandwiches; you got plenty o' time. I got to fill the radiator before we start back to town."

Let me write it down before I forget it that those sandwiches took me right back to the boyhood days on Uncle Silas' farm, when I used to lose my appetite in the hayfield—and find the wolf's. Tarbell rummaged out a rubber bucket from the inwards of the car and began to make trips to the creek for the benefit of the steaming radiator. In the pouring intervals he straightened out a few of the tangles for me.

"Yep, Mr. Sprague knowed they'd changed taxi drivers on you that night at Butte Springs, but he let 'em go—just to see where they'd fetch up. I had my tip—and a motor sickle with a good quiet muffler on it. The taxi beat me here by about fifteen minutes that night, I reckon, and when I peeked into the cabin you had a fire goin' and was smokin' your pipe, all cozy and comfortable."

With the next bucket he went on: "My orders was to trail you and report, so I skinned back to town. Mr. Sprague he just laughed sort o' quiet-like, and gave me some money: 'Mr. Shurtleff may be gettin' hungry, and you'd better take him somethin' to chew on,' was what he told me, and, as I was moggin' off, he allowed that it would be just as well if you didn't know where the grub came from."

"I didn't," I put in.

"You bet you didn't"—with the good-natured grin. "I crope up on you whilest you was asleep the next night. When I got back from feedin' you, Mr. Sprague give me the job of trackin' Gershom. He acted like a man that had got hold of a bull by the tail and didn't know whether to leggo 'r pull the tail out by the roots."

There was another water-carrying break, and in the next pouring space I said: "Gershom came out here the night after you brought the canned stuff. Did you know that?"

"Sure I did. There was four of 'em, and it didn't seem worth while to raise a rookus, so long as it was only talk. So I laid out in the dark, holdin' a gun on the little snipe that was settin' on your bed and doin' the fancy cussin'. I didn't allow he was goin' to give any shootin' signals, but if he had started to, he wouldn't never've give any more—not none whatsoever."

The sandwiches were gone to the final crumb, and Tarbell was putting his rubber bucket away.

"If you're about ready," he said, with another glance at the fat silver watch. "There's goin' to be some sort of a theayter show in the ladies' ordinary of the hotel to-night, and Mr. Sprague allowed like you might want to be there. Can you climb in by yourself?"

I showed him that I could, and a minute or so later he had backed and turned the big roadster and we were flying westward over the trackless flat of the valley at a pace that put all talk out of the question. On the cañon climb at the outlet, my jehu driver was obliged to slacken the breakneck speed, and here he gave me what proved to be his final word:

"We've got sixty good miles to go, and the order is to shoot you in by seven o'clock at the side door of the Inter-Mountain. You hold your hair on, and I'll show you how this old boat'll do it."

Any description of that frantic race against time, around and over the mountains and across the plains, would be inadequate simply because I can't write fast enough to give any just notion of the recklessness of that young fellow Tarbell. If there were any road, I never got a glimpse of it until we struck into the well-remembered pike some distance west of Butte Springs.

By this time it was pitch dark, and Tarbell was running without the lamps. How he managed to keep the road and to miss all the vehicles we met or overtook, I shall never know. But he did it some way, and promptly on the stroke of seven we pulled up at the side door of the hotel in Green Butte.

How I should manage to get to my room, hatless, with my clothes a wreck, and my feet wrapped in blanket strips, without making a holy show of myself, I could not imagine. But apparently all this was carefully prearranged. A corridor man met me at the door, flung a long bath robe over my shoulders, hustled me to the nearest baggage elevator, and so to my room, where I found clean clothes laid out for me on the bed and a good hearty snack of a meal spread ready and waiting on the small toilet table.

I had bathed and changed, and was painstakingly putting away the few final morsels of the small supper when there was a tap at the door and Sprague entered, his big, round face beaming and the boyish eyes twinkling.

"We've missed you," he said, in gentle mockery. "How is it the 'Pinafore' rhyme has it?"

"We miss his presence in his customary haunts,
And so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts—

one cousin in particular. Speaking of 'Pinafore' reminds one of theatricals in general, and we're staging a little movie play to-night—for an invitation audience—that I'm sure you'll want to see. That is my only excuse for sending

Tarbell to break so rudely into your seclusion in Lost Mountain Valley. Have you finished your supper?"

I looked up quickly.

"A moving-picture play? What has that got to do with me and my troubles?"

His laugh was good-humoredly infectious.

"Nothing at all, perhaps. But you have earned a bit of recreation, and you owe it to me to come and look on. The play is my own concoction, and I actually took many of the pictures for it myself. It involves a few new little experiments in the art—it is an art, isn't it?—and that is why I am giving a private exhibition to a few friends first before I try to sell it to the film people. No, you won't need your coat and hat. Our theater is in the ladies' ordinary. Shall we go down?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEAD MAN'S CHANCE.

The ladies' ordinary, a rather small dining room partitioned off from the corner of the mezzanine, in good part by heavy portières, was in twilight darkness when Sprague held one of the curtains aside for me, and we slipped unnoticed into a corner.

The picture machine, which was mounted in the high orchestra balcony, was already in operation. A curtain had been stretched across the opposite end of the room, and upon it there was appearing a series of scenes from the European capitals—a very ordinary film, as it seemed to me. The audience, as well as I could make out in the twilight gloom, was select—as to numbers, at least. There were not more than a hundred people in the ranked chairs, but when my eyes began to get a little accustomed to the light, or the lack of it, I could hardly believe what I saw.

"Not a word," whispered Sprague at my ear, and the warning was needed. In one of the chairs, so near that I could have reached over and touched him, sat Milligan, my old-time chief, and just beyond him I saw and recognized Tobey and Mike Jorkins and Varick and half a dozen more of my old office cronies of the Jimmie Shurtleff days. Across the aisle from Milligan sat McCormack, the P. S-W. Copah yardmaster, with his arms folded and his shrewd old eyes fixed upon the flitting pictures of Europe. Hobnobbing with McCormack, and apparently serenely regardless of the distance which intervenes between a yard boss and the president of the road, was Mr. Ford, the empire builder who had once sent me into the Junipers to survey the route for a coal branch up Coyote Cañon.

Each succeeding row of chairs revealed more astoundments. As I passed the faces of the sitters in review from my corner, it seemed as if everybody I had ever known in the West, and in Green Butte, had been summoned to gather in this one small audience room. Hughes was there, with two men whom I did not recognize; two of my foremen on the track-shortening job in the Jawbone Narrows were there; Judson Carothers was there, with his wife, and just behind them I saw Monty and Mabel, with a big bunch of townspeople, many of whom had known me well enough to call me "Jimmie" in the older day.

It was like an old home-coming, and I was still gasping in astonishment when Sprague quietly thrust me into one of the nearest chairs, making an emphatic sign for silence as he did it. It was well that he gave me the tip. My seat was next to that of a young woman. When I looked around, a small, firm hand had crept into mine with a cautionary little squeeze, and I found myself staring like a man in a daze into the brown eyes of —Cassie Crockett!

"Hush!" she whispered, and then she

passed my hand across her lap to the gray-bearded old fellow sitting next to her on the other side, and I got a big-knuckled mining man's grip that fairly made me wince.

"Tell me," I breathed into the pink ear beside me. "I've *got* to know how you came here!"

"I—I haven't been very well," she breathed back. "We found a little pocket in the mine, richer than the others, and daddy took me out to Aspen—for treatment and the change. Mr. Sprague found us and sent for us to come here. We just got in this afternoon."

I knew why she hadn't been very well; little girls who send their lovers away to marry other people are pretty apt to pay for it one way or another. A handsome picture of an Italian street scene was flitting over the screen, but I don't believe she saw it when she whispered again: "Is that the—the other girl—the one sitting on the left of the man with the curled mustaches?"

"Yes, that's Mabel, and the man is my cousin. They've been engaged for six months or more."

She nodded. "Mr. Sprague told me and tried to point them out for me as they came in a little while ago, but I wasn't sure that I got the right ones. Do you know why he has got us all together here to-night?"

"No more than the man in the moon."

"Neither do I, but he made us come, daddy and me. He said we'd know why after we got here."

People were still coming in, a few at a time, and among the later comers I saw Tarbell slipping to a seat behind Monty and Mabel. Somehow the atmosphere of the place seemed full of electricity, as if everybody was waiting for something to happen—something more startling than the string of scenery pictures.

This sort of tenseness which appeared to be gripping every one tightened like a clamp when the last of the street scenes faded from the curtain, leaving a blank circle of glaring white light on the stretched sheeting. In the hush Sprague stood up, pretty well down in front, and turned to face his audience.

"As you all know, the cinematographic art is still only in its beginnings, and experimenters the world over are constantly trying new processes," he began, speaking in low, distinct tones that reached every ear in the darkened room. "Used at first only as a source of entertainment, it is now entering many other fields—the educational, the scientific, the demonstrative, and even the moral and religious. My own experiments—which, I warn you, are only those of an amateur—have been along the line of an attempt to carry the art into the psychological field.

"Is it possible, I have asked myself, to portray in a series of pictures a chain of events, apparently unrelated, which shall so dovetail themselves together in the portrayal as to impress themselves upon the observers as a complete story of facts which could not possibly have been photographed in their reality? As I have said, my attempt is only an experiment; you yourselves shall be the judges of its success."

He sat down, and as he did so the screen went black for a single instant. Then the name of the play stood out for a flickering moment: "A Dead Man's Chance," and I could feel rather than hear the little gasp of quickened interest that ran through the room.

The first of the moving scenes staged itself at the track-shortening job in the Jawbone Narrows, and then I knew instantly what was coming—or at least a part of it—and why Tarbell had ruined a perfectly good set of tires getting me to town. The pictures were astoundingly real, considering the fact that the background must have been wholly "made up." We saw the men

working in the great cutting, saw the steam of the shovel whistle as it blew for six o'clock, quitting time, saw the men trooping off to the bunk shanties, and presently saw the old 1026, with Mickey Donovan leaning from his window, pull down to the center of the picture to take me on for the run to Copah.

Following this there were glimpses of the racing engine proceeding on its way down the cañon; a glimpse of the station at Copah, of the barber shop, with myself sitting in the chair and well lathered, of the dining room where I was eating supper, of the train platform where I was climbing the steps of a sleeper whose name flashed clear and distinctly, *"Katinka."*

Astoundment followed amazement when I realized how next to impossible it must have been for Sprague to get his backgrounds for all this, entirely out of my descriptions and from the scanty memories of others. But the climax came when the pictures began to show the northward flight of the regular train, with glimpses of the second section chasing it, the race ending for the regular in a startling picture of the derailed sleeper and the actual scramble in the aisle in which Jones' face and my own, as we fought for our clothes, came out distinctly on the screen.

Up to this point there had been no explanatory line flashed upon the screen, but now there was a single sentence shot between the hurrying scenes:

HE CHANGES CLOTHES WITH THE OTHER MAN

which was instantly chased off the screen by a lifelike picture of a horrible rear-end collision, with coaches bunched up, an engine lying on its side in the ditch, and a Pullman, with the medallion name *"Katinka"* still showing plainly on its upturned side, crushed and shattered and in flames.

The lapse of time between this and the next picture was merely indicated by a momentary darkening of the curtain. Then the work of the wrecking crews staged itself rapidly; the two big cranes pulling and tugging at the débris, the finding of the bodies, burned, mangled, and disfigured, in the charred skeleton of the Pullman, the finding in particular of *one* body, with McCormack and Milligan—recognizable to me if to no one else—bending over it and examining the papers taken from its pockets.

I never realized before that moment that one could actually do two things at one and the same time, or keep up two separate lines of thought and hold them apart. I know I lost no detail of the scenes which were holding me in a vise grip of marvelings, but none the less I had a perfectly clear side glimpse of the way all this was plowing furrows up and down Monty Gershom's back.

What would he do? The question answered itself like a flash. He would be crafty enough to sit still and do nothing, no matter how far the revelations might go. It was his only hope of safety, to ignore the whole business as a matter entirely extraneous to him; as if the thing were, what everybody else was doubtless supposing it to be, a piece of pure fiction. Still, if he were in any manner guilty, I could well understand how the cold chills were running over him; how he would have given all of Uncle Perkins' fortune for a chance to run, and how he knew that he shouldn't dare to run even if the chance should come and pluck him by the coat sleeve.

Meanwhile the scenes on the screen were changing again. A sheet had been thrown over the burned body that McCormack had found, and a group of railroad men carried it away on a rude stretcher. Another shift and the funeral train came backing slowly down on the temporary track; the body, with sev-

eral others, was lifted in, and the train moved away.

Once more the curtain went black for a flitting instant, and then a new background displayed itself; a rocky defile in the mountains, and in the foreground four men—one of whom I recognized instantly as Hughes, the young government engineer—bending over a fifth, who was on his back and was apparently dead or dying. Hughes was binding a cloth about the head of the recumbent man, and the subsequent pictures showed the little surveying party at its work, on the march or camping overnight in the mountain wilderness. It numbered five now, and one of the five had his head bandaged, and his beard was growing, almost visibly, it seemed.

The last picture of this series showed a deep-gorged valley, with high mountains on all sides, and on a bench of one of them a mine dump and a cabin. In this picture the man with the beard and the bandaged head was leaving the others, striking off in the direction of the cabin and turning now and then to wave good-by to his late companions. Another change, and two people, an oldish man and a girl, were waiting at the head of the mine dump for the climbing deserter. At the last they reached out and helped him, supporting him between them until all three had disappeared in the cabin. Presently the two, the oldish man and the girl, came to the door of the cabin, the old man searching in the pockets of a coat. An envelope is found, and they scrutinize it closely. A flick of the machine brings the envelope face toward the spectators highly magnified. The superscription reads:

ROBERT JONES,
Denver, Colorado.

What followed this came as a most ingenious bit of sceneshifting. A huge clock face appeared on the screen, with the hands revolving rapidly backward. As the hands spun around, a calendar index showed the resetting to be six weeks earlier in time. When the clock face vanished, the funeral train from Two Horse Gulch came once more into view, showing that the main thread of the story was once more to be followed. There were glimpses of an orchard country, of mountain and plain, always with the racing train in sight, and at the last the entry of the train into a city station crowded with people.

Other glimpses showed the removal of the sheeted bodies from the baggage car, and I knew that I was now about to witness my own funeral. The line of undertakers' wagons drove away and pulled up in a crowded street. The bodies were lifted and carried in, and I could pick out my own, or rather poor Jones', by the sight of Milligan and his office staff walking beside its stretcher.

Once more the machine in the orchestra balcony clicked. The scene this time was a room in the undertaker's establishment. A single body lay on a cooling board covered with a sheet. As we looked, the ghastly interior grew dim, the door opened, and a man entered. Crossing quickly to the dead man he lifted the sheet and appeared to be trying to turn the body over on the board. Then he replaced the sheet and hurried away.

My eyes had now become accustomed to the twilight, and I gave a quick glance in Monty's direction. He had collapsed in his chair, but as I looked he straightened up and made as if he would rise. For half a hundred clicks the scene remained as it was. Then a window at the back of the dead room opened slowly, and the same man reappeared, climbing stealthily into the room. At the side of the sheeted body he took something from his pocket, and a shift of the film showed us a bottle marked "Iodine."

Hastily the stealthy intruder stripped

the sheet from the dead man, and, rolling the body on its side, he began to paint a brown spot the size of a child's hand just below the left shoulder blade. In the act, and throughout the entire scene, he had kept his face averted; but now, as if he had heard some disturbing sound, he twisted his head around and we saw the fear-distorted face of my cousin, Monty Gershom.

A yell like that of a lost soul broke out upon the half-horrified silence of the darkened dining room, and with it came the shriek of a woman. While the merciless film held the accusing picture interminably, we heard Monty shouting like a madman, cursing the undertaker who had given him away, cursing the druggist who had sold him the iodine, cursing the wreck which had killed the wrong man, cursing most shrilly the brain whose cleverness had unmasked him.

The picture machine stopped, and the electric lights went on at the same instant. Everybody was afoot, and I had a brief glimpse of Monty struggling in Tarbell's arms, but for myself I had but one thought, and that was to get Cassie out of it swiftly. When it was accomplished and I had seen her and her father safe in their room on an upper floor, I hurried back to the ordinary. The little dining hall was already empty, but Sprague materialized out of somewhere and drew me to a seat beside him in the open mezzanine.

"They are buzzing too hotly down there in the lobby, and we won't go down just yet," he remarked coolly. "Of course, I know you'll want to be shaking hands with all your old friends who have been mourning you as dead for a couple of years, but that will wait —or won't it?"

"It will wait until you have told me how on earth you did it," I broke out.

"The plan was based upon pure reason, as you may have guessed. The clew which led me to identify you with the missing James Shurtleff was given by Hughes, who told me, nearly two years ago, of his finding of a wounded man, ragged and half starved, in the mountains no great distance from the scene of the train wreck, and on a date which, as he recalled it, was only a few days after the disaster.

"You were that man, and when Hughes had told me how you had completely lost your memory, and how you left his party one day to go to Crockett's to 'ask for a job,' as you phrased it, I became curious to see you and talk with you. The chance didn't come until last spring, when I made the hike up the Cryolite to Crockett's. Beyond that visit it was merely a simple task of putting two and two together. I was confident then that you were Shurtleff, though, as you had lost your identity with your memory, there was nothing to be done at that time."

"But Monty's part in it; how did you get on to that?"

"I had been suspicious of your cousin for a long time. As I have told you, I was here at the time of your funeral —or rather Jones'—and his ostensible sorrow for the loss of a relative was curiously mixed up with a sort of furtive fear, I thought, though what the fear was about I had no inkling then. Your turning up here in your proper identity put an entirely new face on the matter and aroused my interest—with the result that you have just seen."

"Yes, but good heavens, how could you build the thing without a single stick of timber to work on? You didn't see Monty paint my birthmark on Jones' body, did you?"

"Far from it, my son. That is where the good gift of reason comes in. See how easy it is when you construct it a syllogism at a time. The fortune wasn't at stake at that time, but your cousin wanted to marry the girl to whom you were engaged; that's the motive. He wouldn't have killed you out

of the way, perhaps, but he couldn't be inconsolably unhappy when an accident removed you. All clear, so far?"

"Perfectly."

"All right; call that fact number one, and hold it in mind. When the accident came and an absolutely unrecognizable corpse was brought here for burial, it says itself that your cousin, of all others, would be the one who would want to assure himself beyond question that the corpse was, or was not, yours. You had been boys together; had doubtless been in swimming together many times. If you had any bodily peculiarities your cousin would be sure to know them. A little inquiry at the undertaker's developed the fact that he had been permitted to go alone into the dead room, and upon that small fact I built my theory. The snapshot photograph taken of you that day when we went together to the Athletic Club cleared away all doubt."

"I don't see it," I protested.

"You don't? Why, it's perfectly plain to the reasoning mind. You have a birthmark; the body of Robert Jones didn't have one. Your cousin knew of the mark, and he would naturally be afraid that, before the body could be buried, somebody else who knew of the mark might happen along. Hence the iodine and the stealthy return to the dead room. I reasoned it out first and proved it afterward, partially, at least. One dark night Tarbell and I and two others became grave robbers. We exhumed what was left of the body of Robert Jones. I needn't go into details; I'll merely remind you that I am an analytical chemist and that iodine is one of the most imperishable substances known. I may have gotten some of the details of the dead-room scene wrong, but I built it very carefully, on a good bottom of reasoning and after a careful study of the place and all the circumstances which could be recalled by everybody who was questioned."

"Then that scene in the undertaker's place was wholly imaginary?" I queried.

"Oh, yes; all the pictures were 'staged,' of course; that one with the others."

"But how did you get Monty's face; with that horribly scared look on it?"

The expert chuckled softly. "There were two ways open to us. One was to have the actor who was playing the part 'make up' to resemble Gershom as nearly as possible. I was afraid to risk that. The entire success of the demonstration would turn upon that one critical climax, so I made up my mind that Gershom must really see his own face in the picture. He scares rather easily, as you may or may not know. Tarbell held him up for me one night as he was leaving his office, and I got a snapshot picture of the way he looks when he is frightened. Having the real photograph, it was easy to transfer it to the film."

"But how did you get Monty here, in the audience?"

"That was easy. He didn't suspect me at all, and I made it a sort of social affair, inviting Mrs. Calthrope and her set and the Carotherses."

"I am beginning to see," I admitted. "But the immense labor of it all! The staging of all these pictures and the work it must have involved, the rounding up of Milligan and all the others who used to know me—and all upon the one small chance that you might possibly shock Monty into a confession! It's fairly staggering to think of it."

"That is where the scientific training comes in," laughed the big-bodied expert good-naturedly. "No trouble is too great to be taken, no process too intricate or involved to be gone through with if there is a truth to be demonstrated. I will admit that I was somewhat hustled for time in preparing the films, and I was beset by the fear that I couldn't keep you quiet long enough

to give me the needful interval. That is why I permitted your cousin to kidnap you—it offered a few more uninterrupted days for the 'make ready.'

"Mr. Ford, who is an old friend of mine, helped me with the railroad pictures, and one of the bills you'll have to pay out of your new fortune will be for the stage properties and the services of the film company which I wired to Los Angeles for on the day when you told me that you were the long-lost James Shurtleff with the sure-enough Shurtleff memories. But I have assumed from the first that you wouldn't question the expense. Unless we could force Gershom to give up voluntarily, there was no smallest hope that the courts would make him let go. It would have been dragging along on appeals when you were both gray-headed."

Sprague had lighted one of his immense cigars, and the ash had grown a full half inch on it before I said:

"Well, where do we stand now? Do I prosecute this loving cousin of mine and send him to the penitentiary, where he belongs?"

"I think not," was the calm reply. "I know he meant to leave you in Lost Mountain Valley—if he could muster up the nerve to do it—and that he had your food supply destroyed. Perhaps he would have left you to starve, but I doubt it; remembering that limitation of his of which we have both spoken at other times. Tarbell has his orders to turn him loose, and I'm almost sure you will hear from him before you sleep—most probably with a proposal to turn your fortune over to you if you'll give him enough of it to vanish on decently. You'll do it, I know. And now I mustn't keep you any longer from your old-time friends down in the lobby. They are waiting to give you what the newspapers tomorrow will call an 'ovation.'"

I guess I've proved what I set out to, haven't I? Or, if I haven't, it isn't any use dragging the thing along forever. I said I had the man who died and came alive again just to spite his relations backed off the map, and it still looks that way to me.

Monty? Oh, yes; he got down on his knees to me, and when he told me that Mabel—Mabel, mind you; the girl that I had thought didn't have loyalty enough in her to stick to anybody—was willing to marry him and vanish with him, I gave him as much as he had once offered to give me, with a few extra thousands thrown in for Mabel.

And Cassie? Why, God bless your soul, *yes!* She's been Mrs. Jimmie Shurtleff for quite some little time now, and when Mr. Ford agreed to build that coal branch up Coyote Cañon for his railroad, it was Uncle Perkins' money that financed our telpherage bucket line from Chipeta up the creek to Dead Man's Chance.

In the Lonesome Land

By Vingie E. Roe

Author of "When the Red Hills Threaten," "The Steeds of Summit Pass," Etc.

A job for the warden in the forests of the Trinity Range—a job which peeved him at first because of its seeming impossibility of accomplishment, but which eventually was to be reckoned among his finest memories

A RIFLE spat on a hillside, the clean, sharp snap of a thirty-thirty. Kenset, sitting his powerful red horse on a slant so steep that his left toe braced on the earth, lifted his head. A scowl drew deep between his eyes.

"At it again, darn him!" he said aloud.

Mister, the big red horse, flipped an inquiring ear backward. An amazing understanding existed between these two, a sympathy so fine that Mister took his cues from Kenset's evidence of mood—the fiddling with his mane, say when the master was puzzled. Mister felt that a few wisps directly under the bridle hand must have become ragged these last few weeks, so persistently had Kenset twisted and pulled them.

For some one was defying the law of the forest that Kenset stood for, and, keen as the ranger was, he had failed to discover one small clew to the vandal.

It was late in November, and the season had closed over a month back, yet three times in the past two weeks he had heard that clean, sharp snap yapping on the slopes.

It was glorious in the Trinity Range. No railroad screamed its challenge nearer than forty miles, no town worthy of the name marred the wildness. Here and there in the deep creases of the tumbled hills tiny clusters of houses huddled above the leaping, white-water streams, relics of the days of '49. Prospectors still panned on the bars, and down below a huge dredge worked methodically in the river bed.

There had been a rain or two, and the nights were sharp with frost.

Here and there a bush or a tree flamed with the scarlet flag of autumn, but for the most part the land looked like summer. All the mighty slopes were clothed in pine and fir, with here and there a cedar.

"Buck grass" still hung in great, feathery bunches along the rocky edge of the river. A cool, high sun bathed this wild world in brilliant light, while far off the peaks of other ranges swam in a soft blue haze.

It was good to be in the hills in fall, and Kenset was alive to every pulse of his lonely land. He had a cabin high up on a shoulder of Pappoose Mountain, and he could hear and see for miles along the dropping slopes. It was there, in his own dooryard, as he sat smoking an evening pipe and watching the red veils creep over the blue haze as the sun went down, that he had heard that first shot a fortnight back—and he knew some one was after a buck. Once again he had caught the faint, far snap a few days later, and here it was again.

He gathered his rein and put Mister softly down along the hill toward it. For ten minutes he rode. Then he drew the horse into a thicket and dismounted,

hanging the rein over the pommel. Mister was trained to stand at attention—for hours if need be—and to come at a whistle, and he wanted no dragging straps to hinder.

Kenset, a sturdy figure in his khakis, puttees, and wide-brimmed ranger's hat, went forward as gently as an Indian.

The woods were thick with fern and hazelbrush, and slippery with dry needles, and, try as he would, he could not help a sound now and then. The slant was rugged, with a bold jut pushing a brazen front of seamed and splintered rock out to command the valley far below. As he approached this vantage point, he raised his eyes and looked up along its face. Into his line of vision a head was coming, a bold, black head, running with short curls. It wriggled up on the crest of the rock, and an arm came into view reaching for holds here and there, and in a moment a figure lifted itself out on the rock's top with the strength and grace of a cat.

Kenset remained where he was, absolutely still, for it was the figure of a woman. She gathered herself together, tucked a foot beneath her, and leaned back comfortably against a convenient shelf of the bowlder behind.

And she was as startling a figure as one would come across in a lifetime. She wore what had once been a good khaki climbing skirt. Now it was thin with long wear, faded with washing, and it was ragged from contact with rock and thorn and bush. A man's blue flannel shirt, in the same state of decline, covered her shoulders and lay open at the throat, while upon her feet were the most disreputable pair of knee-laced boots Kenset had ever beheld. But if he appraised her raiment keenly, he did it swiftly, for no one could look long at her garments who saw her face above. It was in profile to him, but even so it was magnetic as the north pole, a spirited, boyish face, with a sturdy, small chin, a full mouth of ravishing sweetness, and a straight nose a bit tip-tilted.

One hand hung out with the arm on her raised knee, the other trifled idly with the ragged sole of her boot.

Kenset was young, and he hadn't seen a woman for four months—he said to himself even in that amazed first moment that he had *never* seen one like this girl. Therefore he stepped softly out beside the rock and took off his hat.

"Good afternoon," he said.

The girl jumped, as if his deep voice had been a rattler's whiz. She was on her feet in an instant, ready to fly; and then, seeing him, she dropped quietly down again and smiled.

"Scared me," she said shortly.

But that smile had sent the blood hot in Kenset's cheeks, for he had looked full into two eyes as black as the curls on her forehead, as slow and sleepy and mysterious as he had always fancied Cleopatra's to have been. For such eyes men have lost "jobs" and wrecked kingdoms.

"I'm Kenset," he said, "ranger and warden. Did you hear a shot a few moments ago over here somewhere?"

The girl nodded.

"Yes. Over in that wash."

She pointed with a long, shapely arm, the index finger out, the others curled under, the ancient, efficient way.

Kenset hesitated.

"Did you see who fired it?"

"No."

She looked down at him quietly, taking him in from head to foot with a deliberation that was almost insolence.

The interview was ended, it seemed, and there was nothing on earth for Kenset to do but raise his hat to her, set it firmly on his head, and depart, which he did, feeling that he had blundered somehow.

Of course there was nothing and nobody "over in that wash." He did find tracks of a big buck, made but a few

moments back in the soft loam, but that was all.

He went home to his high cabin with more food for thought than he had had for months.

Who was she? Where did she live? Where had she come from?

He thought he knew every cabin in the hills. Ah, that was it! The old tumble-down house at the deserted Outlook Mine! He'd bet she lived there. It was the nearest place possible, and he hadn't been by there for six weeks—no, it was two months and more since he had ridden that way.

All that evening, while he smoked in his lonely dooryard, he conjured her vital face and listened again to her low-pitched, throaty voice.

He had never seen any such pretty, bold, black head as hers before; no forehead under shining curls like that. And her mouth! He felt his blood stir pleasantly at memory of it, a spirited, reckless mouth, yet full and soft. Oh, she was wholly adorable! And she seemed in the barest poverty, though Kenset knew that the mountain people were a careless lot.

He had known mine owners, worth more money than he ever hoped to have, to wear such clothes as any hodcarrier in a city wouldn't be caught out in.

He shook his head, knocked the dottle out of his pipe, and went to bed.

Once in the week that followed he heard that defiant shot. He pulled Mister's mane savagely, for he knew he was being baited, and he rode the hills continually.

On the Thursday after that first meeting, he came sharply on the girl again. She was coming down a faint, small trail that led from the high brush meadows to a stream below, a deer trail, cut and hollowed by light, sharp feet that traveled it nightly.

"Ho!" cried the ranger, startled. "You scared me this time."

"Yes?" she said. "In that case you oughtn't to be out in these hills alone. They're full of scares."

"So?" laughed Kenset. "Then how about yourself?"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively and spread out her hands. They were strong-looking hands, fine-skinned and brown.

"I'm not afraid of much," she said succinctly.

"You're a stranger hereabouts?" asked Kenset.

"Well, no—hardly. I've been here some time."

"Would you mind telling me where you live? I thought I knew every habitation in here."

"With my father," she said calmly.

Kenset blushed, feeling like an over-inquisitive child that has been rebuked.

"I beg your pardon," he said, but the girl looked up at him and smiled.

"You needn't. These hill billies are all inquisitive."

"For the love of—— Look here—do you take *me* for a *hill billy?*"

The ranger, halfway off his horse, hung arrested in his stirrup, and gazed with angry eyes over his shoulder. He was suddenly and thoroughly "mad."

"Well," she said slowly, "I can only judge by manners."

Kenset got down, stepped close to her, put deliberate hands on his hips, and searched her smiling face with an insolence to match her own.

"Do you know what I think?" he said at last, too angry to be cautious. "Do you?"

The black eyes returned his gaze without a quiver, first looking into one of his own, then into the other, as if she found the color interesting.

"No," she answered, "and I don't care a cent."

"Well," said Kenset, "I think you're a badly spoiled child that thinks impudence smartness."

"Yes?"

She flipped a clinging brier from her

soiled khaki skirt, ran her fingers through her beautiful black curls, and shook her shoulders.

The little play was as insolent as anything could be—and it set the man's heart to jumping with sheer joy in her daring.

"And also," he said swiftly—the temper was fast ebbing out of him—"I think you are a darling."

"Yes?" she drawled. "Well, I can't return the compliment. And, what's more, you're proving what I said about manners."

And without another word she turned back up the faint trail, slipped around a thick growth of young pine, and disappeared.

Kenset went home with more diversified feelings stirring inside him than he knew what to do with. He was humiliated, still a bit ruffled, ashamed of his temper, and decidedly interested in this wild Juno of the mountains.

But however much of new interest had sprung up for him in his autumn solitude, he was still keen on the trail of the poacher. Last year he had had no end of trouble with illicit slaughter of the deer, had made an enemy or two, and heard a bold boast that went about among the old-timers that they "had never been without meat no winter sence '54, an' no young snipe o' a forest ranger'd change the custom."

But this year Kenset had decided that there would be a shining example of the nation's punishment if he caught them at it.

So he was out early and late about his business.

He saw the black-haired girl no more for a week. At the end of that time, he determined to go to the old house at the abandoned Outlook.

It was a morning so crisp with frost in the shadowed places that every light foot left its telltale mark. The dry needles slipped and slid under Mister's careful hoofs, and the forest hung still and glorious.

As they were going gently down a long, shallow slant of the hills, there suddenly cut on the living air that clean snap that Kenset was beginning to know. Mister halted so sharply that he sat back upon his tail, and, thundering out of the ferns ahead, a great buck came leaping up along the slope. It was a magnificent animal carrying eight prongs laid well back on its shoulders, and Kenset thrilled to his toes as it went by in such high, long leaps as only a frightened buck can make. But with its disappearance the ranger's lips came together in a grim line and he slid off Mister. That shot had been very near. The one who fired it must be on this same hill. He would have small chance to get away, for Kenset could see both ways, and anything moving among the underbrush must attract attention. Therefore he drew the blue gun that hung always at his hip, and went forward.

He went boldly, though cautiously, for he well knew that he took his life in his hand. Many a man was found in the deer season, and always the verdict was "accidentally shot by hunters."

One ranger the less would be slight catastrophe to the region.

Keeping first a tree, then a bowlder, then a tree again between him and the point from which he had heard the shot, he covered the hillside from end to end. He even found the spot where the buck had been feeding, saw the scattered frosty needles disturbed by its first startled bound, but, search as he would—and he wasted two hours—there was neither trace nor trail of the vandal.

He would have been hugely surprised had he known that two eyes sharp as a ferret's watched him from under a big rock while a cramped hand held an old rifle along its owner's back pressed up against the sheltering stone.

It was ten o'clock when he gave over

his search, mounted Mister, and rode away. He was vexed and at outs with himself.

But he let himself think of the girl and whether or not he would find her at the Outlook. Once, in the "olden golden days," the Outlook had made millionaires in a night, had seen its blood and buried its dead on the slope below, had sent its name into the great world, and had "lost its lead" in a day, therefore going the way of all the world when its heyday is over. Now it was but a gloomy tunnel high on a mountain, a worn and ancient shack, a monumental pile of rust which had been a forty-stamp mill, and a long blue "dump" trailing down the hill face like a soiled and ragged ribbon.

It was solitude, and unspeakable loneliness and desolation materialized, and Kenset hoped devoutly that he would *not* find her there.

The doors of the house were open. Beside the spring, which lay sweet and clear in the trail, there hung a tin can with the top melted off. And the trail bore evidence of use.

Out on the rickety porch a man sat in a shabby wheeled chair, his limbs covered by a faded plush lap robe. White hair hung in soft rings about a fine brow, and blue eyes looked eagerly down at the stranger as he dismounted and came up.

"Come right up, sir!" he cried, in a beautiful old voice. "Glad to see you! Unspeakably glad to meet you!"

He held out a thin left hand, which Kenset took. The other lay, with the curious seeming of finality that always accompanies paralysis, in his lap.

He searched the young man's face with the eagerness of those whose ways of the outside world have been sharply shut upon them.

"I'm Kenset, sir," said the ranger. "Ranger and warden, and, coming by this way, I thought I'd stop. We have so few neighbors in the hills that we must make the most of each other."

"You are right, indeed! My name is Clarendon—Colonel Clarendon, Ninth Kentucky Volunteers. Sit down, sir! There is another chair inside, I believe, if you will kindly fetch it. You see I am not worth much these days. My daughter went out for a little climb around the hill. It is lonely for a young person. But she will soon be back."

Kenset flushed a bit as he stepped inside the crazy doorway.

So! She did live here, and—— Holy smoke! What utter poverty! It was right, then—that first suggestion of the ragged shoes, the frayed old skirt.

Inside, there was the very atmosphere of bygone days, that most unspeakable sort of loneliness, the wistful air of decay and nonuse.

And there was little else. The wide boards of the floor had been scrubbed to painful cleanliness. There was nothing on the walls but rotting paper, and here and there, pasted flat, ancient and ridiculous wood cuts taken from papers. One of these bore the date 1856.

There was a table made of a goods box, two smaller boxes nailed to the wall with a thin white curtain strung before them, and in the room beyond Kenset could see a pair of springs set up on small sawed sections of a young pine tree, while in one corner another narrower bed was made high on an abundance of fir boughs. Whoever had arranged this interior had made the best of nature's gifts with an aptitude and quickness that spoke well for life in these wilds where one had to forego luxuries.

One uncertain kitchen chair stood beside the table, which was covered with a clean white cloth. Kenset carried it out, and for a long, quiet hour he forgot his vexations in a delightful conversation. His host had no need to tell

of the "old days in the South, sir." His every motion, attitude, and inflection was a dignified delineation of that better time. The morning slipped away, and the still shadows of the pines crept under them, heralding the noon. And presently there came a step on the steep trail by the spring and the girl swung up to the crazy porch. She looked weary, and she carried a battered tin lard pail full of ripe manzanita berries.

"So you found me out?" she said to Kenset, in a tone that nettled him instantly, though he smiled at her with the inevitable sympathy of youth.

"Come, now, Miss Clarendon, there isn't a reason in the world why we should quarrel."

He turned to the older man.

"I met your daughter on the hill the other day, and she accused me of bad manners."

"Daughter! Daughter!" said the colonel, though his old eyes softened with affection. "I'm afraid she is a bit spoiled, sir."

She set down the pail and leaned against the high porch floor.

Kenset offered the rickety chair, but she shook her head. All the soft black curls fluffed and fell back again with the motion, and he thought he had never seen anything so entirely entrancing.

And she suddenly looked up at him, a wistful, tired look, wholly at variance with the usual expression of those imperious eyes.

Kenset felt his head go round, and he stooped and picked a berry from her pail.

"What will you do with these?" he asked, turning the hard, dark, red little sphere in his fingers, breaking the thin, flaky, dry outside from the thick seed.

The girl glanced swiftly at her father, and then down.

"The Indians used to make a certain flour from them," she said, "and I thought I'd try it. You see, one can't get fruit in here."

"No," broke in the colonel, "and as we have been here nearly two months now, our stores of such things are—ah—running low, so to speak."

"Why," began Kenset eagerly, "there is a stage running from Conniston down below. One can order. Will you let me——"

"No," said the girl sharply, "we have plenty for the present."

It was high noon when Kenset rose to leave, and, though no one in the big hills allowed a guest to leave at mealtime, neither father nor daughter asked him to stay, though the eagerness in the old man's voice as he begged him to come back again caused him to promise.

The girl said nothing, sitting insolently against the porch post, but when the ranger had ridden jauntily away down the precipitous trail, she flung herself face down on the worn boards and wept hard.

"Darn him!" she sobbed. "Oh, darn him! I wish he'd die! I do!"

"Child! Child!" quavered the old man, his thin left hand working on the lap robe. "Let us go out. There is still the money for the journey——"

The girl sat up.

"Never!" she cried defiantly. "Aren't you better? Can't you move both feet now? You'll walk by spring. Never!"

And Kenset, riding in a brown study along a wash far down, came abruptly upon a man—a slouch-hatted, booted individual, tall, handsome in a wild way, and grinning.

"Out fer game, warden?" he asked. "Thought I heerd a shot somewhere hereabouts this mornin'."

The ranger knew this youth for one of the reckless spirits of the region—G. C. MacLaw.

He looked at him keenly.

"Yes, and I shall get him, G. C.," he said. "Sooner or later I'll get him, and

he'll pay well to the law for his indiscretion."

Kenset rode on, but from that moment a light seemed to fall upon things. "I wonder," he mused. "I wonder. Is it G. C., and could she care—— Well, if she does, that explains her venom toward me."

But, try as he would, he could not accept that version, perhaps because of her beauty and the fact that it gave him a savage hurt to think of her as being against him because of another man—any other man.

A few days later he came upon a piece of evidence. He was going over the hillside where he had seen the big buck tearing away from danger, and he was searching it, every inch. Something seemed to tell him that he must do this. For an hour he hunted. Then, standing by the big rock from which those two sharp eyes had watched him that other day, he suddenly stooped and looked beneath it.

There, in a shallow cave, lay a gun. He pulled it out and examined it. It was a thirty-thirty, and it gave evidence of long use, a worn, brown weapon, efficient as only a long-used, true gun can be. It worked in the hand as softly and truly as the hand itself. Its forward sight was handmade, a tiny, sharp wedge; its rear sight was a late, improved peep, bored out a bit for rapid work. He who owned this gun was a hunter, and no mistake.

Kenset mused a bit on that bored-out sight. Old hunters, good hunters, sometimes did this, knowing that the eye would automatically find the true center of the hole from the fact that it was the brightest point therein, the outer rim being darker.

He recalled its voice yapping on the slopes, its keen, clean voice.

And yet, with all this evidence of skill, he who had fired it had missed the big buck—had missed at other times he had reason to believe.

Who owned it? And why did he leave it here?

Kenset looked it over from butt to muzzle. Ah, ha! Just under the foresight, on the right side, were scrawled, as with a penknife, two crude initials—and they were a "G" and a "C."

Triumphantly the ranger put the rifle back where he had found it, but in the next moment the triumph had wilted from him like frost in sunlight.

So it was MacLaw, all right, and the girl knew it and hated him—Kenset—for being so hot on his trail. He took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, and he was suddenly tired of the chase.

But, good heavens! It wasn't right to let her waste herself on a man like G. C. He lived at Brandt's saloon up at the Forks—he drank and gambled, and Kenset recalled his ugly tongue, his boasts about women.

For ten minutes the ranger stared down the silent green slopes, and, when he turned back to where he had left Mister, there was resolve and determination in his gray eyes.

He rode toward the abandoned Outlook.

But he had no need to hurry, for halfway there he heard her coming, light-footed, through the ferns. He stopped and waited, and when she came suddenly upon him he did not lift his hat.

Perhaps she liked the "rough-and-ready" sort.

"Hello, kid!" he said.

He almost quailed at the flash of her eyes, but laughed quietly at her and let the admiration he felt for her show plainly through his half-closed lids.

She had stopped close, both hands holding back the ferns. Her little, bold, black head was up, and the red lips were parted over her pretty teeth.

"Kid!" she said slowly. "Did—you—call—me—*kid?*"

"Sure!" said Kenset easily. "Didn't you call me a *hill billy?*"

"Get out of my way!" she said, and, passing insolently around Mister's heels, she raised a hand and struck him on the flank.

But Kenset, his heart leaping hard against his ribs, his breath fast in his throat, turned as swiftly, and, reaching down, caught her shoulders in the curve of his arm. He was strong, and he drew her to him, hard against his breast.

"Beauty!" he said softly. "Oh, you little wild cat!"

He wore on his right hand a heavy Masonic ring, the crest of its double-headed eagles joined by a low-set diamond, and a shaft of the brilliant sunlight coming through the pine tops far above struck full upon the stone. In its opulent glory it cried to Heaven its contrast with the old blue shirt whose frayed fringe stopped at the girl's elbow.

Kenset caught that contrast, and the next instant he was hot with shame and sorrow.

Poor? She was pitiful in her rags! And she was alone, and what business was it of his if she liked G. C.?

In two seconds he was off his horse, his hat was on the ground, and he was holding her hands.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "Say what you will, Miss Clarendon. I deserve it all. I can't apologize enough! I —I——"

But there he floundered, stopped, at perfect loss, for the girl, her face white as chalk, her somber eyes flaming, had opened her mouth with a gasp to flay him with rage, and then the eyes had suddenly dimmed with tears, the lips quivered pitifully, and, snatching her hands away, she covered her face and cried.

She turned her back to him and wept, and Kenset felt like a condemned criminal. He put a diffident hand on her shoulder, but she shook it off.

"Miss Clarendon!" he begged. "I can't tell you how sorry I am——"

"Prove it, then!" she cried, from the shelter of her hands. "Go away, quick!"

And without a word he obeyed.

For two weeks Kenset kept clear of the Outlook. He was after MacLaw, and the handsome youth grinned at him and baited him openly at the Forks.

Try as he would, he failed at everything he touched, it seemed, and he was torn on the rack beside. And then, at the end of that second week, he came upon a circumstance that put him far at sea.

He heard that MacLaw was going to be married—to a girl at Conniston!

What did it mean? What did——

Say! He sat up in his bed that night and cold chills went over him. He slept no more, and he was out on the hills at dawn, restless, driven, waiting until he could decently go to the Outlook.

What might not have happened in those two weeks? Fool! Fool that he had been! Why had he not investigated?

He rode to the Outlook, and his heart was in his throat. He had not waited for good day, so eager had he been. Cold blue shadows, huge as the hills themselves, lay mysteriously in the hollows. White frost sparkled on rock and drooping fern. Snakes, the wicked rattlers of the peaks and rocks, were safely holed for the winter—and the deer were taking their handsome winter coats. It was a glorious country, a big, wild country, scarce fit for a girl to roam at will; and he fell to thinking of her as Mister picked his way up along the faint old trail.

The sun was just lifting above the range when he came around the spring and saw the shack. There was no sign of life about it. The door was a bit

ajar, and Kenset felt cold fear at his heart.

Had they gone—disappeared like the mists of the night, a mysterious pair in a mysterious setting?

He slipped off Mister, hid him in a thicket off the trail, and went softly up on the rickety porch, pushed the door wider, and entered. The blue light of early morning revealed the pitiful poverty of the place without mercy. Kenset stood a moment, searching. Then he stopped, quiet as a cat, and looked into the other room.

On the springs set on the pine sections the old man lay asleep, his white hair spread on the folded coat that served as a pillow. A candle and a worn old Bible lay on a box beside him, its unsightliness hidden by a clean white cloth. The narrow bed on the fir boughs in the corner was empty.

Long the ranger looked, conscious of an aching pity and wholly oblivious to the fact that he was rude beyond apology.

Then he deliberately went to the tumble-down kitchen beyond and searched it from top to bottom.

And a great light grew with his investigations.

It was spotlessly clean, that wistful place of a forgotten day, its old shelves covered with newspapers, its rough floor scrubbed and polished, but it was bare as a man's palm newly washed.

Kenset looked in all the few pots and pails, and there was nothing there. On the bottom shelf there lay the last of a piece of bacon as big as a boot's sole, while beside it stood a shallow dish half full of a grayish-white mixture which looked like some kind of batter.

Kenset dipped a finger in it and tasted it.

"Manzanita!" he whispered. "So this is what she meant! And this is all! All!"

He straightened up and stared at the empty shelves, and he saw again that day when he had meant to kiss her—saw the ragged sleeve of her old blue shirt against his diamond and the tears in her black eyes.

He struck a doubled fist softly in his palm and writhed in real pain. Was it possible that one could starve like this in an abundant land?

Ah, yes. He knew the lonely pockets of the hills, and how, if one had not the price and the way, it could easily be done.

And he—he had persecuted her, had suggested that she order—had tried to kiss her! Oh, he——

But there he lost his abasing thought, for some one was coming up the trail, some one who stumbled and panted with whistling breath. He could hear it where he stood, and a sweat prickled out upon him, it was so strange a sound. Presently a foot struck the steps, slipped off, and tried again, and then came up, heavy, dragging, a burdened step that stumbled and all but failed. And then a voice cried amid its panting, and he knew it for her voice, that sweet, deep voice which had thrilled him that first day.

"Father!" it cried. "Father!" And the exultation in it was beyond description. It waited, then it called again, between the heavy breaths:

"Father, dear! Come out! Come quick! Come quick!"

Kenset heard the slow, heavy movements of one who "could move both feet" getting himself slowly into the old wheel chair, and he waited, tense in every limb, until the crazy vehicle crossed the empty room beyond and passed through the door.

"Why, daughter! Why, daughter!"

There was pride ineffable, and joy and relief in the old voice.

"Why, what a girl you are! Now let us thank God for His bounty, my dear. This is indeed famous, famous!"

And the colonel raised his left hand and sent up to that One who watches

over "His loved and His own" the quaintest thanksgiving in the world.

At its close Kenset stepped softly from his hiding place and deliberately stood in the doorway behind the chair. He looked across the colonel's white head into a pair of eyes startled to the point of panic, filled with such fear as he had never beheld.

The girl stood on the top step, a picture in the sharp gold light of the risen sun. She was wet to her knees with wading some mountain stream, and she was flushed and sweating with great labor.

In her right hand, held by the muzzle, its butt upon the floor, there trailed the old brown gun that Kenset had found beneath the rock, while, hanging on her shoulders, feet tied across her breast with one of the laces from her ragged boots, a young spike buck shone blue in its winter coat.

Kenset had a wild desire to paint her at that tense moment, this Diana of the hills with her game upon her and the panic in her eyes.

All the triumph went out of her, and she swayed upon her feet.

The gun slipped from her hand and clattered down the steps.

The red lips, ashen now, opened and closed without sound, and Kenset, springing past the wheel chair, caught her just in time.

"I—I——" she said thickly, and closed her eyes, standing slim and weary in the circle of his arm.

"Why—why, sir——" quavered the old man wonderingly. "How——" And as the magnitude of Kenset's presence dawned upon him, he picked at the faded robe across his knees.

He bowed his head, and for a long moment there was no sound save a wild hawk screaming in the gorge. Then the old man looked up, the dignity of his years and his simplicity upon him.

"You have caught us, sir," he said gently, "and you will do your duty. But first we must explain so that you will know it was necessity, not wanton lawlessness, that drove my daughter to break the law. We——"

"Stop, sir! Stop, I beg you!" cried the ranger. hoarsely, but the colonel shook his head.

"We came in here in the late summer because a doctor at—at the soldiers' home told my daughter—— She did realize, sir, when she went in the desperation of poverty, that I had fought on what is now the wrong side—that I might improve in the high mountains. A neighbor told us of these deserted habitations in the old mining sites, and so we came, with our last resources, because my daughter—my daughter so loves and guards me, sir, that she must needs take any risk that I may walk again."

He stopped and looked at the girl with tragic old blue eyes, and Kenset's arm tightened about her—and the little spike buck.

"But we found our provisions were—were inadequate, and so my daughter, who never held a gun in her life, must rent this blunderbuss from a youth who comes this way sometimes—I must not divulge his name, for, though he did wrong in the eyes of the law in this arrangement, he would have helped us greatly. She has tried and tried and ever she missed the pretty creatures that it wrung her heart to try to kill; for, you see, sir, she had no skill—and these cartridges cost too much for practice. We—we were—low, I might say, on foodstuffs, and so—so we were elated this morning, you see——"

Kenset groaned aloud, and, gently loosing his arm, he cut the thongs and took the little buck from her shoulders.

"Hush!" he said, as the old man would have added yet more to his dignified justification.

"As this brave little girl has hunted the deer, colonel," he said, "so I have

hunted her; for, in my blundering, I thought I had my man spotted, and I intended making an example of him to——"

"As you still will, sir, if you do your duty," said the old warrior gravely.

"As I will certainly, when I catch the vandals who shoot for daring. But"—he turned to the girl and lifted the pretty black head, no longer bold and imperious but drooping against the post of the dilapidated porch—"but more than all my duty, all my desire to uphold the law I stand for, is your welfare to me. Can you love, ever so little, a hill billy like me, my young wild cat? Look at me! Can you?"

He held her away and forced the long black eyes to lift themselves to his.

"Answer me fairly, curly head," he said softly, "for I have loved you from that first moment when you climbed out on the big bowlder that day and I scared you so."

At his words the red came running back into the ashen lips and the adorable lips curled, albeit somewhat tremulously.

"Scared me!" she said, a bit trembly. "I knew you were there when I climbed up. It was I who fired that shot."

"Well, of all—— But answer me: What of a hill billy like me?"

She turned the little buck with a ragged toe and glanced at her father from the corners of her eyes.

"I—I think I like the breed," she said.

Kenset reached for her, and as his arm went round her the diamond sparkled triumphantly against the faded flannel shirt.

He held out the other hand to the colonel.

"Sir," he said, with so much joy that he could not keep his voice quite steady, "I have a dandy cabin high up where the air is A1. There is room for us all—and I have but your consent to gain before I ride for a preacher down at Conniston."

"Why—why——" said the colonel blankly. "This—this is sudden! But youth—ah, youth! I mind, sir, when I rode a wild way once for a girl who had my daughter's eyes. Ah, yes! Ride, sir! I know a man when I meet him—and so does my daughter. Ride!"

Kenset bowed and kissed the adorable lips for the first sweet time. "As her mother did before her," he said, as he dashed down to where he had hidden Mister—and Mister knew that all was well, for the wisp of mane beneath the bridle hand lay with its waving mates; and they went a swift journey down amid the flaming autumn flags.

A NEW KIND OF SHELL GAME

AN abandoned-looking character, evidently the victim of too much conviviality, was brought into the Baltimore police court on the charge of disorderly conduct.

"What's your business?" asked the judge.

"My business?" echoed the prisoner in a dazed manner.

"Yes," said the judge sharply. "Tell me what your business is."

"I've got a good business," the wretched-looking man answered proudly.

"Well, what is it?"

"I'm a conchologist."

"A conchologist!" exclaimed the judge. "I never heard of such a business."

"That's what I am—a conchologist."

"Explain yourself!" said the judge severely. "What do you do?"

"Well," said the conchologist, "I open clams."

The Millennium Engine

By Leavitt Ashley Knight

Author of "The Arm of As-Sanusi," Etc.

"The perpetual problem of society is the problem of protecting mankind against the devastations of genius and economic progress." **This is one of the arresting sentences in this noteworthy story, and you will understand its significance when you read of the genius that produced the Millennium Engine and created a panic such as this country has never equalled and a money loss unique in the world's history.**

TIME finally enables us to answer the old vexed question about Armitage and Bartlett. For twenty years after the Second Industrial Revolution, historians fiercely debated whether these two astonishing men were mad. Those who said they were agreed that the madness of Armitage was not the madness of Bartlett. Armitage, they said, was money-mad; Bartlett charity-mad. But others insisted that Armitage was nothing but a common self-respecting business man of the nineteenth-century type magnified one hundred diameters. As for Bartlett, said they, he was one of those rare minds which blossom forth among mankind once in a millennium, a great-hearted man strangely impelled at the same time by remorseless logic and empowered with diabolical ingenuity.

Now that the outcome of the Second Industrial Revolution is entirely clear, we know which of these opinions about the men who precipitated that cataclysm is correct. A simple report of the facts will dispel the superstition which still lingers vigorously in many quarters.

The facts are these:

In 1934 the railroads of the United States were in the middle of an era of healthful prosperity. They had entirely recovered from the long series of political attacks that had been directed against them in the first decade of the twentieth century. Even the New York, New Haven & Hartford was earning five per cent of wholly honest dividends.

Remarkable as this was, though, it was overshadowed by the development of the motor truck and the automobile highways. Between 1920 and 1930, no fewer than 653,288 motor trucks were manufactured annually. It was in 1931 that New York City, Boston, Chicago, and Detroit passed antihorse laws, forbidding all animal-drawn vehicles to traverse their streets. Small freight, passengers, and the mails were, by 1926, almost universally moved about by motor within the hundred-mile radius of every large city. Gone was the famous old infamous old Commuters' Local, with its sooty locomotive, its stifling cars of tinder, and its stiff, jolting jog trot. Vanished was the leisurely old Rural Free Delivery postman, thumbing through the countryside's post cards while his white mare ambled along nibbling grass by the roadside. The en-

tire country was ribboned with magnificent macadam roads like the Lincoln Highway—the first large one to be built. When, in August, 1933, the Great Gulf Road from Tampa to Galveston was thrown open, the enormous interurban system was complete, and you might have raced over a rock roadbed seventy feet wide from any city of ten thousand to any other city of ten thousand in our country.

It was inevitable that all this should have affected the railroads. But the effect was much less serious than one might have guessed prior to the facts. True, all local passenger service by rail had ceased; everybody came and went by motor cycle, by car, or by motor bus. But the railroads did not complain. They had never made much money out of commuters, most of whom they had hauled at from one-fourth to one-half cent per mile. Local freight of the lighter sort, too, had all been diverted from the way of steel. But once again the railroad presidents shrugged their shoulders and said: "We'll lose a little, but not enough to make us worry. Short-haul freight is expensive, and it's a horrible nuisance." And they cited familiar statistics to show that the labor charges and the delays in handling mixed car lots of local freight ate up nearly all the profits, and that the big money for the common carriers all came from the transporting of bulk freight over long distances.

"Hurrah for the motor truck!" said President Wheeling, of the Pennsylvania. "It has swept our tracks clean of every confounded local train, passenger and freight alike. And it has left us with a clear way for solid trains of coal, iron, wheat, and lumber. Thanks to the great god, chauffeur, we railways are better off than ever!"

On a sun-washed May morning in 1934, there crawled out of the door of a great office building in lower Broadway a strange, almost comic little car. Through the throngs on the sidewalk it wormed its way to the road and there halted, while a crowd gathered.

It was a weird contrivance, that car. It seemed to be made wholly of copper. Its wheels carried tires a foot wide and spokes half an inch thick. Yet the whole car was smaller than a five-hundred-dollar runabout! The crowd laughed. So did the two men aboard the car. Then they started it up Broadway very slowly, and the engine roared like a hungry tiger. Roared so loud that even its muffler seemed like a gauze veil hung before its fury. When the crowd heard that, they followed, wondering.

A little above Forty-second Street, the car overhauled two Giant No. 8 motor trucks which were panting desperately over an enormous ninety-ton steel girder. The girder rode stolidly on three sets of wheels and refused to move more than ten feet a minute. The driver of the little copper car signaled to the two Giants No. 8 to uncouple. They did so, while Broadway murmured. Then up dashed the little copper toy, slipped *beneath* the titanic beam, lifted a couple of heavy jacks, screwed them up from the car's platform until they bore firmly against the girder.

Then a lever moved, the tiger in the invisible engine roared again, and ninety tons of metal leaped forward like a grasshopper.

"Good Lord! They're making thirty miles an hour!" a man in the crowd yelled hysterically. Then the street lost its head. Men shouted as at a victorious army. A swarm of motorists raced after the vanishing copper car. Far up Broadway traffic policemen were bellowing to its driver: "Halt! Halt!"

But the comic copper car did not halt. On it screamed, and overhead the ninety-ton girder raced, until it reached a store in the upper nineties. There it

drew up at the curb. And the pursuing multitudes of motorists saw in a show window a duplicate of the comic copper car. And on the plate glass in front of it, this sign:

THE MILLENNIUM CAR. 500 HORSE POWER FOR $500.

Bartlett & Armitage. Manufacturers and sole retailers.

AMOS BARTLETT. JOHN ARMITAGE.

A host of excited noises rippled through the crowd, and the name of John Armitage rose rhythmically above the blur of gossip and excitement. For John Armitage was the copper king. He it was who had been the private secretary of the elder Guggenheim from 1918 to 1925. Then, in that memorable wave of religious revivals during the summer of 1925, the entire Guggenheim family joined the Catholic Church, and all the Guggenheim men became Dominican friars. John Armitage headed the syndicate that bought the Guggenheim properties. And after four years Armitage was the majority stockholder in the syndicate. Then the three mountains of pure copper were discovered on Armitage lands in Peru. Men estimated the Armitage fortune at eight hundred million—and that was conservative.

Then fate played a wild trick. She set a young chap in Hartford, Connecticut, at work upon the problem of tempering copper. And within ten months this Amos Bartlett had discovered the now well-known process of polarizing copper atoms. It turned the soft metal into a stuff 8.33 times as strong as the finest vanadium steel. The process, as every high-school boy knows, was almost as cheap as picking up a copper bar and setting it down again.

But this was not the most startling quality of the polarized copper. One night, while he was "monkeying" with a bar over an electric furnace, young Bartlett discovered that the coefficient of expansion had been reduced eighty-eight per cent, while the melting point had been raised by polarization from twelve hundred degrees Centigrade to about thirty-five hundred. For nearly a year, these facts lingered in Amos Bartlett's mind as mere curiosities. Then one night, as he was falling asleep, "a great light from within seemed suddenly to be kindled," so he wrote afterward, "and I saw, in that vast space which imagination holds but which lies nowhere between the stars, an engine of polarized copper racing at a speed invisible to mortal eye. Racing, with every shaft and bearing red-hot. An engine driven by nitroglycerin! An engine enduring easily the frightful heat of explosives. I sprang from my bed crying like a lunatic: 'I shall overturn the world!'"

Remember, it was in May, 1934, that the first Millennium car, driven by nitroglycerin, burst upon the bewildered gaze of mankind. Backed by the immeasurable fortune of John Armitage, the comic little thing in copper was manufactured simultaneously in eight stupendous factories, and, through an ingenious system, sold directly to the public. The engine was of incredible simplicity—"a worm-gear shaft stuck inside a pipe," so the popular saying ran at the time. Selling at "one horse power one dollar," Bartlett & Armitage cleared at least one hundred dollars on their smallest cars—five hundred horse power.

Armitage went around chuckling to himself like a silly schoolboy. He boasted that he would die a multibillionaire. He opened a chain of banks to handle the avalanches of gold that were pouring into his coffers. And yet at times he scowled, sulked, and fell into a strange melancholy. The reason whereof men soon discovered through a babbling stenographer in the office of Armitage's corporation lawyer. The

worm that gnawed Armitage's cruel heart and scheming brain was young Amos Bartlett. For Amos was a Connecticut Yankee—one of the old Bartletts from back of Farmington Ridge, you know. And he had joined the corporation of Bartlett & Armitage with the explicit and binding agreement that one Amos Bartlett own fifty-one per cent of the stock and be not required to divulge his secret polarizing process.

In the largest of the Bartlett & Armitage factories there stood a huge, low, windowless building surrounded by two high fences of copper wire, through which flowed, day and night, a deadly electric current. Every morning Amos Bartlett entered this place alone. An hour later there rolled from the south end of the structure a monster Emden electric truck bearing ten thousand tons of polarized copper—enough for the day's output of the eight factories. When unloaded, the truck was heaped with pure copper bars and swiftly vanished within the house of mystery.

In November, 1934—six months after the Millennium car had been placed on the market—the four largest old-style motor-truck firms went suddenly into the hands of a receiver. Ten days later, eleven more announced that they would close. On Christmas Day, of the two hundred and twenty-one commercial motor factories which had been flourishing for years, there remained only eight, and these eight were the Bartlett & Armitage plants.

In January, sixty-five of the finest abandoned factories were bought—by Bartlett & Armitage. Armitage said he picked them up to avert a national panic. But the only person who believed him was Amos Bartlett.

September and harvest! In the opulent main street of Chamberlain, South Dakota, there came together, of a cool, autumn morning, the twenty bonanza farmers of Brule County. They and their families rode in great limousines. And behind them followed their hired men driving giant trucks loaded to the top with wheat.

Sixty trucks there were, each as large as a small, old-fashioned freight car of thirty tons' capacity. And beneath each there purred a Millennium Engine. At a signal, the parade whirled into the Missouri River Highway and headed southeast.

The twenty bonanza farmers of Brule County were taking their crops to market, as their ancestors did of old. They were going to a breakfast-food factory in Paterson, New Jersey. And after cashing in there, farmers, families, and hired men were going over to New York for a hilarious week of celebration.

From Wheeler to Yankton, the great highway veered northward from the Missouri and followed the railroad. As the marketing tourists whirled over the macadam at a steady thirty miles an hour, a small boy in one limousine cried out: "Oh, mamma! What are those yellow streaks out there?"

The mother looked. "Those, my dear, are steel rails—trains used to run on them."

"But steel is black," objected the lad.

"The yellow is rust—thick rust."

At that an older farmer laughed harshly and chuckled: "We've got 'em at last—those thievin' Wall Street fellers! Fifty years an' more they've been squeezin' us with their freight rates an' their rotten service an' their dirty politics. They've made their millions by crookedness, an' now they're losin' 'em all. The Millennium Engine's a great victory fer th' common people!"

The yellow streaks followed the party like a specter to Sioux City, from Sioux City to Chicago, from Chicago to Cleveland, from Cleveland to Paterson. Sometimes there were two streaks,

sometimes four, and in the great towns, a hundred. In the vast sidings and switch yards of the old-time railway centers, there stood huddled in a dismal congestion and hideously forlorn silence, miles upon miles of abandoned box cars. Hundreds of huge black locomotives clustered about the still roundhouses, cold and unguarded.

Why should they be watched? Thieves do not steal worthless things. And all these properties of the greatest business in America had been reduced to junk almost overnight. The *Wall Street Journal,* in its famous edition of the Second Black Friday, had estimated conservatively that the Millennium Engine had cost the United States as follows:

Paid-up capital	$17,822,590,000
Estimated market value of real-estate holdings	9,710,425,000
Estimated value of rolling stock, rails, and other equipment, as junk	225,670,000
Realizable assets	9,936,095,000
Absolute loss	7,886,495,000

Add to this the losses of the rail mills, car shops, equipment factories, and other industries directly dependent upon the railway business. The *Wall Street Journal* computed these to be in excess of nine hundred million dollars. So the Millennium Engine, in less than a year, had ruined nearly nine billion dollars' worth of property! It was the devilish business ingenuity of Armitage that had accomplished this Second Industrial Revolution at such a dizzy speed. Absolutely sure of the possibilities of the Millennium Engine, the copper king had flung his entire fortune into it. He had bought up the greatest mechanical geniuses of the country. He had retained the six cleverest advertising managers. He paid his workmen a minimum of five dollars a day and sped up the output of his seventy-three factories to sixty-six thousand cars *a day!* On the morning of the Second Black Friday there were in service on American highways nearly four million cars—or one to every thirty inhabitants.

For all these cars, Bartlett & Armitage had received spot cash. Four hundred millions net profit in six months!

Of course, the railroads had fought desperately to hold their long-distance bulk-freight business. But it was a hopeless struggle. In the first place, the freight train was completely outstripped by the Millennium Engine. Few persons are aware that the average speed of the American freight train in the early twentieth century was *only one mile per hour* from the time of loading to that of unloading. This ridiculous velocity was due to the unavoidable delays in switch yards, on sidings—waiting for clear headway—and at loading and unloading points. It was clearly proved, as early as 1910, that mule-drawn canal boats, hauling directly from producer to consumer, traveled more than twice as fast as engine-drawn trains on steel rails. The historical reader interested in curious facts may verify these startling comparisons in the railway statistics of that day.

The second cause of the railroads' failure to compete against the Millennium Engine was the staggering cost of making and breaking cargo. A shipper by rail was obliged to cart his goods to a freight station, dump them onto a platform, have them weighed and recorded, then loaded into a car. The receiving party had to go to his freight station with teams or motors, wait his turn—which sometimes took half a day—load his freight, and haul it home, perhaps a block, perhaps five miles. Now *all these heavy charges were unavoidable. They were the consequence of the railway system itself, which, by having a highly specialized roadbed, was compelled to place its receiving and distributing stations along that roadway.*

The Millennium Engine, on the other hand, loaded at the shipper's door and unloaded at the buyer's. One man ran it easily from Chicago to New York in forty hours, with sixty tons aboard. Unlike the nineteenth-century cars, this one carried steel tires a foot wide; and every highway was rolled as smooth as a table and as hard as solid rock, every time a Millennium Engine traversed it.

Amos Bartlett's breakfast coffee stood untasted and cold behind his morning newspaper. For the day was the Second Black Friday, and the inventor and multimillionaire was reading the black-bordered *Wall Street Journal* which announced that the combined railroads of America had, after long secret conferences, confessed themselves hopelessly bankrupt. They declared that their creditors would not receive more than twenty-five cents on the dollar. The stockholders would receive nothing. The article continued:

This is the most appalling single disaster in the world's history. All the money losses of Napoleon's wars were trifling beside this one. Who is it that must bear the brunt of the frightful shock? The 425,000 stockholders of the railways and affiliated industries. The 155,000 stockholders of the banks which have held the bonds and short-time notes of the bankrupts. And some 200,000 other creditors.

But does the violence of the blow reach no farther? Answer, after you have considered that, during the past sixty days, 2,133,950 men have been discharged, and are standing on the street corners, wondering dumbly to what they can turn their hands, and how they may feed their children. Conductors, locomotive engineers, brakemen, wipers, firemen, boiler makers, signalmen, trackmen, section gangs, gatemen, ticket agents, freight agents—a mighty army robbed of the opportunity to earn a living. And to them there look for bread and clothing a greater, more helpless multitude of eight or ten million women and children.

If this is the price of progress, then better the old sooty locomotive and the commuters' local and the weary weeks of waiting for slow freight!

Amos Bartlett rubbed his brow, as if something was stinging the inside of his head. He flung the paper down, seized his hat, and started for his factory, to prepare the day's supply of polarized copper.

A doorman in gorgeous uniform opened the heavy carved oaken portal for the gaunt young man who had invented an engine and chaos. Amos Bartlett stepped out—and his foot came down upon something soft. Dumbly he glanced down.

On the doorstep lay a gray-haired woman, her dead face contorted by some cruel poison. Beside her, two dead children. In her stiff hand a note, which, as by intuition, Amos seized and read with bulging eyes:

You have robbed me of all I had. It was only a few shares of Pennsylvania stock. I hope you are enjoying yourself. Maybe you are fiddling. Nero did, when Rome burned. You will say I should have gone to the charity societies. But I will not take doles from anybody. SARAH MELLERTON.

"Not to the factory!" Amos snapped to his chauffeur. "Go to Mr. Armitage's—fast, too!"

Armitage met his partner at the door. His fat, wrinkled chin vibrated maliciously, and he cackled: "Well, my boy! We've got 'em on the run, eh? Told you we'd put 'em under inside two years. Went faster than I figured. Did you clean up on the Stock Exchange?"

"What?" Amos asked dully.

Armitage stared uncomprehendingly. "Ain't you been selling short on railroads these past two months? I tipped you off long ago. Remember? Say, boy! Don't mind telling you that I've cleaned up two hundred million at the short game! I've placed thirty-day selling orders on every railroad stock. I began delivering ten days ago. Cleaned up fifteen points or better."

"What are we going to do about this?" Amos broke in sharply, and he thrust the newspaper's tale of horror under his partner's eyes.

"I guess we've done enough already." Armitage winked heavily. "Guess we'd better lie quiet for a while. I'm going to North Africa—hunting trip, you know. Some of these agitators or fellows that are stung will go dippy and come after us with a gun. Better come along, Amos."

"I'm going to see this through." Amos clicked his jaws.

"You want to buy up a lot of bankrupt railroads and banks—make twenty per cent, like any junk dealer, eh?" Armitage half shut his wicked eyes. "Keep away, Amos! Sure money, but almighty dangerous! You've got half a billion, all in safe stuff—cash or copper or our own stock. Don't be greedy!"

"You don't understand." Amos laughed harshly. "You and I have made four hundred millions in six months. How? By a new engine of my inventing that has wiped out nine billions of railroad property. Wiped it out as by a fire! There are honest men and women starving this morning—all over America! I've got to do something about it." And then he told of what he had found on his doorstep.

Armitage paled a little. "Not a bad idea, Amos!" He wagged his head. "We'll give a few millions to the charities. Relief fund, y'know. Tell our advertising managers to get the stunt run as reading matter in all the papers. Will keep the cranks away. Yep. Fine idea, my boy. Put me down for—mmm! —well, I'll begin with a million. If people cheer, I'll follow it up with more."

"That doesn't sound right to me." Amos frowned. "Those poor devils don't need charity! It's an insult to them! They need work—honest work. They need to be—well, insured against the horrible losses they've suffered."

"Insured?" Armitage stared in comic bewilderment. "What the devil d'ye mean?"

"It's simple, now that I get to thinking about it." Amos rushed along. "Here I've invented an engine that has done more damage than all the fires and earthquakes and wars of the last fifty years. It has ruined people who aren't to blame for the ruin at all. They weren't careless. They weren't doing anything wrong. The thing hit them like a cyclone—out of clear sky!"

"Humph!" snorted Armitage. "That's the fortunes of business! Every man takes that sort of chance—just as he does with fire and cyclones."

"But the sensible man takes out insurance against fire and cyclones and death," Amos broke in excitedly. "Why, Armitage, there's insurance against almost every sort of calamity to-day. The employers' liability law is insurance against accidents around machinery. Over in Germany and France the governments insure everybody against sickness, old age, and death. In England the insurance companies insure thousands of people against bankruptcy, burglary, defalcation, and a hundred other business misfortunes——"

"Sure!" Armitage half sneered. "But——"

"There's no *but!*" Amos sprang up, a new light in his swift gray eyes. "If *people can be insured against ordinary bankruptcy and other losses, they can be insured against progress!*"

"Are you out of your head, my boy?" Armitage put his hands on Bartlett's shoulders.

"Never clearer in my life! *I see everything in a new light! That's it! That's it, Armitage! Progress! It's the great curse and the greatest blessing in the world! It's like a fire that burns a forest to the roots and enriches the land with the ashes. It's a disease that wracks a man horribly and then leaves him in better health than ever.*

"Now, if some of us are allowed to reap the rewards of progress under the

protection of patents or by processes which the government allows us to keep secret, why in simple justice ought not those who suffer through our prosperity be somehow protected?"

"They are protected," Armitage persisted stubbornly. "Look at the charities—thousands of 'em—every kind—loan associations, and all that——"

"Rot, Armitage!" Bartlett sneered. "Would you be willing to cease insuring this fine house of yours against fire, and, when it burns to the ground, would you go whimpering to the United Charities Society and say: 'Good people, my home is destroyed. Give me shelter for the night. And to-morrow please build me a nice new home—a little twenty-five-thousand-dollar one will do, seeing that I am an object of charity!'"

"Insurance is another thing——"

"It is, as things are. But it ought not be! That's my point, Armitage! *Men have insured themselves against the lesser evils, and against the greater ones which happen often and with visible violence. But here's a tremendous evil which strikes somewhat indirectly. Indirect, but its course is perfectly clear. It can't be suppressed, because progress is the most precious thing in the world. Why not pay a fair price, then, for this precious thing? Why not pay for its damages?"*

"People can't take out insurance after the house has burned!" Armitage protested feebly.

"Your mind," smiled Bartlett, "is under the spell of law. I'm not thinking of law. I'm thinking of the empty bellies of those two million poor devils who are standing on the street corners this morning."

"What are you going to do, Amos?" the copper king asked, with hardening voice.

"I'm going to Washington to see the President of the United States." The inventor rose and headed for the door. "And, by the way, Armitage, I'd like to have you give me power of attorney over—well, say about five hundred million dollars of your wealth."

"You're out of your wits!" Armitage raged. "I won't let you give any such wad away to a pack of bankrupts——"

"I won't give it away. But I may invest it at a pretty low interest rate."

"No, sir! I'll give you five million for relieving distress—if you'll see that my name's decently mentioned. But ——"

"Then," Amos said slowly, as he set his hat on his head, "I withdraw from the firm—and my polarizing process goes with me. Good-by, Armitage."

"Hold on there, my boy! D-d-don't do anything rash!" The copper king chattered like a frightened ape. "We'll —I'll—I guess you can have that five hundred m-m-millions. You won't throw it away, will you, Amos? You'll be very careful with it? W-won't you?"

"You'll get it all back some day." Amos smiled. "Call your lawyer, quick!"

There remains little to tell. But that little marks one of the great turning points in the world's history. All day Saturday, all day Sunday, Amos Bartlett toiled over figures in the east office of the White House. Around him sat the haggard financiers of New York—the stoical, pale, ruined mill operators of the Pittsburgh district, the heartsick bankers of Chicago, and the frightened, babbling, useless "leaders" of the Senate and the House. The president snapped out questions, now to one, now to another. Amos scribbled, commented, argued.

On Monday morning came the president's special message to Congress. It called a special session and announced that the firm of Bartlett & Armitage had made the following extraordinary offer to the government:

1. Bartlett & Armitage would turn over to the United States treasury $800,000,000 in

cash and the highest grade of negotiable securities—mostly bonds, national and municipal—and would accept in exchange therefore United States bonds, on which the payment of the first ten years' interest might be deferred.

2. This exchange would be made with the understanding that the government would raise a like sum by a special tax upon the four million Millennium cars in operation, and by a special highway toll on all vehicles and by other means, to be selected by Congress.

3. Of the total $1,600,000,000 thus raised, the government would loan to embarrassed banks, against good security, sufficient cash to enable them to resume business.

4. Similar loans would be made to factories and businesses of high standing, provided these might readily manufacture or deal in other goods than those called for exclusively by railways. All such loans would be made under the condition that business be immediately resumed, and the men who were discharged as a result of the panic be re-employed.

5. The government would buy, at its actual value, all real-estate holdings of the bankrupt railroads, and pay for the same in long-term bonds. If no use could be found for the land occupied by rails, it might be sold off in small parcels.

6. The government would immediately issue emergency bills, and distribute them to large business enterprises and banks in exchange for first-class national and municipal bonds, on the basis of $900 for every $1,000 par value of bonds. This would be done on condition that the bank or business receiving the bills resume business within forty-eight hours after the exchange.

Congress met at noon. Two days later the panic was over. Every bank in the country opened its doors. Within a week nearly every large factory was in full blast.

There remains to note only a paragraph or two in the president's special message after the horrors of the past fortnight had passed. Said the president:

"Thanks to the sudden masterly insight of Amos Bartlett, we know to-day what the greatest task of a government is, and how that task must be faced and discharged. The perpetual problem of society is the problem of protecting mankind against the devastations of genius and economic progress. This cannot be solved by suppressing genius and making progressiveness a crime. The human race depends, for the continuous furthering of its happiness and welfare, upon the revolutionary ingenuities of master minds. Without these we should to-day be living in caves, garbed in the skins of wild beasts and gnawing roots.

"But every revolutionary invention has played havoc with thousands of innocent, honest people. The invention of powder ruined armorers all over Europe. The invention of steam engines ruined whole armies of sailing masters and coach drivers. The invention of the locomotive ruined the owners of canal boats and road houses. And so on through the entire list.

"It used to be the fashion to say that there was AN industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century. We now know that there IS industrial revolution, sometimes violent and swift, sometimes mild and slow. It is not an event. It is a continuous flux of affairs. The machinery of life is always changing, always growing more effective. It is always bettering the world in the long run. It is always crushing somebody.

"The social and political problems of the past generation were overwhelmingly problems about insuring people against the pangs of progress. Until to-day men have been blind to this, and so radicals and conservatives alike have misinterpreted the issue. The conservative did not know that industrial revolution is continuous. He thought that once in a thousand years society might be upset by some new device; but, for the rest of the time, business conditions and political methods were—or *ought* to be—immutable, uniform, static. Hence he fought honestly for the preservation of the status quo.

"The radical, on the other hand, did not realize that the horrors of the sweat

shop, the sickening congestion in the city slums, the grotesque, miasmic existence in Pennsylvania iron mills, the evils of contract labor and reckless immigration, the absurd injustices of the law—that was worded to fit conditions long since extinct—and nearly all other acute diseases of the social order at the beginning of the twentieth century had their origin in progress itself. It was the railroad that made the crowded cities. It was the inventor, with his power looms, peggers, and lathes, who filled the upper stories with workmen. It was the telegraph that hastened agreements between men far apart and quickened the pace of business appallingly. It was the exceeding simplicity of operating the stocking-knitting machine and the burnisher and a hundred other instruments that drew children to the mills, where once only men had toiled.

"The radical did not see that the employers who figured in this whole hideous system were simply doing what they had been educated to do—what their fathers before them had done. The radical did not see that the old rules of business had become monstrous as a result of the greater intensity of all business and its wider range and its vaster proportions.

"Radical and conservative alike were in error. They did not see that *great men and new ideas are perilous to mankind and yet must be encouraged. They are the higher forces of nature. And, like sea, fire, and lightning, they are good servants and bad masters. Society must insure against them, by protective devices and by money. Neither radical nor conservative saw that nearly all of the old-time trusts grew up and flourished on the strength of some patent monopoly granted by the State. The Harvester Trust would have been impossible had not the government allowed inventors to own and traffic in their revolutionary devices. The Standard Oil Company would have had a much more modest career if it had not been allowed to buy and control secret refining processes and patent machinery and to use the same in competition regardless of consequences. The Telephone Trust could not have become the most powerful of its day but for the hundreds of patents it controlled.*

"Ninety-nine times out of a hundred such patent monopolies worked injuries too slight or too diffuse to be discerned clearly at the time. But nobody was looking for injuries. Had a careful seeker done so, he would have discovered hundreds of little factories that had been closed, thousands of men thrown out of work, scores of firms brought into bankruptcy.

"The old-fashioned individualist and the radical friend of progress seem to have combined in writing the patent laws. And the result, seen in the light of a later day, was weird and ghastly. Virtually they said to the man with a revolutionary device: 'You have had a great thought. You deserve a rich reward. To encourage you and others in the way of economic progress, we shall make you absolute master of your device for many years. You may ruin all your competitors and thereby throw thousands of men out of work. You may make worthless thousands of rival machines. People may not like that. But they'll have to endure it. It is the price of progress.'

"Hereafter we shall say: 'Enjoy the rewards of your patent up to the point where its manufacture causes disaster. From that point on, the government will control it, so as to prevent, or at least compensate for, the pangs of progress.'"

LEAVITT ASHLEY KNIGHT is now with the POPULAR MAGAZINE. In later issues we will print more of his stories. They are worth reading and keeping.

The High Lander of the "Fannie Jackson"

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of "At the Moon Trail's End," Etc.

The attempt that was made to make a respectable chauffeur out of a toughened sailor whose home had been on the sea, gambling his life in the stormy dark against demoniacal winds

TOM HUNT opened his huge, rope-roughened fist, and four hundred dollars in gold clanged on the polished bar.

"Give us a drink," he ordered thickly. "Set 'em up for the house. Come on, everybody, we're goin' to have a whole flock o' drinks."

Captain Ellis, of the codfisherman *Fannie Jackson,* the "Old Man" under whose stern command Tom Hunt had been through the long months of bitter work in the Bering Sea, slapped him familiarly on the back.

"Show 'em a little speed there, Tom, old boy," he counseled. "We'll make 'em all sit up and watch our smoke tonight."

The crowd in the brilliantly lit and elegantly decorated saloon breasted the bar three deep; one and all they lifted their glasses in salute to the tall, broad-shouldered young man, ungainly in his ill-fitting and palpably new shore clothes, who had bought.

The captain's roving eye caught sight of the marine reporter of the Seattle *Enterprise* coming through the door, and he beckoned to him.

"Meet Tom Hunt, the high lander of the *Fannie Jackson,*" he introduced him.

Hunt gulped his whisky and enveloped the reporter's hand with his own huge paw.

"Glad to know you," he greeted him. "I read your piece in the paper this mornin' about our gettin' into port. That was a nice piece you wrote."

He picked several twenties from his pile of gold on the bar and tendered them to the reporter.

"Take one," he invited. "Go ahead. Need more? Take 'em all."

"No, keep your money," the reporter laughingly protested.

"Take one, you fool," the captain whispered. "He'll only blow it all, anyhow."

"Well, I'll buy the house a drink with this one," the reporter conceded. "Hey, Pete, give us all a drink to the good health of the high lander of the *Fannie Jackson.*"

"That's me," Hunt nodded gravely. "The high lander of the *Fannie Jackson.* Caught more fish by a third than any shellback aboard. Ever codfishin' in the Bering? No? Say, it's hell, that's what it is; five months o' hell! We wasn't shore once the whole time we was up there; nothin' but work, work, work all the time. An' cold? Say, I've had the ice rattle off my hands many's the time when I beat my fingers."

"They tell me it's a tough life," the reporter sympathized.

"It's hell," Hunt reiterated. "But say, listen, kid: I got some bank roll; over eight hundred dollars. Ain't that

some pay day? An' my grub from the cabin table all the way down, too. That's the way they treat a high lander, kid. An' I didn't have to stand watch, neither; nothin' to do but eat good grub an' rest up. Some class to that, hey?"

"Class is right."

"Well, let's have another drink. I'm goin' to treat the lid off o' this town to-night. Hey, Pete, set 'em up again."

"Here's to the high lander of the *Fannie Jackson,*" the crowd roared, as the glasses were lifted.

"That's me," Hunt acknowledged loudly. "An' we're goin' to go some! We'll crack on all sail an' drive her to glory to-night; stay with me, boys!"

A little past midnight the desk sergeant at headquarters opened the door of the reporters' room.

"Guy beat up in a King Street saloon," he informed the man on late watch.

"Bad?"

"I dunno; he looks it. They got him upstairs."

Wearily the reporter ascended to the hospital and gazed with a bored eye at the bloody remnant of the high lander of the *Fannie Jackson.*

"Live?" he queried of the young interne.

"Sure. He's beat up pretty bad, but he'll pull through." He threw back the blanket from the still form on the cot and nodded at the huge, beautifully muscled body. "Give that the once over."

"Some man."

"He's a wonder."

"Any money?"

"Clean as a sea gull. You might get his name from some papers he's got in his coat there."

"Ah, he's no good to me unless he croaks," the reporter scorned him. "Whistle me up if it looks bad for him, will you?"

Tom slowly opened his eyes, gazed up at a white ceiling, to either side of him at the rows of white cots, each distorted with its lump of human misery; felt gingerly of the bandages on his head, and methodically set his brain to work to figure out his situation.

A young, white-capped nurse, with brown hair and mischievous dark eyes, stopped by his bedside and smiled down at him.

"How do you feel now?" she inquired.

Tom regarded her gravely. "All right," he replied. "Say, could you find out for me if there's any money in my clothes?"

"I know there isn't any; you didn't have a cent."

"What day is this?"

"Friday."

"An' we only got paid yesterday! Gee, they got me quick, didn't they?"

"Did you have some money yesterday?"

"I had about eight hundred dollars."

The girl gave a quick gasp of sympathy and gently touched his shoulder. "Oh, that's too bad! I'm sorry. You be a good boy now and we'll have you out of here in short order."

He was a handsome fellow, in a big-featured, aggressive way, and his gray eyes were frank and clean looking. She smiled archly at him, patted his shoulder again, and tripped away.

Tom watched her until she had left the ward, and then relaxed with a deep sigh. Unconsciously he caressed the spot on his shoulder where her fingers had rested; his eyes, as he stared at the ceiling, were misty and tender, but his big jaw was set in the way that made mates love him when there was a risky bit of quick work to be done at sea, and hate and fear him at all other times.

"Me for that," he whispered. "You bet."

Tom had probably never heard of

Othello's method of enthralling the choice of his heart, but instinctively he copied it. A good-looking young man who has spent a score of his twenty-eight years at sea, and can tell of his adventures in a terse, crudely dramatic way, might interest an older and less impressionable girl than Grace Summers.

Her father was a wealthy real-estate man, and her motive for serving in the hospital was not a financial one. She had dabbled in sociology and was interested in types.

She formed the habit of lingering often by his bedside to hearken to his stories of his life and works on the seven seas, and in the ports of the world.

And from his stories she gathered a dim realization of the tragic futility of a sailor's life; a sense of the irony of the pittance paid men for facing death and hardship at sea.

"But you've had big pay days from your fishing trips north," she reminded him once. "Why don't you save your money when you do get it?"

"What for?"

"Why, to do something for yourself, T——"

"Do what?"

"Why—why, I don't know just what, but——"

"Neither do I. I'm a sailor; the only people who'll pal around with me an' give me a good time are them that are after my money. When that's gone, so am I. Besides, a good sailor is a fool ashore, an' I'm a first-class A. B. all right. I've tried stoppin' ashore, but I never could seem to catch on."

"Oh, it's a shame for a big, naturally intelligent fellow like you to lead such a life," the girl broke out. "I won't let you! You wait; I'm going to see that you do catch on."

The next day she appeared, radiant. "Good news!" she called gayly. "You're to go out to my home and go to work for daddy. They need a man around the place just now for some light work, and by the time you're strong again, you can learn to run the car and he'll keep you as a chauffeur. Isn't that great?"

"You bet!"

"Do you think you'd like to run an automobile?"

"I like anything that goes—goes high, or—or fast," he said hesitantly, his eyes glowing.

"Do you think you can learn to run it all right?"

The man who could tie a rose knot, go aloft on any ship in Stygian darkness, and lay his hand on any designated rope, or furl a flying jib in a howling gale when the vessel was burying her bowsprit deep in mountainous waves at every plunge, regarded her blankly.

"Why not?" he inquired.

"Egotist!" she laughed at him pertly. "You can leave here in two or three days now, and we'll take you right out home."

She hurried away, filled with the warm glow of self-appreciation she would have felt had she found a crippled orphan child a home.

Tom lay back on his cot, and in his eyes was the distant look of men who embark on long voyages with full knowledge of the hardships to be endured.

"I'll get her," he promised himself. "You bet!"

Patience is one virtue never lacking in any man who has rounded the Horn twelve times "in wind." For a year, Hunt drove the Summers' car, living in a tiny room over the garage, and not once in word or deed was he aught but the efficient servant who knew his place and kept it.

He sat at the steering wheel on long trips, while swains of varying elegance and age in the tonneau behind him sought for the weak spot in the citadel of Grace's heart. None of them moved

him to jealousy. He measured her suitors as they came with one quick glance, and knew them one and all for his inferiors.

After his second month with the Summers he undertook a course in automobile engineering at the Y. M. C. A. night school. The same ebullient, restless energy that had brought him to port, high lander of the *Fannie Jackson,* drove his brain through work in one year that it would take the average man four years to accomplish.

Not a word or action of the men of breeding and education with whom he came in contact escaped him; he noted all they did or did not do, and copied them religiously.

At the end of the year, the Quaker Car Company offered him a job, and he left the Summers to take it.

In six months he was made a salesman. He was a striking figure of a man, wore good clothes with an air; used good English in a blunt, compelling way; knew the strong points of the Quaker Cars, and the weak points of prospective buyers. Six months later he was made manager of the Seattle branch, and celebrated the promotion by calling up Grace and asking her to go for a drive with him.

It was the first time he had spoken to her, except at accidental meetings on the street, since he had left her father's employ.

Far out on the Bothell Road, where the highway was a fragrant tunnel between the tangled walls of the forest, high roofed by the overarching green boughs of the giant spruce and hemlock, Tom stopped the car and faced the girl beside him.

"I've made good, haven't I?" he asked abruptly.

"Tom, you surely have," she assured him proudly. "Beyond everything I could have dreamed of for you. It's wonderful."

"I haven't got much money yet," he went on gravely. "But I'll be rich in a couple of years. I'm on the inside in some real-estate deals that can't lose. This shore game is easy when you catch on right."

He stared thoughtfully into the green twilight of the forest for a time, and then turned to her.

"When I've got as much money as your father, will you marry me?"

"Why—why, Tom; what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Will you?"

"You—— Why, Tom, you mustn't ask me that. I—— Why, I never thought of such a thing."

"Why not? You think of it when these other men take you out, and I'm a better man than any one of them you know. Why not?"

"I—I don't—love you."

"I can make you; will you give me a chance?"

She was possessed of a panicky desire to jump from the machine and run. She had never thought of him before except as a sociological experiment of which she was proud; and never before had she sensed his formidable strength. Now the tremendous, pulsant power of him frightened and repelled her. She tried to be indignant, and was angered because she could not. When she answered him, her tone was half frightened and half sulky.

"No! And you mustn't see me any more after—after—— Take me home, please."

"Why? I love you more than any one else ever will. When I first saw you in the hospital I made up my mind to have you; you can see what I've done with myself with that end in view. Do you know any other man who would do as much? I've been straight for two years; I'm a success; I know that there's no reason for you to be ashamed of my looks or manners or speech before any of your friends. Why can't

I have at least an even break with the rest?"

She was trembling uncontrollably and crying. "I want you to—to take me home now. It—it isn't fair for you to act like this after—I—got you your start, and——"

"Why not?" He laid his hand gently on her arm, and she recoiled from him with a scream of fright.

"Don't you touch me," she cried hysterically. "Oh, you brute, you; don't you dare to touch me!"

A headstone on the island of Tahiti and another on the shore of the Arctic Ocean marked the last resting places of two men who had seen the expression that came over Hunt's face then. Both of them had witnessed it immediately prior to their violent demise. When he spoke it was in the same velvety voice with which he had warned each of the men mentioned to keep away from him.

"Don't be afraid, I won't touch you. But tell me why."

"Oh, can't you see?" the girl sobbed. "It—it's impossible, Tom. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you—you make me. Don't you see that you—you are—I——"

"I see, all right," he interrupted her. "So that's it! No matter what I make of myself, to you I'm just the drunken sailor that was lugged into the hospital after he'd been rolled in a saloon? I see!"

He started the engine and turned the car toward the city.

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"Oh, that's all right."

He lolled back easily on the cushions, with his eyes fastened on the road ahead. She glanced at him furtively and saw the ghost of an ironic smile on his wide, firm lips. The continued silence grew unendurable to her.

"You—you'll find some one else, Tom," she assured him tremulously. "Some one who——"

"I don't want anybody else."

There was nothing melodramatic about it; it was a simple statement of fact, simply made. A score of trite, consolatory phrases came to her lips and balked at the absurdity of anointing this man's wound with words.

Still with the ghost of an acid smile playing about his lips, he guided the car up to the curb before her house and helped her out.

"Tom—please, please don't do anything you'll be sorry for," she begged, as he climbed back into the car.

His eyes traveled over her in a slow, appraising survey; when he spoke it was impersonally, as of a third and absent person.

"You could have made a fine man of me," he said regretfully. "It's too bad."

He threw in the clutch, and the car shot away down the street.

It was nearly sundown when he reached the garage. He put up the car, changed to a jersey, a pair of grease-stiffened overalls, and a crumpled cap. As he strolled leisurely down Pike Street, he thrust his hands into his pockets and hunched his shoulders; his slow gait took on the insolent roll of the sailor ashore in search of trouble, and his fixed smile grew broader and more bitter.

On a viaduct running over the railroad tracks to the water front he stopped. The sun had set, but the western sky was a vast golden flame, and etched black against its brilliance towered the lofty spars of five big, square-rigged cannerymen loading for the spring voyage north. Every yard and rope in their rigging spoke to him of wild, black nights aloft, gambling his life in the storm dark against demoniacal winds, flying, sodden canvas, and wildly plunging, groaning masts as they jerked in great erratic circles to the mighty surge of the angered sea; of long watches on flooded decks; the brain-deadening roar of the breakers on

a mountainous coast; the splintering crash of broken masts, and the rending death crunch of a stout hull on the jagged rocks.

"Just a drunken mutt," he muttered to himself. "That's all."

To his left the three topmasts of the *Fannie Jackson,* outfitting for her annual trip to the far-away, icy Bering, showed above the top of a warehouse. Tom made his way to the slip where she lay and stepped through the little door in the picket gate.

"Hey, there, what d'ye want?" a burly, blond-mustached man in a side door of the warehouse called to him. "I'm the mate o' the *Fannie Jackson,* I am."

"Well, I was high lander of the old tub before you ever heard of her, an' I can lick any stub-toed Swede —— —— that ever went mate in her."

The Old Man strolled up out of the cabin and squinted up at the two men.

"Hello, Tom!" he called out.

"Oh, hello, cap!" He squatted on the string piece and leaped down onto the cluttered deck.

A lashing November rain, riding a moaning wind, made the Seattle water front a place of chill and gloom the afternoon the *Fannie Jackson* was towed into her slip after six months in the Bering. A few hopeful longshore moochers with dry and expectant throats, who had some claim to acquaintance with members of the crew, shivered on the dock in the cold rain and skirling fog, praying that the pay day would be big, and their friends generous. It was nearly dark when the battered and dirty old schooner was at last made fast and the gangway run ashore. The first man up was Tom Hunt, again high lander of the *Fannie Jackson.*

"See you in the Sumpter Bar at seven o'clock, cap," he called back to the Old Man on deck.

The loafers greeted him eagerly, reiterating acquaintanceship, real or fancied. He included them all with a welcoming gesture.

"Come on, boys; come have one on the high lander of the *Fannie Jackson.*"

A boisterous, profane, avid, thirsty crowd, they followed him into the dark warehouse. A slim figure stepped timidly from behind a high pile of crates and called his name. The crowd hesitated, scowling and muttering at the interruption.

"Wait for me outside," Tom growled curtly, and his companions straggled away. The girl he had loved so utterly came close to him and stood silent, nervously twisting her interlocked fingers. It was too dark for him to see her face.

"Well?" he questioned shortly.

"Tom, come—come back, please," she faltered. "You—you mustn't——"

"No, you don't!" he interrupted her harshly. "I played the game your way for two years and lost. This may be a rotten game, but it's mine, and the people I play it with aren't afraid I'll get 'em dirty with my touch. The best I ask of you is to let me alone."

And then the girl threw her arms about his neck and pressed her sob-shaken body close to his great chest.

"Oh, Tom, forgive me, my big boy; I love you. I loved you all the time, and never knew it until I'd lost you. Afraid of your touch? Oh, my lover, how I've longed for it all these months! Tom—kiss me!"

The mate emerged from the warehouse on to the street and surveyed the chilled forms of the longshore moochers huddled miserably in the scant shelter of the eaves with a surprised eye.

"Why, where's the high lander?" he inquired.

One of the sodden parasites swore wearily and drew his damp coat collar closer about his neck.

"Aw, some jane beat us to him," he explained dispiritedly.

No Luck at All

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Piano Jim," "The Threatening Eye," Etc.

Hitting the trail with two unfortunately-linked families who had agreed to disagree. When they parted company it looked like good fortune for one branch, annihilation for the other—but Luck is beyond human ken

ALL the way, from the rolling country beyond Ellensburg to the wooded foothills of the Coast Range, Bert Kerr and Fred Bishop had been grouching at each other. Not openly, for in that case they would have locked horns and there would have been a sudden end to their quarreling. And they could not afford to quarrel. Of all the party, they were the only two able men. Kerr's father was crippled with a poorly mended broken ankle, a man past fifty, barely able to keep his seat on a horse. Bishop had with him two sisters, married and with three children between them. Their husbands had gone ahead on foot, across the range a month earlier, in search of work. Besides these, there was a half-witted brother, a nonentity except in the matter of consuming food. Bishop had four horses, and no money—Kerr had a few dollars, but no horses. Neither his father nor the women could walk that long, rough trail to the western slope. They all wanted to get across before the snows of coming winter caught them on the dry-land side of the range. Horses would carry them and their few belongings—money would buy food.

So they joined forces. The last of three dry years had driven them out of a region never intended by nature for farming—an arid, hot, treeless area into which they had been lured by the promise of cheap land and abundant crops. The land was cheap enough. It could be had by the quarter section for the filing fee. But the abundant crops failed to materialize, and the Kerrs and Bishops gave over the struggle with sagebrush and sand flies and parching drouth, and set their faces toward the timbered coast country out of which they had originally come to make their fortunes in wheat.

Kerr had money to buy grub, and Bishop had horses to carry them, as I have said. He was little more than a boy, Bert Kerr, slim and wiry, slow of speech, but incredibly quick on his feet. Bishop was bigger and older, and arrogant according to his size and age. He made the common error of thinking Bert Kerr was a trifle afraid of him because Kerr did not flare up at every slight or grumbling word. Bishop drifted into the attitude of the natural bully. It afforded him a certain cheap satisfaction to see Kerr flush, and his black eyes snap—and still say nothing. Kerr was afraid of him. Sure! He had the Indian sign on the black-haired kid. And he did not guess that Bert was only holding his peace because Bishop owned a horse that his crippled father must ride over Snoqualmie Pass if he were to get through at all.

Three weeks on a trail that was beset with many a privation and shift brought them to a noon halt one day's journey

short of the summit, on a little creek whose length was scarce two hundred yards from where it came spraying over a cliff to where it merged with a clear blue lake. The tiny stream split a level bit of treeless flat. From there up, the mountains lifted sharp; great, ragged peaks guarding Snoqualmie Pass, through which ran the way to a kindlier land. Patches of snow capped the mountains already. The chill of approaching winter was manifest in the air, even at noon—the day itself cloudy. Any hour the snow might strike them.

The days were short, and, because they had to get over the mountains before the first storm piled twenty-foot drifts in the pass and blocked the way, they hurried through the meal-getting. With the last cup of coffee, the women, the children, and the old man took horse and struck the trail. Their progress was slow, for each animal bore a double burden, and the grade was getting steep.

Bishop was lazy, and, with no one to shame or frighten him into his full share of the work, he put more and more of it on Kerr. Now he fooled away along the creek bed instead of helping Bert wash up the dishes and pack the outfit so that they could get on after the others. Bert said nothing. It had become a daily occurrence. The Western man despises a shirker on trail—any place, for that matter; but the man who lies down on camp work is an especial abomination. And latterly this neglect of Bishop's had caused him continual hurry in order to get the outfit together and catch up to the others before it was time to camp again. In the meantime, Bishop strolled along at his leisure.

This day Kerr's black eyes glowed as he rinsed off the tin dishes in the creek.

"Blast him!" he muttered at last. "For two pins I'd spread his nose all over his face. I'd do it in a holy minute if it wasn't for the old man. It'd kill him to walk, and I'm broke now from buying grub to feed this hungry bunch. I guess Mister Bishop'll keep. But wait till we hit Snoqualmie Falls, or the first place that looks like it'll furnish me a job!"

He had no more than finished this brief soliloquy when Bishop came across the creek to him.

"Gimme a—aw, that there fryin' pan's the thing," he said, and reached for the utensil named. "There's some black sand here. I'm goin' to wash out a little of it."

"You'd better be washin' the dirt off these dishes and helpin' me pack," Kerr remarked pointedly.

"Aw, you're a pretty good single-handed packer," Bishop returned carelessly, and, squatting on his haunches a few feet away, began scooping sand and gravel into the pan.

Bert consoled himself with anticipation of the future when he would repay this and like incidents. He foresaw a keen pleasure in giving Fred Bishop what was coming to him—the same being a scientific manhandling. That he could administer it was not a matter of any doubt to Bert Kerr—for, some four years earlier, and under another name, he had fought in a dozen preliminaries in and around Seattle, and boxed his way to a decision over one lightweight of more than local reputation. A knowledge of offensive and defensive boxing superimposed on natural fighting instinct put it up to Fred Bishop to do the worrying, if he had known. Lashing the bedding across the sawbuck pack saddle, Bert wished fervently that the time to square accounts was at hand.

He had everything else packed, and now led the horse to the creek where the dishes were piled. He sacked them, and looked over at Bishop.

"Say, I want to pack that pan," he observed.

"By gosh, I'm gittin' colors!" Fred returned. "Look here!"

"Hang the colors! You can get them

any place this side of the range," Kerr retorted impatiently. "We'd better be hittin' the road, if we want to catch up with the rest before dark. Come on with the pan!"

"You just take a look at this here," Bishop persisted.

Bert went over to take a look, inasmuch as he had half a notion to take the frying pan away from Bishop. In the bottom of the pan, among the thin film of black sand, there was not one or two but a dozen shining specks. Bert leaned over, interested in spite of himself. Bishop was already chattering of pay dirt. There is strange magic in the sight of the yellow metal, taken by a man's own hands from Mother Earth. Bert watched him winnow out another batch of dirt. Then he took the other pan himself and tried his luck.

For half an hour or more he jiggled and shook and swirled, and got colors in every pan. These he saved, picking them out with a knife point and dropping them into a tiny pill bottle he happened to have in his pocket.

Idly, half his mind on Fred Bishop's shirking, overbearing way, Bert winnowed the stuff down to the last grain, in half a dozen pans of dirt. It quickened him more than a trifle to see the dull specks show here and there. He had prospected with his father in real gold country, and he knew likely stuff and the simpler methods of handling it. There were colors, all right. Plenty of them. But alas, not the coarse gold that spells pay dirt. The particles were woefully minute. Still there is a most unholy fascination about gold in the raw, as many a grizzled member of the prospecting clan will testify. Bert forgot for a while about the party trailing up to the summit ahead. He moved a few steps and tried another place.

After a time he realized, with a start, that he should be on the road. He had secured perhaps half a teaspoonful of stuff in the bottle, in which the yellow specks were almost as numerous as the grains of black sand. Out of the lot he had gleaned one real grain of gold, a little bigger than a pinhead. But he could not stay any longer.

"I got to pike," he declared. "By jiminy, I wish it was summer, and I could stay with this. I might make wages, anyway—I must 'a' got forty or fifty cents' worth there. Oh, well, darn it, I got to catch that bunch of pilgrims or it'll be dark on me."

He lashed the cover on his pack.

"I'm goin' now," he called to Bishop. "You can bring that pan along with yuh."

"Aw, there's no rush!" Bishop growled.

"No?" Bert returned. "If they make good time, and we have to pitch camp in the dark, you'll be the first to holler."

And that, it transpired, was an excellent forecast. Bert plugged along, leading the horse. Bishop caught up and passed him. The road lifted up through a crooked gulch after it crossed the creek, climbing always to a greater height by curves and bends that shut off all view ahead. And though he hurried the pack horse, it was growing dusk when he turned a bend and met Bishop coming back to see what had delayed him. He chose to rid himself of some rather pointed remarks.

"Saw off!" Bert interrupted. "You grouch worse than any woman in camp. If you'd helped me pack and come along when I wanted to, I wouldn't be so far behind. The less you say to me right now the quicker we'll get to camp."

Bishop forbore pressing the matter. He growled some sneering reply, which Kerr chose to ignore, and presently they came in sight of the others with the horses staked out and a fire started.

Dark, the pitch dark of a cloudy night, closed in on them as they unpacked and set about cooking supper. There was plenty of dry timber, dead and down pine, at this camp. Bert

built up another fire and made down a bed for himself and his father close by it. The women and children settled down. Bert lay on the ground beside the blaze, a mite disconsolate. When a man has put in three years of hard work, and finds himself walking penniless away from the scene of his labors, he is apt to feel as if luck was sadly against him. He helped the old man rebandage the sore ankle, and fixed the blankets over him, and then resumed his brooding, prone by the fire.

The camp grew hushed, except for the little wind that droned among the swaying pine tops. Over behind a clump of these scrub pines, Bishop had withdrawn his bed and started a small blaze. Beyond that again, the horses grazed on picket. As Bert lay staring at the sinking embers, he heard the unmistakable sound of a horse struggling on a rope. He listened a second to see if Bishop would straighten him out; but when there was no sign or sound of a move, Bert went himself. The horse had quieted. But there was always the chance of the stake rope being foul on his leg, and that, if the brute struggled during the night, meant a crippled horse —and the four were none too many. So Bert walked over to make sure.

A straight line to the picketed horses took him close by the clump of pines. Light-footed, and treading dry grass and pine needles, he made no more sound than some nocturnal animal. And as he passed just outside the nimbus of light cast by Bishop's fire, what he saw brought him up standing. He stared, stole furtively nearer, and made sure. Then he stepped into the narrow circle of light. Bishop, sitting cross-legged on his blankets, hastily tucked something in his pocket, and looked up at Kerr with an expression that was part snarl and part sneer.

"What the devil are yuh sneakin' round *here* for?" he demanded.

"You had that all the time," Kerr challenged.

"Well, it's none uh your darned business, is it?" Bishop declared.

"Of all the miserable, petty-larceny cheap skates I ever got mixed up with, you take the medal!" Bert's voice fairly whistled. "You've been heeled *that* way, and you whined about a grubstake, you—you——"

Bishop heaved himself up bodily. What his intentions were, Bert did not trouble to ask or wait to see, but launched a straight-arm blow at his bulkier trail partner. He rocked Bishop's head with it, pivoted on his left toe, and his right fist landed on the other's mouth with a smack such as arises when one smites the water with the flat of an oar. Bishop staggered, and rushed into a clinch in which Bert beat a tattoo on his midriff that almost knocked the breath out of him.

By this time the women and children had observed the ruction, and each lifted up his or her voice, according to their individual temperament, altogether creating a considerable disturbance. The half-witted brother rushed to Bishop's assistance. Bert's father hobbled hastily over. In his hand he carried the camp ax, and he shouldered himself in between the fighting men.

"You boys quit it, now; quit it, I tell yuh! First one uh yuh makes another pass, I'll rap him over the head with the handle. Yuh'd ought to be ashamed uh yuhselves. What's all this row about, anyway?"

The entire party, variously garbed, surrounded them now. And Bert Kerr pointed his finger at Bishop.

"A month ago," Bert broke out passionately, "when we were all gettin' ready to hit the road, he pleaded poverty; didn't see how he was going to feed this layout all the way across the mountains. Claimed he was just about broke, and couldn't even sell his horses. I've spent the last

blamed nickel I had feedin' him and his folks, and all they've done is this—this cheap skate has been pullin' a poor mouth and at the same time packin' around a roll of money big enough to choke an ox."

"I ain't, either!" Bishop brazenly denied.

"You're a liar!" Kerr promptly challenged him. "I stood right there and watched you count off six or seven ten-dollar bills. You say you didn't and I'll take it out of your pocket and shove it down your throat."

He started for Bishop again, but his father menaced him with the ax.

"There ain't goin' to be no more fightin' over a thing like that," the old man declared. "We all will split up in the mornin'. You Bishops take your own trail. You're a miserable lot all around. Old an' crippled as I be, I'm ashamed to travel with yuh."

That, for the time being, was the end of the matter. Bert went back to the fire with his father, and turned in. But he did not sleep. For long hours he lay staring up at the black veil of the clouds, trying to figure how he would get a crippled man through Snoqualmie Pass before the snow came. It looked like hard times ahead, even if they did get over, and Bert wished fervently that he had a few of the dollars he had cheerfully shared with these poverty-stricken Bishops—who, after all, it developed, had greater money resources than he. But presently he dropped into a doze. Somehow it would come out all right. Things always did.

At daybreak he was astir. Bishop carefully avoided him, and Bert went through the mixed camp outfit and took all the food he could lay hands on, which was a meager enough supply. He left them enough flour and coffee to get over the range, a matter of two days' travel. When he had stacked this by his blankets, he set about cooking breakfast for himself and his father. So did the others, the slatternly, sharp-voiced women keeping up a shrill fire of remarks about "them Kerrs." Once the meal was finished, Bishop hastily packed his horses and moved his outfit on. Bert experienced a real glow of satisfaction at the visible amount of damage he had been able to inflict on the other's countenance in their short set-to.

"Well, dad," said he, when they had seen the last horse disappear up the cañon trail, "we're afoot and alone, and a long way from the Snoqualmie country yet. Maybe I was kinda hasty about jumpin' Fred Bishop. I wish we had a horse for you to ride."

"We never died a winter yet, son," the old man replied. "I don't blame yuh. I seen him givin' yuh the dirty end of it right along. I'm glad yuh pasted him good. We'll manage."

"We've got two weeks' grub, I guess," Bert said hopefully. "I believe it would be a good idea for me to scout around and see if I can pick up a deer. You can't tell. There might be a ranch tucked away in these hills where I could get a job to carry us over the winter. Still I don't like the looks of the weather."

The wind whistled more strongly through the pine boughs as day grew. The overcast sky was a dead, lowering gray. And it was cold. The backbone of the range lay hidden in drifting, misty vapors.

"Oh, say, dad!"

Bert recollected the bottle of black sand and gold, and brought it forth, telling how he had come by it. The old man poured the stuff into the palm of his hand and examined it closely.

"That pinhead chunk is only about half the size uh one Bishop got," Bert said. "If we had a winter's grubstake, dad, we might work that place and make wages. There might be something there."

The old man shook his head.

"Colors, that's all," he said despondently. "Flour gold. You can't save it. I've seen lots uh this, Bert. 'Tain't worth a damn. You can get colors any place along this east slope. But nobody ever struck dirt that paid as much as three dollars a day."

"Oh, well, we'll make out, anyway," Bert declared. "I'll go look for that deer. If I don't raise no deer nor any ranch, we'll pike on this afternoon. But, by jiminy, I don't like the look of things. It feels like snow."

He did not succeed in getting venison. Nor did he sight a ranch. Two blue grouse was the extent of his kill. But these fat birds were savory pot meat. He got back to camp easily, one weary eye on the weather. And even while they cooked a bite, a few desultory flakes of snow fluttered down.

They started on, making slow time, Bert heavily burdened with a shoulder pack, the old man limping painfully with his sore ankle. They gained a scant five miles that afternoon, working up into higher mountains, harried now and then by squally bursts of sleet and snow. Snoqualmie Pass, looming still above them, was hidden in the murk of the threatening storm. That night the flakes drove down into the camp fire with a steady *pst, pst,* vanishing in the flame. Morning came, and they trudged on through six inches of snow, with a silent eddy of flakes steadily increasing the depth. And before ten o'clock, the old man, lagging a bit behind, sat down on a fallen pine trunk, and called his son back.

"I kain't go no farther, Bert," he said brokenly. "I just kain't drag m' legs no more. I guess the old man's about done."

"With a horse you'd 'a' been through the pass by now," young Kerr said bitterly.

He shook his fist up the snow-blurred cañon and cursed the Bishop tribe, root and branch. Then he laid aside his pack and rifle, and with the little ax began to chop wood for a fire.

Bishop nursed a grievance nearly as painful as his blackened, swollen eye and the raw bruise over one cheek bone, for a few miles. Then he cheered up and began to chuckle to himself. It was a pretty fair stroke of business, after all, he reflected. He didn't think Bert Kerr had got much the best of *him* in the scrap. And it was a blamed good thing to be rid of the pair—now that they were of no further use to him. Kerr's money had come in handy to grubstake the outfit, as long as it lasted. If the blamed fool had no more money, *he* was just as well satisfied to see the last of them. They wouldn't be expecting him, Fred Bishop, to be helping them out, when they were over the mountains. He had enough to do to look after this bunch the rest of the way.

He fingered the roll of bills hoarded in his pocket. A hundred strong! That would help some. Precious little of that he was going to waste on *this* layout. Beans and bacon for them till they struck Snoqualmie Falls. Then their own men could look after 'em, jobs or no jobs. It did not matter to Bishop that two of these women were his sisters, and all of them blood kin. He had to look out for himself. And he figured that a man with no strings on him and four horses and a hundred dollars should do pretty well on the west side, even in the wet season.

Thus Fred Bishop. "Look out for yourself"—that was his code, and he lived by it consistently. They hurried through the pass, and got below the snow line, bought enough supplies at a ranch house to take them on to Snoqualmie Falls. Once having got them there, Bishop took no thought of their further welfare, but packed his bed on one horse, tailed the other two on behind, and with these in tow behind his

mount, headed on alone toward the coast, before these needy relatives should make any appreciable inroad on his hoarded funds. One brother-in-law had a job. The rest of the bunch, Fred told them bluntly, could live on *his* wages till they themselves got work.

All down the fertile valley in which he traveled, and in numerous other fertile valleys of the Pacific slope, the rolling wheels of time have scattered countless opportunities. Timber and land and fisheries, coal and minerals, a splendid soil and a climate to match, the dwellers by Puget Sound draw upon the natural resources of an inland empire, and flourish accordingly.

But Bishop did not get rich. He held his own. Now and then, perhaps, he might have seen himself a thousand or two ahead of the game. No more. If he never experienced the press of hunger and the discouragement of absolute pennilessness, it was because he looked for and took the best of it always, shared nothing but the knocks with any partner he ever had, and left the other fellow in the lurch when he could.

He left Snoqualmie Falls fully determined to recross the range in the spring and prospect that little creek with the passing of the snows. He carried about with him all that winter the wheat-grain nugget of gold and the few colors garnered in a bit of paper. There might be something good there, he often thought, even if Bert Kerr, who had done some real prospecting, did turn up his nose at it.

But spring came, and Bishop did not go. He had a working job for his four horses. There was certain money in that—a fixed profit. And he had neither the imagination nor that intangible zest for the unknown that spurs men to take chances, to risk anything on a gamble.

Nor did he go the next spring, nor for many succeeding springs. And those seasons lifted him up and down on various waves of fortune, till at last a bigger wave than all the rest, in the troubled year of '07, lifted him a little higher than any of the others; and in its swift, unaccountable recession, left him stranded high and dry on the financial rocks.

He walked out of Seattle, flat broke for the first time in seven years, strapped as he had left Bert Kerr strapped in the mouth of Snoqualmie Pass. He walked the ties to Ballard, a suburb, eight miles out, got a meal there —and a job—hired himself as a laborer on the Milwaukee grade, east of the mountains, and was shipped thence with a score of others in a stinking day coach.

He reached the scene of his prospective labors, and found himself helping to pave the way for steel across the very rolling, arid land where he had made that abortive attempt at farming. He had looped a topographical loop and come back to his starting point with less in his pocket than when he had cursed the dry, hot country and forsaken it, seven years before.

Economic stress, the dire necessity of food and clothing, makes man a willing plowhorse. Bishop held down the grading job for three months, despite the incessant drive of the bosses. Then it ceased. The grade was done, a long brown streak of raw earth snaking away across the land. The country swarmed with idle men, turned loose from the camps.

"No use hanging around here," Bishop said to himself. "I guess I'll roll my blankets and hike over through Snoqualmie. Might strike a winter's job in the woods."

He made inquiries, and learned that the Snoqualmie trail no longer ran through unsettled country. Settlers had come in here and there along the Milwaukee survey—which line almost paralleled the old wagon road, and crossed

the range through Snoqualmie Pass on its way down to the Pacific. There was a grading camp or two besides. A man could be reasonably sure of food and shelter if he were pressed. There might even be work at wages by the way.

Bishop made up a shoulder pack of his blankets and some food. He wished he had a horse, but that was only one of many futile wishes he made. Horses were high priced now, and his capital was less than fifty dollars—and that he might need badly before he got another job.

A week's hiking along the Milwaukee grade brought him to the foothills over ground that opened out in more or less familiar vistas. He recalled that other trip—and wondered idly what had become of Bert Kerr. The country lay unchanged, except that in far hollows he could descry the painted roofs of ranch buildings, and saw a greater number of grazing stock. From horizon to the enfolding hills ran the fresh-piled earth of the grade, waiting for the steel.

"Barrin' a ranch or two and that railroad, the country ain't changed a speck," he reflected. "I wonder if anybody ever prospected that creek? By jiminy, I'll lay up there a day or two, an' see if I can pan anything. Them was good colors me an' Bert Kerr found. Might as well 'a' done that long ago, for all the good workin' has done me."

He rounded a hill one forenoon, and walked into a cluster of houses by the road, a post office and store, a blacksmith shop, and half a dozen shacks. Before the store stoop was drawn up a big, gray touring car, low-bodied, massive, powerful. In the tonneau sat a white-haired man reading a newspaper. Bishop laid off his pack and sat down on the stoop. The old man looked over his paper and nodded pleasantly.

"Pack in off the grade?" he asked. "Quite a ways with a pack."

"You bet it is," Bishop responded feelingly.

"I hear they're about ready for tracklayin' between here and the pass," the old man remarked. "Be a great thing for this country."

"I s'pose so," Bishop agreed. "Yes, they're waitin' for steel. Laid off all the graders. Grade's 'most done between here 'n' Ellensburg."

The old man resumed his reading. He was well dressed, bore all the outward and visible signs of prosperity, and Bishop felt diffident about pursuing the conversation. Still there was something familiar about that fine-looking old man. His voice and his features vexed Bishop with his inability to place him. He tried, but could not recall when or where he had seen him before. Not until a young man came out of the store, and, tossing a package into the tonneau, said to the old man:

"There's a box of Havanas Marks sent you from Spokane, dad. He was tickled to death with that last bunch of beef. He wrote me."

Bishop shrank back a little. The man stood within five feet of him. A little older looking, heavier-bodied, but as peculiarly light and quick in his movements, with the same keen, dark eyes and straight black hair, Bert Kerr gave him a careless glance and went on talking to his father. A good cigar rested in one corner of his mouth. He wore tailored clothes.

Bishop shouldered his pack and took to the road again, sore and envious, and keen to escape recognition. Bert Kerr, by all the signs, had made fortune stand and deliver. In the face of his plight, that hurt Bishop grievously. He felt abused. And he wanted to get away. He took it for granted that Bert Kerr would hold a grudge, would twit him with being down and out.

A mile or so beyond the place, the gray car came roaring up behind him. When it drew abreast, Kerr stopped.

"Have a lift up the road a ways," he called cheerfully. "Headed up the grade?"

"Yes, over Snoqualmie Pass," Bishop managed to return.

"Pile in! I'll drop you where we turn off," Kerr invited.

Bishop bestowed a doubtful glance upon him, and decided that Kerr did not know him from Adam's off ox—and stepped into the tonneau beside the old man. A ride was a ride. He had never been squeamish about accepting favors.

Resting on ten-inch upholstery, Bishop sat back and watched the car eat up the road, while he himself was eaten up with envy. Five miles—six—ten—and a fork in the road brought the flying machine to a halt.

"Here's where we turn off," Kerr said. "Sorry we can't boost you over the summit. So long!"

Then they were gone, a wavering ribbon of dust streaming white in their wake as the car rolled down to where red and white painted buildings betokened a ranch. Bishop shouldered his pack and bore on, the victim of mixed sensations.

The next day at noon brought him up near the little creek and the clear, unruffled sheet of water into which it emptied. Here, except for the deserted grade, and a small cabin to one side, was no visible change. A tiny vegetable garden surrounded the cabin, and a man sat in the doorway, smoking. Bishop concluded to try for a meal. The settler greeted him pleasantly, and invited him to eat. After the meal they lit their pipes, sitting outside. Three hundred yards away the little creek foamed over its rock wall. Bishop could hear the soft murmur where it tumbled in spray at the foot and began its short, placid flow to the lake.

"Ever do any prospectin' round here?" he inquired craftily.

"Some," the settler returned. "Never struck anythin' like pay dirt, though. Nothin' but colors—flour gold. Never was any gold taken out around here but once—an' that was before my time. Funny thing, too. See that little creek over yonder?"

Bishop nodded.

"Old feller name uh Kerr an' his boy tried to get through the pass seven year ago this fall. Got stalled in the snow an' turned back. Wintered here—an' darned near starved to death, they say. In the spring they struck pay dirt on this creek—between the falls and the lake. 'Tain't over two hundred yards long, that bed. They put in a sluice an' peeled her to bed rock. Worked four months—an' took twenty thousand dollars. Never was no pay dirt found in this country before or since."

Bishop looked away to the sky line, blinking, running his tongue over his lips.

"That's what they did," the rancher continued. "They got 'em a big stock ranch about twenty miles below here. Bert Kerr an' his old man. Richer'n blazes now, they say. Yes, sir! Twenty thousand dollars in four months."

After a little Bishop took up his burden and went on. At the crossing of the creek he tarried for a look. Seven years had not effaced the marks. There were the rotting sluice boxes, and the torn bed of the stream, and a great pile of tailings where the sluice had emptied on the shore of the lake. He stared at it all a minute, and went slowly up the trail, his lower lip sagging in pendulous sullenness.

"An' I thought I was so blamed smart ditchin' 'em here," he mumbled whiningly. "Twenty thousand dollars all in a chunk! I never did have no luck."

The Best Man Wins

By William Inglis

How Dan, the Champion of Champions, was knocked out twice in one night, and thereby ceased to be the best man in the world and became the happiest man in the world instead. The story of a professional fighter who took his profession as seriously as any other war lord. A night's battle that will be talked about when the rulers and the wars and all else of this day are forgotten.

DAN O'DONNELL was the best man in the world. No one disputed it. That is, no one had offered seriously to dispute it any time in the last four years; which is not to be wondered at when we consider what had happened to the disputants who came forward in the six years before that. One by one they had fallen asleep. It was Dan's right that rocked them. The left wasn't of much service to him; he used it only to chop down the enemy's guard. But then—oh, then—swift as the lightning bolt after the dazzling flash, the right fell upon the victim. Dan hurled it like a cannon ball or swung it like a club. The result was always the same—the enemy, whether he were lithe and swift as Dan, or half as big again and correspondingly strong, dropped like six feet of chain.

Dan preferred the big ones. They diffused an air of confidence which spread quickly through the community, brought more people into the house—with more dollars; and besides, as a result of many experiments, he had formulated a rule about them—"The bigger they are, the harder they fall"—which you will often hear quoted to this day, though few there are who know that they are indebted to Dan for the aphorism. Not that Dan ever cared. It was his custom to prove a fact, then docket it in a formula of a few right words, and pass on to new deeds of glory. He was no wordsmith; he was a *doer*. And when I speak of him as lithe and swift, you who know him to-day as a burly gray man may laugh, if you like, at the description. But I do not flatter him. In my day Dan was lithe. I have seen him run the hundred in eleven flat—and in smooth shoes and without ever having learned how to start! Moreover, when the gong rang at the ringside, and he shot out of his corner, I always thought of a charging tiger. Oh, yes, he was lithe and swift.

But all this is neither here nor there, for the thing I want to tell you is how Dan himself, Dan the Wonderful, Dan the Champion of Champions, was knocked out twice in one night and thereby ceased to be the best man in the world and became the happiest man in the world instead. There are few who know about that double knock-out. Those who can tell you all about the one in the ring have eyes that never rise above the records and the dope book; and those who know most about the

second knock-out are such superior persons that they cannot put two and two together—which is often a failing of superior persons. It is because I have the honor to be Dan's friend that I happen to know the whole history. I was lucky enough that night to know Dan's secret, and I have kept it for years—long enough to let the world forget him, so that there will be no danger now of his identity becoming known; for he scorns to let the world know anything about his private history.

During the first part of his reign, Dan had plenty of entertainment. At least twice a year some good man challenged him for the championship, and on those occasions, after the drudgery of four weeks' training, Dan enjoyed the pleasure of battle, the wild cheers, the yells of the partisans, and always at the end the thunders of applause for him. But the occasions became fewer and fewer. Good men were either conquered or awed. Dick Hillman sent all the way to Australia for a Maori giant who was well known to combine in his person the grace of Apollo and the strength of Hercules.

Dan played a practical joke with this superman. Having started him rapidly retreating, he swung his right under the jaw with such force and accuracy that the giant flew over the ropes and fell inert upon Dick Hillman, who was cheering madly for him. It was the only time Dan was ever known to laugh in the ring, for he took his profession as seriously as any other war lord. He was more merciful to the champion of England, for he settled him in the fourth round without leaving a mark on him or an ache in him, and then took him out to supper and gave him a thundering benefit the following week.

There followed years of idleness and undermining luxury. Dan's astute manager gathered a company of strong men and with them toured the world. They gave able exhibitions of the manly art, which whetted the appetite of the spectators to the keenest edge. Then Dan appeased the appetite by putting to sleep the local pet, or champion, or strong boy, or whatever he called himself. He offered one thousand dollars to any one who could retain his grip on consciousness during four Queensbury rounds, which is to say fifteen minutes, in his deadly company. Many tried, but none stayed awake. I guess that thousand-dollar bill has long since passed into the limbo of expired currency.

Now fighting keeps a man healthy and happy and well employed—at least as well as stockbroking or practicing law. But the consequences of success in the game are more deadly than those of success on Change or at the bar. Dan formed the habit of eating late suppers and taking too much champagne therewith. Also he saw life, as the fellow says. He lost his judgment of time and distance, for alcohol robs the eye first of all. He put on flesh, far too much flesh, which he had much difficulty to reduce by strenuous training. His old-time endurance was lacking, and his terrific tiger speed was diminished.

The critics knew this, talked about it, wrote about it, published it to all the world. Thereupon a small group of astute men, seeing a chance to get rich quickly, paid the training expenses of the Pride of Davenport—Iowa—and backed him against Dan in thousands all the way from one to five down to four to five at the ringside.

The Pride had his fall five seconds after the first tap of the bell, and to this day there are old friends who quarrel bitterly over the question of whether it was Dan's right or left that did the business. Nobody knows. The ex-Pride, when asked, always makes the same honest reply, namely: "I just seen him jump out of his corner—that's all."

Poor Dan! The years that followed were cruel times for him. He toured the country with his troupe, making

money so fast that he had to call in a crowd of hungry and thirsty parasites to help him spend it. His footfall grew heavier every day, and his girth increased. Slowly—for he was a man of marvelous constitutional as well as dynamic energy—but none the less surely, he was drifting down to soggy decay. Only thirty-four years old, his temples, once coal black, were gray, his eyes were froggy, and there were two pink rolls beneath his chin. Many wise ones said: "Too bad! We shall soon see him in the gutter."

And the prophecies might have been realized if Dan O'Donnell had not happened to drop in at the fair for the benefit of the organ fund of St. Malachi's Church. Father Morris, the parish priest, had been a boyhood chum of the champion, and Dan wanted to help him by spending a hundred-dollar bill at the fair and by bringing in the hundreds of visitors who would be sure to flock around him, so that they could boast forever after that they had actually shaken the terrible right hand of Dan O'Donnell, and that he had condescendingly rumbled at them in his deepest voice: "H'w are yuh? How's the health?"

Like most potentates, Dan could unbend and treat those about him with unaffected courtesy and make them feel, for at least a few happy moments, that they were his equals. He was cheering the souls of a closely packed crowd by relating some humorous thing that had happened to him in Melbourne, when his glance fell by chance on a young woman in a booth across the hall in which tickets for a drawing for a grand piano were being sold.

Now Dan had rushed against the fists of many a good man and never felt a shock; indeed, felt only a pleasant sting and burn that inspired him to hit his hardest; yet the mere sight of this girl gave him a shock that jarred every nerve in his great frame. To the ordinary observer she was merely a beautiful girl with kindly eyes that were both gray and blue and gave a hint of sadness. Also she was tall and fair, and her thick hair, simply coiled above her slender neck, was a plastic mass of color that was neither silver nor gold, but had gleams of both.

Dan stopped talking as he stared. He had been admired by many women, openly courted by some; but all these had meant nothing but momentary interests, trivial incidents along the path of victory. The mere sight of this sweet and kindly countenance convinced him that she was The One. He hardly dared breathe in the presence of such a heavenly vision. He gazed, fascinated, at her sad eyes, and wished with all his might that he could cheer her, make her happy, make those tired eyes smile. Then some subconscious sense warned him he was staring, that his stare would attract attention to her; and the instinct to protect her instantly brought him back to self-control, and he finished his anecdote and basked in the admiration of his hearers. But not for long. He had not shaken more than thirty hands when Father Morris made his way through the crush and carried him off.

"Well, Dan, old boy," he said, "why were you so anxious to have me rescue you? Were my men tearing off your right——"

"Say, Eugene," Dan interrupted, "tell me something. Who is that girl selling the grand piano? You've got to give me an introduction."

"Easy there, Dan!" the priest replied. "You know what I think of you; and for that reason I'd be slow to put you in an awkward position. That young woman is Frank O'Neill's niece, the finest girl in my parish—and she has no use for fights or fighting men."

"Come on!" was all that Dan replied, as he started for the booth; and a few

seconds later Father Morris was presenting him to Miss O'Neill.

"Pleased to meet you," was all that Dan could stammer as she held out her white hand to be swallowed up in the thick right fist that had smashed hundreds of men into oblivion. For perhaps three or four seconds he felt dizzy and conscious of a wild desire to say a prayer to this divine creature. Then the unconquerable fighting spirit that was the breath of his life asserted itself. Here stood smiling at him the greatest prize he might ever hope to win. He must make her his friend, make her like him. Then by persistent effort he would some day make her his, even as he was now—in every fiber and atom of him—her man. Therefore by a great effort he got himself in hand.

"I've taken quite a fancy to pianos," he said. "How many chances have you got left on this one?"

"Three hundred and fifty," she replied, after a glance at a little long red book.

"I'll take 'em," said Dan, and, before she could express surprise, he put in her hand three yellow bills, each with a "C" on its corners, and one yellow bill similarly marked with an "L."

Margaret O'Neill was astounded. Could the man be mad? No, Father Morris would never introduce a madman; besides, she observed, with a sense of irritation, the tranquil and kindly smile not unmixed with sophistication that her evident confusion spread upon the rugged features of Mr. O'Donnell. Rugged features? Mr. O'Donnell? Could this be *the* O'Donnell, Dan O'Donnell, that all the world was talking about? Yes; he looked like the pictures she had seen on the first page of the newspapers ever since she was a little girl—except that now there was no trace of the scowl or the glare that were famous. Only a little while out of her convent school, she had never seen a man of this type, and her curiosity was piqued. It might be interesting to discover whether he was really human or whether he was merely one of the great, brutal, destructive troglodytes she supposed such men to be. At all events, he seemed quite civilized, and he wore his evening clothes gracefully enough.

"I'm rather afraid to take so much money from one person," she said, by way of drawing him out.

"Afraid nothing!" he exclaimed. "No, no. Excuse me. I mean, you needn't worry, Miss O'Neill. It just comes rolling in to me, and this'll be better than—well, it will do some good. You keep it."

"You're sure you won't regret it?" she pursued.

"Sure? Dead sure," he replied easily. "I never made a mistake in my life."

The which goes to illustrate the glorious, overwhelming self-confidence that had made Dan the champion of champions—for most of his life up to this time had been spent in making one grave mistake after another. But now he saw a new heaven and a new earth. He felt inspired. He would win this girl and hereafter do nothing but make her happy. Perhaps the exaltation he felt excused his boast.

When the fair was closed for the evening, at half past ten, Dan was again at the piano booth.

"A little fresh air would do you good after being cooped in here so long," he said to Miss O'Neill. "I live over your way. Will you let me walk home with you?"

"Why, Mr. O'Donnell," she began, "I don't know——"

"Good! Thank you. Come on!" said Dan, and they went away together.

Margaret O'Neill was accustomed to the deference and admiration of all the young men she knew, but she soon decided, with a little touch of amusement, that she had never guessed to what heights admiration and homage could

soar until she saw the glistening eyes and heard the reverent voices of the young men who swept their hats very low as they cried, "Good night, Mr. O'Donnell!" clearly forgetting that she even existed.

Now Dan was so used to worship that it had ceased even to bore him. Automatically he raised his hat, bowed, smiled, and went on talking with her, while all the time one question was burning in his mind. Should he ask her? Why not? This would be as good a time as any. Well, then——

Yet somehow the overwhelming torrent of self-confidence that had never slackened in the face of any gladiator, however truculent, had now dwindled to a mere trickle as Dan looked down at the gentle creature whose daintily gloved hand rested very, very lightly in the crook of his thick right arm. He wondered what he should say, and his throat grew dry and tight, and for the first time in his life the big fellow trembled with apprehension. Yet the habit of courage could not be altogether eclipsed, and he nerved himself for the ordeal by remembering the old thought that had cheered him in his early battles: "Better be knocked out than back out."

Nevertheless his knees were quivering and his hands were cold and moist within his gloves as he suddenly stopped in the little park near her home. His voice was husky. He could hardly hear it above the thumps of his galloping heart.

"Miss O'Neill," he rumbled, "you're the only woman in the world—understand? I love you. Will you marry me?"

The sudden stoppage of their walk had alarmed the girl, and Dan's abrupt speech fell upon her ears as something monstrous and absurd. Yet what woman was ever offended by this question honestly asked? In one swift glance she met Dan's eager, troubled, questioning gaze, noted the tremor in his voice, and that his chin was quivering. And, faith, she might have looked at many a worse sight than big Dan presented at that moment. She could not repress a momentary thrill of sympathy, and yet a certain fierce maidenliness possessed her, and she answered, coolly enough:

"Mr. O'Donnell, I can't understand —how can you say such things to me? I don't know you."

"Oh, yes, you do," he insisted, warming, as he always did, in the encounter with opposition. "You know all about me. Everybody does. That goes with my position."

"Well—but it's simply absurd——"

"No, it ain't," Dan interrupted. "Excuse me, Miss O'Neill, for seeming to contradict you. But, you see, this means life or death for me. I'm a rough fellow, all right; but I'm on the level, at that. I love you, and I'm going to marry you—well, I didn't mean to say it that way, but that's the truth. You may as well say yes."

"It is absurd," she insisted. "I won't consider such a thing. You seem to be a pleasant man, and you might be a faithful friend—but, then, pugilism has little to do with friendship, I suppose."

"Look here," Dan declared, "a man that don't stick to his friends is no good in any game. I'm going to marry you, but just now all you'll take me for is a friend. All right. Just to show you the kind of a friend I am, I'll tell you this: from this minute I'm out of the game, just because you don't like it—understand? And I'll tell you something more: I'm on the water wagon, too, from this minute. I made a living before I ever climbed through the ropes or touched wine. I'll show you what I can do, and you'll see whether you can trust me or not."

Margaret began slowly to walk homeward. Dan, feeling embarrassed, inasmuch as her silence gave him nothing to combat, stalked beside her, eager to

plead, anxious to convince her, yet tongue-tied by his wholesome ignorance of the arts of wooing.

"I'll be going now," he told her at the door, "I hope you won't think wrong of me for speaking out so sudden. But you'll see—I'm going to get you. Good night."

Margaret stood in the vestibule listening to his footsteps as he went briskly down the silent street.

"He walks," she mused, "like a man who has never taken 'no' for an answer; but he will this time. I marry a pugilist? The idea!"

And yet there was something not altogether displeasing in the honest admiration of the troglodyte and in the masterful way he said: "I'm going to get you."

Uncle Frank O'Neill talked of only one thing at breakfast the next morning —Dan O'Donnell had given up the championship, resigned, thrown it away, made a fool of himself. The newspaper was full of it. Uncle Frank was grieved, shocked, outraged.

"Perhaps he has found some nobler ambition," Margaret suggested innocently, as she spread the butter very thin on a delicate bit of toast.

"Nobler ambition!" Uncle Frank shouted. "*Nobler* ambition! And yet some of these women want to vote. Good Lord!"

Uncle Frank experienced another surprise when he arrived at his office. The door boy, almost dumb from hero worship, told him that Mr. O'Donnell was waiting for him. The big fellow greeted him with a wrench of the right hand and a cordial "H'w are yuh? How's the health?"

"What's this I read about you resigning the championship?" O'Neill asked.

"That's right," Dan replied. "I'm sick and tired of being run after by a lot of handshakers. I might get knocked out, too, by the next fellow that comes along. Ten years is long enough to stay in the game. Here! I want you to start me in right. I'm going into real estate now, and if you'll give me room here I've got twenty thousand to put in for my end of it. Is it a go?"

Frank O'Neill was a friend of Dan's; besides, he knew the value of O'Donnell's name in achieving that publicity which is so helpful to the dealer in real estate. Before the day was over, Dan's new desk was standing near his own, and he was teaching the big fellow a few things about that which is perhaps the most puzzling business in the world, and finding him an apt pupil.

One day they lunched together. "A little ale, Dan, with the steak?" O'Neill asked.

"No, thanks; nothing," the big man answered.

"But I thought you athletes always take ale," the host protested.

"Not me," said Dan. "I'm through with the whole business—and that means the booze, too."

"If I didn't know you for an ironclad old bach like myself, Dan, I'd say you were in love," laughed O'Neill.

"How do you know I ain't?" asked Dan, in his deepest rumble. "I am, in fact; and she's the finest lady ever lived."

He said no name, and O'Neill asked no questions. The ex-champion was not an easy man to question. He never mentioned the subject again, but his diligence in the new business which was strange and irksome to him showed that he was working under the inspiration of an ideal. He was not content to sit back and wait for the trade to come to him, as many a man with his big repute might have done, but went out and sought it as diligently as any hustling youngster. He asked the O'Neills to the theater one evening, and on the way home strayed from the rest, Margaret, with her hand resting daintily on his arm, making no protest. They were halfway across the little park near home

when he suddenly stopped and faced her.

"Here's your tree, where I first asked you," he said, nodding toward an aged elm that spread its arms in benediction over their heads. "Here's your tree, and I'll ask you again: Will you marry me?"

"Mr. O'Donnell," she replied, "please don't spoil our friendship by asking me that. I think you have many fine qualities, but I'm not in love with you. I can't think of marrying you."

"Why not?" he insisted, and his deep, growling tones thrilled her in spite of herself.

"I have told you why," she answered. "I am not in love with you, though I like you in many ways——"

"Heavens and earth! You'd think I was an oyster or an egg, to be cooked in many ways!" Dan interrupted impatiently. "Look here. I love you, and I'm going to marry you. You can fall in love with me afterward."

Dan threw his arms around her, drew her to him, and kissed her. She was very still, and her lips were cold. They chilled him, and he released her. The pressure of her small hands against his broad breast drove him backward—him whom no foe had ever been able to press backward. She uttered no reproach. "I'm going home now," was all she said as she began to walk away. Dan was embarrassed, awkward, helpless; yet he could not quit his pursuit. He drew her arm within his with an unconscious gesture of protection—unconscious so far as he was concerned, I mean, for she was both conscious of it and pleased—while he groped for words that should show her all he felt, that should convince her and win her.

"Listen to me, Margaret," he urged. "I'm just as sure to marry you as I'm sure I'm alive. You may as well give in. But I'm not going to bother you by asking for your steady company and making people talk about you. I'm a rough fellow, but you won't mind that after a while. I don't know whether you know it or not, but the O'Donnells were great friends of the O'Neills in Ireland ages ago, and fought for them and were loyal to them. Well, I'm going to be loyal to you, and any time you give me as much as one word I'll ask you again. Good night."

Margaret went slowly to her room, deep in thought. The fierce strength and dominance of the man frightened her. She shivered—not altogether without a compensating thrill of delight—as she remembered how he gathered her to him with no more effort than if she were a doll. His renunciation appealed to her appreciation of chivalry—and yet she could not avoid the thought that one so bold need not have been so backward. Then she reflected that this was unjust to him when he was seeking only to spare her, and her resentment against her own injustice made her sorry for its victim.

"He is a dear, generous fellow," she thought, and this phrase kept running through her reflections until she fell asleep.

Dan, all unconscious of how much he had advanced his cause, walked for hours, lighting a fresh cigar from the end of each one he finished, and always asking himself why the one woman in the world should keep on refusing him. It must be his old reputation, he concluded, and she was too considerate to refer to it. Very well, then; he would build a new reputation. And this he proceeded to do by continuing to busy himself as we have already seen, toiling as hard as any beginning clerk and bringing a fine share of business to the house. His health improved, too. He often walked to places where other men would have driven. He soon dropped ten pounds of superfluous weight; more and more the false tissue of high living tended to disappear, so that at the end of six months he was twenty-five

pounds lighter than when he began, and the two pink rolls had vanished from beneath his chin, and his eyes were bright and clear.

"Why, I believe he's handsome," was Margaret's startled thought, when suddenly she came face to face with him in the street one day. "Yes, he is handsome," she mused, as she answered his polite greeting: "H'w are yuh? How's the health?" She had rather resented this formula until Uncle Frank happened to mention at table one day that that was his uniform salutation to princes, presidents, and friends the world over.

In the meantime the big fellow was following the plan of campaign he had announced to Margaret. He did not ask her again to marry him; indeed, he did not even call at her home. She often was conscious that he was staring at her from a distance. He puzzled her. If he but knew it, her belief in her indifference to him was, under this treatment, rapidly wearing away; but poor, honest Dan, unsophisticated as a boy, knew nothing of the case except that he was sad and grief-stricken as a healthy man can be while he kept trying to puzzle out some reason why she remained obdurate.

And so might things have gone on to this day if the Minnesota Marvel had not sprung effulgent into the firmament that spans the ring. He deserved his name. Tall, long-armed, supple, no one could hit him, and he fought like a stag in the spring. His movements were so swift that the unpracticed eye could not register them upon the mind. What a man! What a man! Professor Davis, champion of the Northwest, was but a child in his hands. The Marvel feinted him into knots, jabbed him in the wind, and left him hanging inert on the ropes, after one minute in the third round.

Eastward he came, vanquishing local "prides" and gathering glory and dollars as he advanced. He persuaded Peter Slavin, to whom Dan O'Donnell, retiring, had bequeathed his title, to engage in a six-round exhibition at Dan McGuiggan's Club in the big city, and poor Peter was laughed and hooted out of the ring; for the Marvel had simply toyed with him, prodding him viciously and snickering as he slipped in and out of distance, and left him staggering and utterly bewildered at the finish. The newspapers hailed the Minnesota Marvel as the find of the century. He didn't have to assume the title of champion—everybody gave it to him. Poor Peter had to be content with a few hundreds of dollars a week as he roamed the country in the reflected—and very much diluted—glory of chief sparring partner.

Then arose the very important question: Who was fit to cope with the Marvel? Men debated it at home, at the office, in field and factory, in the Senate—truly—at the clubs, in saloons, in eager groups after church, in the street cars—everywhere. Baseball was out of season, and the newspapers rejoiced in the problem and bestowed column after column upon its discussion. And from every place of argument there came but one reply—the only man in the world fit to cope with the Marvel was Dan O'Donnell, the champion of champions, Dan the unbeaten, Dan the unbeatable.

But never a word came from Dan. Reporters went to interview him—and came back with nothing but unsought information about desirable factory sites and villa plots and loft buildings, et cetera. Not one word would Dan utter about fighting. Wily ones flaunted the Marvel's achievements in his face, but the best they got from Dan was a patronizing grin and the remark: "He seems to be a likely fellow."

A change came subtly into the comments upon the situation. Men began to quote the adage: "They never come back." The Marvel's manager, as cun-

ning a diplomat as ever went dollar hunting, had a letter in all the papers one Monday morning declaring that while neither he nor his champion desired to drag Mr. O'Donnell from his honorable retirement, nothing would give them greater pleasure than to take him on, any number of rounds, before the club offering the best purse. Still not a word from Dan. From this phase to open declarations that O'Donnell in his best day would not have dared to meet the Marvel was but a short step. Dan still grinned amiably. The experts on pugilism printed long articles to prove that, swift and destructive as Dan had always been, he never could have laid a glove on the Marvel, who had engaged in sixty battles without receiving so much as a black eye.

Need I continue the details of how they nagged Dan? A continuous dropping, says the wise man, will wear away a stone—and Dan O'Donnell was no stone. Margaret O'Neill was first at breakfast one morning and read the glaring headlines that leaped from the top of the two last columns of the first page of the paper: "Dan the Unbeaten Defies the Marvel."

She hurried back to her room, and did not come down again until the others had left the table. Then she sat a while, trying to drink some coffee and eat delicious toast that tasted dryer than ashes, meanwhile lost in amazement that her knight could prove recreant. It was with a shock that she realized her faith in him, upon his word, upon his sterling character—all vanished now in his broken promise. She was glad that she had not yielded to his pleadings. Yes, she was a lucky girl.

But, for all the consolation she got out of this reflection, her eyes were still so overflowing that she was a long time in discovering a letter that lay beside her plate. The handwriting was strange to her, and she wondered whose it could be, so big and boyish and unformed. She opened the letter and read:

FRIEND MARGARET: I trust you will forgive these few lines, which I hope will find you well, but you see I am in a bad position, and it is only right to let you know. This Marvel of Minnesota claims no one in America can face him, and I am not going to let him shame our people and our State. I hate to lose you, but then I guess you have no use for me, anyway, and anyhow this fellow has got to be stopped. Good-by and good luck. From your friend, with respect,

DANIEL O'DONNELL.

Silly Margaret! Back to her room and to bed for the day with a "headache"—complicated with heartache and tears, whose traces, however, were successfully hidden before she came down to dinner. Uncle Frank was full of the news, but she had schooled herself all day to play the indifferent listener.

"I'll tell you what it is," he said indignantly. "There are mighty few men who would make the sacrifice Dan is making."

"Sacrifice!" she exclaimed, and laughed—she flattered herself that she achieved a mean little insinuating laugh.

"Sacrifice, yes!" Uncle Frank repeated. "Dan has a lot of trades on hand that ought to clear him ten or twelve thousand dollars. They're all overboard now, because he will be in training for two months. Isn't that a sacrifice? Besides, this fellow may beat him, for it's four years since Dan had a real battle, while this Marvel is in full practice, up and coming all the time."

"Well, I think it's horrid for men to strike each other," said Margaret, "and, besides, I've heard he made a promise he wouldn't do it any more. I hope the Marvel will slap him out, or knock him down, or whatever they call it."

"A poor wish from a friend—that's all I can say," was Uncle Frank's honest criticism of Margaret's outbreak. He might have said more if she had not abruptly left the room, her cheeks flushed, and tears—could this be pos-

sible with placid Margaret?—yes, tears flowing in a flood.

O'Neill tried to win back his niece's favor next morning, but she heard his pleas coldly and persuaded him that he had spoken very harshly, though he assured her nothing could have been farther from his intent. An air of melancholy settled upon her, and he noticed that whenever he said a word about Dan's training or the prospects of victory, she managed to change the subject instantly. He did not know, of course, that she bought a copy of the *Evening Banner* every afternoon and devoured every word written by "Left Swing," the eminent expert, concerning Dan's fine condition and the phenomenal ability of the Marvel.

On the evening of the battle Frank O'Neill was so wrought up with enthusiasm for the game and partisanship for Dan that he could hardly eat his dinner.

O'Neill did not see his niece when he came home at eleven o'clock, and he had started up the stairs toward his room when he heard her call. He found her in the library, her back to a reading lamp and a musical journal in her hand.

"Well," she cried gayly, "aren't you going to say a word about your wonderfull battle that you were so excited about?"

"Shame on such a heartless question!" replied O'Neill, who failed to observe that her cheeks were pale and her chin quivering.

"Oh, come!" she rallied him. "It wasn't really as bad as all that, was it?"

"Listen to me," said O'Neill. "This night's battle will be talked about when the rulers and the wars and all else of this day are forgotten. It was terrific. I'm sorry I was there—but I wouldn't have missed it for my life. I was waiting at the clubhouse to meet Dan and wish him luck. Oh, if you could only have seen him as he came driving up to the door! His eye like the eye of an eagle, and his blue chin thrust out in the moonlight like a great rock in the sea.

"'Do you feel as good as you look, Dan?' I asked him.

"'I do,' he says. 'And I feel sorry for this young fellow. Still, he brought it on himself.'

"I didn't see Dan again till he came into the ring. Oh, but he was a sight! I never saw him look better. Maybe he was a little thick in the waist—oh, maybe just a trifle! But who'd bother about that in a grand champion like Dan? You must have heard the cheering away up in Orchestra Hall.

"The Marvel crunched Dan's hand and laughed at him when they were introduced to each other in the middle of the ring. Yes, he did, and he's the only man living that ever dared to. That vexed Dan, and he scowled—and what did this fellow do, instead of being frightened to death like all the others, but laugh at Dan behind his hand and point at him, and had Bill Braley, his manager, and Buffalo Jim Grady, and all of them in his corner laughing as if Dan was a foolish clown. Mad? Say, Dan was black with rage.

"When the gong sounded, Dan was across the ring in one jump, it seemed to me, swinging left, right, left, right for the young fellow's head; but the young fellow was a ghost. I'll bet you he leaped backward six feet the first leap. Dan after him like a tiger—but where's the tiger could catch a stag that sees him coming? Full three minutes he chased him, glaring and scowling and never laid a glove on the Marvel—the impudent Marvel, laughing all the time.

"Second round, the same—Dan charging and chasing; that long, mocking devil slipping away, ducking, sidestepping all at once, and quick as a flash. The same in the third, except that just before the bell he crouched low and

stabbed out a straight left like the lick of a snake's tongue. It caught Dan on the mouth and drove his head back.

"And I'm not ashamed to tell you that I looked up into the dark sky, all smooth and rich like velvet, and the big moon and golden stars shining out against the blue blackness, and I breathed a prayer for Dan. No man can best an enemy he can't reach but who keeps reaching him. There was a little red trickle down Dan's chin when he came out for the fourth, but he kept on chasing the tall young fellow. The Marvel would stop running backward now and then to drive a long, straight left into Dan's side. He never used his right once.

"'Wait him out, Dan!' yells a man near me. 'Make him come to you!'

"'Go home to your knitting, you!' Dan roars at him, still plunging after the other. My, my! You should have heard the cheering.

"Well, what's the use of talking? It's all over now. Dan began to breathe hard in the eighth, after a drive in the ribs that came in so hard it made his left knee fly up. Lord! But how that lean shadow of a fellow did hit! But at that he was ages and ages finishing the job. I don't know but he was right, though; for one swing from Dan would drop the best man living at any stage of the game. Yes, he was right. It wasn't till the seventeenth that Dan stopped in the middle of a plunge, both arms hanging straight down and the hands wide open. Then the young fellow came close and swung left, right, left, right, very fast, for the jaw, and down went Dan."

Carried away by the battle he still saw before him, O'Neill did not note the quivering shoulders of his niece or hear her low, half-stifled sobbing.

"But wait! It wasn't all over with Dan," he continued. "When the ten was counted, they carried him to his corner and propped him up in his chair. Say, he was like a sack of meal at first, falling off every way. But soon he began to rally; then I saw that he was trying to get up. Jim Magoun, Brooklyn Charley Goodwin, and all of them did their best to hold him down, but he flung them off like little boys and got up on his feet. He stood there a moment, waving back and forth and getting his balance. It's queer, there was hardly a cheer for the winner, and by this time there wasn't a sound in the arena except the crazy telegraph instruments clattering the news to people far away.

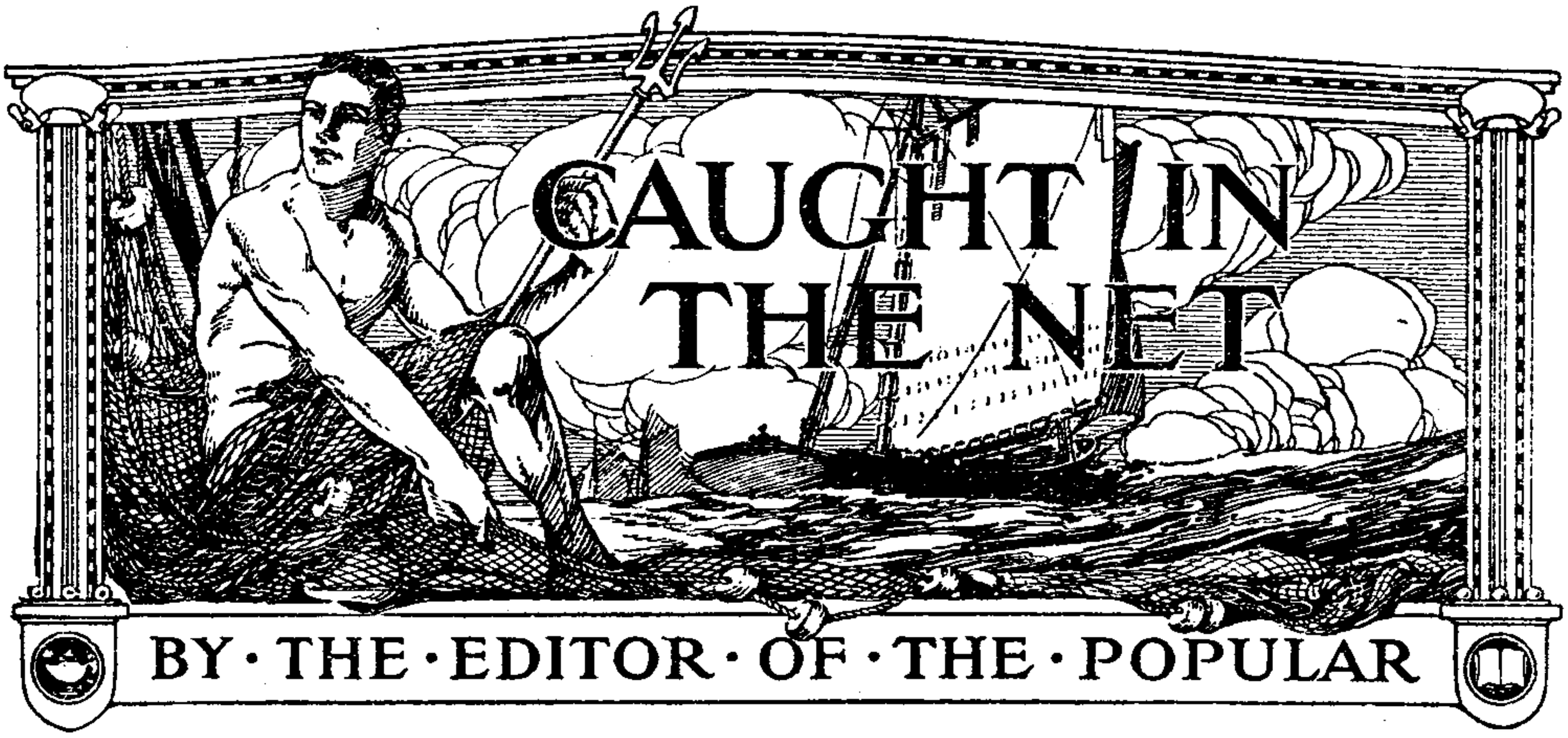
"Dan tottered a little, caught himself, shook his head to clear it, and then walked straight ahead, very slow, till he came against the ropes. He ran his left along the top rope, found a post, patted it, and held up his right arm. The crowd looked at that terrible right that had laid so many men low—there it was, the glove still on the fist—and there were a few low sounds here and there—sympathy, I suppose. I was near blind myself. Then Dan spoke.

"'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I've got nothing at all to say. All I've got to say is I come into the ring once too often, and if I had to get licked I'm glad I was licked by an American. I remain your warm and personal friend, Dan O'Donnell. What——'"

Margaret had flown to the writing table, seized the telephone, and asked for a number, which O'Neill recognized as the call for Dan's home.

"Say," he began, "you're not going to scold him, are you——"

"Oh, Uncle Frank!" she cried. "How can you!" Then, her tone suddenly changing, she inclined her head toward the telephone. "Is this Mr. O'Donnell? Yes? Good! Do you know my voice? Oh, Dan, I've just heard all about it, and I think you're the noblest man in the world! Ye-es. Well, yes, if you must have an answer now."



THE SCOUTS OF SCIENCE

OPPOSITE the elevators on the floor where the executive offices of the American Museum of Natural History are located is a bulletin board. Some forty or fifty names of persons connected with the institution are lettered on little sliding panels of wood. At the top of one column is the word "In," at the top of the other "Out." It is the custom of each person whose name appears on the board to move his personal slide one way or the other whenever he comes or goes.

Now and then a bronzed and bearded man will step off the elevator and find his panel so fixed with disuse that he will have to rap it sharply in order to move it over to the "in" column. Perhaps it has been one year or three or five since he saw it last and registered himself "out." He is one of the many "scouts of science" connected with the museum. He may have come from some unknown land of ice and snow within the Polar Circle, from the "smoky seas" off the coast of Siberia, from the island of New Guinea where tropic heat, savage beasts, and still more savage men have beset his path day by day, or from some other forgotten, far-off corner of the globe where his life has walked hand in hand with death. But he is glad to be back, and, after a little rest, will be equally glad to set forth on another quest.

These world wanderers are the real adventurers of modern times—the Drakes and Frobishers of science. Upon them primarily rest the development and progress of the world. They are sent forth by various learned institutions in Europe and America. They are the first to visit the loneliest, most unknown corners of the globe. If they report that there are new races or new products of nature to be studied there, a large expedition is fitted out and sent forth.

But the "scout of science" almost always goes alone. Alone, except for his native followers—and often he is abandoned by these—he follows his adventurous course. And when he dies under some alien sky his death passes unnoticed by the world at large. His obituary appears in some official publication, with an account of his achievements, and that is his sole epitaph.

When he is at home, in New York or London, the "scout of science" is busy writing up his notes or delivering lectures. At first he enjoys the smell of the

asphalt and the roar of the city. Then it palls on him, and he finds himself looking over his well-worn campaigning kit, cleaning up his firearms, and getting ready for the long road again. The men he knows the best and the ones he chums with are other "scouts of science" whom he meets on world-end steamers. Together they exchange news of what their little fraternity is doing—and who is dead.

This is an uncrowded vocation. The men engaged in it have to have peculiar qualities that are hard to find in a single individual. They must be scientifically trained observers in all the fields of nature; they must be fearless and resourceful and hardy. They are paid fairly well, but that to them is of little moment. What they crave above all else is to discover new things, to visit places where white men have never been before, and to follow the "long trail" until they reach the end of all journeying.

RAILROAD FINANCE

THE average man cannot understand why a railroad should always be borrowing money. It sells its product—transportation—for cash; tickets in advance and freight on delivery. It takes from one to three months to pay its bills. A mercantile business run on these lines could hardly fail to have money in the bank.

But a railroad, curiously enough, never gets out of debt. It is built with borrowed money, and keeps on borrowing as long as it lives. But, no matter how much it may owe, it generally survives. You never hear of a railroad being utterly abandoned, unless it is some short branch line that is of no use to any one.

There are many sound economic reasons, however, for the railroads' almost unique system of financing, which is so intricate that enough books have been written about it to fill a large library. Some of these works are well worth studying, for the railroad is the most scientific of all borrowers. But no ordinary individual should try to apply its methods of financing to his own private affairs. If he does, he is sure to come to grief very quickly.

One reason why a railroad continually needs money is that it is always wearing out. It has to make constant repairs and replacements, in track, rolling stock, and buildings, on a large scale. Otherwise its physique would become a patchwork which would be in constant danger of falling apart. It is not economical to buy rails or cars irregularly or in small lots, at the same rate at which the money happens to come in or can be spared. The railroad has to buy not only labor but material in large quantities in order to get the best rates and terms. Also it must plan its work for years ahead. Five hundred miles of new rails can be laid or ten thousand freight cars purchased at one time cheaper than rails by the single mile or cars by the hundred. Money can be borrowed by the million at low rates, and work can be done cheaper on a vast scale than piecemeal. The saving is greater than the interest cost of the money.

Railroads study the money markets and the markets for material with equal care. When money is plenty and cheap they buy long-time credit far in excess of their immediate requirements. When money is scarce, they supply their immediate needs by purchasing short-time credit, and borrow again to pay their notes. Their financial margin of safety is the normal expansion of business. Most railroads have to rely on this probable increase when they mortgage their incomes in this way for years ahead.

But with all its complexity, railroad financing is sound in theory. Great cities and even national governments proceed on the same principles. That they do not work out satisfactorily in certain instances is due to a very human weakness. When money can be borrowed easily, railroads, like individuals, lose caution and acquire extravagance. In such cases the railroad goes into a receivership and rids itself of its debts through the processes of bankruptcy and reorganization. Then it can resume its borrowing, in which respect it differs from the individual who has experienced the same vicissitudes.

A BAD DEFECT IN A GOOD LAW

THE recent election revealed a very serious and dangerous defect in the Initiative and Referendum law as it stands in Missouri and some other States.

This law provides that any bill passed by the legislature must, on petition of ten per cent of the voters, be submitted at the next general election for ratification, and if it fails to receive a majority of the votes cast on that amendment, the law is dead. In addition the courts have held that a referendum petition automatically suspends the operation of the law until it is ratified at the next general election.

This opens up three opportunities by which almost any element of the community may nullify any law to which they object. And all three opportunites were used in the November election.

Two years ago—the Missouri legislature meets only every other year—a bill known as the County Unit Bill was passed. This bill was very much desired by the country districts, but was strongly opposed by St. Louis. The legislature also passed a Home Rule Bill for which Kansas City and St. Louis had been fighting for twenty years. Under the present law these cities are practically under the direct control of the governor of the State.

Now immediately St. Louis got up a referendum petition to refer the County Unit Bill to the voters, and thereby suspend its operation two years. In retaliation the country districts got up a petition suspending the Home Rule Bill.

For many years it has been almost impossible to get a majority of votes for any constitutional amendment. People who do not feel interested will not vote on it. Many vote "no" consistently on all amendments, without any regard to their value. And of course the active enemies of the measure will vote. So a majority of "yeses" is next to impossible. And to make it deadly sure that some amendments opposed by certain interests should be defeated, an initiative petition was circulated putting on the ballot a constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to issue fifty million dollars in road bonds. As any tax amendment will bring down a shower of "noes" like an opossum shaking down persimmons, that of course guaranteed every one of the fifteen proposed amendments would be overwhelmingly defeated.

They were defeated, and at least ten of them were good, and some of the laws were urgently needed.

And the worst of it is, it has shown the enemies of any legislation a sure way to postpone a law two years, and an almost certain way to defeat it entirely. Anybody with a little time and money can get ten per cent of the voters to sign

a petition against any law. As it now stands, ten per cent of the voters can virtually repeal any law passed by the legislature. And, of course, the more useful a law is, the more likely it is to have active enemies.

These defects could be almost entirely overcome by reversing the manner of voting. The law should go into effect when passed by the legislature, and stand in effect until the voters repeal it. Instead of voting to sustain the law, make it a vote to repeal it. Thus the burden of securing a majority of affirmative votes would fall on the enemies of the law instead of its friends. This would still retain the real virtue of the law—the power to repeal notoriously bad legislation, or to initiate laws strongly in demand.

INVESTMENTS

IT is harder for most persons to invest money wisely than it is to make it. But it should not be any more difficult to invest a hundred or a thousand dollars so it will be safe and bring an adequate return than to buy a pound of good coffee.

A good many of us who have laid by a little and are seeking to set it to work are like a boy just out of school looking for a job. We are inclined to take the first thing that looks halfway decent, or else, timorous or dissatisfied, we keep on looking until we are tired out. In the end we do no better than if we had taken the first chance. Some of us, too, succumb to the temptation of quick profits and big returns. The savings bank's three or four per cent a year looks pretty small when, one morning, we get a circular letter—usually beginning, "My dear friend"—offering us (confidentially, of course) ten or a hundred times as much. "Investments" of this kind make a lot of work for the post-office inspectors and the Federal courts.

But the number of sensible investors is increasing. They are not guided by luck, avarice, or instinct. They apply the same principles to buying a bond or a few shares of stock or a mortgage that they use in purchasing anything with whose quality they were not intimately and thoroughly acquainted. They go to an honest and established dealer in whatever they are after, and trust largely to his advice and judgment. The investment banker's financial standing and reputation are his chief assets. He specializes in learning all he can about what he sells. He is not infallible, but he is less likely to err than one who is inexperienced.

Before any large, first-class banking house buys a block of bonds it applies every acid test to them. It employs experts and accountants of all kinds. The first question that has to be answered satisfactorily is if the security is safe and the kind of security that the banking house can pass to its customers with its indorsement. Of course, there are some investment bankers that are less careful than others, just as there are degrees of thoroughness among merchants in dry goods or groceries. But it is less difficult to pick out a first-class banking firm to deal with and be guided by its judgment than it is for one who is financially inexperienced to select unaided a safe security.

The Line of Least Resistance

By Harmony Herman

Says the Poet: "There's never a law of God or man runs north of 53." Poetry, but not literally true. As a matter of fact there is law in Alaska, and this tale has to do with one of the officers of that law and a man who, though a good citizen, tried to thwart the officer. A story of dog teams and an indignant warden and a girl gifted with imagination.

THE average man is a law-abiding creature, not so much because he has any extravagant regard for the law as such, but because he is a natural-born imitator, and instinctively follows precedent. Since that troublous and mysterious thing known as the law is, after all, only legalized precedent, it is obvious that when a man steers clear of the dread shadow of the penitentiary by strictly following a course of self-conscious rectitude, he does so because he is not impelled in an opposite direction by stronger contrary instincts. Every man takes the line of least resistance as naturally as water takes the steepest grade; but it must be borne in mind that the line of least resistance for one man may be the line of maximum resistance for another. The line of least resistance for Harry Jonas was bounded on both sides by hard work, yet it once led into the twilight zone that fringes the outer boundary of the law. Nevertheless, I shall always maintain that he was a good citizen.

Two or three winters ago, Harry Jonas and Jerry Thomas were prospecting on Five-mile Creek, about one hundred and twenty miles from Fairbanks. They took in their outfit early in the fall by dog team. By the tedious process of "burning down" with wood fires and hoisting the thawed gravel with the back-breaking windlass, they bed-rocked a number of holes that showed nothing better in the pan than a few insignificant colors. Along in February, finding that the water had frozen solid, they started a shaft squarely in the middle of the creek bed. At twenty feet they began to find a few small, water-worn nuggets of gold; but the water broke in on them unexpectedly and they were forced to abandon the hole. Another shaft was started at once to the side of the creek, with the idea of driving under the creek on bed rock.

By this time the month of March was well under way, and the grub was all gone. The prospectors had bagged a couple of moose and a sheep the fall before, and they still had a lot of moose left. Realizing that the shaft, if it were to be sunk before the following winter, must be sunk without delay, since warm weather would turn the waters of the creek loose on them, and drown them out, they decided to take about four hundred pounds of moose to Fairbanks and sell it for the money to buy the needed supplies. Both were enthusi-

astically sure that they were right on top of the elusive pay streak. Harry, it was decided, would make the trip to town, while Jerry remained behind to start the shaft and do what little he could to sink it deeper.

There had been a heavy fall of snow that winter, and the trail to Fairbanks was unbroken for the first sixty miles. Harry found it necessary to go ahead of the dogs with snowshoes to break down the snow so that they could travel on it, and thus double-tripped almost the whole of the first sixty miles. He would go ahead of the dogs for half a mile or so, and then would return and fetch up the load. As the snow was too dry and crystallic to pack well, even the snowshoe trail was so soft that the dogs frequently floundered helplessly, leaving their master to pull the major portion of the four-hundred-pound load. It was hard, heartbreaking work, of the kind that has cast so many prospectors back on the community as premature wrecks. It took three days of grueling work to cover the first forty miles.

March, in Alaska, is a month of high winds and drifting snows, and this March was no exception to the rule. On the fourth day from camp, the wind commenced to blow, and it rose steadily in fury as the day advanced. It was one of those dreaded winds out of a clear sky, as raw and cold as the breath of death itself. It drove the pellets of crystalline snow hissing through the air like sand from a sand blast. Striking the face, they stung like a charge of salt from a muzzle-loader. To face it taxed human endurance to the utmost, and only a man of iron muscles and iron will could have made headway at all. The dogs cowered and whined as dogs will, but at a sharp word of command they would spring gamely into the harness. In places where there was no timber of any kind to break the blast, the wind stripped the snow to the "niggerheads," baring the ribs of the earth itself to the storm.

For three days the wind blew unabated, but on the evening of the fifth day of travel Harry was cheered by striking the well-broken trail used by the prospectors on the left fork of the river in traveling to and from town. The remaining sixty miles to Fairbanks was made in two days of comparatively easy travel.

It seems that some one with an ax to grind had been making complaints to the powers that be about the lax enforcement of the game laws. It may have been the monopolistic meat company, and it may have been some meddlesome big-game hunter from the States, who, having paid a few dollars for a hunting license, and trailed some of Alaska's big game for an enjoyable week or so, felt himself entirely competent to run the country. At any rate, the protest was effective. The game wardens were dazed by the receipt of a dose of hot shot in the form of peremptory orders to enforce the law to the letter. The old warden at Fairbanks contented himself, as on similar occasions in times past, with putting threatening notices in the papers to the effect that he was going to raise the very dickens with all transgressors whose acts came under his jurisdiction. Having thus fulfilled his duty in the time-honored manner, he sent clippings to headquarters, to show how sincere were his efforts to carry out his instructions, and retired complacently to his own particular cozy corner in the Nugget Saloon to await his monthly remittance.

His peace of mind was rudely shattered, however, by the receipt from his superiors of the wholly gratuitous information that he was not properly fulfilling the functions of his office. This insulting statement was rendered all the more offensive by a further intimation that his immediate resignation would not be regarded as a national calamity.

Some one had been carrying tales in the dark, and it was generally believed that the dusky gentleman flirting with the woodpile was none other than Charley Whiteside, who was quickly appointed to succeed the old warden.

Charley was not popular. He was a comparative tenderfoot, and was consequently looked on with suspicion by the old-timers. The opinion that he was an irresponsible buttinsky and trouble maker found ample justification when several astonished hunters were haled before the courts, their game confiscated, and they themselves assessed fines ranging from one to five hundred dollars—fines which some, lacking the money, were forced to serve out in jail.

Thus, when Harry Jonas blew into town with his load of moose, he found the markets closed to him. To make matters worse, some one tipped him off to the game warden. That worthy official lost no time in pointing out to him, with well-meaning, but needless, emphasis, just which foot he was standing on. One ill-advised word led to another, until the discussion reached that unpleasant stage when personalities pass current for argument. The warden threatened immediate arrest, but he did not know where the meat had been cached, pending negotiations for its sale, and without that as evidence he had no case. He determined, however, to spare no efforts to complete his chain of evidence.

This was shortly after the failure of the biggest bank of the city, and times were very hard. A canvass of the business houses quickly convinced Harry that there was no chance of his getting anything on credit. With his partner away out in the far hills, and no grub in the cabin, he realized that his need would brook no delay. He determined to sell the meat, law or no law, warden or no warden.

To find a purchaser was no easy task, but one was finally located in the person of Peterson, an Easter Creek operator. Peterson agreed to pay eighty dollars for the meat delivered at his mine, twelve miles from town, and paid a few dollars down to bind the bargain. This transaction was made, unfortunately, in a saloon where the bartender happened to be a pal of the game warden, and that gentleman was not long in learning of the deal.

He accosted the prospector on the street. "Say, I thought I told you not to sell that meat?"

"Who's been selling any meat?" he was asked.

"Oh, you needn't try to bluff," returned the warden. "I know all about the arrangements you made with Peterson. If you don't turn over the meat to me right away, so I can destroy it, I'll run you in."

This was a little too much for the harassed prospector. "Why, you miserable little bunch of cussedness, you! For half a cent I'd break your neck for you! I know you! You never were anything but a half-starved rabbit strangler until you lied yourself into this job. The trouble with you is you're overcharged with self-importance and undercharged with intelligence."

"I'll just take you along for luck, old-timer, if that's the way you feel about it," the warden returned angrily, seizing the prospector by the arm.

"Not on your life you will!" said the latter, jerking his arm away; "you've got nothing on me unless you produce the meat, and that's where no petty-larceny little swill swiper like you'll ever find it." For a brief moment it looked to the eager bystanders as if they were to be treated to the glorious spectacle of a physical encounter between two men. To their great disappointment, however, the prospector spat contemptuously at the feet of the warden, turned, and walked unhindered away.

Had Harry been a little more diplo-

matic, he might have been able to throw the warden off his guard until he got rid of the meat, but as it was, he roused the latent stubborn streak in Whiteside, who was now determined to humble this independent prospector. The fact that his duty coincided so perfectly with his desires spread a hypocritical mantle of virtue over his splenetic ill will.

The fault of unreasoning stubbornness, however, was not confined to the game warden, for Harry Jonas had his full share. Having gone this far, he would see the matter through, though it landed him in the penitentiary. He determined to make a dash for it early next morning, figuring that Whiteside would not rise until rather late in the day. Once away from the town with the game, he felt that there would be little danger. He left an early call at the hotel where he was staying, and that proved his undoing. The warden, by making judicious inquiries, learned of the early call, and his mind leaped to the correct conclusion. That night he set his alarm three hours ahead.

Harry had his load on and the dogs hitched at six-thirty the next morning. He planned to avoid the center of the town by crossing the river on the ice half a mile below the bridge. But, alas, for well-made plans and wire-drawn specifications! The warden had followed him as he left the hotel, hoping to be led directly to the cache. But the dogs, racing swiftly in the crisp morning air, had left him behind when they swung up a cross street. Reasoning shrewdly, he stationed himself where the lower road dipped down the graded bank to the river.

The prospector was congratulating himself on an easy victory, when, on rounding the turn into Front Street, he spied the warden barely a hundred yards away, and squarely in his path. There was one chance, and he took it instinctively.

"Gee, Roger, gee!" he shouted to the leader. The dogs swerved sharply and swung up Front Street, straight for the center of the town. They passed within a hundred feet of the warden, heedless of his shouted commands to halt.

Whiteside, taking lesson from the near encounter of the day before, had thoughtfully provided himself with a revolver. He drew this now, half minded to shoot, but decided against it and gave pursuit. It was an uneven race. The sleigh was heavily loaded, but it slipped easily over the hard-packed, frictionless snow. At the repeated cry of "Mush, boys, mush," the three dogs broke into a gallop that quickly carried them away from the slow-moving warden. Harry, having discarded the gee pole as soon as he struck the good trail, was steering by the handle bars. Half riding, half running, he was barely able to keep up with the galloping dogs.

They passed a grocery store where the industrious proprietor was sweeping out for the day. He glanced up curiously as the racing sleigh dashed past, but he made no comment, not even when the game warden jostled him rudely aside as he bounded into the store and jerked the telephone from its hook.

A sleepy patrolman, nodding foolishly in a chair in an all-night cigar store that faced the bridge, bounded startled to his feet at the first peremptory jingle of the telephone, listened a moment, and sprang through the swinging door to the street. He didn't know just what the trouble was, but he had his orders to stop the man and dog team racing for the bridge.

He was heavy on his feet, was the patrolman, and he covered the ground like a tailender in a fat men's race. "Hey there, hey there," he wheezed valiantly. "Stop! Stop, or I'll shoot!" But he received no response. The dogs, at the cry of "Haw," swerved to the left and leaped up the approach to the bridge. The patrolman, too slow by

fifty feet, tugged at his revolver. His jurisdiction ended at the center of the bridge, but his orders were to stop the man at all costs. He raised his gun and fired.

Now, it is a popular belief among the uninformed that Alaska is a godless and lawless country, as stated by Kipling in the line: "No law of God or man runs north of 53."

The exact contrary is the truth. Alaskans are about as harmless and inoffensive a people, unless roused to the fighting pitch by rank injustice, as can be found anywhere in the world. Violence of any kind is almost unknown. Harry Jonas, realizing all this, reasoned that the bullet that whistled by his head and plunked into the snow across the bridge was never intended to find a human target. So, though it brought his heart into his mouth, he risked his life on the chance that he had guessed correctly. Two more bullets hummed merrily past, and then he was across the bridge and outside the city limits. Turning round, he playfully signaled his pursuers, thumb on nose, with that time-honored gesture so dear to the heart of the small boy.

Only a man with a commission from the United States government could touch him now, and as there was no marshal at Easter, the way stretched clear before him, a hard-packed boulevard of snow, over which the sled slipped almost without friction. The possibility of pursuit never entered his head.

But not so the game warden. Baffled in his earlier attempts, he was now all the more determined to snatch victory from the closing jaws of defeat. He sprinted for the cabin of Soule, the "mushing deputy," who was charged with the duty of making the long trips into the wilderness that occasionally fell to the lot of the marshal's force. For this purpose he kept a team of nine splendid huskies, picked for speed and endurance, and trained to the minute.

Roused by an urgent hammering on the door, he admitted his visitor. The warden briefly explained the reason for his call, and asked for the loan of the dog team. Soule demurred to this. His dogs were his especial pride, and he was loath to trust them to another. At the urgent insistence of Whiteside, he consented to go along himself; but he took little interest in the affair, and dressed leisurely. Then he breakfasted unhurriedly at his favorite restaurant. By the time the dogs were harnessed and under way, nearly an hour and a half had passed.

For five miles the road led across the flats that everywhere border the Tanana River. Then it swung sharply for a mile and a half of a climb up a hill. From here it traversed the ridge for several miles, now climbing the hogbacks, now slipping into the saddles. Next it dropped a half mile into Easter Creek, crossed the valley, and followed the left limit of the creek to near its head.

It was a long, hard pull up the first hill, and Harry made the climb in a leisurely fashion. Stopping to rest when near the summit, he discovered, a mile below him, a dog team that was plainly traveling in a hurry. He stared curiously for a minute, and then the truth broke upon him in one of those clairvoyant flashes that are really unconscious reasoning. His heart sank as he saw how rapidly his pursuers were eating up the scant mile that separated them. At that rate they would catch him before he reached the creek. He would race for it, of course, but with his overloaded sleigh and three mediocre dogs, there was plainly but one possible ending.

As he watched, waiting for his dogs to regain their breath, the sleigh below came to a halt. A man who had been riding in the bottom climbed out. Evi-

dently, the marshal did not intend to punish his dogs by a hard race uphill with a man on board. Let the game warden walk! This evened things up for the moment, but the odds were still much in favor of the pursuers.

Harry's dogs, with that canine sixth sense that serves their kind in place of conscious reason, seemed to sense the condition of affairs. They crowded eagerly into the harness, and on level stretches and down grade, fairly made the sled hum over the smooth roadbed. But on the up grade the heavy load was a deadening drag. They would come to the top of a rise with long tongues lolling from mouths and dripping perspiration, dog fashion. Then, after a brief rest, they would shoot down the other side on the dead run.

In spite of their game efforts, to Harry they seemed to be merely crawling along. Time and again he glanced uneasily backward, fearful of finding his pursuers close on his heels. They, however, were confident of success, as they had every reason to be, and were not straining themselves unnecessarily. Once on the ridge, they jogged along at a steady trot, to the cheerful jingling of the multitude of bells that decorated the harnesses of the dogs. Yet their even pace won them a steady gain.

Slipping around a bend, they came in sight of the straining prospector, now barely half a mile in the lead. Each time Harry looked back, he could see that this distance had lessened perceptibly, and when he reached the turn where the road dropped into Easter Creek, he could plainly hear the jingle of bells a quarter of a mile behind.

Harry made the dash from the ridge down into the creek on the dead run, heedless of the danger involved. The slightest misstep on the part of the galloping dogs, hindered as they were by the harness that bound them together and to the sled, and the heavy load would ride them down like an ocean liner crashing into a fishing sloop. Time and again the sled runners crowded close against the "wheeler," but each time he leaped clear. The dogs themselves knew their peril, but they had no choice but to run for it. Even Harry himself could have stopped the sled, once it got well under way, only by throwing it over on its side. That the dare-devil sprint was made without mishap was due probably to the luck that everywhere tags recklessness.

Where the road, after crossing the creek, climbed to the firm ground on the opposite side of the valley, the pace was necessarily slackened. Looking backward, Harry saw that his pursuers were making the descent in a more conservative manner. He had gained considerably by his exploit, but he knew that he was no better off than before. It was only a matter of time until they would catch him, for there was no place for him to go to escape them. Even if they didn't hurry, it made no difference, since the road ended a few miles above, at the head of the creek; it was a veritable blind alley!

The hopelessness of the situation had not previously gone home, but now it was as clear as the sun on a cloudless day. During the excitement of the race, there had been scant time for discouragement; but now, toiling up the opposite slope, the full magnitude of his folly was seared on the prospector's brain. He would be arrested, and the meat would be destroyed, ran his thoughts; he would be fined, and would probably have to serve out the amount of his fine in jail. He had also technically resisted arrest when he refused to obey the patrolman's order to halt.

Even if he should be so fortunate as to escape with a small fine, and should succeed in raising the money to pay it, he would still be in a sorry plight. He knew that the case would be given a great deal of notoriety by the news-thirsty press, ever on the lookout for a

sensation. Probably the "thrilling race" would rank in importance for a day or two with the Japanese war scare, then undergoing its annual resurrection. Comment, he was sure, would be unfavorable to him, for there is ever a thin-veiled enmity between those that dwell in a mining camp and the miners that make the camp possible. His credit, bad enough before, would be absolutely worthless. Meanwhile, there was his partner, probably reduced to a diet of meat straight long before this. He had failed miserably, and to the sense of this was added the humiliation of impending arrest.

All this, and more, passed through his mind, but he kept doggedly on, more than ever determined to see it through to the bitter end.

Back in Fairbanks the news of the race had spread. It slipped over the wires to Easter Creek, whose inhabitants were instructed to keep a sharp lookout if they wanted to see the fun. On claim No. 4 Below Discovery, Bessie Anderson, waitress at the mess house of Johnson & Bergson, divided her attention between her usual duties and the road to Fairbanks. Bessie was an old friend of Harry Jonas, and some there were who had hinted at one time of an understanding between them such as has glorified man and maid since the days of Adam. Such an opinion was a trifle premature, however, and when Harry drifted to other parts, there was much gossip of a quarrel that had shattered their dream of bliss.

As a matter of fact, the misunderstanding was really a very small affair, and the lack of an immediate reconciliation was due to a sudden geographical separation that prevented an accidental meeting. Two years had passed away, and each had long ago forgiven the other; yet neither had made the slightest move to effect a reconciliation. Thus, the breach had widened, and was in a fair way to become permanent.

Bessie hoped most fervently that her former friend would not be caught. When he made his reckless dash down the hill, she watched him, fearful of disaster, with her heart in her mouth. When he reached level ground in safety, her heart resumed its wonted position and functions, and her mind began to work. Realizing the hopelessness of the race, she longed to save her friend from the disgrace that was imminent. A plan, attractive in its very daring, flashed, fully formed, into her mind.

Enlisting the willing aid of the white-aproned cook, she ran a sled that had been lying behind the cook house out to the road. Tossing in some sofa cushions hastily abstracted from the small room in a wing of the mess house known by courtesy as the parlor, she covered them with a canvas that had been serving to protect a pile of boxed goods from the snow.

When Harry reached the place, his pursuers had crossed the creek, half a mile below, but they were hidden from view by a clump of spruce, thoughtfully placed by nature and miraculously spared by the hand of man. In a trice the dogs were unhitched from one sled and hitched to the other. Bessie and the grinning cook slipped the loaded sled back behind the mess house, where it was invisible from the road.

When the marshal and the warden emerged from the timber, Harry was jogging along as if nothing had happened. They overtook him at Easter City, on Discovery Claim, where there were a group of business houses and dwelling houses, and the inevitable saloon. Harry was in the post office, in the act of taking a chew from a newly purchased plug of tobacco, when the warden accosted him.

"I want you," he said roughly, displaying his badge of authority for the

benefit of the dozen loiterers that had collected.

"That so? What do you want of me? I haven't done anything," was the easy-going reply.

"You know what I want you for, all right," sneered the warden. "You'll get yours for this. Come along. Mr. Soule is in a hurry, so we won't waste any time."

"Why, great Scott, man! I've got nothing to do with Mr. Soule," laughed the prospector. "As far as I'm concerned, you can both go any time you want to. I'm not particularly stuck on your company, anyhow."

Something in his attitude made the warden a trifle uneasy. "I suppose you haven't got a load of moose meat out there on that sled, hey?" he scoffed.

"Moose meat?" repeated the other incredulously. This was the opening he had been sparring for. "What are you talking about, man? Are you going crazy? Why, all in the world I've got on that sled is my camping outfit."

His words carried conviction to the bystanders, but the warden merely led the way to the sled. "We'll soon see about that," he said.

There had been no time to lash the canvas, and the warden threw it off with a single angry jerk of the hand. His eyes widened and his jaw dropped in amazement when he saw, beneath the canvas, only a bunch of highly decorated sofa cushions. The crowd broke into a roar of uncontrolled laughter. Most of those present knew the game warden, by reputation at least, and they shared the usual contempt of the workingman for the salaried appointee of a distant government. They had received word of the race, and they now gloried in the discomfiture of the warden. "Oh you Nick Carter!" shouted some wag, and the rest took up the cry. This was a joke that would be told and retold for years!

The face of the warden went white, and then the angry blood pounded back to a fiery red. He licked his lips, suddenly gone dry and sticky, but made no sound. The silence of the pair was broken by the explosive indignation of the marshal, who just now viewed himself in the light of the "fall guy." "What kind of a —— fool are you, anyhow?" he asked angrily. Then, seeing the other's plight, his anger gave way to disgust. "You're a hot specimen of humanity, aren't you? You're a real bright ginney, I guess not."

"He had the meat when he left town, all right," Whiteside muttered dully, his mind groping blindly in search of an explanation for this startling phenomenon. "He left it somewhere on the road between here and Fairbanks," he continued, thinking aloud.

"Well, you can do as you please," said the thoroughly disgusted marshal, "but I'm going back to town on the double-quick. If you want to come along, all right; and if you don't want to come, it'll be all right with me, too."

"I'll come, and I'll just take our friend along for luck." Turning to Jonas, he continued: "You are under arrest. I've got plenty of evidence without the meat, and, anyway, I'll pick that up on the road." In spite of the jeering onlookers, he was rapidly regaining his air of jaunty self-confidence.

They started, the prospector in the lead. Whiteside scanned the roadside carefully for signs as they went along. At Johnson & Bergson's, he spied the sled tracks leading to the rear of the house, and called a halt. "There's where it went," he confidently asserted.

Harry followed behind as the warden led the way. This, he thought, was worse than ever, for it meant that Bessie Anderson would be drawn into the affair. They rounded the corner. Before them was the sled, empty and tilted on its side.

Just behind the mess house was the screen-covered meat house. Whiteside

opened the door and entered. Hanging from iron hooks were several pieces of moose and two sides of beef. It was plain that the meat had been removed from the sled and hung with that belonging to Johnson & Bergson, but it was equally plain that the warden could not tell which from which. He rapped imperiously on the cook-house door, and the Teutonic chef, trying with poor success to repress a grin, answered the knock.

The warden nodded toward the meat house. "How much of this meat out here belongs to Johnson & Bergson?" he asked.

"Vy, all of id, I subbose so."

The warden saw his mistake too late. Had he declared positively that he could identify the meat he was seeking, he might have succeeded in obtaining some damaging admission from the cook, but in exposing the weakness of his hand he had overreached himself. He studied the cook for a moment, and, deciding that there was no information to be obtained from that source, asked for the owners of the mine. He was referred to the boiler house, where he found Johnson, an elongated Swede of an independent turn of mind, busy superintending some repairs to a broken car. Whiteside wasted no time on preliminaries. "I am the game warden," he said. "I am running down some moose meat that has been sold out of season. Some of it has been cached in your meat house, and I want you to show me just which is yours, so there will be no mistake."

His manner was not to the liking of Johnson, who replied shortly: "If you can find any meat on my place that don't belong there, take it and go; but if you merely have a vague idea there is some there, and can't identify it, I'll ask you to get to thunder off of this claim and stay off." So saying, he returned to his work, plainly considering the interview at an end.

The warden took a sullen departure, but he turned Jonas loose and returned to Easter City, while Jonas and the marshal left at once for Fairbanks.

Two days later, under cover of darkness, the meat was removed and delivered to Peterson, who, in appreciation of the humiliating of the unpopular game warden, voluntarily raised the price to a hundred dollars. Harry Jonas was very grateful for the extra twenty dollars, for it enabled him to purchase a ring of the proper size and design for the third finger of Bessie Anderson.

RUNNING AHEAD OF HIS SCHEDULE

WHEN Henry Miller, the actor-manager, is absorbed in the production of a new play, he frequently displays flashes of a keen and merciless wit. One morning, when he was conducting rehearsals in preparation for his latest tour to the Pacific coast, one of the actors in the company showed up an hour late.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Miller. "Why this delay?"

"I'm sick," replied the delinquent one. "Honestly, I'm suffering the torments of the infernal regions."

Miller looked at him in a withering manner and demanded:

"Already?"

Revelations of an Ambassador at Large

By H. M. Egbert

IV.—THE RED ENVELOPE

How the Vengeance of a Chinese doctor frustrated the Japanese "Household Plot," and saved Great Britain and the United States from being drawn into a great war

I HAPPENED to be in Tokyo at the time of what is called, in inner diplomatic circles, the Household Plot. How nearly it succeeded in embroiling the United States and Japan only five men know in detail. The first of these is Sir Arthur Sturt, the British ambassador to the mikado's court. The second is the Chinese minister. The third is myself. The fourth is Count Okuma, the astute, one-legged statesman, who has been a moving power in Japanese affairs since the Reform Era began—or was, until the events that I shall describe occurred. The fifth is Doctor Fong, and where he is nobody knows.

I was not in Japan in any official capacity. I was there renewing my acquaintance with old scenes and persons, when Sir Arthur, from whom I had parted the night before, on the occasion of Lady Sturt's reception, and, as I thought, probably forever—since I was planning to sail for Shanghai—sent for me by a special embassy messenger.

I knew that some matter of the gravest import must have happened to cause him to summon me at eight o'clock in the morning. The cause was partly revealed, however, when, on bringing me my breakfast, my Chinese boy informed me that his majesty, Mutsuhito, Emperor of Japan, was dying.

I had known of the precarious condition of his health, and that the fatal climax of his wasting disease might occur at almost any time; still, the shock seemed to have been very sudden, for when I said good-by to Sir Arthur, the evening before, his majesty was reported to be in excellent health.

I had a ricksha called and hastily made my way into the embassy compound, where the ambassador's secretary was awaiting me with a very grave expression upon his face.

"You have heard the news?" he asked. "His majesty——"

"Is dead!" I exclaimed.

"He has been dead two days," he answered.

This news was confirmed by Sir Arthur, who looked even graver as he motioned me to a chair.

"I have been told, Mr. X," he began, "that you have a more intimate acquaintance with the court life of Japan than any man since Bertram Mitford."

"Your excellency is very kind," I began, but Sir Arthur cut me short.

"This is no time for compliments," he interrupted brusquely. "I have just been informed that the emperor's death has been kept secret these two days for the gravest reasons. You are, I believe, personally acquainted with Count Okuma?"

"As everybody is," I answered. For Count Okuma, stumping round on his

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This series began in the POPULAR dated January 7th. Back numbers can be obtained from news agents.

wooden leg—the other was destroyed years ago by a fanatic's bomb; Okuma, the friend of foreigners, the man whose affectation of the simple life led him to carry home his own laundry; Okuma, the patron of Western learning, the wiliest and most astute of the complex-minded advisers of the late emperor, was the most accessible and friendly of men.

"I am informed, beyond any possibility of doubt," said the ambassador, "that Okuma has now in his pocket an ultimatum to be presented to the American minister this afternoon, at the palace."

I saw at once the meaning of the conspiracy of silence. Mutsuhito, of course, would never have sanctioned war with the United States; and Yoshihito, his heir, and now in theory, though not in fact, Emperor of Japan, was even more firmly pro-American. The interregnum, thus artificially created, was to be utilized by Count Okuma and the cabal which he had formed for the purpose of an attack upon the Philippines.

"The name of his late majesty was forged to this document, which is written on the regulation thick red state note paper," continued Sir Arthur. "Japan demands that the United States evacuate the Philippines within a week. And you see how this affects Great Britain."

I certainly did. As a treaty ally of Japan, England would be compelled to stand aside, if she did not participate in the attack, impotent to aid America. Her action would doubtless be construed as an alliance with Japan, or at least a participancy in her treachery, and the people of the United States, stung to the quick, would certainly declare war upon England, with results incalculably evil to humanity.

And, with all respect to the valor of American arms, to hold the Philippines against Japan would be, as all strategists are aware, a military impossibility. Manila must fall long before reënforcements arrived; and, without a base, without adequate transportation facilities, how could the United States hope to throw an army of half a million men into the archipelago, to cope successfully with the war-trained veterans of Japan?

Nay, assuming a base on a near-by island, how could that country transport more than fifty thousand troops at a single voyage, and how could these fifty thousand hold out while the transports went back for more? It is the old story of the fox, the goose, and the bag of oats.

On this account I have always strongly urged the abandonment of the Philippines, which will one day prove a bitter disillusionment to the United States.

Now I realized the ramifications of the conspiracy. It was for this purpose that the War Syndicate, which was seeking to embroil England and America on behalf of Germany, had taken up the latest Japanese loan at four per cent, instead of the five which the imperial government had had to pay for its last issue. The scheme was as clear as daylight.

"You understand the situation, no doubt," said Sir Arthur, who had been watching my face closely.

"Entirely, your excellency," I answered. "It is necessary for us to obtain that document before the count can present it."

"Yes, which means before sundown, when, since Mutsuhito's death can be concealed no longer, Yoshihito will be notified of his accession to the throne. The document will undoubtedly be presented to the American minister at the palace, the count occupying the suite of the minister in waiting there."

It may seem strange that the heir to the throne could have been kept two days in ignorance of his father's death —strange to one ignorant of Japanese

court ceremony; but not to one aware that the emperor, as a divine being, may not be touched, or even seen, by the members of his own family, except at his demand.

I could picture the dead monarch behind the drawn screens in the death chamber; the doctor, fearfully performing the last medical rites; and the imperial family, waiting in antechambers for their god's permission to bid him farewell before his translation to the celestial spheres.

"My information," continued Sir Arthur, "comes from the Chinese minister, who vouches for its accuracy. As you know, he is a warm friend of America, and he has methods of his own for making such discoveries. The Chinese spy system is greatly in advance of the Japanese. Yet I am a little uneasy for fear of some subtle trick having been laid for me, and I am anxious to obtain your advice, on account of your acquaintance with the inner affairs of Japanese court life."

His excellency's reference to my attaché days, when it was said, I believe, that I was the only European acquainted with the ramifications of political intrigue in what was still called the Hermit Kingdom, touched me. Sir Arthur had a good memory, when he chose to give it play. Still, those were the early days of Meiji, as the new era is called, and things are different now.

"In brief," continued the ambassador, "the Chinese minister asks me to place myself in the hands of Doctor Fong, the third court physician. Did you ever hear of him?"

Hear of Fong! A shadowy figure suddenly leaped into my mind, perfectly outlined. I remembered Doctor Fong perfectly.

An accomplished Chinese scholar, he had been employed years before in the medical department of the Japanese legation in Peking. What his duties had been is immaterial, but he was connected—falsely, I believe, with the mysterious death of the predecessor of the late empress dowager, Tsi-An, the first wife of the penultimate emperor of the extinct dynasty.

Fong had been put on trial for murder, had been acquitted, and had later become head of the department of tropical medicine at the University of Osaka. The government subsequently removed him from his post, and he had lived a lonely and embittered life, blaming the cause of his downfall upon Count Okuma. The knowledge of this made me believe that Fong would prove of genuine service to us.

I knew that the late emperor's mysterious disease had been a form of beriberi, a malignant, chronic kind peculiar to the island of Hondo, and I surmised that Doctor Fong's knowledge of tropical diseases had brought him back to favor as one of the imperial attendants. I communicated all these facts to Sir Arthur.

"Then will you accompany me to the palace at once?" he asked me. "Each of the ambassadors has a suite set apart for him there; and we can interview our man unmolested."

I assented at once, and, a few minutes later, we were bowling through the streets in one of the embassy rickshas. A run of thirty minutes brought us to the palace grounds, and, shortly afterward, we were in the ambassador's quarters, consisting of two or three spacious rooms on the second floor.

Although there was no outward sign of lamentation, something in the atmosphere of the interior showed that the news of Mutsuhito's death had already become common property. There was gloom upon the faces of the palace attendants, shuffling to and fro along the corridors in their felt slippers. At the far end of the long passage, at the back entrance to the state apartments, we saw an anxious throng assembled, and, as we were about to enter the ambas-

sador's rooms, we saw the crowd suddenly prostrate itself as a tiny lady, attired in a European court dress, with low neck and sweeping train upheld by four pages, passed by.

"Her highness, the royal concubine, Otura," explained the ambassador. "Let's get inside before we meet her. Sometimes one requires tact in meeting certain court situations, don't you know."

Inside the rooms a tall man, with a clean-shaven, anxious face, was seated beside the fire, reading the *Daily Herald*. As we entered, he sprang to his feet, and I recognized the American minister.

"How do you do, Sir Arthur?" he cried heartily. "Have you heard the news? His majesty is dying. I got the tip from my Chinese boy, and hurried round to be in attendance."

"Yes, it is very sad," said Sir Arthur solemnly.

"His case is considered hopeless, I believe," continued the American minister. "At least, I met Count Okuma on my way, and he looked very despondent. What a charming, enlightened man the count is! He was so friendly, in spite of his preoccupation, that I was almost tempted to suggest calling in Doctor Phineas, of our legation, who took his degree at Johns Hopkins. However—would you have suggested it?"

"It is always a little dubious, making suggestions," said Sir Arthur thoughtfully.

"But Count Okuma is so transparently simple—just like one of us," said the American minister. "I really wanted—however, I've no doubt these Japanese doctors are competent to handle the situation. I won't keep you, Sir Arthur, but if I hear of any developments in the situation, I shall let you know at once."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my dear colleague," replied Sir Arthur, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"Do you know," he said to me, when the minister had gone, "that sort of man makes the best possible ambassador? Directness, guilelessness are awfully puzzling for the sophisticated Japanese mind. However—here is our friend."

Doctor Fong was just entering the doorway, and, though it was years since I had seen him, I knew him immediately. The yellow, wrinkled skin looked just as much like parchment, the wiry, thin mustache still drooped blackly on either side of the sensitive mouth, and the eyes, behind their heavy convex lenses, were shrewd, kindly, and yet impenetrable.

Doctor Fong murmured my name as he shook hands with me.

"I see you have a long memory for faces, doctor," said Sir Arthur.

"I never forget anything," replied Fong quietly.

"Mr. X is to be trusted implicitly," said Sir Arthur. "He understands the entire situation, and thoroughly indorses your ability."

"I am delighted," murmured Fong, in his monotonous, soft tone. "And now, we will begin by trusting one another completely in this affair. It is your excellency's desire to obtain a certain document now in the possession of a distinguished diplomatist?"

"If it can be done honestly," said Sir Arthur. "I mean," he added, "I cannot countenance any objectionable methods. Confound it, Doctor Fong, we have got to get possession of that document before sundown," he added. "Where is it?"

"Upon the person of the distinguished diplomatist," answered the doctor.

"How can you get it?"

"Will you permit me to show your excellency in pantomime?" inquired Fong.

"Certainly," said Sir Arthur, growing evidently interested as he saw the doctor take a small vial from his pocket, half full of a clear, slightly opalescent

liquid. "You are not planning to chloroform the count, I hope?" he continued. "I cannot countenance——"

"Chloroform? The invention of a barbarian," murmured Doctor Fong contemptuously. "We discarded chloroform in B. C. 1774. There is no need to use chloroform, nor any opportunity. Besides, it always requires methodical application, and cannot be used upon a man against his will. No." He picked up a piece of note paper that lay upon the table. "This represents the document, your excellency, and you are now delivering it to me. Hold it firmly in your right hand, so. Now have the goodness to look carefully at this vial. Observe the twinkling lights——"

I thought at first that Doctor Fong was trying to hypnotize the ambassador, for he held the vial closely under his face. Then I saw that Sir Arthur was standing as rigid as a statue, his eyes fixed firmly upon the vial; but there was not the smallest expression upon his face, and he was as rigid as a cataleptic. I knew that catalepsy cannot be induced immediately by hypnotism. I could not detect the slightest odor from the vial.

Doctor Fong opened the ambassador's fingers and took the paper. Turning toward the table, he took up a pen and wrote something upon it. Then he replaced it between Sir Arthur's fingers, recorked the vial, and placed it in his pocket. Half a minute later I saw Sir Arthur's muscles lose their rigidity and the natural expression come back to his face.

"But you have taken it away," he said.

"The vial?" inquired the doctor blandy.

"You asked me to look at it," said Sir Arthur.

"No, no, your excellency. I should have said, look at the paper," replied Doctor Fong.

Sir Arthur turned the paper up. Upon the other side was written:

This is to certify that I have complete confidence in Doctor Fong.

"You are not conscious of the lapse of any interval of time since I began this experiment, your excellency?" Fong inquired.

"You have been asleep for a couple of minutes," I explained, as Sir Arthur looked from the paper to us in bewilderment. And it took a couple of minutes more before we could get him to understand. Then Fong explained.

"Extract of venatica," he explained, taking out the vial and tapping it with his lean forefinger. "The Formosan head-hunters are acquainted with its peculiar properties. In China we use something better. However, this enables them to get heads. The drug not only produces immediate unconsciousness, when inhaled—you were inhaling it when you thought you were looking at it—but there is no remembrance, after awakening, of anything that has happened since the first inhalation."

All the innate pharisaism of the Englishman came to the surface as Sir Arthur answered.

"I can't countenance that method, doctor," he said, a little pompously, and, I thought, a little humiliated. "But if you think you can get the document in——"

"I understand, your excellency," replied Doctor Fong blandly. "The document is the first consideration, after which we can proceed to analyze the means we have employed. By the way, his majesty's end is expected at any moment now, and I must return to my post of duty. You can trust me, your excellency," he added, as he bowed himself through the door.

At five o'clock we were still in Sir Arthur's quarters. The American minister had returned twice, to inform us that Mutsuhito was at death's door.

The French minister had looked in to tell Sir Arthur that, according to a palace rumor, the emperor had died early in the afternoon. At the end of the corridor the crowd of courtiers was constantly prostrating itself as one or other of the royal ladies and imperial princes passed into the mikado's anteroom.

It was a few minutes after five when a distant murmur, like the droning of bees, made itself audible. It rose and swelled into a mourning din. The emperor was officially dead.

The sound of lamentations filled the palace. From our window we could see that a vast throng had assembled in the grounds, and, rippling from one to another, the sound was taken up until it seemed as though the entire people wailed in unison.

"Count Okuma is ready to strike. Heaven grant that Fong does not fail us," said Sir Arthur, turning to me. Then, doubtfully: "Can you assure me on your honor that I was rendered unconscious?"

Before I could assure him, a tap sounded on the door, and a page appeared. He announced that Count Okuma requested the honor of Sir Arthur's presence in his apartment.

We went down the corridor in the page's wake, until we came to the little room that Okuma occupied. It was filled with the ambassadors and ministers of the various powers.

It was furnished with that Spartan simplicity which Okuma, who was a good deal of a demagogue, affected, hoping thereby to set an example of frugality to the rising generation, and ignorant, like all demagogues, that the people saw through his pose. There was a low Japanese couch, concealed in part by a plain screen, a bronze Buddha upon a pedestal, a charcoal box, or hibachi, a writing table, a desk heaped high with papers, and a number of chairs.

I perceived that the American minister alone was absent.

Count Okuma was seated at his desk, facing us, his wooden leg thrust out before him, and an expression of remarkable guilelessness on his smooth-shaven face.

"Gentlemen," said the count, rising, "I have the deep sorrow of announcing to you the demise of his imperial majesty five minutes ago."

Immediately each of the representatives, Sir Arthur included, produced a written memorandum of condolence, which he handed to the count with a bow and a few conventional words. It was an interesting comedy, not the least amusing part being Okuma's expression of surprise and pleasure at these tokens of international sympathy with Japan.

As we were about to leave, among the others, Count Okuma called to Sir Arthur and asked him to remain behind.

"One moment, Sir Arthur," he said, with a charming smile. "It is to be my pleasure to address a communication to your colleague from Washington, who will be here in a moment, and, as our ally, it would be felicitous for you to be present."

He looked keenly into Sir Arthur's face as he spoke, and I saw that the British ambassador's expression was almost as guileless as the count's.

We waited. Presently we heard footsteps at the farther end of the passage. The American minister was on his way to the count's room.

Okuma, turning from us, began to rummage among the heap of papers upon the desk before him, which appeared to consist largely of bills and household receipts, until he came upon a red envelope, of legal size, unfastened, and evidently containing the ultimatum.

He took it in his hand and stood, propping himself upon his wooden leg, his whole expression that of a charming man of the world. If the momentous minute affected him, there was no sign

of it in his aspect. And the footsteps were drawing nearer.

Suddenly the face of Doctor Fong appeared at the door. He bowed low before the count; for the first time, I saw the count's expression change.

Did he suspect Fong at that moment and remember the man's grievance against him? It was one of those dramatic moments when nothing is said, nothing done, and yet one seems to feel the thoughts and minds of others.

Fong walked straight to the count. "Her imperial highness——" he began, and held the vial beneath his nose.

The expression that had been on Count Okuma's face was still there, but it seemed to have been frozen there; and he remained in exactly the same position as he had occupied, slightly leaning upon his wooden leg, the envelope between his fingers.

"Good Lord! Was I like that?" I heard Sir Arthur whisper, as Fong gently opened the count's fingers and took the envelope.

I heard the slight click as the thumb and fingers came together again.

Hastily Fong slipped the inclosure out of the envelope. From the desk he grabbed up a bill or letter, which he placed inside. I did not see what he did with the document, but when he turned back, his hands were empty.

"Could your excellency find some pretext to hold the American minister at the door for a minute?" Fong asked.

Sir Arthur stepped hastily into the doorway, where the minister was just arriving. I saw Fong slip the vial back into his pocket and replace the red envelope between the frozen count's fingers. And then, as the doctor stepped back, I saw the count's conscious return as instantly as a ripple goes across wheat. Every muscle resumed its functions at the same moment.

"Is greatly indisposed as a consequence of his majesty's translation," continued Fong.

"I greatly regret to hear it," answered the count. "I shall prostrate myself before her later in the afternoon. You are attending her carefully?"

"With the utmost care," answered the Chinaman, retiring obsequiously backward.

And it was evident that Count Okuma had not the slightest suspicion of what had happened. Sir Arthur had stepped hastily back to his side, and the American minister was in the room.

"I have the great sorrow of announcing to you, sir, the demise of his imperial majesty, ten minutes ago," said Count Okuma to the minister.

With a few murmured words of sorrow, the American minister quickly produced a written memorandum of condolence, which the count placed among the others on his desk.

"Your excellency," he continued, "there is a communication of some importance which I have to make to you on behalf of the imperial Japanese government. I do so, for reasons which this communication makes apparent, in the presence of his excellency, the British ambassador."

And he handed the minister the red envelope.

The American minister took the envelope and, bowing, withdrew. He hesitated at the door, and seemed desirous of addressing Sir Arthur, but the latter hurried past him to his apartment, and we left together a few minutes later, as the thunder of guns announced the accession of Yoshihito, the new Emperor of Japan.

How nearly a great war between Japan and America, and another between the two English-speaking nations, was frustrated, becomes clear from the following letter, which I received from Sir Arthur in Shanghai:

The American minister called on me at ten o'clock the morning of the day you left.

"I never heard that the Japanese were an

absent-minded people, Sir Arthur," he said, laughing, "but this is too good to hold. Permit me to show you what Count Okuma handed to me last night. I telephoned to ask if a mistake had not been made, but the count had been taken ill and was in bed, his secretary told me."

And he pulled the red envelope out of his pocket and handed me—Count Okuma's laundry list! Three pairs of silk pajamas, a dozen linen handkerchiefs, and numerous other items prove that the count's Spartan simplicity is more apparent than real. No wonder that Okuma was taken ill after the discovery.

I owe you a thousand thanks for your assistance. Doctor Fong's revenge had all the Chinese subtlety, did it not? But I often wonder whether the laundryman received a communication instructing him to abandon his premises under threat of naval intervention.

The fifth story in this series will appear in the first March ***POPULAR,*** *on sale March 7th. It is entitled "Kitchener's Coup."*

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE'S MONEY

IN its determination to safeguard the money of the American people, the Federal government in Washington has built up the most elaborate property-protective system in the world. It consists of sentinels, steel vaults, electric wires, gongs, mirrors, and varicolored electric lights. It is thief proof, burglar proof, mob proof, and fool proof.

The methods employed to keep the money are both ancient and modern. On the one hand, there is the captain of the watch, who receives reports at regular intervals from the men who patrol the Treasury Building inside and out. On the other, there are the heavy steel safes with walls so constructed that a burglar's electric drill, penetrating anywhere into the steel, will strike a wire which will light up a bulb on the wall of the office of the captain of the watch or in the nearest police station.

In the treasury there are fourteen vaults and safes, all strung together on an electric thread that is as sensitive as a raw nerve to the intruder's touch. In the corridors, in various offices, and in the cellar and subcellar are fifty stations where the watchmen on patrol and sentinel duty register their presence on their rounds through the night. They must register by electric signal to the captain of the watch every fifteen minutes, and, if their signals do not come in within five minutes of the schedule time, the captain sends out another watchman to ascertain the reason for the delay. Every hour a tour of inspection is made around the outside of the building, and in unsuspected places on the walls outside are cleverly concealed buttons which the sentinels touch in order to register "all's well" in the captain's office.

There is good reason for all this precaution. The silver dollars packed in the huge silver vault amount usually to about one hundred million dollars. The gold coin averages one hundred million dollars. And many other hundreds of millions are there in the shape of bonds, bank notes, and other securities.

The Gold Pince-Nez

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "The Goblin's Treasure House," "The Sandlotter," Etc.

Outward bound for Japan, American secret-service agents are called on to solve a grim riddle propounded by the Sphinx of the ocean spaces. The story of a stolen document which had tremendous bearing on the present relations between Japan and America

CHAPTER I.

BURKE! Burke! For God's sake!" I do not know how long in the borderland of sleep this hail had come to me, accompanied as it was by a soft tap-tapping on the shutter door of my stateroom. I became conscious of it all of a sudden—sat up in my bunk broad awake.

"Burke, wake up and let me in! Oh, Burke!"

A man's poignant agony was in that low, cautious cry. I thought I recognized the voice as Mather's. With a bound I was at the stateroom screen door and had thrown it back. A whiff of fog, damp and clammy, whisked in from the dark; also the body of a man —of Pierce Mather. He stumbled over the brass-capped baseboard and fell against me drunkenly. I heard him sigh. His dead weight was against my shoulder. I fumbled for the light switch, but his hand groped in the dark and checked mine.

"No, no!" he croaked. "No light, Burke! The dark—the dark is better. Where's the couch?"

I took his hand to guide him to the divan that ran the width of the deck stateroom which I, fortunately, had by myself; the hand was cold, and a twitching came down from the elbow to make all the fingers jerk and flex. Though I could not see Mather's face, this clawlike hand, the whistling of his breath, told me that the man was in the last extremity of fear or nervous exhaustion under strain. I had him on the divan in an instant, could see the vague shape of his head and shoulders outlined against the lighter dark of my window. My brandy flask was handy; I gave him a shot.

"Take a bracer, man! What's got into you since I left you in the smoke room an hour ago?"

Mather did not answer directly, but kept mumbling under his breath: "Burke! Burke! For God's sake!" During a busy life with the news I had never seen a person more completely prostrated mentally. Waking out of a sound sleep to find in the dark a fellow passenger and comrade of the voyage thus on the verge of collapse; why, it was a blood-chilling business! I shook him roughly—even slapped his cheeks soundly with my open palm. At this latter treatment he pulled himself together with a faint gasp of protest and held up a checking hand.

"It's all right now—all right," he said in an altered and steadied voice. "Find a seat where I can feel you near me —and listen."

I drew up the camp stool to a position where, sitting, my pajama-clad knees brushed his. I could not see his features—only the blurred outline of his head and shoulders, but I could guess what was the heavy stamp of fear that rested on his face.

"Listen, Burke. I've been robbed!"

"Such things happen even on Pacific mail liners," I answered shortly, wondering how the loss of a watch or even of a considerable sum of money could so completely subvert a man's mind.

"But—but you don't know all—the terrible feature of it," he answered in the petulance of rasped nerves. "This robbery means sure death to one man and—and disgrace to another."

"Well?" I waited for Mather to explain in his own good time.

"I—I'm about at the end of my string, Burke; this thing's almost put me off my dot; I've simply got to get advice, and so—and so I come to you. I've come right to you—didn't know until fifteen minutes ago that I'd been robbed. You—you're almost one of us in the diplomatic service—you're a diplomat of the news, which is the next thing; you've lived in Japan; you know, of course, the situation between the two countries—Japan and America. Burke, I've simply got to tell you the whole thing."

Mather seemed ready to slip back into his first hysteria. I fumbled for his hand in the dark, found it, and gripped it to steady him. The marvel that this suave, self-centered young Bostonian with his Harvard veneer heightened to a ruby gloss by several years on the emery wheel of official Washington life could thus be stripped bare of all his reserve and come begging for a confidant was still strong with me. We had known each other just a week. A deck-chair acquaintance on the *Siberia* had ripened with more than usual speed because I was an old resident of Japan, and he, outward bound for the islands on his first trip, was eager to know much of the land. The fact that I was head of the Central Press Agency in the Far East, with headquarters at Tokyo, gave my word on things Japanese authority in his eyes, I suppose. All that I knew of Pierce Mather on the night he came crying to my stateroom door was what he had told me—that he was in the state department at Washington and was traveling to Tokyo on government business.

"I need not pledge you to secrecy, Burke," my visitor in the dark began in a voice again controlled. "You know that I would not be coming to you in this extremity if I did not trust you—did not have to trust you in this terrible situation. I——"

"You remember what T. Roosevelt once said about reposing confidences in newspaper men," I interrupted somewhat dryly. "Next to himself, he said, he'd trust——"

"Yes, yes; excuse me if I boggle things to-night. I'm—I'm—— But this is the way of it, Burke. Three weeks ago I was detached from duty in the state department and assigned temporarily as secretary to the legation at Tokyo to take the place vacated by the promotion of Edgerton Miles. The secretary of state took the opportunity of my mission to send to the ambassador some confidential reports which could not be intrusted to cable code or the mails. I know the contents of those reports. They have tremendous bearing on the present relations between the two countries—in fact, they convey to the ambassador information upon which the immediate relations—and very serious consequences—of the two nations hang. I will have to leave you to guess which international problem they bear upon."

"Perhaps I can guess," I put in shortly.

"But more than that," the shadow before me continued in a shaken voice, "in those reports was mentioned the name of a certain person—one connected with the secret-service bureau of the state department who has been in Japan for more than a year without the knowledge of the ambassador or any one else beside the president and

the secretary of state. The reports not only reveal the identity of this agent, but convey to the ambassador the information this agent has secured which bears on the pressing problem confronting the two countries. You, who've lived in Japan, can understand how perilous is the position of this secret agent once his identity is known to the Japanese government. Washington cannot take official cognizance of the agent's presence in Japan—could never even protest if he should drop out of sight. Tokyo does not know officially that such a citizen of the United States is in the empire; Tokyo, therefore, could not know officially of his disappearance. Do you see it, Burke? Once his name is known to the Japanese secret police, that agent's life is on a spider web—there wouldn't be a bubble on the surface to mark his passing."

I saw it only too well—I, who was thoroughly schooled to the ways of the Japanese police system. Where foreigners are concerned every ricksha man, every house servant is a potential spy; espionage seems to be ingrained in the nature of the lower-caste Japanese. Well I remember the petty annoyances of observation to which I was subjected when I first took up my duties in Tokyo. Mather's words instantly brought to my mind comprehension of the American agent's peril. A man detached by very virtue of his calling from his government's protection—one walking blindfolded amid the pitfalls of an Oriental jungle.

"So you have been robbed of those reports?" I asked unnecessarily.

"Yes, Burke." A shiver gripped the limbs of my companion of the dark. "Some time—it must have been to-night—the leather wallet—out of the very pocket of my coat—the inside pocket. It is beyond explaining."

"You had carried the wallet on your person all the time aboard here?"

"Every minute—even in the pocket of my pajamas when I slept," the wretched young man answered. "To-night after you left me on deck I went to the smoke room for an hour or so and watched the poker game; then to my stateroom. When I started to undress I took the wallet from my pocket and laid it on the bunk. Something—somehow it didn't look right—looked smaller. I picked it up to examine it—opened it. Nothing inside but two Pacific Mail folders from the writing room. I——"

"Then it wasn't the same wallet you started from Washington with?" I interrupted. "Somebody worked a substitution on you?"

"It was not the same—not quite," Mather whispered. "Same leather—same fold and leather tongue clasp, but a shade smaller than the one containing the confidential reports; I'm sure of that."

"When had you last examined the papers in the original wallet?" I asked, striving to find some corner to grip in the mystery.

"Why—ah—night before last. I usually looked over the papers every night before I retired to be sure; but last night I think—yes, I'm sure—I went to bed without looking in the wallet. Those three-legged races on deck, you know—they rather took it out of me; I was dog tired."

"Then the substitution might have been made yesterday or to-day," I summarized. "Any time in the last forty-eight hours. You have no idea when or how the trick was done?"

"Positively none," Mather groaned hopelessly. "Some one of the four hundred odd people on this ship is a robber; somewhere on this ship is that bundle of papers upon which a man's life—the dignity of my country—my own honor hang, and—and they might as well be five hundred fathoms down for all my power to recover them."

"Buck up, man!" I said, trying to put

into my voice an element of hope I did not feel. "We're five days out of Yokohama and much can be done in that time. You can be sure your reports won't be destroyed; the thief wants them for the information they contain, but he must also save them to lay before his superiors—visible proof of their contents. Of course we can guess the nationality of the thief."

"But there are thirty-odd Japanese gentlemen aboard," Mather protested. "And we took on some forty or fifty coolies at Honolulu, didn't we? How can we accuse one at random?"

"Well, at least," I put in defensively, "the nature of the case permits us to limit our suspicions to seventy or so out of four hundred; that's a start. Let's build up the hypothesis something like this: The Japanese government keeps one or more secret agents at Washington—that's regular enough, for every country does it and we have ours abroad. One of these agents learns you are going to Tokyo—perhaps he even knows definitely what he would reasonably suspect: that the state department takes the opportunity of your going to send by you certain messages which it would not care to intrust to cable or mail. Of course it is his duty to accompany you and watch his chance to lift that valuable information. It does not take a very sharp eye to see, day by day, the shape of a wallet inside your coat; anybody, he reasons, who carries a stiff and bulky wallet constantly in his coat pocket—and even sticks to the habit when he changes to summer whites as you did on leaving Honolulu—must value the contents of that wallet highly. So, knowing where his game lies, he has only to contrive a substitution—either while you slept, which is improbable; or by some sleight-of-hand work in broad day and right under your nose, which is more likely. Now if you can remember just which of the Japanese passengers you have talked with—strolled about the deck with—we've got a flying start on the search for the thief."

I do not pride myself on any peculiar, analytical traits of the Sherlock Holmes variety, and I am frank to admit that in building up this all too-obvious hypothesis I was leaving holes in it big enough to drive a sprinkling cart through; but my single aim was to try to lift the unfortunate Mather out of a despond which threatened to be a real menace to his sanity. I realized that there in the dark of my stateroom in mid-Pacific I had been called upon to doctor a man's soul and my dose was not homeopathic. He, poor devil, was ready enough to snatch at it.

"Well, I've associated with a good many of them," my companion faltered, evidently straining to focus his recollection. "Thought I'd like to get acquainted with as many as possible because of future relations in Tokyo, you know. There's little Doctor Tokonoku; I've had a couple of games of chess in the smoke room with him and——"

"Tokonoku's harmless; I know him," I cut in. "Played with him myself."

"——and that little chap who says he's been studying cotton raising in Texas—little Something-or-other Matsu. A couple of games of shuffleboard with him."

"Shuffleboard sounds harmless," I ventured.

"And—by the Lord, Burke; it couldn't be!" Mather trembled afresh, and his lowered voice squeaked and cracked under a sudden thrust of excitement. "That fellow Mad—Madatoya—the silk agent from London; he was showing me some jujutsu holds after the games on deck yesterday afternoon, and——"

"Steady now, Mather!" I cautioned. "Tell just what he did; how he did it; how many people were looking on; everything."

I heard the shadowy shape before me take a long breath.

"After the finish of the three-legged race I dropped into a chair up forward by the saloon door, and this chap Madatoya came and sat down beside me. He congratulated me on winning one of the prizes, and our talk ran to athletics in Japan. He told me about the training the schoolboys get and how all candidates for the police force are put through a jujutsu course. I asked him some questions about how a jujutsu wrestler could stand up before an expert boxer, and he, laughing, offered to demonstrate a defense against fists.

"As a joke, of course, I took him up. We stood up, and I squared off at him."

"Wait a minute," I broke in, "who were in the chairs thereabouts—any spectators?"

"Only old Mrs. Jenkins, as I remember. She was doing some crocheting in the chair next to mine, and——"

"And Mrs. Jenkins is nearsighted," I reminded Mather. "Remember the day she thought the alligator pear at your plate was her grandson's rubber ball?"

"Madatoya crouched in front of me, his hands spread out at the level of his knees. I feinted with my left and swung a light right cross to his face, and like a flash he was under my guard, with one elbow under the chin, forcing my head back, and the other arm around my waist with the fingers pressing against my spine. He could have thrown me or broken my back. He held me that way a second or so, as I remember, laughingly taunting me to break the grip; then he let me go."

"Was your head thrown back so that you could not see him during all the time he held you?" I asked.

"As I remember, yes. I thought at the time how helpless I was."

"Then what?"

"Oh, he showed me one or two other simple tricks of tripping, and we went down to the smoke room for a cocktail. I thought nothing more of it until this minute."

I put another question:

"And that night—the night after the jujutsu lesson—when you went to bed you didn't examine to see if you had your wallet?"

"No, Burke, I didn't. I was so dog tired I just fell into my bunk."

For several minutes we sat there in the dark, no word between us. Finally I spoke the result of my deliberations:

"Mather, on principal I'd say you would be foolish to take this matter to the captain. If you had no suspicion to work on it would be simply letting another person into the secret of your loss to do so. But I think what you've told me about the jujutsu lesson justifies you in having a very well-founded suspicion of this fellow Madatoya and that the captain will have excuse to exercise his authority in a search of the man's stateroom and person, at least. Even if we are wrong the gravity of the case and the strength of the evidence will excuse the mistake."

The young secretary of legation was on his feet instantly, eager to follow my suggestion. I threw a raincoat over my pajamas, slipped my feet into straw sandals, and we went out onto the dripping deck. Seven bells were just being struck when we climbed to the shadowy bridge. The second officer, on watch there, demurred at first against rousing Captain Kendall, but upon my assuring him that it was a matter of the gravest importance that needed the captain's attention, and one that couldn't wait, he disappeared into the murk toward the door of the captain's cabin back of the bridge. He soon returned to tell us Captain Kendall awaited us in his cabin, and he guided us to the door.

We found the skipper sitting on the edge of his berth, his uniform jacket

hastily thrown over his sleeping clothes. He received us somewhat brusquely—a manner we could well pardon under the circumstances—but when Mather began in his nervous, slightly hysterical manner to detail the circumstances of the robbery Captain Kendall's first flash of irritation was quickly dissipated by acute interest. The gray old master of the *Siberia* leaned eagerly forward, his hands clutching the raised side of his berth and the eyes under his heavy white brows never leaving Mather's face. When the tale was finished Captain Kendall bent his head for a minute and seemed to be studying the pattern of the Chinese rattan "mules" he had on his bare feet.

"Mr. Mather, sir," he began, "the captain of a ship at sea has wide responsibilities and unusual police powers, but he hesitates to use them except in the most extreme circumstances because he will be held to account for his actions by his owners, and, like as not, the government whose protection an arrested passenger may claim. In this case a mistake would be peculiarly unfortunate for me, running as I do into three Japanese ports; these Japanese are very touchy on points of honor. Moreover, I would not care to have word of a scandal pass among my passengers. I think the best way to do would be to have this Japanese gentleman summoned here now; we can then question him, and, if necessary, detain him while his room is being searched."

He brought a passenger list out of a drawer and studied it a minute; then pressed an electric button. A petty officer appeared in the door and saluted.

"Banks," said the captain, "go down to stateroom No. 141, present the captain's compliments to Mr. Madatoya, and ask him to come to my room as soon as he can."

The man at the door slipped into the gloom, and we were left in an embarrassing silence. I began to feel very poignant unrest; doubts as to the soundness of my snap deduction against the Japanese jutjutsu demonstrator pattered against my consciousness fast as the congealing drops of fog on the panes of the stateroom windows. I began to wonder how far into the halter I had thrust my head out of impulsive sympathy for the distress of another man. Surely if this Madatoya should prove a man of some consequence in Japan and we should be unable to pin the theft on him swift vengeance would be taken against the representative in Tokyo of the Central Press, for one.

Hurried footsteps sounded outside the cabin, the door was hastily jerked open, and the captain's messenger thrust a white face into the square of radiance cut out of the night.

"I think you'd better come below, sir," he stuttered. "Somethin's happened to the gent'mun you sent me to fetch."

"What's that! What's that!" Captain Kendall was already reaching for his greatcoat. Mather and I leaped to our feet. The three of us burst out of the door and were stumbling down the ladder to the boat deck the next instant. The fog was cold and gray; the deck seemed an interminable wet alley leading to blank space; the feel of vast ocean spaces and the mysteries they brew was in the air—charged it with a pricking sense of the weird. We hurried down the grand staircase to the saloon, then followed the lead of the bos'n down a long alley of staterooms—an alley dim and sleep heavy. The noises of sleepers sounded all about us—stirrings, mutterings, the whimper of a child, the stilling coo of a mother.

Beyond a linen closet and the shield of a bulkhead three stateroom doors opened from the passage—three staterooms isolated in part from the rest by the bulkhead shield. Two of the doors were hooked back so that the unoccupied space of the staterooms

showed beyond them; the third was shut, and before this the bos'n paused.

"I had to bust it in with my shoulder, sir, when the gent'mun didn't answer my knock," he said and opened the door. He put his arm in and turned the light switch.

The blaze of light showed the figure of a Japanese in a blue crape kimono sprawled on the floor; his bare legs straddled out from under the cloud of flying storks on the garment in an attitude of a runner thunderbolted in full flight. Just below one shoulder the carved ivory handle of a Japanese dagger stuck up abruptly from the body.

Near an outstretched hand—a hand that seemed vainly gripping for the thing just beyond reach—lay a black leather wallet.

Mather swooped upon it, pawed through its pockets, then turned to the captain and me a face gray green and ghastly.

"M-mine," he stammered, "but I—I'm too late! Empty!"

CHAPTER II.

For more than a minute, I think, we three stood there over that grotesque thing the flying storks covered, stricken cold and dumb. Then——

"Gentlemen, this is a murder," Captain Kendall said sententiously, and at the moment nothing redundant in his statement appealed to us. Mather, still gripping the empty wallet convulsively, sank weakly to the couch and covered his eyes. The man was shaking as in an ague; for an instant I feared he was going to scream like a woman.

"Anything I c'n do, sir?" the bos'n nervously inquired from the alleyway outside the door.

"Go at once and wake up the surgeon," commanded the captain. "Bring him here, then take your station outside the bulkhead door and let no one else pass."

We heard the soft padding of the bos'n's feet on the carpeted alleyway; then silence fell. None of us moved or spoke; there was only the sobbing respiration of Mather on the couch. Perhaps five dreadful minutes passed thus before footfalls again sounded without, and Doctor Sparks, the *Siberia's* surgeon, crossed the baseboard of the stateroom. He was in his pajamas and with feet slippered; the sleep was not yet out of his eyes. Captain Kendall merely pointed to the bundle of blue and white crape on the floor as the surgeon entered. A sharp gasp from Doctor Sparks and he was on his knees beside the body, his ready, professional hands at their exploring almost out of instinct.

With some effort he drew the short sword or one-edged Japanese dagger out of the wound and laid it carefully on a towel. Then he rolled the body of Madatoya over so that the narrow, crescent eyes stared unwinkingly at the cluster of electrics on the ceiling. Perfunctorily he laid a hand over the heart, a finger on the jugular, and shook his head.

"The stab from below the shoulder reached the man's heart," he said, "and he was dead before he struck the floor. There wasn't any struggle as far as I can see. Hello—what's this?"

The surgeon suddenly reached down the length of the murdered man's right arm, which had been folded under the body when we discovered the tragedy, but had fallen limply to one side under Doctor Sparks' manipulations. The hand was all but covered by a fold of the kimono; only the tips of the fingers remained visible. Sparks carefully disengaged the fingers from some small object they grasped, and held it up to the light. It was a gold-mounted pince-nez with a two-inch fragment of very fine gold chain depending from the tiny hole in the upper corner of the left-hand lens. The surgeon passed the glasses

to Captain Kendall and began pawing about on the floor near the body. With a satisfied grunt he held up to our view a small gold hoop such as is worn behind the ear of those affecting the pince-nez; the companion fragment of the broken gold chain dangled from the loop.

"These were not the dead man's," the surgeon said as he pointed to the base of Madatoya's nose. "No pinch marks here; there would be if he was a wearer of glasses."

Doctor Sparks rose, took the glasses from the captain's hand, and carefully examined them under the light.

"I'm not a sharp on optics, captain," he said, "but I should say these lenses were built to rectify a fairly pronounced myopia. The man who wore these will miss them."

"He can come to me for them," Captain Kendall grimly remarked as he wrapped the glasses and the ear loop in his handkerchief and tucked the bundle carefully into the pocket of his great-coat. As he did so I saw him cast a sudden shrewd glance at Mather, who had removed his hands from his face and now sat staring blankly up at the frosted incandescents. With a quick catching of the breath I noted that the secretary of legation had on either side of his rather sharply bridged nose an indented mark—the mark of pince-nez. In my brief ship acquaintance with him I had not noticed before that he was a user of glasses; such a minor detail of a man's appearance naturally would not register one time in a hundred with the ordinary individual meeting so many people as I do in the course of affairs. I looked at my friend's waistcoat, hoping to see pinned there the little spring coil many slaves of the pince-nez prefer to the ear loop; there was none.

Of course, so it came to me in a flash, this scrutiny of mine was wild and extravagant and induced by the clap of tragedy just broken on us by the bewildering turn given to the affair of the missing state papers. But why that sudden searching glance of Captain Kendall's? Captain Kendall had no bias to pull him to partisanship in Mather's favor, such as I had; he merely saw facts as fate played them on the table. The facts, as so far revealed, pointed inexorably to Pierce Mather of all the four-hundred-odd souls aboard the *Siberia* the single one possessing a motive compelling enough to lead to murder. Was all this hysteria of his—the visit to my stateroom and the subsequent repetition of his tale to the captain—mere play acting to cover a grisly back trail of murder, and had the cunning intelligence of a slayer overlooked the one inevitable telltale circumstance said to exist to confound every taker of life—in this instance the pince-nez? Of course, I had known this man but twelve days, and I might have been deceived by his personable surface character. One does not sound the depths of a man in twelve days.

"Doctor," I asked, vaguely laying a foundation of defense for my friend against accusation only hinted at in the captain's sharp look, "how long would you say this man has been dead?"

"Not more than an hour—two at the most," the surgeon answered. "Rigor mortis has not yet set in."

I looked at my watch; the hour was twelve-fifteen. It had been just about an hour since I was roused from sleep by Mather's frantic summons at my lattice door.

"I should think the scabbard of that sword should be around somewhere," I volunteered, and I moved over to the couch where Mather sat and began pawing behind some of the dead man's effects piled there.

"The matter of searching for evidence is entirely the duty of the ship's officers, Mr. Burke," Captain Kendall stopped me with a sharp tone of command. "I think you may assist Mr.

Mather to his stateroom now. Surgeon Sparks and I will take charge, and we would rather act alone. I must command you both that you say nothing of what you have seen and heard here to any of the other passengers. If we are to lay hands on the murderer it is imperative that as little as possible of the events of this night shall be noised about decks. Now, if you please, gentlemen——"

There was no gainsaying the captain's orders even though I strongly desired to share in probing the mystery of the Japanese passenger's death. Mather rose mechanically at my beckon, and we went out into the alleyway together. I accompanied him to his stateroom, which opened from the starboard deck a few doors from mine. No word passed between us until we paused at the door of his quarters. Then he put a hand falteringly on my shoulder and spoke in a low, tense voice:

"Burke, my dear fellow, I am a little child in the dark just now, and—and horribly afraid. You'll stand by me—you'll help me, Burke! I—I need a hand—to grip."

He fumbled for my hand, clasped it convulsively, then was gone. I heard his door shut, and waited for a minute before. I went to my own room, but not to sleep. With me in the dark was the shape of something straddled out under a tumbled blue and white kimono covered with flying storks—something whose outstretched hand groped for a leather wallet as if for a precious thing, and in the fingers of whose other hand was gripped a delicate gold frame and two lenses. Came to me the picture, too, of Pierce Mather's strained and ghastly pale face, the starting eyes, and between them, on either side of the sharply bridged nose, deep red creases.

Angrily I accused myself of being disloyal to a friend as I tossed in my berth; reproached myself as one so old in knowledge of the evil things of the world that instantly I prejudged one as guilty upon the first appearance of evidence bearing against him. But how could cold facts be avoided? Was it conceivable that there was anybody else among the *Siberia's* passengers—or even among the crew—who possessed a motive for murdering the Japanese so strong as Mather's, or who had any motive whatever for doing Madatoya harm? To what other man besides the young secretary of legation was given the knowledge that in the leather wallet stolen from him lay secrets of tremendous value in a certain quarter? Who other than Madatoya himself, the secret-service agent who had paid for his zeal with his life, could know that this thing of great price had passed from Mather to Madatoya in that instant of legerdemain when the Japanese held the American in the jujutsu grip on deck? Would any one but the man whose loss of the wallet meant the ruin of a career and the jeopardizing of a nation's diplomatic interests take the tremendous risk of murdering for the recovery of the papers when the limits of flight were set by the rails of the *Siberia?*

No, the case was clear. Mather, missing the wallet after Madatoya's clever ruse of the day of the deck games, had suspected the thief, awaited his opportunity, and then struck the Japanese to the heart in a desperate moment of encounter. But why, then, his hysterical outpouring to me and Captain Kendall of the robbery tale and his naming of Madatoya as the man he suspected of the theft; why the placing of himself deliberately in the path of a pointing finger? Either the hysterical reaction of a high-strung nature drawn by the unaccountable fascination of blood lust to a secret gloating over the crime, or supreme criminal ingenuity, daring all by deliberately placing hope of safety against the weight of circumstantial evidence

unprovable. Some of the most notorious murderers, I reflected, had almost escaped the consequences of their crimes by permitting suspicion to fall upon them unhindered—even by aiding by their own acts the logical sequence of damning circumstance to a certain point.

But here was I, building up a gallows to hang Pierce Mather on when at the coming of day he would meet me on deck wearing gold pince-nez—his accustomed property. Then scaffold, crosstree, and halter would fall to the ground and I would be caught in my own treasonable folly. For if that bit of gold and quartz crystal clenched in the dead man's fingers could not be proved to be Mather's property, then Mather was innocent of any guilt. Plainly as if an inanimate thing could be given a mouth and speech, that pince-nez in the murdered Madatoya's hand called: "I was snatched from the nose of the slayer; his eyes alone match mine!"

No sleep was mine, and the dawn came chill and dour. For an hour before the breakfast gong I walked the fog-draped decks, turning over and over for the hundredth time the baffling circumstances of the night's mystery. It seemed, as I looked out into the impenetrable wall of the fog, that the genius of the great water wilderness whose paths the *Siberia* coursed by sufferance had laid its mocking hand on the ship to confound puny mortals thereon with unfathomable craft. The flat, white wall of fog was the face of this evil wraith of the sea—blind, expressionless, inexorable to will and to do.

Mather was not in his seat at the captain's table. Captain Kendall gave me just a nod of recognition as he took his place, and he had no word for any of his favorites at right and left; he ate his breakfast hurriedly, and left his seat before most of the passengers had come to table. I was quite as brief about my fruit and fish, anxious as I was to learn how Mather had passed the night and what was his present frame of mind. I went from the saloon straight to his stateroom. He answered my knock with a languid "Come!" I found him sitting in his pajamas before a tray of food, which was untouched; an empty whisky glass by the side of the tray told of the man's unwise fortifying against a new day of strain. Mather's face was drawn and pinched like the face of a fever patient; a trembling was in his limbs.

"What news, Burke?" he shot at me before I was hardly in his door. "Has the captain found—anything?"

I shook my head.

"I had hoped—hoped——" His hands fumbled over the jacket of his pajamas as if searching automatically for something that should be there, and a little furrow came between his eyes—telltale of eye strain. He wore no pince-nez. I saw his hand reach for a bit of toast on the tray—and overreach. His eyes were serving him badly. Had I dared trust myself to put the question casually I would have asked him what had become of his glasses, but—and here again I was acting on the hypothesis that Pierce Mather was guilty of murder—I could not bring myself to voice a leading question which would be sure index of my suspicion.

"Burke," he said in a dead voice, "there's just one chance for me. I've figured it all out—balanced the chances and taken account of the human equation. The one who murdered Madatoya did not do it for possession of my papers—there was something else he expected to find in that wallet—something nobody but himself and the man he killed knew about presumably. When he found instead of the thing he wanted a mere official envelope sealed with the seal of the state department and addressed to the Ameri-

can ambassador in Tokyo there's a chance—a good chance, don't you think, Burke?—that he threw the packet of papers overboard. He'd be furious at missing the thing he'd done murder for—money—letters involving an affair between himself and Madatoya—any one of a score of things which might have great value in his eyes. He'd be afraid to keep the incriminating papers, and it would be quite natural for him to pitch them over the rail in the dark."

"Without even reading them?" I put in.

Again that hard wrinkle between Mather's eyes as he leaned forward to bring them the better to bear on my face.

"Don't knock my only prop out from under me, Burke," he pleaded, a bit petulantly. "Grant that he does read them; is there any reason to suppose that anybody on this ship besides Madatoya would know the value of that sealed package? Wouldn't the thief and killer throw the batch over the rail after he'd read them nevertheless?"

"If he was a Japanese—a thinking Japanese who knows the trend of the times—I'm afraid not, Mather," I answered. "If those reports contain information so vital to the interests of the United States, as you say they do, I think the man who possesses them now will consider it his patriotic duty to turn them over to his government. He need not explain how they came to be in his hands."

Was all this speculation on Mather's part—this grasping for straws of hope in a maelstrom of disaster—but part and parcel of a grim farce of deception? Were the papers he had recovered at the price of a dagger stroke in a man's back in reality somewhere safely concealed within the very walls of the stateroom where I sat? These questions hammer-hammered at my brain even as my sympathies went out to the distracted fellow before me. Well enough, I reassured myself, to allow one's heart to be moved by suffering; but reason is cold and inflexible—has to do with facts, not furbelows of emotion. Why was Pierce Mather without his glasses? That was a question in the realm of fact that must be answered.

"Listen, my friend," said Mather, shifting on his camp chair so as to bring his straining eyes closer to my face, "I have puzzled out my position here in the dark of the night—have tried to build some little raft to hold me up and keep the waters from closing over my head. Here is my scheme and I ask you to help me—I beg you like a drowning man begs for help. We are five days out of Yokohama still; those five days are precious, for we know that during that time the papers are never more than a few yards from us—maybe a few feet at times; in fact, we may walk right over them as we pace the deck. During those five days—and nights—I must move heaven and earth to recover that sealed envelope, and if I fail before we drop anchor at Yokohama——"

Mather winced, and in his eyes stood tears of weakness—of mental exhaustion.

"If I fail in these five days, Burke, there's only one course open for me—continue the search in Japan. Find a candle flame in the Milky Way, you might say! How I'll do it—where I'll begin I haven't the least idea. I only know that I must."

"But, my dear fellow," I interposed, "your position; as secretary of legation you cannot be sleuthing after stolen documents in Tokyo."

"I have thought of that, too. There's just one point in my favor in that connection. The legation does not know that I have been appointed to fill the vacancy; does not know, in fact, that any one has been assigned by the department in Washington. The depart-

ment has a way of boggling along and filling positions in its own good time without advance notification of its actions. So the American ambassador at Tokyo does not know that Pierce Mather is coming to join his staff and does not know, either, that Pierce Mather is supposed to be bringing with him an important communication from the secretary. In the natural course of events he would not know either fact, if I should fail to appear, for two months or more. You, Burke, will be the only person in Japan who will know that such a man as Pierce Mather debarked from the steamship *Siberia,* because from the moment the first landing boat touches the pier at Yokohama until such time as the communications from the secretary of state to the ambassador are laid in his hands with seals unbroken Pierce Mather will cease to exist to all but you."

"Why, you're mad, man!" I could not help exclaiming. "You—a stranger in a land full of the most impossible contradictions and surprises—you try single-handed, or even with my help, to find a packet small enough to be carried in a wallet? Absurd! Better go straight to the ambassador and make a clean report of it all. No blame can be attached to you. You were not lax in your duty. Besides, the ambassador must be prepared to shape his position to meet any move the Japanese government may make in the light of the information it gains from the stolen papers."

Mather groaned.

"When—when that information is known to the Japanese cabinet," he faltered, "there will be no position left for the ambassador to take. Three years of diplomacy will be undone—Washington's hand will be spread on the table, and there will be nothing but for Japan to take the tricks. Then that secret agent whose name is revealed to the Japanese government—his life——"

A knock came at the door. It was opened at Mather's bidding, and a sailor saluted.

"Captain Kendall's compliments," he said, "and will Mr. Mather kindly step to the captain's quarters on the bridge?"

Mather hurriedly dressed and went forward. I passed out on deck, where the long lines of shawl-muffled passengers stretched in their chairs, unaware of the coils of mystery tightening about the ship. My mind was geared as high as the revolutions of the *Siberia's* propellers; it raced unconscionably. My every impulse was to grip the hand of that likable young fellow from Washington and tell him I would see him through his trouble at any price; all my instinct of sympathy was enlisted in unquestioning service in his behalf, and the lure of the mystery fired all my journalistic enthusiasm to the core. If only Pierce Mather would clear himself of the black suspicion circumstances had thrown over him, then would I launch with him on any quest. This hour, when he was before the captain and undergoing the examination that odd light in the captain's eyes on the night before had presaged—this was the hour of test for Pierce Mather.

CHAPTER III.

Perhaps it was an hour—an interminable hour—I paced the deck alone, waiting to know the outcome of Mather's interview with Captain Kendall. In my furious mental wrestling with the elusive mystery of the night, I was oblivious to all surroundings. The chattering, yellow-haired flirt who plied her campaign of conquest at shuffleboard; the buzzing knot of missionaries in the ingle by the after ventilators; those romping youngsters of the Nagasaki consul's—they were all manikins to me. I must have jumped when a deck stew-

ard touched my arm and murmured: "Captain Kendall asks to see you in his quarters, sir." I followed him up to the bridge, and was admitted to the commodious cabin behind the chart room.

Mather sat there, and Doctor Sparks. Captain Kendall paused in his pacing the floor to nod at me and jerk his head toward a swivel chair by the side of his desk. Mather raised his face—the face of one dead—to launch a mute appeal with his eyes as I passed him. His aspect was terrible; utter hopelessness was written on his linen-white countenance.

"Mr. Burke," Captain Kendall began brusquely, "please tell me everything that transpired between Mr. Mather and yourself last night, from the time he came to your stateroom and roused you."

I did as he bid, carefully recalling, as nearly as possible, the conversation between us, as I have set it down here. Mather listened with jaw tight set and eyes straining as if to read the thoughts lying behind my speech.

"Did you notice whether Mr. Mather wore his glasses—his pince-nez—when he came to your stateroom to tell you he had been robbed?" queried the skipper searchingly.

"I did not know Mr. Mather wore glasses," I answered, "until Doctor Sparks called attention to the absence of pinch marks on the dead man's nose; then I saw the red marks indicating the pince-nez habit."

"So you could not identify these?" Here Captain Kendall extended in his palm the damning evidence of gold and crystal the ship's surgeon had found between Madatoya's fingers. "You could not say whether or not this is the property of Mr. Mather?"

"I should think Mr. Mather himself could give the best answer to that question," I answered.

Kendall scowled slightly and tightened his lips under his severe, close-cropped beard.

"I am asking you, Mr. Burke," he said shortly.

"No, I could give no opinion on that matter."

The captain turned suddenly to Mather. There was in the tone of his voice something almost bullying,

"You say, Mr. Mather, that you last had your glasses on just before you went to bed last night, and that you didn't miss them until just before I summoned you here this morning."

"I may have unconsciously missed them when we were—were down there in the dead man's stateroom last night," Mather began hesitatingly. "I was so excited I did not get an impression of their absence. It was not until this morning, when I started to dress, that I could not find them. I—ah—they were not where I think I put them when I took them off before I discovered the robbery. I looked all over my stateroom for them this morning, but failed to find them."

"Where did you put them when you took them off last night?" Kendall queried.

"On the edge of my washstand."

"Hum! And was your port open—the port opening to the deck by the right side of your washstand?"

"I cannot recollect. I think it was." Mather passed a trembling hand over his eyes as if to brush away shadows clouding his memory.

"There was a light in your stateroom, then?" Captain Kendall pressed him. "One standing in the dark of the deck could see you put your pince-nez on the edge of your washstand—if you did."

"Yes, it was lighted. I had not yet switched off the light before undressing. I always undress in the dark—on shipboard, at least."

"And after you discovered you had been robbed, as you say—when you ran

to Mr. Burke's room to tell him of it, you left your light on?"

"Yes," said Mather.

"And your glasses still lying where you had placed them?"

"I believe so. Yes, I must have."

"Did you lock your door behind you?" Captain Kendall was shooting the questions like a trained prosecutor.

"Yes—no! I must have left the door wide open. I was so thunderstruck, you know. I acted blindly."

The skipper summed up:

"Then you laid your pince-nez on the washstand within reach of the open port in your lighted stateroom and ran out, leaving the door unlocked behind you?"

"That must be the way of it, captain," Mather answered dully.

"But how do you account for these glasses, which you say must be yours, being gripped in a murdered Japanese gentleman's fingers an hour after you laid them down?"

"I have told you I cannot account for it," Mather exclaimed pettishly. "It is utterly beyond me."

"You feel some discomfort without your glasses, Mr. Mather," the surgeon broke in. "You have difficulty——"

"I suffer from an astigmatism which throws the focus of my eyes out of whack," the embassy secretary replied. "At the present moment my eyes are weak from strain."

Captain Kendall passed the glasses to the young man with a quick gesture of apology.

"Excuse me, sir, for causing you needless discomfort," he said. "Put on your glasses, and we will go down and look at that washstand of yours. There might be finger marks which would throw some light——"

"Why! Why! These are not mine!"

The exclamation came sharply from Mather. He sat blinking owlishly behind the lenses hung from his nose. Through them his eyes took on a swollen, fishy look. We three started.

Mather snatched the fragile bow from his nose and began to titter. A shrill note of hysteria was in his laugh.

"Ho, ho!" he cackled. "Saved by a pair of specs! Ho, ho! Two bits of glass and a dinky gold frame an alibi!"

The overwrought chap was rocking in his seat, tittering and mumbling like any defective. It was a jarring thing to see.

"Look here!" The skipper had him by the shoulder, and was shaking him smartly. "What do you mean? Didn't you say these glasses were yours when I showed them to you first off after you came in here?"

Mather was on his feet. He tried to spread the bow of the pince-nez over the captain's nose, his hands trembling so that the broken gold chain writhed like a live thing against the skipper's beard.

"See for yourself!" he cried. "Look through them! They're ground for a man almost blind—strong as a telescope refractor! Why, man, I couldn't wear such lenses; they'd eat my eyes out."

Captain Kendall, with a brusque movement, took the glasses from Mather's shaking fingers and fitted them to his nose. He glared stupidly through the lenses.

"Strong enough for a horse!" he muttered. Then:

"Doctor Sparks, have you got anything like a chart of eyeglass lenses—something that'll give us a line on what kind of eyes these are supposed to fit?"

The surgeon thought he had, and went to his room to get it. We were silent during his absence. I confess I could not speak, so bewildered I was by this sudden new twist to the mystery. Out of the jumble of my thoughts lifted one clearly, exultantly: come what might in the development of this baffling case, suspicion was for all time snatched from Pierce Mather. The logic of circumstance which had first pointed to this clean, personable young

chap had been hateful to me. I was as sure of his innocence as if I had just heard an expert optician declare from the witness stand that these all-important specs were made for a Numidian dromedary and none other.

Doctor Sparks returned with a heavy book on optics, in the appendix of which was a chart of numbered lenses with prescriptions according. With his penknife tip he carefully let the right-hand lens out of its frame and examined its beveled edge for a number. On one side of the edge, very fine, was scratched, or etched, not numbers but this legend: "Von Z—Berlin."

"Must mean," the surgeon hazarded, after searching in vain for more tangible identification, "that these glasses were specially prescribed. By a specialist in Berlin, I should say—Von Somebody or other."

Mather produced a cardcase, and from it took a small, folded paper.

"My prescription for glasses," he said, extending the bit of script to Captain Kendall. "Always have it with me in case I break them."

Kendall glanced at the paper, and passed it to Sparks, who, noting the numbers on the prescription, ran a finger down the chart.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed. "Number D-150; S-100—simple astigmatism. Mr. Mather, that's your case."

The skipper reached for the young secretary's hand. He hesitated on the edge of speech, confused.

"Mr. Mather, sir, I am glad. Perhaps I may have appeared——"

"It's all right, captain," Mather interrupted, returning the other's grip with a hearty clasp. "I am too happy to be out of the woods to remember anything unpleasant against you. It was natural—quite natural. You should follow the way signs pointed. But here's a facer: Who stole my glasses, and why?"

"That's only part of the question," answered the captain. "Did the man who took your glasses off your washstand murder Madatōya, intending to put them in the dead man's hand to incriminate you?"

"And left his own there by mistake?" I supplemented.

"Or had his snatched off by the death lunge of Madatoya's hand and didn't dare wait to make the substitution—or forgot to do so," Mather suggested.

"Hold on!"

The surgeon, who had been thumbing the pages of his reference work as we speculated, broke in eagerly. "Listen to this!" he commanded:

"The remarkable operation of removing the lens from the eyeball in cases where that delicate part of the visual mechanism has been rendered useless by congenital cause, by cataract, or as the result of accident, has been achieved with success only in recent years. Doctor Karl von Zumholst, of Berlin, not only has performed this master *essai* with universally favorable results, but has perfected a spectacle lens which restores to the patient full use of his optic organs. The operation entails the removal——

"But pshaw! No need of going into those details." The surgeon looked up from his book with the kindling of enthusiasm in his eyes and the humorous lines of his wide mouth. "Here you have 'Von Z—Berlin' on the bevel of this lens, and you get 'Von Zumholst, of Berlin, oculist and surgeon,' in the book. What does that convey to you?"

Captain Kendall's weather-stained face was breaking into an eager smile.

"I don't want to whistle to false signals again," he exclaimed, "but I should say we want to look for a man with no lenses in his eyes."

"Big contract, captain," Doctor Sparks warned. "Nearly three hundred men on this ship, counting Chinos, and you can't tell by looking at a man's eyes whether——"

"We can cut it down to the men in the saloon," I put in. "Sailors and steer-

age passengers are not given to gold-rimmed pince-nez."

"Limit it further to the Japanese in the first cabin," Mather added. "I'm convinced nobody but a Japanese could know the value of what Madatoya took from me."

"I think you're right, Mr. Mather," Kendall affirmed. "Madatoya was killed with a Japanese short sword, not his own—at least the scabbard is not among his effects."

"And that narrows the search to how many, captain?" Mather asked.

"There are thirty-two Japanese men and one woman in the saloon," he replied. "Madatoya was the thirty-third."

CHAPTER IV.

I can conceive what had been the mental torture of Pierce Mather when he entered Captain Kendall's cabin for his examination an hour or so before. Then he stood alone before the cunning snare of circumstance diabolically set against him; he knew that in the eyes of authority, which at sea is vested without appeal in the ship's captain, he had been pushed under the shadow of a homicide without a single saving gleam in the dark. Now he came out into the sunlight cleared of suspicion, with his former prosecutor as well as Doctor Sparks and myself allies in the combat with blind mystery. A wedge had been driven into that mystery by the strange intervention of two bits of rock crystal and a thin bow of gold; the anonymity of the thief and murderer had been whittled down from the four hundred-odd souls aboard the *Siberia* to thirty-two. More than that, among those thirty-two was one who could not long escape detection by the helplessness imposed upon him through the loss of his mechanical eyes; him we must inevitably detect before the *Siberia* passed the forts at the entrance of Yeddo Bay.

Mather, raised by the reaction from his ordeal to the height of nervous exaltation and alertness, stepped buoyantly out ahead of us and led the way to his stateroom. We passed down the windward deck, deserted by the chair loungers because of the biting sting of the wind, and came to Mather's stateroom without attracting the attention of any. There the young secretary demonstrated how he had removed his pince-nez and placed it on the edge of the washstand before retiring; showed just how he stood in reference to the frosted incandescent globe in the panel overhead as he removed the gold loop from behind his ear. Captain Kendall heard him through without comment. When he had finished he stepped through the stateroom door and out onto the deck.

Now Mather's stateroom did not open directly on the deck, but to an alleyway which gave onto the deck a few inches beyond his stateroom door. The port was let into the deck side of his room a few feet above the narrow couch screwed against the deckward wall of the stateroom; the heavy round circle of brass-rimmed glass swung on a lateral hinge.

The *Siberia's* master stepped around the corner from the alley door to the long bench riveted to the deck boards with its back against the iron wall of the deck house. He stood on this and thrust his arm through Mather's open port. We who remained in the stateroom saw his fingers easily sweep the corner of the washstand; nor were Kendall's arms unusually long. It was, then, sufficiently demonstrated that one standing on the deck bench could have lifted Mather's pince-nez from the washstand ledge, even with no great reach of arm.

Captain Kendall came back to the stateroom.

"Well, even that doesn't prove much," he said, "when Mather admits he ran out in his panic and left the door open. The person who wanted his

glasses probably hardly dared reach for them when he was in the room, even though he had the light off—might just as well have come through the door when Mather ran to your room, Mr. Burke."

I did not answer, for something—call it blind inspiration or a newspaper man's intuition for turning over every rock in the path of investigation—led me to draw nearer the port. I thought I saw a tiny crack in the brass frame by the hinge, ran my hand over it, and brought away a single long hair. It snapped as I pulled; a short filament stayed in the crack of the lateral hinge where it had been caught. What remained between my fingers was probably sixteen or eighteen inches in length. I stretched it between thumb and forefinger of both hands and turned to show the others.

"Exhibit B," I said shortly.

"Relic of a previous tenant, Burke," Mather laughed. "Don't try to complicate a mystery sufficiently abstruse already."

"I hardly think so," Captain Kendall objected. "Your room boy polished your porthole brasswork yesterday or shirked his job. He was at work when I made the inspection of the ship at noon. He wouldn't have overlooked even a hair, for I've jumped the fear of God into those heathen recently. Let's have a closer look at that hair."

I stretched it out on the white counterpane of the bunk, and we four bent our heads over it. The hair was black—glossy black, fibrous, and more coarse than the average woman's. There was no tendency to curl or twist in it; for texture and lifelessness it might have come from a fiddle bow.

"The Chinos on this ship all wear their hair short now," said Kendall, a furrow of perplexity deepening between his brows. "Unusually coarse—might have come from a horse's tail—if we had a horse aboard."

The absurdity of the skipper's speculation did not strike us; we were too alert to the new element in the mystery this single strand of black hair had injected.

"A Japanese woman," I ventured. "You know the coarseness and sleekness of their hair—always oiling and brushing it—no curl in it. Perhaps——"

"Absurd!" Kendall spluttered. "Only one Jap woman aboard—in the first cabin, at least. Little Miss Tokonoku—funny little brown mouse—she sits at the first officer's table, you remember. Her father's that little chap who carries a chess-problem board around in his pocket and picks at it twelve hours a day. As well suspect the Queen of England climbing that bench outside and slipping an arm in this porthole to snatch a pair of glasses. I think we can disregard this hair, Mr. Burke, unless we find a woman aboard with more of its kind on her head and a character to fit the part of murderess better than the little Tokonoku lady."

"I have been surprised more than once by Japanese women with the faces of carved idols," I retorted, a bit warmly, nettled at the captain's cocksureness. "If it is true that Mather's room boy polished this porthole brass yesterday, then the presence of this hair caught in the hinge is more than a coincidence in the light of last night's happenings."

"Have it your way, Mr. Burke," Captain Kendall stiffly answered. "When you bring me the woman whose head lost this hair, I'll consider the question of holding her for the Yokohama authorities."

The rumble of the luncheon gong came down the deck just then, putting a period to further discussion. The commander turned, with his hand on the door.

"Remember, gentlemen, not a word of this on deck, please. The less known about this, the better progress we'll

make in getting to the bottom of this unusual affair. And"—this with a slight stiffening of his tone—"if either of you has any suggestion to make, I will be glad to hear it. No private sleuthing, however, gentlemen. I need not remind you that my position as commander of the *Siberia* gives me sole jurisdiction over police matters at sea."

He left us, Surgeon Sparks following. Mather and I went down to the saloon separately. When I entered I could not help casting a quick glance over to the first officer's table. Little Miss Tokonoku was in her place, demurely and with hands folded, awaiting the service of the first course by the blue-frocked Chinese waiter. The seat beside her, which was her father's, was swung around; he had not come down to his meal. My place was at a table farther on; from it I could see her profile without being observed by her. I freely indulged my curiosity.

It would not be exaggeration to say that Miss Tokonoku possessed no more distinction of personality than the swivel chair she perched on—perched is the word; she was balanced on the stool like a timorous brown wren on the verge of flight. Pale brown was her skin; brown the clumsily cut waist she wore. Above the sharp oval of her face lay, piled high in semi-Japanese fashion, the black cables of her hair. Glossy black it was, coarse, heavy; the comb had left lines in the shining backward sweep of it like the grain in heavy wood. As with most Japanese women who find themselves in the unaccustomed presence of foreigners, Miss Tokonoku hid behind veiled eyes the worriments of embarrassment, looked not at all at her neighbors, seemed constantly in a fever of doubt less she blunder in her table manners.

Looking at this little brown statuette of shrinking self-effacement, I could not help laughing inwardly at the farce of my elaborate sealing of that long black hair from the port hinge in the pocket of my cardcase—so I had disposed of it before leaving Mather's room.

Yet there was hair that duplicated this treasured single strand exactly. Of all the coffures in the saloon—brassy, blond, gray, chestnut, and red—none but that of the Japanese woman against which that telltale hair could lie matched. Away back in the hall bedroom of my mind a little thought persisted: "Explain that hair sticking to Mather's port hinge before you dismiss the little Tokonoku person."

My first move after luncheon was to go to the surgeon's quarters and moil over with him the complexities of the mystery. Sparks was a garrulous chap; all the love of the unrevealed in his simple soul had leaped to the spur of the grim riddle popped at us by the sphinx of the ocean spaces. I asked to read further the note his optical treatise had on the eye surgery of the famous Von Zumholst, of Berlin. Disappointment there; nothing about the effect on vision of the removal of the vitreous lens from the eye. Not a hint which might serve to mark the probable disabilities of one so operated upon and deprived of his special glasses. Could such a one see at all without his aids? If he could, what would be the abnormalities of his vision? The book was mute on these points.

Restless under the fruitlessness of our talk, I left Sparks in a high state of conjecture, and made a couple of loops of the deck. My eye was keen for Mather, but not finding him among the chairs, I dropped into the smoke room to see if he was there. The usual poker game was on in the center of the room, with its fringe of spectators; Mather was not among them. Over in a far corner I spied a wispy little figure curled up on a couch behind a chessboard—Doctor Tokonoku.

Sudden impulse sent me over to him.

"Solitaire again, doctor?" I called.

He looked up, with a nervous start. "Wouldn't it be more interesting to beat me, as you did the other day, than 'dummy'?"

"Ah, yiss, yiss!" The little doctor bobbed his gray head and motioned me to a seat opposite. "I play much the game," he added. "It is like the *go* game, yet not so interesting."

As I reached out to set the pieces in place, I glanced casually at the little doctor's face. He wore gold-rimmed pince-nez on a gold chain and with an ear loop. The visor of his soft traveling cap was pulled down well over his eyes.

I gave my opponent the black men and kept the red. The table we played on had a peg hole in each square; each piece was pegged to fit the holes—this a precaution against the pitching of the vessel. Doctor Tokonoku took first move. With true chess player's deliberation, he kept his hands off his piece until he was sure of his strategy, then moved. His second was a neat gambit play I was not anticipating. The pawn would not, somehow, find the peg hole in the adjacent square; I had to pick it up where it fell and ram the peg home. The doctor whispered thanks.

Play went on without a word from either of us. The Japanese, easily my master, made a relentless drive for my intrenched bishops, moving his forces forward with perfect generalship. I had almost forgotten, in the absorption of the game, the motive that had launched me in it when, of a sudden, an incident, trivial in itself, set all the alarm nerves of my reporter's instinct thrumming.

Doctor Tokonoku moved one of my red knights instead of his black one.

My first impulse was to correct his mistake, but instantly I checked it. Instead I deliberately moved his black knight to a protecting station; the opposing knights were in contiguous positions, and my deliberate mistake was no more noticeable in point of relative board positions than his.

Doctor Tokonoku made no correction, but, after due pause, played again—this time with his own piece. I thought I saw his fingers tremble as he boggled the peg of a castle into its hole. Thrilling under the triumph of a discovery I was all too ready to accept without further and unassailable proof, I made a jump to the rear with the very knight he had shifted as his own.

In the next three plays Doctor Tokonoku twice moved red pieces instead of black. The game was inextricably tangled. I had my proof.

The man was nearly blind! Or absolutely color blind.

He knew this was so, but did he know he had blundered, and did he realize that I knew he had blundered?

Yet Doctor Tokonoku wore glasses—gold-rimmed pince-nez with a chain and loop over his ear. Like Mather's, stolen, and the one found in the murdered Madatoya's grip. If he wore glasses, why was he still groping for vision like one in the dark?

CHAPTER V.

What that bizarre game would have come to, tangled as it was by the little doctor's erratic moves, I cannot guess. Interruption came startlingly. Doctor Tokonoku's hand was hovering over his black line to make a move when, with a smothered sigh, he fell forward on the board, scattering the chessmen to the floor. As he fell, his pince-nez slipped off his nose and clattered across the board to my lap.

I think I must have exclaimed, for at once we were surrounded by men from the poker table, excitedly asking what had happened. I directed them to help me stretch the doctor out on the couch. Somebody began to fan him with a cap; somebody else ran to the bar in one corner of the smoke room

and returned with a glass of brandy. The liquor revived Doctor Tokonoku. He opened his eyes, muttering something in Japanese which I could not catch.

"Ah, excoose!" he murmured, when he saw the ring of faces above him. "For making trouble, excoose, pliss. It iss a sickness—sometimes ver' sudden she comes to me."

"All right, doctor; you're all O. K. now," big Henderson, the mining man, boomed as he laboriously swung his cap back and forth over the recumbent one's face. "Somebody get busy here and help me carry him to his stateroom."

Doctor Tokonoku protested weakly, but Henderson was one of those men who glory in rising to an emergency whether their remedy is right or wrong, and he would not be denied. He lifted the doctor by the shoulders; another took him by the feet, and they bundled him down the stairs to the main stateroom deck. I started to follow with the vague notion of returning to the stricken man the pince-nez that had fallen in my lap. I was conscious as I walked of the *tip, tip* of the golden ear loop against the back of my hand. Somehow this inanimate thing seemed to my highly sensitized mind to be signaling a message; each tap against my hand of the swinging loop was a call from an imprisoned intelligence in the gold filament. The fantastic conceit finally conquered. Instead of following to Doctor Tokonoku's stateroom and giving up the pince-nez, I slipped them in my pocket and went up on deck.

Mather I found in desultory chat with the wife of the Nagasaki consul. I signaled an S. O. S. call with my eyes, and he soon found excuse to join me down by the turn in the deck forward where the sharp wind from starboard had made this spot untenable by the chair warmers.

In a breath I told Mather of the occurrence in the smoke room. He followed me with widened eyes.

"It was eye strain that did it!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Excessive eye strain brings on a vertigo that knocks you out completely. I've had it, and I know what it is—haven't read a line since my glasses disappeared for that very reason."

"But why eye strain when the man was wearing specs?" I queried.

"You've just told me that his glasses didn't do him a bit of good," Mather countered, with eagerness in voice and gesture. "Couldn't tell a red chessman from a black one—his men from yours. Why, man, that little Japanese fellow's practically blind."

Inspiration pounced down on me.

"Then his pince-nez is a bluff!" I cried. "Those lenses don't fit his eyes—never were meant to. He's trying to cover the loss of his proper glasses by wearing somebody's else!"

Mather looked at me, his face drawn into a pucker of excitement. Without a word I drew Doctor Tokonoku's pince-nez from my pocket and put it in Mather's hand. He slipped the bow over his nose, patted it into place, then looked down the deck, out to sea, into my eyes. He slowly nodded his head with an eloquence stronger than speech.

"Make sure," I cautioned. "Look at the numbers on the lenses."

With the tip of his knife blade Mather deftly loosened the tiny screws bolting the lenses to the frame and held up the lenses, edge on, for me to examine. There on the bevels of them I found the prescription numbers—"D-105; S-100." I read the legends aloud to him.

"Mine—mine!" he whispered.

"We'll have to tell the captain about this," my companion added. "Looks to me as if the murderer has been uncovered."

"Easy, easy!" I cautioned. "This isn't proof that Doctor Tokonoku killed

Madatoya; it only tends to fix the theft of your glasses on him. Besides, Captain Kendall feels himself thoroughly competent to do the police work on this ship"—this a savage whack at Kendall's bumptiousness on my part—"and there's no reason why we shouldn't let him. Perhaps before this time to-morrow you and I can turn over the slayer of Madatoya to the skipper, neatly bound and tagged—and have your precious papers back as well. Now just set those lenses back in place, and I'll take them down to Doctor Tokonoku."

"Not——"

"Certainly!" I interrupted. "He mustn't for a minute suspect that his pitiful bluff with your pince-nez is suspected."

Mather tightened the screws on the lenses, and I went down to Doctor Tokonoku's stateroom. The door opened a crack in answer to my knock, and the little mouse face of Miss Tokonoku appeared there. It was a gray yellow, and the moon eyes were narrowed to two little white slits. Even through the Oriental mask of impassivity the stamp of fear leered horribly.

"Your father's glasses, which he dropped in the smoke room," I explained, as I slipped the pince-nez into her hand. "And how is he feeling now?"

The tiny figure at the door shrank back, and the crack between door and jamb was narrowed as if to fend off intrusion. Her mouth tried to frame itself for words, but they would not come.

"I—am—well, thenk you," came the voice of Doctor Tokonoku from within. "For the glasses many thenks."

The door closed instantly.

To me, knowing something of the Japanese character, that grudging crack of the door, the ghost of terror that fought with the starched induration of the woman's face spoke volumes.

I went back to the deck, there to coil up in my chair and do some heavy thinking. What was to be the next move? That was the hard knot that faced me in every essay at the center of the mystery. Fate had played a favoring trump just once, when I was allowed to uncover Doctor Tokonoku's subterfuge of the substitute pince-nez. But fate could scarcely be relied upon to lead again; it was up to me to take the initiative. Find the murderer of Madatoya? Hadn't I done so? It was credible—almost a moral certainty—that the one who would steal Mather's pince-nez with the evident intention of leaving them as damning evidence in the fingers of the slain man was the same who had plunged a short sword into the back of the secret-service agent. Here was Doctor Tokonoku wearing Mather's specs in an attempt to cover the loss of his own—a ruse which might have succeeded had he not risked safety for his chess passion; his artificial eyes were those found in the murdered man's grip; there had been some fatal miscarriage at the moment of the crime. How, then, could little Tokonoku have been guilty of a blunder which marked him as a murderer when he had taken such infinite precaution as to provide, by the stolen pince-nez, evidence of Mather's guilt? Wasn't this very blunder sufficient proof of the participation of a second individual in the murder? Some one, say, who wasn't aware of Tokonoku's provision of the stolen pince-nez, or who didn't give him time to arrange the substitution of Mather's glasses for his own after the blow had fallen.

That long black hair stuck in the hinge of Mather's port! A Japanese woman's hair. The hair that was matched only on the head of Miss Tokonoku.

Was this frail little brown wren the second party to the assassination of the spy? Was not hers the hand that was slipped through Mather's opened

port—her arm being so short that she had to push her head through also to reach the washstand—and was it not her blunder that had left her father's pince-nez in the grip of dead fingers?

Those chilled eyes of fear I had seen in the crack of the stateroom door seemed to answer this question. Some tremendous urge of filial duty, such as is ingrained in the Japanese woman above all women in the world, had whirled this mite of femininity into the grim business of killing. Japanese legend is replete with just such instances. Many heroines of Nippon had hands like the Lady Macbeth's.

Granting this hypothesis, where was that packet of state-department secrets upon which hung the safety of the American secret-service agent in Japan and the honor of Pierce Mather? Where but in the possession of Doctor Tokonoku and his daughter? Why one Japanese had murdered another to gain possession of something profitable to their common country—this was absolutely beyond guessing.

How to get it—another crux!

Did I know enough—have a big enough grip on truth, to go boldly to Doctor Tokonoku and demand the restoration of the packet? That would be to accuse him of murder, and my chain of circumstantial evidence was not strong enough to withstand any sudden twist he might put upon it. Where would I stand if I couldn't bluff him into surrendering what I thought he had—if he defied me to fasten murder and theft upon him?

Two curiously ground lenses in a gold frame and a single black hair sixteen or eighteen inches long—all my evidence!

Oh, that was a wretched day of indecision! A dozen times I determined to go down and face the little doctor, and as many times I was halted by the saving grace of prudence. What irked me greatest was that I saw no way of initiating other action. My hands were tied. Neither Doctor Tokonoku nor his daughter was at table for the luncheon and dinner call. I saw trays going to their stateroom after both meals had been served. Mather, who shared my restlessness, and whom I restrained from spoiling things by going to Captain Kendall with the story of our suspicions only by constant persuasion, ranged the decks like a caged creature. He finally gained my promise that if nothing developed before noon next day—nothing could eventuate but another fortuitous move by fate—I would tell the captain what I knew about Tokonoku's eyes.

What made our futile waiting for blind chance all the more unbearable was the knowledge that Madatoya's disappearance had become common among the Japanese saloon passengers. I overheard a group back of the ventilators by the smoke room discussing it in lowered voices; though their speech was in their native tongue, I understood enough to discover that to them the death of the spy was not so great a mystery as it appeared to me. A single word, *"Dido,"* popped out of the murmur of their conversation several times. Eavesdropping as long as I dared, I quickly turned the corner of the deck house when the scuffling of feet told me the conference was dissolving.

Rack my brain as I would, the word *"Dido"* conveyed nothing to me. Somewhere in the back pigeonholes of my mind lurked the aura of comprehension; I knew I had once heard the word and understood its significance, and I suffered that exasperation which comes to every one on occasions when the backward trail of recollection leads to a black rabbit hole.

Night came, and the desertion of the decks. About the saloon and the smoke room, the two oases of life in the desert of the ocean dark, rallied the *Siberia's*

passengers; in the one to listen to bad music and chatter, and in the other to eddy around the card tables. Mather, whose eyes bothered him increasingly, went to bed early with a bad headache. I climbed into a cave of rugs on the deck forward to nurse a brier and moil over once more the endless chain of the ship's mystery.

Through the lateral pipes of the rail I could see the eerie lift of the Pacific, vague white hands reaching in appeal to the veiled genius of the water waste. In the face of this immensity of ocean, I drifted away from myself and out onto the void beyond the ship's rail.

How long I was thus detached I do not know. The thinking part of me flew back with the swiftness of light when Miss Tokonoku, padding on noiseless sandals, passed me on the way to the steps leading down to the forward deck. She would have passed without recognition had it not been that a stray beam of light from a deck stateroom's porthole caught her fair in the face as she slipped by. My heart gave a bound, and I was burrowing out of my rugs in an instant. I gained the side of the stairs, screening my retreat just in time to see her head disappearing down the flight to the deck below, which was the domain of the steerage passengers.

Silently I crept to the head of the companionway, whose flanking sides were canvas-covered. It was dark where I crouched, but the foot of the companionway was dimly lighted by a flare from somewhere forward of the hatch covers. I heard the Japanese woman's voice and another, pitched in a rough guttural—a man's. She spoke in the coolie class patois, as a gentlewoman addresses an inferior in Japan. He answered respectfully with monosyllables. By bringing my eye to a crack between laced breadths of canvas, I could see them—the woman tiny as a midget before a huge bulk of a man whose head seemed covered by some curiously shaped cap. The fellow was without doubt one of the steerage Japanese who had boarded the boat at Honolulu.

"I am sure, Tamatsu, that father's eyes will be discovered," she quavered, in a broken whisper. "Do you know, worthless one, what that will mean? His death for killing a man he did not kill."

"I am not worthy to raise my eyes to the soles of your feet," the man mumbled. "It is my fault."

My hands against the canvas sides of the companionway trembled so that a little creaking came from the binding cords.

"My father's message to you, unthinking wood block, is that if he is accused you shall keep silence. He can explain much to a court in Japan that this American captain would not understand."

"A noble master whom I will serve with my life," came the answer in the thick speech of the Tokyo streets.

Followed something from the woman I could not understand, and the big man's unintelligible reply. Then:

"You have the American's papers you got from Madatoya?"

"Yes, honorable daughter of my master."

"You have them here—with you?"

"As you say."

"Then throw them in the sea," came the quiet command.

"But, gracious one, the seal is not broken. Your reverend father has not seen them to know what they are." The man's voice was a whine.

"His orders. Throw them in the sea—now!"

Just a flash I had through the crack in the canvas laps, of the man's hand withdrawing from the breast of his kimono with a heavy brown packet between his fingers. Then I yelled and

leaped over the rail, down ten feet onto his back.

What happened immediately thereafter I never have been able fully to recall. I have only a dim recollection of the sudden twist of writhing muscles under me, of an arm thick as an anaconda tightening about my throat—then plunging stars and flames of aurora borealis.

When my senses cleared I was sitting on the lowest step of the companionway with Sparks passing something pungent under my nose. In a circle of coolies and sailors before me stood a giant with arms bound behind him. His face was like a war mask of old Japan, made more hideous by the coarse black hair that streamed down all around it even as far as his breast. Captain Kendall stood beside him, in one hand a heavy brown envelope splashed with red sealing wax. Miss Tokonoku was not of the group.

"Ah, Mr. Burke, you're back!" came the captain's dry greeting, faint under the roaring in my ears. "I see you've matched that hair you found on Mather's port." He jerked his finger toward the fearsome figure of the bound man. "It isn't everybody who'll tackle a Japanese wrestler. I congratulate you."

I looked again at the hideous face and huge shape of the prisoner. Then I knew the clew of the single black hair in the port hinge had led home. It had come from the head of the wrestler, who, true to the traditions of his clan, wore his hair long after the ancient fashion in headdressing of feudal Japan. None but a wrestler in Nippon allows his thatch to grow like a woman's.

"Lock this fellow up in the brig until we want him!" Kendall ordered a bos'n. "And, Mr. Burke, who was the Japanese woman we saw running away from here when we answered your cry for help?"

"Miss Tokonoku," I answered.

"Go fetch her to my quarters," the skipper directed one of the stewards. "Bring her father, too."

Very weak and shaky from the throttling I had experienced at the hands of the wrestler, I followed Kendall and Sparks to the former's cabin behind the chart room. I was tremendously pleased with myself—why not admit it?—for having saved Mather's precious documents from the sea as well as from the hands of the Japanese. Also I realized that the mystery of the pince-nez was trembling on dénouement. Mather came in shortly and fell upon the envelope Kendall handed him with a stifled cry of joy. Tears were in his eyes when he shook my hand and pointed to the seals on the flap of the envelope, unbroken.

"The secretary of state will hear of this, old man," he whispered ecstatically.

Then a petty officer entered the cabin, his hand under Miss Tokonoku's arm. The woman appeared more pinched and birdlike than ever. Her face was ashy white, and her eyes, under narrowed, uptilting lids, were set in a moveless stare.

"Doctor Tokonoku was not in his stateroom, sir," the bos'n said. "I could not understand where the lady said he'd gone."

Little Miss Tokonoku stood in the circle of men, seeing none of us. I mustered my best Japanese, limp and halting at that:

"Miss Tokonoku, the captain would like to speak to your father."

"Honorably pardon," she answered mechanically, cleaving to her native tongue. "The captain cannot see my father. He has augustly departed."

"If you will tell us where we can find him," I began, failing to grasp the meaning of her words, "we will send after——"

"Honorably pardon," she repeated, in a squeaking voice, "the captain cannot

find my father. He has augustly departed—there." She turned and pointed out the door to the black ocean.

I understood then, and translated to Captain Kendall. His lips clapped tight in surprise, and into his eyes leaped pity.

"Ask the lady to sit down, Mr. Burke, and tell her we are ready to listen to explanations if she cares to make any."

I put his words into Japanese. I saw a sob rise in the woman's throat, but she choked it back. The Japanese habit of repression mastered, though her little body was wracked with grief.

"For the sake of the law—when we arrive at Yokohama—this much," she began, her eyes still looking into nothingness. "When my father discovered that Madatoya had taken the American gentleman's papers—to possess them he himself had traveled all the way from Washington—he knew he must take them from Madatoya. He was a patron of Tamatsu, the wrestler, who boarded this ship at Honolulu. He told Tamatsu his desire to get the papers.

"Tamatsu is faithful, but he has little intelligence. He planned to kill Madatoya. He stole the glasses from the American gentleman's room to put them in the hand of Madatoya when he was dead. That was very clever of Tamatsu. My father knew nothing of Tamatsu's plan to kill. My father was in Madatoya's room. Tamatsu came in behind my father and killed Madatoya. Madatoya snatched the glasses from my father's eyes when he fell, and my father ran to his room, afraid.

"Tamatsu saw the glasses in Madatoya's hand. They looked like the glasses he had stolen from the American gentleman. He is a fool. One pair of glasses is like another, he thought, so he left my father's glasses there and brought the American gentleman's to my father with the papers he found in Madatoya's bag. We did not dare change the glasses when my father discovered the mistake; besides the door had locked with a spring from the inside. My father was nearly blind, but he wore the American gentleman's glasses to avoid suspicion."

She finished abruptly.

"Why did your father order Tamatsu, through you, to throw the papers into the sea?" I asked.

"He knew his eyes had betrayed him and he would be caught. He could not read them without his glasses. I cannot read English."

"Do you know why your father augustly departed, Miss Tokonoku?" I asked, as gently as I could. "He was not the murderer."

"He thought it best to do so," Miss Tokonoku answered.

I had been nearly a year back at my post in Tokyo before the last puzzle of the pince-nez mystery was cleared up to my satisfaction. Then through a Japanese a little bit the worse for sake I learned of the Dido Club's plot against the government. The Dido Club was a group of radicals in Tokyo whose sole object was to embarrass the Seiyukai ministry. Doctor Tokonoku was the club's chief mover. The lever which the Dido Club hoped to use against the ruling power was the California land-law crisis.

Doctor Tokonoku, in Washington with his daughter to spy upon the moves of the state department anent the California problem, learned of Mather's mission, and followed him in the hope of lifting his secret dispatches. Madatoya, a regular government secret-service agent, beat Tokonoku at his game.

I have always thought it was Tokonoku's failure to accomplish his mission that led to his "august departure" rather than unexpected complicity in the murder of Madatoya. The Japanese take their responsibilities seriously.

Tom Magee's Boy Ole

A STORY OF HOCKEY AS IT IS PLAYED IN THE FAR NORTH

By N. B. Beasley

Author of "Behind the Plate," "Somebody Squealed," Etc.

FROM out of the North came Ole Magee. Queer combination that—Ole Magee. Ole's father was a red-haired, fighting Irishman from the County Armagh; Ole's mother was a flaxen-haired maiden from the northernmost fling of the Lofoden Islands. Glance at the map, and you will see those islands nestling close to the shore line of Norway, hugging the land as a cub hugging a mother bear to escape the blasting winds from the arctic.

Tim Magee, Ole's father, was a foreman in Lou Turney's camp, near Beaucage, which is in the Nipissing district, when Mary Jensen—innocent, trustful, wide and blue-eyed Mary Jensen—came to cook for a horde of wild men. Tim Magee was hard enough, but Lou Turney was a brute of a man, and when Turney had sought to make Mary his own, Tim fought him, beat him, and left that night, taking Mary with him. He emigrated to Jasper Bigelow's camp, near Nipigon—thirty miles due north of old Superior. There they were married.

As a result of that union came Ole Magee.

Mary Magee died when Ole, squalling and kicking, came into the world. But she lived long enough to clasp the little bundle of humanity to her breast, to press it to her face—her mouth, her eyes. Then it was that the flush faded from her cheeks. She sighed. Her thread of life snapped, and a mother's soul passed through the gate that opens only one way.

In the beginning, Ole's life was a precarious one. Big Tim Magee tried to be kind. He named the baby Ole, because he thought the mother would have liked that. Afterward Tim was helpless. Had it not been for Mrs. Mulvaney, a small grave would have been dug alongside a longer one. But Mrs. Mulvaney took Ole, reared him, taught him his catechism, joined with Tim Magee in urging a hatred of the name of Turney, sent him to school, and saw to it that he made his first communion to Father Hussare.

After that Mrs. Mulvaney had said:

"Shurre, an' that's all th' spalpane can expect av a body. Th' biy has larned th' ways av th' church. It's not me fault now if he doesn't kape straight."

Past that and Ole just grew.

One, three, five, six years he worked with his father in the woods. Sturdy manhood came to be his. Tall, he stood exactly six feet in his stocking feet; well built, he must have stripped one hundred and ninety pounds. All of it was bone, muscle, and sinew. Like his mother he had hair the color of rope, his eyes were blue, keen, and cold. His nose carried the tilt of the Celt, and the twist of his mouth relieved the seriousness of his eyes. Ole Magee had muscles that rippled as if at play under his coat.

In the twenty and two years that had

elapsed since Tim Magee had drifted to the shack of Jasper Bigelow with Mary Jensen at his side, the North country had changed. The camp had been pushed steadily backward with the cut of the timber. Now winter had come. It seemed only yesterday that Tim Magee, the foreman, with Ole Magee, the hewer, had walked together through the quiet lands marking out the timber line. It seemed only yesterday that Tim and Ole Magee had filled their lungs with the air of the balsam, the spruce, and the pine—the sweet-scented air of the forests. The winter of the North came to them quick and almost unheralded. A few flecks of snow were whipped down on a bleak wind. After that was the deluge.

Tim Magee, a Rat Portage newspaper three weeks old in his horny hands, was sitting before a roaring log fire. Ole Magee, his mind a blank to everything else, was bent close to the flame that he might the better see how to study the grain in the twisted wood across his knees.

"If I cut it this way I will have two fair sticks; if I cut it this way, I'll have one a wolf couldn't chew in two," muttered Ole to himself.

Tim Magee pushed aside his paper and watched his son.

"An' phwat are yez makin' there?" queried Tim, although knowing perfectly well what the answer would be.

"My sticks."

"Your phwat?"

"My shinny sticks."

"An' are yez a-goin' to play that crazy game again this winter?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Yez'll get kilt at it some day, me biy, an' thin phwat will your ould father do?"

"An' is it that you're worryin' about?" countered Ole, dropping into the brogue of his parent. "Sure, an' ye nadn't worry about anny av these lads 'bout here killin' me."

"There yez go ag'in. A-botherin' th' ould man. S'posin' yez gets into a mix-up, a scrape, wit' sticks a-flyin' and fists a-swingin'—phwat thin, me biy, phwat thin?"

"I'd take care of myself," answered Ole quietly, and without a show of concern.

Tim Magee shook his head. He refused to meet defeat. But he kept quiet, and Ole continued tracing the grain in the wood before him.

Hockey, as played in the North country, would have been a game for primitive man. Fourteen men, seven to a side, play it. They are men through whose veins flows the reddest of blood, men who are strong, men who live in the open, men who fight things of the open, men who are wild, and who have never been tamed. Nor are they men who will be tamed. They are men who court possible death in the playing of a game more scientific than our American game of baseball, more brutal than our American game of football. The game is one of an everlasting test of muscles, the wood of sticks, the steel of skates, the grit and nerve of man.

Tom Wilson was owner and manager of the Rat Portage seven; just at that precise moment Tom Wilson was encouraging the first fits of despair. As owner and manager of the Rat Portage seven, Wilson was sad, because Tup Turney, his star rover of the last year's team, had deserted—had gone to Port Arthur's team. And Turney had been rated as the best hockey player in the North. Without him, Rat Portage's chances of repeating as a winner in the fight for the championship were practically nil.

Wilson was not a man to spare money. Full of face and figure, and with pockets that were well lined with the coin of the realm—gold that had been wrung from the forests by an industrious father—and with a hearty dis-

position to spend this money on anything that pleased, Wilson was ready to go the limit for a successor to Turney.

Wilson had one stubborn trait. There never was a man who threw him down twice. He would go the limit for a friend; he would do nothing if this friend violated his confidence. Turney, after leaving, had regretted and had wanted to return. Wilson wouldn't listen to him or his pleas.

Wilson passed out the word:

"Get me a successor to Turney—get him quick!"

When Wilson said, "Get him quick," he meant just that. And Pete Dailey, his right-hand man of sport, willingly went on the search.

The North takes its hockey much more seriously than New York or Boston or Chicago takes its baseball. The North—is the North. Hockey is as a child born to it. The atmosphere has to be there. Snow, ice, chill winds, air that sends the red to your cheeks, a tingling to your nose, and a desire, yes, even an anxiety, to walk fast, pretty girls in their toques and sweaters, virile men in pea-jackets—this is the atmosphere of the North.

When Wilson said, "Get me a successor to Turney," Dailey answered with a vigorous "Yes," though lacking an idea and thinking within himself that his boss had sent him on an aimless quest. Dailey had never heard of the famous bit of sleuthing done by one of the ancients for the Golden Fleece, else he might have compared himself to that historic character. As it was, he packed his change of shirt in his big leather suit case, tucked his own portly form well within the confines of a fur overcoat, and set out on the funny little half trot that a fat man sometimes assumes. Pete headed for Rat Portage's single station, and, getting there, jerked a Canadian Pacific time-table from a wooden rack, and, without going to the trouble of unbuttoning his overcoat, flopped himself into the nearest vacant seat and fell to poring over the contents of the railroad directory.

Dailey found a map, and, shoving his stubby forefinger along the red line that indicated the route of the railroad, he mumbled:

"Raleigh—h'm. Had a hockey team there couple of years ago. Busted up. Don't suppose there's a man left in town that knows what a puck looks like." This was stretching it rather far, as Raleigh still possessed an amateur team of some standing—locally.

Dailey's stubby forefinger pushed ahead.

"Bonheur, Martin—h'm, English River. Had a team there last winter. Had a player named Titus, let's see, though." The stubby finger left the map and found a spot right against its owner's upper front teeth. "Titus is trying out with Port Arthur this year."

The finger went back to the map.

"Dexter." Then it skipped over Port Arthur and past the dot that indicated Fort William. "Let's see—Pearl? Nope, there's nobody there that'd do. Wolf—Nipigon?" The finger paused. "Nipigon? Seems to me they've got a team of bushwhackers there. Guess I'll just try that spot."

Decisions were made quickly with Pete Dailey. He stuffed the time-table into a capacious inside pocket, grabbed up his suit case, and crossed to the ticket window.

"Gimme a ticket, one way, to Nipigon, Charlie," he grunted to the man behind the window.

"Better take a return, Pete—no one ever buys a one-way ticket to Nipigon," facetiously answered the agent.

"Bad, very bad, Charlie," wheezed Pete. "Heard that one down to the opera house night before last."

"I don't care, it's a good one, anyway," insisted the other. "Besides, it's the first chance I've had to spring it."

"All right. All right. But hurry and give me that ticket. Hear that?"

Pete Dailey's ear had caught the hoarse hoot of Canadian Pacific train No. 14 whistling for the stop at Rat Portage.

Pete pushed the change across the counter, snatched up his ticket and the leather suit case that was so much a part of him on his travels, and bustled through the door and out onto the station platform. He stumbled up the steps, through and into the coach almost before the wheels groaned into a full stop.

If you ever go to Nipigon you need not be disappointed if you do not find a full-fledged metropolitan hotel. You won't be able to wander through marble-pillared lobbies, nor will you be able to saunter into a dining room that is only one of many where statuesque waiters move to your slightest nod, where the silver, the china, and the cut-glass ware be worth a king's ransom, or where you can order—and get—strawberries on Christmas Day. You can't expect these things of Nipigon. And you don't. You can go to a small stopping place and you can get good, wholesome food. You will get home-made bread and flaky biscuits; you will get fresh eggs and fresh milk and fresh butter, and sometimes you will be given a change to fresh meat instead of smoked ham or jerked beef. The proprietor will kick if you leave your window open at night, but if you get a headache from sleeping in a closed room, you will soon rid yourself of the feeling by taking a turn about the town in the morning.

Pete Dailey had never been in Nipigon before, but as he alighted from the train he wasn't surprised, or disappointed. As assistant to Tom Wilson in promoting the game of hockey in Rat Portage he was accustomed to all manner of places. And he had been caught in more unattractive communities than this.

His first question after becoming acquainted with the long-legged and loose-jawed proprietor of Nipigon's single hotel concerned hockey.

"Nope, we ain't got no hockey team here," answered the dignitary. "But"—he paused impressively—"we got a darned good shinny team."

Pete laughed.

"You get me—that's what I mean," he cried.

"Why don't you say what you mean, then? Coming 'round here with them highflutun' words! Hockey! We calls it shinny—and shinny it is."

"All right, then. Shinny—if you want it," rejoined Pete. "You got any good players around this neck of the woods?"

"I guess. What d'you want to know fer?"

"Well, you see, it's like this. As I told you, my name's Dailey. I'm from Rat Portage, and——" Then Pete went on to explain.

His host nodded, and squirting a stream of tobacco juice into a near-by pail, he said:

"There's Tim Magee's boy; he's good. An' Jack Longridge's boy; he's good. An' Husk Johnson's boy, he's good. They're all good, only Tim Magee's boy he's captain. And talk about skatin'! Say, Old Nick himself couldn't beat this boy."

"When do these boys play?" Pete asked the question rather anxiously.

"To-morrow morning, I guess. Zeb Stewart was in here this forenoon, and he said something that sounded like as though Andy Jennings' bunch, from the camp over around Roseport, had challenged them to the first game of the season."

"Just in time, Petey, old boy, just in time," sang Dailey to himself. For like all men of sport, he believed in premonitions—and he felt one coming now.

The following morning Pete Dailey was an interested spectator at the game between Rossport and Nipigon. He mingled with the scores of lumbermen; he listened to their comments. Pete Dailey kept his ears wide open and his mouth tightly shut, that he might the better understand bits of stray conversation. At one time Pete had believed he would have made a mighty good detective. Perhaps a rival to Holmes, Burns, and some of those other fellows of fiction and fact.

Particular attention did he pay to Ole Magee. The name sounded good to him, and he remembered it.

The science of these woodsmen did not appeal to Pete. At times he could scarcely repress a smile at the antics of one or two of the players. But he refrained. He knew they were in deadly earnest, that the spectators were completely wrapped up in the play of the men before them, and that any adverse criticism by a stranger might lead to trouble. Pete's respect for the health and intactness of his own body was deep-rooted.

But he couldn't help but watch Ole Magee. Here was a player set apart. Ole did everything any of his companions could do, and a lot of things they couldn't attempt. Light as a professional dancer on his feet, although always steady and sure on his skates of steel, quick of eye, keen for openings, flashing, twisting, dodging, jumping, always was he in the center of a mix-up, always was he successfully getting out of it. He simply controlled the play, and when the game had ended, Nipigon was a winner on an easy score of 10 to 2. Of the ten goals, Ole Magee had scored nine.

Pete's appraising eye noted that Ole's shots, though always played in a veriest fraction of a second, seemed the result of quick, but studied, effort. Tricks of hockey, such as dribbling the rubber disk in and out of the opponents' legs, such as catching the puck backward, and bringing it around a danger point, such as clearing the other fellow's stick or his body, if needs be, at a single jump, seemed to be Magee's. Pete noted that all of them were done with precision and decision.

"A born player," commented he, as he watched Ole leaving the ice, skates in one hand stick in another, and accompanying an older man, whom Pete's insight into human nature called his father. Pete sauntered after them and followed into the single hotel. He found them together in the bar with a crowd of other lumbermen. He noted that Ole was the only one of the gathering who didn't touch the whisky. And he was pleased.

Waiting until what he considered his propitious moment, Pete shouldered himself through the crowd and to where Ole was standing.

"Magee, my name's Dailey; I'm from Rat Portage, and I want to congratulate you on your hoc—shinny playing," beamed Pete, as he held out his hand.

Ole acknowledged the greeting.

"Can I have a word with you in private?" asked Dailey.

"In private? Why? These men are all my friends," returned Ole.

"Yes, we're all his friends, stranger," chorused the drinkers.

"But this concerns you—you only," insisted Pete.

"Go aside wit' him, me biy, let's hear what he's got to say," chimed in Tim Magee.

The boy, followed by Tim and Pete, shouldered his way through the crowd and into another room.

Dailey could talk business faster than any man in the North. He firmly believed in going right to the point, getting quick and decisive answers, and following to his own advantage any weakness that might appear in another's defense.

"Magee, I'm—— Wait a minute, is

this your father?" Ole nodded. "I thought so, you look alike." Tim Magee's body unconsciously straightened, and a flash of pride went through his eyes. This was not lost on Dailey. "As I started to say, I'm from Rat Portage, and I'm Tom Wilson's friend and representative." Pete took it for granted that the others knew who Wilson was. "We lost Tup Turney——"

"Who?" bellowed Tim Magee.

Pete was taken back, but he repeated "Tup Turney."

"Who's Tup Turney?" vehemently shouted the old man.

"Well, I'll be a—he's the best rover in Ontario; he's the greatest goal shot in the North; he was the backbone of our team last——"

"I don't care a rap about that! His father—who was he?"

"What's that got to do with this?" inquired Pete, in some amazement.

"Nivir moind—who was he?"

"Heavens, I don't know. Guess he's a timber cutter over around Beaucage."

Tim's face went a dirty red, and he would have burst out with a string of expletives, but he was checked by Ole.

"Dailey isn't interested in that, dad. Wait until we hear what he's got to say?"

Tim subsided.

"As I was going to say," repeated Pete dryly. "I'm Tom Wilson's representative. We lost Turney from our hockey team; Port Arthur coaxed him away—then there was a Moll, I guess. We've got to get a man to take his place. I'm out to find one. I watched you today, and I think you'll fill the bill. We'll pay you good money to come. We've got to have you. What do you say?"

Fortunately, perhaps, for Ole, he possessed some of the instincts of frugality that were born within him from his mother's side.

"Let me understand you," he said. "You want me to play on the Rat Portage team."

"Exactly."

"Do you think I'm good enough?"

"We'll take the chance."

"He'll git a chance to match Turney?" interposed Tim.

"He will if he plays," replied Pete.

Ole examined one point of the skate which was slung over his shoulder. Finally he asked:

"What do I get out of it?"

"Five hundred and your expenses on the road."

Ole looked at Pete keenly. His old cold blue eyes detected a tinge of anxiety. For a reason not known to himself he was cautious.

"You mean—five hundred a season, or a month?"

"A season."

Ole shook his head.

"Not worth it," he answered, with emphasis.

Then followed a long argument; but it was Dailey who finally surrendered. He named a sum considerably in excess of the one first suggested, and his proposal was accepted.

And with the reaching of the agreement Pete Dailey mopped his forehead with the back of his puffy right hand, and heaved a tremendous "Whew!"

But right afterward he hurried to the railway station and dispatched a telegram to Tom Wilson. It read:

Got the best rover west of the Atlantic. Name is Magee. Get ready for him.

Pete made certain that the message got away that night—and that it went "collect."

Rat Portage was excited. There isn't any necessity for using the superlative in this case as Rat Portage never becomes excited over anything but hockey, and it has to have the first game of the season with Port Arthur to put it at the pitch of interest. When this happens, merchants simply close their stores. Fathers take their wives and families; every one, old, decrepit, middle-aged, and the young, men and women, youths

and maidens, boys and girls, buy their way into this contest. Where in your cities can you find such enthusiasm? Imagine, if you can, New York or Chicago closing up shop to go to a baseball game.

Ole Magee had come to Rat Portage. He had made good. The early practice games only served to liven up the team, and in them Ole had made the followers of hockey forget their sighing for Tup Turney, the man who had deserted.

No skater coming down on the wind was faster than he, no puck handler was trickier, no man was more brilliant in attack, not many steadier in defense.

Now the game with Port Arthur.

Tim Magee, flanked by a score of heavy woodsmen from the district near Nipigon, came into Rat Portage a day before the contest, and Tim Magee it was, in a moment of drink, who told of the feud of more than two decades before in Beaucage. Rat Portage, being bitter against Tup Turner, listened sympathetically, and then plied Tim with such information and fiction as would work best with an inflamed brain. Rat Portage was anxious to have this match resolve into a grudge fight. Tim heard and was tearing mad, as tearing mad as only an Irishman can get.

Tim it was who fed the last dregs of parental wrath and hatred into the ears of Ole Magee.

And Ole, revering the memory of a mother he never known, had listened.

Air that was cold, lights that glared and sputtered frigidly, it seemed, above a pen banked high on every side by rows of seats, every one of which was filled by a tense, straining body; this was what burst upon Ole Magee, as, accompanied by half a dozen other players, he skated through the gate for the preliminary practice. A wild crowd released a wild greeting to the home players; it was a sullen crowd when Tup Turney and the Port Arthur players flashed through another opening.

Ole Magee had never seen Turney, and he looked with interest when the son of a father he had been taught to hate appeared. Turney, having heard of Magee, returned the gaze. Turney was a man who might have been modeled from the same pattern as Ole. Tall, straight as any young pine in the surrounding forest, well proportioned, quick and certain in every movement; only Turney's features were different. His face lacked the frank openness of Ole's, and it showed some signs of early decay. His hair was like his father's—short, curly, and black. There was a strain of the French in Turney.

Once he made as though to approach Ole, and he did start toward him, but then, changing his mind, he swung off on one foot and skated away.

The game started in a furious clash of sticks in the center of the rink. Rat Portage's center gained the first advantage, slicing the puck and slipping it backward through his legs to Ole, who was coming up behind him. Getting the rubber disk in the heel of his stick, Ole darted toward Port Arthur's goal and a tremendous shout went up as he cleared the first line of defense. Just for a moment Rat Portage forgot Tup Turney, and in that moment it saw the sudden dash of its favorite checked; the puck was jerked away from Magee; and Turney, dodging and twisting, broke through the Rat Portage line and sped away.

He didn't reach the goal, for Ole had swung around and, striding through with all the strength and speed of his powerful legs, he caught Turney, and there followed a short, sharp tussle for possession. Ole won, again flipping the puck away to where another of his own team was waiting, half bent over, for a vicious dash through the territory of the visitors.

Three minutes, five, then ten, then

twelve, then fifteen of the twenty minutes to a half passed. The game—it was more than a game, it was a fight between two men, a mad, rushing, relentless fight between Ole Magee and Tup Turney for supremacy on the ice. The half was nearing a close. Neither team had scored; the play had been evenly divided. First on Port Arthur's ice, then near the Rat Portage goal, with every man, woman, and child in the mob of five thousand screaming for Ole Magee and his mates to hold them! Not in hockey's history in Rat Portage had there been a game such as this. The minutes slipped away and a whistle shrilled, denoting the end of the half as Ole Magee and Tup Turney slashed away in the center of the ice.

The second half started as had the first. Those two—Magee and Turney—were ever in the front. Rat Portage had almost forgotten to watch the play of the other men. In the beginning Turney had been confident. He had smiled at Ole's first efforts; had satisfied himself in thinking this newcomer an untried upstart. But as the game lengthened, Turney's mind slowly, but nevertheless surely, switched. He began to realize that in Magee he had met an antagonist who was fully worthy of the best hockey that was within him, and in that second half he began a driving attack that crushed Rat Portage's defense.

The wings wilted before his furious rushes, the cover point and the point, the men right in front of the goal tender, lost heart and, instead of crashing into Turney and breaking him, they only reached out sticks in a half-hearted way. Turney went over and through like a man unshod. A dozen times he shot at the Rat Portage goal, a dozen times he failed, failed because of the presence of Magee. Ole was ever on top of him, was ever forcing him to the sides of the pen, was ever crowding him into the hardest of angles from which to shoot. Ole, realizing that these were the insane rushes of a terrific force, knew no man could long continue them. And he bided his time, playing sure, but still letting out some of his own driving power to hold Turney in check.

There came the time when Turney, exhausted by his own efforts, dropped back to regain strength. It was in the closing minutes of the second half, and then it was that Ole Magee went through.

Snaring the puck almost in the shadow of his own goal, and zipping around and through his own and the Port Arthur players, he began a rush that Rat Portage still talks about. With his stick held slightly to one side and the front of him, he flew past the first Port Arthur players, dodged the second, and flashed on toward where Turney was waiting as one of the last defenders of the Port Arthur goal. Dodging was out of the question now. Realizing that his only hope lay in outguessing Turney, Ole made a sudden snap of his stick. The puck was sent spinning away. It crashed against the wooden side of the pen, and bounded off at an acute angle and toward the goal.

Turney hesitated, turned, and sprang for the rubber. He did just what Ole had wished him.

In his indecision he lost the valuable fraction of a second, and before realizing his mistake he felt Magee's body whip past, and almost with the passing, Magee, aided by the speed of a long rush, was again upon the puck. Ole ripped by the point. A stick flashed, the puck, a black streak in the air, sang by the goal tender and dropped into the net.

The upstretched arm of the goal umpire indicated to the crowd that Magee had scored.

There isn't anything to tell of the balance of the game. Rat Portage, bolstered in mind by an advantage, put up

a defensive game. The game ended this way:

Rat Portage, 1; Port Arthur, 0.

Afterward Ole Magee met Tup Turney. Turney it was who congratulated Ole, and Turney it was who told Ole that there should be no quarrel between them.

"My father is dead now, but before he died he asked me to keep faith with a Magee—wherever I met him," explained Tup.

And Ole, being happy in his own victory, shook hands and did his best to forget.

It didn't matter to him that when Tim Magee found out, there should be angry words. For Ole reasoned:

Tup Turney's a hockey player after my own heart, and it isn't his fault if his father was—a brute of the North.

The Right Song

By Berton Braley

OH, we're sick to death of the style of song
That's only a sort of a simpering song,
A kissy song and a sissy song,
Or a weepy, creepy, whimpering song,
And we long for a different brand of song
From the smiling, wiling, smirking song,
From the shady song, or the lady's song.
Oh, give us the thrill of a working song,
The husky shout of the toilers stout,
The rumbling roar of a working song!

We have had enough of the type of song,
That's a whining, pining, sniffling song,
Or the lovey, dovey stripe of song—
An utterly useless, piffling song,
So give us the lift of a lusty song
A boisterous, bubbling, boiling song,
Or a smashing song and a dashing song,
Oh, give us the tang of a toiling song,
The chantey loud of the working crowd,
The thunderous thrall of a toiling song!

Aye, sing us a joyous, daring song,
Not a moaning, groaning, fretting song,
But a ringing song, and a swinging song,
A rigorous, vigorous, sweating song,
We have had enough of the gypsy song,
Which is only a lazy, shirking song,
So toughen your throat to a rougher note
And give us the tune of a working song,
A tune of strife and the joy of life,
The beat and throb of a working song!

The Last Stand

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Good Indian," "Lonesome Land," Etc.

(A Four-Part Novel—Part Four)

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FIGHT GOES ON.

IT is amazing how quickly life swings back to the normal after even so harrowing an experience as had come to the Flying U. Tragedy had hovered there a while, and had turned away with a smile, and the smile was reflected upon the faces and in the eyes of every one upon whose souls had fallen her shadow. The Kid was safe, and he was well, and he had not suffered from the experience; on the contrary, he spent most of his waking hours in recounting his adventures to an admiring audience. He was a real old cow-puncher. He had gone into the wilderness, and he had proven the stuff that was in him. He had made "dry camp" just exactly as well as any of the Happy Family could have done. He had slept out under the stars rolled in a blanket—and do you think for one minute that he would ever submit to lace-trimmed nighties again? If you do, ask the Little Doctor what the Kid said on the first night after his return, when she essayed to robe him in spotless white and rock him, held tight in her starved arms!

The Little Doctor was learning some things about her man-child, and one of them was this: When he rode away into the Bad Lands and was lost, other things were lost—and lost permanently; he was no longer her baby. He had come back to her changed, so that she studied him amazedly while she worshiped. He had entered boldly into the life which men live, and he would never return to the old order of things.

She knew that it was so, when the Kid insisted, next day, upon going home with the bunch; with Andy, rather, who was just now the Kid's particular hero. He had to help the bunch; they needed him, and Andy needed him and Miss Allen needed him.

"Aw, you needn't be scared, Doctor Dell," he told her shrewdly. "I ain't going to try and find them brakes any more. I'll stick with the bunch, cross my heart. And I'll come back to-night if you're scared 'thout me. Honest to gran'ma, I've got to go and help the bunch lick the stuffin' outa them nesters, Doctor Dell."

The Little Doctor looked at him strangely, hugged him tight—and let him go. Chip would ride up later, and he would bring the Kid home safely, and—the limitations of dooryard play no longer sufficed; her fledgling had found what his wings were for, and the nest was too little now.

"We'll take care of him," Andy promised her understandingly. "If Chip don't come up this afternoon, I'll bring him home myself. Don't you worry a minute about *him*."

"I'd tell a man she needn't!" added the Kid patronizingly.

"I suppose he's a lot safer with you

This novel was begun in the POPULAR published January 7th, and may be ordered at news stands.

boys than he is here at the ranch—unless one of us stood over him all the time, or we tied him up," she told Andy gamely. "I feel like a hen trying to raise a duck! Go on, Buck—but give mother a kiss first."

The Kid kissed her violently and with a haste that betrayed where his thoughts were, in spite of the fact that never before had his mother called him Buck. To her it was a surrender of his babyhood—to him it was his due. The Little Doctor sighed and watched him ride away beside Andy. "Children are such self-centered little beasts!" she told J. G. ruefully. "I almost wish he was a girl."

"Huh! If he was a girl, he wouldn't get lost, maybe, but some feller'd take him away from yuh just the same. The Kid's all right. He's just the kind you'd expect him to be and want him to be. You're tickled to death because he's like he is. Dog-gone it, Dell, that Kid's got the real *stuff* in him! He's a dead ringer fer his dad—that ought to do yuh."

"It does," the Little Doctor declared. "But it does seem as if he might be contented here with me for a little while—after such a horrible time——"

"It wasn't horrible to him, yuh want to recollect. Dog-gone it, I wish that Blake would come back. You write to him, Dell, and tell him how things is stacking up. He oughta be here on the ground. No tellin' what them nesters'll build up next."

So the Old Man slipped back into the old channels of worry and thought, just as life itself slips back into the old channels after a stressful period. The Little Doctor sighed again and sat down to write the letter and to discuss with the Old Man what she should say.

There was a good deal to say. For one thing, more contests had been filed and more shacks built upon claims belonging to the Happy Family. She must tell Blake that. Also, Blake must help make some arrangement whereby the Happy Family could hire an outfit to gather their stock and the alien stock which they meant to drive back out of the Bad Lands. And there was Irish, who had quietly taken to the hills again as soon as the Kid returned. Blake was needed to look into that particular bit of trouble and try and discover just how serious it was. The man whom Irish had floored with a chair was apparently hovering close to death—and there were those who emphasized the adverb, but could prove nothing.

"And you tell 'im," directed the Old Man querulously, "that I'll stand good for his time while he's lookin' after things for the boys. And tell 'im if he's so dog-goned scared I'll buy into the game, he needn't to show up here at the ranch at all; tell him to stay in Dry Lake if he wants to—serve him right to stop at that hotel fer a while. But tell him for the Lord's sake git a move on. The way it looks to me, things is piling up on them boys till they can't hardly see over the top, and something's got to be done. Tell 'im—here! Give me a sheet of paper and a pencil, and I'll tell him a few things myself! Chances are you'd smooth 'em out too much, gitting 'em on paper. And the things I've got to say to Blake don't want any smoothing."

The things he wrote painfully with his rheumatic hand were not smoothed for politeness' sake, and it made the Old Man feel better to get them off his mind. He read the letter over three times, lingering over the most scathing sentences relishfully. He sent one of his new men to town for the express purpose of mailing that letter, and he felt a glow of satisfaction at actually speaking his mind upon the subject for once.

Perhaps it was just as well he did not know that Blake was in Dry Lake when the letter reached the office, and that it was forwarded to the place whence it had started. Blake was already "get-

ting a move on," and he needed no such spur as the Old Man's letter.

Blake had no intention of handling the case from the Flying U porch, for instance. He had laid his plans quite independently of the Flying U outfit. He had no intention of letting Irish be arrested upon a trumped-up charge, and he managed to send a word of warning to that hot-headed young man not to put himself in the way of any groping arm of the law; it was so much simpler than arrest and preliminary trial and bail and all that. He had sent word to Weary to come and see him, before ever he received the Old Man's letter, and he had placed at Weary's disposal what funds would be needed for the immediate plans of the Happy Family. He had attended in person to the hauling of the fence material to their boundary line on the day he arrived and discovered by sheer accident that the stuff was still in the warehouse of the general store.

After he did all that, the Honorable Blake received the Old Man's letter, read it through slowly, and afterward stroked down his Vandyke beard and laughed quietly to himself. The letter itself was both peremptory and profane, and commanded the Honorable Blake to do exactly what he had already done, and what he intended to do when the time came for the doing.

CHAPTER XXII.

LAWFUL IMPROVEMENT.

Florence Grace Hallman must not be counted a woman without principle or kindness of heart, or those qualities which make women beloved of men. She was a pretty nice young woman, unless one roused her antagonism. Had Andy Green, for instance, accepted in good faith her offer of a position with the syndicate, he would have found her generous and humorous and loyal and kind. He would probably have fallen in love with her before the summer was over, and he would never have discovered in her nature that hardness and that spiteful scheming which came to the surface and made the whole Happy Family look upon her as an enemy.

Florence Grace Hallman was intensely human, as well as intensely loyal to her firm. She had liked Andy Green better than any one—herself included—realized. It was not altogether her vanity that was hurt when she discovered how he had worked against her—how little her personality had counted with him. She felt chagrined and humiliated, and as though nothing save the complete subjugation of Andy Green and the complete thwarting of his plans could ease her own hurt.

Deep in her heart she hoped that he would eventually want her to forgive him his treachery. She would give him a good, hard fight—she would show him that she was mistress of the situation. She would force him to respect her as a foe; after that—Andy Green was human, certainly. She trusted to her feminine intuition to say just what should transpire after the fight; trusted to her feminine charm also to bring her whatever she might desire.

That was the personal side of the situation. There was also the professional side, which urged her to fight for the interests of her firm. And since both the personal and the professional aspects of the case pointed to the same general goal, it may be assumed that Florence Grace was prepared to make a stiff fight.

Then Andy Green proceeded to fall in love with that sharp-tongued Rosemary Allen; and Rosemary Allen had no better taste than to let herself be lost and finally found by Andy, and had the nerve to show very plainly that she not only approved of his love, but returned it. After that, Florence Grace was in a condition to stop at nothing—short of

murder—that would defeat the Happy Family in their latest project.

While all the Bear Paw country was stirred up over the lost child, Florence Grace Hallman said it was too bad, and had they found him yet?—and went right along planting contestants upon the claims of the Happy Family. She encouraged the building of claim shacks, and urged firmness in holding possession of them. She visited the man whom Irish had knocked down with a chair, and she had a long talk with him and with the doctor who attended him. She saw to it that the contest notices were served promptly upon the Happy Family, and she hurried in shipments of stock. Oh, she was very busy, indeed, during the week that was spent in hunting the Kid. When he was found, and the rumor of an engagement between Rosemary Allen and that treacherous Andy Green reached her, she was busier still; but since she changed her methods and was careful to mask her real purpose behind an air of passive resentment, her industry became less apparent.

The Happy Family did not pay much attention to Florence Grace Hallman and her studied opposition. They were pretty busy attending to their own affairs; Andy Green was not only busy, but very much in love, so that he almost forgot the existence of Florence Grace except on the rare occasions when he met her riding over the prairie trails.

First of all they rounded up the stock that had been scattered, and they did not stop when they crossed Antelope Coulee with the settlers' cattle. They bedded them there until after dark. Then they drove them on to the valley of Dry Lake, crossed that valley on the main traveled road, and pushed the herd up on Lonesome Prairie and out as far upon the bench land as they had time to drive them.

They did not make much effort toward keeping it a secret. Indeed, Weary told three or four of the most indignant settlers, next day, where they would find their cattle. But he added that the feed was pretty good back there, and advised them to leave the stock out there for the present.

"It isn't going to do you fellows any good to rear up on your hind legs and make a holler," he said calmly. "We haven't hurt your cattle. We don't want to have trouble with anybody. But we're pretty sure to have a fine, large row with our neighbors if they don't keep on their own side the fence."

That fence was growing to be more than a mere figure of speech. The Happy Family did not love the digging of post holes and the stretching of barbed wire; on the contrary they hated it so deeply that you could not get a civil word out of one of them while the work went on; yet they put in long hours at the fence building.

They had to take the work in shifts on account of having their own cattle to watch day and night. Sometimes it happened that a man tamped posts or helped stretch wire all day, and then stood guard two or three hours on the herd at night; which was wearing on the temper. Sometimes, because they were tired, they quarreled over small things.

New shipments of cattle, too, kept coming to Dry Lake. Invariably these would be driven out toward Antelope Coulee—farther if the drivers could manage it—and would have to be driven back again with what patience the Happy Family could muster. No one helped them. There was every attitude among the claim dwellers, from open opposition to latent antagonism. None were quite neutral—and yet the Happy Family did not bother any save these who had filed contests to their claims, or who took active part in the cattle driving.

The Happy Family were not half as brutal as they might have been. In spite

of their no-trespassing signs, they permitted settlers to drive across their claims with wagons and water barrels, to haul water from One Man Creek when the springs and creek in Antelope Coulee went dry.

They did not attempt to move the shacks of the contestants off their claims. They grudged the time the moving would take, though they hated the sight of them and of the owners who bore themselves with such provocative assurance. But the Honorable Blake had told them that moving the shacks would accomplish no real, permanent good. Within thirty days they must appear before the register and receiver and file answer to the contest, and he assured them that mildness and forbearance upon their part would serve to strengthen their case with the commissioner.

It goes to prove how deeply in earnest they were, that they immediately began to practice assiduously the virtues of mildness and forbearance. They could, he told them, postpone the filing of their answers until close to the end of the thirty days; which would serve also to delay the date of actual trial of the contests, and give the Happy Family more time for their work.

Their plans had enlarged somewhat. They talked now of fencing the whole tract on all four sides, and of building a dam across the mouth of a certain coulee in the foothills which drained several miles of rough country, thereby converting the coulee into a reservoir that would furnish water for their desert claims. It would take work, of course; but the Happy Family was beginning to see prosperity on the trail ahead, and nothing in the shape of hard work could stop them from coming to handgrips with fortune.

Chip helped them all he could, but he had the Flying U to look after, and that without the good teamwork of the Happy Family which had kept things moving along so smoothly. The teamwork now was being used in a different game; a losing game, one would say at first glance.

So far the summer had been favorable to dry farming. The more enterprising of the settlers had sown grain and planted potatoes upon freshly broken soil, and these were grown apace. They did not know about those scorching August winds, that would shrivel crops in a day. They did not realize that early frosts might kill what the hot winds did not. They became enthusiastic over dry farming, and their resentment toward the Happy Family increased as their enthusiasm waxed strong. The Happy Family complained to one another that you couldn't pry a nester loose from his claim with a crowbar.

In this manner did civilization march out and take possession of the high prairies that lay close to the Flying U. They had a Sunday school organized, with the meetings held in a double shack near the trail to Dry Lake. The Happy Family, riding that way, sometimes heard voices mingled in the shrill singing of some hymn where, a year before, they had listened to the hunting song of the coyote.

Eighty acres to the man—with that climate and that soil, they never could make it pay; with that soil especially, since it was mostly barren. The Happy Family knew it, and could find it in their hearts to pity the men who were putting in dollars and time and hard work there. But for obvious reasons they did not put their pity into speech.

They fenced their west line in record time. There was only one gate in the whole length of it, and that was on the trail of Dry Lake. Not content with trusting to the warning of four strands of barbed wire stretched so tight they hummed to the touch, they took turns in watching it—"riding fence," in range parlance—and in watching cattle.

To H. J. Owens and his fellow contestants they paid not the slightest attention, because the Honorable Blake had urged them personally to ignore any and all claimants. To Florence Grace Hallman they gave no heed, believing that she had done her worst, and that her worst was, after all, pretty mild, since the contests she had caused to be filed could not possibly be approved by the government so long as the Happy Family continued to abide by every law and by-law and condition and requirement in their present thoroughgoing and exemplary manner.

You should have seen how mild-mannered and how industrious the Happy Family was, during those three weeks which followed the excitement of the Kid's adventuring into the wild. You would have been astonished, and you would have made the mistake of thinking that they had changed permanently, and might be expected now to settle down with wives and raise families and hay and cattle and potatoes, and grow beards, perhaps, and become well-to-do ranchers.

The Happy Family was almost convinced that they were actually leaving excitement behind them for good and all. They might hold back the encroaching tide of immigration from the rough land along the river—that sounded like something exciting, to be sure. But they must hold back the tide with legal proceedings and by pastoral pursuits, and that promised little in the way of brisk, decisive action and strong nerves and all those qualities which set the Happy Family somewhat apart from their fellows.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WATER QUESTION AND SOME GOSSIP.

Miss Rosemary Allen rode down into One Man Coulee and boldly up to the cabin of Andy Green, and shouted musically for him to come forth. Andy made a hasty pass at his hair with a brush, jerked his tie straight, and came out eagerly. There was no hesitation in his manner. He went straight to her, and reached up to pull her from the saddle, that he might hold her in his arms and kiss her—after the manner of bold young men who are very much in love. But Miss Rosemary Allen stopped him with a push that was not altogether playful, and scowled at him viciously.

"I am in a most furious mood today," she said. "I want to scratch somebody's eyes out! I want to say *words*. Don't come close, or I might pull your hair or something, James." She called him James because that was not his name, and because she had learned a good deal about his past misdeeds and liked to take a sly whack at his notorious tendency to forget the truth, by calling him Truthful James.

"All right; that suits me fine. It's worth a lot to have you close enough to pull hair. Where have you been all this long while?" Being a bold young man and very much in love, he kissed her in spite of her professed viciousness.

"Oh, I've been to town—it hasn't been more than three days since we met and had that terrible quarrel, James. What was it about?" She frowned down at him thoughtfully. "I'm still furious about it—whatever it is. Do you know, Mister Man, that I am an outlaw among my neighbors, and that our happy little household up there on the hill is a house divided against itself? I've put up a green burlap curtain on my southwest corner, and bought me a smelly oil stove, and I positively refuse to look at my neighbors or speak to them. I'm going to get some lumber and board up that side of my house. These three *cats*—they get together on the other side of my curtain and say the *meanest* things!"

Andy Green had the temerity to laugh. "That sounds good to me,"

he told her unsympathetically. "Now maybe you'll come down and keep house for me and let that pinnacle go to thunder. It's no good, anyway, and I told you so long ago. That whole eighty acres of yours wouldn't support a family of jack rabbits a month. What——"

"And let those old hens say they drove me off? That Kate Price is the limit. The things she has said to me you wouldn't believe. And it all started over my going with little Buck a few times to ride along your fence when you boys were busy. I considered that I had a perfect right to ride where I pleased. Of course, they're furious anyway, because I don't side against you boys and—all that. When—when they found out about—you and me, James, they said some pretty sarcastic things, but I didn't pay any attention to that. Poor old freaks, I expected them to be jealous because nobody ever pays any attention to *them*. Kate Price is the worst—she's an old maid. The others have had husbands, and can act superior.

"Well, I didn't mind the things they said then; I took that for granted. But a week or so ago Florence Hallman came, and she did stir things up in great style! Since then the girls have hardly spoken to me except to say something insulting. And Florence Grace came right out and called me a traitor; that was before little Buck and I took to 'riding fence,' as you call it, for you boys. You can imagine what they've been saying since then!"

"Well, what do you care? You don't have to stay with them, and you know it. I'm just waiting——"

"Well, but I'm no quitter, James. I'm going to hold down that claim now if I have to wear a six-shooter!" Her eyes twinkled at the idea. "Besides, I can stir them up now and then, and get them to say things that are useful. For instance, Florence Hallman told Kate Price about that last trainload of cattle coming, and that they were going to cut your fence and drive them through in the night—and I stirred dear little Katie up so she couldn't keep still about that. And therefore"—she reached out and gave Andy Green's ear a small tweak—"somebody found out about it, and a lot of somebodys happened around that way and just quietly managed to give folks a hint that there was fine grass somewhere else. That saved a lot of horseflesh and words and work, didn't it?"

"It sure did." Andy smiled up at her. "Just the same——"

"But listen here! Nice, level-headed Katie-girl has lost her temper since then, and let out a little more that is useful knowledge to somebody. There's one great weak point in the character of Florence Hallman; maybe you have noticed it. She's just simply *got* to have some one to tell things to, and she doesn't always show the best judgment in her choice of a confessional——"

"I've noticed that before," Andy Green admitted, and smiled reminiscently. "She sure does talk too much for a lady that carries so many schemes up her sleeve."

"Yes—and she's been making a chum of Kate Price since she discovered what an untrustworthy creature I am. I did a little favor for Irish Mallory, James. I overheard Florence Grace talking to Kate about that man who is supposed to be at death's door. So I made a trip to Great Falls, if you please, and I scouted around and located the gentleman—well, anyway, I gave that nice, sleek little lawyer of yours a few facts that will let Irish come back to his claim——"

"Irish has been coming back to his claim pretty regular as it is," Andy informed her quietly. "Did you think he was hiding out all this time? Why"—he laughed at her—"you talked to him yourself, one day, and thought it was Weary. Remember when you came

over with the mail? That was Irish helping me string wire. He's been wearing Weary's hat and clothes, and cultivating a twinkle to his eyes—that's all."

"Why, I—well, anyway, that man they've been making a fuss over is just as well as you are, James. They only wanted to get Irish in jail and make a little trouble—pretty cheap warfare at that, if you want my opinion."

"Oh, well—what's the odds? While they're wasting time and energy that way, we're going right along doing what we've laid out to do. Say, do you know, I'm kinda getting stuck on this ranch proposition. If I just had a housekeeper——"

Miss Rosemary Allen seldom let him get beyond that point, and she interrupted him now by wrinkling her nose at him in a manner that made Andy Green forget altogether that he had begun a sentence upon a subject forbidden. Later she went back to her worries; she was a very persistent young woman.

"I hope you boys are going to attend to that contest business right away," she said, with a pucker between her eyes, and not much twinkle in them. "There's something about that which I don't quite understand. I heard Florence Hallman and Kate talking yesterday about it going by default. Are you sure it's wise to put off filing your answers so long? When are you supposed to appear, James?"

"Me? On or before the twenty-oneth day of July, my dear girl. They lumped us up and served us all on the same day—I reckon to save shoe leather; therefore, inasmuch as said adverse parties have got over a week left——"

"You better not take a chance, waiting till the last day in the afternoon," she warned him vaguely. "Maybe they think you've forgotten the date or something—but whatever they think, I believe they're counting on your not answering in time. I think Florence Hallman knows they haven't any real proof against you. I *know* she knows it. She's perfectly *wild* over the way you boys have stuck here and worked. And from what I can gather, she hasn't been able to scrape up the weentiest bit of evidence that the Flying U is backing you—and, of course, that is the only ground they could contest your claims on. So if it comes to trial, you'll all win; you're bound to. I told Kate Price so—and those other old hens, yesterday, and that's what we had the row over."

"My money's on you, girl," Andy told her, grinning. "How are the wounded?"

"The wounded? Oh, they've clubbed together this morning and are washing hankies and collars and things, and talking about me. And they have snouged every speck of water from the barrel—I paid my share for the hauling, too—and the man won't come again till day after to-morrow with more. Fifty cents a barrel, straight, he's charging now, James. And you boys with a great, big, long creekful of it that you can get right into and *swim* in! I've come over to borrow two water bags of it, if you please, James. I never *dreamed* water was so precious. Florence Hallman ought to be made to live on one of these dry claims she's fooled us into taking. I really don't know, James, what's going to become of some of these poor farmers. You knew, didn't you, that Mr. Murphy spent nearly two hundred dollars boring a well—and now it's so strong of alkali they daren't use a drop of it? Mr. Murphy is living right up to his name and nationality, since then. He's away back there beyond the Sands place, you know. He has to haul water about six miles. Believe me, James, Florence Hallman had better keep away from Murphy! I met him as I was coming out from town, and he called her a Jezebel!"

"That's mild!" Andy commented dryly. "Get down, why don't you? I

want you to take a look at the inside of my shack and see how bad I need a housekeeper—since you won't take my word for it. I hope every drop of water leaks outa these bags before you get home. I hope old Mister falls down and spills it. I've a good mind not to let you have any, anyway. Maybe you could be starved and tortured into coming down here where you belong."

"Maybe I couldn't. I'll get me a barrel of my own, and hire Jimpson to fill it four times a week, if you please! And I'll put a lid with a padlock on it, so Katie dear can't rob me in the night—and I'll use a whole quart at a time to wash dishes, and *two* quarts when I take a bath! I shall," she asserted, with much emphasis, "live in *luxury,* James!"

Andy laughed and waved his hand toward One Man Creek. "That's all right—but how would you like to have that running past your house, so you could wake up in the night and hear it go gurgle-gurgle? Wouldn't that be all right?"

Rosemary Allen clasped her two gloved hands together and drew a long breath. "I should want to run out and stop it," she declared. "To think of water actually running around loose in this world! And think of us up on that dry prairie, paying fifty cents a barrel for it—and a lot slopped out of the barrel on the road!" She glanced down into Andy's love-lighted eyes, and her own softened. She placed her hand on his shoulder and shook her head at him with a tender remonstrance.

"I know, boy—but it isn't in me to give up anything I set out to do, any more than it is in you. You wouldn't like me half so well if I could just drop that claim and think no more about it. I've got enough money to commute, when the time comes, and I'll feel a lot better if I go through with it now I've started. And—James!" She smiled at him wistfully. "Even if it is only eighty acres, it will make good pasture, and—it will help some, won't it?"

After that you could not expect Andy Green to do any more badgering, or to say one word to discourage the girl. He did like her better for having grit and a mental backbone—and he found a way of telling her so and of making the assurance convincing enough.

He filled her canvas water bags and went with her to carry them, and he cheered her much with his air castles. Afterward he took the team and rustled a water barrel and hauled her a barrel of water, and gave Kate Price a stony-eyed stare when she was caught watching him superciliously; and in divers ways managed to make Miss Rosemary Allen feel that she was fighting a good fight, and that the odds were all in her favor and in the favor of the Happy Family—and of Andy Green in particular. She felt that the spite of her three very near neighbors was really a matter to laugh over, and the spleen of Florence Hallman a joke.

But for all that she gave Andy Green one last warning when he climbed up to the spring seat of the wagon and unwound the lines from the brake handle, ready to drive back to his own work. She went close to the front wheel, so that eavesdroppers could not hear, and held her front hair from blowing across her earnest, wind-tanned face, while she looked up at him.

"Now remember, boy, *do* go and file your answers to those contests—all of you!" she urged. "I don't know why—but I've a feeling that some kind of a scheme is being hatched to make you trouble on that one point. And if you see Buck, tell him I'll ride fence with him to-morrow again. If you realized how much I like that old cow-puncher, you'd be horribly jealous, James."

"I'm jealous right now, without realizing a thing except that I've got to go off and leave you here with a bunch

of lemons," he retorted—and he spoke loud enough so that any eavesdroppers might hear.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KID IS USED AS A PAWN IN THE GAME.

In the struggle which the Happy Family was making to preserve the shrunken range of the Flying U, and to hold back the sweeping tide of immigration, one might logically look for some big, overwhelming element to turn the tide one way or the other. With the Homeseekers' Syndicate backing the natural animosity of the settlers who had filed upon semiarid land because the Happy Family had taken all of the tract that was tillable, a big, open clash might be considered inevitable.

And yet the struggle was resolving itself into the question of whether the contest filings should be approved by the land office, or the filings of the Happy Family be allowed to stand as having been made in good faith.

Florence Hallman, therefore, having taken upon herself the leadership in the contest fight, must do one of two things if she would have victory to salve the hurt to her self-esteem and to vindicate the firm's policy in the eyes of the settlers. She must produce evidence of a collusion of the Flying U outfit with the Happy Family, in the taking of the claims. Or she must connive to prevent the filing of answers to the contest notices, within the time limit fixed by law, so that the cases would go by default. That, of course, was the simplest method—since she had not been able to gather any evidence that would stand in court.

There was another element in the land struggle—the soil and climate that would fight inexorably against the settlers; but of them we have little to do, since the Happy Family had nothing to do with them save in a purely negative way.

A four-wire fence and a systematic patrol along the line was having its effect upon the stock question. If the settlers drove their cattle south until they passed the farthest corner of Flying U fence, they came plump against Bert Rogers' barbed boundary line. West of that was his father's place, which stretched to the railroad right of way, fenced on either side with a stock-proof barrier, and hugging the Missouri all the way to the Marias—where were other settlers. If they went north until they passed the fence of the Happy Family, there were the Meeker holdings to bar the way to the very foot of old Centennial, and as far up its sides as cattle would go.

The Happy Family had planned wisely when they took their claims in a long chain that stretched across the bench land north of the Flying U. Florence Grace knew this perfectly—but what could she prove? The Happy Family had bought cattle of their own, and were grazing them lawfully upon their own claims. A lawyer had assured her that there was nothing to be gained by disputing that point. They never went near J. G. Whitmore, nor did they make use of his wagons, his teams, or his tools or his money; instead they hired what they needed openly, and from Bert Rogers. They had bought their cattle from the Flying U, and that was the extent of their business relations—as appeared on the surface. And since collusion had been the ground given for the contest filings, it will be easily seen how slight hope Florence Grace and her clients must have of winning any contest suit. Still, there was that alternative——

The Happy Family had been so eager to build that fence and gather their cattle and put them back on the claims, and so anxious lest in their absence the settlers would slip cattle across the dead

line and into the breaks, that they had postponed their trip to Great Falls as long as possible. The Honorable Blake had tacitly advised them to do so; and the Happy Family never gave a thought to their being hindered when they did get ready to attend to it.

But—a pebble killed Goliath.

H. J. Owens, whose eyes were the wrong shade of blue, sat upon a rocky hilltop which overlooked the trail from Flying U Coulee and a greater portion of the shack-dotted beach land as well, and swept the far horizons with his field glasses. Just down the eastern slope, where the jutting sandstone ledge cast a shadow, his horse stood tied to a stunted wild-currant bush. He laid the glasses across his knees while he refilled his pipe, and tilted his hat brim to shield his pale-blue eyes from the sun, that was sliding past midday.

H. J. Owens looked at his watch, nevertheless, as though the position of the sun meant nothing to him. He scowled a little, stretched a leg straight out before him to ease it of cramp, and afterward moved farther along in the shade. The wind swept past with a faint whistle, and laid the ripening grasses flat where it passed. A cloud shadow moved slowly along the slope beneath him, and he watched the darkening of the earth where it touched, and the sharp contrast of the sun-yellowed sea of grass all around it. H. J. Owens looked bored and sleepy; yet he did not leave the hilltop—nor did he go to sleep.

Instead, he lifted the glasses, turned them toward Flying U Coulee a half mile to the south of him, and stared long at the trail. After a few minutes he made a gesture to lower the glasses, and then abruptly raised them again to his eyes and fixed them steadily upon one spot, where the trail wound up over the crest of the bluff. He looked for a minute, and laid the glasses down upon a rock.

H. J. Owens fumbled in the pocket of his coat, which he had folded and laid beside him on the yellow gravel of the hill. He found something he wanted, stood up, and with his back against a bowlder, he faced to the southwest, whence came the wind. He was careful about the direction. He glanced up at the sun, squinting his pale eyes at the glare; he looked at what he held in his hand.

A glitter of sun on glass showed briefly. H. J. Owens laid his palm over it, waited while he could count ten, and took his palm away; replaced it, waited, and revealed the glass again with the sun glare upon it full. He held it so for a full minute, and slid the glass back into his pocket.

He glanced down toward Flying U Coulee again—toward where the trail stretched like a brown ribbon through the grass. He seemed to be in something of a hurry now—if impatient movement meant anything—yet he did not leave the place at once. He kept looking off there toward the southwest—off beyond Antelope Coulee and the sparsely dotted shacks of the settlers.

A smudge of smoke rose thinly there, behind a hill. Unless one had been watching the place, one would scarcely have noticed it, but H. J. Owens saw it at once and smiled his twisted smile and went running down the hill to where his horse was tied. He mounted and rode down to the level, skirted the knoll, and came out on the trail, down which he rode at an easy lope until he met the Kid.

The Kid was going to see Rosemary Allen and take a ride with her; but he pulled up with the air of condescension which was his usual attitude toward "nesters," and in response to the twisted smile of H. J. Owens he grinned amiably.

"Want to go on a bear hunt with me,

Buck?" began H. J. Owens, with just the right tone of comradeship to win the undivided attention of the Kid.

"I was goin' to ride fence with Miss Allen," the Kid declined regretfully. "There ain't any bears. Not very close, there ain't. I guess you musta swallered something Andy told you." He looked at H. J. Owens tolerantly.

"No, sir. I never talked to Andy about this." Had he been perfectly truthful he would have added that he had not talked with Andy about anything whatever, but he let it go. "This is a bear den I found myself. There's two little baby cubs, Buck, and I was wondering if you wouldn't like to go along and get one for a pet. You could learn it to dance and play soldier, and all kinds of stunts."

The Kid's eyes shone, but he was wary. This man was a nester, so it would be just as well to be careful. "Where'bouts is it?" he therefore demanded, in a tone of doubt that would have done credit to Happy Jack.

"Oh, down over there in the hills. It's a secret, though, till we get them out. Some fellows are after them for themselves, Buck. They want to—skin them."

"The mean devils!" condemned the Kid promptly. "I'd take a fall outa them if I ketched 'em skinning any baby bear cubs while *I* was around."

H. J. Owens glanced behind him with an uneasiness not altogether assumed. "Let's go down into this next gully to talk it over, Buck," he suggested, with an air of secretiveness that fired the Kid's imagination. "They started out to follow me, and I don't want 'em to see me talking to you, you know."

The Kid went with him unsuspectingly. In all the six years of his life, no man had ever offered him injury. Fear had not yet become associated with those who spoke him fair. Nesters he did not consider friends, because they were not friends with his bunch. Personally he did not know anything about enemies. This man was a nester—but he called him Buck, and he talked very nice and friendly, and he *said* he knew where there were some little baby bear cubs. The Kid had never before realized how much he wanted a bear cub for a pet. So do our wants grow to meet our opportunities.

H. J. Owens led the way into a shallow draw between two low hills, glancing often behind him and around him until they were shielded by the higher ground. He was careful to keep where the grass was thickest, and would hold no hoofprints to betray them, but the Kid never noticed. He was thinking how nice it would be to have a bear cub for a pet. But it was funny that the Happy Family had never found him one, if there were any in the country.

He turned to put the question direct to H. J. Owens, but that gentlemen forestalled him.

"You wait here a minute, Buck, while I ride back on this hill a little ways to see if those fellows are on our trail," he said, and rode off before the Kid could ask him the question.

The Kid waited obediently. He saw H. J. Owens get off his horse and go sneaking up to the brow of the hill, and take some field glasses out of his pocket and look all around over the prairie with them. The sight tingled the Kid's blood so that he almost forgot about the bear cub. It was almost exactly like fighting Injuns, like Uncle Gee-gee told about when he wasn't cross.

In a few minutes Owens came back to the Kid, and they went on slowly, keeping always in the low, grassy places where there would be no tracks left to tell of their passing that way. Behind them a yellow-brown cloud drifted sullenly with the wind. Now and then a black flake settled past them to the ground. A peculiar, tangy smell was in the air—the smell of burning grass.

H. J. Owens related a long, full-detailed account of how he had been down in the hills along the river, and had seen the old mother bear digging ants out of a sand hill for her cubs.

"I know—that's jes' 'zactly the way they do!" the Kid interrupted excitedly. "Daddy Chip seen one doing it on the Musselshell one time. He told me 'bout it."

H. J. Owens glanced sidelong at the Kid's flushed face, smiled his twisted smile, and went on with his story. He had not bothered them, he said, because he did not have any way of carrying both cubs, and he hated to kill them. He had thought of Buck, and how he would like a pet cub, so he had followed the bear to her den and had come away to get a sack to carry them in, and to tell Buck about it.

The Kid never once doubted that it was so. Whenever any of the Happy Family found anything in the hills that was nice, they always thought of Buck, and they always brought it to him. You would be amazed at the number of rattlesnake rattles and eagle claws and elk teeth and things like that which the Kid possessed and kept carefully stowed away in a closet kept sacred to his uses.

"'Course you'd 'member I wanted a baby bear cub for a pet," he assented gravely and with satisfaction. "Is it a far ways to that mother bear's home?"

"Why?" H. J. Owens turned from staring at the rolling smoke cloud, and looked at the Kid curiously. "Ain't you big enough to ride far?"

"'Course I'm big enough!" The Kid's pride was touched. "I can ride as far as a horse can travel. I bet I can ride farther and faster'n you can, you pilgrim!" He eyed the other disdainfully. "Huh! *You* can't ride. When you trot you go this way!" The Kid kicked Silver into a trot and went bouncing along with his elbows flapping loosely in imitation of H. J. Owen's ungraceful riding.

"I don't want to go a far ways," he explained, when the other was again riding alongside, "'cause Doctor Dell would cry if I didn't come back to supper. She cried when I was out huntin' the bunch. Doctor Dell gets lonesome awful easy." He looked over his shoulder uneasily. "I guess I better go back and tell her I'm goin' to git a baby bear cub for a pet," he said, and reined Silver around to act upon the impulse.

"No—don't do that, Buck." H. J. Owens pulled his horse in front of Silver. "It isn't far—just a little ways. And it would be fun to surprise them at the ranch. Gèe! When they saw you ride up with a pet bear cub in your arms——" H. J. Owens shook his head as though he could not find words to express the surprise of the Kid's family.

The Kid smiled his Little Doctor smile. "I'd tell a man!" he assented enthusiastically. "I bet the Countess would holler when she seen it. She scares awful easy. She's scared of a mice, even! Huh!"

"She'll be scared when she sees the bear cub," H. J. Owens declared absentmindedly. "I know you won't be, though. If we hurry maybe we can watch how he digs ants for his supper. That's lots of fun, Buck."

"Yes—I 'member it's fun to watch baby bear cubs dig ants," the Kid assented earnestly, and followed willingly where H. J. Owens led the way.

That the way was far did not impress itself upon the Kid, beguiled with wonderful stories of how baby bear cubs might be taught to do tricks. He listened and believed, and invented some very wonderful tricks that he meant to teach his baby bear cub. Not even when the shadows began to fill the gullies through which they rode did the Kid awake to the fact that night was coming close, and that they were still traveling away from home and in a direction which was strange to him. Never in his life had he been tricked by

any one with unfriendly intent. He did not guess that he was being tricked now. So he rode happily away into the wild places in search of a baby bear cub for a pet.

CHAPTER XXV.

"LITTLE BLACK SHACKS ALL BURNED UP."

It is a penitentiary offense for any one to set fire to prairie grass or timber; and if you know the havoc which one blazing match may work upon dry grassland when the wind is blowing free, you will not wonder at the penalty for lighting that match with deliberate intent to set the prairie afire.

Within five minutes after H. J. Owens slipped the bit of mirror back into his pocket upon flashing a signal that the Kid was riding alone upon the trail, a line of fire several rods long was creeping up out of a grassy hollow to the hilltop beyond, whence it would go racing away to the east and the north, growing bigger and harder to fight with every grass tuft it fed upon.

The Happy Family was working that day upon the system of irrigation by which they meant to reclaim and make really valuable their desert claims. They happened to be, at the time when the fire was started, six or seven miles away, wrangling over the best means of getting their main ditch around a certain coulee without building a lot of expensive flume. A surveyor would have been a blessing, at this point in the undertaking; but a surveyor charged good money for his services, and the Happy Family were trying to be very economical with money; with time and effort and with words they were not so frugal.

The fire had been burning for an hour and had spread so alarmingly before the gusty breeze that it threatened several claim shacks before they noticed the telltale, brownish tint to the sunlight, and smelled other smoke than the smoke of the word battle then waging fiercely among them. They dropped stakes, flags, and ditch level, and ran to where their horses waited sleepily the pleasure of their masters.

They reached the level of the bench land to see disaster sweeping down upon them. They did not stop then to wonder how the fire had started, or why it had gained such headway. They raced their horses after sacks, and after the wagon and team and water barrels with which to fight the flames. For it was not the claim shacks in its path which alone were threatened. The grass that was burning meant a great deal to the stock, and therefore to the general welfare of every settler upon that bench, be he native or newcomer.

Florence Grace Hallman had, upon one of her periodical visits among her "clients," warned them of the danger of prairie fires, and urged them to plow and burn guards around all their buildings. A few of the settlers had done so, and were comparatively safe in the face of that leaping red line. But there were some who had delayed—and these must fight now if they would escape.

The Happy Family, to a man, had delayed; rather, they had not considered that there was any immediate danger from fire; it was too early in the season for the grass to be tindery dry, as it would become a month or six weeks later. They were wholly unprepared for the catastrophe, so far as any expectation of it went. But for all that they knew exactly what to do and how to go about doing it, and they did not waste a single minute in meeting the emergency.

While the Kid was riding with H. J. Owens into the hills, his friends, the "bunch," were riding furiously in the opposite direction. And that was exactly what had been planned beforehand. In the minds of those who planned, there was an absolute certainty that it would be so. Florence Grace

Hallman, for instance, knew just what would furnish complete occupation for the minds and the hands of the Happy Family, and of every other man in that neighborhood, that afternoon. Perhaps a claim shack or two would go up in smoke, and some grass would burn. But when one has a stubborn disposition and is fighting for prestige and revenge and the success of one's business undertakings, a shack or two and a few acres of prairie grass do not count for very much.

For the rest of that afternoon the boys of the Flying U worked side by side with hated "nesters," and told the inexperienced how best to fight the flames. For the rest of that afternoon no one remembered the Kid, or wondered why H. J. Owens was not there in the grimy line of fire fighters who slapped doggedly at the leaping flames with sacks kept wet from the barrels of water hauled here and there as they were needed. No one had time to call the roll and see who was missing among the settlers. No one dreamed that this mysterious fire, that had crept up out of a coulee and spread a black, smoking blanket over the hills where it passed, was nothing more nor less than a diversion, while a greater crime was being committed behind their backs.

In spite of them, the fire, beaten out of existence at one point, gained unexpected fury elsewhere, and raced on. In spite of them, women and children were in actual danger of being burned to death, while they rushed weeping from flimsy shelter to find safety in the nearest barren coulee. The sick lady whom the Little Doctor had been tending was carried out on her bed and laid upon the blackened prairie, raving in delirium from the fright she had received. The shack she had lately occupied smoked while the tarred paper on the roof crisped and curled; and then the whole structure burst into flame and sent blazing bits of paper and boards to spread the fire faster.

Fire guards which the inexperienced settlers thought safe were jumped without any perceptible check upon the flames. The wind was just right for the fanning of the fire, and it shifted now and then erratically and sent the yellow line leaping in new directions. Florence Grace Hallman was in Dry Lake that day, and she did not hear until after dark how completely her little diversion had been a success; how more than half of her colony had been left homeless and hungry upon the charred prairie. Florence Grace Hallman would not have relished her supper, I fear, had the news reached her earlier in the evening.

At Antelope Coulee the Happy Family and such of the settlers as they could muster hastily for the fight made a desperate stand against the common enemy. Flying U Coulee was safe, thanks to the permanent fire guards which the Old Man maintained year after year as a matter of course. But there were the claims of the Happy Family and all the grassland east of there which might be saved.

Men drove their work horses at a gallop after plows, and when they had brought them they lashed the horses into a trot while they plowed crooked furrows in the sun-baked prairie sod, just over the eastern rim of Antelope Coulee. The Happy Family knelt here and there along the fresh-turned sod, and started a line of fire that must beat up against the wind until it met the flames rushing before it. Backfiring is always a more or less ticklish proceeding, and they would not trust the work to strangers.

Every man of them took a certain stretch of furrow to watch, and ran backward and forward with blackened, frayed sacks to beat out the wayward flames that licked treacherously through the smallest break in the line of fresh

soil. They knew too well the danger of those little, licking flame tongues; not one was left to live and grow and race leaping away through the grass.

They worked—heavens, how they worked!—and they stopped the fire there on the rim of Antelope Coulee. Florence Grace Hallman would have been sick with fury, had she seen that dogged line of fighters, and the ragged hem of charred black ashes smoking against the yellow-brown of the grass, which showed how well those men whom she hated had fought.

So the fire was stopped well outside the fence which marked the boundary of the Happy Family's claims. All west of there and far to the north, the hills and the coulees lay black as far as one could see—which was to the rim of the hills which bordered Dry Lake Valley on the east. Here and there a claim shack stood forlorn amid the blackness. Here and there a heap of embers still smoked and sent forth an occasional spitting of sparks when a gust fanned the heap. Men, women, and children stood about blankly or wandered disconsolately here and there, coughing in the acrid clouds of warm grass cinders kicked up by their own lagging feet.

No one missed the Kid. No one dreamed that he was lost again. Chip was with the Happy Family, and did not know that the Kid had left the ranch that afternoon. The Little Doctor had taken it for granted that he had gone with his daddy, as he so frequently did; and with his daddy and the whole Happy Family to look after him, she never once doubted that he was perfectly safe, even among the fire fighters. She supposed he would be up on the seat beside Patsy probably, proudly riding on the wagon that hauled the water barrels.

The Little Doctor had troubles of her own to occupy her mind. She had ridden hurriedly up the hill and straight to the shack of the sick woman, when first she discovered that the prairie was afire. And she had found the sick woman lying on a makeshift bed on the smoking, black area that was pathetically safe now from fire because there was nothing more to burn.

"Little black shack's all burned up! Everything's black now. Black hills, black hollows, black future, black world, black hearts—everything matches—everything's black. Sky's black, I'm black—you're black—little black shack won't have to stand all alone any more—little black shack's just black ashes—little black shack's all burned up!" And then the woman laughed shrilly, with that terrible, meaningless laughter of hysteria.

She was a pretty woman, and young. Her hair was that bright shade of red that goes with a skin like thin, rose-tinted ivory. Her eyes were big, and so dark a blue that they sometimes looked black, and her mouth was sweet and had a tired droop to match the mute pathos of her eyes. Her husband was a coarse lout of a man who seldom spoke to her even when they were together. The Little Doctor had felt that all the tragedy of womanhood and poverty and loneliness was synthesized in this woman with the unusual hair and skin and eyes and expression. She had been coming every day to see her; the woman was rather seriously ill, and needed better care than she could get out there on the bald prairie, even with the Little Doctor to watch over her. If she died, her face would haunt the Little Doctor always. Even if she did not die, she would remain a vivid memory. Just now even the Little Doctor's mother instinct was submerged under her professional instincts and her woman sympathy. She did not stop to wonder whether she was perfectly sure that the Kid was with Chip. She took it for granted and dismissed the Kid from her mind, and worked to save the woman.

Yes, the little diversion of a prairie fire that would call all hands to the westward so that the Kid might be lured away in another direction without the mishap of being seen proved a startling success. As a diversion it could scarcely be improved upon—unless Florence Grace Hallman had ordered a wholesale massacre or something like that.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS ROSEMARY ALLEN DOES A SMALL SUM IN ADDITION.

Miss Rosemary Allen, having wielded a wet gunny sack until her eyes were red and smarting, and her lungs choked with cinders and her arms so tired she could scarcely lift them, was permitted by fate to be almost the first person who discovered that her quarter of the four-room shack, built upon the four contiguous corners of four claims, was afire in the middle of its roof. Miss Rosemary Allen stood still and watched it burn, and was a trifle surprised because she felt so little regret.

Other shacks had caught fire and burned hotly, and she had wept with sympathy for the owners. But she did not weep when her own shack began to crackle and show yellow, licking tongues of flame. Those three old cats—I am using her own term, which was spiteful—would probably give up now and go back where they belonged. She hoped so. And for herself——

"By gracious, I'm glad to see that one go, anyhow!" Andy Green paused long enough in his headlong gallop to shout to her. "I was going to sneak up and touch it off myself, if it wouldn't start any other way. Now you and me'll get down to cases, girl, and have a settlement. And say!" He had started on, but he pulled up again. "The Little Doctor's back here, somewhere. You go home with her when she goes, and stay till I come and get you."

"I like your nerve!" Rosemary retorted ambiguously.

"Sure—folks generally do. I'll tell her to stop for you. You know she'll be glad enough to have you—and so will the Kid."

"Where *is* Buck?" Rosemary was the first person who asked that oft-repeated question. "I saw him ride up on the bench just before the fire started. I was watching for him through the glasses——"

"Dunno—haven't seen him. With his mother, I guess." Andy rode on to find Patsy and send him back down the line with the water wagon. He did not think anything more about the Kid though he thought a good deal about Miss Allen.

Now that her shack was burned, she would be easier to persuade into giving up that practically worthless eighty. That was what filled the mind of Andy Green to the exclusion of everything else except the fire. He was in a hurry to deliver his message to Patsy, so that he could hunt up the Little Doctor and bespeak her hospitality for the girl he meant to marry just as soon as he could persuade her to stand with him before a preacher.

He found the Little Doctor still fighting a dogged battle with death for the life of the woman who laughed wildly because her home was a heap of smoking embers. The Little Doctor told him to send Rosemary Allen on down to the ranch, or take her himself, and to tell the Countess to send up her biggest medicine case immediately. She could not leave, she said, for some time yet. She might have to stay all night—or she would if there was any place to stay. She was half decided, she said, to have some one take the woman in to Dry Lake right away, and up to the hospital in Great Falls. She supposed she would have to go along. Would Andy tell J. G. to send up some money? Clothes didn't matter—she would go the way she was; there were plenty of clothes

in the stores, she declared. And would Andy rustle a team, right away, so they could start? If they went at all they ought to catch the evening train. The Little Doctor was making her decisions and her plans while she talked, as is the way with those strong natures who can act promptly and surely in the face of an emergency.

By the time she had thought of having a team come right away, she had decided that she would not wait for her medicine case or for money. She could get all the money she needed in Dry Lake; and she had her little emergency case with her. Since she was going to take the woman to a hospital, she said, there was no great need of more than she had with her. She was a thoughtful Little Doctor. At the last minute she detained Andy long enough to urge him to make Miss Allen feel perfectly free to help herself to clothes or anything she needed; and to send a good-by message to Chip—in case he did not show up before she left—and a kiss to her man-child.

Andy was lucky. He met a man driving a good team and spring wagon, with a barrel of water in the back. He promptly dismounted and helped the man unload the water barrel where it was, and sent him bumping swiftly over the burned sod to where the Little Doctor waited. So fate was kinder to the Little Doctor than were those who would wring anew the mother heart of her that their own petty schemes might succeed. She went away with the sick woman laughing crazily because all the little black shacks were burned, and now everything was black, so everything matched nicely—nicely, thank you. She was terribly worried over the woman's condition, and she gave herself wholly to her professional zeal, and never dreamed that her man-child was at that moment riding deeper and deeper into the Bad Lands with a tricky devil of a man, looking for a baby bear cub for a pet.

Neither did Chip dream it, nor any of the Happy Family, nor even Miss Rosemary Allen, until they rode down into Flying U Coulee at supper time and were met squarely by the fact that the Kid was not there. The Old Man threw the bomb that exploded tragedy in the midst of the little group. He heard that Dell had gone to take a sick woman to the hospital in Great Falls, and would not be back for a day or so probably.

"What'd she do with the Kid?" he demanded. "Take him with her?"

Chip stared blankly at him, and turned his eyes finally to Andy's face. Andy had not mentioned the Kid to him.

"He wasn't with her," Andy replied to the look. "She sent him a kiss and word that he was to take care of Miss Allen. He must be somewhere around here."

"Well, he ain't. I was looking fer him myself," put in the Countess sharply. "Somebody shut the cat up in the flour chest and I didn't study much on who it was done it! If I'd 'a' got my hands on 'im——"

"I saw him ride up on the hill trail just before the fire started," volunteered Rosemary Allen. "I had my opera glasses and was looking for him, because I like to meet him and hear him talk. He said yesterday that he was coming to see me to-day. And he rode up on the hill in sight of my claim. I saw him." She stopped and looked from one to the other with her eyebrows pinched together and her lips pursed.

"Listen," she went on hastily. "Maybe it has nothing to do with Buck—but I saw something else that was very puzzling. I was going to investigate, but the fire broke out immediately and put everything else out of my mind. A man was up on that sharp-pointed knoll off east of the trail, where it leaves this coulee, and he had field glasses and was

looking for something over this way. I thought he was watching the trail. I just caught him with the glasses by accident as I swung them over the edge of the bench land to get the trail focused. He was watching something—because I kept turning the glasses on him to see what he was doing.

"Then Buck came into sight, and I started to ride out and meet him. I hate to leave the little mite riding alone anywhere—I'm always afraid something may happen. But before I got my horse I took another look at this man on the hill. He had a mirror or something bright in his hands. I saw it flash, just exactly as though he was signaling to some one—over that way." She pointed to the west. "He kept looking that way, and then back this way; and he covered up the piece of mirror with his hand and then took it off and let it shine a minute, and put it in his pocket. I *know* he was making signals.

"I got my horse and started to meet little Buck. He was coming along the trail and rode into a hollow out of sight. I kept looking and looking toward Dry Lake—because the man looked that way, I guess. And in a few minutes I saw the smoke of the fire——"

"Who was that man?" Andy took a step toward her, his eyes hard and bright in their inflamed lids.

"The man? That Mr. Owens who jumped your south eighty."

"Good Lord, what fools!" He brushed past her without a look or another word, so intent was he upon this fresh disaster. "I'm going after the boys, Chip. You better come along and see if you can pick up the Kid's trail where he left the road. It's too bad Florence Grace Hallman ain't a man! I'd know better what to do if she was."

"Oh, do you think——" Miss Rosemary looked at him wide-eyed.

"Dog-gone it, if she's tried any of her schemes with fire and—why, dog-gone it, being a woman ain't going to help her none!" The Old Man, also, seemed to grasp the meaning of it almost as quickly as had Andy. "Chip, you have Ole hitch up the team. I'm going to town myself, by thunder, and see if she's going to play any of her tricks on this outfit and git away with it! Burned out half her dog-goned colony tryin' to git a whack at you boys! Where's my shoes? Dog-gone it, what yuh all standin' around with your jaws hangin' down for? We'll see about this fire settin' and this—— *Where's them shoes?*"

The Countess found his shoes and his hat and his second-best coat and his driving gloves which he had not worn for more months than any one cared to reckon. Miss Rosemary Allen did what she could to help, and wondered at the dominant note struck by this bald old man from the moment when he rose stiffly from his big chair and took the initiative so long left to others.

While the team was made ready, the Old Man limped here and there, collecting things he did not need, and trying to remember what he must have, and keeping the Countess moving at a flurried trot. Chip and Andy were not yet up the bluff when the Old Man climbed painfully into the covered buggy, took the lines and the whip, and cut a circle with the wheels on the hard-packed earth as clean and as small as Chip himself could have done, and went whirling through the big gate and across the creek and up the long slope beyond. He shouted to the boys, and they rode slowly until he overtook them—though their nerves were all on edge, and haste seemed to them the most important thing in the world. But habit is strong—it was their Old Man who called to them to wait.

"You boys want to git out after that Owens," he shouted, when he passed them. "If they've got the Kid, killing's too good for 'em!" The brown team went trotting up the grade with backs straightened to the pull of the lurching

buggy and nostrils flaring wide with excitement. The Old Man leaned sidewise and called back to the two loping after him in the obscuring dust cloud he left behind.

"I'll have that woman arrested on suspicion uh setting prairie fires!" he called. "I'll git Blake after her. You git that Owens if you have to haze him to hell and back! Yuh don't want to worry about the Kid, Chip—they ain't goin' to hurt him. All they want is to keep you boys huntin' high and low, and combin' the breaks to find 'im. I see their scheme, all right."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE KID LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF AND HELPS THE HAPPY FAMILY.

The Kid wriggled uncomfortably in the saddle and glanced at the narrow-browed face of H. J. Owens, who was looking this way and that at the enfolding hills, and scowling abstractedly. The Kid was only six, but he was fairly good at reading moods and glances, having lived all his life among grown-ups.

"It's a pretty far ways to them baby bear cubs," he remarked plaintively. "I bet you're lost, old-timer. It's awful easy to get lost. I bet you don't know where that mother bear lives."

"Shut up!" snarled H. J. Owens. The Kid had hit uncomfortably close to the truth.

"Shut up your own self, you darn' ole pilgrim," the Kid flung back instantly. That was the way he learned to say rude things; they were said to him, and he remembered and gave them back in full measure.

"Say, I'll slap you if you call me that again." H. J. Owens, because he did not relish the task he had undertaken, and because he had lost his bearings here in the confusion of hills and hollows and deep gullies, was in a very bad humor.

"You darn' ole pilgrim, you dassent slap me. If you do, the bunch'll fix *you*, all right. I guess they'd just about kill you. Daddy Chip would just knock the stuffin' outa you." He considered something very briefly; and then tilted his small chin so that he looked more than ever like the Little Doctor. "I bet you was just a-lying all the time," he accused. "I bet there ain't any baby bear cubs."

H. J. Owens laughed disagreeably, but he did not say whether or not the Kid was right in his conjecture. The Kid pinched his lips together and winked very fast for a minute. Never, never in all the six years of his life, had any one played him so shabby a trick. He knew what the laugh meant; it meant that this man had lied to him and led him away down here in the hills where he had promised his Doctor Dell, cross his heart, that he would never go again. He eyed the man resentfully.

"What made you lie about them baby bear cubs?" he demanded. "I didn't want to come such a far ways."

"You keep quiet. I've heard about enough from you, young man. A little more of that, and you'll get something you ain't looking for."

"I'm a-going home!" The Kid pulled Silver half around in the grassy gulch they were following. "And I'm going to tell the bunch what you said. I bet the bunch'll make you hard to ketch, you—you *son a gun!*"

"Here! You come back here!" H. J. Owens reached over and caught Silver's bridle rein. "You don't go home till I let you go; see? You're going right along with me, if anybody should ask you. And you ain't going to talk like that, either. Now mind!" He turned his pale-blue eyes threateningly upon the Kid. "Not another word out of you if you don't want a good thrashing. You come along and behave yourself, or I'll cut your ears off."

The Kid's eyes blazed with anger.

He did not flinch while he glared back at the man, and he did not seem to care, just at that moment, whether he lost his ears or kept them. "You let go my horse!" he gritted. "You wait. The bunch'll fix *you,* and fix you right. You wait."

H. J. Owens hesitated, tempted to lay violent hands upon the small rebel. But he did not. He led Silver a rod or two; but he found it awkward because the way was rough, and he was not much of a horseman, and in a few minutes let the rein drop from his fingers.

"You come on, Buck, and be a good boy—and maybe we'll find them cubs yet," he conciliated. "You'd die a-laughing at the way they set up and scratch their ears when a big, black ant bites 'em, Buck. I'll show you in a little while. And there's a funny camp down here, too, where we can get some supper."

The Kid made no reply, but he rode along docilely beside H. J. Owens, and listened to the new story he told of the bears. That is, he appeared to be listening; in reality, he was struggling to solve the biggest problem he had ever known—the problem of facing danger and of treachery, and beating both. Poor little tad, he did not even know the names of his troubles. He only knew that this man had told him a lie about those baby bear cubs, and had brought him away down here where he had been lost, and that it was getting dark, and he wanted to go home, and the man was mean and would not let him go. He did not understand why the man should be so mean—but the man *was* mean to him, and he did not intend to "stand for it." He wanted to go home. And when the Kid really wanted to do a certain thing, he nearly always did it.

H. J. Owens would not let him go home; therefore the Kid meant to go anyway. Only he would have to sneak off or run off or something, and hide where the man could not find him, and then go home to his Doctor Dell and Daddy Chip, and tell them how mean this pilgrim had been to him. And he would tell the bunch. The bunch would fix *him* all right! The thought cheered the Kid so that he smiled and made the man think he was listening to his darned old bear story that was just a big lie. Think he would listen to any story that pilgrim could tell? Huh!

The gulches were growing dusky now. The Kid was tired, and he was hungry and could hardly keep from crying, he was so miserable. But he was the son of his father—he was Chip's kid; it would take a great deal more misery and unkindness to make him cry in the presence of this pilgrim, who had been so mean to him. He rode along without saying a word. H. J. Owens did not say anything, either. He kept scanning each jagged peak and each gloomy cañon they passed, and he seemed uneasy about something. The Kid knew what was the matter, all right—H. J. Owens was lost.

They came to a wide, flat-bottomed coulee with high, ragged bluffs shutting it in upon every side. The Kid dimly remembered that coulee, because that was where Andy got down to tighten the cinch on Miss Allen's horse, and looked up at her the way Daddy Chip looked at Doctor Dell sometimes, and made a kissy look with his lips—and got called down for it, too. The Kid remembered.

He looked at the man, shut his mouth tight, and wheeled Silver suddenly to the left. He leaned forward as he had always seen the Happy Family do when they started a race, and struck Silver smartly down the rump with the braided romal on his bridle reins. H. J. Owens was taken off his guard and did nothing but stare open-mouthed until the Kid was well under way; then he shouted and galloped after him, up the little flat.

He might as well have saved his

horse's wind and his own energy. He was no match for little Buck Bennett, who had the whole Flying U outfit to teach him how to ride, and the spirit of his Daddy Chip and the Little Doctor combined to give him grit and initiative. H. J. Owens pounded along to the head of the coulee, where he had seen the Kid galloping dimly in the dusk. He turned into the cañon that sloped invitingly up from the level, and went on at the top speed of his horse—which was not fast enough to boast about.

When he had left the coulee well behind him, the Kid rode out from behind a clump of bushes that was a mere black shadow against the coulee wall, and turned back whence he had come. He giggled a little over the way he had fooled the pilgrim, and wished that the bunch had been there to see him do it. He kept Silver galloping until he had reached the other end of the level, and then he pulled him down to a walk and let the reins drop loosely upon Silver's neck. That was what Daddy Chip and the boys had told him he must do, next time he got lost and did not know the way home. He must just let Silver go wherever he wanted to go, and not try to guide him at all. Silver would go straight home; he had the word of the whole bunch for that, and he believed it implicitly.

Silver looked around inquiringly at his small rider, hesitated, and then swung back up the coulee. The Kid was afraid that H. J. Owens would come back and see him and cut off his ears if he went that way—but he did not pull Silver back and make him go some other way, for all that. If he left him alone, Silver would take him right straight home. Daddy Chip and the boys said so. And he would tell them how mean that man was. They would fix *him,* all right!

Halfway up the coulee, Silver turned into a narrow gulch that seemed to lead nowhere at all except into the side of a big, black-shadowed bluff. Up on the hillside a coyote began to yap with a shrill staccato of sounds that trailed off into a disconsolate whimper. The Kid looked that way interestedly. He was not afraid of coyotes. They would not hurt any one; they were more scared than you were—the bunch had told him so. He wished he could get a sight of him, though. He liked to see their ears stick up and their noses stick out in a sharp point, and see them drop their tails and go sliding away out of sight. When he was ten, and Daddy Chip gave him a gun, he would shoot coyotes and skin them his own self.

The coyote yapped shrilly again, and the Kid wondered what his Doctor Dell would say when he got home. He was terribly hungry, and he was tired and wanted to go to bed. He wished the bunch would happen along and fix that man. His heart swelled in his chest with rage and disappointment when he thought of those baby bear cubs that were not anywhere at all—because the man was just lying all the time. In spite of himself the Kid cried whimperingly to himself while he rode slowly up the gorge which Silver had chosen to follow because the reins were drooping low alongside his neck, and he might go where he pleased.

By and by the moon rose and lightened the hills so that they glowed softly, and the Kid, looking sleepily around him, saw a coyote slinking along a barren slope. He was going to shout at it and see it run, but he thought of the man who was looking for him, and glanced fearfully over his shoulder. The moon shone full in his face and showed the tear streaks and the tired droop to his lips.

The Kid thought he must be going wrong, because at the ranch the moon came up in another place altogether. He knew about the moon. Doctor Dell had explained to him how it just kept going round and round the world, and you

saw it when it came up over the edge. That was how Santa Claus found out if kids were good; he lived in the moon, and it went round and round so he could look down and see if you were bad. The Kid rubbed the tears off his cheeks with his palm, so that Santa Claus could not see that he had been crying. After that he rode bravely, with a consciously straight spine, because Santa Claus was looking at him all the time.

After a long while the way grew less rough, and Silver trotted down the easier slopes. The Kid was pretty tired now. He held on by the horn of his saddle so Silver would not jolt him so much. He was terribly hungry, too, and his eyes kept going shut. But Santa Claus kept looking at him to see if he were a dead-game sport, so he did not cry any more. He wished he had some grub in a sack, but he thought he must be nearly home now. He had come a terribly far ways since he ran away from that pilgrim who was going to cut off his ears.

The Kid was so sleepy and so tired that he almost fell out of the saddle once when Silver, who had been loping easily across a fairly level stretch of ground, slowed abruptly to negotiate a washout crossing. He had been thinking about those baby bear cubs digging ants and eating them. He had almost seen them doing it; but he remembered now that he was going home to tell the bunch how the man had lied to him, and tried to make him stay down here just to be mean. The bunch would sure fix him when they heard about it.

He was still thinking vengefully of the punishment which the Happy Family would surely mete out to H. J. Owens when Silver lifted his head, looked off to the right, and gave a shrill whinny. Somebody shouted, and immediately a couple of horsemen emerged from the shadow of a hill and galloped toward him.

The Kid gave a cry and then laughed. It was his Daddy Chip and somebody. He thought the other was Andy Green. He was too tired to kick Silver in the ribs and race toward them. He waited until they came up, their horses pounding over the uneven sod, urged by the jubilance of their riders.

Chip rode up and lifted the Kid bodily from the saddle and held him so tight in his arms that the Kid kicked half-heartedly with both feet, to free himself. But he had a message for his Daddy Chip, and as soon as he could get his breath he delivered it.

"Daddy Chip, I just want you to kill that darn' pilgrim!" he commanded. "There wasn't any baby bear cubs at all. He was just a-stringin' me. And he was going to cut off my ears. He said it wasn't a far ways to where the baby bear cubs lived with the old mother bear, and it was. I wish you'd lick the stuffin' outa him. I'm awful hungry, Daddy Chip."

"We'll be home pretty quick," Chip said, in a queer, choked voice. "Who was the man, Buck? Where is he now?"

The Kid lifted his head sleepily from his Daddy Chip's shoulder and pointed vaguely toward the moon. "He's the man that jumped Andy's ranch right on the edge of One Man," he explained. "He's back there ridin' the rim rocks a-lookin' for me. I'd 'a' come home before, only he wouldn't let me come. He said he'd cut my ears off. I runned away from him, Daddy Chip. And I cussed him a-plenty for lying to me—but you needn't tell Doctor Dell."

"I won't, Buck." Chip lifted him into a more comfortable position and held him so. While the Kid slept, he talked with Andy about getting the Happy Family on the trail of H. J. Owens. Then he rode thankfully home with the Kid in his arms and Silver following docilely after.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AS IT TURNED OUT.

They found H. J. Owens the next forenoon wandering hopelessly lost in the hills. Since killing him was barred, they tied his arms behind him and turned him toward the Flying U. He was sullen, like an animal that is trapped and will do nothing but lie flattened to the ground and glare red-eyed at its captors. For that matter, the Happy Family themselves were pretty sullen. They had fought fire for hours —and that is killing work; and they had been in the saddle ever since, looking for the Kid and for this man who rode bound in their midst.

Weary and Irish and Pink, who had run across him in a narrow cañon, fired pistol-shot signals to bring the others to the spot. But when the others emerged from various points upon the scene, there was little said.

In town, the Old Man had been quite as eager to come close to Florence Grace Hallman—but he was not so lucky. Florence Grace had heard the news of the fire a good half hour before the train left for Great Falls. She would have preferred a train going the other way, but she decided not to wait. She watched the sick woman put aboard the one Pullman coach, and then she herself went into the stuffy day coach. Florence Grace Hallman was not in the habit of riding in day coaches in the nighttime, when there was a Pullman sleeper attached to the train. She did not stop at Great Falls; she went on to Butte—from there I do not know where she went. Certainly she never came back.

That, of course, simplified matters considerably for Florence Grace—and for the Happy Family as well. For at the preliminary hearing of H. J. Owens for the high crime of kidnaping, that gentleman proceeded to unburden his soul in a way that would have horrified Florence Grace, had she been there to hear.

A man of whom you have never heard tried to slip out of the courtroom during the unburdening process, and was stopped by Andy Green, who had been keeping an eye on him for the simple reason that the fellow had been much in the company of H. J. Owens during the week preceding the fire and the luring away of the Kid. The sheriff led him off somewhere—and so they had the man who had set the prairie afire.

As is the habit of those who confess easily the crimes of others, H. J. Owens professed himself as innocent as he consistently could in the face of the Happy Family, and of the Kid's loud-whispered remarks when he saw him there. He knew absolutely nothing about the fire, he said, and had nothing to do with the setting of it. He was two miles away at the time it started and so——

And then Miss Rosemary Allen took the witness stand and told about the man on the hilltop and the bit of mirror that had flashed sun signals toward the west. H. J. Owens crimpled down visibly in his chair—and you know about how easily he could hope to clear himself after that! If you are anxious to hear the result at the trial, they gave him ten years in Deer Lodge for what he had done, and the judge informed him that he had been dealt with leniently. The other—the man whom Andy stopped at the door of the courtroom—got six years, and cursed the judge and threatened the whole Flying U outfit when he heard the sentence.

While they were about it, the Happy Family went on to Great Falls the next day, with witnesses and the Honorable Blake, to see that everything was straight, and filed their answers to the contest claims—three days before the time limit had expired. You might call that shaving down the margin of safety

too closely, but they were very well satisfied. They did not worry much over the outcome; why should they, since the Homeseekers' Syndicate, as represented by the absent Florence Grace Hallman, had overreached and played the game directly into the hands of the Happy Family?

Some of you will complain because everything has not been told. But if every little thing were told in this story, there could be no more meetings between you and the Happy Family. I am not even going to take you to the preacher with Andy Green and Miss Rosemary Allen. Take a look at them trailing contentedly down from the courthouse with their hats tilted at certain characteristic angles, and their voices mingled in more or less amiable converse, and their toes pointed toward the Mint. There is no need for any one to worry over that bunch. You may safely take it for granted that they would meet future emergencies and problems as they have always met them in the past—standing up to trouble unflinchingly, and standing together always.

THE END.

For illuminating glimpses of the lighter side of Western life we commend the stories of ROBERT V. CARR. For instance, his humorous yarn, "That Worrying Woman"—the monologue of a prospector—which will be printed in the next POPULAR.

WAR AND THE JOB SEEKERS

THOMAS J. PENCE, secretary of the Democratic National Committee, and one of the big political chiefs of this administration, is pursued so constantly by job seekers and other annoying brands of alleged politicians that he has a secret telephone number and stays away from his office as much as possible. He had dodged one of these pests successfully for several months, but finally got to the point where he wrote the man to come from New York to Washington to see him and state his business.

The visitor, fat, genial, and much dressed up, appeared in Pence's office at the appointed hour, nursed a silk hat affectionately, and indulged in small talk.

"Well," said Pence, feigning great cordiality, "what can I do for you?"

"Just a trifle," said the pest, and added, in an entertaining and confidential way: "I was thinking, as I came over on the train, of the different tactics of the various armies in the European war. I admire the French greatly. Their swiftness, their dash, their irresistible fury in a charge——"

At this Pence blew up. "Just one minute!" he said in a loud voice. "That war is a very sad thing. And the saddest personal feature about it is that I can't get on a street car or enter a public building in this town or stop on the street corner without having somebody talk to me about war. I know nothing on earth about the details of that war. I don't believe anybody in the United States does. I know very well you don't. I make it a rule not to let anybody talk it to me! And here you come, all the way from New York, to tell me about it! Have you no mercy? Have you no heart? Now, do you want to talk to me about French infantry, English cavalry, German siege guns, and Cossack ponies—or do you want to talk about that job you want?"

The man did not get the job.

The Hidden Clew

By George Woodruff Johnston

The strange case of an unhappy girl killed without intent, by a person she had never seen, and for something she had never done. A brief account of a mystery that was cleared up so far as a few people were concerned, but the real facts of the case have never been made public till now

THIS is Bessington," said a stormy voice over the telephone. "For God's sake get around to the Tilloughby as quick as you can, will you? It's about a girl named Dudlow."

"But, old man, my office is full of patients," I remonstrated.

"Hang the patients!" roared Bessington, and I could hear the phone rattle as his agitated hand jammed the receiver on the hook.

I could not refuse an appeal so urgent from the best of friends, and within ten minutes I had leaped out of my machine and grabbed the janitor of the Tilloughby just as he was racing up the front steps of that seedy apartment house at the heels of a policeman. An excited crowd filled the pavement and threw out a wide-flung fringe into the street.

"Say, man!" I cried. "What's the matter? Are all you people crazy? Tell me, does a girl—a Miss Dudlow—live here?"

He shot a glance over his shoulder, and spied my bag. "Come along!" he gasped, and was off again up the stairs.

We tore through a lot of aproned and wrappered dishevelment on the first landing, but on the second there was no one except the janitor's wife, looking as white and weepy as a candle end. I did my best, but the two men ahead beat me through the hallway of the back flat, and as I entered the room at the end of it I found them bending over as if about to lift a girl lying on the floor.

"Hold on!" I called. "Let's see what's wrong first!"

The girl lay crumpled up on her left side, but as I knelt by her she gave a sigh like a tired child dropping off to sleep, and rolled over on her back. For an instant there was absolute stillness. Then, with a shuddering breath, her body relaxed and stretched out flat. I felt her wrist—no pulse! Her heart—no beat! She was dead! And over her left temple was an ugly bruise and a smear of dried blood. I glanced hurriedly about the room. A chair had been upset, a vase overturned, and water spilled, and the bureau cover trailed on the carpet amid a litter of brushes, combs, and women's things. There had been a struggle—that was evident.

"Officer," said I, "you'd better notify headquarters. It's all over, and, if I'm not mistaken, it's murder!"

The janitor collapsed, and sat down with a thump on the floor. The pale sunshine of a winter's morning filtered feebly through the green window shades, while two electric bulbs glared yellow overhead; and in this sickly light the man's face looked almost as ghastly as the girl's. But she, despite all that death had done to tarnish and distort, was still a beauty; and I could not but think what a wonder of love-

liness she must have been only yesterday—what a radiant type of that soft, blond, appealing girlhood, which so often seems foredoomed to tragedy.

The janitor had got himself together a bit by this time, and was shakily lifting the window shades and switching off the lights, while from somewhere outside the room came a feeble, inarticulate sound like the whimpering of an animal in pain—the janitor's wife, thought I, and paid no further attention to the circumstance.

The girl lay as if asleep. I noticed that she wore a black silk petticoat and a pale-blue flannel dressing sack fastened at the waist by ribbons. There had been a knot of ribbon at her throat, too; but this had been torn apart, bringing to view some superficial scratches across her left shoulder. The sack and petticoat were both neat and clean, yet they were made of cheap stuff—even a man could see that—and seemed to fit in with the plain flat and simple, worn furniture. But when I looked at the feet sticking out from under her petticoat I was astonished. The slippers she wore did not accord with the rest. Far from it. They were small, very high-heeled, were delicately made of pale-blue embroidered satin, and, what was more amazing, in the center of the dainty rosette which crowned each instep was a big turquoise.

Instinctively my thoughts coursed back to Bessington. Where did he come in here—a middle-aged man, with wife and children, and yachts and establishments all over everywhere? Why had he sent me to the top floor of a side-street apartment house where a young girl lay dead with turquoises in her slippers? I did not like the look of things and resolved to get out of this mess as quickly as somebody arrived to take charge of the body, and the fidgety janitor and whoever was mouthing and whining outside.

As it chanced, they all came at once—the coroner, two plain-clothes men, more bluecoats, and, last of all, Bessington himself—now outwardly composed, fine, tall, fresh-colored, dominant.

"Hello, Dick!" he greeted me. Then, turning to the rest: "My name is Bessington. The janitor telephoned me that something was wrong here, and I sent my friend, Doctor Dannart, on ahead."

"Do you own the house?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, no; but Miss Dudlow is in my employ,'" he answered.

"*Was,* you mean," said the younger of the two detectives.

"What!" demanded Bessington, striding up to the group about the dead girl. As he caught sight of her he went pale. The others watched him narrowly. He kept pretty cool, I must admit; yet I who had been his intimate for twenty years sensed the tug and quiver of strained nerves. I knew now that I had better stay for a while.

"Don't touch anything, boys!" commanded the older detective; "the photograph man will be here in a jiffy. Anything been meddled with?" he asked, turning to me.

I was about to answer, when the younger man, who had wandered into the adjoining room, came back in a hurry.

"Say, doc! It looks mighty like there's a job in there for you," said he, jerking his thumb toward the door.

This door had been partly open all the time, and suddenly it occurred to me whence had come the peculiar whimpering sounds I had casually ascribed to the janitor's wife out in the hallway.

It was almost pitch dark as I entered the chamber, for its single window gave on an air shaft, and the shade was down. But when the light was switched on I flinched, I confess it, and the others hung back at the door.

There, on the bed, half smothered

in a welter of disheveled bedclothes, lay a woman with her head and face enmeshed in a hopeless tangle of gray hair. Her mouth was drawn to one side, her eyes were starting from their sockets, and from her throat welled an endless succession of feeble, insensate cries that were positively gruesome. She was weakly thrashing about in the effort to rise, but it was apparent that she was nearly all in.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the younger detective. "The old dame must have lamped the whole thing through the door there. Say, mother, put us wise, will you?"

I held up my hand. "She can't talk, man; she's a paralytic," I whispered, and started him toward the door. Finally, I got everybody out, and then fixed the old lady up and gave her a hypodermic to quiet her. This done, I went after Bessington, and found him pacing the hallway.

"Look here!" said I shortly. "This is a dickens of a situation. I don't want to pry into your affairs—but who are these people, anyhow?"

"Miss Dudlow was my private stenographer," Bessington replied, "and that's her mother in there. She had a stroke some time ago. And say, Dick, I've just got to get out of this. You'll stay and see it through, won't you? I can't, and there's no one else." He stopped and shivered. "And—about the poor little girl—look after her body, please—do all you can!"

Just then the coroner came out, and Bessington managed to pull himself together.

"I'm off," said he. "I don't fancy you'll want me."

"Not now," remarked the other. "You'd better give me your address, though."

Bessington gazed curiously at the man, and fumbled a little getting out his cardcase. Somehow I began to feel queer. And when going down to see him into his car and to send my own after a nurse for the old lady, I observed a bicycle policeman, who had been upstairs, leisurely mount his wheel and trail after him, I realized for the first time that for my friend matters were growing serious.

When I got back to the room, the photographer had finished, and they were lifting the body of the girl onto the bed. As they did so something that had lain hidden under her skirt came to light. It was a paper cutter—a silver-plated, dagger-shaped affair, with its point broken off. The blade was about six inches long and of solid metal, and as I held the fractured end toward me I observed that the break, though old, was sharp, and that its cross section formed a perfect diamond. There was a film of dried blood extending for a quarter of an inch or so above the broken tip, but no stains elsewhere. Somebody had used this as a weapon. Was it the girl or her assailant? The autopsy would determine the last, I knew. And then it occurred to me how easily the murderer could be identified if there were found upon his body a punctured wound of diamond shape, or, later on, a scar in like telltale form.

"This didn't hurt anybody much; it didn't go deep enough," remarked the younger detective, taking the paper cutter from my hand.

"But, believe me, here's something that hurt," said the other. He held up an old, battered brass candlestick, with a blunt-edged square bottom filled with lead, that he had found under the table. A mere tap with it could easily have smashed in the thin plate of the temporal bone.

The next discovery knocked the breath out of everybody. In the litter of combs, brushes, veils, and what not that had been dragged off with the bureau cover was a big roll of bank bills, held together by a black velvet ribbon.

The amount completely staggered us—five thousand dollars there were, and not a penny less.

"Whew!" thought I. "Bessington must pay his stenographers pretty well!" So far as I knew he had always been straight, but these fellows had just been told he was a friend of mine, and I wondered how long before they would begin to ask awkward questions about him. Again I felt that I had better be going. I was afraid of what might turn up next.

"Mr. Coroner," said I, "as soon as I have set the nurse to work in the other room I must get back to my practice. There's evidently nothing more I can do here."

"Sure," he exclaimed. "Go ahead."

Scarcely had I reached the door, however, when a pale, slim, dandified young man brushed past me and came to a halt in the middle of the room, staring questioningly about him.

"What do you want?" asked the coroner, eying the man indifferently.

"I don't want anything—at least—I came from the office——" At this instant his roving eyes encountered the body of the girl lying on the bed, and he shuddered convulsively, and sweat broke out upon his forehead. He fought desperately for self-control, crushing his hands together and forcing the muscles of his face to be still.

"You come from the office? What office? Who are you, anyway?" demanded the coroner.

"I'm a clerk at Bessington's. Spangler's my name. The janitor there knows me."

"That's straight," said the latter. "He's often about. He came in with the girl last night."

Spangler spun round and looked at the man in consternation.

"Last night!" rapped out the coroner. "What time last night?"

"Six or half past, I suppose it was," Spangler faltered. "I brought Miss Dudlow home from the office."

"When did you leave her?"

"At eight."

"Eight! What were you doing all that time here in her room?"

"I had a right to be here," retorted Spangler angrily. "We were engaged to be married. Her mother knew it. It was no secret."

"What do you know about this, janitor?" inquired the coroner. "You say you saw them come in together."

"Well, I don't want to queer the guy, but I heard somebody scrapping in the entrance hall, and that fetched me to the top of the basement stairs. I went down again when I seen it was him and Jessie Dudlow. They was always fussing lately."

"When did Spangler go away?"

"I don't know. That's the last time I laid eyes on either of 'em."

"Scrapping! How's that, Spangler?" asked the coroner sharply.

The young man was completely taken aback. "Scrapping! I should not call it scrapping," stammered he, wetting his lips. "We had a little disagreement—that was all. There were no hard words between us."

The janitor sniffed scornfully.

"Call it by the right name—you quarreled, you mean," declared the coroner. "What about? Out with it!"

Spangler's gaze wandered helplessly about the room until it rested on the bank notes lying on the table. First he regarded them with a puzzled frown. Then his face cleared, and finally there settled upon it an expression of malevolent hatred. With that, he ceased to tremble, peered furtively around, and made a dash for the door. But the officers were too quick for him; there was a scuffle, and he was quickly overpowered and searched.

"You won't need this any more," said the older detective as he drew from the prisoner's pocket a new revolver

whose cylinder showed a complete ring of bright brass shells.

II.

I left the flat, and the remainder of the day spent itself in the hurry and worry of a busy doctor's life. During the following afternoon, Bessington telephoned, urging me to dine with him at eight.

Besides himself, there were at table his wife, his two young daughters, and his attorney, our mutual friend, John Limpet, a big, lumbering man with a fat, frozen face.

The affair proved to be even more trying than I had anticipated. Of course, every one was aware that my host's relations with Jessie Dudlow were under investigation, and, worse, that he was suspected by many of having killed her. This made Mrs. Bessington's position well-nigh intolerable. She was a dark, handsome woman, of the proud, glacial type; but as family physician and intimate friend I knew that her pride was more in her husband and children than in herself, and that she still loved him with all the intensity of a bride. And though now, as always, she showed all the poise of the woman of the great world, I could conceive—as she sat there trying to talk, but eating nothing—how wounded, how grieved, how cruelly mortified she must be to have his name dragged through the gutters of the city, and I pitied her.

It was an immense relief to every one when dinner was over, and we men, with Mrs. Bessington's permission, adjourned to the library.

"Now, Limpet," said Bessington, as he closed the door, "let's hear all you have found out about the case."

"Well," began the lawyer, with a wave of his puffy white hand, "the evidence so far is small in amount and wholly circumstantial. Of course, what Miss Dudlow's mother may have seen is a matter of conjecture. What may we expect from her, Dick?" he asked, turning to me.

"Nothing," I replied, "save of a negative character. Her mind is sound, and she can see and hear—her condition yesterday morning led to the inference that she had witnessed the tragedy in the next room. But she is a paralytic. She cannot speak intelligibly. She cannot write. In fact, she has no way of communicating information to others. It is barely possible that later on she may be able to write with her left, or unparalyzed, hand, may even regain the power of speech. But I doubt it. She is too old, and the shock was too severe. In my judgment, she will remain as she is, or grow progressively worse."

"Humph!" grunted the lawyer. "That complicates matters. But let us proceed as far as we can. First, then," ticking off the facts upon his fingers, "we know *how* Jessie Dudlow met her death. The coroner tells me that a blow on the head, inflicted with a candlestick found in the room, broke and drove in part of the temporal bone. That killed her. There were no other injuries except a few scratches on the shoulder."

"How about the suspects—any wounds on them?" I inquired, thinking of the paper cutter.

"None," declared Limpet, "save for a ragged cut on the janitor's right hand. As to *when* the fatal blow was struck," he went on, "that might have happened at any time between half past six, when she was last seen alive, and nine o'clock the ensuing morning, when the janitor's wife went up as usual to wait upon the mother and found the daughter dying on the floor. The struggle was unheard because the flat beneath is untenanted. But the burning lights, drawn curtains, the girl's manner of dress, her bed unslept in—all point to

some hour before half past ten, which was her customary bedtime."

"That's all very well," exclaimed Bessington irritably; "but the one vital question is: Who did the deed?"

"I wish I could tell you," said Limpet. "But one circumstance is noteworthy: The Tilloughby contains few apartments, and is without office, elevator, or bell boys, so that a stranger might very well have entered and left the house without being observed. But Jessie must herself have admitted to her own flat the person who killed her. And it is a reasonable assumption that she would not have let in—particularly at night—any one unknown to her or who bore a threatening aspect. It is natural, therefore, that suspicion should first fall upon one or more of her familiars. Of these, the janitor is easiest disposed of. He is scared, has a fresh cut on his hand, could have found excuse to enter the Dudlow apartment at any time, and, lastly, is openly accused of the crime by his wife. But she is notorious as a rattle-brained, loose-tongued termagant, jealous of every woman in the Tilloughby.

"Now Spangler is in worse case. The victim was last-seen alive in his company. He can bring no proof as to where he was between half past six, when he arrived at the apartment house, and eleven o'clock, when he turned up at his boarding place. Moreover, he had a strong motive."

"What was it?" I inquired.

"Jealousy."

"Of whom?" Bessington blurted out.

There was a pause. Finally Limpet spoke deprecatingly: "If you must have it, Bessington—of you!"

"Of me! Why of me?" demanded the latter roughly.

"He says the girl was always shut up with you in your private office."

Bessington laughed sneeringly. "Where would he expect me to keep my stenographer? On the roof?"

Limpet was nettled, and his manner changed. His pale, round face remained as expressionless as ever, but he fixed his little eyes piercingly on Bessington, and his voice grew hard.

"Spangler says, also, that he saw you with the girl one night a little while ago. You were together in a large limousine, and she was superbly dressed in clothes you paid for. Is that true?"

"She was with me in my car," Bessington responded reluctantly. "Spangler may have seen us."

"But was that the only time you were together in public?"

"No," Bessington answered, with still greater hesitation.

"And in regard to the other matter—did you not give her money?"

There was no reply to this, and Limpet proceeded immediately:

"Your alibi, too? How about that? Where were you night before last?"

Bessington was plainly in difficulties. "Let me see," he said slowly. "My wife had gone to the opera; my daughters somewhere else. I sat here in the library alone, and was in bed before they returned. No, I don't believe anybody saw me until I went upstairs. That must have been about eleven."

"In short, you have no alibi," interrupted Limpet.

"But the motive!" I exclaimed. "What possible motive could be attributed to Bessington for——"

"A dozen," protested Limpet. "Jealousy of Spangler or another, a rebuff from the girl, dread of ultimate exposure and consequent trouble at home, or of a public scandal. I tell you, Bessington," the lawyer continued, more kindly, but still earnestly, "you are in a corner. If you were a clerk or a janitor, you would be locked up now as Spangler and the other man are. As it is, a plain-clothes man was watching this house when I came in. You have got to do a lot of explaining, and you cannot begin too soon."

Bessington remained for a time in deep thought. Then, to our astonishment, he rang a bell and said to the man who answered it: "Ask your mistress if she will do me the favor to come here for a moment."

I was profoundly sorry for Mrs. Bessington. She sailed into the room with the utmost outward serenity, but when she saw us all still there and read the expression on our faces she faltered and turned white. "Jim!" she breathed. "What is it?"

"Paula," he said gently, "I have a very painful statement to make. In the end you are bound to hear the facts from somebody. It is best, perhaps, that you should learn them now at first-hand from me, and with these two old and tried friends beside you." Bessington was finding his task troublesome. There was a long pause between each of his sentences, and a yet longer one ensued before he began again.

"That I should have killed Jessie Dudlow is, of course, preposterous. But that I—that I grew to love her and took her about with me foolishly, recklessly—is the truth."

Mrs. Bessington sank into a chair and bowed her head. Her husband continued with still greater effort:

"Limpet has just told of a night when we were seen together. The circumstances were these: I found her standing in front of a theater waiting for some one who had failed her, and I took her to her home in my car. She was always superbly beautiful; that night, as Limpet says, she was also superbly dressed. I had never seen her like that before. I was astounded. I asked her where she had got the means to pay for all the wonderful things she wore. I myself had given her money, fatuously, generously; but if all my gifts had been added together they would never have bought her triumphant jewels and that one splendid costume. She told me she owed all this and more to a man who had asked her to marry him.

"I shall hide nothing; I shall deny nothing," Bessington continued shamefacedly. "I was furious at first—crazy with jealousy. I begged her to tell me the man's name. She refused—I did not know why till later on. At the time I persisted, I fumed, I made myself utterly ridiculous, but succeeded only in frightening her. And then it slowly dawned upon me that I was absolutely incapable of making her care for me as I wanted to be cared for. Impulsive she might be, and vain and full of fun and of the love of adventure, but she was sweet and clean.

"Finally I came to my senses and realized what an absurd figure I cut, and the only consolation I had was that this poor little stenographer, prinked out in all her finery, was too kind and generous to laugh at me. My unhealthy infatuation had received its deathblow. And that ride—from the theater to her home—which Limpet has spoken of as an incident of our relations was in reality the end of them."

I wondered if Bessington was lying. If so it was magnificently done. I turned to observe the effect upon his wife, but at that moment she spoke from behind the fan which she had raised to screen her face.

"Jim," said she, her voice low and unsteady, "when was the end?"

"More than two weeks ago. But," he went on rapidly, "there is more to tell. Later, Jessie Dudlow came to me in great distress of mind. She feared that the money which had been showered upon her had been obtained dishonestly, and, in consequence, purposed breaking off her engagement. On the very morning of the day she was struck down, she pleaded with me to forgive her for the part she had innocently played in a great wrong that had been done me. She told me it was Spangler she had promised to marry, and that, as

she had lately suspected, but had only then learned with certitude, the money which he had given her in such profusion was not an inheritance, as he had pretended, but had been stolen from me. 'It was Spangler!' she cried in terror and despair. 'And if I do not keep his secret and run off with him, he swears he will kill me!' He did it," Bessington concluded. "He murdered her. But he was too late—his secret was out!"

"But why did you not speak of this before?" asked Limpet testily. "Was it quite fair to keep me, your legal adviser, in the dark?"

"Can't you see, man?" exclaimed Bessington. "It was because the story not only involved me, but, through me, my wife and daughters; and I hoped that the culprit might be found and justice done without knowledge of my past relations with Jessie Dudlow becoming public. But now, silence is no longer possible. From what you say, Spangler has turned on me to save himself. He killed the poor girl—killed her in cold blood—and I will send him to the chair for it!"

Bessington ceased, and profound stillness fell upon the room. Then he walked to where his wife was sitting in the shadows.

"Just a moment!" interposed Limpet. "One thing puzzles me. When Jessie Dudlow told you all this, why did she not return to you the five thousand dollars found in her room? She must have known that this sum had been stolen from you like the rest."

This question was never answered, for as Bessington approached his wife she sprang from her chair, and without a word rushed from the room.

III.

Had Spangler killed the girl, I wondered, and had the fatal instinct of the murderer dragged him back next morning to the scene of his crime; or, ignorant of her death, had he then come to slay her whom some one else had already slain? But Bessington's story of the homicide, however plausible it might seem, was—as Limpet pointed out during our walk homeward together—merely an accusation founded upon theory, and was far from constituting proof of guilt. As a matter of fact, though time passed and inquiry never slept, no such proof, either against Spangler or another, was forthcoming—no finger prints upon the candlestick, no betrayal in the contents of the shabby room, no secret divulged by the bare hall and stairways of the Tilloughby, no revealing word loosed by any tongue, no lifting of the veil at any corner. Spangler was an embezzler—so much had been established, but nothing more. Therefore, in spite of my misgivings, it became imperative to examine Mrs. Dudlow, upon whose testimony, if such could be elicited, the whole case seemed to hang.

To me the problem was a new one. I had never encountered, either in my own experience or in the annals of legal medicine, a case in which it was sought to obtain evidence that would have legal value from a person in Mrs. Dudlow's condition—one who could neither speak nor write. Having no precedent to guide me, I proceeded as follows: We met in her room, the nurse and I, whom she had grown to know and trust, with the coroner as the only stranger present. Limpet and the district attorney remained in the adjoining chamber, where they could see without being seen.

"Mrs. Dudlow," I began gently and reassuringly, "I am going to ask you a few questions. If your answer is 'Yes,' raise your left hand a little way above the bed. If 'No,' let your hand lie still. Do you understand me?"

Tremblingly she lifted her hand.

"Now then: Did you see or hear what went on in the other room one

night about ten days ago? You know the night I mean."

The patient, as I feared would be the case, became violently agitated. Again those awful guttural cries; again those convulsive efforts to hoist herself in bed.

"Try to compose yourself," I said. "We are your friends. You can tell us all that is necessary by answering my questions in the way I have indicated. Let us begin again: Did you see or hear what occurred in the next room on the night I speak of?"

She lifted her shaking hand, but still frantically tried to talk.

I began afresh. "I am going to bring before you three persons, one after the other. If any one of them was in the adjoining room that night, point him out!"

Mrs. Dudlow looked fiercely toward the door, as, at a sign from me, the janitor entered, walked past her bed, and then out of the room again. Her hand remained motionless.

"Was it this one?" I inquired as Bessington succeeded the janitor. My tongue could scarcely utter the question. Despite my friend's specious story, doubts tortured me. But in an instant it was over. To my intense relief, the hand, as before, lay quiet.

"How about this man?" I asked as Spangler entered.

The hand raised itself quickly, and then as suddenly fell. The coroner breathed a sigh of relief. But I was not satisfied. The gesture had not been as pronounced and convincing as the others.

"Tell me," I asked, "did you see Jessie after Spangler left her, and was she well?"

There followed a moment of tense uncertainty. All eyes were fixed upon the pallid hand trembling on the bedclothes. Spangler was as pale as death. He clutched the end of the bed with a despairing grip. And when the woman, after what seemed an eternity, slowly elevated her hand and held it upright, the sudden relief was too much for him and he fell senseless to the floor.

The coroner and I looked at each other. We were nonplused. It was none of these. Who, then, had killed Jessie Dudlow?

"You are sure—perfectly positive about these men?" the coroner inquired. Again the poor creature vainly tried to speak, and her eyes roamed about the room distractedly. But she lifted her hand.

"Mrs. Dudlow," I pursued anxiously, for she seemed on the border of collapse and total incoherencey; "Mrs. Dudlow, there are only two more questions; try your best to reply to them. Did you ever before see the individual who was in the room that night?"

She made no motion. It was the negative answer.

"Only one more!" I begged urgently. Her eyes were closing, and she was slipping from me. "You say you saw that person. Would you know him again? Could you identify him?"

And then a curious thing happened. Instead of replying in the prescribed fashion, she raised her hand with great effort to her brow and drew it downward over her face.

"What do you make of that?" asked the coroner, taking me aside. "Could she by any chance mean a mask?"

I had no opportunity to reply, as at that moment the janitor's wife entered the room bearing a tray, and Mrs. Dudlow, pointing directly at her with her last remaining strength, chattered and screamed until my blood ran cold. We were dumfounded. Here, then, was the answer to the riddle. This jealous, quarrelsome slattern, whom nobody had thought of, was the murderess!

IV.

A disclosure more sudden and more surprising could not have been imag-

ined, and it naturally formed the sole topic of discussion as Bessington and I, leaving the Tilloughby, drove away together in his car. He had asked me to accompany him to his house, for his wife, he told me, had been much upset since his confession in the library, and he was growing anxious about her.

I found her alone in her room, flushed and restless, with headache and a rapid, pounding pulse. She began to talk as I produced my clinical thermometer, and rather than interrupt her I gently drew back her nightdress to place the instrument under her arm. To my surprise, she resisted. But in an instant the thing was clear, and, starting to my feet, the thermometer fell with a smash to the floor. To my unspeakable horror, I saw at the forward edge of the armpit, flaming red against the whiteness of the surrounding skin, an angry, unhealed wound. There was no possibility of a mistake —it was diamond-shaped, the exact image of the cross section of the paper cutter!

When I looked up I found Mrs. Bessington gazing at me with terrified eyes. I could not meet their agonized appeal. For once in my life I was utterly unmanned.

"You have seen! You know!" she whispered, her voice choking with fear. And then she cried hopelessly: "Oh, what am I to do! What am I to do! I did not mean to hurt her. I thought she was stealing my husband from me, and I left the opera early and went to her that night to beg her to give him back. I even offered her money that she might go away and leave him to me. She was young; I was getting old; I had loved him so many years, and he was the father of my children. She swore that there was nothing to give back—that there had been nothing wrong. Oh, if I had only believed her! But I did not. In my folly and desperation I called her a bad name, and she grew furious and threw the roll of money in my face.

"And then—how did it happen? We struggled, and in her extremity she struck at me with something that hurt me here. I do not know what it was, nor do I know what I flung at her. I thought only to save my life and escape, and when she fell I turned and ran—into the scorching hell I have lived in every moment since. Oh, that the poor girl were alive again, and I dead in her place!"

She clutched my hand, and fondled it. She rose in bed and knelt to me. "Richard, for the love of God, tell no one what you've seen! The wound—it burns like fire; it's killing me! Cut it out, and with it my side, my heart —everything, but save my husband and children from disgrace and ruin! I who have knelt to no human being kneel to you. I beg you, I beseech you to hear me and believe me!"

She broke down completely, and hid her tortured face in her pillow. My heart beat as though it would burst from my body, while thoughts raced furiously through my mind. So it was not the janitor's wife, but merely *a* woman the poor paralytic had meant—a woman unknown before, veiled probably and unrecognizable. But now what should I do? I was face to face with a frightful responsibility.

There was that unhappy girl, killed without intent, by a person she had never seen, and for something she had never done. I could not bring her young life back. It lay within my power to avenge her death, but would justice be really served if in doing this I brought to shame the innocent daughters of this forlorn mother, herself almost as guiltless as they? It was one of those problems in which there is no sense and for which there is no fair and adequate solution. I hesitated, and

at this crucial moment the door opened and Bessington entered the room.

"The janitor's wife has been freed," he exclaimed. "She easily proved an alibi. Limpet has just telephoned me." And then, noticing his wife's distracted and tear-stained face: "Dick! What's the matter?" he implored.

My resolution was taken. "Nothing," said I quietly and reassuringly. "Do not worry; it is nothing that I cannot readily set right. All that Paula needs is you—and rest—and silence."

And then as he knelt beside her bed, and she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him tenderly, forgivingly, I changed my place and stood so that she alone could see, and laid my finger on my lips in sign that they were sealed.

Was I right or wrong in what I did? Who can tell? But when I see as a result of my silence a reunited and loving family; when I visit the old paralytic, bedded in comfort and tenderly cared for; when I hear that Spangler, who came in the morning, as he confessed, to kill her whom death had already trapped—that he, given another chance at the intercession of Mrs. Bessington, is proving worthy of her trust; and when especially I think of that unfortunate wife and mother, of her nights of vain regret and burning martyrdom, of her days of unremitting toil, and of the bodily strength, the loving kindness, and the millions of money that she pours out like water in behalf of young girls everywhere, so that no cry for help however feeble or remote remains unanswered—when I think of all these things, then I believe I was right, and feel that Jessie Dudlow, vain, futile little beauty, pure nevertheless, and sweet, who pleaded with him who would have dishonored her to be forgiven for ignorantly using that which had come to her dishonestly, now that she knows all things, has herself forgiven the woman who in the urgency of her own defense unwittingly took her life.

HE KNEW WHERE HE AIMED

FRANK P. MORSE, the theatrical man, and William D. Campbell, a business man of Washington, went to Benedict, Maryland, last November, to do a lot of hunting. Before setting out, they secured several extra guns, loaded themselves down with ammunition, and, looking very wise, talked a great deal about the pleasures of hunting when the hunters were dead-sure shots.

During the first morning of their sport, Morse, who had trained for the trip by smoking about sixty cigarettes a day and losing too much sleep, was aroused from his ambulant lethargy by the whir of wings in front of him. True to his Nimrodlike instincts, and anxious to get the first bird, he managed to get his forefinger into contact with the trigger of his gun, thereby discharging a shell.

While he was still flinching nervously from the report of the gun, Campbell came bounding wildly through the bushes. He was greatly agitated.

"What the thunder are you trying to do!" he shouted. "Some of that shot went through my hat. Are you trying to kill me?"

Morse, utterly unconcerned, reached for a cigarette, and replied in a bored manner:

"Certainly not! I never hit anything I shoot at."

Propinquity

By F. A. Churchill, Jr.

That two men who are fond of each other may develop a man's size feud for no other reason than propinquity, is the theme of this story of a couple of miners who had read all the magazines in camp from cover to cover and found they had nothing else to do but to hate and to think of hate.

SMITTY and Steve were going to work for the Sunset Copper Mining Company, Incorporated, at its properties in the Cascade Mountains. Having recently issued a prospectus with cuts of the properties, the inevitable history of Calumet & Hecla, and, of course, the Shakespeare bit about "a tide in the affairs of men which," et cetera, Sunset's officers found it advisable to have at least two miners actually at work. These would show up well in photographs for future prospectuses, and would also come in handy to display before doubting investors.

And so Steve and Smitty, who had met the day before in a Seattle employment bureau, cultivated each other beside a pack train which wound through the mountains toward the mine.

It developed that both had worked at Calumet, also in Alaska, which coincidence established a footing. Smitty was spare and grizzled, and towered over rotund Steve, whose face was a beardy cherub's.

Reaching the Sunset diggings, atop a divide near a glacier, the men wasted no time appreciating the panorama that composed their front and back yards, with its three mineral lakes of red, blue, and green, its encompassing peaks, and the cascade that hung like a great white portière at the end of a distant gorge. Instead, they attended to the horses, carried supplies into stable and cabin, and inspected the tunnel and the "dump."

The living quarters proved excellent, the mine itself "sketchy." There were but a few tons of ore on the dump, and in this already sprouted oats dropped long ago. "We'll get busy tomorrow," and they returned to the cabin for supper.

After the meal Smitty had a little trouble convincing Steve that the dishes ought to be done up promptly. The latter was all for making this a weekly function, pointing out that there was plenty of dishes.

Their talk was of mines they had known, men they had worked with, fought with; hearts they had broken. A further bond of acquaintance was revealed in a young lady named Gertrude, whom, it appeared, they had both known in her capacity of "hasher" in a Seattle restaurant. They commented pleasantly on the beauty and amiability of Gertrude.

Next morning the friends set to work in the tunnel, taking turns at drill and sledge. A portable forge was fitted up, dynamite was opened. By and by muf-

fled explosions in the Sunset Mine broke the long silence of those mountains, rocketing from peak to peak, disturbing the colored glass of the lakes below. Raw ore began to augment the crumbling dump.

And so their work went on day by day.

Steve and Smitty settled down to comfortable routine, with alternate turns at cooking and dishwashing. Sundays, when the laundry work was done and a row of blue flannel shirts and red underwear flapped behind the cabin, they shouldered gun and rod and descended into the valley, returning at nightfall with trout from the river, grouse or quail from the forest. There were several old magazines in camp, and as neither was a rapid reader the literary supply promised to hold out for some time. The men were fairly contented, though neither had ever worked in such a small mine nor in such limited company before.

One evening Smitty entered the cabin and struck up Steve's hand as the latter poured tobasco sauce into the soup he was cooking. "Go easy on that sauce," warned Smitty. "You put too much of it in everything. You must have learned cooking in Mexico."

Steve was hurt. He had never found fault with the other's culinary methods, and this was the first time Smitty had reflected on his. "Sit down! I'm attending to this job."

"Well, kindly remember I'm no umbrey." Smitty meant "hombre," generic for "Mexican."

Steve did not reply, completing his cooking in aggrieved silence. What ailed Smitty? Had he a grouch? If so, did he think to take it out on him, Steve? Better not try! During the meal he forbore to speak.

Smitty missed his friend's usual profane cheer, and rightly attributed it to his own ill-advised asperity. Humanly enough, he, too, became affronted and was very formal in requesting Steve to "kindly slip me that there dragon's blood," or "please to shoot the axle grease." Steve obliged, wordless and glum.

The tension got on Smitty's nerves. The only sound was of Steve drinking coffee. Steve liked his coffee very hot, and he sipped it with noisy intakes of breath. Smitty began to resent this. He felt out of sorts anyway; so, after fidgeting a while, he said:

"Steve, can't you make less music with your meals?"

The other man looked up in incredulous amazement, his knife halfway to his mouth. Smitty actually criticizing his table manners. He replied, when he recovered, with bright, vivid profanity, not cheerful now, but vicious. Steve knew this because the epithets were not directed at himself. He scorned a reply, and devoted the rest of his meal to an experiment in discovering just how fastidious he could be with his own eating and drinking. He kept his elbows in while sawing at the "horse," and consumed his coffee silently, with curled finger, wiping his beard quite dry afterward.

Steve realized the personal application of his partner's conduct, and renewed his affronts to Smitty's newfound sensitiveness. He succeeded in eating disgustingly, drinking abysmally. Smitty at length rose and stood looking down upon him. "Hog! Ugh—makes me sick!" whispered Smitty, and strode outside.

They spent a bad evening, neither deigning to speak. Next day Smitty accidentally missed the drill his mate held, and grazed Steve's hand with the sledge. This had happened before with both, and the injured had blithely cursed the other man's incompetency. Now Steve merely looked up at Smitty with ugly, narrowed eyes. It was worse than anything he could have said.

Constantly they meditated upon their

difference, planned cutting remarks, and forced these back into their hearts to fester. With the dearth of conversation, they speedily read all the magazines from cover to cover, which left them nothing to do of nights but to hate and think of hate.

Days passed, and the misunderstanding threatened a feud. Both forgot how it started, but that made no difference now. Each had discovered in the other traits that sickened his very soul. Steve was a coarse glutton, who made bestial noises in eating, and was lazy and selfish. Smitty was a miserable, hypocritical would-be aristocrat, and thought himself better than honest men.

One night when Smitty contemptuously pushed away his portion of the wild-huckleberry pie Steve had made and the latter promptly ate it, bloodshed nearly ensued.

The superintendent arrived one afternoon just in time to hear the first violent outbreak. Being a wise man in his generation, he granted the men a week's vacation, and they set off in rival state, with two hundred dollars and a man's size feud between them.

Now the superintendent had rightly figured on their getting profoundly, magnificently drunk in Seattle, but he had expected that they would do this apart. He reasoned that they would return when the money was spent, quite as brothers, the tension of monotony relieved. Unluckily, Smitty and Steve, soon after their arrival in Seattle, found themselves in the same bar, and before they could separate were far too intoxicated to move. Next morning they awoke in a back room with fearful headaches, no money—and the feud. When they returned the following day matters were worse than ever.

It was for want of something else to do that Steve and Smitty went fishing next Sunday. Luck was poor until they reached the "falls," an abrupt declivity of perhaps ten yards, where the river thundered into a big, deep pool. Steve approached the pool, but finding Smitty there first withdrew proudly and wandered on above.

A few minutes later, Smitty, fancying he heard a cry above the endless tumult, looked up just in time to see a pair of boots appear on the brink right where the green water turns white in its first tremendous leap. The senseless form of Steve shot out into air and disappeared with a puny "plop" in the whirlpool.

Smitty's eyes, sharpened by desirous contemplation of the big cutthroats and salmon steering slowly round and round beneath the boiling surface, perceived the outlines of a limp mass far down. Quickly casting off coat and boots, he leaped feet first and caught Steve's body ten feet below. Then he fought the battle of his life. A hundred wicked currents sought to drag him farther down, to crack his skull against the rocky walls, to draw him under the stunning battery of the falls. Using every ounce of his strength, he swam and struggled downstream out of the death-cold eddies, still holding Steve's leg, until they lay together in the shallows. After a while he dragged Steve out on shore.

The latter bled freely from a deep cut above the eye. He had evidently slipped and been stunned on a rock just above the falls. Reviving presently, he suffered Smitty to bandage his head, and the two went home in dour, shivering silence.

Smitty rejoiced inwardly now. He had saved Steve's life and hopelessly indebted him. Steve, realizing this, too, was furious. He owed his life to the man he hated. All he could do was to keep up his end of the feud, which he did ably, awaiting a chance to turn the tables.

The next few weeks were a nightmare. Winter was coming on, and the first snows had already fallen. Fish-

ing at an end, they had nothing but bird shot wherewith to kill the fresh venison that grew bold and numerous. Once Smitty saw a cinnamon bear investigating the garbage heap, and went after him with the shotgun, winning a furious reproof from Steve for his vain efforts. Steve chose to feel that Smitty had wasted those two shells on purpose to aggravate him. He did not desist from grumbling when the superintendent sent up a rifle and more ammunition.

One bleak, clear night—it had snowed all day and the moon revealed a host of forested mountainsides white with their burden; sparkled coldly on the distant cascade and the jeweled serpent river far below—Smitty, presiding as cook, placed a dish of beans on the table as pièce de résistance. Steve eyed it. He was not overfond of beans, and he knew that Smitty relished them. They had had beans every night of Smitty's present tenure as cook, the tinned meats he himself loved lying unopened on the shelves. Men have died for less, Steve reflected. After looking at the beans viciously, he picked up the platter and smelled them in a derogatory manner. Smitty saw him do it. Men have died for less than that, too. The chef moved toward Steve—but refrained. He could not soil his bread knife with such blood.

It was well for Steve that he sniffed those beans. He watched Smitty sailing into them with a cheerful, silent smile. And a few hours later Smitty became terribly ill.

Ironic in his solicitude, Steve looked after his companion, and did for him all that could be done, but Smitty grew worse. His agony was hideous. Writhing on his bunk, the pains grew on him so that he fell with a heavy thud on the floor, and Steve had much ado to lift him back. At last, between spasms, the sufferer beckoned to Steve, who sat by the stove smoking with short, frequent puffs.

"Steve—I'm gonna die."

"Ferget it," replied Steve noncommittally.

"Gonna die. Oh-h-h! You can have my watch an' clothes—an' what's comin' to me. There's no one—else. Oh-h-h—to give it to—ye swine!"

"Well, here's luck to you wherever you land on t'other side of Jordan," chuckled Steve, rising and fastening his mackinaw and taking from the wall a fur and snowshoes.

"Where—you goin'? Leave me die alone? Jes' like you. Oh-h-h—ye yellow pack rat!"

Steve came to the bunk, placed his own blanket over Smitty's feet, bathed the cold, sweating brow, and saw to the supply of stimulant. "I'm goin' for a doctor, ye peel heel, bald-headed, conceited cockatoo!"

"The more—fool you. You'll die in the snow sure—before you make Skykomish. Oh-h-h!"

Smitty recovered from his latest access, wiped the blinding, icy sweat out of his eyes—but Steve was gone.

"Hey-y-y, Steve! Come back—ye darned fool!"

Steve was gone.

Six hours later it had come on to snow again. Smitty, green and shaky, but unmistakably better, dragged himself from the bunk, managed to stuff the stove with bark, and kindled it. With infinite effort, pausing sometimes to sink over the table, he mixed strong coffee and set it to boil. The room became an oven, torture to the still nauseated man, but he kept up the fire and crept to the door, where he lay, cooled by the draft underneath.

He had almost dozed off in his weakness when the door crashed open in his face. Amid a whirl of wind and snow, a strange, conglomerate mass tumbled in.

Smitty picked himself up. The heap fell against the table. It was two men, Steve and the Skykomish doctor.

Both were so utterly exhausted that minutes passed before they moved. When Steve finally beheld Smitty moving feebly about the cabin, preparing coffee, he rose, trembling no longer with cold, but with fury. "Ye black hypocrite! You played sick a-purpose to fool me!" He seized the shotgun.

Smitty grasped a knife, and would have thrown himself under the muzzle had not the doctor interfered.

"You're crazy, Steve!" said the mediator. "Can't you see the man can scarcely walk?"

A truce was patched up somehow.

The mining settlement known as Skykomish boasts but two first-class bars. When in town for a sociable time, Smitty spent his money in one, Steve in the other. They returned to the mine one night carrying revolvers slung about their hips on cartridge belts, and made a business henceforth of turning, when addressed, with one hand on the weapon.

Smitty brought home another purchase. It was a box of ladies' pink stationery, with pen, ink, and stamps. When he first revealed it with elaborate carelessness, Steve forgot his dignity, and craned over to see it, the frying pan in his hand pouring a spluttering stream over the stove.

But Smitty paid no heed. He placed a sheet of the gaudy paper before him, inked the pen, and set to work, often pausing to renew a tooth grip on his tongue and revolve the pen above a word. The letter was finished and addressed in a couple of hours, and Smitty left it lying on the table. Steve glanced at the superscription:

Miss Gertrude Bilker,
Knipe's Café, Seattle.

Reappearing, the other made a great show of snatching the letter away and cramming it in his pocket. He watched Steve the rest of the evening, and certain signs he noted seemed to please him. More potent than ptomaines, the poison that is green began to ferment in Steve's blood.

But not until after a second visit to Skykomish did the latter feel all the pangs Smitty intended for him. Seated by the stove, Smitty produced a blue envelope, unfolded a letter, and read it. He smiled self-consciously. Lastly, feigning embarrassment, he replaced the letter—and glared round on Steve.

But the other man, though racked with jealousy, was equal to the occasion. He unwrapped a parcel containing white stationery, and, taking it to a corner, busied himself with an epistle which consumed three hours. He left it in view, and went out; and Smitty saw that it likewise was addressed to Miss Gertrude Bilker of Knipe's Café.

When next they visited Skykomish, a letter awaited neither. Doubtless Miss Gertrude feared she was being trifled with. At any rate, her silence failed to improve the situation at the Sunset.

The snows began to melt in early spring, and freshets, long pent in the mountains, swelled the river in the valley to a force which the men heard plainly, booming along, carrying rocks and trees in its wild course.

One glorious March morning, Smitty and Steve in ugly mood went out to saw wood for the stove. It was a task they hated, this wood getting; it chained them together with the rhythmic unison of the two-handed tool snoring through the dead cedar. They beheld neither the freshness of clean-washed heaven above them nor the grandeur of the tremendous mountains about them.

Working a while on the first cut in silence, broken only by the saw's ringing groan—"Quit loafin' on me, swine!" snapped Smitty.

Steve's answer may not be set down. Smitty chose to be affronted.

"Take that back! Quick, or you'll eat it!"

Steve's hand sought the gun at his hip, and Smitty sprang for a tree. Scarcely had he reached it before "Whack!" a bullet crashed into the bark.

Steve was behind a tree now, too, and for an hour they crouched there, each taking his chances for a quick shot. The bullets screamed off into the woods, their passage marked by a chain of falling leaves and pine needles; or smashed into the bark. Neither was hit—yet. But they grew bolder and bolder with the passage of time.

Steve glanced once at the saw, lying aslant across the log at an angle to both. Aiming carefully, he fired. Mingled with the report of his gun was a sound like a gong as the bullet rebounded from the saw and hissed past Smitty. The latter caught the idea, and soon both found it expedient to move part way around their trees until the probability of some one's being hit became strong. Suddenly Smitty thought he heard voices in the trail below. He looked down.

The superintendent was coming up the trail with several others, among whom were women on pack horses. He hesitated a second——

"Ay-y-y, Steve! The boss's comin' with a bunch of women. We gotta quit this." First tossing his gun before him, he stepped out into the open. Steve appeared, too, and they regarded each other foolishly.

Smitty ran to the cabin, returned with an empty tin, and shot a couple of holes through it. When the superintendent came up to them, he found the two miners apparently keen in amicable rivalry of marksmanship.

"Pretty poor shooting," he commented. "Only two bull's-eyes for all the shots we heard." He regarded them sharply.

"I've a bit of bad news for you boys," he went on. "Funds are running low; so we'll have to shut down for a few weeks. But I want your addresses so's I can let you know when we start again. Like to keep you with us."

One month later, having issued a prospectus more gorgeous than any that had gone before, illustrated with divers views of Smitty and Steve working in the tunnel, saddling pack horses, at meals, in other innocent pursuits, and having thereby sold several hundred more shares of Sunset stock, the superintendent sought a Seattle tavern beloved of mining men.

Smitty and Steve were inside, sure enough. A foot of each caressed the brass railing, and they clasped one another's shoulders with mutual affection and need of support. A group of barroom loafers hung about.

"Them was the happy days! Ay, Steve?"

"You've said it, ye bald-headed old coot! Them sure was!"

"Him and me, we worked together eight months in the Sunset Mine, we did," Smitty explained impressively to the loungers.

"Better pal I never had. Set 'em up, you!"

"Steve! Ay, Steve! Don't you wish them days was back?"

"Betcha. Happy days. Here's happy days, everybody!"

The superintendent stepped up. "Howdy, boys! Want to go back to the Sunset to-night?"

Smitty looked at Steve, sobered by the press of destiny. Steve looked at Smitty, and the warmth died out of the eyes of both. The stillness was only broken by the clattering of emptied glasses on the bar.

Uneasily they regarded the superintendent.

"Nope," replied Smitty at last.

Steve shook his head, embarrassed.

An Economy Campaign

By H. L. Rennick

Efficiency and economy can be combined, but when you try to combine them by the aid of a professional economy expert there is apt to be trouble. Here is a story of an economy doctor whose coming was synonomous with the coming of trouble on the Central Division of the L. B. & J.

"A RAILROAD president," said Geraghty, superintendent of the Central Division of the L. B. & J., "is a jinx, sent by the fat men of Wall Street to keep us poor devils from growing as fat as they are."

"You're right, Frank," agreed Morgan, the trainmaster; "just listen to this:

"New York, June 25th.

"The board of directors of the L. B. & J. this afternoon elected Robert M. Lawson, former general manager of the M. & R., president of the L. B. & J. to succeed John R. Taylor, resigned. It was reported that bondholders of the L. B. & J. had urged a change because of a delay in interest payments. Lawson gained a reputation for efficiency on the M. & R. as general manager, and changed the road from a losing proposition to a good investment."

"Let me see that paper, Morgan," Geraghty said, when the trainmaster had finished reading the news dispatch. "Is there a picture of Lawson in it?"

"Sure," said Morgan, "there's a picture, and it looks just like it."

"Like what?"

"An efficiency sharp."

"Good *night!*" yelled Geraghty.

"You needn't worry, Frank, you've got your place cinched," said Morgan.

Every man on the road, from Geraghty down to the kid timekeepers for the construction gangs, knew before the day was over that the L. B. & J. had a new president.

Before a month was over, the L. B. & J. knew its board of directors had picked the most economical economy sharp they could buy. It was "retrenchment" here, "cut down operating expenses" there, and even the orders, which once came out on bond paper, were now mimeographed on cheap flimsy.

Then came the big event of the new administration. The president, having settled to his satisfaction all minor details which could be transacted in a twenty-story office building, decided he would make his first tour of inspection.

Jefferson, of the Eastern Division, got him first. What Lawson did to Jefferson was plenty. He swung the ax right and left, lopping off clerks, cutting down requisitions for supplies, and crippling the division shop force beyond repair. Finally Jefferson lost his own scalp, and another expert, with instructions to see how much he could save, was made the "Old Man" of the Eastern Division.

Before he lost his head, Jefferson passed the word on to MacAndrew, of the Fosston branch, and this canny Scotchman preserved his own scalp by cutting down expenses on the day be-

fore the president reached his division headquarters. MacAndrew did a bit of ax swinging himself, and, when he received Lawson, there was not a superfluous man in sight.

"Mr. MacAndrew," Lawson said, "I'm glad to find that your division, in the main, seems to be handled both economically and efficiently. You may hear from me further."

All the time MacAndrew was sweating for fear that a smash-up would cripple him from Fairbury, where his division joined the main, clear into division headquarters and back again.

MacAndrew passed the word to Geraghty. He wrote:

> Frank, man, this Lawson party is too stingy to throw a tie spike at a bull that would be chasing him. He'd want to save the spike. Get ready for him. Fire every man you've got, if necessary, but show him economy, and he's yours.

Geraghty was to get him next. Clinton, his division point, was one hundred and forty miles from Fairbury, where his jurisdiction began on the east. Geraghty pondered all night, and kept Morgan with him until midnight before he found the idea that pleased him.

"Jim," he finally said, "we'll show him."

And show him they did. There were some protests, speedily checked by Geraghty, but the orders went out, and were given in a manner that left no room for doubting that the superintendent meant just what he said. Order No. 736 troubled every man on the division until a few of them realized what it meant. Then all who understood chuckled, and the word was passed that Geraghty had something up his sleeve for the new boss. No. 736 went thusly:

> Effective to-day, the Central Division of the L. B. & J. will have in mind, above everything else, the comfort of the general public, who are its patrons. With this idea in view, regular trains will be given precedence over all specials. No special is to be moved over this division without the special approval of the superintendent. Whenever possible, a special will be combined with a regular train going in the same general direction. This combination will be effected always at the earliest possible moment.

When Lawson's special reached Fairbury, it was midnight. A layover of an hour was scheduled in the yards. The engine crew from MacAndrew's division reported in and went to bed. The hours passed, and still the two coaches which made up the president's special remained in the yards. At seven o'clock, when Lawson awoke, he glanced out of a window.

"Must be in Clinton already," he said to the negro porter.

"No, sah, we's still in Fairbury."

"Where's Jefferson?" Lawson demanded.

"Right here, sir," said the secretary.

"Find out what's the matter?"

"Yes, we're to go west as part of No. 9, which will leave Fairbury at eight o'clock."

"Why didn't they route us straight through?"

"Superintendent's orders."

"Send this message to Superintendent Geraghty:

> Why was special held up at Fairbury. Answer quick. LAWSON.

No. 9 had reached Lewistown, twenty miles from Fairbury, before Geraghty's answer was brought to Lawson by the conductor. The railroad president's brow was knitted as he read this dispatch:

> I ordered your special sent on with No. 9 to save the L. B. & J. $36.53, the cost of operating it as a separate train, from Fairbury to Clinton. GERAGHTY.

The train was on time to the minute when it pulled into the shops at Clinton. Lawson's two cars were uncoupled, and, a few minutes later, Geraghty stepped out of his office and up to the observation platform on the rear coach. He shook hands with Lawson.

"We'll go through the offices, first," said Lawson.

Geraghty piloted him through. There was no unnecessary noise; no idle clerks. The trainmaster was preaching economy in the use of fuel to a fireman who had just been placed on the extra board. The chief dispatcher explained that he had reduced the number of messages per day by eighteen per cent, and had been able to save the railroad the mileage cost of one wire the length of the entire division. The claim department, which Geraghty had tipped off, was in the act of settling a possible ten-thousand-dollar damage suit for thirty-five dollars and a ten-cent cigar. There was every evidence of economy, and efficiency was apparent.

"Understand, Mr. Lawson," Geraghty said, "I am an economist. I do believe, however, that the theory can be carried to a point where efficiency becomes impossible. Notwithstanding, I will endeavor to carry out your policies to the letter."

"Frankly, Mr. Geraghty," said Lawson, "I am much pleased with your spirit."

It had been a more or less trying ordeal for Geraghty while Lawson went through the offices, suggesting a reduction here, a retrenchment there, and Geraghty was relieved when, the next morning, he had Lawson's coaches again coupled to No. 9, and started onward to Markham's Western Division.

Two box cars, in some mysterious manner, were derailed and swung across the main track ten miles out of Clinton. When Lawson protested at the delay in clearing the tracks, Geraghty sent him this:

LAWSON, ABOARD No. 9: Our division has had so few wrecks that I have let out all but one wrecking crew, and have sent the cranes to MacAndrew's division, keeping only one for the Central. The one crew is cleaning up a slight wreck near Lewistown; can't get to No. 9's position for three hours. By letting out other crews, will save company $3,125 a year.

Lawson swore, but sent no more messages. It was six hours before No. 9 finally got started west again. At seven o'clock the president, who had finished his dinner, asked the secretary to join him while he dictated several letters. He asked the porter to turn on the lights. The electric bulbs did not flash. The secretary called the conductor.

"Is the lighting system out of order?"

"No, sir," said the conductor; "there can be no lights until sunset."

"Why, it's dark now," the secretary protested.

"Mr. Geraghty's orders, to save expenses, were that the engineer should not start the dynamo until sunset, which, in this place, comes at seven-twenty-nine o'clock to-day."

"I can't see the sense of the order," said Lawson.

"Mr. Geraghty explained," said the conductor, "that he realized there was little expense in the lighting itself, but that he had figured wear and tear on the dynamo, cost of bulbs, et cetera, cost the company one dollar and sixty-eight cents a year for each car, and said he wished to save that sum. He told us it was the little things that counted."

Nature came to Geraghty's aid just before No. 9 reached the end of his division. It had been raining for two hours, and, during the last twenty miles of the run, a gale had been blowing with the strength of a tornado, and was growing worse every minute. Archerville operator gave Engineer Bill Adams a warning to watch out for a washout at Funk's bridge, eight miles west.

Through the blinding rain the train forced its way. The electric headlight failed to brighten the track for any great distance ahead. Its gleam, however, was bright enough to give Adams warning in time. The bridge was gone. There was no chance for an accident there, so far as No. 9 was now con-

cerned, but it appeared the only alternative to waiting until the engineers could build a new bridge was to back into Archerville. Adams reversed the lever. Four miles back, a huge tree had been hurled across the track by the mighty force of the wind. The way was blocked in front by the collapsed bridge and by the tree behind. The gale had been at its fiercest after No. 9 had safely passed the spot where the tree now blocked it.

Fortunately, there was a small station, Sharpsdale, three miles east of the bridge. The train was sent ahead and brought to a stop at Sharpsdale. The conductor set forth to arouse the station agent, for it was only a day office, a flag stop. After an exasperating delay, the agent was aroused and reached the depot to wire division headquarters that the bridge was out. No. 4, the night mail for the East, was due at the bridge within twenty minutes, but could be caught at Peru, seven miles west of the bridge, the agent thought.

A series of staccato ticks from the instrument brought the Sharpsdale agent to his feet. He shouted:

"She's gone by Peru. Got by just a second before the operator there heard the warning. Ought to be at the bridge in ten minutes."

President Lawson, though an economy sharp, had a high regard for human life, and was an executive of no mean ability. In a second he had ordered the engineer to leave all but one coach at Sharpsdale, speed on to the bridge, and warn No. 4 before it went through into the stream. No. 9 broke all records for running through a storm. The three miles to the bridge crept beneath the drive wheels in something under four minutes. No. 4 had not reached the bridge when the westbound engine halted within a hundred feet of the stream. Adams, Roberts, his fireman, and Lawson ran ahead and hastily shoved the pegs of two red signal fuses into the ground on the bank of the stream, which, even when swollen by the flood, was only a hundred feet across. The lights were planted and lighted just as No. 4's headlights was seen dimly through the rain. It was stopped in time. Shouting across the stream, Adams explained the situation to No. 4's engineer.

Geraghty, back in his home at Clinton, was aroused from sleep by the ringing of his telephone bell. Quickly the dispatcher explained, over the phone, the tie-up and the narrow escape from a disaster. In his energy to reach the scene of action, the dispatcher's office, Geraghty forgot, for a minute, that he had undertaken to teach Lawson a lesson in economy. A few moments later, however, he had recalled his inspection trip, and was determined to carry out his farce.

"Don't hurry too much," he told Reynolds, the night dispatcher; "we've got to show Lawson that our one wrecking crew"—and he chuckled as he said it—"cannot cover the entire division in a few minutes."

Reynolds turned to an operator who was calling for him. Then, while Geraghty was coolly giving orders to the shops to get out the wrecker and notify the engineering department, the night dispatcher interrupted him:

"Is Lawson aboard No. 9?"

"He's at the bridge," said Geraghty.

"This message for him is important. It just came in over our loop from W. U. downtown."

Reynolds handed the flimsy to the superintendent, and Geraghty, whose heart was as big as his brain was determined, lost all desire to heckle the president when he read:

LAWSON, *President L. B. & J., en route on Central Division:* Your wife is critically ill; asking for you. DOCTOR ACTON.

Geraghty thought of his own wife.

The L. B. & J., that night, got the

most thrilling exhibition of quick action it had seen since No. 1, with the coast mail, had been wrecked on the night it was racing for a government contract.

Seventy-nine minutes from the time Geraghty saw the telegram, a wrecking train, with a gang of forty men culled from the shops, roundhouse, and yards, was thirty miles out of Clinton, and speeding for the scene of the tie-up. Sixty minutes later the train had stopped at the first obstruction, and the big tree which had blocked No. 9 was turning and groaning above the levers of a dozen huskies. Seven minutes, and the wrecker pulled up a few yards behind No. 9.

Geraghty rushed into Lawson's car. The president had come back from the bridge. He had not received his dispatch, for the Sharpsdale agent had reported wires down a few minutes after his first message to Clinton got through.

"I'm ready to hand in my resignation right now," said Geraghty, "but I want to tell you just one or two things. This economy stuff of mine has been a bluff. I've been trying to kid you. The first delay to No. 9 was my fault, but this one isn't, and I'm not going to let any economy sharp keep me from making good when there's a tie-up like this. Besides, I've got bad news for you."

Geraghty told Lawson of the telegram.

"My wife!" moaned Lawson. Then to Geraghty:

"Get me into Clinton before six o'clock," he pleaded. "I must catch the morning train for Chicago on the P. & B. My wife is staying in Chicago with her mother."

"I'll get you there," said Geraghty.

The engine which brought down the wrecker was uncoupled in an instant, had switched itself clear a minute later, and, with the private cars on behind, was speeding back toward Clinton. Geraghty was in the cab with Marlowe, the engineer.

"Marlowe," he said, "it's one hundred and thirty-eight miles back to Clinton. You've got just three hours and two minutes to do it in. There'll be one stop. We've got to get a message through from some place ordering the tracks cleared. It means this old rattletrap of yours will have to do seventy miles on the straightaways and sixty on the curves. Can she do it?"

"No. 861 isn't a rattletrap, you son of a gun," Marlowe retorted. "Get in this cab and I'll show you."

Geraghty's rules were shattered on this run. The coal that Marlowe's fireman hurled into the fire box would have given an economy expert heart disease. The regular trains, which Geraghty had declared should have all precedence over specials, were shunted on sidetracks here and there as the engine with the two cars sped on. Marlowe never would tell how fast 861 did make it that night, but Lawson was landed in Clinton ten minutes before the P. & B. left for Chicago.

And the best part of the story, after all, is that Lawson's wife didn't die. It looked pretty bad for her, and—well, it was a baby, but they pulled her—and him—through. She said, afterward, she never would have lived if Lawson hadn't been at her bedside when the struggle came.

Superintendent Geraghty, waiting to be relieved from his job, got his affairs in order and was ready to turn over the Central Division to any one whom Lawson might pick.

Three days after the washout, when the line was clear again, for the engineering department had thrown a temporary bridge across in record time, Geraghty opened a telegram and read:

GERAGHTY, *Superintendent Central Division:* Geraghty Lawson, aged two days, weight ten pounds, sends his compliments. Don't overdo economy. LAWSON.

A Chat With You

ALMOST every one has some possession—a book, a picture, or what not—that when new was highly treasured but was afterward set aside on some high shelf, and, if not forgotten, at least neglected. It pays, now and then, to reach up, take down, and dust off these long-unheeded treasures. We tired of their contemplation once, perhaps, but now, going back a second time, we may find new things about them to love and admire, and sounder, deeper reasons to be glad of them. We have our national possessions as well as personal, which we would do well to take down and dust off occasionally. One of the most durable, genuine, and satisfactory of these is the portrait George Washington left behind him in the things he did and the events that came to pass because of him.

THIS portrait needs dusting and cleaning very badly, indeed. So many false biographers have piled their rubbish on it, so many faint water-color artists have tried to alter the hearty and rugged lines according to their own saccharine ideas. Shake off the rhetorical rubbish, wash away the water-color smugness, and we find there something infinitely human, likable, and understandable. Washington was no faultless prig. The cherry tree and the little hatchet existed only in the imagination of Parson Weems. His father indulged in no more artificial declamations nor embraces than did yours. He came of gentlemen, but his gentlemen were a full-blooded, two-fisted, outdoor lot.

WASHINGTON came honestly by a good, hot temper, a love for horses and outdoors, a dislike for pretense and nonsense of all sorts, and a big, muscular body. He was by no means highly educated in the conventional sense, but he had a sound taste for both books and men, and, like Lincoln, is an example of the fact that there are some people whom no circumstances can make narrow, ignorant, or provincial. By inheritance he was two things: An impetuous fighting man with a temper, who liked rather than dreaded danger, and an honest man by instinct, who hated shams and pretense and sought always after realities. Grafted on these qualities he had something which he must have earned for himself—a self-control and steadiness of purpose won only by the bitterest struggles with a fiery and passionate nature. This was no Greek god serene upon a pedestal, simpering at the weaknesses of mankind. If the face in the portrait seems calm, it is not the serenity of the cold-blooded snob who never had real feelings, but of a human, passionate being, who has struggled long with himself and won the victory. Tears in his eyes there had been plenty, discouragements and doubts to wring his heart, but always he showed that one unfailing mark of a noble nature, the steady effort and resolve to rule himself, and follow the best and highest rather than the easiest.

AS a soldier in the service of the colonies, Washington was successful, but not always. No man was ever less conceited than he, but at the same time he had a sound sense of his own worth and enough temper to assert it forcibly. What became in later life a steady and deliberate valor was in his younger days of a more desperate and reckless sort. He met with defeats and disappointments and lived, in the meantime, an outdoor, frontier life. When he retired from his military command he had a reputation in the colony of Virginia—a very small place—but no-

where else. He was known as a reckless, hardy fighter, with a will of his own. Till the greater war broke out, he spent his days fox hunting and running his estate, and would have remained there till his death had not events called him. He became the general of the Continental armies because he was clearly the best man for the job, not because he sought it. He fought through eight long years, in want and penury at times, struggling not alone against the enemy but against a weak and critical Congress, that failed to give him men and supplies. The campaign he fought against the British can only be compared with the campaign fought by Fabius Maximus against Hannibal. It was masterly in its plan, in its provision for every detail, in the tremendous self-control shown by the general in delaying a decisive stroke till the time was right. Such delay, in the face of hunger, criticism, and discouragement, means a sort of bravery far higher and rarer than the reckless daring of the young Virginian who fought against the Indians. Such a steady diplomacy and command of temper as Washington showed now in handling Congress and his other generals is something far beyond the hot-headed George Washington of years before. For a long time Washington's skill as a tactician has been underestimated, but to-day his campaigns are regarded as models. He was not a showy man, he was never daring for the sake of daring. But he was neither slow nor lacking in subtlety, and he could strike and strike hard at the right moment.

NO man of genius is like another. They are all *sui generis,* sports of nature, never to be repeated, all absolutely original. Washington was a man of genius, just as Shakespeare was, or Burns, or Lincoln, but of his own individual sort. He was by no means an ambitious man. He did want people to treat him with the respect he thought his due, but never in his whole career did he show the faintest desire for fame, or inclination to play to the galleries. He was not out for money. He was well off when the war started, served eight terrible years, took no pay, and furnished over fifty thousand dollars to the government out of his own pocket. The consuming desire of his nature was to do well what he had to do, and make it a success. He was a good mixer, but he always spoke his mind bluntly and sometimes sarcastically. He had a sort of gray granite optimism in his nature. He saw all the difficulties more plainly than any man of his day, but he had the heart to face them and the sturdy will to conquer them.

WHAT Washington did to found a national spirit and to start the United States on its imperial path has been told enough in history. What he was as a man interests us more. A big, strong, rugged figure of a man, sensible and kind, stanch and sound. A good fighter, undismayed when beaten, and steady and modest in victory. A man who could love and hate, and who hated crooks and cowards above all things. A man of plain speech, who despised what we call "hot air," and which, in another form, was just as plentiful then as it is now; a man dignified and democratic at once, fond of horses and cards and society, who talked enough when he had anything to say, but never talked about himself or his own feelings. He had his faults, but he was strong enough to conquer them; he had his pride, but it was in honest work well done and not in himself. Surely in a day of transition, when our melting pot of a world seethes with so many selfish, unsatisfied spirits and so many strange ideals, we can spare a thought for a simple Virginia gentleman, who could found a republic without being puffed up over it, and whose grasp of the old eternal verities was so strong and sure.

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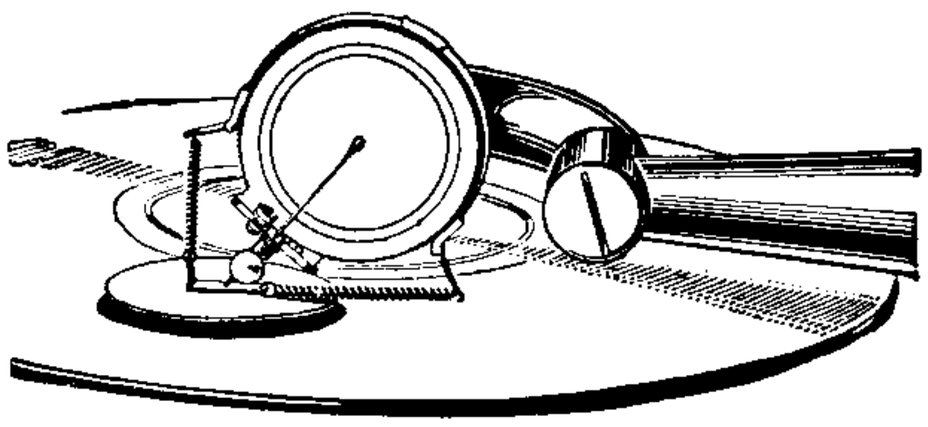

has vastly changed and improved the *whole character of sound reproduction?*

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by using a needle only one-quarter the size of a halftone needle, with which it gives a full, richer volume than the usual coarse fulltone needle. Did you know that fulltone needles used 35 times on a record—on an average—*destroy the overtones?*

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It is a little attachment, weighing about as much as a two-cent letter, which slips over the sound box, adjusted as quickly as the needle, even by a child. It is sold, delivered free, by mail for $2.

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Use This Coupon 21

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Structural Engineer	Commercial Illustrating	
Concrete Construction	Industrial Designing	
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where men to-day are fighting in Northern France under a screen of artillery fire, men fought hand-to-hand fights with naked blades in the days of the French Revolution with a savagery that transcends anything in the present mighty conflict. One of the colossal characters of those horror-filled days was

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whose story will be told in the POPULAR MAGAZINE beginning with the next issue, on sale March 7th. It has a timely interest in that towns where battle raged fiercest have been mentioned again and again in the communiques from the war offices of the nations fighting to-day. The author of this great story is

JOHN R. CORYELL

It is a long novel he has written, too long for publication in its entirety in a single issue of any magazine. It will appear in four long installments in the POPULAR.

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Celebrations galore have been made memorable by toasts delivered with this choice delightful rye. Old Overholt is pure, mellow, delicious, with a delightful boquet.

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A few cents a day will soon make you the owner of a handsome Burrowes Table. You can play on the Table while paying for it. No special room is needed. Burrowes Tables can be mounted on dining or library table or on their own legs or folding stand. Put up or taken down in a minute. Sizes range up to 4½ x 9 ft. (standard).

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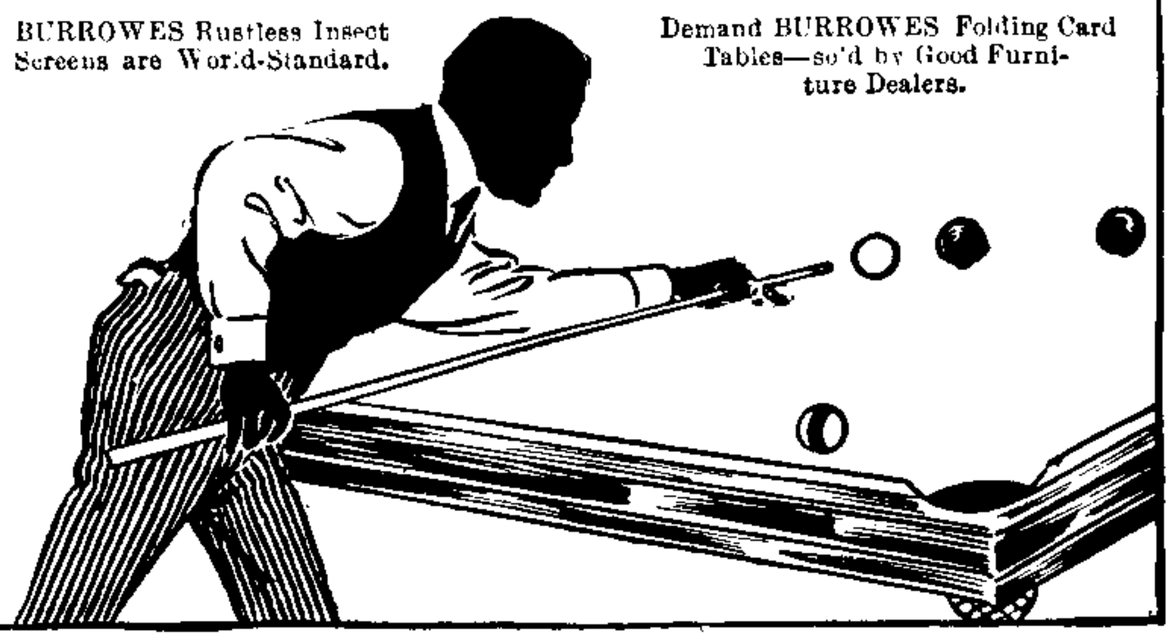

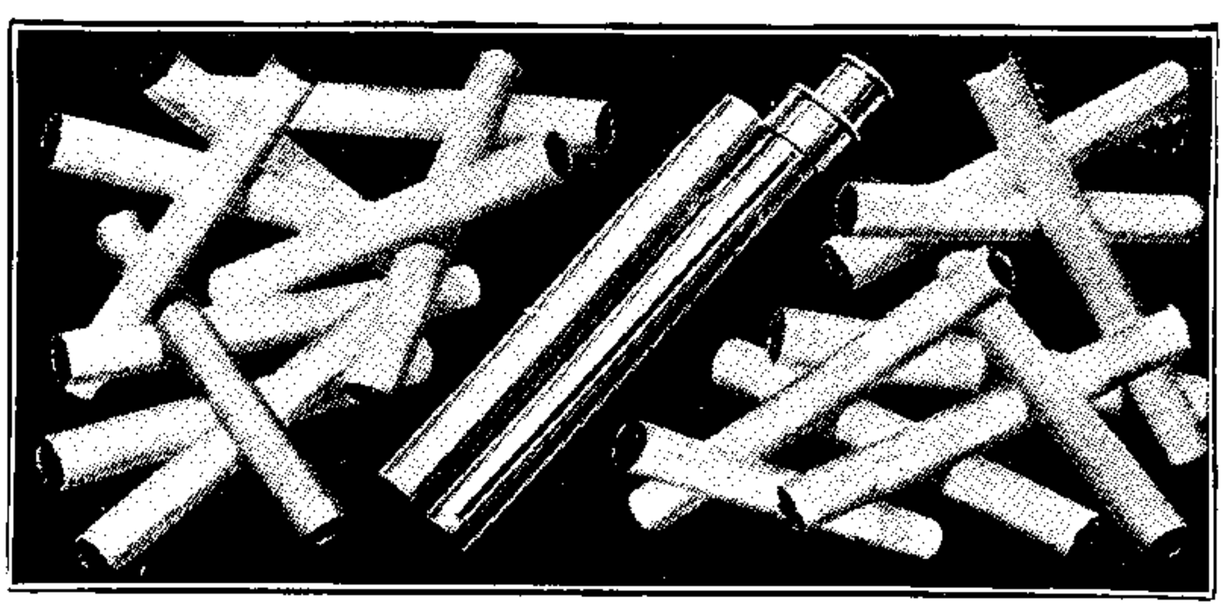

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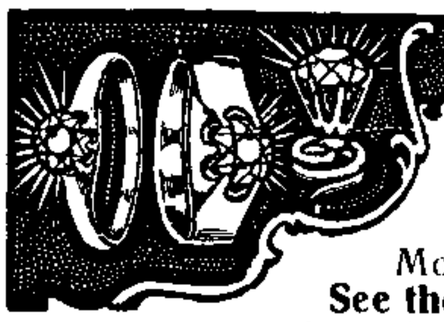

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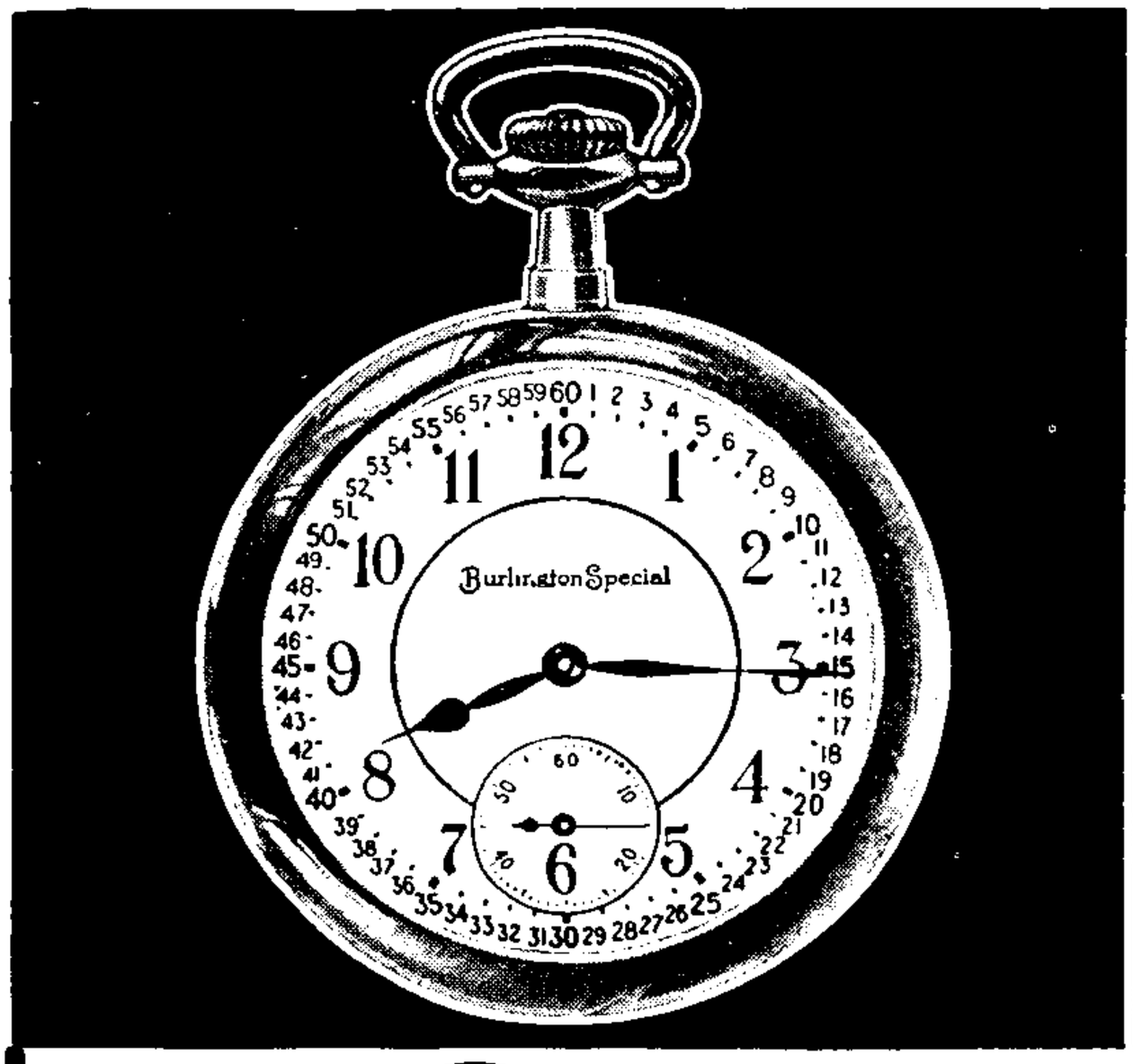

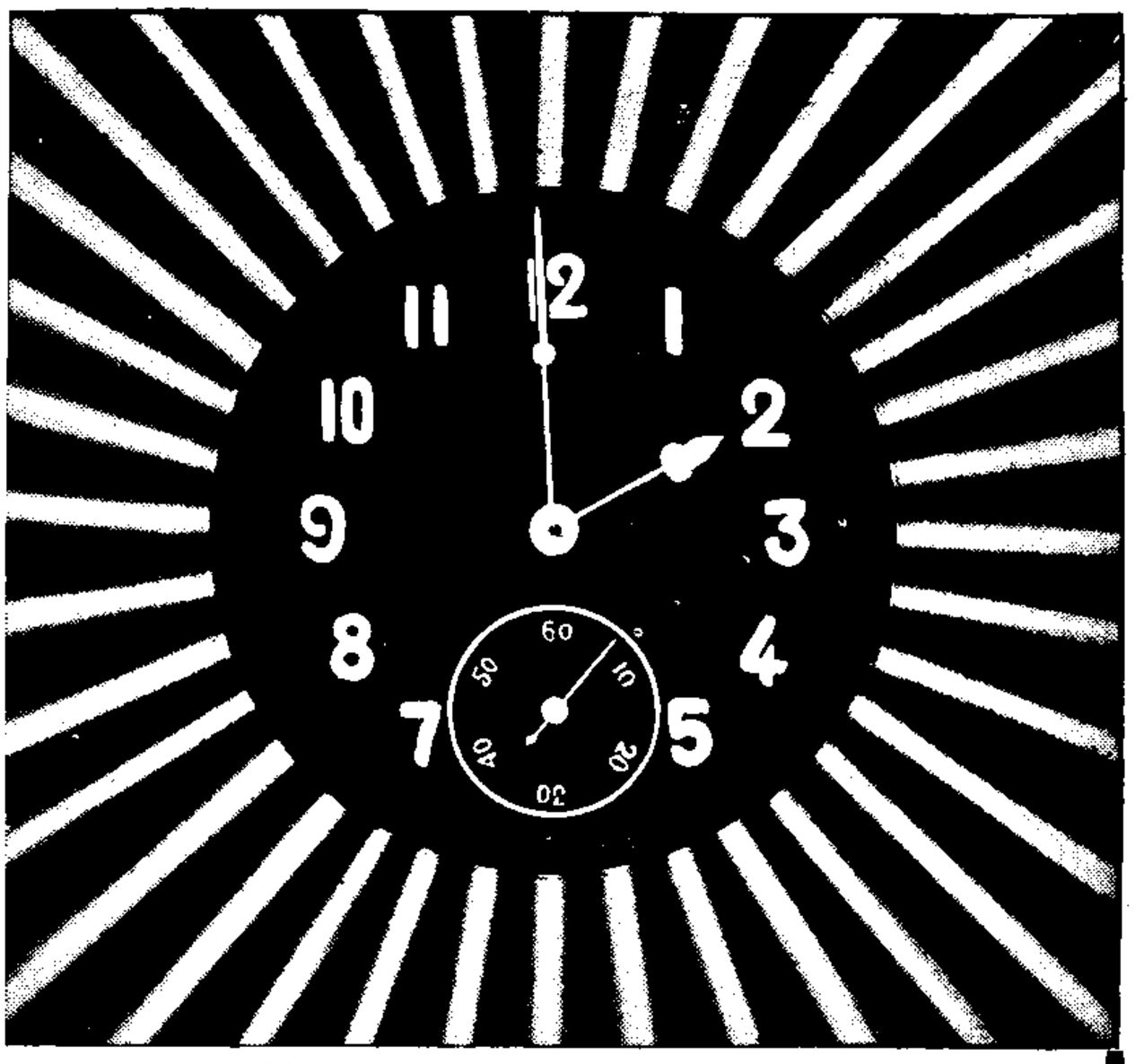

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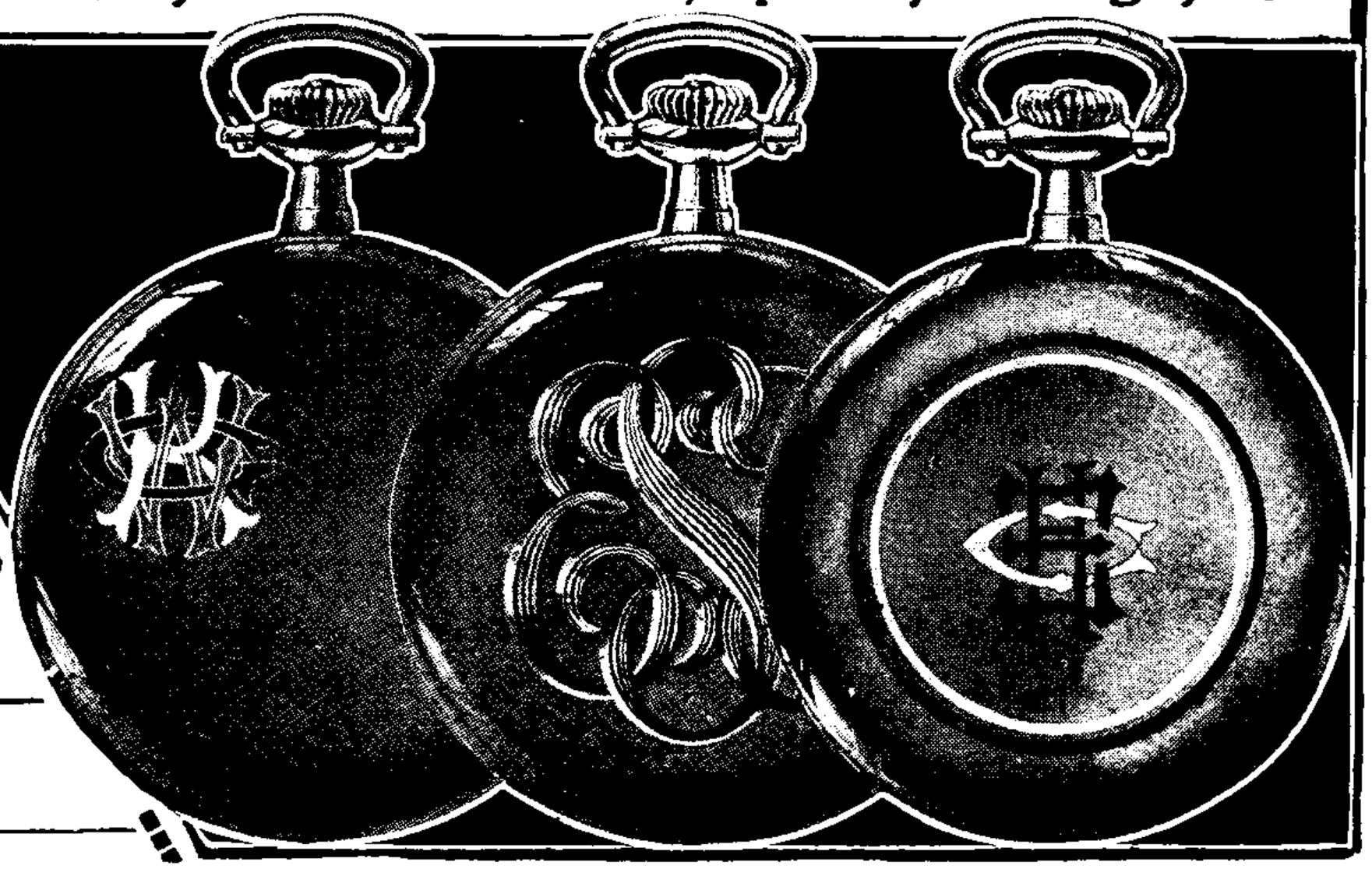

Popular Readers, Attention!

IN the past some of our friends have written us that they wished our magazine were not so tightly bound, that it would stay open and flat in the hand. To meet their wish we are having the problem worked out by experts. But in the interval those readers who complain to us of the binding may be glad to follow the example of an ingenious gentleman in Canada, who writes:

TORONTO, December 12, 1914.

To the POPULAR MAGAZINE:

Gentlemen—I should like to add my name to your list of enthusiastic readers. I haven't missed a number for six years. I am always looking for the next. I wouldn't give one POPULAR for any three other fiction magazines. Being a great smoker, I use the following idea: As soon as I get my magazine I take it to a shoemaker, and get him to punch two holes with an eyelet punch about an inch from the back edge of the magazine. Then I hie me to the nearest printer and get him to guillotine the back off, just enough to clear the gummed edge. I keep two metal rings about one and a half or two inches in diameter, as used in loose-leaf ledgers, and these I insert in the holes and—there you are! Every page you turn over is flat. No swearing when your magazine closes up on you, and your other hand is free. I might add: Be sure and draw out the wire before taking the magazine to the printer, or else you will have trouble. This idea is not patented, and those readers who try this will find the POPULAR tastes twice as good. Wishing the POPULAR continued success, I am

Yours truly,

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