THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE
TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

APRIL 7, 1927
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BY

B. M. BOWER

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On a quest of vengeance a man went down to the wilds of the back country of Alabama where the natives led an isolated existence, cut off from the laws of God or man.

There came into his life, however, a stronger motive than his desire for revenge. How the love for a maid by a man changed the whole course of events, is told in striking manner in

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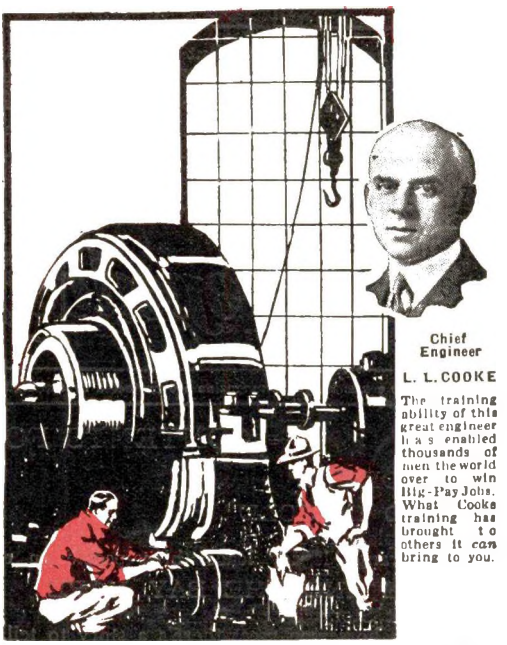

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All our novels are good, but some are better than others. "Black Marsh," by Will McMorrow, in the next issue of THE POPULAR is an excellent yarn which leads you over that ever-ancient, ever-new highway which stretches from the heart of expectant youth through the Valley of the Shadow into the high hills of Achievement. You will find "Black Marsh" delightful.

Volume LXXXIII Number 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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CONTENTS FOR APRIL 7, 1927

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.
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V. H. Harelson of Florida, formerly worked as a clerk in a grocery for what he now calls "the paltry sum of $30 a week." His first year after reading "Modern Salesmanship" brought him over $5,000; his second year $7,500, and his third year $22,500! He frankly says: "Without N. S. T. A., I know that I would still be a clerk at $30!"

$100 a Week Increase

J. L. Jacobsen of Minnesota counts it a "red-letter day" when he first read this remarkable book—"Modern Salesmanship." Within a short time afterward he raised his salary from $35 to $135 a week. He says "I attribute this remarkable progress in large part to N. S. T. A."

Raised Pay $2,500

Kingsley Rowland of New Jersey, was formerly a pattern-maker at a weekly wage which fell far short of satisfying his ambition. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes and started him on the road to real pay. Today he earns almost as much in a week as he formerly earned in a month—300% increase!

$7,000 a Year

F. B. Englehardt of Tennessee used to work for less than 45% of his present salary. "Modern Salesmanship" and N. S. T. A. led to big things. Today he says: "Last year I made over $100 a week and expect to make $7,000 this year. Some increase since enrollment with N. S. T. A.!"

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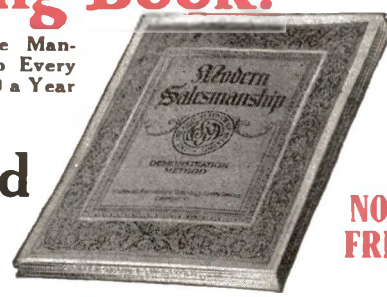

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This vital book—"Modern Salesmanship"—contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid profession in the world. It reveals the real **truth** about the art of selling. It blasts dozens of old theories, explains the science of selling in simple terms, and tells exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen are achieved. And not only that—it outlines a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or dollar from his present position.

What This Astonishing Book Has Done!

The achievements of this remarkable book have already won world-wide recognition. The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of California who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to things he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training Association. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning $10,000 a year! Today he receives as much in 30 days as he used to receive in 365!

And then there's J. H. Cash of Atlanta. He, too, read "Modern Salesmanship" and found the answer within its pages. He quickly raised his salary from $75 to $500 a month and has every reason to hope for an even more brilliant future. And still they come! W. D. Clenny of Kansas City commenced making as high as $850 a month. F. M. Harris, a former telegrapher, became sales manager at $6,000 a year. O. H. Malfroot of Massachusetts became sales manager of his firm at a yearly income of over $10,000.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man of average intelligence can duplicate the success they have achieved—for their experience **proves** that salesmen are **made**—not born as some people have foolishly believed.

Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet. And through the **National Demonstration Method**—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. system of SALESMANSHIP training—you can acquire the equivalent of actual experience while studying. Hundreds of men who never sold goods in their lives credit a large portion of their success to this remarkable training.

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If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. We cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. Find out exactly what the underlying principles of salesmanship are—and how you can put them to work for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession.

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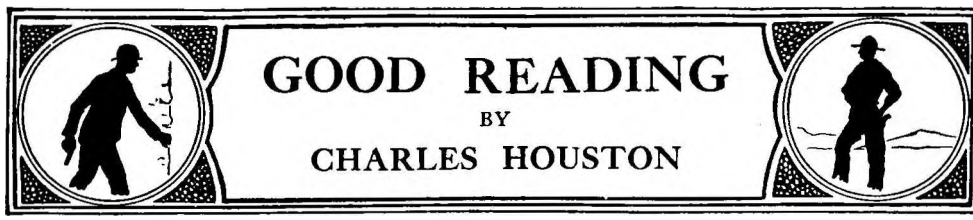

THE men and women who write the novels that are published by CHELSEA HOUSE, one of the oldest and best established publishing concerns in this country, have seen at close range the events and personalities they describe in their novels. They know full well what they are writing about. If it is a story of the West, you may count on it that the author can ride a crazy cow pony with the best of them. If the yarn takes you down the misty hinterlands of the Amazon or across the frozen shores of the Arctic, rest assured that its spinner has been there taking notes. Out of rich and colorful experiences CHELSEA HOUSE authors give their best for your delight. In the language of the street they "know their stuff," and do it magnificently in the popularly priced novels that bear the famous CHELSEA HOUSE brand. Here are some of the latest titles that belong on your book shelf.

LIGHT-FINGERED LADIES, by Armstrong Livingston. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price $2.

"You are foolish to try my patience so far. You ignored my last communication; do not make that mistake again. Walk down the west side of Fifth Avenue between five and six on the afternoon of Friday, the eleventh, and see you have something for me! If you fail me again, remember that I have something of interest for John Annis!"

Such was the note that the frightened society girl drew from the secret drawer of her desk. Its author had in his possession letters that might well ruin her career. In despair she seeks the services of Peter Creighton, a detective very much out of the ordinary. To him she confesses that she has given information leading to two big robberies, and then the chase is on. Follow it yourself through the pages of this fascinating novel. I'll guarantee that you will not skip one of them, and that when you have finished "Light-fingered Ladies" you'll be in the mood to send me an "applause card" for broadcasting the good news about this book.

SPANISH NUGGETS, by Emart Kinsburn. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

This is one of the popularly priced CHELSEA HOUSE novels written by an author who has a score of successes to his credit. The scene is laid in the California redwood country and the story has all of the bigness and sweep of that romantic region. It is a hint in the diary of a tramp that sends young Tupelo Troy away from a life of ease to hunt for gold.

"So this brave knight, in armor bright,
Went gayly to the fray,"

in the words of the song that the beautiful Madrona sang, and you will go along with him to discover that indeed Romance and Adventure are not dead. "Spanish Nuggets" is pure gold. Ask your dealer for it to-day.

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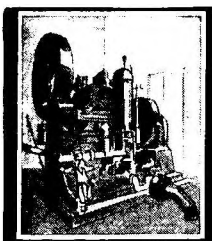

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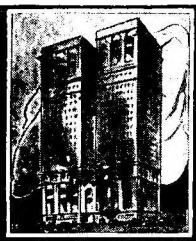

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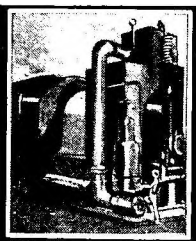

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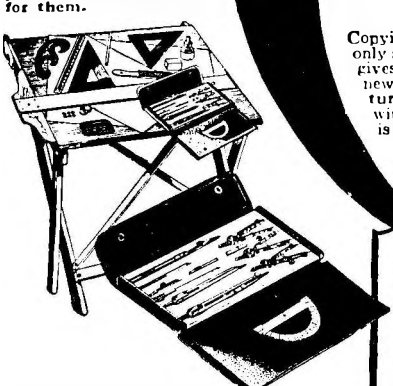

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MASQUERADE, by William Morton. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"It was all so like the modern holdup stuff of the screen; a lonely stretch of road between high wooded banks—Morgan's Gap it was called locally—a stalled two-seater, another automobile with its engine still running and pulled across the road so as to block the first car, and a couple of appropriately masked individuals who stood on either side of the two-seater, their automatics leveled at the driver and sole occupant."

But it was a sure-enough holdup, and if it hadn't been for the opportune arrival of "Smiler" Carey, the fair occupant of the two-seater would have lost some of her money. Now Smiler Carey was himself in a peck of trouble. So much so that the sheriff was hot on his trail. He had escaped from the penitentiary, had Smiler, and if it hadn't been for his rescue of Anne Carfax from the bandits, he might have gone right back behind the bars again. Anne was grateful, however, and she took on the convict as her butler. By doing this she let herself in for a series of startling adventures that are told by Mr. Morton in incomparable manner. This is a story guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your chair until the last word is read, and then you'll go back and reread parts of it.

JUST BUCKAROOS, by Robert Ormond Case. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It's just as we told you, CHELSEA HOUSE writers are real folks who introduce you to their kind. "Lonesome" McQuirk and "Windy" de Long are two of the "realest" cow men who ever rode the Oregon ranges. They have been buddies for life when a red-headed young lady comes into the picture and for a while threatens to spoil it all. However, I'm not going to spoil it all for you by telling you the story. I'll let Mr. Case do that. This is just to inform you that "Just Buckaroos" is a Western story that packs a kick in every stirring chapter.

THE PURPLE LIMITED, by Henry Leverage. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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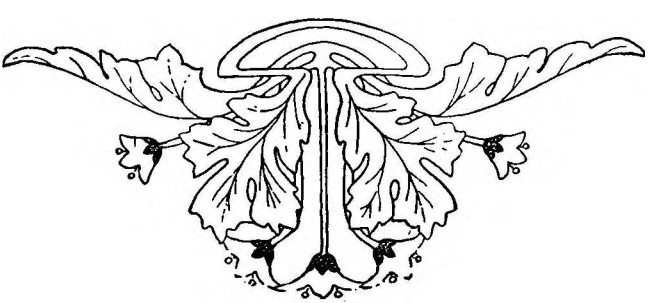

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17	"	" cooking fowl
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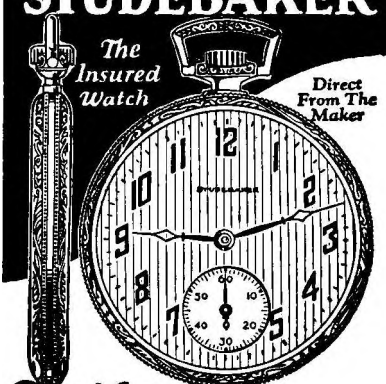

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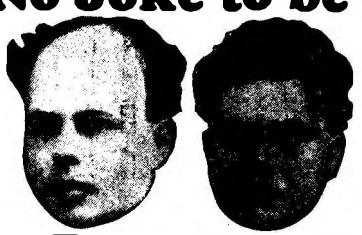

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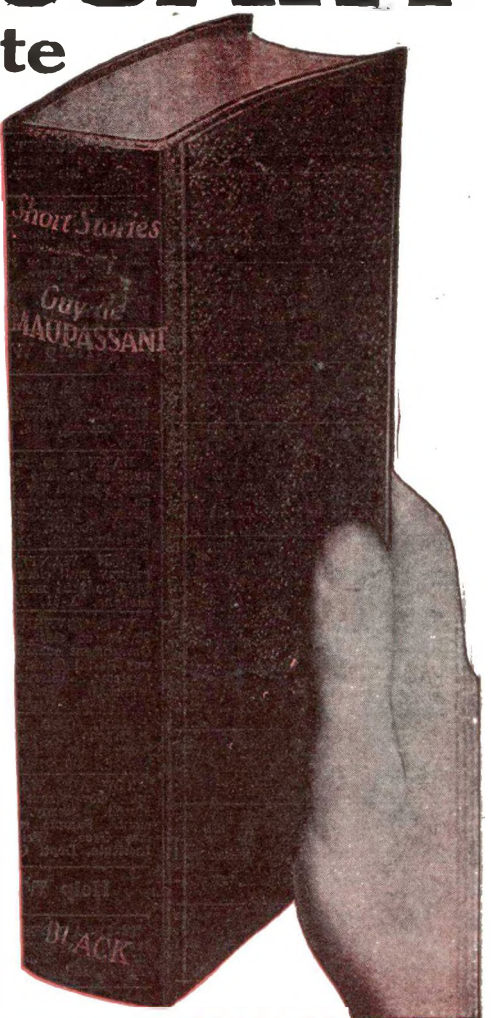

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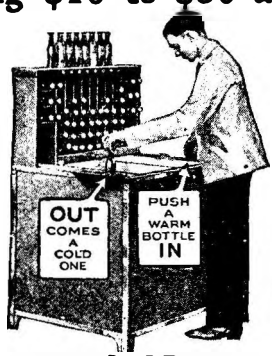

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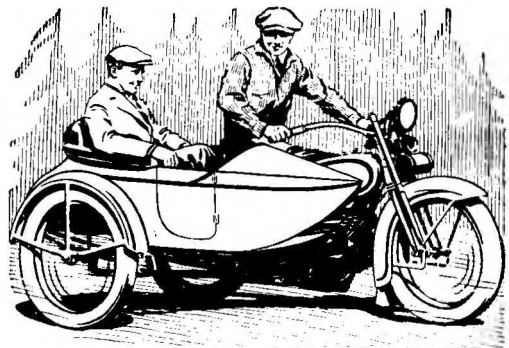

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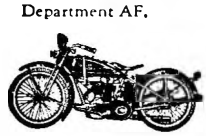

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With studied clumsiness, I fell over the piano stool. Then I proceeded to pick out "Chop Sticks" with one finger! The crowd laughed. This was the dramatic moment for my surprise. Dropping the mask of the clown, I struck the first sweet chords of Wagner's lovely "The Evening Star" from "Tannhauser."

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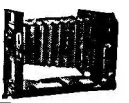

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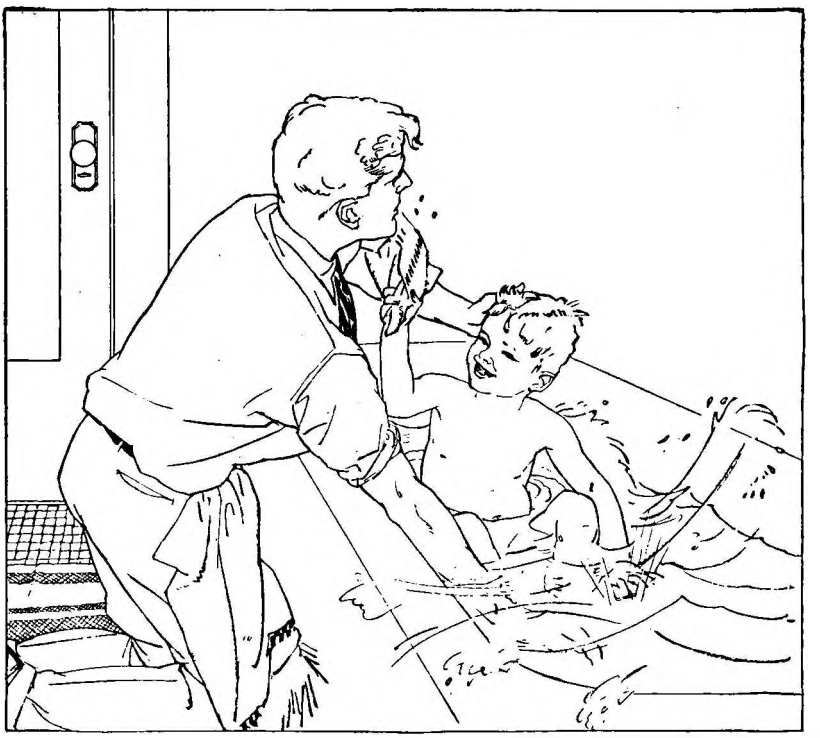

To fathers who bathe 3-year-old sons

IF you haven't bathed that young heir of yours yet, you will. All fathers think it is easy—*once!*

But that slip of a body stays in one place like a drop of water on a red-hot stove. In desperation you cry, "For Pete's sake, keep quiet!" And you get the most angelic smile that ever denatured a temper.

Then, when only one grubby knee is left to be scrubbed, and paternal patience is pushed beyond endurance by the tenth escape of the sinker-soap into some uncharted cove of the tub-bottom —a stabbing voice from below-stairs brings salt to your wounds:

"Henry! I will not have my child hear such language ——"

Well, sir, the joke is on you — you should have *known* about sinker-soap.

Now, Ivory Soap *floats*. Three-year-olds sail it like a boat. They sit *quiet*. They play fair. And when you want it for that last knee, Ivory is there—you can *see* it. Have you ever thought what it means to your own baths that Ivory *floats?*

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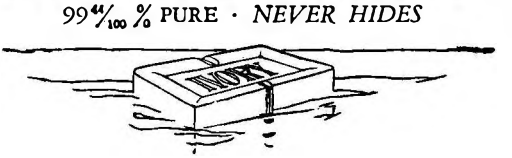

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THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIII APRIL 7, 1927 No. 6

Painted in Gold

By Roy Hinds

Author of "Inclosed Please Find $500,000," "In One Corner," Etc.

The exciting adventures of a young Westerner and his lovely twin sister, who are aided by a gallant newspaper reporter in outwitting the schemes of a monarch of metropolitan swindling, are unforgetable in this vivid tale. Modern New York and the pioneer West, curiously linked by a search for an old treasure and a mysterious painting, provide an ideal background.

CHAPTER I.

WANTED—A POKER PLAYER.

FIVE reporters were lined up at the desk of Vanley, city editor of the New York *Evening Beacon*. The scene in one corner of the big news room, on the rostrum, where reposed the city desk, and an "on-the-carpet" aspect, for seldom if ever in the memory of any man on the staff had that many aspiring news gatherers, receiving assignments, appeared before the redoubtable Vanley at one and the same time.

It was his custom, when he had a multitude of tasks to deal out, to summon one reporter at a time, to issue his instructions and whatever information was necessary, in crisp, terse sentences, which were the admiration of the copy readers. Those grubworms, who spent all their time boring through the typewritten product of the reporters and eating out every word which was open in the slightest degree to the charge of superfluity, had come to think there was only one true clew to genius—a facility for parsimonious expression.

The language might have been a treasure, and the copy readers the custodians of it, so begrudgingly did they accord to reporters any words beyond the number necessary to tell a tale. Therefore, they could admire Vanley, for he could say more to a reporter with less vocal effort than any man in the room. When Vanley spoke, the copy readers, at the big crescent desk near by, cocked their ears to catch his jeweled expressions.

But the crescent desk was almost deserted now. It was late in the afternoon, two minutes after the news-room dead line for the five-star final. The season was early spring. Baseball teams were wending their way north from Southern training camps, and there were no games straggling along to delay proceedings in the *Beacon* establishment.

One lonely copy reader sat at the desk, with nothing to do. A sob sister was busy at her typewriter, on some lachrymose yarn for next day. Office boys forgot to watch the clock, in their interest in the unusual spectacle of five reporters standing on the rostrum at the same time. It was a curious situation to the idling copy reader, who, strain his ears as he might, could not catch a single word that was being said inside the little rail surrounding that elevated spot.

FOR perhaps a minute Vanley said nothing; he did not even look up from the outspread paper on his desk. A minute, sixty lagging seconds, is an unconscionably long time, a harassing eternity, for five puzzled reporters to stand at a city editor's desk wondering what it's all about. They looked sheepish, guilty of whatever accusation might at any moment explode on Vanley's lips.

Silence, the wasting of even an infinitesimal fragment of time, when he had something to say, was so foreign to Vanley's nature, as to serve as a warning that this was an extraordinary circumstance. The stern face, the pointed eyes behind thick-lensed spectacles, were lowered from view. Ashes dropped off Vanley's cigarette onto the newspaper. He blew them away without looking up. Now and then he polished his bald head, but he did raise his face at last.

The pointed eyes looked at the five faces singly and then *en groupe*. That was the way with Vanley's eyes, seeming to look in one direction, but seeing everything. At the moment of his first utterance, he was staring between the second and third faces in the line-up.

"Which of you fellows is the best poker player?" he inquired.

Five separate thoughts, yet thoughts identical in content, leaped up in five separate heads, but remained unexpressed. Five masks of injured innocence confronted the city editor. Five heads wondered if it were better to plead guilty at once to playing the rigidly forbidden game on the premises of the *Beacon*, or to deny, each in turn, that they had "sat in" the previous afternoon at the little session in the Sunday room. They had congratulated themselves that their game was very quiet. They had handled the linotype slugs, which were used as chips, as carefully as could be, laying them down, shoving them in the pot, raking them in, as though the pieces of leaden metal had been eggs. No telltale clicks, they thought, had penetrated outside the precincts of their improvised den; they had bet and called one another's bluffs in hoarse, furtive whispers.

The Sunday room was on the floor below the news room, and the day had been, for that department, slack Monday. Only the Sunday editor himself and a stereotyper had been in the room with the five reporters, and the fingers of these two had likewise handled the linotype slugs, had likewise dealt the cards; their souls were likewise tainted with guilt.

"Well," the city editor jerked out, "how about it?"

The responses came.

"Poker?" said Watts, and he did very well with his counterfeited look of surprise. "I don't know the game, Mr. Vanley."

"If I was a poker player, Mr. Vanley," quoth Reedy, who thought to dodge the issue with an exhibition of carefree levity, "I'd hardly be pounding the hotel beat for thirty dollars a week. Almost any kind of a poker player——"

Vanley silenced him with an impatient gesture. He was in no mood to listen to

Reedy's perennial demand for an increase in salary.

"I used to play the game out West," Dickerman put in, "but it's been so long since I had a card in my hand that I've forgotten whether the ace of spades is black or blue."

"I play poker, once in a great while," Harry Sowers informed the city editor, "in little games up at the Press Club."

The fifth and last culprit at the bar polished off the record of denials with this:

"Bridge is my game, Mr. Vanley. Poker—I never play it, but I hear it's a very interesting game."

VANLEY studied the five faces again, one after another, deliberately and thoughtfully.

"Well," he announced, "I guess that's all then." His voice was low, not at all like the voice of Vanley when he had a rebuke to administer. Somehow he seemed to be in a confidential mood. "I was in hopes I'd find a good poker player on the staff," he added. "I've got an assignment for a man to visit a gambling house, with a hundred dollars of office money for a stake."

Five distinct gasps rent the air.

"I thought that, among you five, there'd be one good player." His voice seemed very far away to the men just emerging from a daze of amazement and dismay. "I can't hand a hundred dollars of office money to a reporter who'd sit in the game up there and lose it on the first hand—before he got the story I want. But poker to you fellows seems to be a deep, dark mystery. I'm surprised that you understood the term at all. Watts doesn't know the game; Reedy can't play it well enough to take a chance even on a ten-cent limit; Dickerman hasn't played it in so long he's forgotten the colors of the suits; Sowers merely dabbles in the game around the Press Club—speaks of it as though he's afraid of the game; and Dingley thinks he's heard the game spoken of.

"Well, I may as well hand the hundred dollars to one of the office boys and tell him to go down to the Stock Exchange and buck the Morgan crowd, as to take a chance on any one of you in a poker game. I don't care if the hundred dollars is lost, but I do want a man who'll get a run for his money—not one who'll go broke on the first pair of sevens he gets in his hand and probably get the air before he gets the story. All right, boys. I guess I'll look for a poker player in the composing room. I understand that printers——"

"Mr. Vanley," Dickerman cut in. He had laid the flats of his hands on the desk and was bending over in high excitement. "Mr. Vanley, if you're looking for a poker player, stop right now! You've found him. In Kansas City one time——"

But clamorous voices drowned out Dickerman's self-adulatory remarks. They crowded against one another, seeking a place of vantage. The whole office heard what was said now, but, the previous talk having been unheard, the thing was a mystery.

"I cleaned up the table at the Press Club the other night," Sowers insisted. "I play almost every night——"

"I was only kidding, Mr. Vanley, when I said bridge is my game. I seldom play anything but poker—stud or draw—any kind of poker; I don't care, so long as it's poker."

"If it wasn't for what I win at poker, boss," Reedy managed to register, "I'd starve to death on the thirty a week I draw down here. Poker's a business with me, not a pastime, and——"

"You hand me that assignment, Mr. Vanley, and I'll bring the hundred back and the gambling-house bank roll with it. All I ask is a stake——"

One of Vanley's hands went aloft, in a gesture commanding silence.

"Oh, ho!" he remarked. "Here I have discovered the five champion poker players of the world—bar none—masquerading as reporters. Now, that's interesting. I didn't know——" He paused. A shrewd smile gathered on his face. "When was that little session held, here in the office somewhere?" he demanded.

Shiftiness succeeded eagerness on five countenances.

"Come on," Vanley insisted, talking again very low. "Confession is good for

the soul—even the soul of a poker player."

At any rate, it was not a trick. No such suspicion crossed the minds of the five. Vanley at times was stern and uncompromising, but he was not a trickster. He would resort to no subterfuges to uncover a violation of office rules, one of which was a strict prohibition of gambling in any form in the building.

Harry Sowers spoke up, without fear now.

"Yesterday," he said.

"Where?"

"Can't tell that, boss," Sowers replied, "without incriminating others."

Vanley did not urge the point.

"What did you play?" he inquired.

"Draw poker—quarter limit," Sowers told him.

"The five of you?"

Each of the five heads nodded.

The city editor leaned back in his swivel chair.

"Well," he pursued, "we'll let that violation of office rules go—for the time. Who won the money?"

"I did," said Sowers proudly. "I cleaned 'em out, boss."

Vanley found confirmation of this in the gloomy faces of the reporter's four comrades. The gloom was induced not only by this reminder of the disaster they had suffered at the hands of Harry Sowers, but by the premonition that this circumstance would win the coveted assignment for Sowers.

"So you won the money—eh, Sowers?" Vanley went on. "I take it that you did it in a workmanlike manner. All right. I've got a job for you. That's all, boys," he added to the four losers.

They straggled away, dispirited.

"Sit down," Vanley said to Harry Sowers, indicating a chair at his elbow. "Now I'm going to turn you loose on this story—nothing else to do until you clean it up. It looks like big stuff."

He had pulled a big manila envelope from a drawer in his desk. It had been brought up to him from the "morgue," the *Beacon's* repository of news history and reference. From this he drew a sheaf of clippings. He laid the clippings aside for a moment, pointed to a brief item in the afternoon edition of the *Beacon*, spread out on his desk, and said:

"Read that."

CHAPTER II.

THE UNFINISHED STORY.

DURING the day Harry Sowers had read the item. He did not know who wrote it; nevertheless he read it now carefully. It was the story of a police raid on a gambling house, a story without important incident or sufficient color to entitle it to more prominence or greater length. In this modern day of lurid crime and extensive police activity, the raid seemed to be of trifling importance.

The proprietor of the gambling house, Nick Brundage, had been taken to a police station in the Bronx, along with four or five men found in the place. The chances were that the names of these men, as given to the police and printed in the *Beacon*, were fictitious. Such an inconsequential foray by the police, there having been no battle in connection with it, had no more than a routine flavor. Nick Brundage had put up cash collateral for the release of all the men arrested with him. They had gone their ways, with never a thought of appearing in court to answer the charges against them, which were misdemeanors. The cash collateral would be forfeited. Any investigation of the addresses given by the prisoners would reveal that none of them lived where he said he did. Nick of course would be heavily fined if he were convicted.

Yet Harry Sowers knew that this story had something in it of concealed importance.

"Those names," Vanley was saying, "are fictitious—except one. Ernest Blake, twenty-four years old, Hotel Clevering. That's the lad's correct name. It's probably his first experience in a raid. He was excited. Thought perhaps his plight was serious, that he would have to call on friends to get him out of the scrape. So he gave his right name and address. There is an Ernest Blake living at the Hotel Clevering."

The reporter nodded, with quickening interest. The Clevering was a fashionable hotel. Vanley made no movement

toward the clippings, between which and the item in the *Beacon*, Harry Sowers felt there must be a connection.

"Not only that," the city editor added, "but he's dodging inquiry. Wouldn't talk to a newspaper, hemmed and hawed about the raid. He's the man. No one else gave Blake's name and address, for a joke or out of spite. Well, the name of Ernest Blake was enough to send me into the morgue. It will take you a long time to read these clippings. That's a job you can do elsewhere. Now, the other big point in the story is this: I happen to know that Nick Brundage runs that gambling house for another man. That place was one of Joe Klondike's joints."

Whereupon Harry Sowers' interest in the job ahead took a decided bound.

Broadway's romantic gambler, Joe Klondike—handsome, debonair, a fashion plate as to dress, a man far more genteel than his name would indicate—Joe Klondike clung to the sobriquet some one had given him when he was roaming about the world in quest of yellow gold and yellow hair. They said he liked tresses of that hue; and it seemed to be the truth, for wherever Joe Klondike was, there was sure to be one golden-haired blonde or another, present or imminent.

A man of mystery. What his family connections were, none knew; but that they were high was easy to be believed. Name upon name he had plucked from his imagination, displayed it a while, then tossed it aside. There was a gap which had never been bridged between these aliases and his true name. Joe, being a gentleman of misdeeds, but still a gentleman in respect to the honor of his family name, guarded the gap with all the valor of Horatius. The family, whatever it was, wherever it was, if it knew Joe Klondike for what he was, could be depended upon to keep the secret.

Yet the sobriquet had stuck—that is to say, it stuck in an altered form. It had first been "Klondike Joe." But Joe was fastidious. He had a fine sense of the thin line that often separates the picturesque from the coarse. Any half-breed Indian, any rough-and-ready bully of the plains, might have been called Klondike Joe. But the inversion to Joe Klondike seemed to him to lift the nickname from the sordid to the picturesque and romantic. It made a ribbon of what had been a rag. He liked it that way—Joe Klondike. He called himself Joe Klondike, and he frowned if any one called him Klondike Joe. In his old days in the West and in the Yukon country, his frown meant something. His steel-gray eyes could accomplish things outside the function of vision. They could inspire respect in all quarters, fear in some. Tall, strong, lithe—a lynxlike fighting man when he was younger, he made the world accept the inversion from Klondike Joe to Joe Klondike. Fifty years old now, such a sobriquet was an asset to a man who sought fortune by conducting gambling houses. A visitor to the city or a dweller in the city, who liked romance and color with his card playing, would instantly feel the subtle lure of a resort called Joe Klondike's place.

AND the intervals when there was not such a resort as Joe Klondike's place were extremely brief. They did occur however, for Joe never opened up the second time in a place closed by a raid. But open up he did. Always ornately, too—lavishly; for men of mighty wealth were on his string. His games were square. He was raided less than any other gambler of consequence in the city. His places were quiet.

It was said that he had a dozen smaller resorts scattered throughout the city, places which he never visited in person. He had his underlings, his managers. Nick Brundage was one. Somehow, through the mysterious channels in which closely guarded information comes to a city editor's ears, Vanley had learned this—had held it in reserve, waiting with the patience of imaginative city editors until the knowledge should achieve news value.

And the moment had arrived.

The name "Nick Brundage" meant no connection with Joe Klondike to any other city editor in town—not even to the police. But Vanley was from the West, and he had a memory. He had been a reporter on a Denver newspaper. He knew. When that insignificant item dropped on his desk he leaned back in

his chair; not so much because of the connection he was aware of between Brundage and Joe Klondike, but because the name of Ernest Blake stuck up from the typed page, in letters of fire. Ernest Blake and Joe Klondike—memories.

His news judgment told him to let the story ride that day as it was. No time to develop the big story in one day. If he were to acquire for the *Beacon* an exclusive story of the porportions he saw in this, he must have the situation investigated, must develop it, or, rather, have a man on hand when it developed itself. So the item had gone through the daily editions inconspicuously.

Yet Vanley had started things almost at once. From one of his police reporters he got the address of Joe Klondike's big place, the gambling house over which Joe presided in person. It was in an old-fashioned dwelling house in West Seventy-fourth Street. Furthermore, he had obtained a card which would give the bearer admission.

And now he was ready. He had at his elbow a young, alert, shrewd reporter—no more capable than some others on the staff, but, at least, as capable. In Harry Sowers he had confidence, and he was already pouring into his ears the fruit of his memory.

"Your ears prick up when I mention Joe Klondike, eh?" Vanley was saying. "You know of him. These clippings will refresh your mind on the raids he's been subjected to. They're a sort of character sketch of Joe."

He was not talking in his terse manner. This story had too many possibilities to dismiss with a few phrases of curt instructions.

"Whenever he's raided, the papers rehash old stuff about him. He has color—Joe Klondike has. Some of his color is pretty black, and to his credit I must say that some of it is white; but no one ever detected even a faint speck of yellow in him. He's a gambler, a crook. He's a swindler, but he's also an adventurer. I don't think he's got a thing on his mind now but gambling houses, but when he was younger—well, you'll get all that from the clippings.

"Now this young fellow, Blake. That's where the story comes in, and it isn't in the clippings. It's here."

He touched his forehead.

"There have been three Ernest Blakes—this lad's grandfather, his father, and himself. The other two are dead. He has a sister named Ernestine Blake. They're twins. Ernest and Ernestine, twenty-four years old. They're both at the Clevering. So far as I know, neither is married. The girl can't be, of course, as she's registered as Miss Blake. No Mrs. Blake is registered, so I assume that Ernest is not married. They must have money—a lot of it. A suite at the Clevering takes more than pin money. They're registered from Peakton, Colorado. That's a gold-mining town.

"Young Ernest Blake must have made his own fortune, or—— But that detail should come later. The first point is that the second Ernest Blake, this lad's father, died a bankrupt, absolutely cleaned out. The first Ernest Blake left a fortune in gold-mining properties. The second Ernest Blake made more money. While the third Ernest Blake was a little boy, his father was victimized by a gang of swindlers—cleaned out to such an extent that his business went on the rocks. He was sold out. Everything fell with a crash.

"The banks, when the thing got started, called every loan made to him. The swindle took the form of inducing him to invest heavily in worthless property in the Klondike. Blake had visions of branching out. Oh, it was a clever stunt. Trustful, with nothing but the best intentions, he went into the Alaskan proposition over his head. He sunk, and stayed sunk, financially. He never came to the surface. He died three or four years later. On his deathbed he swore that some Blake, some day, would close in on the swindlers. The man who did the job that ruined the Blakes was Joe Klondike."

SOWERS' eyes were sparkling. He knew a story when he saw it—when it walked right up and announced itself.

"And the amazing angle of it was that the swindle was legal, just within the law. Investments went in developments that

didn't pan out. That was the answer the crooks made. You can't arrest a man for an error in judgment, in investing money that's turned over to him for the purpose for which it was used. But, of course, the swindlers got away with a lot of the money, but no one could prove it. It was a pretty big story in Denver. I was sent down to Peakton to cover it. It was big there because of the prominence of the Blake family. Outside the State it was just a business failure. I don't suppose the New York papers printed a line of it. It isn't mentioned in any of these clippings. Joe Klondike wasn't particularly notorious then. He wasn't called Joe Klondike until later. He used some other name in the Peakton deal. But I saw him there. When I saw Joe Klondike's picture in the New York papers several years later, after his joint was raided, I knew him. I never mentioned the connection. I've been saving that.

"The Blake story was the first big yarn I ever worked on. I never forgot that deathbed threat of revenge, of retribution. I remember I looked on young Ernest Blake, just a little fellow he was, and wondered if some day he would put through the job his father's illness kept him from accomplishing. It was a wild speculation; yet to-day a little item in the *Beacon* tells me that this Ernest Blake, a man now, is in New York, and that he has been in one gambling house, at least, run by Joe Klondike."

The city editor paused and cleared his throat.

"Revenge! That word somehow implies violence. Nothing doing. A young man bent on something like that would not drag his sister into it. He'd have left her in Peakton. Some sort of a business racket, perhaps, by which young Blake hopes to trap the swindler and squeeze him dry. I don't know. But he's here—Blake's here. He's browsing around Joe Klondike's gambling resorts. It's the situation that I conjured many a time when I was all filled up with the story. It seems as though I'm picking it up where I left off years ago—only I'm a city editor now and not a reporter, more's the pity!"

Harry Sowers looked at his boss. It was the most human revelation Vanley had ever exhibited to him. But it was no more than a flash. Vanley was scowling tremendously, as though he could kick himself for having opened his soul for that tiny squint.

"Peakton at the time," he went on crisply, "was full of talk. It was strange talk. I never did get at the bottom of it. I was called back to Denver when the story seemed to peter out. But I often told my city editor that I'd like to go down to Peakton and finish up. Finish up what? I couldn't give any other answer than some of the gossip I'd heard. That was vague—wild, mostly. There was talk of a concealed fortune; that the Blakes had a fortune tucked away some place, something left by this lad's grandfather. The rumors ran the gamut from buried treasure to securities and assets in foreign banks under another name. But the Blake who had been ruined never produced it. They went to live in a shabby little house. So far as I know, they never moved out of it. The mother may be living yet. I've never heard of her death.

"But here's the son in New York, at the Clevering, with his sister. The boy's only twenty-four. He couldn't have made his own fortune at such an age, unless he's had one of those marvelous breaks you see in the movies. But that's what we want to find out. What's he doing here? Now, then: You've got to meet the Blakes, somehow. You've got to get the layout of Joe Klondike's place."

"In other words," the reporter rejoined, "I've got to get the story your city editor wouldn't let you finish. It's my job to get the finale."

Vanley jerked his head in a gesture of approval.

"And a story of avowed retribution," he added, "handed down from father to son." He handed Harry a slip of paper which entitled him to two hundred dollars expense money, at the cashier's window downstairs. "Half of that," he instructed, "is for poker. That card will get you in, and play 'em close to your chest."

CHAPTER III.

A QUID PRO QUO.

SOWERS had a way with him, as an aloof clerk at the Hotel Clevering discovered that evening. It was only natural that the clerk should resent an apparent effort to intrude into the private affairs of one of the hotel's guests, and his first reactions to the friendly advances of young Mr. Sowers were disdain and frigid uncommunicativeness. But Sowers had the prime requisites of a successful reporter—persistency, complete obliviousness to the fact that he had been snubbed, geniality, and an air of being able to impart to those he sought to pump a feeling that he might in return have interesting news to communicate.

He let the clerk know at the outset that he was a reporter.

"I hardly think," the man behind the desk said, "that you will find anything sensational in Mr. Blake."

"I'm not looking for sensations," Harry confided. "I already have them."

"You have sensations, in respect to the Blakes?"

The clerk looked incredulous and turned aside to answer an inquiry from a guest; then he went back to the reporter, as surely as a bit of steel approaches a magnet.

"Not sensations," Harry assured him, "in the way that some newspapers handle things. But you know the *Beacon*. We don't deal in scandals."

"The *Beacon* is a very good newspaper."

"Thank you. I shall mention your name, if you will be kind enough to give it to me, to the rotogravure editor. Every week, in the Sunday paper—I suppose you've noticed—we print pictures of popular business men. A man who meets as many people as a clerk at the Clevering is more or less in the public eye. You have no objection to giving me your name, have you?"

The clerk's head came down the fraction of an inch. A telescope was not necessary to reveal the slight softening that took place in the cast of his countenance.

"My name?" He was shy. "What were you saying? You said your name was Sowers, did you not? What were you saying, Mr. Sowers, about having interesting news in connection with the Blakes?" He lowered his voice and bent closer. "I hope you're not pursuing the incident that appeared in some of the evening papers—the raid in which Mr. Blake was caught. It was unfortunate and ought not to be carried on. No further publicity, please. I had a talk with him about it. He is young, and the thing took him so by surprise that he was excited. All those policemen! He thought he'd certainly have to call up the hotel and get some one to vouch for him to escape going to jail. He told them his right name before he had a chance to think. I hope the *Beacon*, and the other papers, too, will let that drop. My name, if it's any interest to you, is George V. Glasswell."

"I'll make a note of that, Mr. Glasswell. George V., you say?" He wrote it down on the folded sheaf of copy paper that he used for notes. "If you happen to have a good photograph of yourself—I mean a recent one—it will save our photographer a trip up here to take your picture. No, Mr. Glasswell, I'm not trying to develop the raid incident, as such. That's nothing. Why, it was only an item in the paper, to begin with. It's something else I'm working on."

"Something else? By the way, Mr. Sowers, did you spell my name with a double 'S?' I didn't notice as you wrote it down."

Harry consulted his notes.

"Yes. Double 'S' and double 'L.' Right?"

"That's right. A great many leave out one 'S.' And it's George 'V.' 'V' sounds like 'B' sometimes."

"I have it 'V.'"

"What did you mean—something else? The Blakes, you know——"

Before Harry could answer, the clerk's attention was claimed by a guest inquiring for mail. This service finished, Mr. George V. Glasswell hastened back to the reporter. The diversion gave Sowers a chance to think.

"I'll make a bargain with you," he suggested. "You keep absolutely secret everything I tell you, and I'll do the

same about the source of the information you give me—or about any other little favor you may feel like granting."

"O. K."

"All right. You know that the Blakes are very rich, don't you?"

"I assume that they're wealthy. They're very fine people, I know that, and I don't have to suggest that the Clevering——"

"You don't—you certainly don't!" Harry agreed. "All right. We've got a tip that Miss Blake is engaged to some kind of a prince or a duke or something like that—maybe a king, for all I know."

"Is that a fact? Of course it couldn't be a king."

"No. I was stretching it there. But she's about to grab a title that's got a lot of regal trimmings to it. I understand this prince—I think he's a Russian—is in New York, or coming on the next ship. I don't know, but we got the tip, and it's up to me to run it down."

"Yes, certainly. It's your business as a reporter to do that. Well, I'll say this for Miss Blake—she's worthy of a prince."

"Pretty, is she?"

"Beautiful. And they're really fine people—real people, if you know what I mean."

"I get you, all right. Now, you see, what I'm up against. I can't brace right up to the Blakes and ask them, can I? If it's true, and they want to keep it secret for a while—why, they'd deny it. And they might move out of the Clevering. By the way, don't let me forget that picture for the rotogravure editor, Mr. Glasswell. What I want, you see, is a room close to the Blakes' suite."

George V. Glasswell backed up. This was coming it a bit steep, as he might have put it himself. It smacked of a conspiracy. He wandered back Harry's way after some further service in connection with his duties.

"Here's my police card, Mr. Glasswell. You can see I'm really a reporter for the *Beacon*. Now you know I'm not plotting anything against young Blake and his sister, and I give you my word that all I want to do is keep kind of close to them for a few days, to see if they meet anything that looks like a prince. If the tip is wrong, there'll be no story. If it's right, it won't do the Clevering any harm for the public to know that a prospective princess is a guest."

This sounded reasonable.

"And *Beacon* reporters don't forget favors," Harry added. "Many a young man owes his rise in the world to a little favorable publicity in respectable newspapers."

"And they never divulge the name of any one who perhaps stretches a point to accommodate them?"

"Never, under any circumstances."

THE clerk consulted the room card rack, attended to other business, and returned to Harry.

"I have a desirable room," he said.

"Fine. The room is for rent, isn't it? You certainly are not doing anything unusual in renting one of your vacant rooms."

"No-o-o—except that the circumstances are unusual. A specific request for a room near a certain guest, without that guest's knowledge, is not just what we——"

"Listen, Mr. Glasswell. *Beacon* reporters are under orders to deal squarely with gentlemen like yourself—every one, in fact. Did I come here and snoop around, get the number of the Blakes' suite, and then ask for a number close to it? I did not. I came right out and told you what I wanted, and why I wanted it. The scandal sheets work the other way. We're not looking for scandal—not looking for anything that will hurt the Blakes in any way. In fact, I'll give them every consideration before I print a word of the story."

"I believe," Mr. Glasswell said, "that you are a gentleman."

"Thank you."

"And I know that you can't be looking for information injurious to Mr. Blake and his sister, for such information could not possibly exist. The room is next door, Mr. Sowers, and I think you will find it pleasant."

"Thank you. And the photograph?"

"I shall have it for you to-morrow afternoon, any time after four, when I

come on duty. Will you register, please?"

Harry Sowers registered.

"Do you know where the Blakes are now, Mr. Glasswell?" he asked.

"I think they went to the theater."

"I see. I shall go up and have a look at my room, then go uptown to get my bag. If I should happen to be in the lobby after the theaters close, Mr. Glasswell, would it be asking too much of you to give me a nod that might indicate the identity of Mr. Blake and his sister, when they come in?"

"I don't think that would be any trouble at all, sir. The photograph we talked of, Mr. Sowers—I shall leave it in your mail box, here at the desk."

"Yes, do that, please. And don't forget it."

CHAPTER IV.

BRAZEN EFFRONTERY.

IN the matter of favoring the energetic reporter from the *Evening Beacon,* Mr. George V. Glasswell certainly did himself proud. The room to which Harry Sowers was assigned really was part of the suite occupied by Ernest and Ernestine Blake; that is to say, it could be joined to that suite if so desired. The rooms were so fashioned that they could be rented as a suite, or in part. The Blakes occupied two bedrooms, a sitting room, and bath. The room that Harry got was separated from the others by a door bolted on each side and with the keyhole plugged and cracks sealed, as is the custom when one room is cut off from a suite.

There was no transom over that door, so that the door in its present state amounted virtually to a section of the wall. There was a shower bath in connection with the reporter's room. Harry descended to the lobby, nodded his pleasure at the arrangements to Mr. Glasswell, and hastened to his lodgings to get whatever belongings he thought he might need for residence at the Clevering. He would need evening clothes. Fortunately, he had them.

So, as he assured himself, the swell folks of the Clevering had nothing on Harry Sowers when he showed up in the lobby around eleven o'clock. Mr. Glasswell, eying the reporter, saw that he wore evening clothes very well, that he sauntered and lounged about with an ease and nonchalance that robbed him of whatever self-consciousness might ordinarily come to a young man to whom such garb was an event. Mr. Glasswell, himself immaculate, nodded and smiled his approval, and when Mr. Glasswell approved a man, it could be taken for granted that his appearance and his conduct were in complete harmony with the standards and the air of the Clevering.

There was quite a stir in the lobby. Gleaming slippers, shimmery gowns, befurred cloaks, white shirt fronts—all the details of a hotel foyer, in which guests of fashion are coming in from the theaters or gathering in groups preparatory to a sally on the night clubs. The revolving doors were never at rest; the air never free of the hum of pleasant conversation sprinkled with quiet laughter.

The Blakes came in about a quarter to twelve.

The young gentleman of the press was ensconced in an easy-chair, when his eyes, alert for such a signal, caught Mr. Glasswell's significant nod. It was quite simple to pick out the objects of the nod.

Ernest and Ernestine Blake approached the desk, the girl dropping slightly behind her brother until he could get the key to their suite. The fact of their twinship was apparent, not to say glaring. It was so evident that strangers often looked and turned to look again. Blake was tall and square of shoulders, with an easy, free virility. The girl was modest—timid, almost. Both had dark hair.

"She never got that bob in Peakton," Harry Sowers ruminated. "It's a daisy—just the thing for her."

There was nothing masculine about the girl nor anything feminine about the man, yet the resemblance, vague when one sought for detail, was striking. But it was there, a look, an expression, a tilt of the head—the same dark-brown eyes. A sculptor, working in soft materials, might have fashioned the head and face of Ernestine Blake, and then, deciding to make the face that of a man, he had

hardened the lines and strengthened them, and the result was the countenance of Ernest Blake.

The reporter looked his fill in those few seconds, caught the Blakes, full face and in profile, and then kept his brain open for a time exposure, for he wanted to be sure of them, whenever and wherever they should subsequently meet.

But the face of Ernestine Blake would not quickly slip the mind of any young man. The closed door of an elevator removed the brother and sister from view. Harry Sowers was at the desk again.

"Congratulations," he said to George V. Glasswell, who was preparing to go off duty.

"Congratulations? On what, Mr. Sowers?"

"On the accuracy of your judgment. You told me they were fine people. A man can see that with his eyes half shut."

"Yes, yes—quite true. I didn't know what you meant at first."

The reporter went up to his room.

HE stood in the center of it. He did not turn on the lights, but an illumination came through the transom above the hall door and through the windows. He stood staring at the door which separated him from the suite of the Blakes.

The preliminary aspects of his job shaped up clearly in his mind. The chance of a worth-while story hinged on whether Ernest Blake was in New York in an effort to reclaim the fortune out of which Joe Klondike had swindled his father. The possibility that he would take violent measures of revenge did not fit into the jig-sawed pattern which the reporter was endeavoring to put together. Blake was not of the sensational sort. As the city editor said, he would not fetch his sister to a scene which he meant to darken with violence. He was not one who would stage heroics, lay his man out, and claim retribution; nor would he lurk in ambush.

If he were conducting a campaign against Joe Klondike, it was a campaign of a subtle nature—some kind of a business deal, a trap into which the swindler could be drawn and plucked.

There were possibilities which might throw the story down, flatten it out—leave nothing about which to write. But a reporter never works on the theory that his story is going to fall down.

He had this to go on. Ernest Blake had visited at least one gambling house conducted by the man who had swindled his father. The unfortunate circumstance of the raid, the bewilderment of young Blake that caused him to blurt out his name—these things would, of course, serve as a warning to Joe Klondike. Joe Klondike would remember that name. It would be easy to ascertain that this Ernest Blake was registered at the Clevering from Peakton, Colorado. Joe Klondike would be forewarned.

He would be waiting for Ernest Blake.

Blake knew this. Would it not slow him up? It would. He would proceed very cautiously. He might wait a long time before he made the next move. What was the duty of a newspaper reporter under such circumstances?

Why, when a story's in the making, the thing to do is to nudge it along. Nudge it along—but how?

He felt sheepish when he pressed one ear against the door between his room and the Blake apartment. Silence—silence for a long time. Monotony—the monotony of waiting for words that did not reach his ears. Now, it was not just the thing to do, to listen at a door like that; yet the reporter craved no more than a snatch of conversation that might confirm his theory that Ernest Blake was on the trail of Joe Klondike. A word, a hint. But it was not forthcoming. Nothing was forthcoming. If conversation were in progress in the suite, it was far enough away to be absolutely private.

Listening—listening at a door. Perhaps he might overhear some very intimate secrets exchanged between a young man and his sister. One of Harry Sowers' fists jerked in an impatient gesture, and he moved away from the door. He could not do that. He could not listen in on people like the Blakes. It was contemptible. Now, he could eavesdrop on a man like Joe Klondike, without a qualm; but the Blakes, a young man like himself, his sister——

Yet he was a reporter on an assign-

ment where detective work was necessary. Nudge it along, nudge the story along—step into the thing—take hold of it; on the side of the Blakes, of course. Could he put it over on the Blakes for a while—deceive them? With the best intentions, of course.

Supposing he went to the Blakes and told them he had information that might interest them? Well, what information did he have? Something about Joe Klondike. It certainly required brass if a man were to dig up a story like that which Harry Sowers saw in the offing.

Brass, and he had it when the occasion required. He switched on his lights, stood before the mirror, and adjusted his necktie, though it did not need adjusting; while he stood there fussing with it, he was thinking.

Then he decided on a very bold move. His watch lay on the dresser. Twenty minutes past twelve. A trifle late for a call, but did he not have important information, vital information, for the young people in the apartment beyond? He did—he certainly did. He had just cooked this information up. They would be grateful.

He ironed his yarn out and put in the time taking things out of his bag. It looked like straight stuff, his story, his subterfuge to gain the confidence of the Blakes. It was thrilling, but plausible. Yet his motives were above reproach. Why, he'd even help young Blake. A man who lies in a good cause is not altogether despicable—certainly not as despicable as one who eavesdrops on respectable people. And if a man is going to lie, he is wise if he does it thoroughly. None is so futile and pitiful as a stuttering liar.

IT was twenty minutes of one. Harry entered the hall and shut his door, which locked itself. He went to the door of the Blakes, put on a bold, yet easy "front," and knocked.

The door was opened almost at once, no longer than two seconds after his knock. A man bent on such a mission, with an enterprise of deceit in his mind, unconsciously expects certain developments. That the door would be opened, Harry had no doubt; but, though he had not thought of it, the circumstance would have been more regular had there been a surprised pause on the part of Ernest Blake.

An unexpected knock at twenty minutes of one in the morning. Well, a man ought not to open his door so quickly. He should spend a few seconds in wonder. Harry was startled.

Young Blake had been in his apartment at least forty-five minutes. He was dressed exactly as he had been when he came into the lobby, with the exception that his overcoat and hat lay on a settee across the room. The girl stood behind him, not at all startled; indeed, with a pleasant smile of welcome on her face—in the gown which she had worn to the theater.

"Good evening," said young Blake, holding wide the door. "Come in, please."

"Thank you."

Harry stepped into the room and bowed slightly to the young lady.

"Ernestine, this is Mr.——"

"Sowers."

"Mr. Sowers, my sister."

"How do you do, Miss Blake?"

He had recovered his composure. All the explanations he had framed up in preparation for a colloquy at the door had slipped out of his mind. He was the reporter seizing a break of good luck. He would carry on—go as far as he could.

"How do you do, Mr. Sowers?" the girl responded. "Won't you sit down?"

Harry looked at the brother.

"I suppose we'd better be going, Mr. Sowers," Blake said. "It is for you to say. As you see, I am ready. We have been to the theater. I've been waiting for you. I'm glad you came early. Mr. Glenn said one o'clock, but it's all right—even better, as we were sitting here waiting."

"One o'clock?" Harry asked, with a smile. He had the situation in hand now. "I understood half past twelve, Mr. Blake."

"Well, it's of no consequence. No doubt I am mistaken. Do you think that——"

"I think," the reporter said during the

pause, thinking of the visitor who was due at one o'clock, "that we'd better be going, if Miss Blake will excuse us."

"Very well. Ah, your hat is downstairs, I suppose."

"It is in my room."

"Your room? You live in the hotel?"

"Next door."

Surprise appeared on the faces of the brother and sister.

"Mr. Glenn thought it better," Sowers added with a smile.

It was a chance—everything was chance. He was relieved when Ernest Blake rejoined:

"That's very thoughtful of Mr. Glenn, and nice of you to put yourself out that way."

"Please don't mention it."

Ernest Blake slipped on his overcoat and stood with his hat in his hand.

"Does that cheer you up?" he inquired of his sister. "A friend next door—a friend who understands the situation."

"It is a relief," she agreed and favored Harry Sowers with a grateful smile. "We won't feel so much alone and unprotected. And what time, Mr. Sowers, do you think you shall return?"

"That, Miss Blake, is difficult to say. But, I assure you, that I will bring your brother back as quickly as possible."

"Keep all the doors locked," the brother admonished; "but don't worry. You have the telephone right at your hand—and this is a big New York hotel, remember."

"I am not frightened for myself," she assured him.

"Then don't worry about me. Mr. Sowers looks pretty husky," he added, with a friendly smile at the reporter. "Guess we can take care of ourselves, can't we, Mr. Sowers?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

The reporter was nervous. It was about ten minutes to one. He lost no time in getting his hat and overcoat and in conducting Ernest Blake out of the hotel. He led the way briskly along the street toward Broadway.

His own brazen effrontery amazed Harry Sowers, now that he had a few moments of clearer thought. Yet he had looked on the strange turn of affairs as fortunate; and he was a man who would play a streak of luck to the finish.

"I wonder where in the devil I'm to take this young man?" he inquired of himself.

CHAPTER V.

CLENCHED FISTS.

THE reporter had obtained one tiny peep into the affairs of Ernest and Ernestine Blake. There was something in their present mysterious situation which inspired the sister with alarm. It was a clew which revealed no details, but it did reveal a state of mind—an apprehension. There was real or fancied danger; therefore, there was mystery.

Ernest Blake was saying something about a taxicab. Sowers yanked his mind back to the immediate present.

"Taxicab?" he ventured. "Well, perhaps! but I thought you might like to walk for a while."

"I don't mind."

They sauntered along. What scattered talk they had was mostly of the city, for New York was comparatively new to Ernest Blake, and of the play he and his sister had attended. Presently the reporter took another chance.

"We could walk all the way," he suggested.

Blake looked up at a street sign.

"This is Forty-eighth Street," he said. "That place is in Seventy-fourth Street, isn't it?"

"Yes, Seventy-fourth."

"That would be quite a jaunt, wouldn't it?"

"I agreed with you. It is too much of a walk. We'll take a taxi. It's best, of course, for you to get back as quickly as possible. Your sister will worry."

"Yes."

Harry Sowers hailed a taxicab with confidence. He knew exactly where they were going, and this strengthened him. Seventy-fourth Street! Joe Klondike's gambling house was in West Seventy-fourth Street. Harry had the number; he also had the card which Vanley had given him. This would pass him by the doorkeeper. He wondered if Blake had a card. He thought not. The man he was impersonating, the man provided

by Mr. Glenn, would have the credentials necessary to admit both to Joe Klondike's place. Harry thought the doorkeeper would admit a friend of his on his card. It was a card of plain white, bearing only a penciled notation. It did not specify the number of visitors for which it was good—specified nothing, in fact; merely a set of initials.

The reporter had to make talk while the taxi sped. There were things he could say with safety. For instance:

"Mr. Blake, it was unfortunate that you gave your name to the police in that little difficulty last night."

"Well," Blake rejoined, "Mr. Glenn thinks it won't make any difference."

"That's what he told me," Harry lied.

"He'll be on the lookout for me, no doubt, about that. But I don't think he'll keep me out of his place. He doesn't know what I'm up to—can't know that. He'll be curious and very much interested. He'll bait me, let me go up to a certain point, until he figures things out. I talked it all over with Mr. Glenn, and I suppose Mr. Glenn explained things to you."

"In a way, yes."

"I merely want to look around."

"So I understand."

"I want to see if he's got it there. I did not see it at the other place—the place that was raided."

They were making the turn around Columbus Circle. The reporter hazarded:

"You don't understand this man's affairs. The little places he runs, like the one you were in, are not like his big place, where we're going. He'd hardly keep a thing like you mention in one of the little places."

"Well, I didn't know," Blake explained. "I learned of his business here—got a list of his places from Mr. Glenn. A lawyer can do almost anything. Are you a lawyer, Mr. Sowers—connected with Mr. Glenn?"

"No, no; I'm merely an agent of his. I do special work for him—things like this."

"Detective work?"

"In a way, yes."

"Perhaps it was you who got the list for Mr. Glenn. It must have been the work of a detective. I don't imagine that a gambler gives the general public a list of the places he runs."

"Well, it took a little trouble."

THE taxi rattled over the street-car intersections at Broadway and Columbus Avenue.

"I merely want to locate the painting. I'm certain he has it. I understand he's a connoisseur in such things and has some very valuable works. A few of them are hung in his gambling houses."

Painting—a work of art! It must be extremely valuable, or, at least, have a great sentimental value.

"He's the kind of a man who would have such a hobby," Harry said. "I suppose his explorations in the field of art provide a diversion from his crooked work."

"I suppose. And yet this isn't exactly a work of art, as Mr. Glenn must have told you. It has no great value, but I thought I might find it hung in one of his places. I visited a few of the smaller ones, on the cards Mr. Glenn gave me. It was probably you who got those cards. This afternoon Mr. Glenn and I talked over the raid complication. He advised me to visit the big place at once, before Klondike has a chance to pry very deeply into my business. And he thought it best to send some one with me to the big place."

"If he knew how important that painting is, and that I was after it, and what I want it for—why, he'd have all the crooks in town on my heels."

"There is no reason for his knowing it."

"None. But the possibilities worry my sister."

They turned into Seventy-fourth Street.

"Of course, you're going to play—gamble?" Harry inquired.

"Sure thing."

"What's your game?"

"I get quite a kick out of roulette."

"All right. You drift over to the wheels. Poker is my meat. We don't have to be together."

"Oh, no. Play for a couple of hours,

eh? We'll saunter about the place once in a while, and then go home."

"That's my idea. Here we are."

On the sidewalk the reporter asked:

"Did Mr. Glenn give you a card for this place?"

"Why, no. I suppose that you——"

"It's all right. Come along."

It was a drab-looking building and might have been one of the modest rooming houses which are so plentiful among the old-fashioned dwellings in that quarter of the city. A flight of stone steps led up to what was called the first floor; the ground floor was called the basement, into which there was an entrance under the stairway. They mounted the steps.

A white-coated Japanese answered the bell and bowed them out of the vestibule into a reception hall, which offered no evidence of the character of the place they were in. Neither were there any sounds which might afford a clew. It was very quiet and rather gloomy in the subdued light. Harry had observed that a street lamp was at the curb squarely in front; he knew enough about such places to be aware that they had no doubt been inspected by a lookout, either from the curtained basement windows or those above, while they were dismissing the taxi driver. There would be a signal system throughout the place. The first signal would be that the newcomers looked all right.

A man in evening dress appeared in the reception hall. He had sleek black hair and a shrewd face.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said amiably. He came forward, rubbing his hands.

"Good evening."

Harry produced the card.

"This gentleman is a friend of mine," he said.

That they had passed inspection was indicated when the Japanese asked if he might take their coats.

"Make yourself at home, gentlemen," the sleek-haired custodian said. "What names shall I announce, please?"

"Announce to whom?" Harry inquired.

"Merely a formality. There is no announcement, of course, but names are desirable for future reference."

"Oh, of course. Mr. Drake and Mr. Francis."

"Thank you. Will you walk upstairs, please?"

Before they got halfway up the stairs another signal must have sped on its way —a bell, a whisper in a house phone—something. For doors opened quietly on the floors above—doors which when closed virtually sealed the rooms. The click of poker chips, the rattle of little balls among the slots of the roulette wheels, the hum of conversation, and the droning calls of croupiers reached their ears in subdued tones. All sounds were subdued. Apparently, there was no play on the first floor, unless that was where the private poker games went on.

But the guests seemed to have the run of the house above the first floor.

"Do you know Joe Klondike when you see him?" Harry whispered.

"I saw him years ago."

"I understand that he has thick gray hair."

"Oh, you've never seen him, then?"

"No. But I think I shall know him. You must learn if he knows who you are. You'll be able to tell that by the way he looks at you."

"I'll watch out for him."

ONCE upstairs, the resort had the air of a public place. There were no attendants to bar progress from one room to another. In the second-floor parlor roulette was being played. There were three wheels of the Monte Carlo type, with *pair* and *impair* lettered on the spaces which, on an American table, would have been designated by odd or even. There were a few paintings on the walls of this room.

Ernest Blake shook his head at the reporter, after taking a look about. They watched the play for a few moments, studying the rapt faces of the players. Many were in evening clothes. All were well dressed and generally well groomed. There may have been crooks among them, probably were, but, at least, they were high-class crooks. They looked like prosperous business men.

They saw no one who may have been Joe Klondike. Harry had in his mind a

detailed physical description of the proprietor.

He had taken Blake's nod to indicate that he did not see in that room the painting which, mysteriously, seemed to be the object of his quest. Harry had been pondering. Blake himself had said that the painting was not of great value. He had also said that if Joe Klondike knew he was after it and why, he would have every crook in town at his heels. When "painting" had first been mentioned, it had the effect of a damp cloth on Harry's ardor for the adventure. If it turned out that young Blake was merely seeking to acquire a valuable painting, the story might take the twist of an ordinary contest between art collectors. But the painting was not valuable. It was not desired as a painting. It was a key to something else. It stood for something. When a gambler would set "all the crooks in town" on the heels of a man who wanted that painting——

Well, there was a story here—a big story. But there was also a dangerous complication.

They visited other rooms, and with every passing moment the frown of worry grew deeper on the reporter's face. Numerous possibilities occurred to him.

They saw faro being played; poker, stud and draw, with various limits at various tables. It was a high-class gambling house, richly, though quietly, furnished; yet there were tables at which a fifty-cent limit was played.

"That's about my speed," the reporter told himself.

The third floor parlor contained two billiard tables. On these craps was being shot.

IF the players in other games had been almost rapt, the men who rolled the ivory cubes were devoting to their efforts and the varying fortunes of the game the last word in human attention. Not a single eye was turned from the tables when the reporter and his companion drifted in. Many of the faces were agonized, tortured, and this did not mean that they were losing.

"Look at them," Blake said in an undertone.

"That's craps."

"I know it," the young Westerner protested. "Don't you think we have dice out in my country?"

"Pardon me," Harry returned, with an answering grin. "You've rolled them, eh?"

"Rolled them and talked to them. But, say, you'd think the fate of the world hung on those bones, eh?"

"It does, for the moment and for the man who shoots them. Listen to that fellow coax!"

The crap shooter in question was lavishing on the dice all the endearing phrases that a mother might have crooned over her child. It was both comic and pathetic.

"Falling cards are exciting," Harry remarked, "and the click of a roulette ball is not totally devoid of interest, but two little dice would make a man forget the World War, if he were right in the middle of it."

They grinned at one another and passed out of the room. Harry Sowers' thoughts, however, dissipated his grin.

Nowhere did they encounter Joe Klondike, and nowhere did Blake detect the painting he sought, though there was not a single room which did not have at least one, as well as prints in good taste. Joe Klondike, world roamer that he was, knew how to draw gamblers. There were coon-can tables for Southern visitors, blackjack games for the Westerner, and craps and poker and roulette with a universal appeal.

"Well, we ought to play," Harry suggested. "We might want to come again, and they mustn't get the idea that we're sight-seers. This is a gambling house. If we don't play, they might suggest the rubber-neck busses to us the next time we ring the bell."

"All right. I choose roulette."

"I'll take poker. But, listen, Mr. Blake—don't you suppose you'd better call up your sister?"

"Why?"

"Well, I thought it might ease her mind to hear your voice. She seemed to be worried. I saw a telephone booth on the second floor."

"All right."

Now Harry Sowers knew that his impersonation would likely come down with a crash when the brother and sister exchanged a few words. The man who was due to call at one o'clock had been there. He would probably indicate to the girl that they had been imposed on. She would be frantic and might call in the police, thinking Ernest Blake had been lured away by enemies. There were any number of things that might come out of this. Regardless of the trouble it would bring on the reporter, he must face it to relieve the mind of Ernestine Blake.

So Ernest Blake telephoned. Harry waited near by, his mind filled with the explanation he would make. Blake came out of the phone booth with a look of anger on his face, his fists clenched.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PAPER OR THE POLICE.

HARRY stood near the stairway. Blake faced him.

"Where's my sister?" he demanded.

This question took the reporter so by surprise that he stammered. Blake thought he was scared.

"Y-your sister? Why—isn't she at the hotel?"

"I'll knock you down that stairway if you don't tell me, and tell me quick."

Their voices were low and as yet attracted no attention.

"No," said the reporter, "you won't knock me down any stairway. And we won't waste time chewing the rag over this thing. I'm not the man you took me for—all right. Why I kept up the deception is something you'll learn later. But you'd better believe this—neither am I working for any one who's against you. I'm a newspaper reporter who butted into this thing, and I was on your side from the start. I know more about this town than you do. If your sister is out of the hotel, it means——"

"It means that she went out with the man Mr. Glenn sent up to us. I took you for him. She left word at the desk, and she was excited. What's your game? You know about this mix-up. She's gone and——"

"They'll be here to look for us," Harry assured him. "I'm surprised they're not here now. They've had time enough, if he called at your apartment at one o'clock."

"Why did you come to my apartment?"

"To scrape up an acquaintance with you."

"You've got gall."

"Perhaps. I'm not afraid of anything, if that's what you mean—and it's my bread and butter to get a story when I'm sent out after it. Now, I know I owe you an apology. But it was your mistake that gave me an opener. My intentions are all right." He looked about and dropped his voice even lower. "I think as little of Joe Klondike as you do," he insisted. "I know how he trimmed your father. I'm with you in anything you want to start, if that means anything."

"With me, yes—spread the thing all over the papers." His eyes narrowed. "That's assuming of course that you are a reporter."

"We'll let that pass. I don't spread a story until it's ready to be spread. I'm not going to do anything that will interfere with your plans. What I'm after is a story when it's all over. That's what I'm going to get. I can get it by working with you, or I can get it with you trying always to give me the dodge. Take your choice. For me I have only one choice—get the story."

"You move into a room next to me, spy on me probably, and——"

"No, I went directly to your door—showed my face."

"And made me think you were another man."

"Well, we fellows have to take things as they come. That looked like a good bet at the time. It didn't look so well a few minutes ago. It didn't seem to be fair to your sister. That's why I urged you to call her up."

"That's right. You did."

Recollection of that incident put a different face on the matter.

"Is your name really Sowers?" Blake asked.

"Sowers, of the *Evening Beacon*."

"If—if I were sure——"

"Will you believe the managing editor of one of the morning papers? The *Beacon* is an evening paper. The office is closed now. But I'll get in a taxi with you and go to any morning paper you say. I've got friends in every office in town. I've got a reporter's police card, but you may think I stole that. I'll go to any paper——"

"No, I believe you."

"All right. Then you don't mind taking advice, do you, if you think a fellow wants to help you? You certainly don't think any self-respecting paper would have a reporter who'd work with Joe Klondike against you, do you? So I must be with you or I must be neutral. Well, I'm not neutral. Just what the game is, I don't know. You can tell me if you want to, or we'll let things go as they are, and I'll dig up the facts in my own way. But right now there's one thing to do. That's to call up this Mr. Glenn you spoke of—your lawyer, I suppose—and ask him if he's heard from the man he sent to your hotel. I'm worried. If your sister left the hotel with him, the first place they'd come is here, looking for you. That fellow could get in."

"He may be here right now."

"He may be, but you don't know him, and he doesn't know you. You don't even know his name."

"Mr. Glenn merely said he would send a man to see me at one o'clock. I don't suppose he knew at the time whom he would send."

"All right. This fellow will call Glenn when he learns you've been tricked. He's called him by this time. Call Glenn at his home—get him out of bed, certainly—ask him *where* his man and your sister are looking for you. Listen here: You can look for anything in a stunt that Joe Klondike's mixed up in. If your sister is away from your apartment—I don't care if she is with some private detective sent to you by your lawyer—you want to know where she is. Let this sink in, and stay sunk in: Joe Klondike can outwit any private detective in New York. You say that if he was onto your game it would——"

Ernest Blake made a dive for the telephone directory.

It was a long time before his ring was answered in the Glenn home, and still longer before Ambrose Glenn himself got on the wire. It seemed an eternity before Ernest Blake, his face twisted with alarm, came out of the booth.

"Well, how about it?"

"That fellow called Glenn up, but he did not mention that he was going to take my sister with him."

"He didn't?"

"No; Glenn's excited now. He said there would be no reason for him to ask my sister to leave the hotel."

"What time did he call Glenn?"

"Five minutes past one, as soon as my sister told him about you. They both talked to Glenn. Nothing was said about her leaving the hotel. Say—say!" and his gleaming eyes told of the great fear that had seized him. "You're not stringing me again, are you? You're really what——"

"I'll prove it. Back in that booth for you. Get the clerk at the Clevering who gave you the first message. What time did your sister leave the hotel? That's the question."

IT developed that Ernestine Blake left the hotel shortly before two o'clock, and in the company of a man other than the one who called an hour earlier.

For a few seconds the two young men stared into each other's eyes. Harry Sowers' shoulders drooped. He had the awful fear that the deception in which he had engaged might have passed beyond his control.

"Blake," he said, "I feel sorry for you. I know you must be in agony, and you've got to let me in on it now."

"What—what in the world will we do? The police?"

"That depends. We can't take any chances. I don't know just what this thing is yet—what the stakes are."

The air of the gambling house grew stuffy in their nostrils.

"Let's get the air," the reporter suggested. "We'll walk and talk it over. We've got to be careful."

An attendant at the door of the nearest room was watching them curiously. He had not heard their words. He was

merely amused, not absorbed. Excited whispers were nothing new in that place. The turns of the games sometimes threw players into animated discussions. Guests passing from one room to another, if they thought anything at all, took the two for young blades who, perhaps, had lost their rolls and were consoling each other or talking of ways and means to raise more money.

They drifted down to the first floor and got their coats and hats. In the street they walked a few moments without words.

"If I knew what this game was," Sowers suggested, "I could advise you."

No answer. Ernest Blake was staring straight ahead, a grim look on his face. The great city had suddenly become a jungle to him. His sister had left their hotel under circumstances which indicated she had been the victim of a ruse. Somewhere she was in the company of a strange man. He couldn't quite collect his thoughts. Alone, he might have dashed for the nearest police station, but the young man at his side had a sobering influence on him.

It seemed curious that he could be walking slowly in the street, almost inactive. Yet what was he to do?

"Oh, I'm not trying to pump you," the reporter added, "just to get what information I can, and then leave you flat. It was me that got you into this hole. I'm going to stick whether you like it or not. If that girl has been kidnaped——"

"I've no more doubts about you," Blake assured him. "A man like you —— You look square, talk square. A fellow's sister, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"If I knew where she was, I'd rip and slash my way through all the thugs in New York. But I don't know. Don't know where to start."

They stopped and stood on the curbing.

"How big a game is this?" the reporter demanded. "How much dough's mixed up in it?"

"A whole lot."

"What do you mean—a whole lot? Say something."

"Half a million dollars."

"Half a million? That's big stuff. Can you think of any reason why they'd want to kidnap your sister—hold her prisoner?"

"They'd torture her, maybe—try to make her tell."

"Tell what?"

"Where this money is."

"Well, where is it?"

"I don't know. It's mixed up—all mixed up in that painting. I don't know myself."

"And do they know—Joe Klondike and his crowd—do they know it's mixed up with the painting?"

"No; they don't know that. If they knew that, they'd have the whole thing. See what I mean? They'd have it, and I'd be out. They wouldn't have to do anything about it. They'd laugh at me."

Harry Sowers understood.

"Then they've kidnaped your sister," he asserted, "in an effort to make her tell, or to hold her prisoner until you come through with the dope they want."

"That's what I think."

"All right. Then they won't kill your sister—harm her in any way. That would queer their own game."

"But she's a girl—pretty." His voice was pathetic. "A gang of thugs——"

"Listen, Blake. Joe Klondike's a crook—a swindler, a confidence man, an adventurer—anything for money. But you've got to give him credit for some things. The other crooks call him square. He's square with his own crowd. He never picked on women. He's a lady's man, all right, and a lot of them fall for him, but he isn't a man who'd take a woman by the throat. I've got a bunch of clippings about him in my room. You ought to read them. You've got to bank on a fellow's character. Joe hasn't got much when it comes to men, taking the last sou a fellow's got, any way he can get it; but women—— Well, that's his stock in trade, the thing he's vain about —his chivalry. You know there are crooks like that. He likes to see his chivalry in print. He'll be nice to your sister. He'll make flourishing bows to her. Every little thing she needs for her comfort, she'll have it, wherever he takes her. He's got women on his string. Some

of them will be around. You can leave it to Joe Klondike to be the grand gentleman. He'll delight in it. You—well, if he had *you* in a hole, he wouldn't be so gentle and gallant; but your sister will——"

"I've always heard that about him."

"Sure. That's the kind of a guy he is, all right. But if you turn the police on him, they might press him too close. He might have to do something desperate to save his own skin. He's not afraid of you. He wouldn't be afraid of me, but, with a bunch of detectives giving him the push, he might tighten up."

"I hate to tell all my business to the police."

The reporter lit a cigarette, meditating.

"And still I hate to advise you not to tell the police," he confessed. "It's a big responsibility. But what I'd like to do is wait a few hours, anyhow, till I can get in touch with my city editor. The *Beacon's* a big paper. The little stunt I pulled, making you think I was the guy your lawyer sent over—that kind of started things. I'll tell my city editor. If he says tell the police, all right. If he says the *Beacon* will find Ernestine Blake, you can bank on it that she'll be found. The police can't do anything the *Beacon* can't do, with its lawyers and the private detectives it could throw onto the thing. I don't know what Vanley will want to do, but I'd like to wait and see."

The prospect of enlisting a big newspaper in the chase gave Ernest Blake more confidence than a resort to the police; not that he lacked confidence in the police. But he had an instinctive feeling that the police were futile when it came to Joe Klondike. Had they ever been able to convict him of a crime? Didn't he always beat them, even in the cases growing out of raids on his place? He did. But the concentrated efforts of a newspaper—that would be an attack from a quarter little expected by Joe Klondike.

"The *Beacon* will print it—about my sister being missing?"

"Listen, Blake: Get over the idea that a newspaper rushes into print with everything it gets hold of. That's wrong. I know better unprinted stories than any I ever saw printed. I don't say we don't want this story. It's what I came after, but we don't want it till it's ripe. If the *Beacon* can put Joe Klondike where he belongs, it will be doing something the police haven't been able to do. And let me tell you something—Vanley, my city editor, knew your father."

"He knew my father?"

"He was a reporter on a Denver paper, at the time of your father's trouble. He worked on the story, out there in Peakton. He saw you when you were a kid. He's wrapped up in your affairs—he's for you."

"That cheers me up—it sure does!"

"All right. Now it's after three. Sleep? Nothing doing. I couldn't sleep."

"Nor me."

"But we want to shed these evening duds and grab a bite to eat. Back to the hotel, eh? Change our clothes, drink some coffee, pick up what we can from the clerk who saw your sister go out. We must talk to the doorman and the taxi starter. And then——"

"What?"

They walked into Broadway and looked for a taxi.

"I'm just thinking," said Harry Sowers. "I'd like—— How about calling on Joe Klondike? Let's dig him up, take him kind of by surprise, and take a squint at the place he lives."

Ernest Blake stared, for he had his doubts about the wisdom of this course; yet he was in the hands of his friend.

CHAPTER VII.

ENTER SHERLOCK HOLMES.

THE directory soon gave them Joe Klondike's address. Joe, thinking that such openness was conclusive proof that he had nothing to conceal, that it amounted to an invitation to the police to visit him at any time, flaunted that address with all the brazenness of an impudent crook who regarded himself as a trifle too slick for the emissaries of the law.

It was a bachelor's apartment in Central Park West.

Joe was in. He was a night owl. A

call at half past four in the morning was not disturbing. A call at noon might have nettled him—found his eyes heavy with slumber.

The visitors meant to check it squarely up to Joe Klondike. The name of Ernest Blake was announced over the telephone.

"Ask him to come up, please."

That was Joe Klondike. He never hesitated a moment. It was like him, too, to smile a cordial welcome upon a man he knew hated him; not to be surprised that he had a friend with him—to ask them in at once, to stand in the center of his sitting room, his white hands tucked casually into the pockets of his robe; smiling, debonair.

"Ernest Blake," he repeated, as though the name sent his mind back to stirring days. "A man now. I remember you as a little fellow. It's a pleasure, I assure you."

But all the while he was watching. Young men smarting with an injury were sometimes impulsive. One never could tell. Blake looked haggard, distraught.

"And your friend—Mr. Sowers, I believe you said—from the West, too?"

"From the New York *Evening Beacon*."

The gambler looked at Harry and sized him up casually.

"My favorite paper," Joe Klondike said. "Well, gentlemen, why not sit down?"

"My sister has disappeared," Ernest Blake informed his amiable host, his eyes glued to his face.

"Your sister—disappeared? I did not remember—— Ah, yes, I *do* remember. You had a sister, a twin sister. She has disappeared, you say? And you have come to New York to find her."

"She disappeared in New York just a few hours ago. The man you sent to the Clevering Hotel told her some story that induced her to leave with him. Where is she?"

Joe Klondike started to laugh, changed his mind, and frowned.

"Now, really, Mr. Blake—that's putting it bluntly. But you are excited, suffering. Why not sit down? I am always ready to be of service if a lady is in danger."

The visitors looked at one another, then sat down.

"Smoke?" the gambler invited. There were cigars and cigarettes on the table. They smoked their own. "Now, tell me, Mr. Blake—what theory have you built up that sends you here with the thought that I know where your sister is?"

His dark eyes had grown pleasant again. His thick gray hair lent dignity to a smooth, unlined face that might have been much younger than Joe Klondike's fifty years.

"I was taken in a raid on one of your gambling houses last night," Blake rejoined. "I was fool enough to give my right name. It was printed in the papers. That fellow Brundage—your man—he'd make a report to you. You knew I was in town. You've got a good memory. You knew you missed something when you cleaned my father out, and you think now that you're going to get it. You've got ways of moving fast. You had some one on the job at the Clevering. I went out with my friend here. That left my sister alone. A man called at the apartment—a man sent there by my lawyer. Your man saw him go up and come down. He knew him. It was easy enough then for your man to call on my sister, tell her the lawyer's agent had sent him, and ask her to go somewhere to meet him. She went."

THIS theory had been evolved by the young men while they were changing their clothes and eating a lunch at the Clevering.

Joe Klondike waited a while.

"That," he said, "is the case for the prosecution, is it? I suppose I'm expected to make some defense. Well, young man, I'll begin by saying that I had no idea you were in New York until your name was announced over the phone, a few minutes ago."

They did not believe this, but they did not dispute him.

"You say you were arrested in a raid on a gambling house, and that I run the house? You do?"

"That's what I said."

The gambler meditated, looked shrewd, then smiled.

"We'll take it for granted," he said presently, "that we're all gentlemen. Anything that one of us says will not be used against him. I'll admit that I have something to do with the house that was raided, but do you realize of how small importance that is to me? I have not seen Brundage, do not expect to see him —at least, about that. I talked with him on the phone, but he did not give me the name of a single man taken when the place was pinched. I wouldn't pay any attention to the names if he did—they'd be phony—always are."

"But mine wasn't phony. It appeared in the evening papers."

"Evening papers? The *Beacon*, I assume, among others. The *Beacon* is my paper. I read it every day; that is to say, I read it the next day after it's printed. There it is, gentlemen, on the table. I got home less than an hour ago. I was about to sit down, to smoke and read, when the phone rang."

A copy of the *Beacon* lay on the table, first page uppermost. The raid story was on an inside page.

Ernest Blake and Harry Sowers looked at one another. Joe Klondike saw his advantage. Exultation rippled a moment in his eyes. He was proud of the smoothness of his tongue.

"Some one brought me word that the place had been raided," he added. "I didn't pay much attention to it. There was no racket with the police—no trouble. A mere incident. I did not know that you were in town, Mr. Blake, and it's nice of you to inform me. I am also grateful for the information that your affairs are such as to prove of interest to me. It may be worth looking into."

The reporter hitched up in his chair at this point and butted in.

"I think you've already looked into it," he said pleasantly. "That copy of the *Beacon* has been read by some one. You're hardly a man to carry around secondhand newspapers."

Joe Klondike rejoined with the greatest good nature:

"Enter, Sherlock Holmes."

"All right, then I'll be Sherlock Holmes. That happens to be the noon edition of the *Beacon*. It went to press yesterday morning at ten o'clock; it was on the news stands at eleven. It's going on five o'clock now. I've got a hunch that your bedtime is about daylight, around six, eh? You wouldn't get up until noon, anyway. By the time you got out on the street, that edition would be off the stands. You'd buy a later edition, unless you had arrangements for first editions of the evening papers to be delivered to your apartment, so you'd have the latest news with your breakfast. In that case you'd get the noon edition of the *Beacon*. You got that paper around noon yesterday. There's this morning's *Star* on your table, too, the very latest news. You got that on your way home this morning, or found it at your door."

"You're clever. No doubt you are an excellent reporter."

"Well, I don't know of a paper in town that's got a blind man on the staff. The *Star* is nice and fresh, isn't it? Look at the fold of it. You probably haven't opened it. But the *Beacon*—look at the fold of that—edges, too! It's been read. Why you are saving it, I don't know, but exactly nineteen hours have elapsed since that paper went to press. A paper nineteen hours old in New York is like last year's almanac."

Joe Klondike threw his gray head back and laughed with quiet amusement under his breath. Then he looked from one to the other, with a very straight face, as though he were having difficulty in repressing his mirth.

"One of my hobbies," he said, "is the cross-word puzzle. As you may understand, this is my hour of leisure. I always save my *Beacon* to work the puzzle, and to read it more carefully than I have time to do when I first get it."

"But, even a casual reading of the *Beacon* would reveal the story of the raid. It happened shortly after midnight last night. Nick Brundage, in jail himself—he'd manage to let you know, wherever you were last night. The raid didn't get into the morning papers yesterday, but you knew about it when you got home. If one of your places has been raided, I don't suppose you look for mention of it when the evening paper is delivered, eh?"

"If I know about it, yes."

"Well, you can't tell me that you haven't got a 'grapevine' alert enough to give you raid news during the night some time."

Joe Klondike was getting nettled.

"And you can't tell me," Harry added, "that the name of Ernest Blake doesn't mean something to you. If you saw that name in the paper, especially as one of the men in a place of yours, you'd look him up. His address is in the story. A telephone call to the Clevering, and you discover he's registered from Peakton, Colorado. That's all Joe Klondike needs to set things going."

"What, for instance?"

"I don't know. I don't know what the idea is; but, when a girl is kidnaped out of her hotel, that's going it too strong. Blake wants his sister. You send her back to the Clevering; get on the phone after we've gone. A word from you will put her back in the Clevering."

"I wish that were true."

Sowers got up. So did Ernest Blake.

"All right," the reporter said. "Then it's a fight, eh?"

"If you choose—if you persist in this unjust accusation."

They stepped into the hall.

"If I can be of any further service to you, gentlemen——"

But they were out of earshot of his low, bantering voice.

Almost in front of the apartment house they found a taxi at the curb. They got into it without speaking of the man upstairs.

"The Hotel Clevering," Harry said to the driver.

"Yes, sir."

At a cross street or two down the avenue, the driver turned into Central Park. The passengers talked earnestly in low voices. They were plainly up against it. Harry meant to go back to the hotel and call Vanley at his home. If Vanley said go to the police, they'd go to the police.

"Here, here!" Harry presently called to the driver. He pulled the sliding window back. "The Clevering's downtown. You're going across——"

The driver did not even turn his head.

"Sit down, bo!" he growled.

At that instant another car, a private sedan, drew alongside, at the right, and another taxi appeared on the left. Both of these cars were filled with men. Harry slugged the chauffeur on the back of the head. The man slumped down. The machine, going very slowly, swerved sharply and got tangled up with the sedan.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLOW AND A BUST.

ALL three machines came to a halt. The occupants of the other two cars swarmed over their victims. Neither Harry Sowers nor Ernest Blake had a weapon. Their assailants, undoubtedly armed, did not seem to wish gun play. What had they to fear? Eight men against two. They could accomplish their purpose without a shot which might attract some policeman wandering through the byways of the park.

The real attack started before Sowers and Blake could get out of the taxi. They were punched as soon as they opened the doors, one on each side.

Ernest Blake, who had appeared rather weak and futile after the shock of his sister's disappearance, now had something in front of him which he could fight. These men were tangible, mixed up in some way with the girl's adbuction, and he sailed into them. He kicked one off the running board and leaped out with flying fists.

Sowers managed to get his feet on the ground, too. Both fought with everything they had, feet, fists, and, in the clinches, with their teeth. But there were four men against each. For a few moments this was an advantage to Blake and Sowers, for the number of their adversaries, crowding close, kept any one of them from landing a clean blow.

The battle swayed away from the machines.

It was still very dark, though the drive was illuminated by lamps, faintly at that particular point. It was about five o'clock, and spring daylight would not come until after six.

Blake and Sowers were presently dragged to the ground, yelling. Blows silenced them.

When the reporter regained his sensibilities he discovered that he was in the sedan, speeding away from the scene of the encounter. His face was bruised and sore, his head thumped. It was a big car. Both he and Blake were crouched awkwardly on the floor of it. Three men sat in the rear seat, and two in front.

What faces Harry could see were far from reassuring. Thugs, gunmen—all young. He stirred. So did Blake. Guns, automatic pistols, were shown them.

"Lay still!" was the command.

"I can't lie this way," the reporter remonstrated.

"Well, wiggle around. Get yourself set, but don't start nothing. We'll polish you guys off, if you get fussy again."

The victims had strong reasons for believing that. They wriggled about carefully and got into more comfortable positions.

Harry could see only the fronts of buildings, high up, from where he lay. His legs were tangled up with Blake's. He could not see a street sign. Presently, however, he knew they were on a bridge. It was probably the Queensboro Bridge. He and Blake were watched very closely and threatened, from time to time.

There was considerable traffic on the bridge and on the other side of it—early-morning traffic—but the hour had not yet arrived for traffic-signal systems to be in operation, nor for policemen to be on duty at intersections. The sedan was not held up near some cop. It speeded on, with a considerable display of dexterity by the driver at times.

Neither the hands nor the feet of the captives were tied.

They traversed another park, probably Prospect Park. It was about that distance, Sowers thought, from the bridge. They swung into what seemed to be a broad boulevard. There was less traffic here—much less. Treetops were visible and no building fronts. Sowers thought they were in the Ocean Parkway.

NO doubt, they were being taken to a rendezvous, to be held prisoners. Their activities would cease. They would not even be able to make a report on the abduction of Ernestine Blake. Was she in the hands of men such as these—coarse, brutal—men in whose hands guns looked perfectly at home?

Well, he probably invited speedy death, but Sowers had no intention of being carried into captivity without a struggle. He began to meditate on just what move he could make. He could see the back of the driver's head, a man who wore a cap. He measured the distance. The machine was making fast time. Somewhere on the Long Island shore, no doubt, there was a rendezvous where they would be put away, and the driver meant to get there before the neighborhood was astir. It was just peeping daylight.

Sowers could not attack the three men in the rear seat with any hope of success. They would merely plug him with a bullet or knock him cold. Whatever attack he made must produce a devastating result.

The back of the driver's head. He thought he could reach it, if he made one quick spring, and strike before a hand could be laid on him. He'd leap and strike at the same time. It would take only an instant. If he could stun him —— The machine was going very fast.

It was all guesswork as to what would happen. But it was not guesswork as to what would happen if they were landed in some place of captivity. They would merely be held helpless, while Joe Klondike put through whatever game he had in hand, and Ernestine Blake would receive no relief.

The reporter twisted around a little, as he had done many times, easing the awkwardness of his position. But this time he darted upward and struck.

His fist caught the driver behind the ear.

The imminence of the crash seemed to paralyze the men on the seats of the car. At any rate, they did not shoot nor strike a blow. Every man in the car suddenly faced disaster. Harry was conscious of a lurch when the car bounded over the curbing and struck the looming trunk of a tree. The impact was terrific.

Somehow, he got out of the wreckage and dragged Blake after him. He dragged others out, too—two of the men who had been in the rear seat. Their

guns were not in their hands. One of the reporter's arms gave him intense pain, but he had no time to investigate. He knew only that he stood on his two feet, and that his senses were with him. One of the rescued thugs lay on the ground. The other got up, in a daze, hugging his midriff. There was no near-by traffic.

Harry got Blake on his feet.

"Can you walk?" the reporter demanded.

"Yes, I guess so." He made the attempt. "Sure."

"Then we'll beat it." He fumbled in the tonneau and retrieved Blake's hat and his own. "The cops'll come. We want to be out of this mess."

They started to run. Cars were approaching.

"Get busy, you bum!" Harry yelled to the thug who was on his feet. "Drag your pals out."

The man was doing this, when Sowers and Blake raced for the cover of an intersecting street. They heard house doors, banging in the vicinity of the wreck, and cries and shouts. But they kept going, turning corners, striving to cut all connection between themselves and what had happened at that big tree.

"We're lucky," said Blake.

"I'll say we're lucky!"

"You've certainly got nerve, Sowers."

"Well, I'm working on a story. How am I going to get it if I let a gang of crooks salt me down in some place?"

SOWERS suffered a lot of pain in his right arm and shoulder, but they were not broken. He kept his arm in motion to keep it from growing stiff. They tidied up as they went along. Blake's head was cut, but not seriously. They wiped off the stains of the wreck and of the beating they had received in the park—wiped off the stains, but not the marks.

"That's a peach of a black eye you've got," Sowers commented.

"If it's any peachier than yours, I'd like to see it."

"I'm still set on seeing my city editor before I get the police in on this," the reporter explained.

"I'm willing to trust you on it. Whatever you think is best."

"All right. You see, if the police get it, the other papers get it. By beating it away from that wreck, my story is still exclusive. It's a cinch those fellows won't tell whom they had in the car."

"It isn't likely. But, how in the devil did——"

"I thought of that, too. That taxi driver got on the job, somehow. Remember, it took us three or four minutes to get up to Joe Klondike's apartment, after your name was announced on the telephone. The elevator was a long while coming down. What did he do in that space of time? Put in a call, maybe. Got his gunmen on the job. All they had to do was wait for us. It's a cinch we'd take the first taxi we saw."

"Sure," Blake assented. "And he's got taxi drivers working for him. He's fast, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's fast. But this thing is bigger than it looked. It's a big chance for my paper. Joe Klondike can be put out of business. He can't go on forever. He's not only running gambling houses, but he's got thugs and crooks on his string. It's time he was knocked over. It's a big thing for the *Beacon*, if we can get it on that guy."

Daylight was broadening. Men, walking in the streets, sized up the pair's black eyes and fist-bruised faces, and grinned wisely. A little drinking party that ended in a row. They were in a residential district and had not encountered a single taxicab.

"I don't know what Vanley will want to do," the reporter speculated. "If your sister wasn't in danger—why, he'd say to keep at the story, keep it quiet until we could close in on Joe Klondike. But your sister——"

Blake's voice was very quiet, not at all dramatic. Yet there wasn't any doubt about his meaning when he said:

"I'll kill that fellow—kill him dead."

They came to a business street and presently to a taxicab.

"The *Beacon* office," Sowers said.

THEY got into the news room and into Vanley's own office, back of the rostrum, before more than a few of the staff got on the day's job. There was lively

curiosity about their black eyes, but Sowers declined to make any explanation. They clung to the privacy of Vanley's office, after Harry had called him at his home.

"I'll come right down," the city editor had said.

Reedy was on the early trick that day. He butted into Vanley's office.

"What's the matter, Sowers?" he inquired. "Poker game bust up in a fight?"

"Poker game?"

Sower's head was awhirl with the events of the night. He had forgotten that he had missed a chance to play poker on the office stake.

"Sure. Didn't you play?"

"No."

"Didn't play! Hundred bucks of office money in your pocket, and—— Well, I'll——"

Yet Sowers looked sober. He wasn't much of a drinking man, anyhow. But Reedy could get no information. He withdrew, his curiosity torturing him.

Sowers presently went into the news room and began to prowl around. A bulletin on the automobile wreck in the Ocean Parkway came in on the news ticker. Additions to it dribbled along. None of the men had been killed, though the driver was in a hospital in a serious condition. The guns found in the wreckage indicated that the occupants of the car were crooks. All were under arrest. One had been caught a mile from the scene, having run away when householders appeared. He was limping badly.

There was as yet no hint that two other men had been seen running from the scene of the accident.

Sowers relayed this information to Ernest Blake. Vanley arrived at ten minutes of eight. In the private office, after presenting Blake, the reporter plunged into his story. Vanley listened, absorbed.

"That's big stuff," he broke in once to say. "A set-up for us to get Joe Klondike, if it wasn't for Miss Blake. She comes first, exclusive story or not. We can't take a chance. It's a job for the police—a big job. What were you saying about this wreck—just how was it you pulled that, Sowers?"

He had his hand on the telephone. He would call the police at once. The bell tinkled however before he lifted the receiver.

"Hello," said Vanley. "No, no. . . . The managing editor isn't in yet This is the city editor. . . . I beg pardon. . . . Yes, we have a man here by that name. Who is this, please?"

He was looking straight at Harry Sowers

Suddenly his whole frame stiffened. His eyes gleamed behind the thick-lensed glasses.

"Wha-what's that? Miss Blake—Miss Ernestine Blake?"

Ernest Blake's body sagged. The muscles of his face twitched. It was an awful let-down from the tenseness of the night.

"Are you all right, Miss Blake? . . . That's fine! And you're at the Clevering?"

The ears of the two young men drank in these snatches of the conversation. Each of Vanley's rejoinders seemed to tell what was being said at the other end of the wire.

"No, no, Miss Blake. You're mistaken about him. He's your brother's friend. They're right here at my elbow, both of them. . . . Yes, he's all right. . . . Yes, I suppose it does seem strange to you. But you will find out that Sowers isn't a villain. Why, he's really a fine young man, Miss Blake. . . . No, it was Sowers—not some one using his name who registered there. . . . You say you inquired about him at the desk, and they got the clerk who registered him on the phone? . . . I see. Well, it's a big relief, Miss Blake. I was about to call the police. You say you were mysteriously released, shoved out of a car on a street corner? Held a while in some house, you say—under the care of a yellow-haired woman? Listen, Miss Blake, don't talk to any one else, will you, until your brother can get up there? . . . Thank you. . . . Yes, he'll talk to you now. It sort of knocked him out when he discovered I was talking to you. Here he is."

Ernest Blake took the telephone with trembling hands. Sowers rubbed his swollen eye; and Vanley grinned with great satisfaction.

CHAPTER IX.

COFFEE CONFIDENCES.

THE city desk was in charge of Vanley's assistant until ten o'clock each morning, so Vanley found time to join the breakfast party in the suite of Ernest and Ernestine Blake.

The sister kissed every bruise on her brother's face.

There was a rush of talk at first, after Vanley had succeeded in convincing the manager of the hotel that Harry Sowers, registered as a guest, was really an estimable young man. Ernestine Blake's inquiries had aroused skepticism in respect to young Mr. Sowers. She had let it out that her brother had been duped by him, and, of course, every one at first thought he was an impostor—some crook employing the name and credentials of the reporter. George V. Glasswell, the obliging clerk, had come to the hotel in fear and trembling, after telephone inquiries had been made of him. He did not reveal, however, that he had received a specific request from Sowers for that room, and neither did any one else. As it turned out, George V. Glasswell and his job were safe.

The hotel staff, those who took part in the discussion, thought they understood. Young Mr. Blake, arrested one night in a gambling raid, had been cutting up again, this time in the company of a young gentleman of the press. They had had an exciting night. Their faces showed that. Every one smiled wisely, and every one was happy.

Sowers and Blake and Miss Blake were very tired, but no one thought of sleeping until the whole thing had been talked over and plans made to meet whatever move might next be set afoot.

"And we won't wait for the other fellows," the city editor said. "We'll start something ourselves." They were idling over the second cup of coffee. "Now, Miss Blake, you're very tired, I know, but I wonder if you could tell your story—just how you were tricked—what you saw?"

The slight heaviness lifted from her eyes. They were wide open, as she talked.

"When Mr. Glenn's man was announced—I think it was about five minutes of one—I asked to talk with him on the phone, before I asked him up. I couldn't believe it. Ernie had gone out with Mr. Sowers, and I thought Mr. Sowers had been sent by Mr. Glenn."

She looked at Sowers and smiled.

"I had a bad opinion of you about that time, Mr. Sowers," she declared. "Mr. Glenn's man convinced me something was wrong. I asked him up. As soon as I told him about Mr. Sowers, he called Mr. Glenn. I talked to Mr. Glenn, too. It was terrible! I thought of all sorts of things. The man went away. He was here only a few minutes.

"I couldn't sleep. I didn't even try to sleep. Then, about a quarter to two, another man called from downstairs. He said he'd been sent by the first man, and could I come down right away? We were to go to some detective's home and get him out to search for Ernie. I thought, of course, that he was another man from Mr. Glenn. I was dressed, so I just slipped on my cloak and went downstairs. I left a message for Ernie at the desk, in case he did come back, and I went away with that man. He was very nice. We walked to Broadway and got a taxi——"

"No wonder the taxi starter in front of the hotel could tell us nothing," her brother interjected.

"Well, I thought nothing of that. It seemed to be the taxicab the man had come in. It was at the curb, just this side of Broadway. He talked a constant stream—that man did. I know that we started uptown, but I soon lost all sense of direction. It seemed to be a long ways."

"Across a bridge?" Vanley inquired.

"No, no—we did not cross a bridge—not that I remember."

"You would remember it, Miss Blake, if you crossed one of the Long Island bridges."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure I would. They are very long. We have been over in Brooklyn. No, we did not go to Brooklyn, but we did cross Central Park. At least, I thought we crossed it. The roads are so winding in the park, and it is so easy to be mistaken. I am not sure it was the

park. He may have driven in one gate and out another, very close to it. But I hadn't the slightest suspicion at the time. We stopped at a house in the middle of the block. The number on the house was 461, but I haven't the least idea of the street. It was a very long block. He rang the bell, while I sat in the taxi."

"And you would know the house if you saw it?"

"Yes, I'm sure I would. I think I would remember the arched doorway and the curtains at the windows."

"There were no stores around there—business signs?"

"No, just houses." She finished her coffee. "Well, he talked to some one at the door. I could not see. He stood inside the vestibule. Then he came out, paid the taxi driver, and said that we were to go in. And that's the last I saw of that man."

"You were received by some one else?"

"I was received by an awfully pretty woman. She had the loveliest blond hair. It wasn't bobbed, and she had it caught up nicely, piled rather high. She looked wonderful in a blue kimono, trimmed with ostrich feathers of the same shade. And she was awfully nice. Asked if I'd mind waiting in the second-floor parlor. She sat with me there for a while. The man simply disappeared. I thought, of course, he was talking with the detective in some other room—this woman's husband. She was in and out of the room several times, but I never heard the slightest sound of any one else. Then she came in and asked me if I would not like to lie down.

"'Lie down!' I said.

"Imagine it—as nervous as I was. But she said the men had decided to go out by themselves, to the gambling house, and it was better that I should wait there for them. But the idea of lying down alone, with no one to talk to, was dreadful. I knew I couldn't sleep. But the woman said she would sit in the room and keep me company, if only I would lie down.

"'You look awfully tired, dear,' she said.

"I suppose I did, but I didn't feel tired—just all unstrung. She tried to keep my mind off Ernie and advised me not to talk about him at all. She was certain the men would find him and bring him back. Well, she conducted me into a bedroom. I laid down on a settee in the room, not on the bed. She sat with me. It was the longest wait!

"We talked mostly about New York. She said their name was Redding—that they had two children—asleep now, of course. It was after daylight when she got a telephone call. She did not return to the room for five or ten minutes after she hung up. I could hear her voice, downstairs, on the phone, but I could not hear what she said. She talked very little, anyhow—just listened, making short answers. After a while she came into the room with another man."

"Still another?"

"It was just one stranger after another, and no names were mentioned. He was to take me back to the hotel, she said. Yes, my brother had been found; he was all right. In front of the house was a limousine with a private chauffeur. I could hardly see out of it. Just a tiny oval window in back, and the curtains drawn down at the side windows. The man sat beside me. Then we drove and drove. We went into the park again, speeding. His driving frightened me, but the man said the chauffeur knew his business. I supposed he did, but it made me nervous, just the same. I didn't think about being confused until later, but I know now that all that speeding and sudden turns were meant to confuse me. But that never occurred to me until I found myself standing alone in the street."

"You were pushed out of the machine?"

"Oh, no—no. They weren't rude at all. The chauffeur stopped suddenly at the curb.

"'We are to take a taxi from here,' the man said. 'Our chauffeur has another engagement.'

"That was at the corner of Seventy-second Street and Columbus Avenue. I saw the street signs. It was broad daylight then. There were lots of men around there, hurrying to the elevated station. I did not feel alarmed. The man got out first, then assisted me out.

Suddenly he darted back into the limousine, and, before I knew it, they had driven off!"

Vanley inquired: "And you could not retrace your route from that corner?"

"I have thought of that, but I know I couldn't. I stood there, staring after that car. It went toward Broadway. Then I noticed that several men were staring at me, grinning. I suppose it looked as though I had been left in the lurch. I felt dreadful and hurried along the street until I came to a taxi. Then, of course, I came to the hotel. And I called Mr. Glenn at once. He advised me to learn what I could about Mr. Sowers. You know the rest. After I talked with you, Mr. Vanley, I called Mr. Glenn again and told him Ernie was all right."

"Has Mr. Glenn notified the police?"

"No, he hasn't. He was about to leave his home when I called the second time, to go to police headquarters, but he said there was no hurry now. He would come down during the forenoon, he said, and we'd all talk it over. But he did advise me," she added with a smile, "not to talk to newspaper men. And here I am, talking to two of them!"

"But Glenn doesn't understand," Ernest Blake put in.

VANLEY walked back and forth across the room, several times, his head lowered in thought. He paused at the window, looked out, jingled change in his pocket. He turned.

"Mr. Blake," he said, "do you feel like entering into a compact with the *Beacon?*"

"Why," the young man replied, "I have great confidence in the *Beacon*—and in its reporters. When Sowers hit that driver behind the ear and took a chance on being smashed up, that was enough for me. I'll follow Sowers anywhere. Ah," he added, "what kind of a compact, Mr. Vanley?"

"A compact to get Joe Klondike."

"That's the ambition of my life, right this moment."

"We can do it!" said the city editor, with enthusiasm. "We can close in on him. For twenty years or more that crook has carried on, almost unmolested, all over the country—all over the world. He's brazen and thinks he's charmed—can't be reached by the police. Look at the impudence of the man, receiving you and Sowers in his apartment, not at all worried about your suspicions. Then an idea hits him. He's already kidnaped Miss Blake. He can summon crooks and gunmen and taxi-driving thugs right out of the air, like a magician. He can strike the quickest of any crook in this man's town—strike before a fellow can draw his breath. He's got places to put his victims away. He decides, between the time you two fellows announced yourselves and your departure, to put you away." Vanley snapped his fingers. "Just like that—and he's got the plot laid. You walk right into it. Now, I don't know what might have happened if Sowers hadn't wrecked that car over in Brooklyn. Miss Blake might have been a prisoner yet. You two fellows would probably be in some other hole, trussed up, perhaps. But the wreck twisted things about. I think that thug that got away for a while, the one who was caught a mile or so away, telephoned to Joe Klondike that that end of the jig was up."

"That sounds reasonable," Blake assented.

"The thing isn't ripe yet," the city editor pursued. "Joe, on second thought, wants to put a damper on you. He doesn't want you to go to the police yet. So he sends your sister back to you. That rather leaves you puzzled—a little bolder. But do you think he isn't going to strike again? Wait and see! Any minute now—anywhere."

He studied the Blakes.

"Your lawyer will be here presently. You will want to advise with him first. I know there's something big in this. You haven't told us yet, except that there's half a million hanging in some way onto this painting you're trying to locate. It's up to you and your lawyer whether you do tell us."

"It's up to me," said Ernest Blake.

"All right, but I'd rather you'd talk to your lawyer first. Lawyers are funny. They're fussy. This Mr. Glenn—is he an old man?"

"Old—and musty."

"He knew your father, perhaps?"

"Yes, and he's slow and poky. He'd have been here now, wouldn't he, if he'd had any pep?"

"He certainly would! He never should have gone back to bed again, after getting the first alarm. But I think I've got him," Vanley added. "If his house were on fire, he wouldn't send in the alarm until he had looked through a hundred and fifteen law books to see if there was a precedent for such drastic action."

"Right! That's Ambrose Glenn. But then," Blake told his guests, "I can understand his state of mind. He hasn't got a bit of confidence in my mission here. Thinks it's a wild, impossible dream. Not only that, but he thinks I'm using it as an excuse to have a high old time in New York, around the gambling houses."

"The suspicion of age for modern youth!"

"Something like that. I'm no angel, Mr. Vanley, but——"

"Hush!" Ernestine Blake admonished. "Any one would think you were terrible, Ernie. Why, Mr. Vanley, he isn't wild at all! He did have some trouble at college, but nothing serious."

"Mr. Glenn thinks it's serious," the brother insisted. "You see, he was a sort of guardian for us after our mother died. We never saw him until a few days ago, but we had lots of correspondence with him. Our mother died three years after our father. Securities she had in her own name, worthless at the time, were placed in Mr. Glenn's hands. But that stock took a big boom. The mines produced. My sister and I were suddenly well off. I went to college, 'Teeny,' too. Pardon me, that's my pet name for my sister. Mr. Glenn took a fatherly interest in us, and we think a lot of him, but when I got into a couple of scrapes at college, he became very stern. Nothing serious, you know. I wasn't put out of college, but the dean did write to my guardian. And Mr. Glenn hasn't had much confidence in me since then. He looks at me out of the corner of his eye, and when I sprung this thing on him——"

"He hasn't any faith in it," Ernestine Blake put in.

"I might as well suggest to him," the brother finished, "that he give his approval for an expedition after Captain Kidd's treasure."

The newspaper men made no rejoinder to this. They waited.

"Let's get some more coffee," Blake suggested, reaching for the phone. "I'm out of cigarettes, too. Thanks, Sowers." He jiggled the receiver hook. "This yarn will sound better over coffee."

CHAPTER X.

THE IMPROBABLE.

VANLEY called the assistant city editor at the *Beacon* office. He would not be there at ten. No, there was nothing exciting in the day's news, so far. Automobile wreck in Brooklyn, on the Ocean Parkway? Oh, yes, the ticker had come through with a better story on that. The man on the city desk read it over the phone. Two of the victims in the wreck had been identified as gangsters, with police records. The police were trying to hook them up with one or more crimes which had been reported during the night, though no loot was found in the car. There was no mention of Joe Klondike in the story. Neither was anything said about two men who fled from the scene of the accident. That was all. Yes, Vanley would be in as quickly as he could, but he could not say at just what time.

The city editor sat down to listen.

"You know a lot of what happened out there in Peakton years ago," Ernest Blake said. "You were mixed up in it, in a way, as a reporter—getting the news of my father's failure. You know he was swindled, swindled legally, but swindled just the same, and you know this fellow who calls himself Joe Klondike is the man who did it. I didn't understand it very clearly at the time. I was only about eight; but I do remember that my father was in great trouble, that his health broke, day by day, that my mother cried a lot, that the nickels and dimes didn't come to me so freely, and that finally we went to live in a little box of a house. I remember this Klondike, too—he called himself Turner then. I remember him first at our dinner table, a business friend

of my father's—a fine fellow to us kids—playing with us, and all that stuff. He was a handsome duck, just the man for a swindle, and he had the air and manners of a gentleman. He is a gentleman, gone wrong."

Ernestine Blake had withdrawn from the group and sat apart. Her face was sad under this recital of the melancholy past.

"I don't know just when the crash came. That is, I wasn't aware of much at the time, except that Turner didn't come to our house any longer, that my father once told me never to ask about him. He walked around the house sunk in thought, or stayed at his office far longer than his usual hours. There were lots of meetings at the house, busy men with papers, some friends trying to do what they could; others trying to get what they could, now that my father's affairs were tumbling down. But there was one visitor who came there many times, always in the dead of night, and no one but our family knew about him. You, as a reporter, Mr. Vanley, knew nothing about him."

THE two newspaper men waited without a word during the pause. Blake went on:

"He was an old man, with a beard that stuck out in all directions from his face. He was seventy-six years old then. I remember one of my kid ideas was that he looked like a caterpillar, for the hair of his beard grew almost up to his eyes. He was dressed in loose clothes that weren't ragged, but they fitted him so badly that he looked ragged. He was all bent over; hobbled around on a heavy cane. That old fellow was Lant Cunningham, the first mine boss who ever worked for my grandfather. He wasn't poor, for my grandfather had left him enough money to last the rest of his life, if he lived to be a hundred. But he lived in an old shanty, from choice, a couple of miles from town, near the first mine from which the original Ernest Blake ever took gold. He was with my grandfather from the first to the last, and he retired a few years after my father succeeded to the business."

Blake paused again. Vanley's memories were busy.

"And maybe it will surprise you," Vanley said, "if I told you I remember the old man—Cunningham."

"Nothing will surprise me about a newspaper reporter," Blake returned, with a laugh.

"I never knew, of course, that he visited your father in connection with his troubles, but I do remember a trip I made to the Blake mines—all of them—working mines and abandoned mines. I was after what we call a human-interest story. I met the old man out near that mine. It was the first ever worked by the Blakes; and, to prove that my memory's good, that's the mine in which your grandfather was killed, isn't it?"

"That's the mine—a slide of rock."

"Lant Cunningham told me the story."

"Yes, he'd do that. He liked to talk about the old days. The first mine had a sentimental attraction for him. It took him back to his youth, I suppose, when he and my grandfather had their fortunes yet to make, but were young and strong. Well, Cunningham, Lant Cunningham—he lives in that shanty to this day."

"Living yet! Why, he was so old then that——"

"He's ninety-two years old now. Sometimes he knows me when I go out there to visit him, sometimes he doesn't."

"His talk wandered a lot the day I talked with him," Vanley said reminiscently.

"His memory has been shaky ever since the accident—thirty-one years ago—before I was born, of course. He can't remember. He was knocked out by the fall of rock that killed my grandfather. His head has never been right since. He can't remember things. Flashes come back to him. I've known him to talk connectedly for as long as a minute at a time, then everything leaves him. He looks blank, gropes, talks of something else. I've had him to a brain specialist in Denver. Hopeless."

"Well, I got a pretty good story out of him. It took him a long time to get it out, but it made a good yarn. It was thrilling, like the story of all those old gold hunters," said Vanley.

"Yes, but there are some things he can't remember. That's the trouble. That's why my father went to see him often, after dark—sneaked out there. That's why old Lant came to see him so often in our house. Maybe you don't know it, but my father kept a man with Lant constantly for years, hoping that, if he did have a flash of memory on the important thing, the man would get it before the old mine foreman's mind went blank again."

"I didn't know that."

"No. Every one knew that father had a man there with him, but they thought he kept him there merely to look after Lant's comfort. He did, in a way; but there was another reason, too. Father often tried to get Lant to come to our house to live. But do you suppose any one could budge him away from that shanty?"

"And the old mine?" Vanley suggested. A shrewd look had come into the city editor's eyes. They gleamed behind his thick-lensed glasses.

"You've got the idea," Blake said quietly. "The old mine."

"If he could remember," the city editor continued his speculations, "you'd know just where to look."

The other nodded.

"I would. I'd know just where to look. If my father had been able to jog Lant Cunningham's memory, he'd have known just where to look. He'd have had assets that would have kept him out of bankruptcy."

"He would be living to-day," said Ernestine Blake, with a little catch in her voice.

THERE was a moment's pause, while old memories returned. Then Ernest Blake spoke again:

"It was bound to get out. It did get out. Rumors filled the town that somewhere the Blakes had assets. No one knew what they were. No one knew where they were—not even the Blakes themselves. The rock slide, that killed my grandfather and knocked Lant Cunningham's brain 'hay wire,' wiped out that knowledge. But somewhere in that brain is the secret. It's baffling. We can't get at it. We've exhausted every artifice and trick, every hint and suggestion, that might touch the spring and let daylight into that nook for just a moment. But nothing doing. The brain specialists say it isn't his brain so much as his nerves. If there were a bone pressing on the brain, it would be simple. An operation would do it. But it was the shock of the accident, the exposure he suffered for seven hours, lying there, with his head just above water, his legs mangled. They fixed his legs up, but they couldn't restore the nerves that were snapped. It's like shell shock, I suppose. Well, there he is, out there in that little house, talking and mumbling to himself. It's strange. Why, he worked as mine foreman after he got out of the hospital—worked for years. His brain was clear enough for that. But the past, it's all tangled up. He can't put it together—can't find the missing pieces. Lots of things he can't remember, but, of course, this is the most important."

"You have some one with him now—an attendant?" Sowers asked.

"Sure. Have had right along."

"Some one you can bank on, of course."

"A doctor," Blake told them. "An old friend of my father's. He's had his troubles, too. Went all to pieces a few years ago—drank too much. My mother straightened him up and gave him a home out there with old Lant. He practices a little among the poor, but he's glad to get that home. My mother fixed the place all up for them. They're snug and cozy. Lant has his income, under my grandfather's will. We look after them. The doctor is sixty-three. He says Lant is failing. Of course, he's failing. Why shouldn't he? Ninety-two years old. If he dies without remembering—well, we lose."

Ernest Blake seemed to be avoiding the subject of the painting. Vanley, shrewd student of human nature, suggested:

"Mr. Blake, you needn't fear that we will scoff at your ideas, as your lawyer probably did. You said he thinks it all a wild dream. Now there is something else."

Blake nodded. He plunged into additional details bluntly:

"There's the painting of my grandfather. Years ago some wandering artist came through Peakton and got two or three commissions among the business men. He painted a portrait of a banker. It was really a fine piece of work. I saw it about three weeks ago, still in that bank out there. The old men of the town say it's great. The painter displayed the portrait, and on the strength of that was commissioned to paint my grandfather. Well, he did a fine job on that, too. My grandfather had a strong face, a great character study, people said. I barely remember the painting. It was in our house; then my father let Lant Cunningham take it. Every time Lant came to the house he'd rivet his eyes on that painting. Father meant to lend it to him, that was all—but it never came back to our house. It was stolen."

"Stolen? Who could want it?" Vanley inquired. "A precious thing for the family, of course, but, unless it's a work of genius——"

"It isn't a work of genius. It's a fine portrait, but it doesn't get in the class of valuable pieces of art. I suppose it has some value—an interesting character study, well executed, of an old man. But a thief like Joe Klondike would not stoop to petty loot like that unless it had some other point in it."

"Joe Klondike!"

SOWERS rose up out of his chair, grinned at his impulsive display of excitement, and sat down again, with the exclamation:

"Wow! What a story!"

"Old Lant says he was the man who stole it. 'Turner! Turner!' he says, over and over, every time the painting's mentioned. Not only that, but he stole a whole lot of papers—old mine records kept by Lant when he was a foreman, and I don't know what all. 'Turner' is the name Joe Klondike used out there. My father thought Lant was raving—thought it until the day he died, and he passed out, with never a thought that Turner might have had an object in stealing that portrait. He thought that Lant had been knocked crazier by the swindle. But Lant insists that Turner came into his little house one evening, while all that trouble was going on there, and took the painting and the papers that were missing later. The fellow who stayed there with Lant didn't see the thief. He was in town for something, but Lant claims he saw him—claims it in his own way, of course, telling a rambling story about it. But when I got old enough to inquire into things, I noticed that Lant mentioned Turner every time I spoke of the portrait. Not once have I ever asked him about the portrait that he hasn't mumbled: 'Turner! Turner!' And he seldom mentions Turner when we're talking about other things."

"That's a good hunch," said Vanley.

"It's so good," Blake rejoined, speaking with deliberation, "that I've constructed a theory on it—a theory that Mr. Glenn calls a dream. My father knew that his father concealed gold—nuggets, coins and gold bars—for years and years. It was a habit he got into in the old days out there. The country was wild. The banks were not superintended by the State and the government as they are now. More than one bank had to close its doors after a raid by outlaws, and there were plenty of outlaws. As my grandfather grew older, it became an obsession with him. My father thought he must have put away gold worth in the neighborhood of half a million. I don't know. But my father believed it, and, furthermore, he believes that Lant Cunningham knew at the time where the gold was hidden. My mother believed it. Ernestine and I believe it. Now, he must have left some clew. Is it possible that the portrait contains a message? What inspired Joe Klondike to steal that portrait? I can understand his taking the papers, on the chance that he'd find a coded message—directions; but the portrait! Well, if Joe Klondike thinks the painting is some sort of a key to the mystery, there's something in it."

"If Joe had that idea," Vanley agreed, "that's enough for me. For I have great respect for the shrewdness and cleverness of Joe Klondike. If he did steal the painting, if he has kept it all these years,

it is more than a portrait to him—or, at least, it was at one time."

"That's my idea," Blake rejoined warmly. "Mr. Glenn laughs at the idea. Now, I like to talk with a man who has a little imagination."

"Thank you. And you came here thinking that he might have the portrait hung in one of his New York gambling houses?"

"I thought he might have it still. I thought he might have discarded the idea that the portrait was anything but a portrait, and fetched it out and hung it somewhere. It was a long chance—a remote chance, of course, but, before I'm through with it, I intend to get a look at Joe Klondike's private places, his home, his resorts—anywhere and everywhere he might keep a thing like that."

"That's a big job."

"But it's worth the try. I was in his home this morning. I didn't see the portrait. I'd like to look all through that house where they took Ernestine. That yellow-haired woman there—that sounds as though it might be another of Joe's homes."

"That's right," the city editor agreed. "Well, you fellows have a big job cut out for you."

"If I can take that painting back and stick it in front of old Lant Cunningham, work on him with it—let the old doctor keep pecking at him—never stop while Lant breathes—we might get at it, somehow. They say a man's brain clears out altogether just before he dies; the clouds go away. If I could have that portrait right in front of Lant, on his deathbed —— It sounds sordid, doesn't it? But a man ninety-two years old can't last forever."

"It isn't sordid at all. Old Lant himself wouldn't think so. He's groping for the secret himself. Does he talk about the buried gold? I assume that it's buried somewhere."

"Yes, he talks about it, but he can't remember. He beats his head with his fists and almost cries. He can't recall amounts or anything like that. 'The mine, the mine?' I say to him often. Sometimes he nods; sometimes he shakes his head. We've searched the mine, of course. My father did. I have, too, several times."

"Yes, surely. So the portrait is never mentioned, eh, that he doesn't speak of Turner?"

"Every single time."

After a while Vanley said:

"It isn't a dream, at all. It's a very thrilling story, beginning in the old West and running now into the underworld of New York. Impossible? I should say not. Improbable? Well, improbable things are happening every day. The improbabilities of life are the things that put human interest into a newspaper. That's what I'm always looking for—improbabilities that turn real. The probable things are big, but they lack color. I know that Congress is going to convene at noon to-morrow. Does that thrill me? It does not. But am I thrilled by the prospect that a young man from Colorado is going to recover a portrait of his grandfather from an adventurous New York gambler, and that portrait is going to give him the key to a treasure buried by an old pioneer in the gold fields? Am I thrilled by that? I am."

"And I'm going to have trouble sleeping, as badly as I need it," said Harry Sowers. "This——"

The telephone rang.

CHAPTER XI.

KNOCKED COLD.

IT was Mr. Glenn, a fussy old gentleman. He was buried, head over heels, in the law appertaining to civil contracts, and he had but little time for anything else; certainly, no patience with a young man whose wild fancies had led him into the rounds of the gambling houses of New York. He wore a pince-nez, with a ribbon, which he took off and put on a great many times during the ensuing conversation, as he gazed at the newspaper men, as if he were fearful that they might dig out of him a story of one of his own youthful escapades, and plaster it over the first page of the *Beacon* that very day.

"Now, now, young man," he said to Ernest Blake paternally, "it is just as I expected. A black eye, bruises on your

face—out all night, the Lord knows where! Mingling with questionable characters, I warrant you—so questionable, that they intrigue your sister out of her hotel at two o'clock in the morning, and the Lord knows to what dangers she was subjected. You can't—you can't delve into the underworld, young man, without getting thugs and villains at your heels. I—I am astounded that I did not insist on you bundling yourself back to Colorado when you first put this ridiculous proposition to me. But, out of the kindness of my heart, I humored you. I employed a private detective to get you a card of admission to gambling houses. I sent him here to escort you, only to find that you had already gone off helter-skelter with some riotous——"

"With this gentleman here, Mr. Sowers, to whom you have just been introduced," Blake put in, with a smile.

Mr. Glenn looked the reporter over more carefully.

"Yes, yes—Mr. Sowers. No offense, I assure you. And I see that you were treated likewise. You have a black eye, too. I hope you have both learned a lesson. But, as I was saying, it is so ridiculous! Miss Blake, I appeal to you, as an old friend of your father. You must induce your brother to return to Peakton at once. He has capital. No reason at all why he shouldn't settle down and get into business out there. New York is a wicked town. I don't believe for an instant that Klondike—Joe Klondike—had a thing to do with what befell you two harum-scarums. He's a wicked man, but no time has he to bother with such a sensational plot as you would lead me to believe in. You were followed out of the gambling house by thugs, who meant to rob you."

Something of what happened had been told to Mr. Glenn, immediately after the introductions.

"Then why didn't they rob us?" Blake inquired.

"Why—why——"

"I had three hundred dollars in my pocket, a gold watch, a diamond stickpin. I still have them. Sowers had several hundred dollars, a watch and a pearl in his necktie. He still has them."

This was a poser. Mr. Glenn turned to the city editor.

"Mr.—ah, yes—Mr. Vanley—you appear to be a gentleman of some substantiality, and no doubt you have sound judgment. Your appearance is quite impressive, Mr. Vanley. Tell me, do you believe this ridiculous——"

"I believe it so strongly, Mr. Glenn, that the whole weight of the *Beacon* is going to be put behind Mr. Blake and his sister. We are going through with it. We are going to get Joe Klondike."

The legal gentleman blew out his cheeks, puffed a tremendous sigh, removed and replaced his spectacles four times.

"That—that," he conceded, "puts a different aspect on the situation. The *Beacon* is a respectable journal. You think that this—this delusion of my young friend will give you grounds upon which your paper can conduct a compaign to put Joe Klondike behind the bars?"

"I expect developments that will throw a net around him."

"A public service—a public service, sir! I congratulate you, Mr. Vanley. It should have been done long ago. I know well enough that he is the same man who swindled my friend, this boy's father, but I did not put stock in the theories this young man has advanced. I do not believe this gambler and scoundrel has the portrait. I never believed Ernest would find it. Yet he was so determined, so stubborn, against my most earnest counsel. Ah, well, it is encouraging to know that he is to be supported and advised by the *Beacon*. But, please, please, Mr. Vanley, do not let my name creep into your accounts of this thing, will you?"

"You have my promise, Mr. Glenn—unless, of course, developments should make it absolutely necessary to the news of the story."

"Thank you, thank you. I never knew the *Beacon* to be unduly sensational, though I have sometimes criticized the lengthy accounts of crime that appear in all the papers."

"We have to do that, when crime itself is lengthy."

"Yes, yes." Mr. Glenn fussed with his spectacles again. "Well, then, I suppose I am out of it."

"No, you're not," said Ernest Blake. "You have been our friend too long to be out of anything that concerns us."

Ernestine Blake came forward and added her grateful reassurances to the old gentleman.

"I have your interests at heart, always," he rejoined. "I suppose I am an old fogy——"

"You're an old dear!" said the girl. "And we shall let you know about everything."

Mr. Glenn nodded.

"Yes, yes, my child, keep me informed. I—I feel safe now; that is, I feel that you are safe. I am very much impressed by Mr. Vanley. But I hope you will keep me informed."

He presently departed, after looking skeptically at Harry Sowers. Sowers had the misfortune to be young, and the young men of this day and age—— Well, Mr. Glenn had his doubts. Furthermore, the black eye which young Mr. Sowers at that moment presented to the world wasn't exactly calculated to impress an old gentleman of his staid and conservative nature.

"And now," said Vanley, "sleep!"

He hurried away.

ONE of his first acts on reaching the office was to make arrangements for permits to carry firearms, one in the name of Harry Sowers and the other in the name of Ernest Blake.

Meanwhile, sleep came to the occupants of the suite at the Clevering. The door between Ernest Blake's bedroom and Sowers' room was opened. It was fitful sleep, filled with startling dreams, but youth is quick at recovery. At six o'clock in the evening Harry Sowers got up. While he was shaving, he heard Blake moving about in his room. Blake stuck his head in. His face looked much better.

"What's the program for to-night?" he inquired.

"Poker," the reporter replied.

"At Joe Klondike's place?"

"Yeh. We want to get him to watch us—put some more of his thugs on our trail."

Ernestine Blake called from the sitting room.

"But that's awfully dangerous. It means another night of—of—I don't know what."

"We'll get some one to stay with you, Miss Blake. I can get Vanley to send up one of the girl reporters."

"Oh! I'm not thinking about myself."

"Then don't worry about us," the brother interjected. "Sowers showed what he could do, didn't he?"

"He certainly——"

Harry Sowers stopped that talk with:

"Please don't talk about that. I was pulling myself out of a bad hole, wasn't I? You can't make a hero out of a fellow who fights his way out of a corner. Any one would do that."

They had dinner downstairs, despite their discolored eyes.

"We've got to hit Joe Klondike through his own men," the reporter explained. "Get a look at them, give them turnabout, and follow them—see where they hang out; maybe catch them in a meeting with Joe himself, in one of his many rendezvous. If we could just find the house where they took Miss Blake! The beautiful blonde there makes me think that's one of his real homes. He'd keep things there, maybe, that he wouldn't keep elsewhere."

They agreed with this.

"But I want to play poker, anyhow," Sowers told them. "This hundred dollars the office gave me for a stake, it's burning a hole in my pocket. It's the first time in my life I ever had that much to chance in a poker game. It would be awful if this story wound up quickly, and I didn't get a chance to play. I'd have to turn the money back in."

"I could stand a little roulette, myself," Blake said.

"I might win myself a fortune," Sowers speculated. "Vanley didn't say whether my winnings belong to me, or whether I'd have to turn them into the *Beacon*."

"You'd better get your winnings in your pocket first," the girl suggested, with a laugh, "and divide them afterward."

"That's a splendid idea," the reporter

assented. "But I always did count my chickens the day after I set the hen, and my figures never agreed with the hen's."

"What time shall we go up there, Sowers?" Blake asked.

"Not before midnight, I shouldn't think."

"All right. How about a show? We already have two tickets for the 'Follies,' and it will be easy to get a third."

"Thank you," Harry said, "but I shall ask you to excuse me. I've got to go up to my room—where I really live, you know—and get some more things. I may be here quite a while. But you folks take in the 'Follies.' No reason why you shouldn't."

They argued over that, but Sowers won.

The Blakes left for the theater about eight o'clock. Sowers thought it might be a good idea to sit in the lobby a while, to study the throng there, to see if he could detect any one who seemed to be watching him. He thought he would go to his home about nine o'clock to get some more things.

VANLEY phoned to tell Sowers to go to the *Beacon* office the first thing in the morning and get two pistols he would have there for him. When Sowers said he meant to visit the gambling house that night, Vanley thought he should have the pistols at once. But stores where they could be bought were closed. Vanley had thought the two young men meant to remain in the hotel that night, to rest up thoroughly after their experiences.

"Well, go ahead," Vanley finally said. "But just get a line on things to-night—see whom Klondike talks with, if he shows up around his place. Be careful of the taxis you take. Keep out of the tight places to-night."

"All right, boss."

Vanley had talked with the private detective sent to the Clevering the night previously by Mr. Glenn. The detective seemed to share the pessimism of the lawyer. He had not looked for Ernest Blake in the gambling house, thinking that he had given him the slip purposely, and was out carousing with some other young rounder.

In the lobby, Harry talked with George V. Glasswell, the obliging clerk. He already had Mr. Glasswell's photograph. Despite his tremors over the possibility that he might get into trouble over his action in assigning Sowers to a room next to the Blakes, who were strangers to the reporter at the time, Mr. Glasswell had not forgotten to fetch down the photograph.

Sowers was seated off in one corner of the lobby, watching for any one who might by any possibility have him under surveillance, when a bareheaded man with a Vandyke beard approached him, smiling. Harry had noticed him about the lobby for several minutes, sauntering around alone. He was middle-aged—a big, well-knit man, decently dressed in a dark business suit. He had rather sharp eyes, deeply set, a nose slightly crooked and flattened, a nose such as one often sees on a professional pugilist. Tenacity and strength radiated from the man, despite his ingratiating smile.

"Mr. Sowers?" he inquired, in a low, confidential voice.

Harry got up and faced him.

"That's my name," he rejoined.

"I'm Clay, the house detective," the bearded man informed him. "The manager thought it might be all right for me to have a talk with you. He isn't quite satisfied. He has an idea that the clerk who registered you did something he shouldn't do. Oh, you're not under suspicion, Mr. Sowers, but it is my duty to inquire into derelictions on the part of the clerks."

Just one idea filled Harry Sowers. He must protect the clerk—lie, if necessary.

"I'm sure I don't know of anything any clerk has done on which I could make a complaint," he said.

The detective looked around. Bystanders were very close.

"Could we go up to your room and talk it over?" Clay asked. "I'd like to ask a few questions."

"Why, yes. I don't mind answering questions."

On the way up he concocted a plausible story that he thought would clear George V. Glasswell of all suspicion.

Harry closed his door behind himself

and his guest, switched on the light, and turned. He was absolutely unprepared for what followed.

The big man's fist struck him squarely on the chin. The blow was delivered with the aim and force of an expert. It was a knock-out.

The reporter's tall body reeled backward and collapsed on the bed. He lay there insensible. Beyond the dull thud of the blow and the slight creaking of the bed springs, as Sowers fell, there was no sound to apprise any one that a man had been knocked cold in that room.

CHAPTER XII.

BY WAY OF THE ROOF.

THE reporter was out a very short time. When he recovered his senses sufficiently to be aware of things, he learned just how much can be accomplished in a space running only into seconds. A handkerchief had been stuffed into his mouth. A man, not the one who struck him, but equally as strong, had him pinned to the bed before he could make a move toward resistance.

The lights were out.

Sowers' efforts to cry out resulted in harmless gasps and gurgles. He fought desperately, while the man with the Vandyke beard tugged at a sheet, finally yanking it out from beneath the struggling men. The reporter noticed that this man now wore a hat. His companion, lurking in some closet on that floor, perhaps, had been intrusted with the hat, so that the other could appear in front of his victim bareheaded. That little detail probably settled things. The man, bareheaded, aroused no suspicion in Harry's mind that he was anything but the house detective. Had he had a hat on, a grain of suspicion might have entered.

Those crooks were clever. Crooks who did Joe Klondike's business had to be clever. They got the victim's point of view, considered the state of his mind, allowed for the psychology of a given situation, and laid their traps.

The sheet was being torn into strips. This done, the bearded man took a hand in the fracas. He plugged Sowers in the jaw again—coldly, with deliberate calculation, while the other fellow held the unhappy reporter's head in a favorable position for the blow. A butcher felling an ox would have struck that way.

Dizziness, a faint, then a suffocating ache in his chest. Harry's struggles had robbed him of his breath, and when he came to fully, he found that his ankles were bound, and that he was about to smother, with his face buried in a pillow. They had turned him over and were tying his hands. He could do nothing to prevent them. They rolled him over like a sack of potatoes, then drew away, to rest and confer in undertones.

Harry lay very still, striving to get back his strength. He was winded, and it was difficult to dispel the awful ache in his chest, breathing only through his nostrils. He felt once or twice that he must faint, but fought valiantly for his senses.

The man with the beard had gone into the suite of Ernest and Ernestine Blake. Whatever he did there, he did without lights. He was conducting a search, perhaps. He was very quiet.

His companion stood over Sowers, a dim, threatening figure in the gloomy room.

The other man presently came into the room.

"Sowers," he said in a low voice, "we're going to take you on a little trip."

The victim, of course, could make no rejoinder. The hinges of his jaw ached from the enforced necessity of keeping them wide open. Take him out of the hotel? That was cheerful news, for, how in the world, could they do that without giving him some opportunity to summon help? Impossible.

"I'm going to untie your hands and feet," the reporter was told. "You're going to walk right along with us. I'll fix that handkerchief so it doesn't keep your mouth open. You're gagging now. It's uncomfortable, sure; but I'll fix that. I'll tear it in two and stick just enough of it in your mouth to keep you from yelling. We'll walk along the hall—the three of us. If we meet any one, what do you think I'll do if you start anything?"

Harry thought: "Kill me probably."

"That's what I'll do, just what you're thinking. Just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "You can pull out of this, all right, if you obey orders. But I won't monkey."

Sowers believed him. All the while he was thinking how impossible this venture was for his assailants. Why, all he had to do was to give some one a significant look. There were any number of ruses he could pull before they got him out of the hotel.

"Just obey orders, that's all. You'll be treated all right. You're wise. You'd be a fool to get yourself polished off. We got you. You haven't got a chance."

They untied his hands and feet. He stretched his limbs.

He had made up his mind not to start anything in the room. Plenty of time to do that when they got into the halls. They were probably going to lead him down the stairways, out some side door, then hurl him into an automobile. But it was early in the night. There could not be any route out of that hotel absolutely safe for their enterprise. Kidnap a man out of a crowded hotel, lead him down eight flights of stairs, out a door, across a sidewalk!

There might be some way by which they could gain access to an alley without going into the street, but somewhere along the line, even if they went below the first floor of the hotel, they surely would encounter some one, an employee of the hotel, a fireman, an engineer, a worker in the big storerooms.

THE reporter's hopes were very high. One of his captors choked him, with deliberation, while the other stuffed a smaller gag in his mouth. He did not try to cry out when this operation was finished. It was a more comfortable gag, and he obeyed the command to keep his mouth closed. He did not think he could yell very loud; perhaps he could do no more than grunt; certainly he could not utter an articulate word.

They yanked him to his feet.

"Mind what I say now!"

The smooth-shaven man was peeping into the hall, watching the elevator cages, waiting for a safe moment at which to signal departure. It presently came. They hurried out and turned away from the elevators. There was as yet no one in that long corridor but themselves. They may have been three friends walking briskly to some room at the end of the corridor.

Step by step. No one appeared from any of the rooms. The journey, of course, required less than a minute. Just before they got to the end of the corridor, Harry first thought of the possibility of being thrown into another room, and held prisoner there. There certainly did not seem to be any way out in that direction. Fire escape?

But he hadn't much chance to think, no opportunity to rebel, after these possibilities assailed him, before one of the men suddenly opened a door at the end of the corridor, on one side, and pushed him through.

They were on the service stairway. Just a fleeting thought, a renewed hope that even on the service stairways they would encounter a maid, a porter—surely would in that long descent—and then he was pushed across the landing in the direction of the stairs going upward.

His hopes faded, but the muzzle of a pistol gouged his ribs. Three flights of stairs. The man with the beard took a key out of his pocket and opened a door. A gust of air told the reporter that they were close to the roof. They reached the roof by climbing another flight of stairs; then they stepped out into the starlight from the hooded covering.

Well, they had him, for the time being, at least. Any rumpus that he might kick up there would not draw help. It might, probably would, draw disaster. They had slipped it over on him. Until he was on that service stairway he had given no thought whatever to the roof. He was up on the roof, gagged, each arm held in a powerful grip, almost before he had a chance to think.

What next? It was very much of a puzzle, but Harry Sowers was sufficiently impressed by the ingenuity of his captors to understand that thin hope of escape lay ahead. He was helpless—at their mercy for whatever they had in mind.

He walked on tiptoes, under orders,

across the roof. They went down a fire ladder to the roof of an apartment house four stories below the roof of the hotel. One of Harry's captors went first, quite a distance below him, looking up, gun in hand. The other followed the prisoner down, his legs out of Harry's reach, watching him, also gun in hand. This was not the ordinary winding fire escape, but an iron ladder, one of two on that side of the hotel, put up for additional means of escape for guests on the higher floors who might be driven by fire to the roof. No windows opened onto the ladder.

They crossed the roof of the apartment house.

From the edge of that they jumped down to the roof of a business building, only half a story below, Harry jumping second. He was thus always under cover of one gun, at least. From there they got onto the roof of a row of old-fashioned dwelling houses, which yet remain standing in many of New York's streets and avenues.

Into one of these they descended, by way of a hooded stairway. Another man had met them at the top. Sowers calculated that he was perhaps half of one of the city's long blocks from the Clevering.

On the third floor of this house he was thrust into a room and left there alone. He pulled the piece of handkerchief out of his mouth, but did not cry out. What was the use?

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUMMONS FOR HELP.

THE room was in the middle of the house. There was no window in it, as the building abutted against the wall of another. Light was afforded by a single electric bulb, of weak candle power. The only ventilation possible was through the transom above the door. The air had a stale smell; the furnishings a musty look. A rickety iron bed stood against one wall, with a coverlet as thin as tissue. The bed sagged in the middle, and the pillows had a flat, unrestful look. There was a heavy, square table, a rocker and a straight-backed chair. The dresser was bare; indeed, the bareness of all the pieces except the bed was relieved by neither doily, scarf, nor cushion.

Sowers sat down on the bed. He stared at the door. When they left him there and banged the door shut, he had not heard the turning of a key. Yet he did not try the door. He did not wish to remind any one of this oversight, if it were an oversight.

He had cigarettes and matches. That helped some. The smoke hung in the room in lazy clouds. It was a large chamber, yet no more than a hole in the gloomy light and stagnant air.

Well, he had to pull his brains together. What would happen to the Blakes? That was hard to tell. Would they be kidnaped also? It was more than likely. It would be fairly easy, too, for the abductors to return to his room; he remembered that one of them took his key. He was probably waiting in the suite now. No reason why they couldn't make off with Ernest and Ernestine Blake as they had with him. None at all. But there was one chance. Vanley might call —might come to the hotel in person. Vanley, whose connection with Sowers was known to the manager, could easily get a key to his room. If he did that, if he visited the room—— Well, Vanley might be knocked on the head, if the kidnapers were there waiting. But if Vanley got one peep into the room, at the tumbled bed and the torn sheet, and got away, he could save the Blakes. Yet it was only a slim chance that Vanley would call.

Then there was another chance. Ernest and Ernestine Blake had to pass his door to get to their own. Blake might knock. Sowers had said he would be in the room, waiting. An unanswered knock might possibly arouse their suspicions. If it only did, if it kept them from entering their suite before an investigation, they might avoid his fate and be enabled to sound an instantaneous alarm. If the Blakes were kidnaped, too, the alarm would not be spread until the next forenoon.

It was five minutes to ten. The house was like a tomb.

Sowers had not been relieved of either his watch or money. It seemed an hour

later when his watch said three minutes after ten.

"I'll go nutty!" he exclaimed and got up and paced the floor.

He was up and down for the better part of an hour, fighting his curiosity in respect to the door. In time he would try the door, but not yet—not yet. A movement too soon in that direction might dispel that thin hope.

About eleven o'clock some one shoved in a pitcher of water. Sowers saw only a big thick hand. No key was turned in the door. He was certain of it now. Still he kept away from it.

The room and the halls were thickly carpeted. A half dozen thugs might be moving about just outside, and he not hear them. Neither could they hear him. He peeped through the keyhole, saw nothing but darkness, and hung his hat on the knob. That would keep them from seeing him. No face appeared at the transom.

Five minutes past eleven. Well, the Blakes would be getting back to the Clevering any moment now.

UP and down the room he walked, to and fro. At eleven thirty he began at intervals to listen at the crack of the door. It was almost twelve thirty before he heard sounds. Voices, low, abrupt snatches of conversation, a short scuffle, the sound of a body scraping the wall —all on the floor above—a door closing. Whispers on the stairway leading to the floor below; creaking of the stairs; then silence again.

The keyhole still revealed to him nothing but darkness. Continued silence, nerve wracking, baffling. A full hour he listened, but nothing came, not even the creaks from the staircase. He drank water nervously, drained the pitcher, then threw himself on the bed.

He had not yet turned the knob of his door, nor did he mean to do so until he had some kind of a plan.

One foolhardy move might cut off even that slim chance. He lay on the bed and smoked, staring up at the lofty ceiling; he thought he heard, from time to time, a creak in the floor above. But, when he listened for it, it did not come. It was only when his mind was elsewhere that he thought he heard it—vague, elusive, tantalizing. It was not there when he strained his ears.

If he were to make a dash, he ought to wait until very late in the night; until almost daylight in fact. He had no idea how many men were in the house, but the sounds he had heard convinced him that Ernest and Ernestine Blake had been brought in—were quartered somewhere under that sinister roof. Very late, some of the men, at least, would be asleep. If he remained quiet, hour after hour, the tenseness of their vigilance might relax. If he kept stirring them up with noises and movements they would never quiet down; they would be on watch every moment. He would, if he could, sleep—or pretend to sleep. Yes, that was an excellent idea.

He took off his shoes and coat and unloosened his collar. He turned off the light and stretched out on the bed; then he closed his eyes. But, of course, he couldn't sleep; he had to hold himself from smoking again. He shouldn't do that. The air of the room was stuffy enough as it was. Besides, he should convince his captors that he was too strongly intimidated to attempt escape. He must pretend to sleep, anyhow. He looked at the transom from time to time, but, with his own light out, that had become merely part of the general blackness.

Lying there, with his eyes closed, his thoughts began to emerge from the turmoil of the night. Before he realized it, he was thinking clearly, with an ease and speed approaching deduction. He had convinced himself that both Ernest and Ernestine Blake were in the house. They would be put in separate rooms, on different floors, likely. He had heard a door close upstairs. One of them put away? He had heard sounds on the staircase going down. Another led below and put away there? Three prisoners in the house, as far away from the street as possible, and yet kept safely separated. All right. There were four floors in the house, likely as not. These old dwellings were much alike. There were thousands of rooming houses in New York, with the same layout as this, from what Sowers

had seen of it: Halls with a door at each end, doors along one side, and an open staircase on the other. A man could stand at the banister of the top floor and look clear down to the first floor.

Sowers was on the third floor. At least, he had descended two flights of stairs, one from the roof to the top floor, then another. A second prisoner would be on the second floor, the third on the fourth.

He continued to think in a straight line. It was interesting, this process of deduction.

In the hypothetical situation he was creating, he had placed Ernest Blake either on the fourth or the second floor. Would not the man be put as high up as possible, so that if he succeeded by his greater strength and activity in getting out of his room and into the halls, he would have just that much farther to go to get down to the street? That reasoning put Ernest Blake on the fourth floor, his sister on the second. And would not they be quartered in rooms without windows? Assuredly.

The rooms at the ends of the halls, no doubt, had windows. The rooms midway of the house did not. So he began to think of Ernest Blake just above him, Ernestine Blake below. He listened again for some sound from above. Nothing—nothing from any quarter.

Well, what was the use of linking together such a chain of probabilities if his deductions were not somehow put to a test? None whatever.

BUT he should wait. Yes, he should wait. At last, he had a scheme, a theory to test. He lay on the bed trembling with eagerness, fighting off the desire to smoke. He lay there for ages, it seemed, exercising his will power. He thought it must be at least five o'clock in the morning. He ventured to strike a match and look at his watch. It was twenty minutes past three.

He fell back on the bed. He did not smoke. He had to stick it out—had to wait until at least five o'clock. Five o'clock in the morning would be a sleepy hour for the men in that house. Hour after hour, and no disturbance from any of the prisoners. The guards, wherever they were, whoever they were, would relax. It was humanly impossible to keep vigilance at the highest pitch when a man under guard hardly refused to stir.

Twice more he looked at his watch; the last time at five minutes to five. He got out of bed, in his stocking feet, feeling around cautiously for the heavy table. He found it and slid his hand along it. He pulled it out from the wall, an inch at a time, pausing every few moments in that velvet blackness to listen, to gaze at the point where he knew the transom was—seeing nothing beyond the imaginary specks of fire, which appear before open eyes in darkness as thick as that. He got the table where he wanted it. It was heavy, solid. The carpet, heavily padded underneath, gave no sound.

Then he felt for the chair. He had not previously touched it, but now he ascertained that it was sturdy. He placed it on the table gently—so gently that it merely scraped a trifle. He listened. Then he got onto the table and thence on the chair, standing in his stocking feet, straightening up a kink at a time. He stretched his arm upward, opened his hand, reached. He could not touch the ceiling. He did not dare stand on his tiptoes on that precarious perch.

He sighed. All the way down he had to come, striving not to make the slightest sound. It was difficult, nerve racking. Presently he stood on the floor, perspiring like a harvest hand.

Sowers did not know whether he had missed the ceiling by an inch or a foot. He had not seen anything in the room which he might use to negotiate the distance between his hand and the ceiling. He couldn't think of a single object which might be turned to his purpose.

All he could think of was a cigarette, but still he did not smoke. He meant for a few minutes longer to convince any one who might be listening that he was asleep. Then he began to look in the drawers in the dresser. He could not do that noiselessly. One of them stuck. It scraped when it did come open. All of them gave off some sound. And his search was unavailing there. Was there a drawer in the table?

He found it, and the moment he pulled

it open he heard some round object rolling on the bottom of the drawer. A penholder!

That might do the business. It was about six inches long. Sowers listened at the door again and heard nothing. He moved with more confidence now, up onto the table, the chair.

The dead silence was curious, yet he was certain that his own room and the rooms of the others were under guard.

He straightened up, lifting his arm, the penholder clutched in his fingers. He could touch the ceiling with it—more than touch it. Still he hesitated, fearful of the possible consequences. Well, he had to make a try at something—a move of some sort toward freedom. He must ascertain the whereabouts of Ernest Blake and his sister, if possible.

HE tapped the ceiling with the penholder. It gave off sharp little raps, which sounded extraordinarily loud to him in the silence.

Nothing happened. He stood there with bated breath, his legs trembling with excitement. His footing was secure if he kept his balance. He became emboldened, reached up, and tapped the ceiling again, this time harder.

Still nothing happened. Sowers understood the psychology of a person imprisoned against his will, on the lookout for a chance to escape. He ought to understand it. He had put in close to seven hours in that room, alone, filled with misgivings. If he heard taps on the ceiling below his room, he would speedily tap on the floor in reply—seize every little straw. There was a quality of hope, of promise, in such taps. Yet no reply came from above.

His deductions were probably all wrong. The chance that one of the Blakes was in the room above was very slim. They might not even be in the house.

He tapped on the ceiling the third time. Two quick taps, a pause, two more. He waited perhaps thirty seconds, decided he would take just one more chance. He tapped the fourth time, in the same measured way—tapped, then listened, with scant hope.

Then the answer came from the room above: Two quick taps, a pause, two more.

The reporter found his legs trembling violently. He was in imminent danger of toppling from his perch. He steadied himself, took a grip on his nerves, and applied the penholder to the ceiling, changing the measure now.

The answer was repeated from above, also to the changed measure. Hollow knocks, different in tone from his own, as though the person above were rapping on a carpeted floor.

Sowers descended, stood in the center of the room, tense, alert. The occupant of the room above rapped again, and still again—then desisted. It struck the reporter as a summons for help.

He crept to the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

NO CHOICE.

IT was unlocked. Sowers opened the door an inch at a time. Darkness and silence in that strange house; only the distant hum of an elevated train, sounds of a noisy automobile passing through the street below. What the darkness held he had no way of knowing. Some one might be standing six inches away, gun in hand. He explored around and felt nothing until his hand encountered the banister rail, a few steps from his door. He followed this around to the stairway going upward.

The stairs creaked, no matter how cautiously he stepped in his stocking feet. He might be walking into a trap. It was inconceivable that they would throw him into a room and leave him absolutely unguarded. It might all be a trick—the tapping on the floor above, the silence, the darkness—everything. He might be struck down. Yet he could not back up now. He did not back up. He kept going, following the rail up to the fourth floor and around to a point in front of the room above his own.

Was that door unlocked? Who was inside? Well, he had to press to the limit the streak of luck that seemed to have befallen him. It was mysterious, yet he could not tell into what mistakes,

errors of judgment, the fancied security of his captors may have led them. It was now or never. He stepped to the door, turned the knob, opened it.

"Sowers!"

"Yes, it's me, Blake."

Quiet whispers; Ernest Blake waiting in the darkness; the two men feeling around for each other; their hands meeting.

"How'd you open that door?" Blake asked.

"It was unlocked. I just opened it."

"Unlocked?"

Whispers, all whispers, with the door closed softly.

"Yeh—unlocked. Didn't you know it?"

"No. It wasn't unlocked a while ago. They gave me a pitcher of water. Forgot to lock it, I guess."

"Maybe. It's funny."

"Where's my sister?"

"I don't know. We'll look for her. They brought her here, eh?"

"Yes. Let's get started."

The brother was quivering all over. Sowers hesitated.

"I don't know," he said. "It's funny—awful funny—letting us alone like this. I don't like it."

"It *is* funny."

"But we'll have to keep going, I guess—just keep going. I think she's downstairs, a couple of flights, anyway. Come on."

They drained Ernest Blake's water pitcher, then started.

In the hall again, on the stairway, Blake in his stocking feet, too; one step at a time, long pauses in the darkness, past the door of Sowers' room, down another flight. Down the well of the staircase, on the first floor, they could make out a faint glow of light—pale, uncertain, seeping in from the street. But above that was darkness—the darkness of a house without side windows, with the front windows cut off by closed hall doors. At the rail on the second floor they stopped.

It was a chance. There were two doors on the side. Their fingers had come into contact with both. It was a problem which to open first, or to try to open. Either of the doors might open into Ernestine Blake's room; either might open into the room of one of the crooks who brought them there. It was a chance, a desperate chance, but one that had to be taken.

Sowers tried the door of the room immediately below his own. It yielded, and they felt their way inside; arousing no one, they continued to explore, going all over it. The room was unoccupied. They returned to the hall and tried the second door.

That yielded, too, and in that room they found Ernestine Blake.

"Oh-h-h!"

"Sh-h-h! It's us."

THE bed squeaked, her feet found the floor, and Ernest's arms found her. She was almost a dead weight, shook all over convulsively, gasped painfully in the effort to restrain her sobs.

"I've found it," she managed to say presently.

"Yes, yes—you're all right now. We'll get out of here."

Apparently the brother did not understand. But Sowers had stepped close to them, whispering:

"Found—found what, Miss Blake?"

"The painting."

Blake's body stiffened, and his arms tightened about the girl in his excitement. Then he came to himself and released her.

"Where?" he demanded.

"In this room—over there."

There was a long silence.

"I wonder if we could chance a light, Sowers?"

"No. We can get it down without a light."

"It isn't on the wall," the girl told them. It's in a flat box on the floor. It's wrapped in paper. And, Ernie, I think—I think I understand."

"You've seen it—studied it?"

"When I first came in, I noticed the box. There was no lid on it, just something inside, wrapped in paper. I unwrapped it. It was the painting. It was lying flat in the box. I saw it upside down first. The light was on then. I turned the light out later. I feel safer

in the dark—don't feel that they are looking at me, through the keyhole, the transom——"

"Yes, yes," her brother interrupted. "You saw the painting, upside down. What then?"

"I was at the head of it, when I took off the paper, looking at it at a slant. I saw—I think I understand. It may sound foolish, but——"

"No, no, it isn't foolish. What did you see, Teeny?"

"The old door—the old door that goes to the lower level, in Mine No. 1."

This was unintelligible to Sowers, well nigh so to Blake. It was bizarre and sounded like a vagary, the product of a feverish dream induced by the exciting events of the night.

"You think I'm out of my head," the girl was saying, in a louder whisper, "but I'm not. That idea struck me. I looked at it from different angles, always going back to the head of it. It was there, that door—so strangely. We played in the mine when we were small, Ernie. You remember the old stope door—the lower stope?"

"Yes, yes—I remember."

"In the portrait—grandfather's coat is open, that old-fashioned coat, old-fashioned vest buttoning high up, with his gold watch chain, the big one we still have, looping across the vest. Remember that old rusty chain on the stope door, Ernie?"

"Yes. It looped——"

"From one side to the other, remember—up, then down to the other side, held in the center by a peg, a spike. The watch chain, looking at the painting upside down, loops upward, too. The coat is open. The strip of the vest underneath looks just like that door, Ernie, with the string of buttons for that row of copper nails that ran down the center of it. The chain running across—oh, it looks just like that door. It's cut off square at the top. That's the bottom of the picture, looking—at it that way; and—and, Ernie—I know you won't believe me, but you'll see. You'll see it for yourself."

"What? See, what?"

"The links of the watch chain, Ernie—the links. They're letters, when you look at the chain upside down. They're done in oil. They look ragged, just little flecks of gold paint, but—but they're letters. I saw them!"

"You—you read them?"

"They say: 'Second pillar lower stope.'"

Silence again; Sowers bending close, absorbed.

"Yes, they do, Ernie. Those links—they spell that. 'Second pillar lower stope.' You'll see."

Ernest Blake spoke like a man in a dream.

"But there isn't any second pillar in the lower stope. They never took much ore out of that level. It didn't grade up. There's only a little chamber, and they left just one pillar. No second pillar there."

"Well, you wait until you see that chain, in the painting."

"I've been on the lower level lots of times. I've opened that door, pulled off the rusty chain. I've hunted there with Lant Cunnigham, trying to jerk his mind back. I never found anything. But I know they never took out enough ore to make a second pillar necessary. It isn't there, that's all. Think we'd better look at the painting, Sowers?"

"No, not here."

THEY came back to themselves, then. In the excitement of what looked like a discovery, they had wasted precious seconds—taken desperate chances.

"Let's go," Sowers said.

The method by which they would go required some thought. Neither Blake nor Sowers had shoes, hat or coat. But, if they were to go on downstairs, they certainly would not venture above for those trifles. They certainly were trifles now. The men had their money on their persons, their watches in their vests. One more flight of stairs, and they would be on the first floor.

Sowers and Blake felt around for the box containing the portrait. It wasn't large—perhaps three feet long over all, two feet across. They did not venture to turn on the light, for even one peep at the painting. Blake lifted the box.

Fear, grim apprehension, seized the reporter at that moment. But he did not express it. He led the way out of the room.

There was more light at the bottom of the stairs. Daylight, just peeping, enabled them to see ahead, in a gray, ghostly pallor. But the silence of the house remained unbroken; nothing reached their ears beyond the detached sounds of the city outside, a clatter of hoofs, the voice of a milkman calling to his horse, the rise and fall of the elevated's roar.

Yet the mind of Harry Sowers, filled with the idea that had come to him in the room, refused to be comforted by the seeming absence of the men who had kidnaped them.

"Be ready for anything," he cautioned.

At the bottom of the stairs he saw a telephone on a stand, close to the last step. His thoughts flew from one thing to another. They got down there, Sowers first, the girl next, Blake last, bearing the painting under his arm. Sowers and Blake looked woefully tough in that eerie light from the street, coming through the glass panel in the front door. Beaten up again before their faces had much recovered from the experiences of the previous night, they looked more like hospital cases than they did like men able to put up a fight against whatever odds might confront them. Blake's countenance testified to the fight he had put up in the suite at the Clevering. He had acquired another black eye. The flesh of Sowers' jaw displayed a red welt and a gash, puffed and discolored. The gentleman with a Vandyke beard had a sturdy fist.

The girl's eyes were wide open in fright; her face was pale; yet she moved as steadily as the men.

Sowers took a match from his vest pocket, snapped it in two, put one piece back, held the other in his fingers. For just a few moments they stood, the girl and her brother between Sowers and the closed sliding doors of the first-floor parlor. Sowers' fingers fussed with the telephone quickly, skillfully, yet he did not pick it up, nor seek to use it. For just a few moments, hardly longer than the space of a breath, he worked.

"The door," he whispered. "If it's locked, we'll smash the glass out."

A man's face appeared, framed in the glass panel of the door, rising up from the crouching position he had maintained in the vestibule. He tapped the glass with the muzzle of a pistol and grinned.

At that instant the sliding doors of the parlor opened. Faces, any number of them—a half dozen at least—guns, grins.

"Up the stairs! Back up the stairs!"

They had no choice.

Ernestine Blake shrieked, fainted and sank to the floor, like a dangling string suddenly released. The brother reached for her, but he was quickly seized.

Sowers' hands flew up. He yelled loudly:

"Don't kill us!"

Running feet sounded above stairs. There had not been a single moment in which they had been unguarded. They had been tricked; let to go just so far and no farther.

Back in the parlor, over the heads of others, Sowers saw the smiling face of Joe Klondike, handsome, triumphant.

"Don't kill us!" Sowers yelled again.

"Shut that fellow's mouth," Joe Klondike commanded.

Before they could get to him, however, Harry yelled again. He continued to babble entreaties that his life be spared, as they led him upstairs, followed by Ernest Blake and his sister, the latter borne by two men.

"The reporter's lost his nerve," some one said. And, indeed, it seemed that that was what had happened.

"He's cracked, wild-eyed, loony."

They pushed Sowers back into the third-floor room and shut the door. He continued to babble, begging his unseen enemies to spare his life.

Ernestine Blake, out of her faint, again in the room on the floor below, listened to Sowers' mutterings. She frowned, with great disappointment, and walked nervously about.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH A PIECE OF MATCH.

BUT Harry Sowers presently let up his whining entreaties. He may have been sleeping, for all the noise he made.

Yet he was neither sleeping nor altogether exhausted. He had his shoes on now, though he lay stretched out on the bed—waiting.

He had not long to wait, yet it seemed long. He became aware, first, of the tinkling of the doorbell somewhere in the nether depths of the house. Then footsteps hurrying upstairs, and, before he could get to the door, it was flung open, and two men pounced on him. They flung him onto the bed, and once again he suffered the gagging discomfort of a handkerchief in his mouth. They held him there, while things happened outside.

Another man stuck his head into the room.

"Hold him tight," he admonished. "There's a cop at the door. We're shooing him off."

"A cop! How——"

"That's the mystery."

He went away. Harry's captors studied each other curiously and in some alarm But they held onto him. He did not struggle, but he kept watching their faces, keen to detect every flicker of doubt and misgiving.

They did not talk. Then the panic in the house broke out.

The shrill blast of a policeman's whistle, in the street, penetrated to every room in that doomed house. Sowers' assailants leaped off him, as though his flesh had suddenly turned to red-hot steel.

"Raided!" one of them cried.

They dashed from the room.

The reporter got off the bed, looked out the open door cautiously, and hoped that Ernest and Ernestine Blake would not be too precipitate in leaving their rooms. Men were racing downstairs and upstairs, seeking escape by way of the roof and the basement—rats scurrying from the holds of a sinking ship.

The glass of the front door crashed, a shot—a volley. A clamor in the street, more running—the dull thump of hurrying feet on the carpeted floors and stairways. Ernestine Blake was sobbing hysterically. Sowers dashed into the hallway, his arm in the air. He took no chances on being mistaken by the police and shot down.

"Three of us prisoners here, officer!" he shouted to a policeman. "The girl down there——"

Ernest Blake raced down from the fourth floor.

But the police took no chances. There were three of them in the house. Others were arriving in speedy automobiles, throwing a net around that whole block. Blake and Sowers and the girl were corralled. All three uttered volleys of excited explanations. Sowers presently thought of his reporter's police card. He told a policeman it was in his coat, in the room. That did the trick.

There was a wounded man on the floor in the hall below.

SO far as any one knew, few of the gang got away. Eight were captured, in addition to the wounded man. No one but the crooks themselves knew just how many of them had been in the house. Sowers sought out a police captain.

"Did they get Joe Klondike?" he asked.

"Joe Klondike! Is he mixed up in this?"

"He certainly is."

The captain rattled out questions and hurried off somewhere to give that information to those searching the neighborhood.

Ernest and Ernestine Blake were in the first-floor parlor. Policemen were systematically examining the house. The three freed prisoners were told to wait there. They would probably be questioned very soon.

"Sowers," Blake asked, "just what did you do?"

"Do—when?"

"How did you fetch the cops here?"

"Oh, I almost forgot that. Some excitement, eh? Feel all right now, Miss Blake?"

"Nervous, but happy," she replied.

"You've got one more black eye than you had when you started for the theater last night, Blake."

"That's my specialty—accumulating black eyes. Somebody's painted your face a bit, too, since then."

"They played for my jaw this time."

"Come on, Sowers. How did you get word to the police?"

"Why, I telephoned them."

"Tele——"

"Sure." He led them into the hall and picked the telephone off the little table. "Why," he said, grinning a horrible grin with his battered face, "they haven't cut me off yet."

He plucked a broken piece of match from the little slot under the receiver hook. The hook dropped into place.

"That kept the hook up," he explained, "with the receiver still hanging to it. If they had seen the receiver off the hook, they'd have tumbled. But they never noticed that the hook was up—the phone open."

A certain troubled look which had been hovering in the eyes of Ernestine Blake vanished.

"The phone was open," she said. "Central could hear, plugged in, and asked 'Number?' And she heard——"

"Well, she must have heard, Miss Blake. I don't know of anything else that might have brought the police."

"And all that yelling you did here in the hall——"

"Of course! That was my message to central. Don't you remember I hollered the word 'kill' a lot?"

"I do. And you kept up your cries upstairs, just to cover up your ruse?"

"Sure. Did you think I was scared, Miss Blake?"

She smiled and looked her admiration.

"I'm awfully glad," she said.

The reporter thanked her.

"Of course, I was scared, Miss Blake," he insisted. "Honest, I was—good and scared. I'm no hero. But I knew we had to do something. Just before we all started down, I got a hunch that they'd spring out on us, before we could get outside. It's all a trick, I said to myself, to get us to talk, so they could listen in. Well, we talked. We'll discuss that later—how we chewed the rag in that room up there, about what Miss Blake saw in the painting. I don't know whether they heard us or not. But I got that hunch. I was up on the stairs there. I saw the telephone. If they'll let me get to that, I said to myself, I'll take the receiver off and yell 'Help!' until I'm knocked cold. But that wouldn't do, if I could think of something else. They'd be onto me the instant I picked up the phone—knock me out before central answered, anyhow. No message would get out that way. I don't know how I thought about the match. I was thinking of a thousand and one things about that time. It just popped into my head—seemed to; and, almost before I knew it, I was fixing the phone. A man can do a lot of thinking when he's scared."

"And when he's clever," she rejoined, "and has presence of mind. You can't make me believe you were frightened, Mr. Sowers—not ever!"

"Thank you."

THE look in her eyes thrilled, disturbed him, disturbed him because of the possibility that he may have woefully mistaken its import. That would be awful, to take encouragement from that, the way he had begun to feel toward Ernestine Blake—awful, to build up hope on that, only to have it dashed to bits.

But here, here! He had work to do.

He hunted up the officer in charge of the policemen in the house, got his consent to use the telephone, and called Vanley at his home.

"I'm pinched," he told the city editor.

"Well, stay pinched," Vanley growled good-naturedly. "You might have spent another hour in your cell without getting me out of bed. All right, all right, Sowers. What's the trouble?"

"The story's broke, boss," the reporter announced. "Police are in it now—other papers will get it—get some of it."

"I'll be right down," Vanley returned. "What particular jail are you in, by the way?"

"No jail at all. I'm in a private house, half a block from the Clevering. It looks like a cheap rooming house, with the roomers and the landlady and the chambermaid off on a picnic. The joint is full of cops, and there's a thug in the back bedroom, with a bullet in his arm. They've rounded up seven or eight others, and they're still frisking the roofs and the basements in the neighborhood—alleys and everything. It looks like a clean-up, except——"

"Except what?"

"Well, they didn't get the big guy. You know whom I mean?"

"Was he there?"

"He certainly was. And the portrait was here, too, but that's gone with him. There's a lot to tell you, boss. You may have to give me expense money for a long railroad trip, if you want this yarn cleaned up right. I've still got a poker game coming to me on the office, you know."

"Railroad trip where?"

"Colorado."

"You mean——"

"I mean that I see the finish of this story. It's out there—out there in that old mine at Peakton. And believe me, it's some finish! And the bouquets go to Miss Ernestine Blake."

"I'll be right down. What's the address?"

"I'll have to get it from the cops. I've never even seen the front of this house, boss."

"How'd you get into it?"

"From the roof."

He got the address and gave it to the city editor.

No word came into the house of any trace of Joe Klondike. The alarm was flashed throughout the city. But the minutes and the hours went by, with no report of his capture. He did not show up in any of his haunts; did not appear at his bachelor's apartment in Central Park West. It seemed that the police, at last, had something on Joe Klondike. They had never been able to hook him up completely with the gambling houses they raided. He slid out of those charges. But there was kidnaping—kidnaping, holding his victims under duress. Serious charges—good for a long stretch behind the bars any day. And three were creditable witnesses who would swear he had been in the house, to say nothing of the confessions that probably would be obtained from at least one, if not more, of his gang.

Joe Klondike hooked up, at last, as the captain of a gang of crooks and gunmen! All very well, but Joe declined to permit the police to lay a hand on his shoulder. The charges might just as well be no more serious than stealing peanuts off a roaster in the street if Joe weren't nabbed.

Harry Sowers had his own ideas. That portrait had been planted in the house, in Ernestine Blake's room of captivity. It was meant that she should find it; meant that the reporter and her brother should go sneaking about the house until they found her. If they already knew the precious secret of the portrait, they would talk about it, drop some word, thinking their captors had abandoned the place for some reason or other. They would be permitted to go just so far, to talk as much as possible, get to the door, in fact, with ears everywhere alert for a chance word that would reveal the secret.

Joe Klondike, or some of his men planted about the house, had heard something—some part of the conversation about what Ernestine Blake had discovered in the portrait. Joe Klondike had the painting. He was looking for the message of which he now had at least a hint. He was on his way to Colorado.

"But this job belongs to the *Beacon,*" Harry Sowers kept telling himself. "It's us who've got the goods on Joe Klondike, and it's our privilege to bring him in."

Yet the police would insist on full and complete information. Many of the prisoners had been recognized as notorious crooks.

Vanley came in, saw at once that the interior of the place bore no resemblance to a gambling house, and asked Sowers:

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I didn't come, boss. I was brought."

They had a chance, the Blakes and the newspaper men, for a private conference before the police began questioning them. Policemen were kind enough to bring in coffee and sandwiches.

And this was the story the police got:

Joe Klondike—Sowers had let his name slip out before he thought—years previously had swindled the father of Ernest and Ernestine Blake. He had learned that the children of his victim were in the city, knew they were rich, kidnaped them, probably for ransom—fetching the reporter along because he happened to be on the scene and was apparently a friend of the Blakes. The

portrait was not mentioned. Neither was the supposed treasure of gold. Vanley could not be blamed for protecting his own story from the energies of other newspapers. He wanted to go through with the story independently of the police. The police already had enough to spur them on in their search for Joe Klondike. Additional details were unnecessary. The police should be thankful for the load of crooks and thugs thrown into their hands. It was the *Beacon's* story.

And on that the Blakes and Sowers were dismissed by the police. With Vanley they went at once to the Clevering.

"If you fellows get beat up a couple more times," the city editor said, "you'll be put out of the Clevering on your general appearance. I doubt if the doorman would let you in now, if Miss Blake wasn't along."

THEY went upstairs to the suite, spending some time in recounting just what happened there. Sowers gave a thrilling account of the attack on him. The Blakes told how they had been waylaid and captured, when they stepped into the suite. They had been taken to the house down the street by the same route that Sowers had traversed. Yes, the girl said, they compelled her to jump the half story too, from the roof of the apartment house to the business building.

"Sowers," said Vanley, "I'm going to let you give your story over the phone to Reedy. Be careful now. Give him just what the other fellows will get out of the police. All of you will have to dodge reporters all day. The *Beacon* will cover enough of the story to keep from being scooped. But the big story is yet to come. The *Beacon* wants that. *exclusive*—by wire, from Peakton."

They elaborated on what they had already told him concerning Ernestine Blake's idea in respect to the portrait. He got it, detail by detail.

"I've got faith in it," the city editor declared. "Somewhere in that lower level you'll find it—the gold. The second pillar—you say there's only one pillar in the lower stope, Blake? Well, why not look at the spot where the second pillar would have been cut out, if the work there had gone on?"

Ernest Blake leaped to his feet.

"That's it—that's it!" he cried.

He stared from one to the other, with glistening eyes.

"That old granddad of yours," Vanley suggested, "was a man who probably wanted his children to work for what they got—exert themselves."

"Yes, he was that kind of a man."

"But he did leave a record of the secret and chuckled to himself over the stunt he framed up with that artist. The artist wasn't in on it, I don't suppose. The words don't reveal much. Probably thought the old gentleman was eccentric and humored him. He also told Lant Cunningham about it. But Lant has forgotten—can't remember."

Vanley considered things, walking about the room.

"And, somehow," he said, "I feel that it isn't a treasure you are going to find—not a chest of gold. It's something else. It's valuable, of course. I—I don't know. I await the outcome, hopefully and eagerly. Now, Sowers can leave on the next train. How about you folks?"

"We'll go with him," the girl replied.

"You can't take him away from us now," Blake asserted.

"All right. You may find Joe Klondike out there—you may and you may not. I'd go quietly out to that mine and drive down to Peakton from some place a few miles away. Don't let the news out that you're home, until you've had a chance to look things over at the mine. If he is out there, he'll lay a trap for you. If he got the hint as to what the portrait means, he'll be there. You can't escape it; he's a fast worker. Has his dens scattered all over town. That rooming house down the street, he got that some way—or has had it. Probably did have it as a lodging place for his thugs. It's hard for us to understand how he can frame up these things. But the underworld of New York is an amazing thing, anyway—stunts almost unbelievable come up right along. If I know what I'm talking about, we've got him—we'll get him out there at that mine. I'm

not going to handicap you with detailed instructions, Sowers. After all, it's Blake's job. You're just a reporter trailing along to get the story."

"He's the whole thing in this," Blake cut in.

"If it wasn't for Mr. Sowers," the girl supplemented, "we'd still be groping in the dark."

"Groping in the dark!" Sowers repeated with a laugh. "Thank you for the compliment, Miss Blake, but that expression makes me think I'm still in that house down the street. I put in the night groping in the dark."

"And found a way out for us."

Vanley looked at the reporter with admiration.

"That was good work with that telephone, Sowers," he said. "Good work! The police say they got the tip from the telephone exchange. Well, as I was saying—you're on your own, Sowers, with the *Beacon* behind you for expense money. I can't tell you what to do. I don't know what you'll be up against. Get the story, is all I can say. You don't need instructions. You've proved that."

"Say," Sowers begged, "lay off, will you, folks? Honest, you make me feel like a curly-haired hero who's just rescued a boatload of orphans from a sinking ship. What I'm worrying about, boss—I haven't had that poker game yet. I frame up an evening with the cards, my pocket bulging with more money than I ever had before for chips, and a guy walks in and bangs me in the jaw. But listen here: I'm going to have that game yet, if I have to play it with Joe Klondike and his gang in Sing Sing!"

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LOWER CHAMBER.

QUIETLY Harry Sowers and Ernest and Ernestine Blake disembarked from a transcontinental train at Denver. It was early in the morning. An hour later they took a train for a city twenty-eight miles from Peakton. There they rented an automobile and put in the day driving leisurely among the mountains, with a picnic lunch beside a sparkling waterfall.

They were less than ten miles from the abandoned mine, but they did not wish to appear there before dark.

Ernest Blake grew drowsy after eating, lay back on the grass, and closed his eyes. Harry Sowers and Ernestine wandered up a path, stood a few moments on a bold cliff and watched the sword play of the waterfall in the spring sunlight, scintillating and dazzling. They kept going, and when they got back Blake was up and stirring, full of enthusiasm for the adventure ahead, fussing with the lanterns and equipment they had brought along in the car.

"Well, folks," he said cheerfully, "I suppose you've got the scheme all laid, eh? It's going on six now. Time we get down there; it will soon be dark. Any suggestions?"

They hadn't any.

"What have you been talking about?" he inquired. "I thought when I woke up, you'd have everything mapped out."

"Don't you suppose there's anything in the world to talk about but that old mine?" Ernestine Blake rejoined.

The brother looked at their faces; presently he nodded and grinned.

"I guess there is," he admitted. "I guess there is, but I hadn't thought of it."

Darkness found them edging the car off the little rutty road that ran from the main highway down to the mine, seeking a place to conceal it, lights out. They found a favorable spot under the trees, a quarter mile from their destination.

"Ernestine," said Sowers, "for the last time, I suggest that you stay here, in the car. Let Ernie and me go down there first and take a look. Things might pop the moment we show our faces. If everything's all right, we'll come back and get you. You say it isn't far from here, and that——"

"I'm going with you," she persisted. "I was in that house in New York with you and faced everything that you did. I'm back home now, and I'm not a bit frightened. Honest, I'm not."

"Of course you're not. No one said you were, but——"

"I'm going with you. I've got this shiny new revolver, and I'm all togged

out in these knickers and sweater. Just like a movie, isn't it? Now, would any director permit the heroine to sit in an automobile a quarter of a mile away, while the men were fighting? I should say not! The audience would walk out if she weren't in the thick of things."

"This is serious business," Sowers returned gravely. "You don't seem to understand—it's an adventure, yes, but there's no play about it."

"I know it's serious, and I shall treat it seriously. But I'm not a bit frightened. I wouldn't go down to that old mine alone for all the gold in Colorado, but with you—and Ernie, of course——"

"Aw, come on, let's go," Blake put in. "I never won an argument with her in my life, Sowers, and I don't think you ever will."

Each had a revolver. Each carried an unlighted lantern. Blake and Sowers also lugged various tools which might prove useful.

THE little house in which Cunningham lived was on the other side of the mine, from the direction from which they approached. They saw a light in the windows and occasionally some one moving about.

"That's the old doctor who lives there with Lant," Blake said. "Lant's in bed by this time. Always is at dark. Ninety-two years old, he is, Sowers."

"Poor old Lant," the girl murmured. "He's played with all the Blake children there ever were. Mother always knew where to find us, didn't she, Ernie, when we came up missing?"

"Always—at Lant's house."

"I'd like to go in to see how he is."

"Not yet."

They moved on cautiously, toward a rocky hill that threw its bulk in front, like a Gargantuan monster blocking their path. They moved ahead, evading the starlight by clinging to a fringe of undergrowth and scrubby trees that ran along the base of an adjoining hill. Here they stopped. Blake laid a hand on Sowers' arm.

"The mine's in that big hill," he explained. "Entrance is up a way, but not much of a climb. The shaft slopes down, and we'll have to bend over, going through it to the upper stope. The door to the lower stope is at the other end of the upper. We can open the door and jump down a few feet. It's in that stope—what we're looking for."

Sowers already knew that the area which included this hill belonged to Ernest and Ernestine Blake, as well as the little patch of ground on which Lant Cunningham lived. That property, worthless for agricultural purposes, had not been seized in the crash of bankruptcy which had overtaken Blake's father.

They kept on going and presently reached the point from which they would begin the ascent to the mine shaft.

"Look!" said Blake.

They looked. Under the brow of the hill, a few yards farther along, an automobile, lights out, was parked. They stood exactly where they were, staring.

"Nobody in it," Sowers whispered. "Wait here."

He crept ahead to investigate, gun in hand. After a while he returned.

"Trunk on the back of it," he reported; "trunk inside, and two suit cases. All empty."

They weighed this information. Empty trunks—empty suit cases!

"Some one's figuring on taking a load away from here," Ernest Blake suggested.

"Of course," Sowers agreed. "Well, he's on the job—Joe Klondike. No telling how many men he's got with him. He's in the mine now, searching. Wonder if he's got a lookout?"

They shrank deeper into the shadows at this suggestion and began to study the hillside, without getting any information.

"Well," Sowers said after a while, "we've got to get closer, anyhow. I wish that——"

He did not finish.

"You wish I was somewhere else," Ernestine Blake finished for him. "Well, I'm not—I'm here. You may be thankful for that fact before it's over with."

"What did I tell you, Sowers?" the brother said. "When she gets her mind set——"

"Let's go."

It was fairly easy going up the hillside.

Occasionally small stones rattled down behind them. They paused often to listen. On the last lap of their climb they were, all three, exposed to the open starlight. They made a dash for it and got into the blackness of the pit.

No sound came from within the mine—no sound of human activity from anywhere.

"Ernestine," the brother whispered, putting his head very close to hers, his hand on her hair, "you'll be careful, won't you, to stay behind and not get into it unless you have to, to save us? You can shoot, I know, but this may be a fight in the dark. They're in the lower stope, I'm sure. I want you to stay in the upper, hidden. If they don't know you're with us, you'll be our reserve force."

She promised.

SILENCE was impossible. Tiny stones insisted on clicking under foot, the lanterns, still unlighted, scraped the rock walls of the shaft from time to time. The descent was not very steep, but progress was difficult in that inky blackness, because of the crouch they were forced to assume. Blake went first, Sowers next, the girl following. The shaft was straight. Blake knew it—knew about the number of steps they would have to take before they got into the big chamber which was called the upper stope. At one point in the shaft they paused.

Blake put his lips almost into Sowers' ear.

"The rock slide was here," he said. "It's been cleared away. Water had come in after the heavy rains. My grandfather was killed right here, and Lant Cunningham was pinned down, in a puddle of water."

They continued. Some change in the air told Harry Sowers that they had come to the upper chamber in the mine. Something else told him, too—a glow of light on the ceiling.

Some one was working in the lower stope. The light from a lantern came through the open doorway, upward, and struck sharply at one point on the rock ceiling, suffusing the entire chamber with an unearthly glow.

Sounds—the contact of steel with rock; a scent of cigarette smoke. Voices.

"Watch when it falls—watch lively."

The subdued, precise tones of Joe Klondike, gentlemanly adventurer, swindler—tangled now in the intricacies of another adventure, digging in an old mine for a treasure of gold put away by a pioneer.

"I'm watching it."

Another voice—strangely familiar to Harry Sowers, but unheard previously by Ernest and Ernestine Blake. Sowers rubbed his jaw reflectively. He could almost feel the sting of the blow that had knocked him insensible in his room at the Clevering; he envisioned a face adorned with a Vandyke beard and desecrated by a twisted and flattened nose. It had developed that this man was not among those who kidnaped Ernest and Ernestine Blake. Joe Klondike had sent others to the Clevering for the second enterprise of that exciting night.

Blake took a chance on whispering again, his lips close.

"Sowers, if the play comes up, so we can manage it—if there are only two men in there—I want Joe Klondike. You understand?"

Sowers nodded. They could see one another now, in the light from the lower stope. Sowers could understand Blake's feelings. Here, at last, he had the man who had been an honored guest in the Blake household, and who had not hesitated to send his host into bankruptcy.

"And I want the guy with the beard," Sowers whispered back.

"Beard?"

"Yes. That other fellow down there—he's got a beard, if he hasn't shaved recently."

He rubbed his jaw again reflectively.

They placed Ernestine Blake in a position where she could command with her pistol the doorway to the lower stope, without being seen herself by men emerging therefrom. They put their unlighted lanterns down and clutched their guns—all three.

Then they listened—listened for any other voices that might reveal there were more than two men in the lower stope. But they heard only the voices of the two.

Blake and Sowers were separated now. Blake could not inform Sowers of the news he got from the talk below. Klondike and the man whom he occasionally called "Mitch" were cutting away the pillar in the lower stope, under the delusion that, with that removed, they would somehow come to the thing they sought. This indicated that they had not deciphered the message wrought in gold paint into the portrait of the man who left it. They had no doubt heard enough of the conversation in the house in New York, the talk between the Blakes and Sowers when they came together there, to glean the information that the lower stope should be the scene of their search and that a pillar figured in it.

The watchers were convinced that only two men were in the lower stope. They exchanged signals.

SOWERS and Blake stepped to the door, looked down, caught the interlopers on their knees, working at the base of the pillar.

"Stick 'em up, boys!" Blake commanded. "Stick 'em up, and get on your feet. Easy now! No false motions."

Joe Klondike's arms went up slowly. He stared at the apparition in the doorway, two armed men. Mitch did not even turn his head, his back being to the door, but he did put up his arms.

"One at a time—you first, Klondike. On your feet now. That's the boy. This way, this way—right up to the door."

While Sowers' gun hovered very close to his head, Joe Klondike stood with the utmost docility, his head and shoulders above the threshold of the door, arms up, while Blake got down flat on the floor of the upper chamber, reached down, and got his victim's gun out of his pocket. Mitch, facing the other way, could not see that for several moments he was uncovered. He continued in a kneeling position, hands in the air.

They compelled Joe Klondike to climb into the upper stope. His gun had been turned over to Ernestine Blake. She clung to one corner of the chamber, waiting almost breathlessly, eyes wide open.

Blake faced the swindler. For the first time Harry Sowers saw a vicious look on the face of the young man. He reached backward.

"Take my gun, Teeny," he said to his sister. "I've got this fellow now!"

Blake and Joe Klondike went at it hammer and tongs—man to man. Sowers leaped into the lower stope.

He moved with a speed that completely deceived Mitch, who was in his shirt sleeves, the butt of his gun sticking from a hip pocket. Just as Mitch turned to make a fight for it, Sowers yanked the pistol away from him and tossed that and his own into the chamber above.

"Get 'em, Ernestine!" he shouted. "Get the guns!"

She gathered them in, retreated to her corner, and stood there, guarding a small-sized arsenal, while the sounds of furious combat filled the mine.

Harry Sowers was the busiest newspaper reporter in all the world at that moment—fighting for his life. Blake had a comparatively easy job of it. He was fully as tall as Joe Klondike and much younger.

Mitch was a bruiser, a big powerful man—taller, broader, bigger in every way than the reporter. He was skilled in the science of physical combat. Sowers knew at the first rush that he had taken a foolhardy chance.

But he eluded the rushes, took ringing blows, kept his senses, and struck back. He did have speed, and his life was at stake. He was elusive. Mitch several times tried to gather him in, get him at close quarters, squeeze and pummel the life out of him, but Sowers always managed to slide away. Once he backed Mitch against the pillar, clipped him on the jaw and knocked his head against the rock support with a thump. Mitch was dazed, and Sowers sailed in.

He hammered the big man about the ribs and body, while Mitch groped for him. He ducked under his big arms, striking, sinking blow after blow into his adversary's midriff. Mitch gasped, roared with rage, and struck blindly. One of his blows connected.

It caught Sowers alongside the head and sent him spinning, but he did not go down, thanks to the wall that gave him support. He fought for his wandering

senses, struggled against the blinding dizziness, and had the presence of mind to dart to one side. Mitch fetched up against the wall himself. His quarry wasn't there. He reached for him, missed and began to rush, with a ferocity which reflected the murderous rage that filled his heart. He stormed about the rock chamber, like a man trying to catch a chicken that remained always just out of reach.

The pestiferous reporter assailed the big man, almost winded now, from front, side and rear. Mitch's eyes were bleary and a gash showed on his forehead.

"I want his chin—I want his chin," Sowers kept saying to himself. "That's where he hit me, when I wasn't expecting it—hit me again, while that other thug held my head. I want his chin!"

BUT Mitch's chin was hard to reach. Sowers was far from undersized, but the other man was so big—so awfully big. The weight of his body was enough to overwhelm his antagonist.

Sowers ducked just in time. It was a terrific swing that Mitch launched. The big fist raked the wall. His hand looked as though it had come into contact with a buzz saw. He roared in pain. But Sowers was after him then. He struck him in the short ribs and sent him into a corner, with his head down. Mitch was stunned, but still on his feet.

In that corner, just as Ernest Blake and Ernestine came to the doorway above, Harry Sowers finished his man.

He darted to his side, avoided the groping arm, swung under and upward, lifting his heels, just as his fist landed flush against Mitch's jaw. The big fellow went down with a grunt.

Sowers gasped for breath and staggered away. Blake gave him a hand and hauled him up to the chamber above. Then Blake dragged the insensible form of Joe Klondike to the door and pushed him off the threshold with his foot. Joe's form struck the rocks below with a thud.

"That's what I think of him," Blake said.

Ernestine Blake was looking down at the huge figure of Mitch, who was just scrambling to his feet.

"You—you whipped that big man?" she said to Sowers.

"He bumped his head against the wall," Sowers told her jerkily, still struggling for his breath. "That stunned him. I got him then, bang in the jaw!"

Ernestine Blake gave him a kiss.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO TELEGRAMS.

THE mine was as yet illuminated only by the one lantern that rested on a ledge in the lower stope. They lit others.

"The car is outside, Teeny," her brother said. "Get into it and make it into town. Fetch the sheriff and a couple of his deputies. Was that car unlocked, Sowers?"

"I never noticed."

"Go and see, Teeny," the brother went on. "If it is locked, come back here. We'll get the key off those fellows. Here, take this lantern."

The girl went away. She found the car unlocked.

Joe Klondike was on his feet, with Mitch. They were trapped. Egress from that chamber could be had only through the door above. Two men watched them from there, men who had any number of guns to support them. Joe Klondike had reached the end of his tether. His handsome face was far from handsome now, bruised and discolored. Indeed, none of the four men in that mine was an object of beauty. Fists have a desecrating way about them.

"There's something satisfying in it—eh, Sowers?" Blake remarked. "Give a fellow a good whipping, and it satisfies. I'd rather have that kind of revenge than to shoot a man. I'll never worry about Joe Klondike again—never lay awake nights dreaming of what I'd like to do to him."

"I'm satisfied," Sowers rejoined .

The men below overheard these remarks, but they kept their silence. They were sitting down, backs against the walls, dabbing at their smeared faces with handkerchiefs.

"They were cutting that pillar out," Blake said.

"Yes, I know."

"They were on the wrong track."

Blake stood in the doorway, looking at Joe Klondike.

"Where is the portrait?" he asked presently. "The painting of my grandfather."

Joe Klondike made absolutely no rejoinder; merely looked up impudently, scornfully.

His scorn did not abate when the sheriff and three deputies returned with Ernestine Blake, and, after a few words of explanation, took Joe and his friend, Mitchell, off to jail.

No sooner were Sowers and Ernest and Ernestine Blake left alone, than they descended to the lower stope. They searched there a long time, but found nothing.

"If the work had continued on this level," Blake said, "the second pillar would have been left here. They always leave pillars to support the ceilings."

They were silent a long time, feeling about the walls.

"Dynamite," Blake said presently. "Dynamite—to-morrow."

They left the mine and went back to retrieve the car in which they had come to the scene. On their way into Peakton, they stopped at Lant Cunningham's little house. Lant was asleep.

The old doctor was considerably agitated.

"All the commotion, out there at the mine," he said—"what is it? Ernestine stopped for just a minute and told me not to worry. But I'm excited."

They moved out of the bed chamber of Lant Cunningham, turning for another look at the aged face and bushy white whiskers. In that head somewhere was the secret they sought.

"You'll know all about it to-morrow, doc," Blake told him. "But don't say anything to Lant until I get out here."

"I won't."

"And now for home," Blake said.

"Home?" Sowers rejoined. "Not for me. Where's the telegraph office in that town of yours? I've got work to do."

"Why, we almost forgot," said the girl. "And we'll go with you—stay right with you until all your messages are sent."

"Now you folks go home and go to bed. Just show me where your house is. I'll come up when I'm through."

"You didn't leave us when our work was unfinished," she insisted, "and we won't leave you."

And they didn't.

The rest of the story is pretty well told in the archives of the Western Union Telegraph Company.

ABOUT noon next day, it still being early in the forenoon in New York, Sowers filed at Peakton, Colorado, a new lead for a story he had previously sent to the *Beacon*. The *Beacon* already had in type a thrilling story of the downfall of one of the city's most notorious crooks. Officers from New York were already speeding westward, with enough on Joe Klondike to put him within the four walls which had so long been awaiting him.

The new lead concerned a treasure which had been found that morning in the abandoned mine in which Joe Klondike had been trapped. It was not a chest of gold, nor a sack of gold. But it was a treasure, nevertheless—a rich vein of ore which, discovered by Ernest Blake's grandfather, had lain untapped throughout the years. It was a legacy—a hidden legacy, not a treasure to be picked up easily—one that had to be worked.

But all this additional information did not serve to nudge the mind of old Lant Cunningham. He was too far gone even to show any interest in the portrait of the original Ernest Blake, which was recovered from the hotel room of Joe Klondike, in a city a few miles away. Lant merely shook his head, blinked his watery old eyes, and mumbled unintelligibly. No one could be quite sure whether he recognized Ernest and Ernestine Blake.

So that story out of the past had to be put together as best it could. It seemed plausible that the original Ernest Blake, finding the rich lode in Mine No. 1, and already busy with operations in other mines, decided to seal it up for a time. This was done by cleverly fitting rocks together so that they appeared to be an untapped wall. He let it be known that the mine had petered out. Time went on.

Why not leave that vein for his son to

work? Did not it please the old gentleman's eccentricity to keep it a secret, to spring it on his son as a surprise? Who could say what pleasure he got out of his contemplated surprise when he decided to make a puzzle out of it, to compel his son to work out that puzzle? By chance he observed that one section of the half-completed portrait resembled the door of the lower stope. It did. It certainly did. Now that the Blakes and Sowers had a chance to study the portrait, the thing was striking—so striking that it wasn't at all strange that Ernestine Blake, chancing to look at the portrait from that angle, got the idea at once. The strip of vest revealed in the portrait, the row of buttons, the gold watch chain, might have been a painting in different colors of the old door with its row of copper nails down the center and the chain stretched across it, a chain fastened with a padlock ripped off by Joe Klondike. With the treasure filling her mind, with the feeling that it was somewhere in the old mine, and that the portrait held a hidden clew, it was not curious that Ernestine Blake, happening to look at the painting from exactly the proper angle, should see the resemblance to the door, and continue her scrutiny until she got the message wrought in gold paint into the inverted watch chain.

"Second pillar lower stope."

Make a man think! The old pioneer had had to think and work for his fortune. He had had to explore, to look in hidden and concealed places for his gold, to face baffling puzzles. It would not hurt his son any to think and to work, too, if he wished to tap that vein. So he dropped a hint from time to time that a treasure was there; probably hinted that the portrait was concerned in it; undoubtedly told the whole truth to Lant Cunningham—meant, perhaps, to leave a clearer record of the concealed vein of gold. A rock slide; the pioneer dead; the only living brain that held the secret a wreck.

And on down through the years, mystery and nothing but mystery. Gossip about buried treasure. The stories of concealed gold, coins and bars, grew. Old Ernest Blake probably had never hidden gold in that way in big amounts. Certainly, he gave up the practice when the country became more thickly populated, and the banks were safer.

But the rich vein had lain uncovered all through the trying financial difficulties of the pioneer's son. It was brought under the light now to make his grandson and his granddaughter rich.

Ernest Blake's life was cut out for him now. No longer did he speculate on just what business to enter. He knew—mining—gold mining. That meant the labor of getting the old mine in shape and all the multitude of details necessary to float the enterprise. The pioneer had chosen wisely in the matter of a legacy—a useful one.

And all this went over the wires in a news story—a great news story, it was pronounced, in the office of the *Beacon* and elsewhere. Mingled as it was, this tale out of the old West, this drama of the romantic gold fields, with the story of Joe Klondike—a scoundrel, yet colorful, handsome, adventurous, a villain to capture almost any one's interest—it really was a great news story.

The next detail in the archives of the Western Union is a telegram filed in New York:

Sowers, care Ernest Blake, Peakton, Colorado. Great story, old man. Use your judgment about clean-up and return when you think best. Suggest make trip back with Klondike and officers, but, if you think developments warrant, stay until clean-up. Man named George V. Glasswell at Clevering pestering me about photograph he wants printed. How about it? When you know definitely, wire time of your return. Use bank drafts for expenses. VANLEY.

And then a personal message going the other way:

Vanley, Beacon, New York. Thanks for kind words, but compelled for several reasons to tender resignation. Blake thinks big reward is due me, now that he's as rich as a half-witted Indian in the oil country. Maybe so. Am taking the reward, anyhow, and buying rattling good little afternoon newspaper in this town. For Heaven's sake, print picture. George V. Glasswell obliging clerk at Clevering who put me in the room from which

the fun started. Forgot all about him in the excitement. Sending photograph by mail. Forward salary check due me. Expense account will be mailed with letter of details tonight. Holding hundred dollars you gave me to play poker with. Big game here in the mayor's office every night and see my chance now if some one doesn't sock me before I get to it. Got big business chance here with newspaper, but could not return to New York, anyhow, as Ernestine doesn't like it there. Will see you when we go East to testify against Klondike and his gang. Planning honeymoon for that time, so New York State can foot the bill. SOWERS.

Vanley, finishing the reading of this telegram, leaned back in his swivel chair. He lifted his thick-lensed glasses to his forehead and wiped his eyes of a little mist gathered therein.

"It's great to be young," he murmured.

The clamor of the machines and the news ticker, filled the room. Stories, new stories, always something in this busy world to keep a city editor from dreaming too much.

"Reedy!" he barked. "How about another 'take' of that elopement story?"

"Coming, boss!" the genial Reedy rejoined, waving a sheet of typewritten copy at an office boy.

The complete novel in the next issue of THE POPULAR *is called "Black Marsh." The author is Will McMorrow, and the story will convince you that Mr. McMorrow is a writer whose work will meet with enthusiastic recognition by* POPULAR *readers. "Black Marsh" has all the elements of a good tale—mystery, menace, and well-sustained suspense.*

THE PITTSBURGH STOGY

THE tooth of time which devours all things from the wall of China to the lovely clapboard houses of New England, cannot wholly destroy the soul of a civilization. Long after its sticks and stones, its marble palaces and its triumphal arches have been buried in the earth from which they were taken, something of its spirit enters into the soul of a people, never to be wholly lost.

The American pioneer, who began to break the Westward trail just one hundred years ago, about 1826, a date which coincides with the last of the great scholar American statesmen, Thomas Jefferson, has left decided traces of his adventure in the popular mind. The rapid rise of mechanics and industrialism has blotted out forever his footprints on the Western sands. But some tags of pioneer customs and many expressions, souvenirs of border-land days, remain.

Most men who use tobacco are familiar with the type of cigar known as the Pittsburgh stogy. Not only in the Middle West, but also in the East, it has come to stand for a rough, strong "smoke," a he-man's cigar for the open. The contemporary Pittsburgh stogy goes back to the Connestoga wagon, and is a living connection with pioneer days, though it is safe to say not one man in a thousand knows its origin. The Connestoga wagon, a type of broad-wheeled wagon for the transportation of merchandise, was made at Connestoga, Pennsylvania; it was particularly adapted for freighting goods over the deep soil of southern and western Pennsylvania. Later it was adopted as the common vehicle of settlers bound for the prairies in the West. The drivers of these wagons were partial to a strong kind of cigar which has ever since retained the name of "stogy."

Maurice and the Bay Mare

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Stray," "The Fighting Gringo," Etc.

The true horseman, born to it and bound to it by an inbred love of the animal, admires a spirited horse. Old Maurice, the groom, in the days before he had had to turn to the less-glorious branch of the game, had experienced his share of thrills with lively thoroughbreds.

MAURICE the groom sidled up to me, indecision in the flicker of his bright brown eyes—indecision, which held him, with one hand raised to the level of my shoulder affectionately, as though he wished to emphasize the appeal so evident in his attitude. A quaint smile touched the corner of his mouth and vanished. A stranger might have thought Maurice timorous—Maurice, who had in his day ridden many a steeplechase in Ireland.

"Why do you take the mare out?" he said and glanced about to make sure that the other grooms could not hear him. "Why not have one of the boys give her a half hour in the ring, first? She has stood up three days, sir. I'm begging your pardon for mentioning it, but we've both been hurted by horses before, sir, and, you know, it ain't like when we were younger. Why do you take the risk?"

There was a fine deference in his manner and more—a solicitude that rather astonished me.

"Then the mare is in your string?" I asked.

"They fetched her up from the lower stable three days ago," he replied.

I had forgotten that Maurice did not know the mare well. She had but recently arrived from Tennessee, and even more recently she had been transferred to his stable.

"I wouldn't take the risk, sir," he reiterated in a whisper.

I was about to say, "Oh, yes, you would!" but I could hardly resort to such a cheap acknowledgment of his kindness. To have overcome his usual diffidence and made any suggestion at all, had cost him an effort, evident in the heightened color of his clean-shaven, pink cheeks. He glanced toward the grooms.

A quick light shone in his brown eyes when he again looked up at me.

"You'll ride her, sir?"

This was not so much a question as a challenge. He had raised his voice a bit, evidently intending the other grooms should hear him. I thanked him and told him to get the mare ready. I wondered if she had developed some dangerous trick since he had been taking care of her. I was curious and, I admit, a trifle nervous.

Instantly Maurice's manner changed. He nodded, shuffled to the stall, and led the mare out. Deftly he snapped the pillar reins in the halter ring. With brush and cloth he went over her from muzzle to hoof accompanying each stroke with a sibilant breath. The mare was spotless and sleek, yet Maurice's old-country pride would not allow him to turn a horse out that did not shine like burnished copper. Even in the semidarkness of the runway, her coat glowed and shimmered like sunlight on water. When it came to "doing" horses, Maurice had no favorites. He was as impartial as a machine.

I could hear him talking to the mare.

"There, now! Be quiet, ye huzzy! 'Tis old Maurice that's taking up your foot and not some murdering horseshoer, me lady! Be a good girl, now! 'Tis not I that would hurt you!"

Schooled to the pillar reins, yet resenting them, the mare stamped with haughty impatience.

Bridled and saddled, she was led out, her fine, glossy coat changing hue, as she moved, her head high, her ears sharply to the front. In her full eye glowed the courage of her breeding, not unmixed with mischief. Maurice made her pose and held down the right stirrup.

"She has ideas of her own, sir," he said, as I mounted. "A light hand and firm is what she needs. Good luck, sir."

Gently he let go of her head and stepped back. The mare quivered and bounded forward, tugging at the snaffle. She swept out of the yard and struck into a singlefoot—a gait natural to her, as natural as the high carriage of her head and tail. We swung into the bridle trail leading up the valley toward the hills.

THE trail was arched by wide-spreading branches of oaks and silver-mottled sycamores, and dappled with sunlight and shade. A gray squirrel scampered along a limb and leaped to a slender branch that bent and swayed above us. Yet the mare did not flinch, but swept on, her hoofs sounding a muffled rhythm on the soft earth. I marked squirrels off the tentative list of unpleasant possibilities. Round a wide bend in the trail the mare stepped on a slender, fallen branch. It snapped, and a piece of it flicked up and struck her, yet she did not flinch or play up. A vagrant wind, drifting along the afternoon hillside, scattered a heap of dead leaves piled beside the trail. The mare hesitated the least bit, then shook her head and went on. Fallen branches and dead leaves were scratched from the list. Farther along, a Mexican, clearing out brush, rose suddenly and stared at us. The mare stopped and snorted, not because she was actually frightened, but rather because she was indignant at being startled.

I scratched sudden Mexicans off the list. A horse would hardly be worth riding that would not be startled by such an apparition. A straight stretch offered, and I put the mare into a canter. She went collectedly, smoothly, and with fine restraint. My suspicions were rocked to sleep. I had begun to get the pace of the mare, to get in tune with her mood and manner of going. When such harmony is attained, riding becomes a superlative delight. But delights are ephemeral.

At the head of the valley are the gravel pits. And up toward the head of the valley a road crosses the bridle trail diagonally, a modern road, hard-surfaced and commercial. It is a highway for mammoth steel gravel trucks that, empty and loaded, go and come day and night. Their right of way is never disputed or ignored. What do they care about mere automobiles or even more insignificant horses and riders? These trucks are the clamoring juggernauts of civilization.

Shortly before we came within sight of this hazardous crossing, both the mare and I were aware of the heavy boom and roar of a motor. The mare stopped abruptly. I urged her on. She re-

sponded, going at a walk, but daintily, as though afraid of treacherous ground. I felt her grow tense. I surmised that she intended to whirl and run. The sound of the motor grew louder. I tried to take the mare on, that she might at least see what caused the noise, but she refused. Then, with the rattle and clash and clang of a drayload of iron pipe over cobbles, an empty gravel truck thundered past. The mare laid back her ears, whirled, and bolted.

It happened that I was fortunate enough to accompany her, but in a more or less impromptu manner. I had been told, often enough, that there are certain rules to observe in such cases: Use your legs; take a firm hold of the snaffle; don't take hold too hard; give your horse his head; sit down and ride; let him see that you are not afraid of that which frightened him; speak to him quietly; keep him going on. These rules are all very well, but the difficulty seems to be that there are no two cases exactly alike. About all there was left to do was to sit down and try to ride. Also, there were branches and tree trunks to dodge. The mare was cutting turns, with a wild disregard of obstacles. She did not seem especially interested in taking me past them if she cleared them herself.

I had a vision of foliage whisking past, of a winding trail that swept dizzily underneath, and of a sharp pair of upstanding ears, ever pointed toward the south and the stables. By great good fortune, I managed to get the mare down to a reasonable gallop before we made the turn into the stable yard. We made it together, but I came along merely as a passenger, not a rider. She stopped at the entrance to the stable, drew a deep breath, and stood quietly, with ears pointed sharply to the front.

Maurice came up, a quizzical smile tugging at one corner of his mouth. He stroked the mare's neck.

"You'll be taking her out again?" he asked.

I told him that I had dropped my whip, and thought I'd go back and get it.

"And don't forget to pick up your hat, also," he said. "I have known a gentle horse to shy at a hat in the road, him thinking, most like, that it was no place for a hat, anyhow."

AGAIN the mare went out of the yard, daintily now, at a walk. Arrived at the memorable crossing, she sidled, but went on. And when we returned, about an hour later, it was evident that she had not forgotten the gravel truck. While she was doing her best to behave, she did not intend to be caught napping. Back at the stable, I sat down in Maurice's old armchair, fetched from the tack room. Patiently he led the mare round and round the quadrangle, cooling her. He gave her a little water, then walked her again. Presently he fetched her up, took off her cooler, and went to work. Sponge, rag, brush, and water bucket—ten minutes, twenty minutes, and he was still at it. At last he led her to her stall, blanketed her, and gave her some hay.

Two of the grooms came from the stable, on their way to supper. Maurice puttered about, hanging up this tie rope and that halter, straightening the coolers on their racks, and tidying up the runway. Long shadows of early evening reached across the quadrangle. Quail called plaintively from the brushy hillside, west of the stable buildings. The sound of contented munching came from the stalls. Maurice fetched another chair from the tack room and sat down.

"Won't you be late for supper?" I asked.

"It can wait. I'll rest a bit." He glanced at me, his head the least bit to one side, a twinkle of humor in his bright brown eyes. "The mare, now—and did you have a good ride?"

I nodded and tried to appear casual.

" 'Twas good that you took her out the second time," he said. "Good for the both of you."

"It might have been worse," I told him.

"And you need not be telling me that, sir. But you must have patience with her. She is young and green—a country girl, sir, with manners to learn and city ways and the like. She is not mean, nor is she a fool. It's the wise head she has, and all the more reason for a man

to be wise in the handling of her. You cannot fight her kind, nor can you let her be the boss. I would take her along at any gait, but I would not let her take me, when she had a mind to. 'Tis hard to explain, but if you have the feeling for a horse, 'tis but a matter of time and patience, and you'll be riding as sweet a mare as ever I laid a brush to. You see, sir, I was not always a groom."

I told him that he was a whole lot more than that, as far as I was concerned. Perhaps, because I meant it, Maurice felt inclined to talk intimately of his past or a portion of it.

"I was not always a groom," he reiterated. "One time I had a little money put by and some good clothes." He smiled wistfully. "I'll not tell you about Ireland and the steeplechases and flat races I rode when I was a lad. And I was no more than a young man when I came to America. New York it was, where I worked for a gentleman, at his country place, a millionaire, sir, but that did not hinder him from being a fine horseman. I rode his hunters, trained them, and showed many a jumper of his at the Garden. Being a bit handy with the ribbons, there would be times when I would be driving his four-in-hand. He paid good wages. I put by a little money, thinking that maybe some day I would set up in the horse business, myself—in a small way, of course.

"But you know how it is. A man would be having a lot of friends, and what with the treating, and lending to them who would be forgetting to pay back, the money went. But I kept me good clothes, sir. I have some of them yet. Anyhow, one day I quit me job. I'll not be telling you why, but it was not the fault of me boss, and maybe not so much me own fault. I bought a ticket and came West. One time I would be working on a ranch, but always I would be moving on. One good job I had taking care of fifty brood mares and their colts. But when the man sold out, I left. I worked in many places, sir, and always where there were horses. But I must always be moving on. Maybe it was me pride that kept me moving on. I was not always a groom. Anyhow, I kept me trunkful of good clothes against the day when I would have the job I was looking for. And I thought I had found it when I came to this city and went to work for a man I'll not name, but maybe you'll be knowing who he is without that.

"But it makes no difference. He gave me a string to do—mostly jumpers that he was getting ready for the winter show. And there was my work, and I knew how to do it. It was not long before I was taking some of them over the jumps, with him leaning on his cane and watching me. One day he called me into the office and tells me that he will be putting another groom on my string, and that I will be exercising the jumpers and getting them ready for the winter show. And he tells me that if I keep straight, I'll be riding some of them over the jumps at the show. It was my chance. But it would have been better if I had never had that chance. You see, the man had in his stable some boarders and some school horses and some show horses, five-gaited and jumpers and the like. But what he cared for most was to buy and sell. He was not so much a horseman, sir, as a horse dealer, and there's a bit of a difference.

YOU see, sir, he would be buying a sick horse, or a lame one, or one with a bad temper, and doctoring them and patching them up and doping them till he had something that looked like a real horse. Then he would sell it. And he was clever at it. But it was not for me to say a word to anybody, although there was times when I felt like telling some nice young lady, who didn't know horses at all, at all, to buy somewhere else, and not to buy something that looked pretty and went sound with a trainer up, and the horse gingered and primped and too scared to show lame. But it was not for me to speak. My work was to condition and train the jumpers, and that I did.

"Yes, the man I speak of was clever at buying and selling. But tell me, sir, what dealer has not been fooled at one time or another? Now, there are some dealers who will buy a horse and get fooled on him, and, finding it out, they

will take their medicine. They are the kind that will try to get rid of the horse to some other dealer who is supposed to know his business. And there be dealers who would sell anything with a mane and tail to it, to anybody. And the man I speak of was that kind. And that is the great trouble with the horse business. Buying a bad one or a lame one discourages them as would spend their money, and you know, sir, 'tis the money of the amateur horseman that keeps the game going. And it is a queer game, at best. There be riders who will spoil the best horse money can buy, in a week, and say that the horse is no good and that they have been cheated. You have noticed, sir, that some rich people, who ride because it is the fashion, are always having trouble with their horses. And there be riders who will get along with most any kind of a horse. But money never made a rider, sir, much less a horseman. The best money can do, in the way of lessons, is to make a natural rider a better one. And it is a poor stick of a man that cannot learn something from a horse.

"But I would be telling you about the man who would be buying and selling, and who would cheat his best friend. In every stable you will find, maybe, one or two horses that it would be best to shoot before they kill some one. The man I am telling you about had one—a big chestnut hunter, with a blaze and one white foot. He stood close to sixteen hands and had good bone and muscle. His powerful hind quarters had just the right drop to make him a good jumper. He was the type. I have seen many like him in Ireland, but not with his temper. I would be thinking his sire was a thoroughbred and his dam a range mare. You see, he was shipped down from Alberta, with a bunch of hunters, and sold at auction. The man I was working for bought him cheap.

"It was not long before the horse had a bad name. He crippled one boy, broke his leg, and he like to tore the shoulder off one of the grooms. He was sullen, sir. There would be days when he would behave like any decent animal, sir, and then, without warning, he would bite or strike or kick or rear and go over backward. A devil he was. But I paid little attention to him, being busy with my own string. And the grooms that knew him didn't say much. They knew the old man wanted to get rid of him, and they were hoping he would, and that soon. You see, 'tis not so bad when a horse is honestly mean and shows it. But this one was sullen and tricky. I have seen one of the boys put him over two or three jumps and bring him in with never a wrong move. And I have seen him rear and come over back before he was scarce out of the stable. Just tricky, sir."

"I had been working on my own string, and I was bringing in one of my horses, when the old man told me to put a saddle on the blaze-face gelding and take him over two or three jumps. I wondered what the old man was up to, till I saw a young fellow with him—one of them kind that dresses horsy and tries to make himself believe that he has a right to be wearing them kind of clothes. As I brought the gelding out, I heard the old man telling the young fellow that the gelding could jump anything up to six feet, and that anybody who knew his business could handle him. 'He's got plenty of life,' says the old man, 'but that's what you want in a jumper. Go ahead, Maurice.'

WELL, sir, that horse took the first jump as square and clean as any horse I ever sat on. I brought him back and was for taking him in before he got a chance to show his meanness, when the old man told me to take him over the first jump again. I was for leaving well enough alone, but it was not for me to say. So I turned him and put him at the jump again. And, before he got his stride, I knew that he intended to run wide or refuse. And, knowing that, I forced him, and it took all I had to keep him from running into the corner of the wing and crashing through. But I got him over and fetched him back, him plunging and fighting his head.

" 'He's a good one,' says the old man to the young fellow. 'I admit it takes a man to handle him.'

" 'That don't worry me any,' says the young fellow. And then I knew he was no horseman at all, at all, and that it would be plain murder to sell him the horse. For, by the same token, any man who could tell one end of a horse from the other, could see that it was all I could do to put him over the jump the second time, and that he intended to run blind into the corner of the wing and not take off at all. I had him in the stable and was just turning him over to his groom, when the old man tells me to fetch him out again. I was afraid that the young fellow was going to try him, but it was not that. And, just as I came out, leading the gelding, the bookkeeper called the old man to the telephone. 'Begging your pardon for asking,' says I to the young fellow, 'but was you thinking of buying this horse?'

" 'And suppose I was?' says he, and he might just as well have gone on and said: 'What business is it of yours?' It was in his eye.

" 'He's dangerous. I wouldn't buy him,' says I. And maybe I looked at the young fellow's riding breeches and new boots a bit longer than was called for.

" 'Are you afraid of him?' says he, smiling.

" 'I am,' says I. 'He'd kill a man if he got half a chance.'

"The young fellow laughed in me face. 'I haven't much use for the opinion of a man who would knock his employer's business,' says he. It was a queer way of thanking me for trying to save his neck. And, what with handling the horse and the young fellow's talk, and how the old man was willing to chance having me break my neck, showing a devil to a buyer, I got hot in the collar. I had it in mind to say more to the young fellow, but the old man came from the office and walked up, swinging his cane. The young fellow takes out a cigarette and lights it. 'I'll buy him,' says he, 'if your man will put him over that jump again.'

" 'All right,' says the old man. 'Take him over, Maurice.'

" 'I was thinking of the show coming on, and the other jumpers,' says I.

" 'That's my business,' says the old man. 'If you haven't nerve enough to put a real jumper over that jump, you can't show any of my horses.'

"Now, the grooms had all come out and were standing by the doorway, watching us, and maybe expecting to see somebody get hurt. And it was the first time in me life, sir, that anybody had ever said to me that I didn't have nerve enough to take a horse over a jump. 'Twas a black rage that took hold of me. 'No man has ever said the like to me,' says I. And I mounted and took the horse down the field and turned him. When he lunged out and went toward the jump, I knew that I had lost my judgment of distance and stride, and more, that I didn't care. I was as blind mad as the horse himself. I fought him up to the wings, and I tried to hold him straight, him rearing and lunging. But no living man could have held him to the jump. He went into the corner. He didn't even try to take off. They told me he turned over twice. I knew nothing about that. I was down and under him."

MAURICE shrugged his shoulders. The ghost of a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"We all get it, sir, sooner or later. Of course, I have seen some of the boys that got hurted bad ride again, but they would have to have the liquor to do it. Their nerve was gone. And that is a terrible thing to happen to a man. But it was not nerve that made me put that horse at that jump. It was pride. I knew better. I should have refused to take him over. 'Twas plain reckless, and 'tis no credit to a man to be reckless, for then he has no judgment. If he comes through, 'tis luck that does it. And, sir, I had plenty of time to think about it all, on me back in the hospital. It was close to six months before they let me go. And me being a stranger in this city, never a soul came to see me, saving a young man who was riding master at the stable, a boy from Ireland, like meself.

"He would be bringing me a package of tobacco, or maybe some fruit, or a bit of a book to read, and telling me a joke or two to pass the time. And when I was to leave the hospital, he put some money in me hand, and says the boys at the sta-

ble had took up a collection to pay me hospital bill. You see, sir, grooms and stablemen and trainers will always be helping one another, when a man is sick or hurted bad. And many the dollar that is give outright, and many is the dollar lent and by the same token never paid back. But, then, sir, the fellow that will borrow and not pay back will be helping some other fellow, so it is all in the family, like. But the old man, who had money, he never came to see me once. But one day a lawyer came and told me I could sue the old man for damages.

"The lawyer would be asking me to sign a paper, saying he would take the case for half when we got out of it. But I did not like his talk, and I signed no paper. I told him it was me own fault that I got hurted, and that I knew the horse was bad, and the chance I took. It was a long time after that I found out the old man sent the lawyer to see what I intended to do about it. A trick of the trade, sir. But I signed no paper. I would not be blaming the old man. He knew the horse was bad, but also he knew I would be knowing it meself. They say there is some good comes out of everything. I don't know. But maybe my getting broke up saved that young fellow from getting killed complete. If so, I am glad. But I paid a terrible price for saving him, sir. Look at me hands! Sometimes I look at them and wonder if they belong to some old man with the palsy. And I am not an old man, sir. Ah, well, 'tis all in the way of our business. I'll always be with the horses. 'Tis in me blood. I was born and raised to it, in Ireland, and me father before me."

One of the grooms came back from supper. Maurice got up stiffly.

"I'll be getting a bite to eat," he said.

"But the mare," I said, as we walked across the quadrangle; "there's nothing mean about her. She's just young and lively. You can't blame her for wanting to play."

"No, she is not mean," said Maurice deliberately. "'Tis not that. I got to thinking, sir, why take any risk at all? You see, it is not just yourself—you have a family. With me it would be different. I have no one. I was paid for riding. It was my business. But you ride for pleasure. You are your own boss. You do not have to take any chances."

"Chances? Why, Maurice, I take a longer chance driving my car from here to my home, through this town, than I do when riding the mare."

"It may be so, sir. They do be smashing up cars and people something wicked. 'Tis hard to say what a man should do to keep his bones whole."

"That's just it," I said. "Where can we draw the line? Why, a man isn't safe, even in jail. There might be an earthquake. But we were talking about the mare. I am going to let you make a decision. I'll stand by it. If you were in my place would you keep on riding the mare, or would you ride a deadhead and try to make yourself believe you enjoyed it?"

"Deadhead, is it? There are no deadheads in this stable." Maurice's tone was brusque, but he smiled instantly. "And the others—well, I would be thinking the mare is the best of the lot. I will have her ready for you at the same time to-morrow, sir."

"SHINE, SAHIB?"

THAT'S what travelers will be hearing around the Taj Mahal in India, if we are to believe the latest reports from Calcutta. The natives have adopted a new fad—that of wearing shoes and shining them. Tons of shoe polish have been imported from England to meet the demand. Up to a few years ago, comparatively few natives even wore shoes. Fewer, if any, polished them. But now, every one is trying to outdo his neighbor. The brilliancy of the shoe shine may possibly become a new symbol of caste.

POP 5A

By

B. M. BOWER

Author of

"For the Good of the Service,"

Etc.

IN FOUR PARTS—

PART I.

Points

CHAPTER I.

BED ROCK AND UNDER.

THE sheriff's right leg swung a leisurely arc over the wild-rose pattern stamped on the cantle of his saddle, and dropped to the iron stirrup that dangled stiffly below the level of his horse's belly. The sheriff was a tall man, with wide shoulders and narrow hips and blue eyes that sparkled rather startlingly in his leather-brown face. As his boot clicked into place, the horse moved forward, following the other riders and the herd, but the sheriff reined him back to the youth who stood leaning against the corral post, staring with expressionless face after the retreating group.

"Got any plans, Cole?" Then he hesitated. Sympathy is often a more ticklish sentiment to handle than is blame, and the sheriff found himself groping for words. "You don't want to take it to heart, kid—about the propitty, I mean. I'm goin' to get all I can outa the stock, and what's left over and above the debts, of course——"

"To hell with the stock!"

"Yeah, well, that's all right, too. But it don't get yuh nowhere, kid. What I was goin' to say is, if you should want a job, why——"

"If I want a job I'll get it away from here."

The sheriff carefully selected a cigarette from the carton they were sold in; a "tailor-made," because rolling your own takes time when a man may not have it to spare from his business. While he drew his thumb nail across a match he eyed the young man covertly from under bushy eyebrows. The kid was taking it hard—which was to be expected—but it was a hardness that might lead him into trouble. The right word—— But who can say just what is the right word to speak when youth stands in dazed, impotent fury, while his world crashes around him?

"Look here, Cole. Don't get the idea that bad luck is a disgrace you've got to run away from. Your dad's layin' under ground because he made that blunder, and there wasn't nobody there to stop him. What if the market did go down, just when he figured it would go up, and he loaded up with stock there wasn't no sale for? Any man's liable to guess wrong! What if the banks did

No great, undying purpose filled young Cole Lawson, when he packed his horses and hit the long trail. Just to get away from everything and every one associated with a bitter chapter in his memory—that was the impetus. The objective rested with Chance. Cole, however, was soon to find that he could not hide from life.

West

close in on him? He ain't the first feller that's been crowded to the wall. Most of 'em, kid, are able to start right at bed rock and make a comeback they can brag about afterward. I ain't sayin' a word against your dad. He was a fine man, and what he done was on the spur of the moment, before he had time to think it over. But don't *you* go and let your pride——"

"Pride!"

Cole looked up at him then and grinned, with his teeth clamped together, and that same impotent fury in his eyes.

"I've got a lot to be proud of, I must say! Don't you worry none about my *pride,* Mr. Carroll. That's been tramped into the ground for keeps! My pride—— Oh, damn the world and everything in it! All I ask of it is to leave me alone."

"And that's meant for me, I reckon. Well, have it your own way. You will, anyhow. As I was saying, I'll get all I can outa the stock and turn over what's left to you. And if you want a job, you better get it with some of the outfits where you're known. You'll get a better break here than you will among strangers, kid. You never had to work for wages, and it's liable to come hard till you get used to it. You've got four darned good saddle horses there. Want to sell any of 'em, Cole?"

"No."

"Well, they ain't no vast herd, but it's better than bein' down to your bed roll—and that wore out. Better come along in with me till I see what I can save outa the wreck for yuh."

"Thanks! No; I'm heading in the other direction."

"Any idee where?"

"To the devil, maybe."

"Wel-l, they say he works his men pretty hard, and he's mighty poor pay. But I wish yuh luck, kid, and I hope that——"

Whatever he hoped, the sheriff thought better of mentioning it and tilted his spurs against the smooth coat of the sorrel, as a signal to be moving. He flung up a hand in wordless adieu and rode off after his men, without once looking back. For, when all was said that could be said, Cole Lawson, Jr., would have to live his life in his own way and solve his problems for himself.

With his teeth still clamped together so hard that afterward he found his jaws

aching, Cole watched the receding dust cloud that hid the last of the Lawson herds. The cattle had gone on a foreclosure of the bank, when the ranch mortgage fell due, and that was the day before Cole Lawson, Sr., had taken the muzzle of his six-shooter between his teeth and pulled the trigger. Pride—the sheriff had called that impulse. Maybe it was. Who knows?

"Thank the Lord, mother died before everything went to hell," Cole found himself saying aloud, and he bit his under lip painfully, when he realized where that thought would lead him. At any rate, it was better than having to see her suffer for his father's last, mad impulse. An upward tilt of the old six-shooter, a crook of the trigger finger—so slight an effort as that, and the brain that had planned and schemed and loved and hated became scattered, spongy stuff.

AND one was life, and that other, ugly thing was death! The wealth that had been his—what was that, save words written upon paper? Thousands of cattle branded with the "C Bar L"—that had been wealth for Cole Lawson and his son and sole heir. Well, the cattle had not died; they still fed contentedly on the range that had always been their home, but they were not Lawson cattle now. Certain words written on a sheet of foolscap had changed all that, just as certain words on another piece of paper had taken the Lawson lands and given them to a bank.

"Bed rock and under?" Cole said to himself, with a bitter twist of his lips. "They think I'm licked. They—— The whole darn bunch is *sorry* for me! Heir of the C Bar L—son of a suicide and heir to the disgrace of a quitter!"

He pulled his hot rebellious stare away from the dust cloud, now shrinking to the level of the ridge over which the last of the Lawson stock had been driven, and turned a long, calculating look upon the rambling old house where he had been born. The place looked as strange and unfamiliar to him now as though he had never seen it before in his life. Empty—a mere thing of boards and glass, half hidden under vines that were trying to hide the stark desolation of the place. And that was the result of words written on a sheet of paper and of a lump of lead no bigger than the end of his finger.

His eyes narrowed studyingly, as he stared and wondered why it was that he felt so much a stranger here now, when a few days ago the place had been so deeply embedded in his thoughts and his plans that he had never dreamed of living his life apart from the C Bar L. Why, even a week ago, he had taken it for granted that they were rich, and that his father would grow old in the customary activities of a prosperous cattleman. Yet only yesterday he was boxed and buried in commiserating silence. Even now Cole could not quite sense the enormity of the catastrophe that had come to his father.

A reckless impulse seized him to mount his horse and ride away, with the clothes he stood in and what loose silver was in his pocket; but his practical common sense forbade that gesture of childish defiance of fate. Instead, he walked deliberately to the empty house, entered rooms that had never before echoed so hollowly to his tread, and began to pack his most cherished and portable possessions. A stranger might have smiled at some of the things Cole considered of value: A quilt, which his mother had pieced together from scraps of her own dresses and aprons, each one of which Cole remembered poignantly, though many of them had been worn years ago, when he was a little boy who loved to sit in her lap and be rocked; a guitar, small and cheap, but nevertheless prized because it was her gift, proudly presented to him on his twelfth birthday; a few books which she had also given him, and finally a buckskin bag of gold coins.

This, too, was the gift of his mother—a bag with his initials worked in beads on one side. On his fifteenth birthday it had been laid beside his plate at breakfast, with a five and a ten-dollar gold-piece inside, each stamped with the year of his birth. She had laughed and said that it was the beginning of a nest egg which she expected him to save. The idea had pleased Cole, and he had declared that he would save a piece of gold

money for every year of his life, and have the dates to match. Well, he had stuck to that notion closer than he had to some others, and while his mother lived she had helped and encouraged him in making the collection complete. Now he weighed the bag in his hands and thought of the gold as money that could be spent, if ever he were pushed to that desperate point. A tragic awakening for the son of Lawson, the cattle king, who was reputed to be well on his way to a quarter of a million in horses, cattle and land!

These things he packed in a weatherproof, sole-leather bag, made to order after the pattern of a mail sack, which could be strapped around the top and padlocked. He left the house then and carried the bag to the corral, where he saddled Johnny, his own pet saddle horse. He considered that he was entitled to a roll of bedding, a small tepee tent, and what food he would need for his journey into the unknown world, where lay his future; and these things he assembled quickly, in haste to be gone from the place before sundown.

Such was the precision of his movements that the sheriff and his men had not driven the last of the C-Bar-L horse herd, five miles down the trail, before Cole himself was mounted and taking the less-used trail to the eastward. Two lightly packed saddle horses and the three-year-old colt, Hawk, followed trustfully behind Johnny. Cole did not know where he was going nor what he would do when he got there. He did not care. All he wanted was to put the C Bar L and its tragic downfall behind him—to outride the sympathy of those who had witnessed the crash, and to find some isolated neighborhood, where he could look into men's eyes and read there no compassionate knowledge of his hurt.

CHAPTER II.

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

MANY a man has attempted to outride his troubles, and few have ever succeeded; for who has ever yet been able to outstrip his own soul and the ruthless memory that calls thoughts trooping up to harry the fugitive?

In those first few days of flight, Cole Lawson would have been no more miserable had he stayed on the ranch or ridden in with the sheriff, as he had been invited to do. He was trying, for one thing, to outride the memory of that horrible minute when he had stood aghast beside the still quivering body of his father. Cole had loved his dad in an inarticulate, shy way that never found open expression. He had never suspected him of being in any deep trouble, and he could not account for the instant chill of apprehension which flashed over him when he had heard the shot in the room his father had used for an office.

Gunshots were not so infrequent on the ranch, where target shooting was a popular sport, and there were always hawks sailing up in the hope of pouncing upon a chicken and making off undetected. His father always had an eye out for these pests and never failed to send a shot after any hawk he discovered within range. Yet this particular report had sent Cole racing to the house, with his heart pounding heavily in his throat. For years to come he would carry a gruesome picture indelibly fixed within his mind, and, ride as he would, it flashed before him at unexpected moments when he thought he was thinking of something altogether different. The picture would never leave him.

He rode out of the Black Rim country by way of Thunder Pass, which sloped steeply up between Gospel Peak and Sheepeater Mountain, and so came down the steep trail into Burroback Valley, which seemed remote, sufficient unto itself, a world apart from the rangeland across the mountains. Cole had heard rumors of the Burroback country. It was said to be tough. But, then, Black Rim County was no saints' rest, so far as that went, and the toughness did not trouble him in the least, save that it put him a bit on his guard.

Burroback Valley was long and deep, with a creek running the entire length of it, and many little gulches and cañons twisting back into the hills, so that a map of it in detail would somewhat resemble the back and ribs of a great fish. The nearest railroad was miles away, and it

seemed to Cole that he might safely ride up to some ranch and ask for work.

The place he chanced upon first was the Muleshoe, a bachelor establishment, which lay just down the valley from Thunder Pass and seemed to hug close to the ribbed side of Gospel Mountain. It was a secluded ranch, which looked as if it held itself purposely aloof from the rest of the world; sinister, too, if a man were old enough and experienced enough to read the signs. But Cole was neither, and the entire absence of normal activity around the squalid ranch buildings served only to impress him further with the idea that here would be a sanctuary from his tragic past. Folks wouldn't know anything about what happened outside the valley, and they would care less.

A hard-faced, shifty-eyed man came forward to the gate, as Cole rode up, and he leaned over it, with his arms folded upon the top rail, one hand drooping significantly toward his left side, where the brown butt of a .45 stood loosely in its holster. Afterward, Cole heard the owner of the Muleshoe called Bart Nelson; but now, in the soft light of the afterglow, he never dreamed that so unsavory a character as Bart Nelson confronted him. He had not lived his life among killers, and the sag of Bart's right hand went unnoticed, and he thought the man was merely squinting against the light of the western sky and looked at him innocently through half-closed lids.

Cole asked for work, bluntly and without preface, because he did not know how to go about it, and he wanted the distasteful question out and done with.

Bart Nelson studied him—studied the four horses—good-looking mounts they were, too—and then glanced down at a white rock near by.

"What you doin' over in Burroback?" he asked in a flat, grating voice. "You're Cole Lawson's kid, I bet. Heard he went broke and blowed his brains out. Tryin' to sneak some horses out away from the sheriff?"

"Why, you go to the devil! That's none of your business!" Cole retorted, with quiet viciousness, and turned Johnny away from that gate, the other horses swinging to follow him, with the docility which tells of days on the trail together.

Bart Nelson straightened his shoulders and fingered his .45. No man had ever slapped back at him in that fashion and turned his back and ridden off, without answer of sharp words or shots. Other Muleshoe men mysteriously appeared and stared after the boy, who never once deigned to look back.

"Now, what d'yuh think of that for gall?" Bart Nelson inquired of no one in particular. "Somethin' behind that play, I betcha."

He watched Cole out of sight, his narrowed eyes sinister. When nothing developed, the Muleshoe men shook their heads and decided that the kid had been sent to spy around, in hope of not being recognized. When he had discovered that they were not such fools, after all, he gave up his plan, whatever it had been. Four C-Bar-L horses and a look like old Cole Lawson—and he thought he could pass unrecognized! The darned fool! Did he think they were blind? They all agreed with Bart that there must be something behind it, and they were all particularly wary for several days thereafter.

AS we all know, their uneasiness was causeless, for Cole had none of that boldness which his manner indicated. He rode away, sick at heart over the unexpected jab at his wound, just when he had believed he had outridden all knowledge of it. If his retort to Bart had been brutally direct, he had never been taught to set a guard over his tongue, but had been permitted to say what he thought, when he thought it. The men of the C Bar L had always liked him and humored him from the time he could string words together into a sentence, and Cole did not dream that he had spoken to Bart Nelson in a manner that might well have started gun play. The chief thing was that he had been recognized.

Of course it was the brand on his horses that had given him away at the ranch back there. There was nothing about himself or his outfit that would give any one a clew to his identity, and, as for his name, he had meant to tell

folks it was Colman, and let it go at that. No, it was the C Bar L, and he was a fool for not thinking of that brand as a dead give-away. The C Bar L must be known all over the West, and gossip rides fast, even in this big, empty country. Well, he would have to do something about it, he supposed.

As he rode on down the valley, Cole cast frequent dissatisfied glances back at his horses. They were the pick of the C Bar L herds, and most of them had been given to him when they were yearlings, all of them pets which he had broken and taught. One was a three-year-old colt, a round-hipped, straight-limbed animal, giving promise of speed and strength and wind—a gentle thing, with a disposition for nuzzling confidences. Cole thought fleetingly of selling them here in the valley; but that would be useless, and, besides, horses weren't worth much nowadays. They were worth so little, in fact, that Cole had turned in a small bunch of horses, which he might justly have claimed as his own, to help swell the number for the sale and make certain that the herd would bring enough to cover the debts which had driven his father to take "the six-gun route" out of the muddle. It was because these four were particular pets that he had kept them. He couldn't sell them now. There was still another way.

That night, in a secluded little meadow ringed round with thick bushes and quaking aspen thickets, Cole took that other way of removing the last clew to his past. He built a little fire, heated a cinch ring, in the manner he had heard described by his father's punchers, when they spun tales of the range on winter evenings, and he proceeded to wipe out the last clew to his past. One by one he roped and tied down his horses; then, with the white-hot ring held firmly in the fork of two green willow sticks, he marked out the C Bar L with deep, criss-cross burns. What he wanted was to make that brand forever undecipherable, and he succeeded so well that one would have needed to skin a horse and look on the wrong side of the hide to tell what the original brand had been.

SEVERAL days elapsed before he could bring himself to the ordeal of riding again to face the world he hated with all the fierceness of unhappy youth. The little glade seemed remote from the business of the valley, and his horses fed contentedly there, switching at the flies which buzzed tormentingly around the fresh burns. Cole fished a little, but most of the time he spent lying on the ground under a tree, with his hat pulled low over his eyes, thinking round and round in circles, which always brought him to the central fact that he was alone in the world, and that his life must start from that secluded little meadow.

It would be life on the range, because he had never learned to do hard manual labor, and he had refused to spend the years in school which were necessary if he would get an education; so he was not fitted for the competitive life of the towns, either as an office man or a common laborer. He had sense enough to know that, and he had pride enough to want to live where he could hold his own with the best of them. He could ride. The C Bar L maintained that Cole could ride anything that wore hair. He could bounce tin cans off the ground with bullets, while he galloped past and shot. as he rode; and he had an uncanny skill with a rope. Also, he had four good horses and a deep-rooted love of freedom and the outdoors.

The range, then—or what little of it was left—was his natural field of achievement. As he lay there, he sometimes dreamed of owning a ranch—and you could bet he'd never go in debt for a dime's worth of anything! There was still government land to be taken up, and he was of age. He'd call himself Colman, which was his mother's maiden name, and forget the Lawson. He could file on a homestead and work part of the time—say during round-up—and gradually get together a little bunch of stock. By the time he was thirty or so, he ought to be fairly independent.

It was the foundation upon which many a range lad has built castles in the air, and in the summer tranquillity of that small meadow Cole sometimes forgot his bitterness long enough to fence

and cultivate an imaginary homestead, build cabin and corrals and a stable or two and watch his small herd of cattle grow to big proportions.

But the time came when the bacon and flour ran alarmingly low, and Cole could not swallow another trout, especially when he had nothing to fry it in. The blotted brands had reached the stage of "scabbing" and would not, he hoped, attract too much attention. So one morning Cole broke camp and moved reluctantly out to the road again to face the world of which he secretly felt a bit afraid. As the three loose horses took last mouthfuls of grass and trotted after him, Cole twisted his body in the saddle and looked back. The little meadow was sunlit and peaceful. He knew the shape of every tree and bush that rimmed the grassland; the gurgling murmur of the brook had made words for him, as he lay staring down at it, watching it curl and twist among the stones. Even the clouds that floated lazily across the opening seemed friendly and familiar. There were the pressed places in the grass where the horses had lain down to sleep; the trampled nook where he had made his camp; the ashes of his small fires.

He hated to leave that meadow which seemed saturated with his thoughts—made homy with his days and nights of eating and sleeping there. But the grass was cropped short, and his food pack swung nearly empty, and man and horses must eat.

Cole heaved a long sigh and faced about to ride where the trail led him and to meet whatever lay upon it.

CHAPTER III.

WAITING FOR A SIGNAL.

COLE heard one of his horses snort, and he looked up from turning bacon in the frying pan to see two men seated upon quiet horses in the shadow of the broken ledge of lava, beside which he had made camp for the night. Cole lifted the frying pan off the fire to a flat rock close by and stood up, his thumbs hooked inside his belt, in the fashion he had learned from certain of the C-Bar-L riders whom he especially admired for a quality of potential deadliness which appealed to him. The men eyed him, then eyed the horses with a curious interest and muttered to each other. Presently they started toward him slowly, with an air of caution which might be flattering or menacing as one chose to interpret their manner.

"I guess there ain't anything much over this way you want," Cole said, when they had ridden ten feet nearer.

The men stopped, and the older of the two ostentatiously clasped his hands over the saddle horn, though that would not have slowed his reach for the gun stuck inside his chap belt on the left of the lacing, should he feel the need of his gun. He had a long upper lip, and when he smiled his mouth drew down into a pucker, which might give one the impression of a dry humor, half reluctant to betray itself just then.

"Don't want to intrude on any one's privacy," he said gently. "We was just ridin' by and seen your smoke. No harm in swingin' this way on the chance of bein' invited to supper—in case it was some friend of ours camped here." He paused to clear his throat with a slight rasping sound, and then added apologetically: "Folks that are shy of meetin' anybody generally pick drier wood for their fire. Got any coffee to spare?"

Cole was on the point of snapping out "No!" But these two looked friendly, and it had been overlong since he had held any pleasant conversation with men. Talking to your horses will do for a while, but the time comes when one wants to hear new thoughts put into speech. Cole relaxed, stooped, and replaced the frying pan on the fire.

"I guess I can split the grub three ways," he said gruffly, as he lifted the coffeepot to see how heavy it was. "You live around here?" He looked up from adding more water and more coffee, and his cool glance went flicking over the two, by no means off his guard because of one humorously suppressed smile.

"Wel-l, hereabouts," the tall man drawled, swinging down from his horse. "You're a stranger in these parts, I guess. Where from?"

"Points west," Cole said briefly.

"You'll have to eat with your fingers. I'm travelin' light."

"Fingers was made before forks," the stranger tritely answered and seated himself, with his back to the ledge. His companion got down and eased into place beside him. "We're travelin' kinda light ourselves."

Cole looked at the two, aware of a certain significance in the remark; but the other met his eyes with that same humorous smile drawn into a pucker of the lips. The younger man was staring furtively at Cole's horses, turning his eyes, while his face did not move.

"Out huntin' stock, and we didn't expect to get up this far," the man further explained. "These draws and cañons are sure a fright for huntin' strayed stock in."

It was the old excuse, time-honored and always good because it could seldom be refuted. Stock did stray, and men did ride out to find them. Hunting stray horses was a plausible reason for appearing anywhere on the range at any time of the day or night. Cole knew that well enough, and he wondered if it happened to be the truth this time; but there was nothing he could say to it, except to agree that the country sure was a fright. He had three cups—or, more particularly, he had two tin cups and a can—and he filled these with coffee, speared bacon from the frying pan and laid it across thick pieces of pan-baked bread, and told the two that supper was ready. They moved up and sat on their boot heels, eating and drinking with appetite.

"You don't happen to need another man, do you?" Cole asked at last, speaking to the older man, with a carefully indifferent manner and tone.

"Well, I could use one—the right kind. Ever hear of John Roper?" He eyed Cole over his cup.

"No. Don't know anybody around here. Just travelin' through; but I wouldn't mind working for a while—right kind of a job."

THE other chewed his bannock meditatively, watching the bay, Johnny, as he came nosing up for attention from his master. Cole had baked plenty of bannock because it was his habit to feed bits to his horses while he ate; now the horses all came poking along toward the camp fire, snatching at tufts of grass as they walked. Their freshly blotted brands would have caught the attention of the most ignorant tenderfoot. John Roper studied them and turned his eyes speculatively upon Cole.

"Them your horses—the hull four?"

"They're supposed to be," Cole replied, snubbing his inquisitiveness.

Both men grinned involuntarily and sobered again, save that the humorous pucker remained in John Roper's lips.

"Well, I could use a man with a string of saddle horses like them. Seem to be gentle enough; fast, too, by the looks of them legs. You can rope, I s'pose. How about shootin'? They's a pretty tough bunch rangin' in these cañons; we all go heeled and ready for a scrap. No use hirin' anybody that's gun shy or that can't ride."

"I'll chance coming out all right," Cole said grimly and looked over his shoulder at the horses. "I'll guarantee these four to go anywhere a goat can—and finish at the head of the parade. That," he added for good measure, "is why I've got 'em."

Roper studied him again, peering, squint-eyed, through the firelight. Perhaps he saw the settled look of misery in the boy's face and mistook it for something less innocent; perhaps he read the moody set of the lips as something evil and hard. At any rate, he glanced sidelong at his companion, who gave a slight nod of approval, and cleared his throat with that dry, rasping sound which was not much more than a whisper of a cough and seemed to be a little mannerism of which he was unconscious; an habitual preliminary to speaking his decision.

"Well, I'll give yuh work—for a while, anyway, till we finish up a ticklish job we got on hand." He shot a keen glance at Cole, who was staring moodily into the fire, while he smoked. "Ticklish, because we're dealin' with a tough bunch, and we want to handle it quiet as we kin. Got away with a bunch of horses I own, and I got reason to believe the brands has been worked, and they're

keepin' the horses right in this country. Me an' Pete has been scoutin' around to see what we could find out about it. What I want is to get 'em back on the quiet, without them knowin' just where they went to. Savvy?"

"I guess so. You're leaving the sheriff out of the deal?"

"Got to, when the sheriff's in cahoots with the gang. No, I want my horses back. May have to steal 'em, but I'll get 'em, if they're still in the country. You game for a little hard ridin' and mebby a little gun play? I don't look for no great trouble; still, standin' in with the sheriff and all, they're purty damn bold, and they might have the gall to fight it out with us; that is, if they git wise to what we're up to. If we work it right, though, we can run off the hull herd right under their noses and not a grain of powder burned. What d'yuh say, kid?"

Cole got up and gave Johnny the last piece of bannock before he shooed the horse back to tell the others there was nothing doing in the way of hand-outs tonight. He wanted a little time to think over this matter of the "ticklish" job, and he was too boyishly proud of his courage to let it be seen that he hesitated to accept. There was something about it which did not sound right; and it was not the element of risk, either.

PERHAPS it was the bald assertion that the sheriff of this county connived with the horse thieves; that did not gibe with all Cole knew of sheriffs; but, then, he had never known any save the big, bluff, kindly soul who had tried to comfort him when all the world was black. Of course there were not many like Carroll. Yet, dishonest sheriffs did exist, and he had always heard this section spoken of as a black spot on the range. He had ridden this way because it seemed the farthest removed in point of contact —farther than twice the number of miles in any other direction—and because the very toughness of Burroback men held them aloof from the rest of the world and so from gossip. His reasoning had been logical enough, but he had not taken into consideration the fact that the character of these people would be reflected in the work he hoped to find. Still, there was no use in being finicky, and getting stock away from horse thieves promised diversion, at least. And surely it was honest to get your own stock back.

"I'll try it out," he said, turning back to the fire. "It ain't just what I had in mind, but it's all right till I can pick up a steady job of riding, if I decide to stay in this part of the country. But, if I use my own horses, I'll want extra pay, and a six-gun job is worth a lot more than straight riding." He turned upon Roper a steady, impersonal stare which made him seem older and more experienced than he was. "So you may as well understand right now that, if I take this job, it'll be for the money there is in it, and that I don't give a darn for the risk."

"Suits me," Roper told him dryly. "Money's what we're all after, I guess. Any p'ticular name you want us to call yuh?"

"Yes. It's Colman, and you can call me Cole if you want to. How much do I get extra for furnishing my own mounts? They're dandies, and I'll guarantee them to do all any four horses can do."

"Anything but show a clean brand," the silent Pete spoke up, with an abrupt laugh that carried more meaning than Cole quite realized.

"Say, that brand suits *me*, all right."

"You're the one to be suited," Roper pacified, giving Pete a warning glance. "Well, how'd a hundred dollars suit yuh, for this one job? May last a week, maybe longer; won't be more'n a month at the outside. We've got to lay our lines careful and watch our chance; no use gettin' in too big a hurry and ballin' it up. Call it a month."

Stifling any surprise he may have felt, Cole said he would take it. The two got up and went to their horses and hovered there, talking together in low tones. Then Roper turned back for a last word.

"Better break camp and come along with us now," he said, glancing around him. "Might as well git yourself organized with us before anybody else runs across yuh. This is once when it don't

pay to advertise. We're goin' on home, and you might as well go along."

A reasonable request, thought Cole, and began getting his meager outfit together. He had taken his time that day, and the horses were not tired, nor were they especially hungry, since he had camped early, and they had been feeding industriously ever since. No; there was no reason why he should not go with Roper; yet reluctance nagged at him and made him potter over the packing. It was as if he were trying to remember something important which had slipped treacherously from his mental grasp; as if there were some very good reason why he should not go with Roper and Pete, if only he could think what it was.

At the last, Pete came up to help him with the pack lashing, his attitude one of impatience. Roper himself seemed uneasy and in a hurry to start.

"We got a long way to go, young feller," he said, to explain his haste. "They's a late moon, and we oughta catch it just right fer a bad stretch of trail. These horses of yours—they surefooted, you say?"

"That's what I said," Cole retorted, disliking the other's persistent way of returning always to the subject of the horses.

"Well, they need to be; we got rough goin', gettin' in from this side the Sinks. Ever been through the Sinks?"

"No. I told you I'm a stranger here."

"Yeah, so you did. Well, it's goin' to be hard work drivin' your loose horses over the trail we'll take. I dunno——"

"I don't drive them anywhere. They'll follow where I ride." Cole mounted, and the horses came up and stood grouped around him, waiting for the signal.

Roper eyed the bunch, grunted something under his breath, and swung in beside Pete. They started down along the ledge to where a broken crevice gave precarious foothold to the top, then turned into the fissure and went scrambling up. Loose stones rattled down among the boulders, so that Cole was kept busy dodging them, and Johnny snorted and would have turned back had there been room enough. But somehow he gained the top and saw where Roper and Pete had swung off sharply to the right and were picking their way single file along the brow of the cliff, their vague forms sometimes lost to sight among the stunted junipers, which grew courageously among the rocks, their roots thrust deep within the narrow cracks in the ledge.

ALL day Cole kept to the floor of the valley, these broken cliffs and ledges hemming him in and shutting him off from a view of the country beyond. Now the starlight dimly revealed to him a vast broken area that seemed a madman's conception of hell frozen over. Stark black peaks thrust up against the sky to the eastward, but before them lay a tortured land that told of the world's age-long travail of creation, when fire and flood, slow creeping fields of glacial ice and sudden blasts of subterranean fires gouged and twisted and spewed forth strange conformations of rock and soil. He wondered if the trail led down into that nightmare country, and, while he was speculating upon it, his guides turned into a tilted crevasse and went slipping and sliding to the bottom.

Cole spoke encouragingly to Johnny, glanced back at the three loose horses, mentally measured the width of the pack on Mick's capable back, and followed down that fearful incline. With some secret relief he reached the bottom without mishap, listened a moment for the click of hoofs to the front and went on, for the most part letting Johnny choose his own path. Once he heard the mumble of voices ahead; again, he caught sight of a man's head and shoulders silhouetted against the sky line, as he rode up over a billowy ridge of sandstone. A moment later he heard Roper's voice calling back to ask if he were making it all right.

"Fine and dandy," Cole replied, and he heard Roper's slight laugh much closer than he had expected. Another minute, and he saw that the trail doubled sharply back upon itself, and that Roper had ridden almost abreast of him and a little above. Cole pulled up sharply and waited. He did not want any rocks rolling down and crippling Johnny.

"What yuh stoppin' for?" Roper taunted. "Thought you could ride where a goat can go!"

"Quit kicking rocks down here, then. What you riding, anyway? A snowplow? That skate of yours must be digging his way through this hill!"

Roper did not say anything to that. Evidently he had gone on, for the small avalanche of sand and small rocks ceased. Cole went on, made the turn, and went up cautiously, one eye on the loose horses coming along the lower trail. A dangerous place, he decided and halted the loose horses with a word, making them stand still and wait until he had completed the switchback. Then he waited until they made the turn safely before he went on angling down the ridge in Roper's wake.

After that Cole lost all sense of direction and all sound of his guides, trusting mainly to the keen instinct of his horse to keep him on the trail, if trail there was. The foot of the ridge stood in deep, muffling sand; other ridges closed in, like the crooked fingers of some Gargantuan image of stone, and there was no sign of Roper or Pete to tell which way they had gone. He could have shouted for them, but he would not give them that satisfaction, after Roper's taunt. If they wanted him to follow them they could do the shouting themselves, he thought perversely, and waited in a triangular niche, where Johnny had stopped for the simple reason that he could go no farther forward and had received from his master no hint that he should turn back.

Cole dismounted and felt along the sheer wall with his hands, making sure that there was no outlet save the way he had come. It was dark as a pocket in here among the ledges. Surely Roper must know that a stranger would be utterly confused in such a place. He would come back, of course, when he discovered that Cole was not following him. There was nothing to do but wait, and Cole felt his way past the three trustful animals that had crowded in after Johnny, reached the sharp turn of the cliff, and leaned against it, waiting for some signal from Roper.

CHAPTER IV.

A HUNTED ANIMAL.

"HE never come this far, I tell yuh. He was over on the switchback when I dropped him, and he musta kep' on around the ridge."

In the act of licking a cigarette into shape, Cole stopped and listened, instinctively wary as a hunted animal. Coming stealthily out of the deep silence, as they did, the words carried a certain sinister quality, though of themselves they seemed innocent enough. Roper and Pete were coming back to look for him, just as he had been expecting for the last ten minutes.

"Hell of a note if we miss him," Pete's voice growled in a guarded undertone. "Yuh sure he climbed the switchback? You coulda popped him then."

"On that cattle trail? Might as well 'a' done it back there at the camp fire. No; the deeper we git him in the Sinks the better. Hell, I thought you was keepin' cases back there! Didn't I motion yuh to wait till he passed an' then foller him? Git him between us, that way. Now you come moggin' along, and yuh don't know where he is!"

"You was closer to him than I was, John. You had every chance in the world."

"That's all you know. Better go back and holler for him, I guess. This is no place to do it."

Flattened against the rock, Cole held his breath, while he listened. The two voices sounded close behind him, but that could not be, since he had been riding along a rock wall for some little distance until Johnny, still keeping alongside the cliff, had turned into the niche and stopped. Yet he plainly heard the clink of an iron-bound stirrup striking against the rock and the sigh of a horse, as he moved away. Not a dozen feet away it seemed, and Cole's hand slid along the ledge, half expecting to find another corner which the two might ride in a few seconds.

Instead, his fingers dropped into a narrow crevice, through which a cool breeze came drifting. Cole felt farther, found the solid rock again, and saw at once

what had happened. Through some freak of chance—or, perhaps, it was destiny that guided Johnny's steps that night—he had come down along one side of a narrow pillar of rock, while the two he had tried to follow rode down the other side. How they had happened to stop and talk beside that crack in the rock, only God could explain. But they did stand at that point to discuss, with bloodcurdling matter-of-factness, the details of their plan, and Cole was there to hear. Things happen that way sometimes when there is no other human means of protecting a man.

Cole at that moment did not feel the protection. All his mind could grasp was the fact that Roper and Pete had tricked him into coming down into the Sinks with them, so that they could kill him without fear of interruption or discovery. Moreover, it was much easier to get him down in here with the promise of a job than it would have been to carry his dead body away, without leaving a clew. He had camped too close to the road, and he had been too much on his guard. He remembered now that he had kept the fire between himself and them. They would have been obliged to shoot him, and they evidently feared that some one might be riding that way who would investigate. Down here—if they got him far enough into this ungodly country—no one would hear a shot; or they hoped to kill him quietly. Pete had mentioned a rock, Cole remembered.

It was the horses they were after, of course. They had been very much interested in the horses. Probably his clothes and his camp outfit appealed to them, also, and the hope of finding money. Cole trembled a little with the excitement of it, but he did not feel afraid, now that he knew just what to expect from them. He would be prepared, and he would shoot before they shot him.

But there his nerves rebelled. Too lately had he seen just how a dead man looked. No, he could not bring himself to face the thought of killing, however much they deserved it; yet it might come to that, if he wanted to go on living.

"And they had the gall to talk about a tough gang in this valley!" Cole's anger grew apace, as he recalled the specious talk of Roper at the camp fire. He had heard the C-Bar-L riders talk of such human wolves as these, but he had never quite believed that men would kill for the sake of a horse or two, or for a few dollars in money which they could carry away and spend. That had always sounded unreal and overdrawn, as if the boys were just yarning for the effect upon him. Now he was prepared to believe anything he heard about cold-blooded killers.

STANDING there beside the crack in the wall, Cole considered what he must do to outwit them. In the darkness he could not do much of anything; but then, in the darkness, they would not be likely to discover him, either. The trail, he decided, must run along the other side of this outcropping; how far, he could not even guess. By daybreak they would probably be able to track him in this loose sand; so, whatever he did, must be done as soon as possible. And that, he was forced to admit, was nothing at all, save watching and listening for their approach. At least the horses were safe for the present, penned in that niche, as they were, and the thought brought Cole some comfort.

How long he stood there, Cole could not tell, for he dared not strike a match to look at his watch. He dared not smoke or move about, since sounds carried plainly through that crack, and the two might come on up the trail at any moment. Fervently he hoped that the moon would forget to rise that night; and, after a long while, when the east began to lighten a bit, he saw that the sky was becoming overcast with clouds that scudded obliquely across the whitened patch just over a peak. Wind came, but no moon—a slow, sweeping wind that blew strongly and steadily without any violent gusts—such a wind as would have delighted a sailor aboard an old windjammer on the homeward voyage. It delighted Cole no less, for he felt the sand creeping past his legs and knew that it was drifting and would blur his tracks, even if it did not obliterate them en-

tirely. This gave him a fighting chance of escape.

Twice he thought he heard a faint halloo back in the direction from which he had come; but, with the wind whistling among the interstices in the ledge, he could not be sure. When his legs wearied of standing, he withdrew around the corner of the niche and sat down, with his back against the rock. Hawk, the three-year old, came up and nosed him wistfully, and Cole drew the sleek head down where he could rub the satiny nose and smooth the long forelock, running his fingers absently through the hair to smooth out each tangle. But, though the colt's companionship was gratefully received, he did not forget to listen with strained attention for the approach of Roper and Pete.

Dawn came gray and cloudy, with a high wind which whipped up the sand into stinging swirls that piled small drifts here and there against the rocks. In the open, it gouged deep furrows in fantastic patterns, and the whooping of the gale made an eerie song among the thin, sharp ridges that went twisting this way and that in labyrinthine windings through this particular portion of that strange, forbidding waste land locally called the Sinks.

When daylight was full upon him, Cole saw that the niche into which Johnny had led him might more properly be called a triangular cleft in the rocks. The horses stood huddled at the far end of it, where the narrowing walls sheltered them from the wind. This circumstance pleased him so much that he got his rope off the saddle and stretched it across the twenty-foot space, penning them there, well out of sight except from the opening itself. Had he been searching for a hiding place, this spot would have appealed to him as almost ideal, he thought, as he surveyed the horses contentedly standing in their little corral, Mick with his chin resting on Johnny's neck, Hawk crowded in between Eagle and Johnny, his big, dark eyes fixed inquiringly upon Cole. Get those horses? Roper and Pete would have to take them over his dead body, Cole thought rather melodramatically, and took out his six-shooter to examine it and make sure that it was in perfect working condition.

With the horses safe for the present, Cole turned his attention to the wall itself. It struck him that Roper and Pete would be looking for the horses and would never think of watching the top of the ledges; so he pulled off his boots and began climbing the wall on the side next the crack, which had proved so useful last night. The rough, splintered face of the rock gave many handholds, as he neared the top, the other side of the cleft tilted inward and offered its solid surface as a brace, so that presently he found it very much like climbing up inside an ill-shaped chimney.

IF it came to a fight, this would be a fine spot from which to defend himself and his horses, he thought, as he stopped to breathe and look down at them. There was one danger to be guarded against, he remembered. If he got out of sight, the horses would probably whinny after him. Certainly, Johnny would lift up his anxious voice and probably set them all neighing. Eagle, in particular, had a terrifically high, shrill call. He must bear that in mind and not go too far, lest their very love for him should betray them all.

As it happened, Cole discovered that the ledge narrowed like the peak of a wind-chopped wave, and that he could stand, waist-deep, on a broken splinter of rock within the cleft and look down to the blowing sand on either side.

With his eyes watering in the wind, he gazed out over an intricate jumble of narrow, winding lanes, hemmed in with barren, broken hills, which seemed to extend in an uneven line to the black peaks in the distance. There must be open stretches, wide spaces here and there, but Cole could see nothing of the sort close by; nothing, save the thin ledges thrusting up from the sand, with, here and there, piles of loose boulders where some portion of wall had fallen in a heap—shaken down in an earthquake, perhaps.

To find him in that maze would be almost impossible, he decided. Roper and Pete would have no clew to his

whereabouts, now that the wind had come and swept out his tracks. They must hunt for him at random, and from where he stood he would see them coming long before they could possibly discover him.

So far was luck on his side. But, if they could not discover his hiding place, neither did he know the way back out of the Sinks. Without water, he could stay hidden only so long before his sanctuary became a trap. He had food, but there was nothing for the horses to eat, and he would be obliged to chew his bacon raw or do without—a thirst-provoking repast which did not tempt him at all.

He shifted his position to where he could sit on a narrow shelf, which projected on the lip of the crack, his legs dangling into the cleft and his back against a slanting slab of stone. There he perched, bareheaded in the wind, and smoked, while he watched the desolate terrain spread raggedly before him. Black rock and yellow, drifting sand, with here and there a deformed juniper bush—not an enlivening scene under happier conditions than these; certainly, holding no cheer for him now.

Toward noon ragged rifts tore through the mottled gray blanket of clouds and let a dazzling shaft of sunlight through. The gale still whistled around the rocks it could not shake, and the sand still drifted before it and built little furrows and ridges, that were scooped up bodily and tossed into the air in a cloud, with the next erratic gust.

Up on the perch which he had chosen above the cleft, Cole nodded in spite of himself. Nothing had moved within his range of vision, save a flock of buffeted cedar birds that flew over his head, making for the farther hills. Insensibly his vigilance relaxed, and he dozed fitfully, his shoulders sagged into a depression of the rock at his back. The *whoo-oo* of the wind merged into a droning chant and faded to silence, as his mind dropped deep into the velvet darkness of sleep. Presently Cole heard again the sound that took the form of words, at first mumbled and meaningless, then clearer and carrying a meaning that tugged at Cole's consciousness until he opened his eyes and blinked guiltily, as if he would deny even to himself that he had been asleep.

ROPER and Pete were riding along the wall toward him, side by side, with stirrups almost touching, as they swung to the plodding of the tired horses through the sand. Pete was talking, and it was his growling voice that had seemed a part of the wind's monotonous drone.

"You'd oughta got him on the switchback. That was a cinch, an' you let it slip by," he was saying crabbedly, but without any greater animus than the impulse to pass the blame along to the other fellow. "Now we got t' hunt him outa here like a rabbit in a rock pile. This damn wind——"

"Jim's picked him up with the glasses, maybe. Once we git him located the rest will be easy. Quit yur belly-achin', or I'll send yuh on home."

A mirthless grin twisted Cole's lips, as he listened. Had these two been quarreling over his disappearance ever since last night? They weren't getting anywhere with the argument, that was certain. Pete must be a privileged character, he thought. As the two rode nearer and passed so close that he could have flipped a pebble on to their hat brims, Cole thought what an easy shot it would be to drop them both off their horses. An Indian or some harder-natured man might have done just that; certainly, *they* would have considered this a miraculous opportunity to shoot *him* down, had their position been reversed, and Cole scowled at his own softness because he could not kill them for the human wolves their own mouths proclaimed them to be.

Instead, he stiffened to the immobility of the rock behind him, just as old Billy Parrish, his father's foreman, had long ago taught him to do on the hunting trails when game stepped out in plain sight. Not even the horses, walking with drooped heads, swinging to each stride they took, flipped an ear his way to show that they suspected his presence. Cole was thankful now that he had taught his own horses to be quiet on hunting trips. They probably believed he was watching

for deer; at least, they made no sound, even though they must have heard the voices of the men.

For the matter of that, he wondered at their apparent carelessness in talking when they did not know how close he might be to them. But when they had passed and he ventured to examine that rock lane more closely, he saw that no hiding place presented itself as far as he could look in either direction. His guess that they would never dream he would climb to the top of the rock was evidently correct. They were searching for some sign of him with the horses, and they knew they were alone in that particular passageway.

The thought of Jim perched on some height, with field glasses watching for him, was, to say the least, disquieting. It must mean that in the night either Pete or Roper himself had ridden to headquarters, wherever that was, and had brought out the rest of the gang. How many that would be, Cole, of course, could not know, but from all he had heard of outlaw gangs he believed there would be several riders poking through this area of primal eruptions. Or was it a great rock field shattered long ago and worn down with water in past ages? He was not geologist enough to know, and mentally he dubbed this "bad lands" and let it go that way. Surely it was bad enough from any point of view; bad enough to make him almost despair of ever escaping from the trap.

The only thing he could do was stay where he was on the lip of the niche's end and watch, motionless, for some further sign of his hunters. It was what a wild animal would do in covert as safe as his, and for the time being he was little better off than a hunted animal; their cunning must be his cunning, their caution his best defense.

CHAPTER V.

A FORCED CAMP.

WITH the fading light of a cloudy sunset, Cole scrambled down into the cleft among his patient horses that greeted his arrival with little nickers of anticipation, expecting to be fed and watered after all these empty hours of inaction. Their eager faith in him hurt Cole beyond words, added much to his bitterness against Roper and his gang. How long the search for him would continue he had no means of knowing, but it would perhaps be longer than he could endure the thought of hiding here and watching his horses suffer.

For the first time since he left home, Cole wished that he had some of the boys here to advise him. Billy Parrish had fought Indians; he would know what was the best thing to do in such an emergency as this. Gene and Art and "Red"—if they were here they could ride out boldly and give the Roper bunch something to think about!

Johnny reached out his nose and bunted Cole gently in the ribs, dumbly urging him to remember that this was supper time. Hawk pushed up and nosed him reproachfully; Mick and Eagle begged him for attention. With the imminent expectation of having to make a hurried fight from that retreat, he had left saddle and pack in place, and now his conscience smote him for putting that discomfort as a climax to the hunger and thirst of his mounts.

Sliding his palm along Eagle's smooth barrel to the rump, as he walked, he ducked under the rope barrier and went to the corner of the rock wall, listened for a minute and peered out into the twisting defile. Nothing moved, save the sand blown before the whooping wind; nothing save the whistling of the gale did he hear. From the swiftness with which dusk was falling in that dismal place, it would soon be dark. The unknown Jim would have to postpone his spying for a time, and Roper's riders would be searching at random among the rocks.

Billy Parrish had always taken advantage of night to steal out of whatever tight place he found himself in by day, and make his escape, even when Indians lay watching for such a move. Cole hesitated, glancing back to where four necks were stretched over the rope, as four pairs of brown eyes watched him with hungry interest. He bit his lip, as their silent pleading struck home, and

went back to rub each satiny nose in helpless misery.

"All I'm afraid of is that you might get shot if any of them sees us," he whispered. "Far as I'm concerned, I don't care a damn; but I've got you to think about, and I'd rather see you dead than mauled around by them coyotes. I dunno; it's takin' a long chance——

"Oh, hell!" Suddenly he revolted against all caution. "I can't set here and watch you starve to death, either. I guess I can hold my own against 'em if it comes to a show-down, so we'll go, hosses. You know where there's a creek full of water and grass growing along the bank, and it's up to you boys to find the way back."

He felt better after that decision and moved briskly to Mick's side, digging into the pack for the extra cartridges he had tucked into the top of a kayak. Then, with his rope once more coiled and tied to the saddle, he mounted and rode quietly out of the niche and down along the ledge.

Once headed back along the way they had come, he hooked the reins over the saddle horn and let Johnny take his own course. For himself, he rode with his hunting carbine in his hands, and his eyes turning this way and that, straining through the growing darkness to watch for any movement—any glimpse of men on guard.

Left to himself, Johnny stepped out briskly in the running walk that made these four horses famous for covering the trails with little effort. It was an easy pace, and it carried them down through the winding aisles and up to the ridge where they had lost Roper, before Cole had expected to cover half the distance. At least the danger of suddenly meeting one of the enemy around some sharp turn was past, and Cole breathed freer, as they swung into the faintly defined trail up the side of the ridge that led to the well-remembered switchback farther along. Certainly Johnny knew where he was headed for and meant to lose no time in reaching the spot.

Somewhat to Cole's surprise the switchback trail was left unguarded. Johnny went down it almost at a trot, the loose horses crowding close to his heels and kicking rocks upon the lower trail in their reckless haste. Cole watched anxiously the trail behind him, though it was now too dark to see much beyond the tail of the hindmost horse, fully expecting some pursuit. But nothing appeared to be abroad in the Sinks that evening, and the boy's spirits rose to a jubilant mood that he had so neatly tricked that traitorously smiling man who had offered him a job merely for the sake of coaxing him down in here, where murder would be perfectly safe and easy of accomplishment.

NOW they were passing over the great billowy ridges, which Cole vividly recalled. He felt safe now, for he was sure he could have made his way back without trusting to the sure instinct of his horse. He wondered if Johnny was as thirsty as he was; he certainly was not letting any grass grow under his feet; for, now that the trail was fairly easy, he broke into a lope that gradually increased in speed until he flew over those ridges almost at a run. Cole laughed aloud, as he listened to the clatter of those galloping hoofs over the gravelly sandstone and wondered if Roper's men would hear and realize who was riding that trail in such a hurry.

Now they were at the steep incline of the long crevasse which led up out of the Sinks to the higher ridge that bordered the valley. Johnny slowed to a walk and went scrambling up over the rocks, like a mountain sheep, taking his time because he must, yet wasting no seconds, either. If a boulder lay in his path, he would pause just long enough to lower his head and give the obstacle an inquiring sniff, and then up he would go, the three others following slavishly where he led.

Cole had put away his rifle in its scabbard beneath his leg, and now he rode with his hand on the butt of his six-shooter. He did not expect to need it now; he had left all danger behind him in the Sinks, he was telling himself, when, without any warning, he rode out of the cleft and came face to face with three riders, who bulked vaguely before him

in the trail, very much as if they had heard him coming and were waiting for him there.

Instinctively Cole's heels swung inward, and Johnny leaped forward, straight at the nearest horseman, whose horse backed and sidled from the threatened collision.

"Hey, wait a minute!" another called sharply. "What's your hurry?"

"None of your business! Get outa the way!" Cole yelled and fired a shot, more or less at random, as he charged them.

"Git 'im, boys!" some one shouted, as Cole and his horses went thundering up the ridge.

They whirled and came after him, shooting as they rode. Cole sat twisted in his saddle, firing back at them, obliged to aim high because of his horses coming behind. Then Eagle gave a lunge and went clattering past Johnny, the pack horse racing after him. Cole had the sense to pull out of the trail and let the frightened animals in ahead of him; he was shooting now with deadly intent at the dim figures that seemed to hesitate at coming in too close.

After all, it was a running fight that was quickly over; a rapid succession of shots, and then Cole was around a sharp curve in the trail, out of sight of the three. He waited a minute, but they must have expected him to do that, for they did not come on, and Cole began to suspect that they meant to come at him from some other direction which he did not know, being a stranger to that particular ridge. He gave Johnny his head and went galloping away after his horses that were making for the creek and their last camp ground under the lee of the ledge.

Cole would like to have stopped there, but it seemed too risky, so he took the lead again, when the horses stopped to slake their thirst at the creek, and went on down the winding road which led away from the Sinks. It did not seem likely that Roper's gang would follow him along the highway, deserted though it was. Still, he did not feel in the mood for further fighting, chiefly because of a bullet wound in his wrist which pained considerably and helped to impress upon him the risk he had run of being killed. No; decidedly he wanted no more encounters with Roper's men.

As best he could, while he rode along, he bound up his wound with his handkerchief, thankful that the bullet had missed a bone; but it had passed clean through the flesh, and there was a good deal of blood. Altogether Cole was in no happy frame of mind, as he loped along through the windy dark on a trail he did not know; and when, far in the distance behind him, he heard Eagle's high, shrill call and suddenly discovered that only two horses were following him, Cole Lawson, Jr., was closer to panic than he had ever been in his life.

HAWK answered with an anxious whinny, as Cole pulled up and peered into the dark behind him. Roper's gang, he thought, must have ridden after him and managed to rope Eagle; and yet they could scarcely have done that without his hearing them, even if they would attempt such a thing without taking a shot at him. But something must be holding Eagle back against his will, for the horses always kept close together; whatever it was, Cole could not go on until he had investigated and got his little band together again.

To ride back up the trail in the dark would have taxed the courage of a more seasoned soul than Cole Lawson, faint with hunger and the pain of his wound, his nerves suffering from the strain of those long hours in the Sinks. But he went, guiding Johnny with his knees, the reins wrapped around the saddle horn, and his gun held ready in his uninjured hand. The revulsion of finding Eagle alone in the trail turned him so dizzy that, when he dismounted and walked up to the horse, he staggered and almost fell. The other horses were nosing around inquisitively, giving no hint of any strange presence in that vicinity. Reassured, Cole pulled himself together and gave Eagle a reproachful slap on the shoulder.

The horse flinched violently from the touch. With a heavy sense of premonition, Cole felt more gently the place and found it sticky and wet. He risked

lighting a match to see what was wrong, and, before a gust of wind blew it out, he saw the ragged wound and groaned an oath of commiseration. Shot in the shoulder, the horse had gamely traveled these miles and kept pace with the others until the stiffening muscles and loss of blood had forced him to give up.

Cole sent a despairing glance around him in the starlight. He could not go on and leave the horse there, nor could he make camp so close to the road; for sooner or later he must sleep, and there was no telling when some of Roper's gang might ride that way. He led the horse slowly away toward a small butte dimly seen against the stars. Off there should be the creek he had crossed some miles back, and it was vital that he should find it. Where water flowed there should be grass, and Eagle would need food within easy reach. With himself and one horse crippled, he must do some careful planning; but Cole's brain did not seem to function easily in the face of this fresh catastrophe.

He felt that he should leave the horses there and scout ahead a little, but he was afraid that Hawk and Mick would follow him—indeed, they were certain to do that—and that would set Eagle to whinnying again. Cole had a nervous dread of that. So he went forward slowly, stopping every few yards to rest and encourage the horse. He must trust to luck for a feasible place to camp.

They were descending a slope, and he hoped that he was keeping out of sight of the road. A ridge seemed to rise this side of the butte, and, as he approached nearer, he could discern the faint outline of huge boulders the size of a house, scattered here and there. These promised concealment at least, though it was slow, painful work getting Eagle that far.

Finally he stopped, simply because he hadn't the heart to force the horse to further effort, and he managed to get the saddle off Johnny and the pack off Mick. Working awkwardly with one hand, he unrolled his bed and lay down, too worn out and wholly miserable to care whether he ever got up again or not, yet anxious for daylight, so he could find water and dress Eagle's wound and his own. His own injury seemed the less important, in spite of the pain, which would have tried the endurance of any man.

But, as he lay there, his gloomy thoughts insensibly merged into the inconsequent fabric of dreams, mingled with the *whoo-o* of the wind. Sunk deep in the reaction from the strain of the past thirty-six hours, he slept heavily and long, while the disabled Eagle stood drooping near by, and the other horses foraged hungrily for grass among the sage.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTER THE MUTT.

THE quality of youth is resilient beyond belief. Twenty-one more or less carefree years had left a good deal of the boy in Cole. After more than two weeks of moody isolation and a bitterness greater even than that despair which had driven his father to suicide, Cole was due for a reaction of some sort.

A weaker nature might have slipped over the edge of normalcy and gone bad, turning another twisted mentality loose upon the world to wreak what havoc it would, until the law stepped in with the strong hand of restraint; or, on the other hand, he might have given up the fight as his father had done.

But there was in Cole Lawson a good deal of his mother, who had been brave enough to laugh down the heartaches that came her way and to find a whimsical angle to any problem life gave her to solve. Cole Lawson, Sr., would hide his troubles from the world, but he would not laugh at them; instead, he brooded in secret and ended with a bullet crashing through his tired brain. Cole's mother had gone out smiling, racked with pain and game to the last breath. Something of each had gone to the making of Cole's nature, and it was his father's side that had sent him away hating the world that had dealt him hard blows without explaining why. Perhaps he would have gone on hating the world and his fellow men, and turned out altogether spoiled and useless to life and himself, if "The Mutt" had not chosen to make friends that morning.

The Mutt was lonesome, too, and life had dealt him some bitter blows which he did not in the least deserve, and which he never would understand, being a dog with a vague past and no talent for introspection. Tragedy had stalked The Mutt's trail and kept him busy dodging, but it had not quenched the indomitable optimism within him which rose valiantly, with a quizzical lift of one eyebrow and a hopeful tilt of the head in the very face of disaster.

That optimism held him all aquiver this morning, and the reason for it was a boy with a bandaged wrist. The boy was lying asleep in the dooryard that had been a dismal, empty place for so long, that all the man tracks were faint and had no smell, and all the tin cans were red with rust and had only shreds of faded labels to say what had once been their contents. A pair of old shoes, lying beside the wind-swept woodpile, were curled like dried potato parings, with all the nails pulled loose from the soles and showing like small teeth. It spoke well for the fidelity of The Mutt that he still slept under the corner of the cabin next the doorstep, where his vanished master had thrown down two old sacks for a bed, when The Mutt was a yapping puppy.

How long the little rusty-red waif had carried on alone he could not remember; long enough to have almost forgotten the taste and smell of bacon and to learn a good many of the coyote's tricks in hunting; long enough to become very self-assured and capable, but not long enough to lose the lonesome look in his eyes or the hunger for human companionship.

The Mutt had been off hunting rabbits, and he had not come home until dawn. His first yelp of surprise at finding visitors there having produced no definite effect, he had circled and barked for a while, sniffing investigation between spasms. But the horses continued their feeding and gave him scant attention; and the young man, lying covered with a blanket to h[illegible] boots, which thrust boldly out into [illegible] soft glow of sunrise, might have been dead, for all the movement he made. The Mutt's barking diminished and finally ceased. Occasionally licking the chops that were whiskered like a little old Irishman, he sat down to consider these unexpected arrivals. Especially did the long figure covered with the gray blanket interest him. Curiosity pulled him nearer; he sniffed the tanned young face, with its scowl of pain and loneliness and bewildered sorrow; then he sniffed the blood-stiffened bandage on the wrist.

COLE'S well arm thrashed out, fell upon the blanket, and lay slack. The Mutt stood looking it over, smelled the friendly man smell which he had missed out of his life, edged forward, and began licking the fingers, with growing affection and enthusiasm. The hand drew away, lifted to the boy's face, fell across the closed lids, lifted again and dropped to the blankets, tensing to support the weight of arm and shoulder, as Cole raised himself up and stared blinking all around him. His eyes turned toward the dog, sitting very straight upon a stub of tail that vainly tried to wag. He was staring into wistful brown eyes that held the light of expectancy, emphasized by the sidewise tilt of the dog's head, and the quizzical arch of one eyebrow, decorated with a black spot the size of a dime.

"Hello, you Mutt!" said Cole and grinned for the first time in two weeks.

"Woo-oh!" answered The Mutt, and rose straight up on his stubby tail, his capable paws folded across his brindle belly like a ground squirrel.

The two sat looking at each other measuringly. Cole snapped thumb and finger, and the dog exploded into wriggling, fawning ecstasy. With his forequarters laid to the ground, he yelped and sprang. He was in Cole's arms, licking, whimpering inarticulate endearments, smelling rapturously.

"You Mutt, you!" Cole struggled up, holding his face away from that whipping, eager pink tongue. "Quit slobbering, darn yuh! Say, where'd you come from, I'd like to know?"

This was the first time the rusty-red, small dog of no particular breed had ever been addressed as Mutt, but he

seemed to like the name better than he had liked anything in a long while, even jack rabbit carried straight home and eaten warm under the cabin, or devoured on the spot where he made the kill, if he were hungry, as he had been to-night. He had taken his rabbits as he found them, thankfully, but without fuss; certainly not with the joyful contortions, the yelps, the frenzied lickings with which he attested his joy over this new adventure.

Cole got up and stood looking about him. What he had thought were huge square boulders, such as abounded in that valley, were in reality a cabin and a ramshackle shed, with a rusty, barbed-wire fence straggling around it. Half the posts were down or leaning crazily to the pull of the sagged wires, and the shed roof seemed about to fall in at one corner. A deserted place, surely, by every sordid sign save the dog.

Watchful, Cole walked over to the cabin and looked in through the open doorway. Many whooping gales, such as this last one had been, must have swung the door off its hinges, for it lay tilted against the table. In the corner at the back a pole bunk held a rat's nest, little sticks and litter piled up in a rounded heap. Two rats scurried out, jumped to the dirt floor, and dodged out past Cole, as he leaned, looking in.

"Sick 'em, Mutt! Go git 'em—atta boy!"

With all the zest of youth, Cole watched the brief, zigzag race, and slapped his thigh in approval, when The Mutt darted in ahead and caught the hindmost rat, shaking it viciously before he let it drop limp.

"Atta boy! Nabbed him, didn't yuh? Some dog, ain't yuh?"

BUT catching rats could not divert him from the business in hand, which was to find water and give Eagle's wound such dressing as was possible. He thought there must be a spring somewhere near, or the creek within easy distance, and presently he discovered an old trail worn into the gravel, with weeds growing up in it, wherever the soil offered any sustenance for vegetation. As he started along it, The Mutt slipped past him and trotted sophisticatedly ahead, lifting his knees high, like a spirited horse.

Cole laughed at the impudence of the gait, and that in itself was sufficient justification for The Mutt's existence. Cole had needed something to make him laugh as a boy should laugh.

Mutt and the dim old pathway led him to a choked spring, where the water lay yellow in a grassy bowl, slim-bodied insects darting across its surface. No stock, Cole decided, ever watered there. Then the creek could not be very far off. Moreover, this dilapidated camp was probably never visited by any one. Certainly the place bore no sign of having been disturbed for months. The stagnant water did not appeal to Cole, but the trickle from a finger-wide crack in the rock above was clear and cold to his lips. Cole held his throbbing, bandaged wrist under the thin stream until the cloth was soaked. Presently he returned to Eagle.

Mutt, with that same brisk, high-stepping gait, trotted before him, frisking, as he had almost forgotten to frisk—one needed human friends for audience when one did that—and deporting himself generally after the manner of a nondescript rusty-red dog, with an enormous capacity for affection that has been starved and thwarted until all at once it finds expression in strange and pestiferous ways. All the while Cole was ministering to the wounded horse, The Mutt—or, plain Mutt, which he had become—barked and played and cavorted madly among the bushes. He jumped clear of the ground, his tongue out for a passing lick at Cole's face. He pounced and gnawed and worried Cole's boots, flying back to a growling attack, when Cole pushed him off. Tiring of that, he went off and barked at Johnny and his mates, busily grazing around the roots of the bushes for the tender grass which grew there. He was all dog, obtrusive, irrepressible, forcing attention. The Mutt was proving a mental tonic for Cole who, having laughed at him once, laughed often that day.

That evening, having pitched his tepee

tent beyond the cabin near the spring, where it would not easily be seen by any chance rider who came that way, Cole sat on his bed roll, with the dog in the crook of his arms, and carried on quite a conversation. His horses grazed near by, the wind was down, and the sky a gemmed glory of stars. Eagle stood beside the spring, where he could drink without having to stir from his tracks, and leisurely munched dry grass, which Cole had patiently gathered, squaw fashion, in an old burlap sack. Up on the ridge behind him, an owl hooted in measured accents to his mate, and on the high slope of the little butte a coyote yammered.

For the first time since he rode away from the C Bar L, Cole's eyes were unshadowed, and the deep crease was smoothed from between his eyebrows. He could look about him with a sigh almost of content. Here were scant comforts, it is true, and small mercies, perhaps, but he was content, nevertheless. He had needed a friend, and he had found one that did not know his tragic secret, that would not question him about his past, that would never care who or what he had been before to-day. For Mutt it was enough to snuggle there in Cole's arms, fed with man-cooked food and no longer forlorn.

"You're a great old Mutt, ain't yuh?" Cole whispered, bending low to speak into one lifted ear. "Guess he was lonesome here all by himself; guess it's pretty lucky I happened along. Huh?"

And Mutt, whimpering endearments, reached up and licked the boy adoringly on the neck in eloquent response.

CHAPTER VII.

AND THE WOP CAME ALSO.

HURTS deeper and more lasting than gunshot wounds healed there in that lonely hollow in the half month that followed. For a time, Cole's activities were confined to little necessary tasks which he could perform with one hand, while his wrist healed. It kept him fairly busy, for he must spend hours each day pulling grass for Eagle, whose shoulder must have perfect rest until the torn muscles renewed themselves with fresh tissue.

Cole could not understand that long, ragged wound, until he decided that it must have been made by a bullet that had flattened against a rock and ricochetted at a tangent, finding Eagle's shoulder in its path and tearing a way through the muscles. It was an ugly wound which would have cost a veterinary some anxious thought.

At first, Cole kept the horses close under cover of the ridge in daylight, turning them loose at night to graze. Hourly he waited for discovery, grimly determined to shoot at sight. "Shoot first and ask questions afterward—eh, Mutt?" But when day after quiet day slid behind him, and no one came to the hollow where the deserted camp stood forlornly in a welter of high sage bushes, Cole insensibly relaxed his vigilance and wandered afoot beyond the ridge and found the creek, just as he had expected, flowing quietly along through a rocky little ravine, into which the horses picked their careful way to drink.

"Say, a fellow could build a dam across this narrow neck, run ditches, and raise hay down below there. Wonder why nobody ever thought of that before? Mutt, how'd you like to turn nester?" It was an idle thought, no more than the recognition of a natural opportunity going to waste, but it gave evidence of a healthier state of mind. Cole was beginning to interest himself in his surroundings.

He wondered what had happened to the fellow who had built the cabin, had dug post holes, stretched wire, and fashioned that crude shed for his horses. Some one had meant to start a ranch, he guessed. That some one had left unexpectedly and had not just moved out in accordance with some change of plan. For, while the cabin had been gutted, it had been done hastily, and many things had been left which the owner would have wanted to take with him. Books, half a sack of weevily flour, a box of dried fruit, wormy beans.

It looked to Cole as if something must have happened to the man who lived there; as if he might have been robbed —killed, perhaps. It would not be surprising in a country that held John

Roper, he thought. Perhaps this was why the place was left so completely to itself; why Mutt, in all the months he must have lived here by himself, had found no human companionship until Cole wandered into the hollow that night. Whatever the reason for its complete desertion, the place offered sanctuary now, when Cole most needed it, and if there was reason why the hollow should be deliberately shunned, so much the better for him. Eagle's wound was slow to heal, and Cole could not move on until the horse was in condition to travel.

After a while, when no one came near, and the dilapidation of the cabin and corral began to get on his nerves, Cole set to work making repairs. He cleaned out the cabin, mended the door, and cleaned out a rat's nest from the oven of the rusty stove. When he had moved in he fixed the corral fence, straightening the posts and nailing the wire back in place. There were tools enough in the shed, and the work served to pass away the time. He was glad now that he had bought plenty of supplies at that little store and post office down below the Muleshoe Ranch. He would not go hungry if he spent another month in the hills.

Then one morning home came Mutt from one of his hunting trips, and with him came "The Wop"—named in the first startled sentence when Cole set eyes upon him. The Wop was a pot-bellied old burro, with limp ears that spoke of deep-seated melancholy and a disposition which leaned toward unexpected nippings and small heels lifted with amazing suddenness.

Stepping high, Mutt led him triumphantly to the very door of the cabin, where Cole stood grinning at the pair. Cole was so unwise as to offer the burro a piece of bannock and a bacon rind, and that settled it. The lonely little camp came under the rule of The Wop, and nothing short of shooting would have eliminated him.

THAT day Cole was obliged to take Eagle by painful degrees to the corral and shut him inside, reënforcing the wire fence with sagebrush to keep The Wop outside. That day, too, he scoured out an old zinc washtub and placed it in the corral for a watering trough, because Wop and Eagle had developed a feud at first sight, and a horse with only one good front leg can't kick the paunch off a burro, however much he may want to do so.

"I oughta brain you, Mutt, for bringing that moth-eaten monstrosity home with you!" Cole grumbled, while he wiped the perspiration of toil from his face, after hacking sagebrush with a dull ax and carrying it to build the barricade between Eagle and his enemy. "You wait till Eagle gets well! I bet Wop will hit for the hills again and keep on going. The place for that bird is back in the Sinks."

The Wop stayed, however, and Cole in his friendlier moments doled out crusts of bannock and laughed at the pestiferous little beast; which made The Wop's presence worth while, whether Cole realized it or not.

One night, after he had sat for a long while on the doorstep, with Mutt curled between his feet and his guitar pressed against him, while he stared down over the quiet starlit valley and plucked wistful, thrumming melodies from the instrument, Cole had a dream—a vivid, colorful dream which stayed with him all the next day and for days thereafter, dragging him back to his misery and adding the burden of loneliness to the homesickness it bred.

He had dreamed of the C-Bar-L boys; of Billy Parrish and Gene and Red. He had been riding with them on round-up, hazing cattle out of the brushy draws, talking and laughing with them. Later he had been at camp, eating supper and lazily spinning his rope in a circle around him, hopping in and out, while the boys lay around on the ground, smoking, as they watched him. It was very real—too real. In some subtle way the secluded little valley, with the old cabin set back in the hollow against the ridge, had changed overnight. He had gone to bed thinking that he would like to make a ranch of this spot, wondering if it were government land open to settlement. He got up realizing how empty the place

was, remembering how long it had been since he had exchanged laughing words with any man.

He wished now—for a matter of minutes—that he had not repulsed the friendship and sympathy of the C-Bar-L boys. They had tried to treat him like a brother, and he had turned his back on them, snarled at them, told them to leave him alone. Well, they had done it, that last day. They had ridden off to town and left him there, eying him askance with hurt reproach. The sheriff had tried, and he, too, had gone off half angry, willing to let Cole go his own gait.

Now Cole was dimly aware of a great loss which he had thus far ignored. Loss of his father, loss of the ranch, the cattle, the horses—yes, there was that; but the loss of friends, of young fellows to ride out with him on the trail of adventure—fellows to joke with him, argue with him, wrestle and work with him—he had lost all this, too. He had foolishly thrown away their companionship just because trouble had come, and he had hated the thought of their knowing anything about it.

Not all of this did Cole realize, perhaps, for he was not much given to analysis. But he knew that he missed the boys terribly, and that this was a lonesome hole, and there was no use in living like a hermit. Just as soon as Eagle could travel, he would get out and find a job with some good outfit, and have fellows to talk with. The whole country couldn't be filled with men like Roper and his gang, who would kill a man for four horses.

He could make friends—he always had been able to make friends—and he didn't believe it was because folks thought his father was rich, either. He could go back right now and find plenty of friends; but he wouldn't, because they would be sorry for him, and he did not want sympathy. No; even now he was determined that he would make his way among strangers. If he ever went back it would be when he had money, cattle, land—was a successful stockman who had made every dollar on his own hook, without any friendly boosting.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORDERS TO MOVE.

COLE was in the corral trying to make himself believe that Eagle was fit for the trail again, in spite of the fact that the horse moved stiffly, when he moved at all, and seemed to prefer standing in the shade of the shed, dozing and switching his tail apathetically at the droning flies. He did not care now whether the other horses were near him or not. He was content to eat the grass Cole brought him, to sip a little water from the old tub, to nod and blink the hours away.

Eagle was getting lazy, Cole declared, and needed exercise in those shoulder muscles. He needn't think Cole meant to spend the rest of his life rustling grass for him in a gunny sack, just to save him the trouble of finding it for himself. But, in spite of Cole's coaxing and upbraidings, in spite of morsels of bannock, held out enticingly, while Cole backed slowly away from him, Eagle did not show any enthusiasm for walking. The torn muscles in his shoulder were still stiff and painful, and he had learned the foolishness of useless effort. Even cold bannock did not seem to him worth that price.

But, in the midst of his apathy, he threw up his head and stared past Cole at something beyond. There was a muffled pounding of galloping hoofs sweeping down into the hollow. Cole whirled and looked that way, then ran for the gate.

Down through a depressed place in the ridge came a herd of horses running straight for the cabin, or, perhaps, straight for the opposite side of the basin, which would take them past the cabin. Fifteen or twenty, Cole estimated them at a glance, with several colts running alongside their mothers. Behind them, swinging a rope and shouting, a single rider galloped.

Cole stopped outside the gate and stood watching the little herd wistfully, as it clattered past. Some cowboy bringing in horses for the fall round-up, he guessed. There must be a ranch, then, farther down the creek. It did strike him as unusual that only one man was driving the bunch, but there was always

the chance that the riders had become separated and would meet farther along. A nice little bunch of mixed stock—— Suddenly he gave a shout and started running.

Very cleverly the rider had swung the herd toward Cole's horses, feeding down toward the creek. The band had gone tearing in among them and swept them along, with heads and tails up, stepping high, as if they thought it a great adventure.

Instantly Cole thought of Roper. Had they discovered his retreat, here under the ridge, and taken this seemingly innocent way of getting his horses? It did not seem likely that they would risk the attempt with only one man, but then there might be others hiding behind the ridge, waiting to see what would happen, and ready to take a hand in the foray if necessary. That would be like Roper, who apparently planned always to make sure things of his crafty stealings.

No matter. Cole pulled his gun and fired two shots after the rider, as he ran. It was simpler than shooting tin cans, as he galloped past them, and he would probably have made a hit if the range had been shorter. Even at that distance, he had the satisfaction of seeing the rider's hat go sailing to the ground. He went down on one knee, meaning to take a more careful aim next time, when the rider swerved and came galloping back, waving a six-shooter. It was not that flourishing of a gun instead of shooting that made Cole give a grunt of dismay and get upon his feet; it was the long, tawny braid whipping out behind the riders bare head.

"Put up your hands! What the devil do you mean, shooting at me? Do you want me to kill you?"

SHE had ridden close and pulled up her horse before Cole, glaring down at him, while she pointed the gun more or less in his direction.

"What are you running off my horses, for?" Cole retorted angrily. "Why wouldn't I shoot? There was no way of knowing you are a girl—in that outfit!"

That outfit happened to be a pair of bib overalls, and the girl looked ready to murder him.

"You'd have shot, anyway," she told him unfairly, her eyes blazing. "What are you doing on our land? You've no business here with your horses. Go get my hat! Go on, before I take a shot at you!"

Cole looked at her, then looked at his gun which he was still holding, in spite of her command that he put up his hands. He gave a snort and slid the gun into its holster.

"All right! You could shoot a man, and it would be fine and dandy, but you know darn well I couldn't shoot a woman."

"Sure, you couldn't. Give me that gun!"

"You go to thunder!"

"Give me that *gun!*" Had she been on the ground, the girl would undoubtedly have stamped her foot at him.

"I'd like to see you take it off me!"

"Maybe you think I couldn't!"

"I give you leave to try it."

"Well, I don't need it, or I would. I can kill you with this one, quick enough."

"Oh, sure!"

"Will you pick up that hat?"

"Certainly!"

Cole was mad, and he did not intend that she should get away with his horses, but there was no reason why he should not get her hat for her. He wanted to see just where he had hit it.

As he walked down to where the hat lay, brim up on the sand; and girl rode after him, her horse held firmly to a pace that kept his nose within nipping reach of Cole's shoulder. Indeed, a blob of bit slobber landed moistly against Cole's ear, and that young man started at the unexpectedness of the moist contact.

"Oh, you aren't shot—yet," the girl maliciously assured him, and Cole hated her for the implication that he had jumped because he was afraid.

"Glad you told me," he sneered and stooped for the hat. As he picked it up and saw the brown hole in the crown alarmingly close to the band, saw, too, the cut where the bullet had clipped the

brim, his heart gave a thud of dismay. A close call, that.

"What rotten shooting!" said the girl, seeing how his cheeks had paled, and probably understanding why.

"Not so good," he admitted perversely, looking her fairly in the eyes, as he gave her the hat. "I need practice."

"I don't."

The girl dropped the reins over the saddle horn, took her hat, and settled it expertly on her head. But she did not tuck up the tawny braid under the crown, because to do that she would need both hands, and she would not put away the gun.

"I couldn't miss that way if I tried. When I shoot, I mean business."

"Well, what about my horses? When you drive off a man's horses, do you mean business, too?"

"I didn't drive off your horses. They went along with my bunch because they wanted to. They don't belong here, anyway. You have no business on our land. I advise you to get off it."

"And I advise you to bring back my horses."

"Oh, you do!" She seemed to consider, eying him with a lurking imp in her eyes. Cole would have called it a devil.

"Well, I don't want your horses mixed up with mine, I can tell you that. And I'm certainly not going to hold a round-up all by myself to please you. If you want your horses, you can hike along to the ranch after them. It's only seven or eight miles."

Cole knew where he wanted to tell her to go, but he could not bring himself to say it. According to his simple code, one did not swear at girls. One took them to dances and danced with them and made sly love, when the other fellow was watching with murderous eyes, and, when one was that particular kind of a fool, one fell in love and married and settled down. But no fellow with any manners or any self-respect ever swore at a girl.

"What's that horse doing in that corral? Why don't you ride him after your horses?" She had turned and was looking back at Eagle. Now she bent a suspicious glance upon Cole.

"He's laid up. I can't ride him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Shot—er—cut with barb wire. He's lame. You'll have to bring my horses back, I tell you. I certainly am not going after them afoot," he told her with stubborn eyes and compressed lips.

"Say, I don't *have* to do *anything!*" Supreme scorn vibrated in her voice, as with a twitch of the reins she rode back to the corral. "We'll see about this horse shot with barbed wire. Sounds like a lie to me."

COLE did not reply to that, but contented himself with furious wishes that she was a man. While she sat on her horse and stared over the brush-woven wire fence at Eagle, who stared back rather apathetically, Cole got his rope. Whatever this damnable girl did or said, he meant to have his horses back, and he did not mean to walk seven or eight miles after them, either. Just how he was going to recover them without walking after him he had probably not decided, but his actions indicated that he expected her to drive the bunch back where he could rope out his own animals. At any rate he started off toward the creek, with his rope looped over his arm, walking unhurriedly and carefully refraining from looking behind him. Mutt came loping down off the ridge to join him, yelping joyously that his master was actually going for a walk. Even Wop came loitering out from among some high bushes, stopped to waggle his great ears in deep cogitation, and then made up his mind that whatever was in the wind, he meant to share it.

The girl, however, did not overtake Cole until he was across the creek and following the dust cloud kicked up by the horses, as they trotted away down the valley, which he had thought would make a good meadow. Then she came loping along, settling her horse to a walk.

"I must say you've been making yourself at home," she remarked, after a dozen paces, during which Cole refused to recognize her presence. "Can't say I'd want to sleep in a bunk a man had lain dead in for a month; but some folks are not very particular."

"I wish you'd go haze those horses back here," Cole said in a throttled voice, after another five minutes of silence. "You had no business driving them off in the first place."

The girl shrugged.

"If I rode on ahead, you'd probably use me for a target again. You said you needed practice."

"Oh, hell!" said Cole, but he said it into his shirt collar.

"And blazes," said the girl calmly. "Besides, I didn't drive them off. They went because they wanted to. I've got enough to do without wrangling horses for hide-outs." With that she touched her horse lightly with the quirt and rode on away from him, sitting her saddle with the easy grace of a slim young cowboy like Cole, who rode like a Centaur.

At this moment he walked stiffly, like a man going up to challenge a bully to an old-fashioned fight. Whenever his toe struck against a stone, he gave it a kick that sent it spinning. The girl looked back and caught him doing that once, and he could hear her laugh, as she rode on.

"Lucky thing for her she ain't a man!" gritted Cole, the veins standing out on his forehead with the beating blood of his impotent wrath. Of course, he couldn't take a shot at her now, knowing her for a woman; but he wanted to, badly enough—or, at least, he thought he did. To trail her down that valley afoot was the most humiliating thing Cole had ever done in his life, but he had to go. A girl like that—with a tongue like that—never in this world would she drive back his horses. No, she gloried too much in making him walk after them. Trying to get back at him for shooting at her, he supposed. Well, how was he to know the difference?

"If she wants to wear breeches like a man, she can take her chance of being shot like one!" he exclaimed, dismissing that incident and glaring after her, with hot, angry eyes. "'Hide-out!' Oh, damn her, anyway!"

After that he damned Johnny and Hawk and Mick for stampeding with her galloping herd. They ought to know better; they did know better, but horses will be horses, however carefully they have been brought up; however well trained they may be, there is always the element of mob psychology to reckon with. Cole walked half a mile, while he invented new and vividly profane ways of threatening to beat the tar out of those three runaways when he got his hands on them; but in his heart he knew that they were forgiven before they were caught, and that he was merely venting a little of his anger on them because there were such well-defined limits to what he could say of a girl.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands April 20th.*

PRIMITIVE HUMOR

DOWN in the Dutch East Indies, a scientific expedition recently discovered an unknown race of pygmies. Among other valuable data gathered, an amusing custom attracts attention. When the fancy of a young man turns in the age-old direction, he is first made to undergo a certain test, before he can marry the damsel of his choice. The champion bow-and-arrow artists of the tribe line up at a distance from the lad and take pot shots at him. It's up to him to dodge the arrows. Nice pastime. If he survives the ordeal, which lasts a specified length of time, the head of the tribe says to him: "Here is your wife, big boy. You've got nerve enough and fast enough feet to endure marriage." The pygmies think that's funny!

The Honor of the Regiment

By Will McMorrow

Author of "Battle Honors," "Old Frisky," Etc.

In a most unexpected manner, the almost superstitious regard for the traditions of his regiment, for which "Old Frisky" had often been secretly sneered at, proved to be of some utilitarian worth.

YES, a bleedin' slave driver, s'help me!"

Recruit Bradshaw scowled into his beer and, still scowling, drank deeply. Having drunk, he placed the empty glass conspicuously in the center of the table, where it could twinkle reproachfully at Bowles.

"Hear! Hear!" Bowles encouraged, absent-mindedly pushing the glass aside. "Right you are, mate! The first words the old blighter sez when 'e lands 'ere from France is: 'So this is the blurry reserve battalion, wot the blasted newspapers call bleedin' lions—the old, reliable canteen soldiers, undefeated because they never fought! Well, they'll need a bit of sharpening, an' I'm something of a lion tamer myself.' Well, I'm 'appy to sye I'm for the next draft for France. I'd rather 'ave a go with the enemy than with 'Old Frisky,' any dye."

"You can 'ave my share of it, mate," scoffed Cossey, an "old sweat," with a wound stripe gained at Neuve Chapelle. "The draft wot goes out this time is for it, an' no mistake. They's a jolly big drive comin' off soon. Don't be so anxious to go out this time. Wait for the next replacement draft, an' you'll 'ave an easier time an' you'll live longer. This one ain't goin' to be 'ealthy."

"Old soldiers never die," quoted Bradshaw. "They just blurry well fade away."

"When you've been in as long as I 'ave, my lad," answered Cossey complacently, "you'll not go inwiting it, either. I'd rather 'ave Old Frisky, anyway, than 'is bloomin' nevvy, with 'is sneaky looks an' his pipin' voice."

"You mean the temporary gentleman wot just came—is that Old Frisky's nevvy?"

"Calls hisself such," declared Cossey, "though I fancy as they ain't blood related. A bloke told me that this young Lieutenant Somers was born in Bombay, an' Old Frisky must 'a' knew his folks. 'E served there as a young lad. The old bloke 'elps him a bit on parade."

Recruit Bradshaw laughed raucously.

"Fancy 'im 'elping any one—the old goat! If 'is own father was to come on parade, Old Frisky would find a bloomin' excuse to put 'im in the guardroom. Bullyin' an' raggin' men around the way he does——"

He broke off suddenly and darted to the open door of the "pub." A dog of low degree and haphazard ancestry emitted a yelp and disappeared quickly, as Recruit Bradshaw's number-ten ammunition boot reached its mark.

"Old Frisky's dorg," he explained, returning to the table. "I ain't 'ad a chance to kick a drill sergeant's dorg since I enlisted. 'E tried to bite me the other day at church parade, an' Old Frisky put me in the book fer movin' my foot. I'll move my foot at 'im again an' 'is bloomin' marster, too, s'help me, if 'e pushes me too far! I'm none of your time-served soldiers to be messed about. I'm a British workingman, and I've got rights, an' I'll bash Old Frisky on the ugly mug if 'e don't let up."

"You blasted bunch of cook-house swabs! So 'ere you are!"

The half dozen men in khaki stiffened in their chairs, dropped their glasses, and jumped to their feet. It was not necessary to look around—nor advisable, under the discipline of the Windsor Rifles. They knew that rasping, roaring voice that sent forth each clean-cut, unaccented syllable, like the menacing and impersonal barking of a machine gun—a voice terrible on parade, hoarsened and made penetrating by years of stern combat with wind and dust and uproar and undisciplined minds.

The men of the fifth reserve battalion of the Windsor Rifles were already as familiar with that voice as they were with that gray mustache, waxed to two points sharp as needles, those two piercing eyes sunk deeply behind tufted eyebrows, that lean jaw and iron mouth, that formidable red nose, with its tiny black bristles, massive, craglike, projecting from beneath the shiny visor of the military cap, and that silver-headed stick gripped firmly beneath the rigid right arm.

"Sittin' here swillin' beer and fatigue call blown ten minutes ago," Drill Sergeant Frisbie barked. "I've a mind to put every man jack of you in the 'spud hole.' Turn out of 'ere now. Quick now! Damn your lazy 'ides."

"I sye," protested the publican from behind the bar, "this is a bit thick, you know. Them lads is just a-sittin' peaceful——"

Old Frisky's mustache bristled slightly.

"None of your lip, my man! I'm on the king's business here, an' I'll thank you to keep your tongue in your jaw. None of yer damned Hyde Park socialist sentiment 'ere! 'Op it now, you dozy blighters!"

THEY hopped it rapidly, Recruit Bradshaw one hop to the fore, with Old Frisky, limping a trifle from an old wound, but disdainful of the aid of his silver-headed stick, hurrying them up the hill to the barracks.

"Put a blurry jerk in it, now!" he snapped at their heels. "Heads up, ye loblolly mob of costermongers! Pick up your feet, that man, or I'll give you pack drill till the war is over. You, I mean! That man with the dirty neck! Forgot to wash this mornin'. I'll put a scrubbin' brush in yer kit an' a cake of sergeant major's soap. Left! Right! Left! Step out!"

They turned in at the barracks gate, through the gray-stone arch that was smudged with London soot before Drill Sergeant Frisbie's grandfather saw the light of day, past the guardroom nestling under the wall, built by hands that have mixed no mortar and laid no brick these hundred-odd years, and along the narrow, flagged walk, where generations of Windsor Rifles have worn away the stone. Sedan chairs and swaying coaches and powdered wigs and hansom cabs and top hats and automobiles had all passed beneath that entrance arch, as also long columns of Windsor Rifles in

shakos and cross belts and leggings, on their way to a glorious eighteenth of June at Waterloo, and longer columns of Windsor Rifles in khaki and pack and haversack on their way to Mons and immortality.

It was not a new regiment—in spite of the "new blood" that flowed always into its reserve battalion—flowing faster than ever now, since the veins were open in France.

Old Frisky fell behind to tell the sergeant of the guard a few pointed things about the sentry on duty at the gate, said sentry not having managed to erase the smile from his face in time to avoid Old Frisky's eagle eye. This duty accomplished, and the sentry's name entered in the black book for action later on, Old Frisky marched stiffly across the parade ground, in a line as straight as a homing pigeon's flight, in the direction of his austere quarters. There he kept his afternoon "peg" of Irish whisky, which he never omitted to take for his stomach's sake, fair weather or foul.

But halfway across the ten-acre, graveled space he stopped, whipped his silver-headed stick from beneath his right arm to a position beneath his left arm, exactly parallel with the ground, and brought his right hand smartly to the salute, his heels clicking together precisely at the moment that his hand touched the visor.

Young Lieutenant Somers, who had called out, answered the salute with a wave of his cane toward his rakishly cocked cap and strolled over not too hurriedly. He was a pallid young man, effeminately handsome, with a weak chin and a tiny curled mustache, like the one pictured on the jack of spades.

Old Frisky stood at attention, chin up, elbows pressed back. He had stood sentry in the barracks in Bombay on the night young Somers was born. He had watched young Somers drill his first box of tin soldiers—that was after that black day at Steinkop, when Captain Somers and Corporal Frisbie lay on the South African veldt, waiting for the death that took the one and spared the other. He had held young Somers on his knees and quieted the child's fears all one long night, while the light strengthened in the eastern sky and the light in the dark eyes of a woman faded away.

BUT not for anything in the world would Old Frisky, in the center of parade and observed by recruits, have relaxed from that soldierly erectness before the officer.

Somers fidgeted nervously with his Sam Browne belt.

"I was looking around for you today, Uncle Harry," he began, using the nickname invented in boyhood. "You're deuced busy on parade."

"I 'ave to be," Old Frisky snorted, "with the scurvy mob of shoemakers' apprentices they want made into soldiers—it's 'eartbreaking. I've spent a long time in the Rifles from the time I was a little shaver in the drums, back there in Rangoon, an' this is the worst lot I've ever seen. It's kept me busy. But even if I 'ad the time, lad, I fancy it would be best not to spend too much time with me. You're an officer now, an' your place is with officers. That's disc*ip*line!"

Young Somers smiled uncertainly and patted his jack-of-spades mustache.

"No need to shout so at a chap. I fancy you're right, but I got such a dose of discipline in training I'm ready to let down a bit. By the way, I've been rather on the go—celebrating with some chaps I used to work with at the office—so I almost forgot to thank you for helping me buy the kit. Dad's pension didn't go very far."

"I 'ad a little put aside," Old Frisky snapped out, his nose a more fiery red. "I wouldn't see Captain Somers' son lack anything a gentleman needs, for the sake of a few dirty shillings. I don't waste my pay on beer. I've a bit more if you need it. If the damned civilians runnin' the government 'ad the brains of a squad of rabbits they'd pay your way through right an' give you a permanent commission in your father's regiment, instead of this temporary tommyrot!"

The subaltern's eyes shifted uneasily. His sallow cheeks flushed.

"Look here," he blurted. "I—er—I'm in a bit of a hole. It's something I can't

talk about to the C. O. or any one else —strangers, that is. The fellows in the mess would have helped me for the sake of the regiment, but—I—it's what I wanted to see you about."

"What's this about the regiment, lad?" Old Frisky's voice was hoarser than ever. "What 'ave you done?"

Somers dug the toe of his new trench boot into the gravel.

"At a night club in Piccadilly," he mumbled. "We were all pretty much blotto—there was a chap there named Willems. Willems and another civilian —Norwegians, I think they said—played some cards afterward—I don't remember everything, of course—but—but I gave them a check for my losses on a bank where I had no money left—and some I O Us. It means I'll be disgraced, I suppose. There's a law for that sort of thing, and——"

Old Frisky waited motionless, like a carved figure of a soldier.

"I've always been cursed that way—gambling. I can't make good on the check, and Willems will demand it and publish it everywhere, no doubt."

Old Frisky's silver-headed stick quivered with the intensity of his grip. He held to that badge of authority as one might cling to something secure and immovable in the midst of earthquake and disaster.

He swung around on his heel and pointed to the white flagpole and the colors—a rippling splash of blue and red and white against the tinted sky—the colors, badge of undying fortitude and honor, symbol of the regiment that was eternal, despite the vagaries and weaknesses and passings of men.

Topping the pole was a wreath that had been hoisted that morning, as wreaths were hoisted many mornings throughout the year in the barracks yard of the Windsor Rifles.

"You know what that means, do you?" Old Frisky lowered his voice.

Somers wet his dry lips.

"The wreath? Anniversary of Lucknow, I suppose."

"Aye, Lucknow! An' the Windsors chargin' the gate sixty years ago to-day. An' the regiment is three times older than that. It isn't your disgrace I'm thinkin' of. 'Ow much did this civilian win of you?"

"Two hundred pounds, more or less. But what's the use? I'll resign."

"It'll be the first time an officer of the Windsors 'as resigned in war time." Old Frisky's voice was dry and hard. "No. There's a draft due to go out in a day or two. You'll 'ave to go with it. I fancy I was mistook. But it's been a long time since Bombay, an' we ain't seen each other much. If you stay 'ere, likely as not there'll be more trouble an' maybe disgrace to the regiment, an' I won't be able to 'elp you again. There's an officer wanted, I 'eard, for a special detail—special dangerous an' secret. They'll let you volunteer."

"There was talk in the mess about it," Somers muttered. "It's—it's almost suicide."

"There's worse things can 'appen to an officer in the Windsor Rifles an' the son of an officer that died in it. I'm not bein' 'ard on you, lad. It's the regiment I'm thinkin' of. You'd best go now."

Young Somers' head came up slowly. His eyes were steadier, and the weak lines of jaw and mouth not so perceptible.

"I have been a bit of a waster, I suppose," he said, "and the joke of it is I know I wouldn't do any better if I stayed here. I'll tell you the truth, Uncle Harry. I've done something like this before."

He jerked at the glove that covered his long, slim hand.

"But I fancy I shall not do it again. I'll go out with the draft. I'll see the C. O. now—if you'll do what you can about the money."

Old Frisky's eyes were fixed unswervingly on the horizon, but his parade-ground voice rumbled a trifle unsteadily.

"I thought you'd see it like I do. What was the address of this damn civilian?"

FIVE minutes later Recruit Bradshaw ducked hastily around the corner of the canteen and peeped cautiously forth.

"Gawd blimy!" he whispered to his friend Bowles. "The old bloke must be

goin' blind! An' a blurry good thing, too, I says! The blighter passes right before my nose wiv 'is silly old silver stick an' his silly old beak pointin' straight ahead an' never clicked that I was swingin' the lead on that fatigue detail. 'E could 'ave touched me wiv his bloomin' 'and. 'Ave a look at 'im!"

Bowles had a look, but fearfully, as a canary-fed cat might look at a king.

Old Frisky stalked into the nearest block of barracks, turned sharply right, and mounted the stairs, his thin, weather-beaten neck pressed tightly back against the collar of his tunic, his feet clicking against the stone stair treads in the even marching cadence of one hundred and twenty steps to the minute —not faster, not slower. The recruits of the regiment firmly believed that if Old Frisky wanted to hurry the pace he would have to break into double time, and that if he wanted to go more slowly he would stop and mark time at intervals, that being the nearest he could come to sauntering. But then they also believed that Old Frisky had two rows of brass buttons down the front of his old-fashioned nightshirt and went to sleep with his stick under his arm, which was manifestly absurd.

He entered the little cubby-hole that constituted his quarters. It was furnished with an army cot, a chair, an iron-bound wooden box, a worn Bible, a bottle of Irish whisky, and two pictures, one an unflattering portrait of the royal family done in three colors, by an advertising pickle manufacturer, by "special appointment," every one in the lithograph having a uniformly jaundiced face and blue shoes and looking dissatisfied with the arrangement.

The other, occupying a post of honor over the head of the cot, was a steel engraving, a trifle stained at the edges, with the original title, "The Thin Red Line," crossed out and "Windsor Rifles at Balaklava" substituted in Old Frisky's angular writing.

He laid his stick on the cot, pulled the wooden box from underneath, and threw back the lid. There were a lot of things in the box—a worn uniform, neatly folded, a broken assagai, a bullet that Old Frisky had carried away from Steinkop—in his leg—a thumbed book of drill regulations, two medals in cardboard boxes, a bundle of old letters tied with tarnished gold braid, and a couple of savings-bank books.

He picked up the books, produced from his pocket a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, and read the amounts credited to him.

"One 'undred and ninety-eight, ten and sixpence! I'll make it! Now, Mr. Willems, let's 'ave a look at you!"

STANDING before the mirror in his neat bachelor apartment across London town, Mr. Willems did not find his face particularly repulsive. It was a round face, rather fat in the jaws, as befitted a gentleman of middle age fond of the table, and it continued upward, merging indefinitely into a round, bald head, and it was partly concealed behind a pair of thick-lensed glasses and a constant smile. But behind the shining lenses the flat, blue eyes were watchfully alert.

He eased his weight into a comfortable chair and wrote a letter to his aunt in Rotterdam. Every week he wrote a letter to his aunt in Rotterdam—sometimes oftener. It will be seen thereby that Mr. Willems was a dutiful nephew.

He was quite a square figure of a man, as he spread himself across the table—a chunky, bowed, solid man, who, seen from the rear, might have suggested a patient fisherman emptying his net of the day's haul. He wrote slowly in clear, angular characters, such as any honest man might use who had nothing to conceal from the world, and he wrote, without stopping, in Norwegian, for fifteen minutes.

It was not a letter that would interest any one in the world but an elderly aunt in Rotterdam. It mentioned the weather in detail, described the state of Mr. Willems' health in many words, discussed the war resignedly but hopefully, condemned the enemy U-boat warfare, regretted the decline of business, and ended with a neat scriptural quotation —the very letter to an elderly and possibly pious female relative—chatty but not informative.

After which Mr. Willems walked to the door silently but quickly for so large a man, swung it open, peered into the hall, then closed and locked the door. He opened a bureau drawer that held an abundance of laundered collars of the semisoft variety and selected a collar carefully. This he carried to his private bathroom and, oddly enough, dropped a corner of the collar in a glass of water.

For the next fifteen minutes he sat polishing his glasses with a silk handkerchief and smiling pleasantly at nothing in particular.

He looked at his watch, stepped to the bathroom, and removed the collar, squeezing the water from it into the glass, which he carried to the writing table. He searched in the drawer of the table for a ball-pointed pen, rubbed the pen nib in the cigar ashes in a tray near at hand, and dipped the pen, after carefully wiping it, into the colorless liquid in the glass.

He pulled the finished letter toward him and for a long time wrote steadily between the lines, and the language in which he wrote so invisibly was not Norwegian. He concluded:

W. R. draft leaves Friday—Havre. The work progresses. Already I have one officer —perhaps two, deeply in debt. We may expect something from them. Send more money by R. Entertaining is expensive. More money is needed. The W. R. draft is 800. The R. K. draft 400 or more. Z4 did great damage. More to-morrow. Use address number 35 hereafter. Great caution is necessary. The British police are clumsy, but sometimes lucky. L.

When he had finished he threw the liquid in the glass away, allowed the sheet to dry, then dabbed it lightly between the inked lines with a piece of cotton soaked in ammonia. It was still to all outward seeming the affectionate, but uncommunicative, letter to the elderly aunt in Rotterdam, written in clear, angular characters, such as any honest man might use who had nothing to conceal from a curious world—a bluff and convivial man like Mr. Willems, for instance, possessed of a harmless collection of soft collars of foreign make and a bottle of household ammonia.

Some men carve in enduring brass, some write in flowing water. Mr. Willems, alias V. L., dipped his pen in the blood of British soldiers—invisibly.

He stood up, filled a glass from the decanter on the sideboard, and clicked his heels smartly, raising the glass toward the east. A sharp knock sounded on the door.

WILLEMS was in a business requiring the coolest and steadiest of nerves. He drank his toast, reached over and shoved his letter beneath a few papers, and opened the door, smiling interrogatively at the stiffly erect figure in uniform.

"You wish to see me, sergeant major?"

Old Frisky blew through his nose, glared at Mr. Willems, with the particular glare that he reserved for civilians, and marched into the room, removing neither his hat nor his stick.

"I 'ave the money," he snapped, "to pay for the check and I O Us that Mr. Somers left with you. There it is!"

He laid a bundle of Bank of England notes on the writing desk.

"Really?" the fat man queried. "I see. Mr. Somers sends his sergeant major to pay these things. As a matter of fact, I don't want the money. I'd just as lief let the matter rest where it is. I'm in no hurry——"

"There's your money. Don't worry —it's good, I'll warrant. I'm payin' the freight 'ere, not Mr. Somers. If you're not in a 'urry, I am!"

Mr. Willems' smile did not abate by a single fat wrinkle.

"You're rather fortunate to have such an amount. I didn't think the pay in the ranks was as good as that."

"It's the savings of twenty year," Old Frisky cut in, "an' put aside for an object which, though it's none of yer blurry business, was to start a school when I retired—a boys' school in the military line. But that's neither 'ere nor there. I'll trouble you for them documents!"

The heavy man reached over and picked up the money. He shook his head regretfully.

"I'd prefer to keep the check. I'm rather busy just now, my man."

His glance toward the writing desk was eloquent. If this tiresome old fellow with the gendarme mustache would take the hint——

He reached out just too late. Old Frisky's keen eye, directed toward the desk, had caught sight of the check lying on top of a couple of scraps of paper bearing the signature of Somers. And Old Frisky's hand was not two seconds behind his eyes. He stepped over to the coal fire, burning murkily in the grate.

"You 'ave the money; now, my lad, I'll just burn these 'ere."

He tossed the papers on the coals, watched them turn brown at the edges, gripping his stick tightly under his arm, which was little emotion enough for a man to show who had just spent the savings of twenty years.

The flames licked at the corner of another paper that Old Frisky had picked up with the I O Us. It was a letter written in a clear, angular hand, and, as the heat reached the chemical, a line of writing appeared as if by magic. Old Frisby bent over quickly.

"——is needed. The W. R. draft is 800. The R. K. draft, 400——"

He whirled on his heel. But Willems had read that fateful line of brown writing, too. He flung his bulk at the drill sergeant, grunting thickly, reaching eager, desperate hands for Old Frisky's throat—and missed by the shadow of a second. The silver-headed stick whirled quickly and crashed down on the fat man's head. He fell across the chair and lay quietly.

Old Frisky looked placidly at the senseless man, nodded approvingly, tucked his stick under his arm again, and picked up the telephone instrument on the writing desk.

"Put me through to Scotland Yard, miss!" he jerked out. "Sharp now! I've a party 'ere that I fancy they'll want to talk to!"

When two eager and jubilant young men showed up a few minutes later to pick up the finest prize that had fallen to the counter-espionage service in many a month, they found Old Frisky seated uncompromisingly erect in a chair, silver-headed stick across his knees, and a silent, glowering man lying on the floor, securely tied with his own braces and belt.

"This chap was owed money by Mr. Somers," he said, "an' Mr. Somers sent me 'ere to pay it, an' I found the paper."

AND that was all he would say about it. The officers' mess of the Windsor Rifles must have suspected another story altogether, for two days later the youngest subaltern waited on Old Frisky, with a purse of exactly two hundred pounds, and insisted on Old Frisky accepting it, and the colonel made a neat speech, and Old Frisky stood like a ramrod, with a redder nose and a more baleful glare than ever.

The colonel hurried away after that, for the draft was ready—ready to start for France through that ancient stone archway that had seen so many men of the Windsor Rifles march away to war.

The huge iron gates swung open. The drum major raised his corded baton, and the drummers crossed their sticks overhead and the shining brasses swung on high. Then drums, cymbals, and horns went smashing into "Mandalay," the marching song of the Windsor Rifles, and the draft pushed its way through the cheering crowds outside the walls and swung up the street toward Waterloo Station, with the throbbing boom of the big drum barely heard above the din.

The adjutant polished his monocle on the sleeve of his tailored khaki. He was a shapely person of shining boots and had a scrap or two of public-school Latin.

"*Morituri*——" he began and stopped, not wishing to appear indecently learned. "By the way, that young Somers looked really quite pleased to get that assignment. Carries himself well, too. I'd never have suspected it."

"Somers!" The C. O. frowned. "I wonder if he can be anything to Somers—before your time, my dear Barnes—who went out at Steinkop. Wonderful chap. Married rather beneath him, so

they say—daughter of a gunner in the horse artillery. I must ask old Frisbie some time. He served there."

Old Frisky stood by the barracks gate, arm held at the salute, eyes straight to the front, looking over the heads of the last of the marching men, toward the colors flying in the barracks yard—farther, perhaps, beyond the square of bunting flung across the sky—to a horse-artillery camp in Bombay, and a thought—an idea—a memory thirty years gone—and it might have been a prayer, so tense was his whisper:

"Did I do right to send 'im? I wouldn't 'ave. But it was 'im or the regiment—'im or the regiment."

He blew his formidable nose in a handkerchief as large as a small tablecloth and marched stiffly out onto the parade.

KIDNAPERS' PRACTICAL JOKING

OUT in Arkansas, recently, a banker was kidnaped and placed, gagged and bound, in an empty farmhouse. The sheriff and his posse jumped on the trail of the outlaws, and spent most of their time running down the clews left in a note. The bandits had adopted the new sport known as the "treasure hunt," to mislead their pursuers. After searching all night, the posse returned to the starting point, minus the criminals. The banker, however, turned up later. In some manner, he had released himself.

HUMANIZED BULLFIGHTING

FROM time to time these items have told of various phases of bullfighting, the famous Spanish sport. Because of its cruelty, the pastime is prohibited in the United States. It follows that a Latin, living where the game is taboo, must feel as homesick for the beloved sight as would an American, hankering for baseball in a land where Babe Ruths are unknown. But necessity is the mother—et cetera. In Newark, New Jersey, therefore, the Spanish colony has made bullfighting safe and sane. In a conventional arena the matadors, picadors and toreadors, dressed in the proper costumes, do their stuff, but ah! the bull, he is not what you think. El toro has a leather hide, horns, a tail, and a head that shakes ferociously, and his hoofs are attached to rollers. Wires are connected with the lifelike apparatus, and the capers of the "bull" are controlled by an electrician at a switchboard behind the scenes.

But it satisfies the audience, for everything else in connection with the event is regular. Even the people who attend it are, for the most part, clad in their national costumes. At one side, Spanish songs are played by an orchestra, to provide atmosphere.

An odd feature of the affair is that the gentlemen who wave the red cloths, do not wave them at the bull, but at the spectators. Some one explained that this makes the people "enthusiastic." The whole performance proceeds according to rule. The banderillers place their darts; the picador eggs on the synthetic beast with a lance, and then the climax is reached. At the sound of a bugle, every one in the arena clears out, and the toreador enters magnificently to "kill" the bull. He goes through all the motions and finally lunges, his sword entering the sawdust breast of the fatigued victim. If the thrust is accurate, a bell rings inside; if not, the toreador is booed.

Old-timers

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Caribou," "Waters of Healing," Etc.

Each of us has marveled regretfully at the way the years seem to slip away. Up there in the woods, "Longheaded Bob," who had seen the changes from buggies to flivvers, from trails to highways, welcomed a certain incident, which brought back to him the days of the old-timers.

THIS is a story of the changing West, and there is a lot to be packed into it, just as a lot has been packed into these last fifty years west of Missouri and into the Rockies.

We'll begin it with Robert Rogers, a young engineer, full of college degrees, donning his drill camping suit and getting ready for the job—which job had to do with a railroad that was to be built. It was a very nice suit, indeed. It had all manner of pockets, each pocket with a flap over it and a button to keep it shut. It had been made to measure.

Tom Edwards looked at that suit. Tom was the boss of the horse wranglers for the expedition. He had the most dancing gray-blue eyes; he stood straight and alert, six feet of him, in loose attitudes; and when he moved an arm the muscles ran under the skin like those of a cougar. He sized up Rogers—and wondered. No, Tom did not think Rogers was soft. He noticed that the other did not swell his chest nor hold his head back like a sergeant of the Victorian age. But gosh, what a dude he looked!

His voice worried Tom. So did certain mannerisms. There was, for instance, the way he had of giving little bows from the waist and saying: "Af-ter you!"

One day there was a ford to be taken, and there was trouble at the ford. Three horses were swept down and had to be rescued. Rogers helped, and that enraged Tom. He said some caustic things to his wranglers.

"Do you need the dude engineer to show you your job?" he growled at them.

Here was Rogers butting in and doing their work, spurring his own saddle horse

afloat, so that he, too, swept down in the flood to encourage the pack ponies to gain the shore.

That night the trouble came. They were camped in a meadow threaded by a tributary creek of that swift river that came down, close by, over five hundred feet of cliff. At the base of this cliff, on a rock, a dipper was left, as some one was always wanting a drink. Now it happened that Tom and Robert went over simultaneously to get a drink. Robert lifted the dipper first, and Tom, raw with the day of self-contempt over a bad ford and one thing and another, foolishly took it from him and executed a bow.

"Af-ter me," said he.

Now, Robert had known all that was going on. He had noticed little smiles aside, little sneers, though he had given no sign. He took the dipper back from Tom in a deliberate way that could not be called snatching, and he also gave a bow.

"Oh, no," he said. "Af-ter me."

Tom's eyes blazed. He was mad at horses and men. He snatched the dipper.

"After me," he said and turned to dip it in.

Robert stretched out to take the dipper again, but Tom tapped him over the knuckles with it and bowed once more from the waist.

"Af-ter me," he repeated.

What happened then was swift. Robert punched with an upward jab, took Tom under the chin, and sent him down with a crash.

They fought. There was no one here to order them to desist. Who is there to give orders when commanders come to blows? Nobody timed them, but the men listened to the thwacks and grew excited, as men will over a cock fight, or a fight of bull moose, or two men hard at it. But there were in the party men older than either the engineer or the transport boss, and several of these began to cry out:

"Quit, fellows! Aw, quit!"

Those shouts made them, for a moment, desist. They stood facing each other, pivoting, Robert up on his toes, Tom crouched and staring at him. Then suddenly they changed pose. A grin spread on Robert's face. A grin spread on what could be seen of Tom's between the puffed flesh. They laughed. They extended their hands. They shook.

Everything went very well with the expedition after that. And this is not a story of enemies through life. That was the beginning of their friendship.

"Gosh, I sure have been acting mean," said Tom, and rubbed a forearm against the pulp that was his face.

"That's all right," said Robert. "It's all over. You've been having a bad time with the horses."

They stepped across to the rough trestle where the basins stood. There was a big enamel jug there for filling these, and Robert took it over to the cook's fire, returning with it full of warm water to pour that into one of the basins.

"Go ahead," he said.

"Oh, no. After you," said Tom, perfectly naturally.

"No, no. After——" began Rogers, and then they both lifted up their heads and shouted with laughter.

"Well, there's enough for us both," said Robert, filling another basin, and they washed.

Thus was the friendship cemented.

WELL, the years passed. The railway was through the mountains. The cattle business was getting crowded in the eastern foothills, but with the railway running clear through the mountains and their intervening valleys, cattle ranching there might be lucrative. Between the heavily timbered or the rocky ranges were these valleys waiting for cattle.

Robert Rogers saw his chance and invested. Through from the plains he drove in his herds to his chosen valley. He had been the good little lad, saving his pennies. For foreman he found a man, and that man was Tom Edwards who had not been saving his pennies. But here was a job to his mind and for sure, now, he would save.

These were great days in their valley, with Robert becoming more and more like the uncrowned king of it, his shipping station fifty-five and one half miles

from his ranch house, fish in the river, deer and bear in the hills.

Then the prospector, who has left his memory in the name of Dutch Creek, came in and found color. Little towns sprang up at the mouths of all the creeks. The prospector, with his pack horse astern, was in the land.

It was then that Rogers went away to get married. But what a home-coming! It would be a story to tell in the next decade, if they got through.

Tom, by appointment, was at Silverton to meet them, all dolled up with a new Stetson, and black satinet shirt with pearly buttons.

"My friend and foreman," was how Robert introduced him.

His friend and foreman was worried. There had been a big strike on Bonanza Creek in Robert's absence, and Silverton was celebrating. The sight of the celebrating startled the new wife; but she noticed how these reeling men seemed all aware when a woman came near. It was in its way a triumphant procession. They blinked, peered, and then staggered from the sidewalk. It was hers—all of it. And then, after she had passed, they got back to the sidewalk and staggered on again. The formality of it seemed to be like that in giving a salute—so many paces before coming level, and held for so many paces after passing. Any man who stayed on the sidewalk was sober; but, truth to tell, that afternoon of Mrs. Roger's arrival, few did.

With Robert to one side and Tom to the other, she progressed along the two blocks from the depot to the hotel in a clear space. Twenty feet ahead men coming toward them lurched into the road; twenty feet astern the men lurched on again. Those close ahead of them, seeing the movement of the men they were meeting, looked over their shoulders to discover its cause, then reeled from the sidewalk till the lady had passed.

"I'm very sorry about this," said Rogers. "There has been a lucky strike, Tom tells me on one of the creeks, and they are all celebrating."

"In a way," said she, "it is comical. I have never felt so much like royalty."

Tom glanced at her.

"This woman he has gone and got hitched up to is the goods," he considered.

BUT he worried. He had seen signs, coming up the road, that the hooch peddler was in the land. Or, to be precise, he had heard. He told Rogers about it, after Mrs. Rogers had gone to bed.

"Say, Bob, she takes the whoop-up here very good, but how about the road?"

"That will be all right. They'll all be in town to whoop-up. We'll be up bright and early and get out of this."

"Yes, but—well, you see, there has been a hooch peddler down the valley. The Indians have got the stuff. Coming up yesterday I could hear them screaming and yelling away up the draws. That is their notion of keeping quiet about it—go back in the draws and hit the stuff there."

"Well, if we start early we'll be home long before sundown. She won't be scared by day."

"As you say, Bob."

"Yes, I think that's better. See you in the morning."

But there had been too much hooch down the road. Tom had come for them in the big democrat rig, so that the baggage could go along with them. Robert was driving, his wife by his side. Behind sat Tom, bending forward, for they talked as the road ran steadily under them and the dust rose and billowed behind them, the two sturdy horses keeping up a steady rhythm. On they went, the men congratulating themselves on every mile traversed without hearing those screeches from the draws. There was no sound louder than the chuckling of the creek to the right, and the crackling of the grasshoppers on the benches to the left.

And then—then a high, shrill, trembling yell.

"What on earth is that?" asked Mrs. Rogers.

Robert did not reply at once. Behind, Tom spoke.

"Now what was that?" he said. "It might have been a cougar. Well, they've got an awful yell; but they have never been known to attack a human being."

She looked at her husband's face. She looked over her shoulder at his friend and foreman. Again came the scream; came, indeed, several screams together. She shivered up and down the spine. But she looked over her shoulder again.

"That, I suppose, was a dozen cougars all together," said she. "I never heard they went in packs," and she laughed.

Rogers sat back a trifle on the seat so that he might feel, against his hip, a gun that Tom had brought him secretly before they started. Thoughtful of Tom. But Tom had done much more than that. He had a Winchester in the rig, nicely covered by a bearskin cast in the bottom. These things were comforting to both. But, having a woman along, and she new from the East, they sought other comfort.

They were trying to assure themselves that there would be nothing untoward, that the Indians knew too much to make a real rumpus, that they were only blowing off steam. Each was telling himself that they'd never do anything beyond reason—might shout a scare into a person when lit up, but that was all. Yet each knew that he lied to himself, that the valley had known scarlet stories both of Indian and bad-man trouble, and might again.

Rogers glanced up to a bluff ahead, and then looked away rapidly. He used the whip lightly, but for more than pointing. The horses leaped forward.

"Now, why did he do that?" thought Tom, knowing these horses needed no whip and that it was but decorative.

And then he, too, saw the figure on the bluff.

Even that distance off, that it was an Indian was clear. Queer thing, the shape of a race. Half a mile off one could tell Indian from white. And this Indian was not half a mile off. And he was signaling to some one—or it might be to others—behind him.

There they came! But the democrat rig went past on the road before they got down from the bluff. The Indians shouted. They shouted for it to stop.

Then there was some hard thinking for these two men. They thought on the same lines, and to tell the thought of one is to tell the thought of both. Thus it went:

"If we were alone there would be no doubt at all what to do. We'd stop. We'd not look as if we expected anything but a friendly greeting—in spite of the guns they have. We'd look as if we expected to be offered either a friendly pull of the bottle or asked if we could replenish their supply. The idea is: Stop every time if invited to and then, if there is trouble, meet it. Never even look as if you're running away. But with a woman along? Pretend we don't hear? Look ahead? But they know we couldn't help hearing. They'll think we're scared. That's bad. It's always bad to run. Yes, I know; but there is a woman along."

THAT brought them to Tillicum Cañon, where the road is all there is. It's just eight hundred feet of cliff, then road—not broad—then fifty feet cliff and the river. That's Tillicum Cañon. By the voices, the Indians were gaining on them. And then one shot.

Gosh, that was unexpected. That was what came of not stopping. But should they halt now? Tom bent down and fumbled in the bottom of the rig for something.

"Slow up a mite, Bob," said he.

"You think so? I was going to hit it up. We can let them know later we weren't scared." He turned to his wife. "We've never had anything just like this before, and to think that on the day that you——"

"That'll do fine," said Tom. "I can hop off."

"Hell, man, you're not going to——" But Tom had jumped.

"I'll hold 'em," said he. "The chamber's full. I'll stop 'em here. Go on, man, go on."

"But—oh, all right. By gosh, Tom, I'll be back for you before you know. I'll——"

"Go on!"

With a groan at leaving his friend and foreman, Robert Rogers drove on. He sped up again, rolling along the cañon road like a charioteer in the Olympic games, the river flickering foam below.

Crash went a rifle behind them, as they passed out of the cañon.

"We shouldn't have left him!" exclaimed Mrs. Rogers.

"Circumstances alter cases," replied her husband, and felt very much married.

He was enraged. He could have wiped out the whole tribe at that moment, in many furies. He loved this woman, and was nigh demented at leaving his friend and foreman in the lurch.

But she was not a woman to cling to him when they reached the ranch, however, and decide then that she couldn't spare him and that he must not go back.

The boys were all there to welcome her, all spruced up; but, instead of smiles and cheers and hat waving, there were blank stares. Why did the boss hit the grit like this? And where was Tom?

"Introduce yourselves," said Robert, drawing rein and jumping to the ground. "My wife, boys. Look after her. Tom's holding a bunch of hooch-crazy Indians back at the cañon."

They looked as if they pondered what to do with the woman, where to cache her so that all might go to Tom's assistance. Two of them made no bother about it, but threw the saddles on their horses also, and dashed away for rifles.

"We'll soon be back, dear," said Robert.

It seemed a long time to them all that day, "the boys" at the ranch making cursory remarks, listening, waiting, tongue-tied by more than shyness, some of them thinking: "Darn her—keeping us here!"

It seemed long to Robert and the two who accompanied him. But at last they came to the cañon. They rode on and at the farther end, there was Tom sitting on a boulder, the Winchester on his lap; and beside him sat an old Indian with white locks fanning out from under a big hat, though he wore a buckskin coat—Chief Blue Horse.

He was talking to six sullen, blazing-eyed, deranged-looking others. And they were taking what he said to them. There was another Indian, lying by the roadside, very still. He would never move again. He had gone down to a shot from Tom, but not the one that Robert and his wife had heard, which had been a humane preliminary, a warning fired in air, a warning that had not sufficed.

"How-do, chief," said Rogers.

"How-do. All right. These men—I know. You tell sheriff. He come for them. I tell them so. You—you see he catch hooch man and put in jail, too?"

"You bet, chief. That's a square deal."

With the coming of Mrs. Rogers another period ended. For there were examples made. Six Indians went to the penitentiary for that fracas, and so did one white man, for supplying them with the juice for it. The Indians made pictographs of the incident on their winter count that year; and the hooch peddlers put the valley on their black list.

FOR the next stage in the story there are many contributing causes.

Rogers accepted the leadership thrust upon him as the first of the cattlemen, and made it clear to the railway company that the time had come for a spur line to serve them. And soon followed the overcrowding of the free range there, nay—the eating out of it. Most of the cattlemen did not wait for the inevitable end. They sold out and went elsewhere.

But "Longheaded" Rogers—they were beginning to call him that—did not do so. He got in touch with capitalist friends. He floated a company, an irrigated lands company, and was its president. The big ranches were cut up and sold in small portions.

And there it was that Tom left him. He was out of his element. A little barbed wire was all very well in its way, if it was to go round wide miles, but rolls of it to go round small acres—no! All the station platforms in the valley showed stacks of it after the freights came through. Men who wielded picks and shovels came in to dig ditches. Grangers arrived. The longhorns were gone. Only back in one or two of the side valleys did they linger.

Rogers offered Tom a job in the land company office.

"No," he replied. "I can't set on a high stool, Bob. I just got to set on a high saddle."

So he went out of the story. But he's coming back.

The placer men washed out all the gold dust in Dutch and Bonanza Creeks, and the ore prospects, in the mountains behind, were on the market. Longheaded Rogers bought one or two of these and got in touch, in his persuasive way, with the capitalists again. By the time gasoline came along there was no doubt that there were grounds for what old Chief Blue Horse said:

"Robert, white chief of the valley, get devil wagon. Guess red chief of the valley get devil wagon, too."

Not that he did, but he had the notion to do so; only, like Tom, a saddle was more natural to him.

The white chief played his part. He helped the valley and himself. He helped himself and the valley. He blossomed schemes as a rosebush roses, and if it was one of these bushes with thorns, that can't be helped. Sometimes people got stung—or, perhaps, one should say pricked, to keep the simile straight. But it was usually outsiders who got that.

Cattle had long gone. They were shipping potatoes, which grew well in that soil. People, however, came in too thickly in response to the advertising of the Irrigated Fruit Lands. The old-timers profited for a spell, especially those who had bought land that was to be sold to the I. F. L. But the newcomers began to feel crowded, as the cattle had been. More meetings were convened, not now in the barroom but in the church hall, rented for the occasion. How about small fruits? All very well, but who was going to eat them? Ship them to the prairies and mining towns. Would that suffice? Well, then, get the people in to eat them. Who? Tourists! We have a cañon worth looking at; we have mountains and lakes. Thus went the talk, and thus came into existence the Tillicum Bungalow Camp.

Rogers worried the government for subsidies for roads. He got the valley road linked up with the roads that led to the highways that led to San Francisco and Chicago. A few of the old cowpunchers who had not, like Tom, left the valley but had remained precariously making a living by fishing, placering, a little trapping, a little fire fighting, once more donned the chaps and herded tourists over trails to lakes where there were both fish and scenery.

ABOUT this period Robert threw himself more assiduously into the task of "making the valley" because he was lonesome and would forget. For a great sorrow came to him. His wife died—she who remembered coming into the valley by democrat, and the crazy screams of the Indians on that day; she who had learned to love the smell of the sage, the call of loons across the waters. She was gone. Old Chief Blue Horse was gone, and his son was a poor specimen in comparison.

"Gone—all are gone—the old familiar faces," used often to come into Robert's mind.

He often wondered where Tom Edwards had gone to. The last he had heard of him, he had been teaming supplies to a mining camp back in the hills on the other side of Silverton. A pity he had never made good. He must be up in years now. Robert himself was up in years. His mirror showed him gray hairs.

Two years after Mrs. Rogers' death, the Prince of Zenda—we'll call him that—visited the valley and stayed at Robert's ranch. Bob told him and his entourage many stories of the old days, and after supper they all gathered round the log fire, while their host talked to them of the valley as he had first known it.

But in the morning they had a story of the old days relieved. The Silverton *Sentinel* told all about it. The Imperial Bank had been held up, lone hand, and robbed of a cool hundred thousand dollars. Why "cool" I don't know, but that's what it said.

The Prince of Zenda was delighted.

"It's awfully thrilling, what?" he remarked.

He was, indeed, tickled to death, so to speak; and his entourage all said, "Rather!" as one might say: "You bet you!"

And they chaffed Robert over his paradoxical plaint—he who was all for the

advance of the valley—that the old days were over, and so nettled him.

It was not holdups that were the strong point of the old days. Couldn't they understand that? It was the freedom, the adventure, the elbow room, the—— Oh, they couldn't understand?

He was weary of them. He wished they would go. They were not. at base, his people. The Indians, riding past in their democrats, all tinkered together with hay wire and rope ends, were nearer to him. They were really part of that part of the scene that had not been spoiled by progress.

Before going to bed that night he went out for a little turn around in the dark under the stars. A duck talked sleepily from a slough. Far off a coyote whimpered, and that made him feel better. His beautiful formal garden—chiefly to show people what could be done with the soil under irrigation—glimmered to the quarter moon. But he strolled beyond it to where whiffs of sage intruded into the scent of roses.

For a moment he thought he heard an Indian drum throbbing for a dance, but the reserve was far away, and there was no powwow that he knew of then. It was the blood in his ears; that was all. A quiet night. Then he heard a little creak over toward the henhouse. It came again—from farther—over at the stables. And then there was a light there.

He had no dog to give any warning of intruders—four-footed or two-footed. He had owned a dog, but when it died he had not got another. That dog had been part of the old life. One gathers that behind the part of Rogers that was somewhat of an exploiter—smooth—there was a heart. Gosh, he was a lonely man, if they only knew! Lonely in his big twenty-thousand-dollar house, with the men of the old days scattered.

HE went back to the house and got a gun and shoved it under his belt, tiptoeing past the room where the Prince of Zenda lay sleeping. He sneaked past the raspberry canes and the henhouse, and on to the stable.

A slit of light showed at the side of the door and he came closer and peered through. A tall man was there in the light of the stable lantern, his back turned, taking a bridle from a hook. There was electric light in the stable but there were lanterns also, for chores about the place; and this intruder preferred the lantern, its flame turned low.

"Put up your hands—and snappy!" said Robert Rogers.

The man wheeled, bridle in one hand, and the other hand went backward.

"Quick!" warned Rogers.

The hand poised, stayed. But it did not go up at once.

It all happened very speedily. In another second that man's hands might have been up, but they remained down, for Robert said:

"Good Lord, it's Tom! What's the game?"

He opened the door then, thrusting his revolver under his belt, and stepped in.

"I was just going to borrow a horse from you," explained Tom.

"How come?" inquired Robert, and sat down on a bale of hay.

Tom eyed him thoughtfully. He had, from much he had heard, lost confidence in his old boss and friend, for the story was that Rogers was smooth. But Tom decided to plunge, chance it, and trust him.

"I came down on the freight from Silverton," he said. "But I'm no hobo to travel that way."

"Broke!" ejaculated Robert, and his hand went halfway to his pocket. That it did not go all the way was not because he changed his mind, but because he had not enough loose change to offer to a broke friend and one-time foreman.

"Broke!" ejaculated Tom in his turn. "No, siree! I'm worth a cool hundred thousand!"

There was the old twinkle in his eyes as their gaze met in the light of the lantern that hung askew at the end of one of the stalls, its rays glinting feebly on harness and the glossy haunch of a horse.

Robert, on the bale of hay, his hands together, looked up at Tom and a corner of his mouth twisted. He understood. Here was the lone holdup man told of in the Silverton *Sentinel*.

"That's right," said Tom, though Rogers had said nothing beyond a look. "And the job is to get away with it. I had a hunch that for old-time's sake you would not mind lending me a horse."

"I don't mind in the slightest," replied Robert. "That's the best way to make a get-away. You know the old trails."

"Me! I could get from the Caribou country to Utah without being seen, once I got going, and only old-timers and Indians could trace me."

"Do they know it's you that did it?"

"Nope; I guess not. But there will be descriptions out. I can't chance roads and railways for a spell yet. I've got to get into the hills. This horse, now, with the little flannel bangles round it——"

"You can't have that. It's the Prince of Zenda's. It would tickle him to death; he'd think it awfully thrilling that his horse had been stolen overnight—just like the old days, what?"

"Ah, but the question is: Can this horse stick to a hillside, 'all same fly?' I judge he can travel like lightning on a flat and turn on a dollar; but can he cling? The ways I'm going, he's got to do some clinging, believe me. I guess a cayuse is more the thing."

"Well, Tom, take mine. There's a cayuse worth riding."

"You may never see him again, Bob."

"That's all right. It will do me good to know you got away on him. Use him kindly."

"Sure. Say, maybe after it has all blowed over, I'll pike in again and spill the yarn I made good somewhere and thought I'd come back to my old ha'nts to settle."

Robert Rogers had a sudden thought that one can't do evil that good may come, and that a stolen hundred thousand—cool or hot—would never go that way. And then he suddenly felt himself a humbug. Some of his own hundred thousands had come to him, not exactly by holding up a bank, but, in the eyes of a Supreme Arbiter, perhaps not much more honestly.

"Well, it's been a hell of a time," said Tom, once more as if answering Robert's unspoken considerations. "They sure poured their progress over us. It is like jam; it is like fly paper. A person gets all lost and mired. I can never get used to every new move. As soon as I think I do, there's another one. I was spraying apple trees last week for a man, and that finished me. I can't get the damn stuff out of my nostrils. Spraying apple trees—me! And slap-bang, when I was passing the bank, the notion came to me and I just acted upon it."

THIS simple statement sent Bob into a shaking mirth. He could not stop. He sat there laughing and laughing, his whole body shaking. Then suddenly he rose up and his eyes looked moist. Perhaps he had laughed too much. He was no longer a young man, any more than Tom was. The tear ducts weaken, as age comes along. Or maybe he had been thinking of the old days, and all his love for them. Anyhow, he was under the stress of some deep feeling, as he rose and stepped over to the far stall and led out the cayuse of cayuses.

"That's his saddle," said he and pointed. "Here is the bridle."

He bitted the horse, and Tom threw the saddle over the blanket that Rogers carefully spread.

"I'll get you some grub," said Robert.

For a moment Tom's eyes showed something. That something passed. He would trust him, for all his name for being smooth.

"All right," said he.

"You've got the dough, have you?"

"Yep."

"Wondered if you had cached it."

"No, got it in this sack."

"That's fine."

Robert went away to look in the larder for food and, returning, set it before Tom, also a rifle with a box of cartridges and a fishing rod.

"I'll rob you of the fishing rod as well as the horse," said Tom. "The rifle I won't take. I got my six-gun. And I've got to travel as light as possible, you know."

He fell to the food, plate on lap, while Robert sat beside him on the bale of hay, bent forward, elbows on knees, chin between his palms, silent. The meal over, he tossed off a jorum that Robert put

on the tray, and then rose and stood by the horse.

"Do you remember," said Robert, "that day at Tillicum Cañon, when Mary came in?"

Tom looked at him.

"Gosh, he's getting old," he thought. He felt young enough himself, though he was just Robert's age. "That was a great day," he said aloud. "Well, s'long, Bob."

"S'long, Tom."

When the horseman was gone, with a plash through the river and a crackling of twigs of the riverside bushes on the farther bank, Robert turned back to the house and, having put the tray back in place, and the dishes, stole quietly to his bedroom.

He sat down on a chair and thought, and ever and again he laughed, his plump and elderly body shaking.

"Well, I hope they catch him—not!" he exploded. "I guess this would have tickled Mary. She used to say the old days were best. I hope they catch him *—not!"*

A week later a letter came to him from the secretary of a stock association. A horse, buckskin, white forehead, had been found on Tobacco Plains. It bore his brand. Would he give the matter his attention?

So Tom had got away.

Perhaps this story is one of those that helped to give that look to Rogers as of a man with deeps in him, that look as of one a trifle aloof despite all his bonhomie. A trifle pathetic too, he seemed at times, to discerning observers, as of a man lonely with many memories, behind his air of genial host.

But, as you may guess, this is one of the stories he never told. Well, now that he has gone, to meet the boys that went before him, now it can be told.

A NEW INDUSTRY—RAISING FROGS

PERHAPS a new and highly profitable industry will presently lift its great head in commercial circles, if one is to believe implicitly the predictions of the humorous frog farmer, Emil Hendrich, of Washington, Missouri. Mr. Hendrich, whose wide activities as a naturalist have splendidly equipped him for his new avocation, came upon the idea of raising frogs, almost by accident. One day while fishing, he found his seine full of tadpoles instead of minnows. Seized with the bright thought of a frog farm, he seined out all the minnows and put more tadpoles in the little pond. Now he has from one hundred and fifty to two hundred frogs of all sizes and varieties. His experiment has filled him with enthusiasm; for, as he claims, frogs not only have a high market value for their legs, but they could be made a wide-selling product as insect exterminators. Farmers, says this enterprising man, should have a frog farm in each corner of their land, and then they'd have no more trouble with insects. For, he goes on, eight hundred million dollars' worth of food is destroyed every year by insects. Is it not feasible to employ the frogs to wipe them out? Mr. Hendrich's experiment may really develop into something. His work is attracting the attention of biologists, and Federal authorities are interested in finding out the value of the idea in regard to food production. One of the interesting results is the news that a complete literature on frogs is sadly lacking. Very little is known about their habits or their relation to the world, and Hendrich, through his serio-comic venture, is discovering and recording a great deal of data hitherto unknown.

The Greek Statue

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Out of the Air," "Spirit of the Mist," Etc.

You don't have to believe in reincarnation to enjoy this story of an American business man who found, in a Naples museum, a Greek statue that startlingly resembled him. And then a strange thing happened!

HIS corner in R. F. and D. had netted Rupert Hawkins several millions of dollars and the respect of Wall Street, but it had done funny things to his heart. In Europe now, because his physician had assured him he would be dead in a year if he did not take a long vacation, he was going through the Naples Museum—a place that had once been recommended as worth visiting. He stopped before a statue of a Greek person named Phillidas, then regarded his companion rather sheepishly and said:

"Look here, Fostick. I'm supposed to be a sick man; but the doctor did not say that my brain was affected. Since I entered the Hall of Statues, I've been under the delusion that a lot of these relics resemble people I know. Now, I am thinking that this fellow looks like me."

Professor Fostick, who had met Hawkins during the voyage from New York to Naples, gazed at the yellowish-white marble and at the pink countenance of his companion and back again.

"It's not an hallucination, Mr. Hawkins," he stated. "You might have posed for this statue, which was recovered from the ruins of Thebes in Bœotia. The inscription says it dates from the fourth century before Christ—sculptor unknown."

"But, man alive, this Phillidas was a Greek, and I'm an Anglo-Saxon. All the Greeks I ever saw were swarthy, undersized, and bootblacks by profession. Imagine a fellow who looked like me walking about, wrapped in a sheet, twenty-three hundred years ago. It's uncanny! See, he has the same bump on his nose; his mouth lifts a little at the right corner, just like mine; and he has the same sort of chin. I'll swear I have no Greek ancestors."

"It's a racial, rather than a family, resemblance," declared the professor. "Ever read any ancient history, Hawkins?"

"Sure. I went to college and studied Greek and Roman history, but it's a very long time ago. I'm fifty-one my next birthday."

"Come out into the café. While we are drinking a cup of coffee, I'll tell you a few things not mentioned in your very concise college histories. Perhaps you may understand why you and What's-his-name—Phillidas—have the same predatory noses and acquisitive chins."

"Never too old to learn," answered the millionaire. "I'll pay for the coffee."

WHEN they were seated upon small cast-iron chairs at cast-iron tables, Professor Fostick, figuratively speaking, ascended the lecture platform.

"Civilization has a way of stamping itself upon the human visage," he explained. "It produces high foreheads, long noses, strong narrow chins, and it always seems to have been carried on by blue eyes.

"History, authentic history, does not extend farther back than twelve or fifteen hundred years before Christ. If the Moslems had not destroyed the library of Alexandria, perhaps we might know more about antiquity. But this we do know: Out of the center of Russia or western Siberia, some two thousand years before Christ, came a tribe of tall men with blue eyes and blond hair, who overran Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt. They either eliminated or made slaves of the original inhabitants, and either brought with them or produced in these countries the seeds of progress and civilization.

"These blond Nordics were the ones who developed the arts and sciences of antiquity. They were responsible for 'the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.' Their conquests ruined them, for they intermarried with subject races and produced an inferior grade of men. In the course of time, they were overpowered by barbarians from the North—barbarians of the same race as they had been originally, but who were lacking in the refined qualities which made remarkable the original Nordics.

"If you visit many museums and study the statues made of residents of Greece and Rome during their golden ages, you will continue to be struck with their resemblance to Anglo-Saxons. You are by no means the first man to notice it. You are a Nordic; so were Pericles, Julius Cæsar, Cicero and Alexander the Great."

"It's curious that these types should skip France and Italy and jump to England and America," ruminated Hawkins.

"The Latin countries are largely inhabited to-day by remnants of the original populations of the Mediterranean region and by an influx of a south-Russian race of short, squat individuals inaptly called 'Alpines;' but there still is a fair percentage of Nordics among them."

"The Scandinavians are pure Nordics, aren't they?"

"Yes. One hundred per cent."

"So? Well, I have not observed many statues that resembled Swedes and Norwegians. I could pick out a dozen New York business men who look like Julius Cæsar, but I never saw a Scandinavian who resembled him."

"There is something in what you say," said the professor. "I presume it is the influence of the sharp conflict of American business life which resembles, in a way, the keen struggle among Roman patricians which produced that particular type of Nordics."

"Well," admitted the millionaire, as he bit off the end of a Havana cigar not purchased in Italy, "your explanation is interesting and may have science behind it, but I am not satisfied that it covers the resemblance between myself and this Phil—Phil——"

"Phillidas."

"Yep. Dress me in a sheet and put a laurel wreath on my head, and you couldn't tell us apart. I suppose he had blue eyes."

"Most likely—and probably reddish-brown hair like yours—what's left of it."

"Do you believe in rebirth?"

"No," replied the professor curtly. "I'm a materialist."

"I'm not so sure. I've had queer dreams at times. How does either of us

know that I didn't cut a lot of ice in Thebes under the name of Phillidas?"

"Don't be absurd. Nature often duplicates. Most likely there are a dozen men alive in America to-day who look so much like you that your wife couldn't teli you apart."

"I'm a bachelor. Never met a woman I wanted to marry. I've always had a fool notion I was waiting for somebody. Got kind of an idea what she looks like, but I can't ever see her plainly."

"Well, let's get back to the hotel," said the professor. "I am sorry to say I don't believe in reincarnation; but if such a thing were possible, the soul would not demand that each new body be exactly like that of its former self."

Hawkins laughed and threw away his cigar.

"I'm an idiot, of course. but ever since I saw that confounded statue, I have a queer feeling and can't explain it."

THE professor left, and the captain of industry remained sitting on the wide porch of the Hotel Parker, smoking a heavy cigar and sipping a delicious alcoholic concoction.

"Phillidas," Hawkins mused. "Wonder who he was, and why they made a statue of him. Must have been 'some pumpkins.' They'll never erect a statue to me in little old New York."

"Phillidas," said a musical voice, with a note of impatience. "Wake up, friend! This is neither the time nor the place for slumber."

Hawkins did not know he had been asleep, but he opened his eyes to see a tall, kindly man in his late thirties standing before him—a man who looked like Henry Baker, president of the Merchants' National Bank, but dressed as Mr. Baker might have been at a Turkish bath, in a brown robe hemmed with red.

"Greeting, Epaminondas," he said, strangely accepting the presence of this individual and inexplicably knowing his name. "Why come you to my house in the heat of the afternoon? I was not aware that I had fallen asleep."

"Men of Thebes should not sleep while the Spartans hold the citadel."

"What can we do?" protested Hawkins, or rather, Phillidas. "With tyrants ruling us, the whole strength of Lacedæmonia at their back, our stoutest citizens dead or in exile at Athens, spies in every home and upon every street corner, men must think of their own necks."

"We can think of our lost liberty, instead of stuffing ourselves like swine with food and sleeping in the sun."

"I had a strange dream, my philosopher," Phillidas replied, ignoring the reproach. "There were no Spartans in it. I seemed to be living in some remote age, far in the future, where men rode in wagons without horses and voyaged in ships without sails or oars, where they communicated with one another at great distances and fought with weapons which spat fire and killed several thousand paces distant."

"You must have traveled to Egypt in your dream. 'Tis said that the priests of that strange country have such devices, but hide them from the people. I would we possessed the fire weapons to slay the accursed Spartans, as they walk the ramparts of the Cadmea."

"Do you believe in reincarnation, Epaminondas?"

"Not I," laughed the philosopher. "I am a materialist. I do not believe in the gods of Olympus, and I know that the oracle of Delphi is dishonest."

"'Twas a fantastic dream. I was very rich, but not happy. Olympia was not there, and I waited for her. There must have been a tyrant, for good wine was forbidden."

"Deliver me from such a place," scoffed Epaminondas. "Listen, friend. Art content with our slavery to these enemies who betrayed our city to the Spartans?"

"Archias, the real tyrant, professes to be my friend. I have no desire to lose my head in a futile uprising. Best take care, Epaminondas. Your poverty and your scholarship will not save you if Archias or Philip or Leonidas learn of your sentiments."

"I am cautious. In my school I have been encouraging my young athletes to wrestle with the Spartans and conquer them in friendly games. Then I whisper to them how shameful it is to sub-

mit to men whom they can so easily best, but I take no open action. Look! Our tyrant, Archias, approaches—those are his trumpets."

Phillidas followed his finger and saw a commotion at the far end of the wide avenue. The avenue was lined with beautiful residences of the Theban better class, and was paved with wide flagstones. There were curbstones and sidewalks, like those in Naples. People were coming out upon their porticos—comfortable porches, shaded by brightly tinted awnings—and were moving to the ramparts of their flat roofs. Already Phillidas had dismissed the vague memory waves of Hawkins, the millionaire, of a country not to be discovered for seventeen hundred years, and he saw nothing strange in the appearance of the sturdy city of Thebes, as she had looked before the Macedonians had obliterated her.

THE crowd was gathering in the street, dividing to permit the passage of the regal procession. It was a motley throng —some in rich, white garments, others in scanty, brown tunics, ragged and dirty —drawn from byways by the mellow notes of the trumpets.

Archias, with Philip and Leonidas had persuaded the Spartans, in a period of profound peace, to surprise the citadel of Thebes. This was a powerful fort on a hill dominating the city. It bore the name of Cadmus, after the mythical founder of the place, who had quickly reduced his fellow oligarchs to the post of lieutenants. Archias was as nearly a king as it was possible for a Greek citizen to become, and he was preceded by a company of Theban hoplites, foot soldiers, who were weighted down by heavy armor. They carried great brazen shields and spears twelve feet long, as well as the deadly short sword, which swung at their belts. Such men as these had crushed the Persians at Marathon and driven back the myriads of Cyrus, the Great.

Behind them rode a score of horsemen; cavalry was scarce in Greece and ill considered, and then followed a band of white-clad maidens, whose snowy garments did but emphasize the milk-white beauty of their faces. They capered joyously, as they spread flowers in the path of the selfish brute who had betrayed his country. The cheers that lifted, as Archias passed, were hollow, for tyrants were intolerable in Greece, and were hedged about by no divinity. They were not warranted by the Hellenic religion.

"The fool!" gritted Phillidas, safe on his portico. "Does he not realize that he will pay for his brief reign with his life? Tyrants have short lives."

"And his death will come sooner than he anticipates, despite his Spartan garrison," whispered Epaminondas. "Already—— Hist! Here comes Olympia."

From the interior of the house had glided the wife of Phillidas, whose eye kindled at the sight of her familiar loveliness—a small, young, dazzling creature, whose hair hung upon her shoulders like a curtain of burnished copper, and whose dark-blue eyes mirrored the smile with which she greeted her husband. She wore a blue house robe, and her bare feet were thrust into tiny pigskin sandals.

"Salutations, Epaminondas," she said pertly. "I trust you are not plotting together. when a pageant like this passes before our door."

"I salute you, beautiful wife of my honored friend," replied the philosopher, who became the greatest strategist in arms of antiquity. "Phillidas, I pray you, send her indoors, lest the tyrant set eyes on her. Have you not heard how the wives of Lucores and Aristo were thrown into prison?"

"True, hasten within, beloved. Watch, if you wish, from behind a screen at one of the windows."

"But I want to be here with you," she pouted.

"Obey me," he commanded, with a smile which belied the hardness of his words. Olympia seized his right hand, bent over and touched it with her lips, then fled indoors.

"Tell me, Epaminondas, was Agamemnon's Helen more wondrously fair?"

"I know not, but this wife of yours is much too beautiful for your safety," retorted his friend. "Such women breed wars. And the tyrant has already remarked her. Best cast your lot with us."

"Show me a remote chance of success," pleaded his friend, the husband of Olympia.

"More anon. I shall leave your house by the rear, lest the tyrant spy us together."

Meanwhile, the procession was passing, and the litter of Archias, surrounded by horsemen, was opposite the small palace of Phillidas. The curtains were up and Phillidas saw the traitor lying back on silken pillows, heedless of the regard of the mob. At the same moment the tyrant saw him.

"Halt!" Archias commanded, whereupon his litter bearers, eight sturdy Thessalian slaves, lowered the litter until it rested upon its short legs.

"Tell Phillidas to approach," he commanded. One of the captains made a sign to the person who had been Hawkins, and who now reluctantly approached the litter.

"You need not kneel, friend," said Archias. "Were we not fellows at the school of Palamenes? I crave a boon, good friend."

"I am at your service, master," replied Phillidas.

"I thirst. I would quaff a cup of wine from the hand of the exquisite Olympia, your wife whose presence will make it sweeter."

"She is not well, sire."

"But now she stood beside you upon your portico. It is my wish, Phillidas."

"I obey, sire."

With ill grace Phillidas entered his house to bid Olympia fetch forth a cup of wine. He had no choice for, despite the fair words of the tyrant, a refusal would have caused a guard to sever his head from his body; but he was pale with terror, not knowing what the request of Archias portended.

Those who grasped precarious power in a Grecian State drove furiously to their desires, aware that the freedom-loving citizens would not suffer them to reign very long. Brutality, cruelty, dissipation, and, at last, the assassin's knife, were the usual characteristic steps in the lives of most tyrants, whose only claim to kingship was ability to grasp it.

Olympia came timidly, her lovely hair now confined beneath its headdress, her eyes wide with wonder, half vain of the honor and half alarmed by it, while the procession halted, and the populace gasped.

The tyrant kissed the hand which proffered him the cup, drained it, and, sitting up on his couch, returned it graciously to the doner and said:

"Fair lady, much as I esteem your husband. I do not believe him worthy of such a treasure."

This sinister compliment made Olympia tremble and withdraw. Stepping backward, she found that her husband's arm encircled her. With a laugh, the tyrant gave the signal to proceed.

Phillidas, with drooping shoulders, escorted his wife into his dwelling—or, rather into the patio, for his house was a quadrangle around a lovely little garden.

"Have I done wrong, Phillidas? she queried timidly, as she studied his clouded countenance.

"No, beloved. 'Twas no fault of yours. Curses upon the gods who permitted that profligate to spy you upon the outer portico."

DROPPING upon a marble seat in the garden, he looked up and shook his fist at the Cadmea, where fifteen hundred Spartans resided, prepared to descend upon the city if any should lift their hands against Archias, their friend.

Phœbidas, the Spartan general, had been returning from an expedition to the north, when emissaries of the traitors waited on him and suggested that he surprise the city, with which Sparta was at peace, during the feast of Ceres, when the gates were open. Considering the easy possession of Thebes a great advantage for Sparta, he made a compact and secured the place with ridiculous ease. Even Sparta, always selfish, could not brook such perfidy; but, on the other hand, she was loathe to relinquish such an advantage. Accordingly, the ephors censored Phœbidas, relieved him of his command, and placed a heavy fine upon him, but kept the garrison in the Cadmea. As Plutarch puts it: "They punished the doer, but approved the deed."

Phillidas gazed tenderly down upon Olympia, crouching at his feet, her head against his knees, and laid his hand upon her soft thick tresses, the touch of which caused electric prickles in his fingers. Although a soldier, like all citizens, he did not love war, and he had taken no part in the short, sharp conflict which had set Archias in the seat of the mighty; hence, he had not suffered in the slaughter of all supposed to be hostile who had not escaped through the city gates.

Epaminondas, the scholar, had escaped for like reason from the ruthless sword. But Pelopidas, his former intimate, was in exile in Athens, with about three hundred Theban patriots. Archias and the Spartans had demanded the delivery of these fugitives, but the Athenians, as yet, had refused to drive them forth to their death.

PHILLIDAS had recognized evil in the eyes of his erstwhile friend, Archias, as he looked on the marvelous Olympia, and he knew well enough what most probably would happen to him if he did not consent to deliver her up to the tyrant. Yet he had no thought of yielding what was more precious to him than his existence. Olympia was a Thessalian, captured in a raid by Theban soldiery, and brutally exposed for sale at the tender age of twelve, in the market place of Thebes, where Phillidas, in a surge of compassion, had purchased her. As the years passed, she increased in beauty, and he fell madly in love with his little slave. When she was seventeen he married her and established her rating as a citizen, and for three years she had made him ideally happy. Now their time had come; he would have to slay her to save her, then fall on his own sword. Sensing what was passing through his mind, Olympia snuggled against his knees and, looking up with adoring eyes, murmured:

"Do with me what you think best for us, Phillidas, my husband."

Kissing her, he sighed, then bade her return to her spinning wheel.

That night he sought Epaminondas for counsel and found him in his house, which was little more than a hovel, for the great man was as poor as a church mouse.

"Welcome, Phillidas!" exclaimed the philosopher, with a smile. "Doubtless you are in a mood to listen to a rash man, and here is Pelopidas, who has entered the city in disguise, and Charon, whom you know and respect as I do."

Pelopidas was wearing a beard and the rags of a beggar, yet it was astonishing that such a soldierly figure could have slipped past the guards of the tyrant. He was a magnificent young man, with laughing blue eyes, broad shoulders, and a jaw like an Olympic athlete, and he thrust an eager hand toward Phillidas.

"This is fortune favoring me. I sought earnestly to have speech with you, Phillidas, but this old scholar warned me that you were lukewarm."

"I sought not a futile death," replied Phillidas. "But it seems I must die, anyway. Archias covets my wife Olympia."

"Aye, and he will take her, for he has power. Art ready to draw your sword?"

"In what company, Pelopidas? There are few in Thebes to fight politarchs and Spartans."

"But many outside. Now here is my plan——"

"——which begins with killing," declared Epaminondas. "It is against my principles. Openly, I will fight Archias, but I will not stab him nor any man in the back."

"Not even to save your country?" asked Pelopidas.

"A country which cannot be saved otherwise deserves her fate."

"Tell me your plan, Pelopidas," pleaded Phillidas.

"I can bring three hundred exiles from Athens and hide them in the hovels on the plain; but it is necessary that a few of us penetrate into the city, hide until night, then slay the tyrant and his companions and open the gates. Under cover of darkness, three hundred men can take the city; when morning comes, and the people find the politarchs slain, all citizens will join us, and we can besiege the Spartans in the Cadmea."

"He has five hundred guards around his palace. You are mad, Pelopidas!"

"Ah, perhaps we could not force our way into the palace, but if he were invited to a feast in the house of a friend.

and that friend opened his door to us there——"

"He is too cautious to accept such an invitation."

"There is one house to which he will gladly go—one house, my friend."

"Whose house?"

"Yours. He desires to seize your Olympia, and he will see in your invitation an easy way to get her. He will assume that you are unsuspecting and he will take this manner to capture her."

"By Zeus," began Phillidas fiercely, "I'll slay her first!"

"Rather let us slay him. Be bold, Phillidas. Save your wife, your life, and Thebes."

"I do not understand your plan," he objected feebly.

"And I do not wish to know it," exclaimed Epaminondas. "I shall leave you conspirators together." Pelopidas laughed, as the philosopher withdrew.

"We do not need you, crafty one," he declared. "Now, listen, Phillidas: Our friend, Charon, has agreed to give me and my companions from the exiles, to the number of twelve, shelter in his house and to collect there a score or two of stout fellows, who will slay the guards at the eastern postern, after we have disposed of Archias. Here is your part. Listen well."

NEXT morning Archias arose with the image of Olympia before his eyes and the determination in his mind to bring her to his palace. There were already several matrons of Thebas confined in his palace, but to-day he determined to add the wife of Phillidas to their number. She had brought him wine in a wine cup outside the house of his schoolfellow, but a tyrant was above the conventions of hospitality.

Tyrant though he was, it behooved him to proceed cautiously. He could not send soldiers in broad daylight to tear her from the home of her husband. Better to trump up some charge against Phillidas, try to convict him, and then seize the unprotected woman.

While he schemed, a messenger arrived from Phillidas with a missive which he read with much satisfaction. His old friend implored him to honor his house with his presence at a feast, one week from this night, when he hoped to demonstrate his friendship and admiration for the ruler of the city.

"Tell my dear Phillidas that I accept with pleasure for myself and Philip and Leonidas," said the tyrant Archias, with a smile.

Phillidas could read the handwriting upon the wall, thought Archias, and had no mind to lose favor for the sake of his wife. As there were many citizens who would cheerfully surrender their wives for the friendship of a monarch, he saw no reason why Phillidas should be any better than others, and the complaisancy of the husband made simple a rather difficult matter.

The feast, of course, would be for men alone. When all had drunk much wine, Archias would slip away, seek the women's quarters, and have a soldier carry off Olympia. Phillidas, of course, expected this to happen, and for this reason issued the invitation. Well, afterward, it would be a simple matter to make Olympia his wife, and he would send Phillidas as an ambassador to the "Great King." He would allow a sufficient interval to elapse, to save appearances, before he put his full plan into effect.

In the meantime, Pelopidas had slipped out of the city, disguised as a market gardener, returned to Athens, not such a long distance away, and rallied the bravest of the exiles. As it was essential to the success of the plan that no suspicion of an intended revolt should reach the ears of the tyrant, they moved on Thebes in small groups, their armor and weapons buried in carts laden with hay or vegetables.

They met at a certain wooded place on the plain outside the city, and then Pelopidas selected twelve strong, courageous youths, who would venture with him within the walls. It was agreed that the others should provide for their wives and children and parents, if the plot failed, and upon the night of the feast they were to approach close to the southern gate to await a signal from the walls that all was well. If no light were dis-

played during the night, they were to return to Athens.

The dauntless twelve went forward boldly, clad in short coats, carrying hunting poles and accompanied by hounds to create an impression that they were hunters beating over the fields, and thus prevent suspicion in those they met on the way.

IT had been arranged that Charon and his friends in the city would send out a man to warn them if it looked as though the case were hopeless, and in that case, they were to notify Pelopidas not to make the venture. A person named Chlidon was chosen to carry the message, who, going home and leading out his horse could not find the bridle. His wife told him she had lent it to a friend, whereupon Chlidon began to upbraid her, and a quarrel ensued. Finally, she called down the gods to cause ill to him on his journey, and they spent precious hours quarreling, until he realized that he has wasted so much time he could not reach Pelopidas until too late. Therefore he shrugged his shoulders and sought a safe place to hide. Upon a missing bridle depended one of the greatest events in ancient history.

And you may find the incident in Plutarch's life of Pelopidas, if you doubt its authenticity.

Meanwhile, Pelopidas and his companions reached a vacant hut outside the walls, dressed themselves as clodhoppers and, dividing, entered by different gates, while it was yet daylight. There happened to be a heavy fall of snow, a rare thing in ancient Greece, and a high wind, and the guards at the gates were huddled in their quarters, paying no heed to the few stragglers who were passing in. They found their way to the residence of Charon, slipped within, and discovered a determined band of citizens awaiting them.

At the moment that Pelopidas was entering the asylum of refuge, the cortège of Archias was arriving at the door of Phillidas, who stood in the snow to receive him. Accompanying the tyrant was Philip, his associate oligarch, completely under his thumb, but Leonidas had decided not to attend the feast and had retired to his own residence, a contretemps not anticipated by the conspirators.

A score of courtiers accompanied Archias, hard-drinking sycophants, whose eyes gleamed at the thought of food and wine. Twoscore stout hoplites took up posts about the house than none might interfere with the enjoyment of their master.

"I am greatly honored, mighty Archias, that you should deign to enter my humble home," was Phillidas' salutation. The tyrant threw his arm about the shoulder of his host.

" 'Tis a good residence, but not worthy of my friend Phillidas," he replied graciously. "I shall make it my business to install you and your exquisite Olympia in a better one."

They passed through the garden, now covered with snow, and entered the large refectory at the rear of the house, where fifty torches shed a bright light upon a table loaded with viands and vases of wine.

Phillidas had almost bankrupted himself to provide this feast. Half a dozen cooks had labored three days to prepare the meats and pastries, and the finest wines in the market had been purchased regardless of price. Cushions of many colors and fine texture were provided about the long, low table, to the head of which he now escorted Archias and Philip. The guests handed their warm outer garments to waiting slaves, and at a signal from the tyrant all took their places. An orchestra of women slaves provided music of lutes and flutes and other instruments, music of which no trace has come down to us.

Phillidas, with a thrill of satisfaction, took his place between the politarchs. An hour before he had sent Olympia, heavily veiled and protected by a faithful male slave, to the house of Epaminondas, lest Archias seek her before the patriots arrived. Though he might lose his own life, his beloved would be safe. However, Archias did not believe in interesting himself in other matters until the inner man had been thoroughly refreshed.

"If you have not provided paid enter-

tainers," he said kindly to Phillidas, "I shall send for some to be here in two hours."

"I have not overlooked that necessity," replied the host. "But I crave a writing to admit them past your guards."

"The password is 'Lacedæmonia,'" replied Archias. "Send out a slave to fetch them; the word will bring them safely through the cordon."

AND then the feast began. Attentive slaves kept the wine cups filled, huge platters of game and beef and mutton and pork were set before the guests, sweet music accompanied their feasting, while Phillidas took advantage of the permission to send forth a slave with word for Pelopidas that Leonidas had gone to his own house.

Impatiently he waited for the guests to become drunk, striving to remain sober himself, a difficult task because Archias had an arm around his neck and insisted upon sharing his wine cup with him.

There were always traitors in Greece, and there was one among the following of Pelopidas, who had cravenly refused to set forth from Athens and then betrayed the whole plot to Archias, the Hierophant of Athens, who immediately determined to save his namesake of Thebes—the tyrant.

The messenger from Athens arrived when Archias was growing very drunk, leaped from a sweating horse, and was immediately conducted into the apartment by the captain of the guard. Saluting, the messenger said:

"Great Archias, the writer of this letter is your namesake, the Hierophant of Athens, who desires that it be read at once, as it is urgent business."

Archias stretched out his hand for the letter—even Phillidas suspected nothing like a betrayal from Athens—took it and made to open it. Then, with a wild laugh, exclaimed:

"Urgent business to-morrow!" He thrust it under the pillow of his couch and continued to assure Phillidas of undying friendship, while he besought him to introduce Olympia long enough to give him one cup of wine.

"Dancers!" shouted a gross fellow. "We want dancers!"

The cry was taken up on all sides, for the moment had come when the drunkards required entertainment other than food and drink.

"Patience," pleaded Phillidas. "They are on the way, the most beautiful dancers in Thebes."

"But none so fair as your wife, Olympia," shouted Archias.

"A toast, boon companions. The glorious Olympia, daughter of Venus, and her thrice-blessed husband."

It was drunk in noisy glee; then Archias staggered to his feet.

"Good friends. I love Phillidas. I shall send him to-morrow on a mission to the Great King in Susa. But the fair Olympia remains in Thebes."

Phillidas almost drew his dagger from his girdle, but prudence held him. Where was Pelopidas?

At that moment there entered the captain of the guard.

"A band of women wait without," he announced.

"Bring them in, fool, and get back to your post!" roared Archias.

There filed into the room a dozen persons wrapped in the enveloping winter mantles of Theban women, their heads covered with green garland, plentifully sprinkled with snow.

"Take off your mantles," thundered the tyrant. "There is snow on your garments."

"And soon there will be blood upon our swords!" cried a male voice. The dark veils dropped to the ground, and a dozen young men drew their swords.

"A plot!" shouted Archias, drawing his dagger and making a thrust at Phillidas, who, anticipating the situation, rolled out of danger.

"Lie still!" Phillidas shouted. "No one will be harmed except Archias." But several boon companions had already drawn daggers, but they were at once dispatched by the conspirators, who now hurled themselves upon Archias and Philip, so drunk they could not defend themselves against men with swords and breastplates.

Charon now threw open the front door

of the house and proclaimed what he had done to the hoplites.

"The politarchs are dead, the tyrants are slain! Thebes is free!" he shouted.

Instead of attacking him, the soldiers cheered. The guests of Phillidas who had not been slain promised glibly to join the conspirators, and a few moments later Pelopidas with his party arrived, after dispatching the unsuspecting Leonidas in his home. The triumvirate was gone; Thebes now had no tyrants. Phillidas consoled himself for the crime committed in his house by the safety of Olympia.

TO open the city gate was an easy matter, and in rushed the exiles, armed to the teeth, who soon suppressed any slight efforts to revenge the tyrant and his lieutenants. It was a night of great excitement in Thebes, during which the Spartans, unable to discover what had happened, remained in the Cadmea.

Under their eyes a public assembly was held next morning which legalized the crimes of Pelopidas and the false hospitality of Phillidas and declared for the ousting of the Spartans.

Meanwhile, Phillidas had hastened to the house of Epaminondas to fetch home his beloved, and he was confronted by the philosopher, with a blank face.

"Olympia did not come, Phillidas," he said in great concern. "I supposed you had changed your mind."

The grief of Phillidas was so piteous as to move Epaminondas to tears, and when Pelopidas was informed of the strange disappearance of the beautiful wife for whose salvation his friend had connived at assassination, his sympathy was equally wholehearted, and the entire resources of the city were used for her recovery, without the slightest trace of the girl, who had disappeared as though the gods had reached down from Olympus and lifted her from the earth.

Of what solace to Phillidas was the action of the assembly of the people who voted that Pelopidas, the leader, Charon, his invaluable aid, and Phillidas, whose assistance was responsible for the freedom of Thebes, should have statues erected to them in the public square. He pleaded with Pelopidas to permit him to lead an attack on the citadel, but that clever commander had no intention of storming an invulnerable position. Instead, he starved out the Spartans until they asked for terms and were permitted to leave Thebes, with their arms in their hands.

Phillidas, the lover of peace, was now a man of war. He joined the company of three hundred whom Pelopidas gathered around him and called the "Sacred Band." He was with the general when that hero encountered Tegyræ, with a detachment of seven hundred Spartans.

"We are fallen into the enemy's hands," exclaimed one of the company.

"And why not they in ours?" Pelopidas retorted.

The effrontery of his reply is understood when one realizes the terrific reputation of Spartans in battle. Until that day no force had ever defeated an equal number of Spartans, and nobody dreamed that an inferior company could vanquish a Spartan army. But Pelopidas, instead of extending his ranks in battle, drew up his three hundred in a small compact force and, ignoring the wide-spreading wings of the Lacedæmonians, struck them in the center, in the hope of cutting his way through. He succeeded; then, seeing the enemy in confusion, he turned and struck first at the right wing and then at the left, until the doughty enemy was in flight.

Among the wounded was a Spartan captain whose courage had awakened the admiration of Phillidas, so that he bound up his wounds.

"What is the name of my kind enemy?" asked the Spartan.

"Phillidas," he replied.

"What? Are you that Phillidas who had a wife called Olympia?"

"The same. Know you of her?"

"Aye. The night you slew Archias, a captain of our forces was on his way with half a dozen men from the Cadmea to Sparta. He encountered a woman with a slave, plucked the veil from her face, and saw that she was beautiful, so he killed the slave, lifted her to his saddle, and carried her to Sparta. He sold her to our King Cleombrotus."

With a despairing cry, Phillidas raised hands to heaven; then, in his madness against Spartan brutality, he plunged his dagger into the heart of the wounded officer who had told him the fate of his wife.

FROM that time he thought of nothing except his revenge on Spartans, and, had he not been restrained by Pelopidas, he would have invaded the Peloponnesus alone.

"Fear not," promised the commander. "Presently the whole force of Sparta will come against us, and, unless the gods descend to help us against them, as they aided the Greeks against the Trojans, we shall be shut within our walls, while they ravage our country. Cleombrotus will lead them, and you can personally take vengeance upon him."

Sparta, indeed, was arming against Thebes, and such was the fear she inspired throughout Greece that Pelopidas could find no allies among the other Greek cities. To make matters worse, his term as general expired, and, according to the idiotic custom, the people chose a successor by popular vote, and the choice fell upon Epaminondas, the philosopher. The scholar protested, but Pelopidas, who was glad that some less competent individual had not been chosen, promised to act as his lieutenant.

Thebes at the time contained less than forty thousand inhabitants, and Epaminondas was able to raise no more than six thousand troops. It was certain that Sparta would put an army at least twice as strong in the field, and one Spartan was equal to two Greeks or any other nationality. True, Pelopidas had conquered seven hundred Lacedæmonians with three hundred Thebans, but this was the Sacred Band, and no other Theban troops were of the same quality.

At that period military strategy was in its infancy. Some advantage was taken of terrain, something was known of reserves, but, in the main, a battle consisted of drawing up both armies in a line, advancing into contact, and then the more numerous army extended beyond the opposing line and crumpled up its flanks. The generals usually fought in the front line and contributed much by the power of their individual swords and spears. Two armies being equal in strength, the doughtiest conquered.

Epaminondas, Pelopidas and Phillidas were discussing their prospects a few days before the battle, and the two generals were reluctantly concluding to remain within their walls rather than face certain extermination, when the fury which was burning up Phillidas against the betrayers of his Olympia gave him inspiration.

"It seems to me," he murmured, "I seem to see a way. Epaminondas, do you remember the day I told you of my strange dream, when I thought I lived far in the future? To-day I recall something of warfare as waged in that period. There was a general, a man who beat great forces with few men. How did he do it? Ah, by always having more men than his enemy in the place where he struck."

"How could that be?" asked the wondering sage. "If he was outnumbered, how could he outnumber the enemy?"

"But that's what I did at Tegyræ," exclaimed Pelopidas, smiting his thigh. "The Spartans advanced in their usual array, eight files deep. My only hope was cutting my way through them, so I drew up my three hundred, twenty deep, and charged their center, hoping to be through and away before their wings could close in. We smashed through with ease; then, mad with victory, I faced to the left and crushed their right wing coming up in disorder; next, turning suddenly, I crumpled up their left. You are right, Phillidas. Think, scholar! How much more can we do with a whole army what I did with the Sacred Band."

"The Spartans are dauntless, but slow and stupid," replied Epaminondas, "and their experience with you has taught them nothing. They will draw up their army as always. Phillidas, give me tablets and stylus. I, also, think the gods have inspired you."

NEXT day came spies to report that Cleombrotus was advancing with an army far stronger than expected. His Lacedæmonian troops numbered eleven

thousand, and he had ten thousand allies collected from various Greek cities, including fifteen hundred cavalry. Against such an array the Thebans were only six thousand strong.

Now arose a cry of lamentation from Thebes. Women and children, old men and those too young to bear arms implored the commander not to hazard a battle. The easy victory of Pelopidas at Tegyræ had not dissolved the dread of Spartan arms. That was an accident. Such a thing had never occurred before —could not occur again.

Even Pelopidas advised against the hazard of battle. If the power of Athens had not prevailed against Sparta, how could Thebes, comparatively untried in war? But Epaminondas, the philosopher, the citizen general, the lover of peace, wore a confident smile.

"Man to man, the Spartans are our superiors," he admitted. "In this fight the gods will be with us."

"Bah!" growled Pelopidas. "You know better than to depend upon the gods."

"The gods and Phillidas," declared the philosopher. "Phillidas was inspired the other day. I have been busy in my tent, my friends. Until this time, brawn has always decided battles; brain is now to have its chance. Will you trust me when I tell you that I am preparing for the brutal Cleombrotus something he does not expect?"

"You are the general," admitted Pelopidas. "You are also the greatest thinker in Thebes. I yield."

Two days later Epaminondas led forth an army which had taken a last farewell of all it held dear. None expected to return alive, save, perhaps, the shrewd philosopher, with his new strategy born of the fancy of Phillidas and the experience of Pelopidas. He halted at a tiny hamlet called Leuctra, which is the burial place of several virgins who had been killed a century ago by brutal Spartans, and around which hovered a legend that some day the Spartans would pay in that place for their crime. Epaminondas chose the plain of Leuctra because of this superstition, but he was confounded when a priest appeared before him to declare that he had a vision that a brown-eyed, brown-haired virgin must be sacrificed on the tomb of the dead women if victory were to be gained.

Neither Epaminondas nor Pelopidas took stock in ancient and inhuman religious rites, yet there was the example of Agamemnon, who slew his own daughter in exchange for a fair wind to Troy, and the superstitious soldiery demanded the sacrifice. To refuse it would dishearten an army in great need of heart.

The priests were insistant, and they found a willing victim, a young girl who offered her breast to the knife, and most reluctantly the generals gave their consent. The troops were drawn up, the sacrifice was ready upon the forgotten tomb, when suddenly a chestnut mare with brown mane, broke from the camp and came galloping upon the scene.

"Here is our sacrifice!" exclaimed Epaminondas. "Here is the brown-eyed, brown-haired virgin, sent to us by the gods. Kill the mare and release the maiden."

Pelopidas, who had engineered the coup, commanded the Sacred Band to cheer, and the soldiers accepted the sacrifice. The priest had to be content, and the only dissatisfied one was the foolish virgin who wanted to die on the tomb.

NEXT day appeared Cleombrotus at the head of his array, and his eyes widened with astonishment when he saw that Epaminondas actually intended to give him battle. Then he hastened to draw up his army. On the right he placed his Lacedæmonians, upon this occasion, twelve files deep. His left wing was composed of his allies, commanded by Archidamus, son of Agesilaus, the second King of Sparta, who commanded at home.

Content with his arrangements, Cleombrotus waited for Epaminondas, whose line was much shorter, but yet extended considerably farther than the Spartan had anticipated, which caused him to think that his spies had been deceived in the strength of the enemy.

Phillidas saw with satisfaction that the King of Sparta commanded on the right. For the Sacred Band, of which he was a

member, was posted directly opposite. In the whole Theban army the Sacred Band was the only force worthy of comparison with Spartan soldiers, for the three hundred were personal friends of Pelopidas, sworn never to retreat, but to defend one another to the last drop of the blood of every man.

Ordinarily, it was the Spartans who advanced; but, ere Cleombrotus was ready to give the order, he heard the trumpet of Epaminondas, and the Thebans began to move. His astonishment turned to rude laughter when he saw that the order was executed so clumsily that the left of the Thebans swung forward far ahead of the right.

"With a fool for a general against us, there will be little credit in this victory," he observed to his staff.

Yet Epaminondas made no effort to straighten his line, which now broke into sections, the extreme left advancing rapidly, the left center more slowly, the right center imperceptibly, and the extreme right hardly moving. It was an oblique advance, daring and dangerous, had there been any except a muddle-headed self-satisfied Spartan in command of the enemy, but Cleombrotus did what Epaminondas had expected. He waited too long before taking action, and then it was too late.

For the extreme left of Epaminondas was a phalanx fifty men deep, a hedge of spears penetrating from a brazen wall of shields, moving with the irresistible force of a vast mass. The Spartans did not budge, confident of repulsing this lop-sided charge, until the king realized the depth of the phalanx, and then it was upon him.

The individual bravery of the Spartans was of no avail against this battering-ram, which shattered their comparatively thin line; and, as it yielded, the second phalanx, twenty men deep, struck the line at right center, which fought more bravely until the first phalanx, instead of pursuing the fleeing Spartans, turned and struck in the flank.

Cleombrotus lost his head. Instead of rushing to his left and ordering it to charge against the enemy in front of it, he dashed into the fray, sword in hand, endeavoring to stem the oncoming tide single-handed, and the left wing, seeing the Thebans opposite advancing slowly, held its ground, not daring to send reenforcements to the right.

The right wing of Epaminondas had no intention of engaging, for it had been weakened until only a double file of men composed it. The Theban general had staked all upon defeating the Spartan right before his own right came into contact. He had massed most of his troops upon the left of his line, having constructed his strategy upon Phillidas' dream of a general who always had more men than the enemy in the place where he struck. This piece of strategy had been supported by the success of Pelopidas at Tegyræ.

For the first time in history a military strategist was in command of an army, and his principle was the basis of the success of Philip of Macedon, Alexander, Cæsar and Napoleon.

Pelopidas faced Cleombrotus, a Spartan defeated, desperate, who dared not live if his army was vanquished. As their swords clashed, Phillidas, with a shout of fury, dashed his friend aside.

"He's mine!" he cried. "I demand him as my right!"

Pelopidas yielded, and the sword of the Spartan king cracked the breastplate of Phillidas. They fought. None watched the fray, for on every side was the clash of arms, while the now broken phalanx of Epaminondas bore down the Spartans by force of numbers. And during this time the left flank of the army of Cleombrotus, without striking a blow, watched the Thebans, not more than one fifth of the Spartans, very slowly approach.

Phillidas was bleeding from a dozen wounds when he slew the King of Sparta, and by that time the Theban victors were crashing against the left wing of the enemy, who did not tarry in their retreat.

The lukewarm allies saw no reason for fighting a second battle, if the Lacedæmonians were crushed, which was fortunate for the Thebans, who had lost their solid array. Although still outnumbering the forces of Epaminondas two to one, they fled like rabbits, while the

Thebans devoted themselves to cutting down the Spartans whose backs, for the first time, were turned to a foe.

Never in all history was there such a slaughter of Spartans. Never had they received such a blow. Their greatest loss up to this time had been five hundred of their citizens. Here they lost four thousand Laconians, and out of seven hundred citizens of the city of Sparta engaged in the battle, four hundred were killed on the field.

The only credit they gained was their skill in rescuing and carrying off the body of Cleombrotus, who had been left where he fell by the maddened Phillidas, who now sought the Spartan camp in search of Olympia.

The tents were still standing, but full of Thebans slaying and pillaging, among whom he dashed like an avenging Fury. He spied the royal pavilion and hurled himself through the tent door into a throng of shrieking women, who were already being dragged about by the conquerors. A Theban soldier had a woman by the hair—the burnished-copper tresses of Olympia.

"Olympia!" her husband shouted. "It's Phillidas!"

"She's mine!" cried the soldier. "Prize of my sword."

"Stand aside, dog!" bellowed Phillidas. "It's my wife, a citizen of Thebes."

A woman's angry scream was heard, and a Spartan girl, a follower of Cleombrotus, grasped a fallen javelin and hurled it at the hero. It penetrated the unprotected groin of Phillidas, who sank slowly upon the ground, casting at Olympia a look of ineffable woe. The soldier thrust the Spartan woman through with his short sword, while the released Olympia, with a wail of agony, fell upon the body of her husband.

"Olympia, my darling," he groaned, as his life ebbed away. "Too late I found you."

His head fell back, the death rattle was heard in his throat, and Olympia, seizing his bloodstained sword, thrust it into her white bosom.

People sitting comfortably upon the terrace of Parker's Hotel in Naples were startled when an elderly man, who had been nodding in his chair, suddenly rose, lifted both hands above his head, shouted something in an unknown tongue, then dropped upon the floor and lay still.

A physician was summoned who said he died of heart failure. He was identified as a rich American named Rupert Hawkins.

THE PROTECTION OF WILD BIRDS

DURING a recent meeting of the American Game Protective Association the providing of refuges was recognized as a more important means of protecting birds and wild life than legislating against hunting. Naturally the open season for hunting brings about a great reduction of wild fowl, but observation shows that the closed season does not bring about a proportionate increase.

The conversion of lakes, swamps, streams and forests, which only a few years ago were to be found near most cities, into urban regions, has resulted in the destruction of the places where wild fowl breed and live. The unethical hunter is a menace to bird life, but forest fires and the draining of lakes have destroyed more birds than many hundreds of hunters. Where natural ponds have been reduced to alkaline pools which poison water fowl, the old sweet water must be artificially restored. As soon as the natural conditions have been restored, the natural instincts of birds will bring them back. It will not be necessary to import birds to restored areas.

Every one living in the country or on the outskirts of a city knows that wild birds will be attracted to his home if he regularly provides food and drink for them. Keeping a trickle of water which will not freeze and nailing a piece of suet to a pole, are enough to attract them. When preserves provide the same protection on a large scale, wild bird life will flourish again.

The Pure Strain

By Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Old But Not Feeble," Etc.

Romance blooms only under a favorable sky and a kindly sun. The climate of the South Seas nourishes the flowers of Romance, but sometimes the sun is too hot, and then the orchid drops from the hand too eager to pluck it. A beach comber had better stick to his beach, for his ways are too rough and his intentions too devious to hold a lily of the South Seas.

THE wind had roared high in the night and out on the Tasman Sea it had hurricaned. If the *Tamoana* had put out from Fiji, as scheduled, it had probably been badly caught in the blow, and if caught it had scarcely a chance of riding afloat this morning. It was not visible on the indigo horizon. Well, one must wish for the best. Kennedy, the white man, sat above the water upon a ledge of lava, his dungareed knees gathered close, and occupied himself with wishing the best for the steamer with which he had no remotest connection.

The big ships that coursed along the sky line were like friends to Kennedy, though they never came closer than merely to suggest that the rest of the world was still running well enough. The islanders called the white man "Hoopilimeaai"—lazy one who waits, or parasite; he had no impulse to live otherwise. Idly he watched the waves glisten beyond the rim of the atoll and was glad of the opportunity to feel relieved that he had not been aboard the *Tamoana*. Flotsam was beginning to tell the story of the night; spars and beams chafed against the reef, and some splinters drifted over. A fragment like half a lifeboat rubbed through the natural gate in the rim, and not far behind it a whole one bobbed. When the whole one shifted close enough, Kennedy exerted himself to the extent of putting his feet into the sea foam and wading up to his waist, for he wished to see what was moving so curiously inside the boat.

To fill out the picture, he thought, the little girl should have been hugging a rag doll and crying piteously for her

mamma. Instead, she was playing intently with an empty and unsymbolical whisky bottle and enjoying her ride. She said "Hello!" blithely to Kennedy and, as he carried her to the beach, added that she was hungry. She did not need to declare she was unafraid, for her great amber eyes said it fully. Walking with her tiny hand in Kennedy's, while he escorted her to his *fare*, she listened curiously to the linnets singing, looked at the kupui and guana trees, and wanted to stop to pat the dogs. He gave her *poi* to eat, and breadfruit which she liked not too well, and kukui nuts, which she liked better, and oranges, which pleased her most of all; and during this eating she gazed interestedly at the golden-brown native men wearing only the *malo*, and the black-eyed women in their Mother Hubbards, who chortled over her fairness. She was a splendid little girl, deserving such very nice things that Kennedy shaved and put on his shirt.

Just as he had habitually evaded explaining to himself the devious circumstances which had brought him to this lesser island in the Southern seas, the white man neglected to learn how the child had happened to be drifting alone in the lifeboat. She probably did not know. It didn't matter; they both were there, and they would stay. And why not? What more peaceful spot to live could be found, and what more languorous existence could be led? The opal air and the crystal sea were theirs together, as no more worldly folk could ever know them. Of food there was profusion, of leisure no limit, of happiness no equal measure elsewhere. To try to return the girl to her people would be an act of unkindness, indeed. Kennedy let her go the way of her will and called her Moku, because he wished her to forget the background of her real name.

The sea had robbed Moku of her parents and her social world, but she never realized it or soon forgot it, and she went into the water as her natural element. Her swimming was superb. While she stroked she smiled, as though the caresses of the ripples brought happiness to her. At first she tried herself in semicircles out from the water line, increasing her distance each time until she could easily reach the reef; and there she liked to sit, taunting the sea, lifting her hair to the brushing of the breezes. Swimming washed the chubbiness off her, making her supple and lithe; she lengthened at a prodigal rate. Eighteen years can accomplish much with the beauty of a child.

Moku's voice, calling often an invitation to the natives to go into the water, ranged gradually from a babyish pipe to a contralto distinctly womanish. Haunched on the lava bank, watching this pretty animal of a Moku flashing in the water, Kennedy felt happy. The water had carried her to him, and it seemed that she swam as a way of saying she was glad of its agency in bringing them together. They would always, of course, dwell beside the sea together.

THE sun was high, and Moku was diving off a coral prominence, when Hinemoa came to Kennedy on the lava bank and put into his hands a rolled palm leaf, warm and difficult to handle, like a baby. Over her gift fleshy Hinemoa tittered sentimentally.

Kennedy grimaced. The native woman's baked breadfruit and custard were welcome, being food, but Hinemoa herself was one of those persistent females, found even in the South Sea islets, who accursedly impart to men they desire a strong impulse to flee. Among other things, Kennedy was grateful to Moku for her mere existence, because without her he might have yielded and taken Hinemoa as mate to his *fare*, if for no other reason than to end her persistent pursuit. Now, thank the oceanic fates, he would never have a spouse so fat. He himself possessed enough fat to equip an entire family. He thanked Hinemoa in a way that implied she might very well get the deuce away from there and let him alone.

"Pahii, pahii!" said the woman, lingering and pointing toward a noisy motor boat bobbing beyond the gate. *"Papaa!"* —which meant white men.

Only one white man was, however, in the craft. The runner was brown. Moku had seen the boat and was striking smoothly toward the beach. On the

sands she wrapped herself in her *nidi* and came to perch beside Kennedy.

"White man come across warter," she said. Whites were not frequent visitors. She was curious.

"Some preacher, maybe," Kennedy told her. "Don't you pay any attention to him."

"Pary any 'tention him," echoed Moku.

Retired a short distance, Hinemoa watched the craft and glanced toward Moku, who was sitting so close beside Kennedy. Chewing upon the breadfruit she had baked, he was sitting so close beside the girl.

"Aue!" sighed Hinemoa.

"Pary any 'tention him," Moku said again. The sounds and not their sense interested her. She was looking at the neck of the white man in the boat. "Kenn'dy, he has no corllar." She had seen missionaries before.

The motor craft was carrying astride its stern an upturned canoe, with sprit sail detached and rolled. The nearest island was a long ride away, even in a petrol-propelled boat. When the boat beached, the native runner assisted the white man to right the canoe, place it half on the sand and affix the sail. They were finished with it very shortly. Snorting, the motor boat wheeled out of the atoll and into the open sea, taking a noisy tangent to the northward. The man at the water line waved in friendly fashion to Kennedy and came up. Directly above his cleft chin and his snubbed nose his bleached hair had been parted by the wind. Upon Moku his blue eyes dwelled.

"Morning. Has anybody any objections to my messing around this island for a while?"

Kennedy had objections to any other white man's coming within sight of Moku. Chewing upon Hinemoa's breadfruit he grunted:

"Missionary, eh?"—with undisguised contempt.

"The Lord is my shepherd," said the other, "but Pegasus is my mount." This obviously meant nothing to Kennedy and still less to Moku. "My passport says I'm a journalist. I call myself a writer. My friends call me a scribbler. My dad says I'm a total loss. I don't know what my wife calls me—I haven't one. May I have a chunk of breadfruit?"

Hinemoa in the background saw the donation, and Kennedy hoped it hurt her.

"I noticed your daughter swimming. It was rather fine. I looked around half expecting to see a movie camera aimed at her. It's almost like that joke, you know. I knew it wasn't Lon Chaney, but it might have been Gilda Gray." The young man's eyes sparkled.

"Moku ain't my daughter," said Kennedy stiffly.

"Moku not his darter," confirmed the subject.

The young man asked, behind an irretrievable lump of breadfruit:

"Shef nof yur wife?"

"No," said Kennedy; "not yet."

THE other appraised the contrasting fatness of Kennedy with the slenderness of the girl. He was puzzled; his eyes expressed the thought that this thing was a frightful shame. Swallowing the breadfruit, he went on:

"Well, I'm going to hang around for a while. I've seen all there is to see at the last place. Nice island you've got. Poor commutation service, though. Too far out. Still, that may be an advantage. Any other white men about?"

"I'm *the* white man."

"You *were*," the other corrected. "My name is—ah—let's see, what *is* my name? I haven't used it for so long, you know. Oh, yes—Peccadill. No wonder! I'm glad to know you, Mr.—um——"

Kennedy remained silent.

"Mr. Um," said Peccadill. He watched fat Hinemoa come near him and extend to him the circlet of sea shells which she took from her head. *"Aroha,"* she said felicitously and padded away before Peccadill, lacking the intuitive sense of woman, realized the prompting of this gift. He put the string of shells across his forehead. "Do I look native, Mr. Um?"

Moku giggled. "Meerster Um!" She laughed outright.

Kennedy dropped a shellful of custard

on his filthy trousers and painstakingly, cursingly wiped it off.

"Meerster Um!" Peccadill's laughter mingled with the girl's. "Meerster Um!" giggled Moku, as she subsided. They had quite a good time together about it.

Kennedy knew almost at once that there was going to be trouble. From the first he was openly hostile to Peccadill. His efforts to keep Moku to himself were plainly urged by fear. He explained to the young man that he had found the girl in the sea, had brought her up, and considered her his. He was no man to court a girl, and, although he was somewhat older, the time was coming when Moku would grow more serious, less agitated than the waves she swam upon, and come naturally to him for enduring shelter. It was Kennedy's wisdom that this was the best way to achieve it, and nothing had ever come up before to disturb the process. It was understood by everybody to be under way.

"Well, well," said Peccadill, "we all have our beliefs."

He had believed his disappointed self, for instance, to be immune.

Peccadill took to running with Moku on the beach and swimming with her. They raced to the reef and dove for shells and sat on the lava shelves, while the moon rose, eating kukui nuts and talking. On these nights Kennedy paced the rises, heard their voices muffled by the night, and felt turmoil rising within him. He confronted Peccadill later.

"Don't you go making her dissatisfied. Don't go telling her about New York and the bright lights."

"Dear me, Mr. Um. I've never seen New York. Not a bright light has ever entered my life. I was born and reared in Peoria."

"You'd better get off this island."

"I don't intend to."

"You leave my girl alone."

"You go to hell, Mr. Um."

They had several such futile conversations. Peccadill continued to swim with Moku. Moku's delight in him deepened. He was her willing playmate. He had none of the physical unwillingness or overabundancy of Kennedy. Unlike the native youths, his skin was whiter than hers, and he was of her strange kind. It was inevitable that a new force began to rise within her and trouble her, a power which magnetized her and drew her, willingly and yet reluctantly, to Peccadill every hour of the day and some of the night. The exhilaration of it pleased her; the solemnity of it frightened her. It was fresh, and it was beautiful.

NO reason existed to keep them apart. Kennedy heard their voices in the night, while the first moon was still high, and did not resist the urge to spy upon them. From a loftier point on the ledge he looked down and saw them sitting beside each other, gazing over the silver sea.

"Oh!" murmured Moku. "Inside me I irtch."

Peccadill asked:

"Is it very bad?"

"Awe."

"Moku, I'm going to stay here. We'll be here together forever—a pretty long while."

"Oh!" said Moku. "Now I irtch more!"

His arm slipped into the cool hollow of her neck, behind her hanging hair; he drew her close to him and kissed her. Kennedy closed his eyes and eased back, sickened with loss. During the rest of the night he trod up and down the gloomy slopes of the island; and when dawn lightened the air he went to his *farc*. That of Moku, next his, had its bark curtain drawn; the girl was still asleep. Kennedy strode down the row of dwellings until he found Peccadill's, and unceremoniously entered. He awakened the young man.

"Morning," blinked Peccadill, "Mr. Um."

"You're makin' a big fool out of yourself, young man," said Kennedy. "You don't know what kind of a girl Moku is. What would you expect, her livin' here free since she was a little girl? What does she know of the way things go anywheres else? They don't go here like anywheres else, anyway."

"What're you talking about?" Peccadill demanded. "It doesn't sound helpful."

"I'll show you what I mean. Since you came, the girl has been hangin' around you every wakin' minute; but you just go away a bit, and see what she does when you're gone. Maybe it will tell you somethin' you ought to know. You come along with me."

"I guess Moku herself would tell me anything——"

"Moku don't know enough to tell you —don't know much about it. How could she? You come along with me."

While the sun was still low, the younger man went puzzledly with Kennedy, who would say nothing further except that Peccadill must wait, and Peccadill was therefore silent; he pondered the meaning of this business, and what it would prove about Moku. When the sun was higher they turned back, climbing upward as they went, and, as they neared the line of *fares* below, Kennedy signaled for carefulness. They looked down. The natives were languorously occupied. Moku was at once discernible, sitting in front of a *fare*. Her *nidi* was dampened from the sea water on her skin. Now and then she looked around, as though waiting for Peccadill. Two golden babies were beside her, one asleep, one entangling its fingers in her hair.

"Well?" asked the young man. "What's that?"

"They're hers," Kennedy said.

"What?"

"Those babies."

Peccadill stared and impulsively moved toward Kennedy, intending violence.

"Easy, now. I'm doing this for your own good, young man. Don't get so upset. What could you expect? God knows I tried to take care of her, but she didn't know. How could she?"

"It's a rotten lie," Peccadill said hoarsely.

"It's so, boy."

"I'll ask Moku—I'll ask her."

"I tell you, she don't know. How could she? I tried to keep her some other way, but I couldn't watch her every minute. And it's not bad. To you it is, because you got brought up different, but to her it ain't. Why should it be? Ain't it natural? It's just part of livin' to her. It is to anybody, for all o' that, in a kind of different way. Everybody knows that. Well, there you are. It's too bad for you."

"God!" said Peccadill, revulsion turning his upper lip. "She didn't seem——"

"Are you su'prised?" Kennedy asked. "Couldn't you 'ave expected it?"

Peccadill gestured miserably. "It's too damned probable."

"You want to stay with her the rest of your life, with that apt to go on, eh? And do you think it'd be any different if you took her away?"

"This damned world! This damned world!" The young man shuddered quite visibly.

"But me, I want her—I'll take her like that."

"Let's go somewhere else, Mr. Um."

They half circled, slashing through the ferns and bushes, until the water of the atoll became visible, dipping slowly away and over against the knobs of gray coral; and the sea beyond invited to Peccadill an escape from Moku's charm. He tried, as he heeled down the slope, not to look at the splashing crystal which had washed Moku's body and his together. In the sand, where he had left it, his canoe was resting. He pushed it off and jumped into it viciously and jerked the sail up:

> "No traveling at all, no locomotion—
> No inkling of the way, no notion—
> 'No go' by land or ocean——

"I thought it was going to be like that," said he to Kennedy:

> "No mail, no post;
> No news from any foreign part;
> No park, no ring, no afternoon gentility,
> No company, no nobility.

"No nobility," he repeated in a different sense, as he veered the craft off and swung it around.

"You're a fool to try to make it in that little canoe," Kennedy called at him, knowing he would pay no attention. "It's a good long way."

"I'm a fool, Mr. Um," agreed Peccadill loudly, over the swells.

Kennedy could see, as the canoe cut through the gate of the reef, Peccadill's head turning back in spite of him, his

eyes reaching for a last glance of Moku. And Moku was not there to be looked at. Outside the reef, the waters were rough, and the boat lurched. Peccadill pulled the sail higher and stared over the surging expanses, while the craft skimmed. A sly grin crept upon Kennedy's lips, as the boat vanished around the island.

He hitched his belt and turned to find Moku coming down the slope toward the water, loosening her *nidi*. She was sad, and she did not speak. When she noticed that the boat was gone, she stopped short and stared appealingly into the eyes of Kennedy. He knew there would be no talk about this. Words would mean nothing. Even if he explained at length that the young man had gone because he was another kind and would never return, Moku would not believe it. Time must prove it and bring her back to Kennedy. Time would.

KENNEDY felt profoundly unwilling to be near Moku this day. Her presence was a chiding and a rebuke to him. Even her splashing in the water was lonesome and unhappy. Splendid and helpless she was—splendid and helpless as a woman in love always is. Kennedy would feel easier, he knew, if Moku was for the time not close to him. Now that Peccadill was gone, Kennedy had nothing to fear. Moku would finally grow tired of waiting. Time would bring her back to him.

Kennedy climbed to a knoll. Lying under a mango tree, he escaped his conscience by dozing. In his sleep Moku came to him and asked pleadingly for the slender young man.

"Makai," Kennedy's dream self-answered, meaning that Peccadill had gone once and for all toward the sea. *"Makai,"* he repeated—toward the sea. The girl would not believe. She said *"Mauka!"* and again *"Mauka!"* and again *"Mauka!"*—toward the mountains. These are the only directions in all the South Seas. She meant that Peccadill would return. The oppression of her insistence awakened Kennedy, and he started up. Already the sun was low.

Clattering down the slope he peered and could scarcely realize that the canoe was sanded again on the beach. Then he ran down and kicked it. Its reality stunned him, filled him with a nervous need for activity, and he sped away from the water. Outside the line of *fares* he paused, staring ahead. Peccadill was standing with Moku beside him, and they were chattering with the formless Hinemoa. Moku was laughing and close to weeping, Peccadill to swearing; and on the thick lips of Hinemoa was a smirk of triumph. Before they saw him, Kennedy hastened back to the canoe and planted himself squarely before it. Moku and the young man appeared, hastening, hand in hand. Upon sight of Kennedy, they hesitated a moment, but then came on. Peccadill's face was livid.

"You rotten liar!" he shouted. "It was all lies, you rotten liar!"

Kennedy took the discovery with grim calmness. He intended that he should not lose Moku whatever the cost, whatever the measure necessary to keep her. Peccadill loped toward him, crying out angry denunciations. Moku shrank back a little; it was well for Kennedy, for she might have impeded him. When the moment came, Kennedy's fist rammed forward and took the younger man on the chin. Grasping Moku's wrist, he pulled her to him, stepped across the unconscious Peccadill, and with ease lifted the girl in his arms. She shrieked at him to let her down, but he clung tightly.

Ignoring the natives who customarily ignored him, he went into his *fare* and there lowered Moku, but kept his grip on her wrist. With his free hand he brought out of the palm leaves on his bunk an ancient .38 revolver and a rattling box of cartridges. These he thrust into his pockets. He clasped the squirming Moku to him again, stalked out, and carried her to the uplands.

In the craggy fastenesses of the island were several caverns which no stranger could find soon, if ever.

As he waded through the ferns, Moku vigorously and constantly slapped Kennedy's baggy cheeks, but he kept on stolidly. Crossing a trickling stream, he jumped into soft mud and fell, upon which Moku wriggled up and ran nimbly from him. Kennedy cursed his misfor-

tune, as he dragged his knees from the quicksand. Moku would not come to him; she kept aloof. His coaxings brought only a stare from her—a hostile stare. She understood it all, and she would not forgive him. It was useless to try to regain her by chasing. She was light as a bird, and he was heavy. Kennedy could succeed only in blocking her attempts to move downward toward the water line and Peccadill. He kept her at bay.

When a rustling sounded behind him, his eyes threateningly told Moku to keep silent, but in spite of him she called out warnings. The rustling came closer, and soon the head of Peccadill rose above the clumps of green. Kennedy did not mean to kill—yet; he sent his bullets over the other man's head, thinking to convince Peccadill of his determination and so to frighten him away. After the explosions Moku quieted fearfully. The rustling ceased, while Peccadill lay prone; but in a moment a quicker movement stirred among the ferns, and Kennedy knew that the other man was retreating. He could do nothing, however, to stop the sound of Peccadill's call:

"Come, Moku! Come!"

THE rustling moved farther away and vanished. Through the trees dusk was sifting, making the air gray. Kennedy stood looking at Moku, while reloading his revolver from the box, and she stood looking at him. He could see that she hated him. Her eyes blazed, as never before; the curl of her lips expressed her loathing. When Kennedy moved toward her she shrank away, step for step; when he moved backward, thinking to entice her within his reach, she did not follow. Behind the girl was the end of a volcanic ledge and a sheer drop of dangerous depth; she would not dare to put herself over. She must come down, when she came, past Kennedy. It was pleasant enough for him, at the moment, to realize that she was neatly trapped. Eying her, he leaned casually against a tree. His manner told her he was victor.

"You've got to promise to stay with me, Moku, or I'll kill him."

It was better to have Moku's hate than Moku not at all. Eighteen years she had been with him, growing each day ruddier with the sun, quicker with the waters. Without her the atoll would seem dry, the island would lay desolate. His life, filled so full since the coming of Moku with the beauty she exuded, would again become a deadly void. He could not live, he felt, without her presence. He did not care to live without her. Yes, having Moku's hate was better than having Moku not at all.

Looking back through the foliage, Kennedy saw on the far waters a haze of smoke trailed by a steamer. The fog of dusk was already settling thick upon the sea; the red and green lights of the ship were sparkling. It would pass the island as all ships passed it—scarcely with notice.

"He can't take you away," Kennedy said across the space that separated the girl from him. "If he got you to one of the other islands, the officials would keep him there until they saw me about it."

This was true. The copra traders, and through the gossiping of the traders, all the near-by islands knew that Moku was Kennedy's and not to be gazed upon too long. If Peccadill tried to steal her there would be unpleasant doings. Or, in any event, Kennedy could easily lie so that the young man's death would be held justifiable. Peccadill would be out of the running very soon.

The younger man at that moment was probably trying to find a way past Kennedy's bullets to Moku. No help would be forthcoming from the natives. No approach led to this spur, other than the slope, and Kennedy still hoped to take the girl toward a cunningly hidden crevice farther beyond and below, and to hold her there.

"Come with me," he attempted again, extending one hand toward Moku. She stared stonily and stood her ground.

From the slope below came a renewed rustling and a call from Peccadill to Moku. At once she became enlivened. Confronting her, Kennedy gave her to understand that she might not go back. He nestled his weapon in his hand and waited; but, as he peered downward

through the gathering darkness, the girl darted aside, and he was compelled to rush wildly in order to head her off. She doubled back nimbly, while he strained his heavy legs to follow her. His desperation gave him more quickness.

The girl weaved from side to side, while the calls from below reëchoed, and still Kennedy blocked her path. He was afraid of the gleam in the girl's eyes now. He had not seen that cold light in her before. It chilled him; it was something more than hate. And when, in order to threaten her back again, he leaped to the farther bank of the stream, he realized what she had so cleverly been about. The slimy quicksand engulfed him to the waist. Moku cried out gladly and raced down the slope.

Each movement wedged Kennedy more deeply in the ooze. He heard Peccadill's quick encouragements, Moku's tremulous voice answering, and the noise they made, as they ran toward the water and the waiting canoe. The clammy sand was creeping over his belt. He called to Moku and for help.

He knew, though his terror was genuine, that it was discernible in his high-pitched voice; if it were clear enough, it would bring Moku back. She must know that this greedy mud would swallow him alive, if he were not pulled out very soon. Eighteen years she had lived close to him; she cared too much to let him die. She must come back. And Kennedy continued to shout as pitifully as he could.

Darkness had closed down swiftly; it was made heavier by the thick foliage of the trees. A bleary blackness was all around Kennedy. Everything had vanished except the sand that held him. He felt his feet touch a solidness which did not yield. The slime had reached his armpits and was sucking heavily upon him, but he sank no farther. There was no danger of death here, after all. Moku would never know this. She would believe him very near to death, and her remorse would be great. She would cling to him again and lavish compensations upon him. Kennedy forced air deeply into his compressed lungs and called again, as though even then he might be expelling his last breath.

He waited, while the answering rattle of the ferns grew louder. The face that, lighted by a match, peered through the parted bushes was not Moku's, but Peccadill's.

Insanely Kennedy swung his gun and emptied two shells in Peccadill's direction. The young man had stepped aside to take the shelter of a tree.

"Mr. Um," came his voice pantingly, "stop it!"

Kennedy shouted that Peccadill might not touch him; Moku must come. At the height of his lungs he called for Moku. Peccadill, without further attempting to give aid, but with a bullet singing over his shoulder, hastened down the slope again.

KENNEDY heard excited voices below, closer than before. That young man would try to stop Moku. Even then the girl was angrily protesting, attempting to come back to Kennedy, and he was preventing her. Kennedy kept his feet firmly on the fixed rock and called encouragingly. The voices, in a moment, ceased. Perhaps Peccadill was carrying Moku bodily away. That was it! Moku was being dragged off.

Then again Kennedy heard a motion among the leaves. Ah, Moku! She had broken away from Peccadill—broken away! Kennedy pictured it—Peccadill's restraining hands upon her; a struggle in the boat; her desperate wrench away; Moku diving gracefully and with firm arms propelling herself back toward Kennedy. Back she was coming, to stay forever!

The movements now were close. Pebbles rattled. He kept talking, so that the sound would guide her. Soft hands strained toward his and gripped his fingers.

"Moku," he gasped. "Ah, Moku, at last!"

The glorious strength in those soft hands! No words came, but the intentness of her pulling, the tenseness of her breathing spoke of her love. At last Kennedy struggled out of the clinging mud, lay weakly, and clasped the cool knees close to him.

"Moku—you won't go away?"

"Kenn'dy!" said a voice softly.

He grew stiff. "Moku!"

"Kenn'dy!" came again.

Snorting, Kennedy pushed himself to his feet and cried out:

"Hinemoa, you wench!"

"Yees, Kenn'dy."

He stumbled down the slope and stood, chill and shivering, staring out over the black sea. Far away a green and a red dot hung over the horizon, so close together as to seem one. A long time Kennedy watched the sparkling point drift across the void; and a long time he stared, while it hung stationary below a gleaming white star. The steamer had stopped. The ship was a friend, doing him treachery. Then it moved on until, while the moon rose, it vanished, taking something of the sea with it.

When dawn opened the day, Kennedy was squatting on the lava shelf, staring at the amethyst water. The years were slipping into vagueness, the world was receding like a lost dream. Abruptly he shouted and hurtled, knee-deep, into the water toward a boat bearing an amber-eyed little girl who was playing with an empty whisky bottle. He lashed the water where the vision had floated. At last he came up to the lava shelf again, and Hinemoa, silent and content and unnoticed, sat behind him. All day he haunched there, and for all his days afterward, peering at the water, and waiting.

A TRAPPER'S YARN

PERHAPS, after all, it was only a Westerner's tale, told for the wonderment of a tenderfoot. But it's a good story, true or not. The trapper had started out to hunt for mountain lion. Tired from his fruitless search, he lay down on the ground to sleep. The rustling of leaves awakened him and, on his guard at once, he lay quite still, moving only his eyes. His gun was leaning against a tree, within reach, but he decided to let it stand until the mystery was solved. He did not wait long. Sniffing at one of the trapper's outstretched arms, was a tawny, sullen puma. Since the beast showed no active disposition to attack, the man remained quiet. Possibly some insight into the animal's mind told him that there was no immediate danger.

Then the puma began a curious performance. Like a dog trying to dig a hole beneath a fence, it clawed at the thick carpet of fallen leaves around the figure of the man, patiently continuing until the trapper lay entirely covered by the natural camouflage. He could still see out from under his covering, and his surprise was great when the puma sneaked off into the woods. Cautiously, the trapper drew himself out of the leaves, planning to hide and bag the beast on its return. His sense of humor made him place a tree branch upon the ground and sweep the leaves over it until it resembled its former arrangement.

After a time, the puma returned, but accompanied, oddly enough, by a cub. To judge from the actions of the two, the intent was to teach the little brute how to spring upon a carcass. The elder demonstrated, leaping with a snarl upon the mound of leaves. In telling the story the trapper declared that he had never seen displayed, by man or beast, the utter baffled astonishment registered by the puma as it plunged, entangled, into the branch. And then the Westerner's gun, aimed exactly, barked the climax to the little lesson.

By

DON McGREW

Author of

"Men Command Men," Etc.

The Broadening

THE STORY

In the summer of 1857, an old Sioux chieftain stood on a Wyoming ridge, bitterly watching the progress of an ox-team caravan across the plains below. At the same moment, on another part of the plains, also headed West, was Buck Hilton, a Southern lad whose parents had been killed, supposedly by Mormons. Alone in the world, Buck had started out to "git him a Mo'mon." Bad luck came upon him, for while trying to kill a buffalo to satisfy his hunger, his horse fell beneath him, and it was necessary to shoot the injured beast. Philosophically, Buck resigned himself to endure whatever he might have to face. The next development was the appearance of a little Indian girl, Rose-dawn, daughter of the Sioux chieftain. She had been captured by Pawnees and had escaped. Buck took her under his wing, and protected her when Pawnee scouts, on the trail of the little captive, attacked. The death, in the mêlée, of Lame Bull, a renowned warrior, discouraged the braves, and they were easily routed when a band of Sioux rode up to the rescue. Buck was honored in the tribe. While they were all making merry, celebrating the victory, the ox-team caravan, which had been sighted not long ago, approached, and it turned out that old Dan Mulcahey, one of the leaders, had been a great friend of Buck's father. And both Buck's father and Mulcahey were highly regarded by the Sioux, as one-time benefactors. The caravan proceeded, presently, and Buck went along with it. As time went on, he learned many valuable life lessons from old Dan, among them a better understanding of the Mormons he had so hated. Farther on along their journey, they met with a cavalcade of soldiers, commanded by a Major Busbee, known by Mulcahey. Coincident with the meeting, a stagecoach, containing the major's daughter-in-law, granddaughter, and a girl companion, stopped at the encampment. Buck went wild at the sight of the latter, recognizing her as a "Mo'mon." Another member of the Mulcahey party, called The Smiler, had also been identified by Buck as one of those who had been implicated in the killing of his parents. Because of insufficient evidence, though, it was impossible for any one to act. Buck's frustrated anger was soothed by old Dan, and the caravan continued quietly toward the West. The little Indian girl, Rose-dawn, had been adopted by the party, under Buck's special protection. Under the soothing influence of her devotion, and of old Dan's impromptu sermons, Buck grew happier; but, beneath his blithe exterior, he still carried the determination to track down those who had been responsible for the loss of his father and mother. The pioneer train was now nearing the Territory of Utah, where the young chap was to grow into manhood amid many difficult problems and exciting adventures.

Where people now ride at ease in swift parlor cars, ox teams once rumbled. Buck Hilton was a member of one of those ox-team caravans, and Buck, who had inherited the finest traditions of his Daniel Boone ancestry, was fast proving himself to be eminently worthy of his illustrious line.

Trail

In Five Parts
—Part II : :

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE PROPHET.

BUCK'S first news of Lot Smith's presence near by was received on the third of October. On this day Dan Mulcahey's sweating oxen were dragging their lurching vans along the Big Sandy, in the lee of Bad Land Hills. Suddenly a small band of bearded, dust-stained Mormons, under Smith, galloped out of a defile and halted one of the trains ahead of Dan's. The wagon boss was ordered to turn back. This order had been complied with, though the train master turned and retraced his steps, as soon as the Saints galloped out of sight.

When informed of this, Buck's amazement and anger filled his young breast to overflowing.

"Why didn't them bullwhackers fight?" he demanded indignantly.

"Why," said Dan, " 'tis like the divils figger the soljers ought to do the fightin'!"

"Well, then, where *is* them soljers?"

"Be r'asonable, me bhoy. Wot good is a doughboy mounted on a jackass?"

Everywhere about them confusion and uncertainty reigned. No one seemed to know how many Mormons were roaming the country, or what Alexander wanted or intended.

"Wan forced march wid knapsacks w'u'd settle the mess," said Dan. "But as ut is—phut!. Alexander seems to be runnin' aroun' an' aroun' hissilf, tryin' for to ketch his little tail."

Disgusted and chagrined, Buck could only plod on and keep an eye on The Smiler. If the man was a Mormon in reality, he might now seize an opportunity to slip off and give Smith information concerning the disposition of troops with the baggage trains.

So matters were standing on the next night when they went into camp. They were then within a mile of Simpson's Hollow. This lay near the junction of the Big Sandy and Green Rivers. Lew Simpson's train was encamped in the hollow, with two other trains, making seventy-five wagons in all. No troops were at either camp, and Camp Winfield was over ten miles away.

Shortly after ten o'clock Buck was taking his turn at night herding, when he sighted Harding slipping off into the dark, rifle in hand.

The cavayard driver was also herding that night, and Buck came to an instant decision. He quietly followed Zeke.

The former Mormon did not discover his small shadow until they were well away from the train. He wheeled with a start.

"Buck," he whispered fiercely, "what do you think you're doing?"

"Well, if you was intendin' to git yore sistah, whether or no, I done tole you I'd he'p."

Zeke choked back something between a laugh and an exasperated snarl.

"You little Indian!" he whispered sibilantly. "I'm not going after my sister now. You go back."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Going to warn Simpson's outfit to be on the lookout. You see, that little skunk, Small, got away."

"The one 'at said he tattooed The Smilah!"

"Yes. We were so busy watching The Smiler we overlooked that little rat."

"That means there's Mo'mons still heahabouts," said Buck, looking fearfully around. Far off in the dark night a cougar screamed hideously. This was followed by the mournful howl of a timber wolf and the dismal hoot of an owl. The shivers ran up and down Buck's spine; the night was peopled with ghostly, menacing shadows.

"That's it exactly," Zeke returned. "We figured Small couldn't be in direct touch with them; but the rat knows Smith is somewhere near. If he can get word to Smith that there are no troops hidden in our wagons——"

JUST then the faint words of a song came to them down the breeze blowing from Simpson's Hollow. A bullwhacker was singing:

"Oh, it's every day at noon there is something to do.
If there's nothing else, there will be an ox to shoe;
First with ropes you throw him, and there you make him lie,
While you tack on the shoes, boys. Root, hog, er die!

But I'm a jolly driver on the Salt Lake City line,
And I kin lick the rascal that yokes an ox o' mine;
He'd better turn him out, or you bet your life I'll try
To sprawl him with an oxbow. Root, hog, er die!"

The former Mormon stifled a snort of indignation.

"The fools are drinking," he whispered. "I've got to hurry. Now you——"

He broke off sharply and suddenly crouched low. Buck immediately followed; for he, too, had caught a fleeting glimpse of movement. Between them and the warm glow of their own distant camp fire prowled sinister shadowy figures.

"Mormons or Piutes!" ventured Zeke. "Likely both."

Despite the best traditions of the Boone line, Buck was filled with terror. The endless sky, with its myriad of stars above him, seemed no more stupendous than the eerie mountain world in which he crouched. And this great silent place was now alive with demoniac Utes and members of the Big Fan!

"What if they should ketch me?" he fearfully surmised.

Up before him rose in memory Eb Snow's still, cadaverous face. He suppressed a shudder and with difficulty achieved the characteristic poise which the occasion apparently demanded from one of his line.

"Well, anyway, I knowed I weren't born to be hung!" he whispered.

"Shhh!" warned Zeke, choking back a laugh.

But the boy found this order hard to obey. He wanted to take the initiative, if only from sheer terror of the menace creeping about him there in the dark. For the very name of the country curdled the blood in his veins. In vain Dan and Zeke had tried to picture for him the marvelous purple gorges about Salt Lake city, near which ranged in scenic splendor a gigantic chain of vermilion peaks, towering into the blue. In vain they had described its perpendicular cañon walls, tinted with the colors of the geranium, the lilac, and the rose. His imagination persisted in painting the country in somber tones.

It appealed to him as a mystic—this dead man's country, where the buffalo had ceased to graze upon the far-flung carpet of yellow sand. He saw there no sign of cheerfulness, nor any color, nor any sign of life, save horned toads hopping about over the bones of those who had drunk of its alkaline waters. Mists drifted in the red cañons. Indigo shadows from the base of lonely, turkey-red spires spread over its pallid lakes. Even the soaring eagle hated to alight on the somber desert, where the sage appeared purple in the distance. And, above all, he saw dominating the whole expanse a constant shadow emanating from gloomy fear of the secret twelve.

"Let's do somethin'!" he insisted nervously.

The two then held a council. Being now nearer Simpson's Hollow than Dan's train, and knowing Dan's men were on the alert, Zeke decided to attempt the warning of men who seemed oblivious of the danger. The two thereupon started crawling forward toward Simpson's train.

As they were dodging skulking Mormons, their progress was of necessity painfully slow. It was near midnight when at last they worked their cautious way up through the grass on the rise overlooking one side of the hollow.

The whole situation burst upon them at the first glance. Most of the men were asleep. Their rifles were slung in the canvas wagon tops. The other men were lolling about the camp fires, chatting and drinking there in the flickering shadows. And, as Buck and Zeke looked down, Lot Smith and over forty bearded, roughly clad Mormons appeared on the scene.

"Throw down your arms, every one of you!" Smith roared.

Buck choked down a sob and gripped his rifle, as he saw the startled bullwhackers rise sheepishly and hold their hands aloft. Yet he dared not fire for fear of striking one of his own men.

Sick at heart, he watched while Smith curtly ordered the prisoners to stand to one side. At this, Buck raised his rifle to aim at the Mormon leader, but Zeke grabbed his arm. And it was well that he did. Smith immediately informed the bullwhackers that their arms would be taken, but their lives spared under one condition. They were not to extinguish the flames of the burning wagons. These were then looted of part of the loads, after which Smith called on a gentile member of his band to apply the torch.

"'Big James,'" said he, "it is fitting for the gentile to despoil the gentiles."

With a laugh, the big buckskin-clad frontiersman ran down the line, firing the tops of the wagons.

"We came too late," whispered Zeke. "We'll go."

Then a voice from behind them challenged, and Buck's blood congealed.

"Don't make a move, you two!" the Mormon behind them ordered. "I got you damned gentiles covered."

For one brief second the terrorized boy thought of trusting to luck in a wild attempt to escape. But he was given no opportunity to move. The Mormon scout had risen to his knees and was covering them with a long rifle. And, at his shout, three other Mormons ran up the slope to disarm the two captives.

ONE of the trio was bearing a torch. Tall and heavily bearded, he towered over Zeke, peering into the latter's face. Not a sound had escaped Harding; but his slender body was held erect, while his pallid features were set in rigid lines. In the torchlight his compressed lips appeared as an ugly, dark-blue slash across a narrow expanse of white. The skin seemed to have tightened over his cheek bones. His black eyes were flaming like pools of illuminated ebony.

"Zeke Harding, as I live!" gritted the exultant Mormon.

"You ought to remember me, Nate Tuller," Zeke responded.

"Waal, I sh'u'd smile! I reckon there'll be others as will remember a man we find he'pin' cursed gentiles agin' that man's own kith an' kin." Here the big man's face convulsed with fury. He thrust his livid features within a hand's breadth of his prisoner's, while his eyeballs dilated insanely. "I'd oughta cut you off the earth, ef only to save you, like Brigham done said!" he snarled.

"Hold on there, Brother Tuller!"

shouted their commander from below. "Bring those two here to me."

Tuller's vicious snort was eloquent in its expression; but he lowered his rifle and shoved Zeke roughly down the slope. So, in a moment, the two were facing the Mormon leader.

"Ah!" said Smith. "Young Harding. You have several charges of assault to answer for. Anyway, we'll take you."

"Fair enough," Zeke returned stiffly. "But you don't want this boy."

"Why, no," said Smith, with a glance at the pale lad. "You join the rest of those men of yours, sonny."

Torn between relief and fear for his friend Zeke, Buck hesitated. Then he stifled a cry. Looking past Smith's shoulder, he saw the squat, heavy figure of Eb Snow.

As his glance fell on the boy, Snow stopped dead. Pin points of fire flared hideously for a flashing second in the depths of his midnight eyes. And, as he stepped quickly forward, his eyes seemed to expand for a brief instant, like those of a snake's in the first exultant reaction after sighting its victim. Yet, when he addressed Smith, the mask of piety had fallen once more over his inscrutable features.

"I—ah—might suggest something, sir," he said. He was unctuous and deferential; and Smith turned toward him with some impatience. And, while Snow whispered in his ear the major's features wore an expression of frowning reserve.

"I'll send him along, then," he decided, with obvious reluctance. "I'll send him back under guard, though, mind you!" he added firmly.

Snow immediately turned out his palms in a deprecatory gesture. "Oh, but of course! I would leave it with our prophet to decide. I——"

"Yes, yes," Smith interrupted brusquely. "But we'll discuss that later, Brother Snow."

He gave an order to Tuller, who immediately started off with the captives. But when Smith turned his back Snow's eyes dilated once more, and he smiled. Seen there in the flames shooting up from the wagon tops, it was a ghastly grimace. It seemed to start slowly, till one tooth after another was bared. But it never reached the eyes. Buck received only the impression of sharp teeth locked against sharp teeth. It was a hyena's grin which was to appear before him thereafter in nightmares.

The boy's courage almost failed him. His tender, sensitive lips quivered; tears stung his eyeballs and hung on his long, dark lashes. Yet, when Zeke noted this and threw a comforting arm around him, Buck blinked rapidly and lifted his chin. He had been schooled in this frontier belief: Death is to be feared, with no loss of self-respect, but other things were to be feared even more. One of them was the saying: "He died yellow."

Steeled by this thought, the lad fought down his weakness and mounted a led horse at Tuller's order. Soon afterward the two prisoners were on their way to General Wells' headquarters.

CHAPTER XIV.

WEST OF ECHO CANON.

FOUR days later found the prisoners walking through the mountains to westward of Echo Cañon. They were bound for Salt Lake City, with their arms tied behind them. A solemn old Mormon rode after them, mounted on a mule, and carrying a heavy rifle across the pommel of his saddle.

The two prisoners were cold and depressed. Their diet had consisted of parched corn, rancid bacon, and soggy biscuits, and at night they had huddled without covering. But, aside from a few rough shoves and volleys of curses from some of the wildly jubilant Mormons, they had been unharmed.

In all that time Buck had not seen Eb Snow, but he felt certain his fate was only being delayed.

"They're sendin' us on to the higher-ups to see what *they* say," he thought, "or else this silent ole fellow has odahs to pick out a nice quiet spot an' send us to hell across lots."

He was ready for anything, then, when the old Mormon halted them later on in a pass and told them to face about.

"Son," said their guard, "what do you think I'm goin' to do now?"

Buck drew a deep breath. "You're goin' to finish us, I suppose—er else leave us to them Piutes—and *they'll* get the blame."

Gregory, the solemn old Mormon, sighed. His broad, bearded face was benignant, grave. thoughtful, sad. His beard curled softly; his clear eyes were widely spaced; his brow was wide and high.

"That's what the world is thinking of us, worse luck," he said, with a weary shake of the head. He eyed Zeke sadly. "Young man," he said, "I know your father. He's very bitter."

Zeke nodded, staring wonderingly at the old man. While the bearded patriarch was eying him directly, he seemed also to be seeing on beyond his prisoner. He was wrapped in moody reflection.

"There's that to consider," Gregory continued, speaking as though communing with himself. "Your father has risen. He controls—— But never mind that. I am afraid—I am afraid——"

As he broke off, his prisoners' breathed rapidly. Hope was rekindled in the boy's breast. He could hardly believe his ears; but this kindly appearing old man was plainly engaged in a struggle between his sense of duty and his own private inclinations.

"No," the old man now resumed, "you would not fare well. And this boy—he is from Missouri. That is bad—very bad. And he—why he's just a little boy."

His voice broke here, and again he shook his head.

"There's something else, too!" he gritted, with sudden vehemence. He shook his gnarled fist southward. "Ah, God," he prayed, "if they incited that horrible, terrible deed, may You have no mercy upon them!"

"What deed is that?" Zeke prompted softly, but with poorly restrained eagerness.

"A horrible, ghastly butchery at Mountain Meadows—down below Cedar City—there in the mountain deserts to southward. A whole train of folks from Arkansas was wiped out."

Tired as he was, Buck was instantly fired with interest.

"I heard talk about a train from Arkansas, back thar along the Oregon Trail!" he cried. "Was it the one that had some Missourians with them?"

"So they say."

"Then you mean you Mo'mons used 'em up?"

The Mormon winced and turned tragic eyes to Zeke.

"See what the boy thinks? This thing is just leakin' out. It happened last month, and they say those Piutes got 'em."

"That bunch of Utes were on the reservation under John Lee's charge, weren't they?" Zeke queried, breathing very heavily.

"Yes. Brigham Young's adopted son. There was one hundred and thirty or more of those people. Struck Salt Lake City along late in July. Bound California way, they was. Well, now, there was Bishop Pratt's killing. And Brother Smoot got back just before, saying Johnston's army was on the way. Then I *heard* that some of the Missourians boasted they had the very pistol which killed 'old Joe Smith.' So they got a mighty cold reception all the way down through Provo, Payson, Fillmore and on southward to Cedar City. Most folks wouldn't sell them anything. Ordered not to."

"Well, and then?"

Gregory's face worked with emotion. "Why, it's said the Piutes accused them of throwing arsenic into the springs," he answered heavily, "when the Arkansans were camped on Corn Creek, late in August. But what would they want to go and make themselves more enemies for? Especially such varmints?"

"Sounds mighty fishy!"

"Ahuh! But the report is that about four hundred Indians attacked their wagon corral later at Mountain Meadows. Them Arkansans fought like devils, they say. Fought from the sixth to the eleventh. And then all were massacred—all, that is, but about seventeen children."

"What's that? *You mean to tell me that Utes spared children?"*

Gregory shuddered violently.

"I didn't say that!" he protested

hoarsely. He raised his toil-worn hands slowly toward the skies, while the tears coursed down his furrowed, bearded cheeks. "Ah, God!" he mourned in shaking, vibrant tones. "What can the world think? Those children are in Mormon homes. Who was it who ordered them spared?"

"The Mo'mon leadahs boss the Utes an' Shoshones!" Buck declared.

"But not the Mormon sect!" Gregory expostulated, in tones of utter abhorrence. "The Mormon sect will have to assume the blame because a few——" But here he shuddered again and dropped his head on his breast.

"Zeke," Buck asked fearfully, "I wondah did Don Busbee turn down that a way 'bout that time?"

Zeke thereupon described young Busbee's equipage, asking Gregory if he had seen it.

"Ahuh!" Gregory affirmed. "Saw them leave Salt Lake City with Brother Eb Snow, bound south. That was late in August."

"Then is Eb Snow still ranching near Cedar City?"

"Why, yes," Gregory replied. "His young wife, named Milly, died a few days ago. Don't know how. And now don't ask me any more questions. I——" But here he broke off, for all heard horses galloping over the rocks in the cañon behind them.

QUICKLY then the old man pointed to a fissure, which they ran for; and in a few minutes three masked horsemen thundered by, traveling in the direction of Salt Lake City. All recognized readily upon one of the running horses the broad, thick form of Eb Snow.

"I feared so," Gregory sighed, when the hoofbeats died away. "They figured I would take this trail after leaving Echo." From his belt he now produced a bowie knife and with this quickly slashed the chafing bonds that bound their wrists.

"War is one thing, and murder another," he grimly said.

Choked with amazement and relief, neither prisoner seemed able to speak. Zeke only murmured brokenly when Gregory handed him an old six-barreled pistol.

"It is the best I can do," Gregory explained apologetically.

"What more could a man ask, though?" was Zeke's exclamation. "Why, man, you'll be shot for this!"

"I think not. I can say that a squad of your scouts intercepted me—anything—and it will be a blessed lie, I hope." Whereupon he handed them a lunch wrapped in a copy of the Deseret *News*.

"I can't thank you in words!" Zeke broke our again. "So I won't try. But will you tell me this: Where is my sister Nina?"

"Why, I thought you knew! She ran away and got to California, they tell me. Married a miner there."

"Safe, then? Ah, God!" The usually quiet and contained Zeke laughed and cried in the same breath.

Young Buck was still eying the patriarch in amazement. "You ain't doin' this fer us because you are one o' them 'postates, are you?" he asked.

"God forbid!"

The stalwart old pioneer's palpable and undeniable sincerity seemed to flood from his broad-toed black boots to the crown of his dented, battered Stetson. It reacted powerfully on the boy. Looking up into those damp, kindly eyes, all the radiant sweetness in Buck's character came to the fore. For the moment his features were almost girlish in softness.

"You make me plumb ashamed o' myself," he acknowledged humbly. "You was told, I suppose, why they took me?"

"Yes. Furthermore, I'm willing to say I believe you were perfectly justified in —well, at least *believing* that some one professing Mormonism killed your people. That's one reason why I'm freeing you."

"Shore, I understand. Well, suh, here's my hand."

They shook hands gravely, while Gregory's eyes looked down fondly at the youth.

"I couldn't think o' nothin', no ways, way down deep, but what I'd git me *a* Mo'mon," Buck concluded. "*Any* Mo'mon. From now on I don't aim to git me no one, ef I git the chanct, but them *murderers*."

CHAPTER XV.

FOR A MORMON CHILD.

AFTER a few hurried inquiries from Zeke as to the location of old acquaintances, the two shook hands once more with their benefactor and scrambled up a trail which ascended one side of the cañon.

With no money, one pistol, and only a few venison sandwiches between them and starvation, they were now afoot in a vast mountain range. Winter was blowing its first icy breaths through the foggy gorges, and snow was threatening.

There also seemed to be but three courses to choose from. One was to cross western Utah to Carson's old trading post or Virginia City. The Mormons there had been called to Salt Lake City. But thirty thousand Mormons in the valley of the Great Salt Lake and over four hundred miles of almost waterless desert intervened. The second route, which lay to northward, would take them to Fort Hall. Since the Bear River Trail was thick with Shoshones and Blackfeet, it seemed that their best chance lay in attempting to recross the Wasatch Range and reach the army.

"It's only a hundred miles or so that way," said Zeke, "and I know it like the palm of my hand."

Assured of his sister's safety, the slender bullwhacker seemed to have imbibed a fresh draft of stimulating wine. His eyes were no longer grave and brooding in aspect. They sparkled. Fully conscious of the dangers before them, he nevertheless straightened and rubbed his hands.

"Son," he cried, with a sidelong glance, in which defiant laughter lurked, "if we have to, we can live on Injun breakfasts."

"An' what's an Injun breakfast, suh?"

With a significant gesture, Zeke tightened his belt a notch.

"Well, ef you feel that way, suh, let's go!" said Buck, laughing outright.

"Not right off. We've got to get horses somewhere and a rifle or two. Follow me."

"Towa'ds Salt Lake City?"

"Yep. I think I can make a riffle thereabouts."

Without a word, Buck followed; and Zeke led the way to a grotto in the rocky promontories overlooking Emigration, Red Butte, Parley's, and Mill Creek Cañons and Salt Lake City.

The Mormon Zion was then a collection of small log cabins, houses built of adobe brick, and a few stone structures. The new tabernacle had not been started; the famed temple had been under construction at intervals for four years, but was far from completion.

Nevertheless Buck gasped.

From where he stood the Mormons had looked down upon a desert valley, only ten years before. Now that valley was covered by a great city laid out in five, ten, forty and eighty-acre plots, intersected in squares by the widest streets Buck had ever seen, fertilized by irrigation ditches, marked off by miles of well-kept fences, beautified by transplanted shade trees and fruit orchards, and showing everywhere the unmistakable proof of thrift and prodigious effort. With the Wasatch Mountains stretching away to north and south at its eastern edge, this Zion of the Saints formed a garden spot in a panorama where every color of a gorgeous rainbow had been daubed by the Master Hand upon the cliffs.

"A fellow wouldn't've *believed* it!" cried the lad.

Still marveling at the sight, he turned presently to aid Zeke in building a sheltered fire. This being started, they took turn about in sleeping till the sun, in a blaze of red, sank down beyond the rim of the desert in the west. Not until the purple mists of twilight changed to soft ebony, and the cerise chasms were fading into the shadows, did Zeke lead the way down the mountainside.

Several hours were consumed before they reached the outskirts of the settlement. Here Zeke left the boy in a gully. Though a log farmhouse was close by, and cows were contentedly grazing not far from him, more hours seemed to drag on before the boy's companion returned.

Buck could hardly restrain a yell of delight when he saw the man. Zeke was riding a saddled horse and leading another. He was also equipped with well-filled saddlebags, a short Hawkins heavy-

game rifle, of large bore, and a "Purdy Express Train" gun, with a much longer barrel.

"My oldest brother gave me the Hawkins and one horse," was his explanation. "Had to borrow the others."

"Oh, glory be, who cares? Le's go, is what I say!" cried Buck between voracious bites of a sandwich.

"Wait!" Zeke admonished. He seemed to be pondering over something, and was strangely hesitant for a man in his position. "I had a little talk with my brother's first wife, when he was getting the horse," he said presently. "Son, that Major Busbee's son and his wife were killed!"

"You mean down Mountain Meadows way?" gasped Buck.

"Between Parowan and Cedar City, she said—cowboys and all. It was laid to Piutes. But the baby——"

"Yes?"

"The baby was spared!" Zeke said portentously.

"Eb Snow!" cried Buck through clenched teeth.

"Well, I wouldn't take three guesses. Meantime, I know now where that baby is!"

Buck licked at his lips.

"Well, an' what do you want to do?" he asked huskily.

"I'm waitin' first to see what *you* want to do. She's some distance north of here. If we try to get her, it means we'll have to hole up to-night in the mountains and work back to-morrow night. Too late to try it now—to-night."

The lad's lungs filled slowly. Why, he asked himself, should he agree to risk a whole day's delay for the sake of a little "half Mormon?"

Adding a girl of but three years to the party meant another mouth to feed and a serious encumbrance if pursued or surrounded in the mountain passes. That was one phase of the situation; the other brought Gregory's kind face before him. Where would he have been but for that Mormon? And she was such a little, little girl. His chin came up. His long lashes were dampened with the first rush of his instinctively generous and selfless reaction.

"Why, suhtinly we'll git her!" he decided.

Zeke's eyes glistened like sapphires in the darkness. "Pard," he said, "put her there!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GIANTESS.

AT a point to the north of, and within a few miles distant from, Temple Square, there lies the entrance to one of the numerous cañons which slash into the western slopes of the Wasatch Mountains.

In the year of '57, a brook raced merrily over the rocks of one of the fissures of this cañon, and wended its chuckling, gurgling way through the chasm to the entrance, and thence down across the great swelling rise of ground which formed the approach. This spot was a fertile mountain meadow, with sheep and cattle grazing in fenced pastures near the cañon mouth, and a trig log cabin, located close to the entrance and under the lee of the towering right-hand wall.

At about eight o'clock on the evening following their acquisition of horses and rifles, Buck and Zeke found themselves near this cabin. It was the home of a Mormon named Leward; and it was here, Zeke had said, that they would find the baby Matilda.

The two had intended to approach the cabin directly. According to the meager information given Zeke by his sister-in-law, Leward was not at home, having been called into service. The baby had been brought to the elder Mrs. Leward, by order, from some one in authority, Zeke had been informed. In all likelihood it was the intention to rear the child in the Mormon faith.

Beyond this he knew little, save that the eldest of Leward's three wives was a rough-spoken giantess. He was in ignorance of her attitude toward the child, and he did not know whether or not she would resist their attempt to take her. Despite this, Zeke proposed to put the matter to the test by direct methods.

Riding up the slope with this intention, they had reached the top when they were suddenly checked.

A dog shattered the stillness with a savage succession of barks. At the same

instant Buck's heart lost a full beat; for, even in the uproar, his quick ear caught from the little rocky ford below them the sound of many horses' feet. And they were barely hidden in the shadow of the near-by stable when a hinged wooden window opened in the cabin, and in it stood framed the form of a big woman, armed with a heavy game rifle.

"What did yuh see thar, Rover?" she inquired in a raucous voice, hoarsened by much weeping. "Oh, I see—some one thar below! Shet up, you Rover—shet yore durned mouth!"

Ceasing to tug against his chain, the dog subsided, while for a second Buck gazed in utter fascination at the woman with the deep voice. Another woman held a candle behind her, and in its flickering rays the boy saw depicted the most strongly marked feminine countenance of his experience. It was massive and craggy; the blazing eyes were shadowed by thick black eyebrows; and, though nature had bestowed upon this woman of forty a mass of black tresses, now neatly coifed and meriting a high compliment, it had also placed upon her upper lip a faint, dark mustache.

"Is that Mrs. Leward?" he whispered.

"That's the first wife, yes. Sit tight now. We may have to ride through these fellows."

His teeth chattering with cold and excitement, the lad nodded. So, with rifle ready, he sat there till the horsemen came up.

"Danites!" he almost gasped aloud. For there were eight men, all mounted and masked, while in their midst sat a ninth, upon the back of a mule. This man's arms were tied behind his back, and a sack covered his head.

The broad-shouldered, mannish woman in the window aperture kept silence, as the dark figures halted. But in a flash Buck's nerves tightened, and his finger crooked against his trigger. For there was that in the air which was like the distant tolling of a death bell. The very manner in which the dauntless woman held her rifle toward the masked riders made her hatred plain. When she spoke to the leader, Buck barely controlled his start.

"Well, Bill Hickman?" she snarled, as the leader dismounted.

IN all his life, amid rough surroundings and in the midst of tragedy, Buck had never heard such tones. They were venomous, deadly, terrible. They thrummed like the coarse, heavy notes of a bass viol, expressing the accumulated bitterness and loathing of a strong character which had been plunged into the depths of agony, grief and despair.

"Is that any way to greet ary man—even when you don't know the man?" growled the masked bandit.

"Oh, I know you and all yore kind, Bill Hickman!" the woman retorted. Her hatred blazed forth like the blast of heat from the door of a roaring furnace. "Say what you've got to say, an' mouty quick, afore I go on the prod!" she added.

"Waal, now, sister, better wait a minute. All we want is that girl kid you got here."

"Thought so. Waal, you ain't goin' to git her."

One of the mounted men cursed under his breath, but the leader held up his hand. Again he addressed Mrs. Leward, with his mask bellying oddly in the faint candlelight.

"What's that kid to you, anyways? She ain't yores. Besides, she's a gentile."

"I know exactly who she is, Bill Hickman. I done found out most of it."

Again there came the sound of an uneasy murmur in the midst of the band. The captain stilled it angrily.

"Maybe you know more than is good fer yuh!" he snarled. "You open that door, afore I plug yuh!"

"Yes, yes!" pleaded a frightened feminine voice behind the giantess. "Let them have her. They'll—er—you know what they'll do."

"Yes, I know what they'll set out to do!" cried the baby's defender, in strident, ringing tones. "May God send their souls to everlasting hell, the whole of them! Don't I know *nothin'* would be too bad for Mountain Meadows murderers?"

The leader's intake of breath was so sharp that it whistled in his nostrils. Sav-

age and tense, he leaned menacingly toward the woman.

"What do you know?" he hissed sibilantly.

"Don't you move nary a foot nearer, Bill Hickman, or I'll scatter yore rotten heart all over the mountingside!" she threatened. Her voice was now as hoarse as the croak of a raven. "What do I know? All about Mountain Meadows. How John Lee hired them Piutes to go with him an' a few from Cedar City. How they fired from ambush on that Arkansas camp, just after break o' day, the mornin' o' September 7th."

"Look here, woman——"

"Don't 'woman' me. I tell yuh I *know*. I know how them Arkansans pushed their wagons together nigh the creek, an', even though they lost most a score, kilt an' wounded, the first fire, they fit off nigh onto four hundred Indians—an' Mormons disguised as *Indians*—for four days. Then I know how Lee saw it wasn't goin' to go, and how he sent word to that Nauvoo Legion Company up Cedar an' Parowan way. Yes, to help the Injuns murder whites!"

The bandit Danite leader cursed.

"Go on!" he suggested menacingly. "Let's see what other crazy idees you got, woman."

"Crazy, eh? I'll tell you some o' the names—Ike Haight, president o' the stake at Cedar; Cunnel Bill Dame, bishop o' Parowan; and Major Jack Higbee, too."

She glared defiantly at them. "Right near Jake Hamblin's ranch, it was!" she went on. "It was Bill Bateman them Mormons sent with a flag o' truce—yes, to fool them pore Arkansans!"

A heavy hand seemed to have been laid on her masked listeners. Their breathing became audible—the breathing of men temporarily chained by a surge of rage, terror and dismay.

"Then," she charged tensely, "them Arkansans helt up a little girl in white, in answer."

A sob shook the woman's great bony frame.

"Ah, God!" she wailed. "I kin see that little girl now! I kin see how thankful them pore Arkansas men an' wimmen an' children felt when they thought white men was comin' to their rescue. They thought they'd been fightin' only Injuns and——"

"Well, they had!" roared the captain. "It was Injuns did the whole——"

"That's a lie, Bill Hickman! John Lee went into the corral o' them Arkansans an' talked to a man named Hamilton. Told them people the Mormon milishy would save them from the Piutes, only they was to turn over all their guns so as not to make the Injuns any madder. Lee says that otherwise they couldn't hold them Injuns back. Them pore people hadn't hardly no amminishun left, an' so many children wounded an' all, why they agreed. *That's* what happened. Bill Hickman."

"It's a lie, by——"

"Hits God's truth. Want me to tell you how them women an' children marched out ahaid, and then the men, an' then the wounded layin' helpless in the wagons? There was the Mormon milishy on one side, and the Piutes waitin' in ambush. Oh, I kin see them Arkansans *cheerin'* the Mormons they thought was rescuin' 'em! Then Higbee give the word, an' the milishy shot them helpless Arkansas men down in cold blood! Shot 'em down, I tell you, while the Injuns came out screechin' after them sobbin' wimmin an' children. I——"

"You needn't go no further!" the Danite chief warned thickly. "I see one thing: You think this kid is one of the seventeen under seven that was spared, eh?"

"No, I don't. But I know the littul innocent lamb's folks was kilt by a bunch right afterward. There was, anyways, three white devils painted up like Injuns among the Piutes that did it, too."

A gasp broke from one of the riders.

"*What* white men?"

"Ef I was shore, I'd spit their names out, don't fear!"

"By the Lord!" yelled the leader. "There's only one man would have told you that story, and that's——"

"My boy!" screamed the tragic woman, with a broken sob. Her face contorted piteously, and another sob shook her from head to foot. "He's—he's out thar where you cain't harm him

no more, pore boy—out thar where I shoveled him under, my own se'f. An' me to blame for it—me, the pore fool, who nursed him at this breast an' taught him to obey orders from them above him, like they was God. I was a pore, ignorant woman what couldn't read or write, hardly; but I tell you God wrote hit out all plain fer me this day."

"You mean he told you to kill yore own son?"

"Kill my son? Shore he went into that Mountain Meadows thing under orders from Dame, and then came home here an' went ravin' crazy, a-listenin' to them screams. He went crazy and *shot hisself.*"

Here her voice broke again. "He were my only child!" she shouted hoarsely. "It's God's judgment on me, it is. But you don't git this girl baby."

"Why not?"

"Stand fast, thar! No tricks! Why? Because she's got a grandpap that's a major in Sam's army. Because yore a-scared they'll break through and are thinkin' now maybe you'd better cut her throat or lose her among the Injuns, so's there won't be any explainin' to do."

Rising then to her full height, she shouted: "But as God sees me now, you cain't take her 'less it's over my daid body!"

A tense instant followed, in which not a man among them moved under the menace of that long, black rifle. It endured but a few seconds. Cold, merciless rage filled Buck's veins with ice, and he had raised his rifle, intending to fire, when one of Leward's younger wives came running lightly around the corner of the cabin. She had taken advantage of the older wife's position and had sneaked out of the rear door with Matilda in her arms.

"Take her and spare us!" she screamed excitedly.

This was the spark to the magazine. The Danite leader lurched to one side, and the giantess pulled trigger in the same instant. The roar of the heavy piece reëchoed thunderingly up and down the eerie cañon. The bullet sped past Hickman and struck another masked horseman. He clutched his middle, coughed hoarsely, and pitched to the ground.

The Danite captain answered the shot, as did another mounted man. Their aim was marred by the startled horses. Only one bullet struck Mrs. Leward, and this in the left forearm. Simultaneously Buck and Zeke fired. Though their horses were plunging nervously in the uproar at least one shot told; for another masked rider screamed and toppled out of his saddle. Before this man struck the ground, Zeke split the heavens with a terrifying cry and charged into the Danites, like a madman. He clubbed at them with the strength of a giant, while Buck followed, discharging Gregory's pistol.

The Danites were thrown into panic. The leader leaped for his horse, while the others spurred down the slope. Despite her wound, Mrs. Leward seized a six-barreled pistol and emptied it at the fleeing men, while some of the riders fired back at the house. But only one of their bullets told. The woman who had brought out Matilda now dropped her, to run back around the rear of the house; but a slug sped through the window, passed the giantess without touching her, and killed the younger wife, as she entered from the rear.

Thus the tables were temporarily reversed.

CHAPTER XVII.

TEN FEET ACROSS.

AT once Mrs. Leward unbarred the door and ran out to scoop up the baby. The child had not uttered a sound, though her eyes were wide with fright. Clutching the little girl to her breast with one brawny arm, the giantess turned to Zeke.

"Zeke Harding!" she marveled. "Shore, the days of mericles ain't past. But come in—come in, afore those devils come back."

Spurring round the house, the two tied their horses and entered. Mrs. Leward had already covered the dead wife with a blanket and was busily engaged reloading her rifle. She scoffed at her flesh wound, but submitted when the third wife, who answered to the name of Belle, insisted

on binding it up. And, while she was thus engaged, and Harding and Buck hurriedly finished reloading the weapons, Zeke told the astonished women their story.

"Shore, an' ef I'd knowed where you were," she assured them, "I'd have *brought* her to you, pore littul lamb." And, as she caught the child up again, for one brief caress, Buck was amazed. Ugly? In that instant he saw her face transfigured with a pathetic, yearning tenderness and thought her beautiful.

"Yes," she rushed on, "I'd've brought her, though I'd've hated like all get-out to part from this pore lamb, whose mother, I think, was killed by mistake. Now, maybe I won't have to."

With the words she was striding into a bedroom, jerking at her skirts. "Belle," she roared, "you hurry and throw together all the snacks there is handy. An' you, Zeke, ef you won't mind saddlin' fer me——"

"You mean you're going with us?" was Zeke's incredulous shout.

"Waal, now, where *would* I go? No time to talk. O' course I'm a-goin'. They'll be back here when they git help."

With a delighted cry, Zeke ran out to saddle the horse, while Buck watched at the window for returning Danites. His own heart reëchoed Zeke's shout. Though neither had spoken, both understood the situation. For they could not have left this courageous woman to be murdered by her enemies had she decided to remain. He had no doubt she would prove far more reliable and capable on the trail than many a man.

Thinking thus, but keeping ever on the alert, he presently heard a sound on the rocky path. Some one was running toward them. But when he challenged, and Mrs. Leward, attired now in man's clothing, came running out, a muffled cry filled him with amazement and fresh delight. With his arms bound, and his head still covered by the sack, the prisoner had thrown himself from the led mule in the stampede. He it was returning. Buck recognized the voice of the old Mormon, Gregory, who had given them their liberty.

"I decided that I wouldn't lie about it," Gregory panted. "I was put under arrest and then told I was to go home and await orders. That's all I know. To-night they came and got me."

"*Was Eb Snow with them?*" Buck queried excitedly.

"I don't know. They didn't say, my son. But if there's a horse, I'll go with you."

"A horse an' saddle an' another gun, too!" said Mrs. Leward. "Run to the stable. But yore folks——"

"Madam, I never had but one wife, and she died last spring. I was at my son-in-law's house."

Then Gregory ran out to secure his mount.

WITHIN a few minutes the horses were saddled, food put in the saddlebags, buffalo robes rolled and strapped to the cantles, and the baby bundled in a deerskin paque. After the hurried collection of a few light utensils, they were ready to go. Thereupon the woman Belle, with tears streaming down her face, astounded Buck by kissing the giantess good-by.

"I don't blame you a mite!" she cried. "I'll run to the Harriman's. I can't stay here alone—with her dead in there. If I see them—yes, I will—I'll say you went the other way."

One thing only remained to be done. They examined the dead Danites, but found that neither man was Eb Snow Then they were off down the slope, with Mrs. Leward carrying the baby, despite her wounded arm.

They had barely turned to the north when the anticipated pursuit developed. The masked riders were returning with reënforcements. A command to halt rang out in their rear; and when they put spurs to their horses, red flames split the darkness, and a bullet whined past their heads.

"Ride!" yelled Zeke. "We can make a stand in Crooked Gulch if we can get there!"

They flew along now behind Zeke, with the bellies of their mounts skimming close to the ground. Bullets shrieked and thrummed overhead; others struck with a vicious spat against the rocks and rico-

cheted off into the night with a hideous wail; and ever as they rode they heard the fierce yells of their pursuers. These yells told them that Indians were with the enemy, and this fact served to increase their speed. So they lashed the horses forward recklessly, while the wind roared in their ears and beat the rim of their hats down over their eyes and noses.

Now a horse's iron-shod foot struck a rock with a bell-toned clang, and sparks flew off into the night. Now a mount stumbled and was saved from falling by a firm upward pull on the reins. They were risking not only the flying bullets, but were in constant peril of falls which would spill the riders in a heap.

Half Mormon or not, that dark-eyed baby girl, with her troubled, frightened stare, so fresh from a tragedy closely resembling his own source of grief, tugged mightily then at Buck's heartstrings. Zeke he had come to love with a deep and abiding affection; while the rugged giantess and the bearded Gregory appealed to him as brave, but pathetic, victims of tragic circumstances brought about by honest and sincere convictions. And suddenly he reacted to an irresistible impulse. He reined in, dropped behind, and commenced firing back with his six-barreled pistol.

"My soul, boy!" Zeke yelled, turning back toward him. "*Ride* that bronc! You want to get yours?"

"Aw, this hoss is faster than the rest!" Buck panted, spurring on again. "I jest thought I'd hold 'em up a little."

But Zeke and the others understood. The boy had checked the Danites momentarily. This enabled the fugitives to spur forward and reach the protecting rocks of the narrow Crooked Cañon.

"I won't forget it in a minute!" Mrs. Leward huskily promised, as they came to a trot in the chasm.

Zeke and Gregory fell back here temporarily, turning their horses over to Buck. Firing from behind rocks, they scattered the Danites once more, and then came running back. "They can't get around up top in the dark," Zeke gasped. "We'll get a start on 'em now. Follow me."

TROTTING ahead, he suddenly turned to the right in a fissure, that rose rapidly at a tangent toward the starlit sky.

"They'll never think we'd dare go this way," he explained. "They'll go *up* the chasm."

"Boy," said Mrs. Leward, "I wouldn't 'a' dared it myself. But go on!"

"What's ahaid?" Buck queried excitedly.

"There's a branch of Crooked Gulch. Boy, it's from ten to thuhty feet across —and nigh onto five hundred deep!"

"And we jump it!" he gasped.

"We shore do, or——"

The incompleted sentence was finished ably enough by Buck's imagination, and the actual test proved even more terrifying in prospect.

Reaching the top unmolested, they paused at the brink of the dark chasm, while Zeke trotted up and down in the starlight, searching for a suitable point from which to make the leap. He found a point where the walls were between nine and ten feet apart. Yet, while the surface appeared fairly smooth on both sides, there were small, jagged erosions here and there, which might cause the horses to stumble.

Buck's heart rose in his throat when Zeke quietly prepared for the first jump. He almost cried out to ask him to find some other way. However, he did not speak. The others were accepting the risk without a word. It was simply something that had to be done. Therefore they were doing it.

When Zeke's broncho rose in his leap, Buck sought to aid him after the manner of a better pulling for his favorite horse. A lunge, a moment in mid-air, and Zeke was over safely.

Next came the problem of the baby. It was settled quickly by Mrs. Leward.

"Catch!" she called to Zeke, and, raising the child on high, the powerful woman tossed Matilda over the chasm into his arms. Zeke stumbled and fell, but the little girl was unhurt.

A moment later Mrs. Leward made the leap, followed by Gregory. The latter's horse stumbled when he landed on the opposite side, but Mrs. Leward grabbed

the bridle, and the terrified animal jerked his hind legs up over the brink and rolled on his side. Gregory was only slightly bruised by the fall.

It was then Buck's turn, and he faced the ordeal with a sinking sensation in the pit of the stomach. He was glad there was little light. His face was very pale. Galloping to the take-off, he was almost unseated and thrown over the brink when his horse refused to jump and whirled, instead.

Again he tried it, and the horse refused a second time to leap. Then fresh terror smote him. Horsemen were heard scrambling up the trail by which they had mounted. The ruse had been discovered.

"It's do or die now!" cried Zeke imploringly. "Ride 'im there, ole pard!"

"Come on, son, and God be with you!" called Gregory.

"Tell him I'll come back over thar an' throw the fool over, like I did my honey lamb, if he don't get sense!" shouted the giantess.

So the boy reined back and set out at the canter for the take-off. Whether or not Mrs. Leward's threat had anything to do with it, the horse rose in a magnificent leap. The breath was sucked from Buck's lungs, while he soared in the air over the fearsome depths below. A crash, and he had landed safely on the other side.

Two minutes later found them working down into a valley. Their pursuers had not reached the top of the up-coming trail. For the moment they were safe; but it had commenced to snow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRONTIER FUGITIVES.

WHILE Buck's party was in the mountains, Johnston was still en route from Leavenworth and not due to arrive until the third of November. Colonel St. George Cook, with his five hundred dragoons, was not to come up until the nineteenth of November. Alexander, in the meantime, was without cavalry, without orders, and gifted with little initiative.

After Lot Smith's raid, Alexander decided to march to Fort Hall. He set out on the eleventh of October, while the snow was falling heavily. His baggage train was so long, and progress so slow, that the advance guard was in camp before the rear guard started. Laughing, triumphant Mormons rode on the flanks, driving off one herd of seven hundred oxen on the third day. The grass was destroyed by fire, so the animals starved; and then orders arrived by courier from Johnston to proceed to Fontenelle Creek, where grass was reported abundant.

They had just arrived there when the Mormons ran off another herd of about five hundred oxen; whereupon Johnston, coming up, ordered another move, on the sixth of November, toward Fort Bridger. With the baggage train six miles long, the temperature dropping to sixteen below zero, animals freezing by the hundreds, little fuel save wild sage, cottonwood and willow, and little forage other than bark, it required this small force of infantrymen fifteen days to march the thirty-five miles to the burned site of Fort Bridger.

By this time Echo Cañon was choked with snow, and the Mormons retired, leaving Johnston to go into winter quarters near Fort Bridger, in an encampment of Sibley tents which he named Camp Scott. Here the troops lived on draft animals all winter. Then, when their force was increased in the spring to about six thousand men, and they were ready to fight, Buchanan pardoned the Mormons!

IN the interim, shortly after their leap over the chasm, the fugitives were forced to abandon further travel for the night, the trail being too dangerous for passage in the starlight. It grew colder and colder, and the early October snow continued to fall, while they huddled together under the lee of a bluff, without fire or covering save the buffalo robes.

At daybreak they were off again, after a breakfast of half frozen biscuits and cold bacon. It was still snowing; and when they reached the next cañon, the wind had risen and was whipping the white flakes through the chasm in blinding clouds.

Whirlpools formed, emptying their

lungs in the vacuum; and these were followed by vicious, deafening inrushes of air which flung snow over them in sheets and threatened to beat them to the ground. Sleet stung their eyelids and froze upon their cheeks. Frequently they gasped painfully for breath. And even when the wind died away, the air was filled with a semifrozen fog which blotted out the trail and forced them into a cave. They dared not continue for fear of falling over a precipice.

Here they built their first fire of cottonwood and scrub oak. It was a smoky fire of green, damp wood, which threw out barely sufficient heat to dry their steaming clothing and kept them coughing in the choking smoke. Nor did this constitute the only source of discomfort. Their heels itched maddeningly from chilblains, and their frostbitten cheeks burned excruciatingly with the return of circulation in the affected parts. They were frequently busy rubbing frozen spots with snow.

When the sun and breeze combined to dispel the fog on that first afternoon, they set out once more. All realized that they *must* press forward; for, while the temperature rose measurably, another drop, with an accompanying blizzard, might mean the end.

"Do or die!" was the cry which sent them forward.

Repeatedly forced to abandon the broader cañon bottoms, where Mormons were sighted, driving stolen mules and oxen, they mounted the slopes and took perilous Indian trails which led them around the bases of naked spires and down the sides of great yawning chasms.

Ofttimes these cañon-wall trails were only a few feet in width. Buck could often touch a towering cliff with his left hand and dangle his right over the outer edge of the path. He could then look almost directly down to rocks a full thousand feet below. With the snow on the rocks and blinding gusts sweeping up from the gorges, it was extremely difficult for the horses to keep their feet on these dizzy ledge trails.

They were forced frequently to climb afoot, slipping back one for every two feet gained, while the snorting animals buck-jumped ahead of them. Again they were able to go forward only by seizing the horses' tails. And at night, when the animals had been blanketed with buffalo robes and had finished browsing on half-frozen bunch grass and shrub bark, the party found but one way to keep warm. When the hobbled horses laid down and had warmed the ground beneath, the animals were ordered to move over a little. This they did with many groans, while their riders snuggled in next the bellies, placing their heads between the animals' forelegs and their feet between the warm thighs. Both animals and human beings benefited thus from the exchange of body heat.

Yet, through it all, Buck gained something he would not have exchanged for gold. He heard not a word of complaint. He saw human nature at its simplest and best. Never would he forget the picture of the giantess alone, swinging an ax like a man, gazing off over the notched horizon for signs of approaching Indians, or trudging sturdily up the trail, with her long gun on one arm and the baby Matilda on the other. Never would he forget the picture of her crooning over that little, black-eyed girl, keeping the child warm and snug against that broad, swelling breast, while the snow and frost settled upon Ma Leward's bushy eyebrows, and her heavy breathing left a trail of fog in her wake.

"From thet ole battered felt hat to her dog-gone ole-man's boots, I'll say she's a *man!*" Buck declared fervently to Zeke. And he included them all in a warm glance. "Ef the Injuns *do* get us," he added impulsively, "I kin die, anyway, thinkin' I've knowed some of the nicest folks in this yere world."

"Bless yore heart!" cried Mrs. Leward. "You air a sweet honey lamb, but you keep thet muffler aroun' yore ears now, like I done tole you, or I'll take a stick to yuh. You *hear* me?"

So they trekked on, and on the fourth day, when their meager supply of grain had been exhausted, the end seemed near. They were without water save that from melted snow. No game had been sighted to replenish their meager ration stock. The horses were growing weak on their

scanty browsing. And, though they had won through to the broad table-lands, Camp Winfield was still thirty miles away.

Then Mrs. Leward horrified them with a cry. Pointing back over the expanse of white showing there in the morning sun, she indicated a pass in the cordon of upflung cliffs and peaks jutting high against the western sky.

"Injuns!" she exclaimed.

WITHOUT a word further the party turned and pressed forward at a gallop to a knoll which Zeke pointed out. It, at least, afforded a fair field of fire on all sides. The Indians were still two miles or more away, but the ponies of the savages appeared fresh, while three of their own mounts were near exhaustion.

"Better to take the best position than try to run!" Zeke decided. "We'll shoot these cayuses for breastworks."

"That Roman-nosed bronc of Buck's is tough yit!" Mrs. Leward declared. "Buck, you're light, too. You ride with this baby!"

"Right!" Zeke approved, as he shot his horse. "To Winfield for help."

"I don't wanta leave yuh!" Buck protested brokenly. "I wanta he'p fight."

"Go on!" roared Mrs. Leward. "Take this baby!"

"No! They need me to he'p. *You* go—you're a woman."

With one sweep of her brawny arm Mrs. Leward placed the mighty Papoose-born-a-man over one uplifted knee and struck him a half dozen resounding blows with the palm of her broad hand. With another sweep she reseated him in his saddle, kissed the baby hungrily, thrust her across Buck's lap, and slapped his horse across the rump.

"I lay I'll learn yuh to mind yore elders!" she cried. And then, as he flew away, she screeched: "Ride like the wind for my lamb, you honeysuckle kid! Oh, Gawd, be good to my two pore babies—an' Zeke, gimme the loan o' thet handkerchief for one minnit till I blow my fool nose. Thar now—whar's my rifle?"

With these words, she shot down her horse and prepared to fight.

As Buck started galloping over the snow-covered ground to eastward, he suddenly emitted a wild yell of delight. He had sighted a company of infantrymen mounted on mules.

These infantrymen bounced awkwardly, and painful expression distorted their red faces. They formed one of many detachments, out in an ineffectual attempt to capture guerrillas. Their saddles were slipping sidewise, or up on the mules' withers; many of the galled animals were pitching or sidling, and Buck had never sighted a more discomfited and awkward collection of "Ichabod Cranes."

Nevertheless, Buck cheered and then yelled again, when Rocky Moore came galloping forward. That dragoon had come on with Johnston's courier and had been pressed into service to transform "doughboys" into cavalrymen.

"It's one good turn we did, even if we never ketch a Mormon!" yelled Rocky, when he had heard Buck's story. "Here's my canteen. Take a little drink. Take two little drinks. But, oh, I forgot to tell you. Dan shot that Smiler, first off—soon as he heard you'd been taken, Buck. Called him out on general principles and beat him to the draw. But The Smiler didn't die—damn it!"

Buck heard him as one in a dream. Rocky's task in making cavalrymen had been a hopeless one in so short a time; but when Ma Leward came forward, with tears of gratitude and relief running down her cheeks, and the men crowded round, cheering huskily, the boy could have hugged them all.

Thus they won through; and, apropos of this, it may be remarked that the gun-throwing "bad men" of the West usually dramatized themselves. Such people as these dramatized the frontier.

CHAPTER XIX.

RED CLOUD'S DEFEAT.

LEADING up from Fort Laramie, along the Powder River and northward into the Bighorn country, there ran in the year of '67 a route called the Bozeman Trail. For gold had been discovered in Montana, while the Civil War was being fought; and, despite the treaty of '51, this trail had been blazed by

prospectors through the hunting grounds legitimately owned by the Sioux, the Arapahoes, and the Northern Cheyennes. As the Indians quite naturally fought bitterly against this, there had been built on the Powder River in '65 a post called Fort Reno.

A year later Colonel Carrington followed it with two other posts to northward. One was Fort Phil Kearny, in the Bighorn Ridges, and the other C. F. Smith, still farther north, in the Montana country.

When therefore Buck Hilton left Fort Phil Kearny early on that August morning, ten years after his escape from the Mormons, these three posts had become synonyms for frontier privations and hardships. The Ogallala Sioux, under the young chieftain Red Cloud, and the Brule Sioux, under Spotted Tail, had joined with Rose-dawn's father and the Hunkpapas to keep the two northern forts and their inadequately supplied infantry garrisons in an almost constant state of siege. The country at large was still talking about the killing of Fetterman's sorteying infantry force of seventy-eight men, near Phil Kearny, in the preceding December.

"So, Blacky," Buck drawled to his sleek horse, "you'll probably get a chanct to step some again, ole-timer. Heah me, yuh son of a gun?"

Blacky whinnied, but did not increase his gait. He had come northward some two hundred and sixty miles from a temporary cavalry camp near the new city of Cheyenne, and must now retrace his steps over the same route, and he was quite well aware of it. He had the honor of carrying Colonel Busbee's pet dispatch rider; for Buck, now wearing the blue uniform, had transferred to that officer's regiment some months before, after service as an enlisted scout in the West during the greater part of the Civil War.

Narrow of hip and wide of shoulder, the tall youth sat flat in his McClellan saddle, taking the jar of the trot with the ease of a supple horseman. There was about him the air of a man who could run and land standing on the back of a cantering horse. Humor and daring were marked strongly in his countenance. And, as he drank deep of the pine-spiced mountain air, he chuckled aloud and looked over at Piney Island, some five miles from the post.

"I told that dog-gone kid, Tuesday Knight, I'd bring him out a plug o' chewin' on the way back," he informed Blacky, nodding at the distant spot, where a detail of infantrymen were guarding civilian woodcutters. These were supplying the post with fuel. "And him swore off once, too!" he continued. "Well, it's out of our way, but we'll go, eh, Blacky?"

To this the horse responded with a wiggle of his pointed ears, and Buck again chuckled. "Yuh needn't act so wise," he declared. He leaned forward and ran an affectionate arm up under the glossy black mane. "I suppose yuh think you'd a-jumped that cañon with *two* o' us on your back, eh?" Whereupon he fell into reverie, thinking back over the events which had come to pass since Ma Leward had been engaged by the colonel as Matilda's nurse for life.

"Reckon Ma was glad to get back from the East to Matilda's Texas ranch," he mused. "Fo' yeahs with the colonel's folks during the war didn't fit well with her kind, I reckon."

Here his thoughts reverted to Eb Snow, whose father had died before Johnston's troops occupied Salt Lake City in '58. No proof had ever been obtained against the Mormon rancher for the Busbee murder. Neither had any indictments been secured against the guilty in the Mountain Meadows affair, though the leaders were soon well known by repute. The Mormon juries simply refused to indict.

The advance of the West during that decade had without cessation gone on apace. Nothing could stop the prospectors. Their discoveries of precious metals had set the country afire. Overland freighting had grown till ofttimes there passed one station in a single day no less than six hundred wagons. The pony-express riders, with Buck and Wild Bill Hickok and young Bill Cody among them, had electrified the country during the two seasons of '60 and '61; and then had followed the completion of the first

telegraph system, flung with a magnificent gesture across the virgin continent.

"Only that ain't a patch to what's goin' on now, Blacky," Buck murmured. "Hell is shore poppin', high, wide an' handsome."

FOR now the Union Pacific was coming west from Omaha through Nebraska, and the Central Pacific eastward from San Francisco, planning eventually to link up at Promontory Point in Utah. The Kansas Pacific was also building westward through Kansas. So places like Cheyenne were agog with feverish activity and frenzied speculation. Agitation had already been started toward the foundation of a new territory called Wyoming. Custer, Sherman, and other generals were also in the West, erecting military posts, negotiating treaties, and attempting the formation of new Indian reservations. For most of the Western Indians were up in arms.

Regardless of this, the Union Pacific was going steadily forward. Mammoth camps were being erected overnight in the midst of clamor and smoking guns. The ties were past Julesburg, and the Irish spikers declared that, despite the "Sooz, hell, or high water," they would reach Cheyenne by November.

"Mighty funny how the wheels of the world turn," Buck commented. "Gentiles an' Mo'mons, Catholics an' Protestants, Germans an' Irish, chinks an' Japs, Johnny Rebs an' Yanks, an' every other kind o' enemy joinin' together to build this heah railroad. Men get mighty forgivin' when theah's a dollar in sight, seems like." And he snorted, as he thought of Eb Snow.

The former Utah cattleman had left the church two years before—rather than pay tithes, it was said—and was now engaged as a contractor on the Union Pacific, with The Smiler in his employ. The man also owned a saloon, dance hall, and store, which had been moved from Julesburg to Cheyenne within the past week. In addition, the man had a finger in the Indian trade, and Buck was mortally certain that it was not with friendly Indians alone.

But the youth determinedly threw off the shade of gloom these thoughts engendered.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "Somethin' good comes out of everything, Blacky. Good ole Zeke, he made his strike in '60, an' takes Uncle Dan an' Uncle Dave Gregory into partnership as freighters, an' now that's doomed, 'count o' the railroad. But ain't they got a fat gradin' contract o' their own? Shore! Well, then, get happy some, Black."

With this he grinned and took from his pocket a recent letter from Rose-dawn. Five years before this she had deliberately left her father to attend a mission school in Minnesota. Far from being converted, she had returned, some four months previous, to her people. While she deplored the fact that she must fight against him, she rejoiced over two things. Her English, she wrote, was a wonderful asset in dealing with dishonest traders, who might cheat her people when selling them rifles and ammunition. It would also prove an asset when Buck doffed the uniform. She hoped then to tell him many thoughts in his own language. She wrote:

I found a copy of a paper with that story about you. "The youth with the wintry smile and the flaming guns!" Did I not say my Papoose-born-a-man would carry his head like the bull elk, with antlers tossed on high?

"I'd like to have that newspaper man by the neck!" Buck ejaculated, coloring vividly. "Cost me most a fortune in drinks, that did." But he replaced the letter carefully and thought of his discharge to come within a few months.

"And if she's half as sweet as she was when I saw her last," he reflected, "why ——" Here his thoughts trailed off into a rosy cloud. Not quite decided, not quite sure of himself, Rose-dawn nevertheless furnished a pleasant subject to ponder over.

But, while engaged thus pleasantly, he suddenly chuckled at the memory of another letter. From Texas Matilda had written:

Ma and I will visit the colonel soon. Later, when that country is opened up, I am going to move my cattle across the Red River to the

Wyoming hills. I have given this serious thought, and I have made up my mind.

Not having seen Matilda for several years, this statement from a girl in her very early teens amused him. Yet he knew that others would come with their cattle, and that the destinies of his friends and enemies were linked with the movement which bade fair to roll like a relentless juggernaut over the enraged Indians.

"But that ain't gettin' ole Tuesday his tobacco," he said aloud. And he chuckled. "I knowed that Tuesday's swearin' off wouldn't last."

He saw in the distance a circle of wagon beds, dismounted from their carriages, and within the circle soldiers lolling. To this he rode at once. Saluting Captain Powell, and dismounting, he faced the grinning Tuesday Knight.

"Hello, 'Wintry Smile,'" said that youth, sotto voce—and dodged the blow which Buck aimed at his cap. "However," Tuesday continued, "welcome to our village. Sorry we ain't no entertainment to offer—kinda like to show my appreciation for bringin' that tobacco——"

But his sentence was cut short by the sound of firing in the near-by woods.

PRIOR to those shots, the surrounding hills and the area of isolation which they formed had been quiet, there in the white transparency. To the outward eye it was but another unfrequented Western solitude, over which vultures exploringly wheeled, and in which the sun shone soberly down on yellow slope and mourning pine. Now, with dramatic suddenness, it emitted no less than three thousand Sioux warriors, under the command of Red Cloud.

To meet these there were but twenty-eight men in the wagon-box corral. Four woodcutters succeeded in joining them, bringing the number to thirty-two. They were armed with the new Allen modification of the Springfield rifle and new Colt revolvers. They were also fortunate in having several rifles for each man and abundant ammunition. For protection, they had sandbags piled breast high within the wagon boxes and loopholes suitably arranged. But at least half the Indians were carrying Winchesters, Spencer carbines, or old army muskets.

Out of the grass and through the trees and over the ridges, Indians rode upon them, while from every bit of cover others poured a terrific fire between the charging gaps. But Captain Powell met the situation coolly. When Buck had thrown Blacky, he was given several rifles and a poorer shot to load them for him. This rule was also applied to all other well-known shots in that small band.

The fire which therefore ripped into that charging horde shattered and stunned it. The hard-shooting Springfields crashed bullets through three horses in a row. They fell in piles. Others got within fifty yards before falling or turning, and at least three Indian ponies died with their forelegs in the wagon boxes. Dead warriors littered the ground in rows on all sides. And back like a recoiling wave fell the first attack, broken and reeling.

While squaws came out on the hills and watched—and Buck knew Rosedawn was there among them—the battle raged on anew. The firing was almost continual. Buck's later memories of the fight retained as high lights the remembrance of the perspiration pouring from his cheek against the stocks of the pieces handed him, and how white seemed the teeth of the yelling Indians against the red war paint. He shot till his ears were deafened, shot till his hands were blistered by the gun barrels, shot till he was forced to remove his shirt and with it form a pad for his sorely aching shoulder.

"An' a mean shame it has to be done, too," he muttered once. Deliberately then he withheld fire when a splendid buck retrieved the dead body of a mate by means of a thong of deerskin attached to the ankle.

That fight lasted till three o'clock, with two more desperate charges in a body. The wagon-box tops were shot to splinters. When the rescuing force from the post arrived with a howitzer, the defenders' ammunition was nearly gone. Yet only two of the thirty-four had been killed, while Red Cloud had received a defeat with terrible cost. Captain Pow-

ell's modest report included only the dead left upon the field; but the Sioux, who had retrieved the greater part, afterward admitted a loss of eleven hundred.

Ascertaining that Blacky, lying hobbled below the line of fire, had escaped injury, Buck looked at Tuesday Knight. He felt that he dare not move his right arm, lest it break off at that aching shoulder. So, with his left, he produced the damp slab of tobacco which had brought him into this.

"Heah's yore plug, Tuesday," said he. "Glad to accommodate yuh. Oh, yes!"

The slightly dazed young Tuesday rallied.

"Oh, to be sure, ole-timer," he replied, in a voice as light and dry as air. He took the plug. "Well, s'long. Drop in any time. Maybe next trip we'll show yuh a *real* parade."

"Oh, yes! Much obliged. But, Tuesday, while I ain't gettin' *personal,* I'll say this: The next time you swear off chewin', for all me, you'll stay swore!"

CHAPTER XX.

ENTER MATILDA.

IT was four days later that Buck met Matilda standing on the path close to his tent, in the camp near Cheyenne. She and Ma Leward had arrived from Texas only the day before. She was rather tall for her age—a slender and somewhat angular youngster of thirteen, with a disorderly, but luxuriant mass of blue-black hair. As she stood there confronting him, with one foot on top of the other, her hands on the back of her hips, and a big hat hanging behind her back, one lock of that soft, wavy hair persisted in dangling down over her rather sharp and eloquent nose. This she kept blowing up, as she calmly looked Buck over with her unblinking black eyes.

"Well," he said, with his inimitable smile, after an awkward pause, "you might say, 'Hello!' "

Here the dark girl blinked very rapidly.

"I just knew it!" she cried.

Buck started, for her deep, melodious voice was at least an octave lower than he had expected.

"Knew what?" he exclaimed.

"Nice voice. Ab-so-lute-ly."

Buck's smooth features acquired a new coat of tan, and he snorted; but she did not appear to notice. Instead, she continued to look at him, her appraising eyes running over his six feet of superb physique, with an expression of frank satisfaction.

"Well," she said, with a little sigh, "I won't have to worry—about your health, anyway." And she blinked again. "Heard about your quickness on the draw," she continued. "But I see you're not tough—yet. Anyway, you can still blush."

"Can I?" cried the youth, coloring vividly.

"Exactly!" Matilda again blew up the loose hair. "I had grandfather on my mind," she added, "Rocky Moore, too, and Sergeant Alberson; also, Sergeant Krueger. So I had to come. You know —to take care of them."

Buck laughed outright. It was his personal belief that any one of the four could blow all the dust off the parade ground with one snort.

"So," she finished imperturbably, "I thought maybe I'd have you on my mind, too. But what do you think about this?"

Not knowing whether to laugh or sneer at this amazing, nonchalant girl, who disconcerted him despite his added years, Buck, with color still heightened, glanced at a spot near by. Where Nature had once so calmly maintained her empire of lonesomeness, there was now erected a clamorous construction camp.

Upon the bosom of the sun-baked earth, which Buck so dearly loved, were pitched tents to the number of hundreds, and above these tents rose smoke from many fires into the quiet blue sky. Between the structures wended teams dragging heavy plows and scrapers, brought in from the outlying grade for repair. From their dirt-scoured blades and bottoms the sun flashed blindingly, as from the surface of Roman shields; and where once the infinite earth and the infinite sky had combined to awe Rose-dawn and Buck with an inspirational vista, there now resounded the clang of ringing anvils.

No more would this spot be a Mecca for contemplative Indians or lone travelers with a penchant for abstract thoughts. No more would the smiling moon preside in tranquil benevolence over the slumberous prairies. The symphony of peace wrought by basking plains and sun-warmed mountains had been drowned ruthlessly by the discord and turmoil of seething action. There were no Indians watching the changing clouds, nor any Indian maidens laughing in their games of plumb stone.

Where the Indians and the bullwhackers of old had used for their table the warm ground, Buck now saw through the open sides of one great canvas structure bare wooden tables and crude benches, awaiting the noonday rush for steaming platters of coarse food. Near by was a long row of mangers, and over the mangers dirty tarpaulins, and under the tarpaulins champing horses, facing each other in rows and tearing at their hay. Whips were cracking, as oxen drew up with prairie schooners to discharge loads of bolts, "fish plates," canned goods, baled hay, and the like. Cooks were busy peeling potatoes for the noon meal; oxen were being butchered on the open prairie, while other men cut up buffalo quarters, their arms bare to the elbows. Everywhere brass-lunged straw bosses were adding to the rumble and roar of the congested camp with loud orders. As many as fifteen hundred teams worked on one fill, dragging slip and wheeled scrapers into the cut, filing on out to the dump, and returning in a long, endless chain.

ALL this Buck suffered his eye to take in with a sweep before he looked back again at Matilda to say, somewhat facetiously, and with a trace of mature condescension:

"Well, she looks pretty good—some ways—Matilda."

"Looks good as *what*, for instance?"

This halted Buck temporarily. His meager academic education had been gained from voracious reading of a few badly assorted books. Prior to the war, three different winters had been spent with Dan in the sod houses of the Pawnees, under Bear-at-bay, and the buffalo-skin lodges of the Sioux, under Rain-in-the-face. So he had acquired a certain outlook and clung tenaciously to the plainsman's creed. In his talks with Dan, beside a glowing camp fire, he had more and more absorbed the color and the beauty of the mighty earth. Hence, while he was thrilled by the great movement, it also filled him with a certain wistful regret and awakened in him no desire to play a constructive part. He was still the reckless, footloose adventurer and express rider in spirit. The growing West loomed in his eyes as a great theater in which untrammeled youth could solve the problems of existence in hazardous, but exciting callings.

"Well, tell me this," said Matilda, as he frowned a little and searched for words: "Are you going to work for Uncle Dan when you're discharged?"

"No. They don't need me, p'tic'lar," he replied. "Figure to be an army scout. Kill buffaloes, too."

She nodded vigorously.

"Thought so!"

"Huh! What's wrong with that?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing—in a way. But the buffalo won't last forever. Neither will the fighting. Besides"—she squinted again at her rebellious strand—"it's not building nor taking root at anything productive."

"Well, anyway," he asserted hotly, "no man don't have to apologize for bein' a scout or huntah—not, at least, to any —to any——"

"Fresh kid," she cut in, with a sudden, adorable smile.

It was so radiant, so dazzling, that Buck was taken aback like a schooner coming up into the wind. And while he stood thus, she continued: "But you're going to teach me, you know, to ride Roman and to hunt buffalo."

Buck's nostrils arched and quivered. "Riding Roman" means standing on the bare backs of two galloping horses, taking ditches, and what not. As for buffalo hunting—he was chased by Sioux, at least once, out of three times out!

"Well," he drawled, after an eloquent snort, "you bring youah hobbyhorse

around. Yeah, about two o'clock next summer."

"Oh, no," she returned. "Real horses! Leave it to me. I'll fix it."

Buck nearly jerked his hat from his red-bronze curls in his sudden start. "Do you mean the colonel will——"

"Oh, I spoke to him last night. He swore frightfully, but that's a detail. Well, good-by. You'll probably get an order in the morning."

Just then the colonel appeared, striding across the parade ground.

"Matilda!" he bellowed. "You come here!"

"Oh, vurry well," she responded and ran directly to him. Tucking his arm around her waist, she said: "Well, it's all arranged."

"What?" the colonel thundered. "Didn't I tell you last night? I said, 'No!'"

Matilda pressed the colonel's arm and looked pleadingly up at him.

"No!" the colonel continued, when out of Buck's hearing. "That buffalo hunting is taboo. As for the other—I don't want to humiliate that boy by making a nursemaid out of him. What's more, he's the best scout and rider I have. You think I can spare men like that?"

Then the colonel dilated on Buck's worth. He was doing scouting and hunting for which such men as Bill Cody, "Big Bat," and John Nelson were paid from one hundred and forty to one hundred and seventy-five dollars a month.

"If you think so well of him," queried Matilda, looking away, "why hold him?"

"Meaning I could discharge him and then hire him as a scout?" The colonel snorted. "Discipline—that's why I don't. He was a sergeant. Beat another sergeant, so I reduced him and haven't discharged him because——"

"You're a soldier—just iron."

"Well, by thunder, I'm *liable* to discharge him, if you get gay."

"Making him a civilian scout?"

"Exactly."

"Whereupon you'd have no authority to detail him as my instructor?" she asked, with eyes lowered.

"Move to the head of the class, my dear."

"Oh, vurry well," she replied meekly.

This Buck did not hear. He moved off, nevertheless, with his hat on three hairs, humming "Blue Bonny Blue."

"I guess that will hold that fresh egg for a month of Sundays!" he thought. With which he withdrew Rose-dawn's letter and reread it for the tenth time.

CHAPTER XXI.

"A DARN FRESH KID."

BUT within the hour Buck was convinced that Matilda was utterly unabashed by the colonel's rebuff. He came within earshot of old Rocky Moore and the demure girl in time to hear the gnarled old veteran shout:

"I'll *not* tell the colonel you'd be safe with him to protect you! Want you should be kilt!"

Still later he saw Matilda speaking to Sergeant Krueger and Sergeant Alberson, and he heard Sergeant Krueger thunder: "Matilda, you git. Vot I told you, hangin' der enlisted quarters aroun'? Vill ve efer make from you an officer's laty? Monkey drill? Monkey doodles, dot's vot."

The four musketeers had presented an unbroken front; yet Buck frowned thoughtfully at Matilda's departing back, and seized his first opportunity to see Ma. When he sighted Ma on the plank floor of the colonel's improvised veranda, he grinned, as he noted that she had donned a suit of fringed deerskin, wore a pair of voluminous slippers, and was puffing contentedly at a corncob pipe.

"My Lord!" she cried ecstatically. "It's my honeysuckle kid growed up." Whereupon she ran out, hugged him close, and kissed him on both cheeks.

After a few excited questions, Ma led him to the porch. "Lord," she said, sitting down in a rocker, "it does seem good to git out here again where yo' kin stretch."

"Why, Ma, I thought you was in Texas a whole yeah befo' you came up?"

"Yeah; but wa'n't I East mostly durin' the war? I ain't over that yit." Then she looked at him with a twinkle in her bright eyes. "I suppose you want me to take yore part, eh?"

The youth flushed. "Oh, you know, eh?"

"Shore. Well, there ain't much chanct. She done made up her mind, all right."

"Darn it, though, Ma, I tell you she's liable to be killed! Can't you *lick* that kid?"

"Oh, yes." Ma rocked back and forth, blowing smoke out toward the sky line. "I paddle her. But, shucks!" And Ma laughed. She seemed curiously unconcerned over Matilda's risks. "Think they don't know nuthin' down Texas way 'bout straight ridin'? An' *say!* That ain't *nuthin'!* Do you know what she's made up her mind to now?"

"Huh! I wouldn't be surprised at nothin'!"

Ma pointed northward. In the terrain indicated lay a much discussed section. On the south it was bounded by a prolongation of the present Nebraska-South Dakota line; on the north, by the forty-sixth parallel; on the west, by the Bighorn Mountains; and on the east, by a north-and-south line beginning at the point where the forty-sixth parallel crosses the Missouri River.

"She's got her eye on that country," said Ma.

The youth smiled, for the section comprised about a quarter of the territory which had been allotted to the Sioux and the northern Arapahoes and Cheyennes in the treaty at Fort Laramie in 1851. It lay between the Union Pacific Railway right of way, on the south, and the Montana gold mines, in Helena and Beaverhead Valley, on the north. As the railroad was cutting through the territory belonging to the three tribes, a peace commission was planning to confine them within this new and much smaller reservation, well to the north of the Union Pacific, to south of the Montana mines, and to the east of the Sweetwater gold fields.

"What does she see up theah?" he asked.

"Some mighty sweet grazin' lands jest east o' the Bighorn Mountains, son."

"H'm! That Bozeman Trail had mo' to do with this Sioux war than the railroad," he declared. "Red Cloud told 'em fair last yeah not to build posts no farther no'th than Reno."

"But didn't Swift Bear an' some o' them Cheyennes an' Arapahoes agree to let it open last year?"

"Yeah, only Red Cloud he nevah signed that treaty, and he's got mo' followers than any in them allied tribes. Theah's mighty small prospect o' openin' that country yet a while. Why, those doughboys in them three small posts, stretched way apart—how does a gov'ment expect them to keep fo' or five hundred miles o' trail open, an' the Sioux mounted?"

"Yeah, son. But the talk is that some o' the Sioux is discouraged since Piney Island. If they go on the new reservation, she figgers maybe she can dicker fo' grazin' rights."

"Ahuh! But that looks a long way off to me!"

"Yes," said a voice behind them. "Still, there may be a chance. That is, if the Sioux agree to parley."

Buck looked around to see Matilda.

"Oh!" He grinned a little and stood up. "Then you've made up yore mind, eh?"

Matilda's lashes lowered and raised several times, and she suddenly smiled.

"Oh, yes—just like the other. Well, au revoir. You'll probably get an order —*muyo pronto, mi amigo.*"

And Buck left, blinking on his own account. He was fuming inwardly and yet amused and interested as well.

"A darn fresh kid!" he reiterated. "But, by thundah! Durn if she don't act most a hunderd, sometimes—an' jest like she's got an ace in the hole."

COULD Buck have been present the next day, he might have watched Matilda playing that particular ace. Sergeant Krueger was a former Prussian guardsman, with nearly thirty years' service in the American regulars. He was a consistent murderer of the English language and was extraordinarily sensitive about his false teeth. Matilda conquered him by the simple expedient of approaching his detached quarters before reveille, appropriating his dental plates while he slept, and awakening him with

a hoarse whisper from where she stood at his open window, poised for flight with her prize.

The troop went out on patrol after breakfast, leaving Sergeant Alberson in charge of quarters. This soldier, like the other two, was also on his last enlistment. He was Irish, but had taken the name of Alberson for "po-lithical raisons, me bhoy!"—not to speak of the fact that the roll is called in alphabetical order on pay day. He wore two medals and was noted for a peculiar grimace.

Matilda visited the company street soon after breakfast, holding something in her hand.

"Ooh-hoo!" she called. "Uncle Pat!"

He whirled round to see her holding aloft a miniature reproduction of his bust, done in putty, and showing him in the act of smiling.

"Thought maybe one of the men would like it," she announced.

These two having been disposed of, Matilda centered her attention on the remaining half of the quartet, and she was prepared when Colonel Busbee started out that afternoon toward Rocky Moore's saddle room.

This was a signal for all enlisted men within sight to steal into B troop's stables. There, hidden in stalls and runways, they listened eagerly. And eventually the subdued hum of conversation was broken by a snort. The hum became a rumble; and suddenly, with a tremendous slam of his fist on the table, old Rocky shrieked: "You're mistaken, colonel. It never happened no such way. Wasn't I there? Didn't I see?"

"You're mistaken yourself, Rocky Moore!" the colonel thundered. "Why, my soul, I was as close to him as I am to you. I——"

But just here Rocky gave vent to an insane howl. "Lookit!" he shrieked. "Lookit in this drawer. My pipe's gone. My pipe I had for thuhty years. By gad, I'll——"

And then a clear call rang across the corral:

"Ooh-hoo! Uncle Rocky!"

Two irate and dumfounded old men peered from Rocky's window to see Matilda perched on the roof of A troop's stables. In one hand she held Rocky's beloved clay pipe, and in the other she held a box of cigars. The colonel knew at a glance that it was his last box of a brand which he had smoked for years.

"So you think you have me licked, eh?" roared the colonel, after the initial explosion. "Well, I'll show you. I'll discharge him and hire him as a scout as soon as I can get authority from General Augur."

"Then," said Matilda, sliding down and approaching them, "I'll take my spanking and give back the—er—trophies of war—on one condition."

"Well?"

"Don't tell him he's to be discharged—till the papers come from Fort McPherson, I mean. Meantime——"

"Well, out with it."

"He can teach me monkey drill."

"Unless I have a message to send. All right; but no buffalo hunting."

"*Esta bueno,* colonel."

There was a provoking twinkle in her eye which caused the colonel to stare at her more closely. Suddenly then it dawned on him.

"Well, by the gods!" he cried. "She was driving at that discharge all the while. Buffalo hunting be damned!"

"Ha! Ha!" cackled Rocky. "And they won't give votes to wimmin! Don't you never go to play poker with her, colonel, or she'll take the eagles off your shoulders!"

CHAPTER XXII.

SMOKE RINGS.

EARLY on that same morning Buck was sent with dispatches to Dan Mulcahey's outlying grading camp, where every blue-jowled Irish skinner on the grade worked with a Winchester, Colt or Sharp's rifle ready to hand. And both Dan and Gregory, though they had reached the age of sixty, seemed to thrive on it.

"God has been good, son," said Gregory, fingering his long, soft beard. "Of course, we've got everything tied up at stake in this railroad work. But we expect to pull through, God willing."

"God, an' thot dam up there," Dan supplemented, pointing.

In order to fill a quicksand bottom, engineers had caused the construction of a dam in a creek that formerly crossed the right of way at this spot, and were cutting a new channel to change its course.

"You see how thot wather is backed up there?" Dan asked. "Well, there'll be a hell av a pressure there till we finish diggin' the new cut-off through the ox-bow to thot rocky ground. And if thot dam goes out—good-by fill."

"Well, couldn't yuh fix a commissionah an' blow it up? Then you'd get anothah contract!"

"Go 'way wid yer foolin'. We'll l'ave such as thot to Eb Snow."

With an affectionate hand Buck clapped his old friend on the back.

"Well," he said, "heah I was thinkin' maybe you'd help me stick up the Sweetwater stage next week."

"Shure," Dan whimsically retorted, "we might, if the dam wint out, an' no commissioner said the railroad wud take the blame."

"Because then we'd have to do the work over at our own expense," Gregory explained.

"Which w'u'd bust us higher than anny dom' kite, me bhoy.'

Then Dan's expression suddenly changed. "Oh, bedad, I nearly forgot!" said he. "Zeke's goin' to be married. A gyurl from Omaha."

"Yuh don't say! Well, the ole rascal! I shore hope he gets what he deserves."

"You bet! Ah, he's the salt av the earth, thot bhoy. Goin' along like a grandfather clock, day after day. Thot's Zeke. But say, whilst we're sp'akin' av marryin'—well——"

Though Dan paused, Buck knew his thought. Grinning impishly, the youth chose to misunderstand it.

"Come to think of it," said Buck, "they tell me you were Ma's first caller."

"Go 'way wid yer blarney," Dan retorted, coloring on his own account. "Shure, an' she makes foine biscuits. There was method in me madness."

With this Buck settled into the saddle and cantered off through Wyoming's immaculate light. To the dam he gave but a passing glance. It seemed stout enough. Nor did he dwell long upon the conversation. For on his return trip he noted upon many bleached buffalo skulls some freshly painted designs in red and green. And next he saw, on a high butte, the figure of a warrior poised, with his streaming war bonnet sharply outlined against a background of vast blue sky. Alternately covering and uncovering a fire with a buffalo-hair blanket, this warrior sent up through the still air an unwavering column of clearly defined smoke rings; and off to northward, where saffron-tinted mesas and solemn buttes of blackest ebony stretched past Fort Laramie, other columns relayed the message onward.

"Powwow on," Buck reflected.

And then, on arrival at the camp, his friend, "Sudden" McEwan, told him of Matilda's coup. But for one thing, he might have yielded to a temptation to go A. W. O. L. It developed that the signals of the afternoon had to do with the proposed treaty. The Sioux and the Cheyennes were ready for another parley, many being cast down by the defeat at Piney Island. But the elderly Rain-in-the-face and young Red Cloud were insisting on the presence of Straight Tongue Dan Mulcahey. Buck was therefore sent to Cheyenne to see if Dan had returned. He reasoned that duty connected with the parley would temporarily postpone his humiliation.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands April 20th*

David Rolfe, Deceased

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Higher Showmanship," "Empress of the Sands," Etc.

The Great Macumber, magician-detective, regarded all mediumistic phenomena as just so much amateur magic. In spite of that, his mind was not closed to conviction, and it was for this reason that he looked into the mystery of spirit messages from the late David Rolfe, banker.

FEW men may be found in this skeptical world who are less likely than the Great Macumber to be hoodwinked by the chicanery of the spirit medium. To Macumber, the devices of the mountebank mahatma and the venal yogi are an open book. Far better than many of those aggressive savants who spend their odd evenings ripping the winding sheets from the shoulders of astral masqueraders, he knows the workings of the machinery of materialization and the origin of spurious phenomena.

The tooting horns and jangling bells of the pay-as-you-enter séance—the floating lights and the sepulchral voices and the soaring tables and the slaps of unseen hands—represent to him only a corruption of the art to which he has devoted an honorable lifetime. It is all, in his discerning eyes, no more than rudimentary magic.

Yet, knowing what he knows, Macumber follows no philosophy of negation. Because those mediums with whom he has had experience have proved to be charlatans, he does not take the position that all must be. His mind stands open to conviction. He is no readier to deny that here and there rifts may exist in the curtain between this life and the next than he is to admit as a fact that disembodied intelligences of the dead sometimes find means of lending counsel and comfort to the living.

In the early days of his acquaintance with Doctor Hugh Ballestier, I recall some memorable arguments which ended invariably with the brilliant young specialist red of face, and Macumber unshaken in his tolerant agnosticism. Bal-

lestier saw the earth as a huge laboratory. Science, he held, could admit no future life for those who wriggled beneath the cosmic microscope; man lived while he lived, and when he died he was dead. All his problems, all his interests, ended at the grave.

I could not repeat if I would the arguments heaped upon Macumber. Ballestier bored me. When he got off on the metaphysical tangent—which I was amused to note was usually after he had downed the second or third glass of soda flavored with Macumber's unsurpassed Scotch—I habitually took my thoughts to other things.

"If I were to wake up at midnight and see my good old dead grandfather bending over my bed," Ballestier would say, "do you know what I'd do, Macumber? I'd get up and pack and be off by the first train on a vacation that wouldn't end until grandfather took himself back to his decent and sensible and scientific grave. As a neurologist, I'd feel competent to diagnose my own symptoms. But there are three reasons why that will never happen. In the first place, grandfather has ceased utterly to be. In the second, no matter what the exigencies of my practice, I never permit myself to get in anything approaching a state of nerves. And, thirdly, I've about given up hope of ever being in bed by midnight again."

AND then to my astonishment one evening I heard this same calm and confident voice saying:

"By Jefferson, Macumber, do you know I believe there may be something in it, after all—this survival-of-the-intelligence business, I mean! There's a lot to it."

I had been woolgathering, but the trusty subconsciousness had been doing sentry duty. Suddenly I found myself an interested listener. Through the smoke pall that hung heavy about the two, I saw Macumber's lips curl in a misty smile.

"You haven't had a visit from Grandfather Ballestier, have you, doctor?" he asked lightly.

I thought I detected just a trace of unsteadiness in the hand which Ballestier reached out for his glass.

"No," he said. "Grandfather hasn't seen fit to get me or any other member of his surviving family on the subliminal wire. But I'm not so sure that old David Rolfe isn't making himself heard from."

"David Rolfe?" repeated Macumber, with so complete an absence of surprise at his guest's sharp about-face as to suggest it had not particularly commanded his attention. "So you've a notion David's restless in the world next door, eh? Well, he might be, doctor, having been called so unexpectedly from the stewardship of so many millions and of so beautiful a daughter as——"

Ballestier put down his glass ungently.

"I can't help having that notion, Macumber," said he. "I'm in my right senses, I'm quite sure, and, as a medical man, I will certify that to all intents and purposes I'm cold sober. But there have been some curious things happening since old David died—very curious, to say the least."

Macumber's question was artistically casual. He has a faculty of inviting confidences by seeming to repel them.

"Was Rolfe so fond of you, after all, that he had to return for an eventual heart-to-heart chat?"

The neurologist smiled dismally. What other matters, besides metaphysics, he had been discussing, during those long evenings which had made them intimates, I could only imagine.

"No," he replied. "David in death seems disposed to hold himself as completely aloof from me as he did in life. He hasn't been around with a blessing. I'm hanged, though, if it doesn't look as if he'd managed to crowd that iron fist of his through the veil and get at least a finger hold on the dollars he had to leave behind."

"What are you talking about, man?" demanded Macumber. "Is this some fantastic way of telling me he left his property entailed?"

"It isn't," said Ballestier. "Mrs. Rolfe has absolute control. It's the manner in which she's closing up old David's affairs, and going ahead with some of them, too—that is what I have in mind. I

wouldn't have to see much more to convince me that David himself is actively directing every move."

"What nonsense!" said the Great Macumber, with what one who did not know him so well might have taken to be scorn unadulterated. "Rolfe hasn't been buried a month. Even the most fanatical of the adepts wouldn't say that the round trip between here and the hereafter could be made in so brief a time. Whether there be any returning or no, it's a long journey that Davy's set out upon, Ballestier. What, in Heaven's name, has got into you, man?"

"The question should be, rather, what's got into David Rolfe's widow? I've never in my life seen such a change in a woman as she has shown since David died."

MACUMBER put aside a short-bitted black pipe that had begun to sputter mutinously and filled its twin.

"What sort of change, doctor? If it's something that interests you solely as a neurologist, I don't know that I——"

"It will interest *you,* Macumber," said Ballestier. "I guarantee that." He hesitated. "But, before I say another word, I'll have to have your pledge of absolute secrecy."

"Have I the reputation of being loose-tongued?" inquired the Great Macumber dryly.

Ballestier brushed away the thought with a slender and notably well-kept hand.

"That's not the idea," he protested. "But I've noticed that young Race of *The Sphere* is in the habit of dropping in on you, and an unguarded word in his presence would have all Park Row about our ears. Once they got a hint of what I'm going to tell you, the newspapers wouldn't be satisfied until the front pages and the Sunday supplements had squeezed the last throb and thrill out of the story of the return of David Rolfe." Ballestier shuddered. "That *would* finish the widow. The thread by which her reason hangs is slender enough now. Whatever the influences which have been at work upon her, she has been under a terrific mental strain. It's telling. So, in the circumstances, may I not assume——"

"You need assume nothing, doctor," said Macumber quietly. "You have my promise not to repeat, in whole or in part, anything you may tell me. You were about to describe, were you not, some change which you have observed in Mrs. Rolfe since the death of her husband?"

"That was my intention, and you have had opportunity to see the impression that has been made on me. But I do not ask you to believe as I have been impelled to believe. I merely shall present the facts. You will be at liberty, of course, to draw your own deductions from them."

"Thank you," murmured Macumber. "And this change, I understand, has manifested itself chiefly in the widow's development of some latent business ability following David Rolfe's passing?"

Doctor Ballestier settled his glasses more firmly upon his nose, as might a myopic horseman at the approach to a hurdle.

"That has been, perhaps, the major visible manifestation," said he. "But you must consider, Macumber, the sort of woman Mrs. Rolfe was while her husband lived. She was a home body. She knew next to nothing of David Rolfe's affairs. She had no social aspirations. Her life centered in Doris."

"I know," nodded Macumber, whose mind I have often had occasion to liken to one of those vast encyclopedic mail-order catalogues. "Rolfe couldn't be satisfied with one railroad, but one woman was enough for him. He never outgrew, I believe I've heard, the helpmate of his years of struggle."

"He never did," said Ballestier; "and it was his tragedy that his success meant so little to her. I think I understood the man, although for the life of him he couldn't understand me—or Doris. In the old days Doris' mother could figure the dollars with him, figure them down to the final pennies. But in the new days she was left behind. She couldn't calculate in the millions. The gigantic deals in which Rolfe became involved, after he had fought Wall Street's old

guard to a standstill, made her head swim.

"She was beyond her depth, and David Rolfe came to realize it. For years, to my personal knowledge, he had not talked to her of his business affairs. And yet in the last fortnight, Macumber, the widow has shown a positively occult knowledge of negotiations she could scarcely have known were under way. She has even demonstrated a mastery of details that David Rolfe alone could have had at finger ends."

"It's a strange word to hear on your lips, doctor—that 'occult,'" remarked the other.

"It was chosen deliberately. At the outset, for instance, there was the peculiar business of the pen. I simply cannot explain that through the operation of any law recognized by science. And then——"

Macumber tamped down the tobacco in his pipe with a calloused and blackened forefinger.

"The pen, Ballestier?" said he. "That sounds as if there'd been something in the nature of psychic phenomena accompanying this change in the widow. If that's the case, by all means tell me about it."

Doctor Hugh Ballestier tipped the deep-dimpled brown bottle, which is the hall mark of the genuine MacVickar, and stirred himself a fresh Scotch and soda.

"I came here to-night, Macumber," he said, "with the intention of telling you everything. After the talks we've had on the subject of spiritism, I felt I owed it to you. I'm ready to concede that your attitude has been the fair one, and that it is I who have been the fool!"

FROM a side pocket Ballestier produced a brier as large as any two of Macumber's. With a grimace he rejected the jar of jet-black Louisiana shag which Macumber hospitably shoved toward him, and filled the pipe with a less-devastating mixture from his own pouch.

"In a way," he continued, when the tobacco was aglow, "I will be violating the ethics of my profession in speaking so freely to you. Unless it were in consultation with a fellow neurologist, or with Mrs. Rolfe's own family physician, I want you to know, I'd not breathe a word of this to another man in New York."

Macumber nodded.

"You honor me, doctor," said he. "And, also, you increase my impatience—or call it eagerness or what you will. What was it about the pen?"

"I'll come to that directly," Ballestier assured him. "I wished you to understand, as a further precaution, that I've had the widow under professional observation. Doris felt for several days that her mother had become unbalanced through grief over David Rolfe's death. It was very sudden, you know, and the shock——"

"I spend at least the first hour of every day with the newspaper," said Macumber. "You do not need to tell me that Rolfe was stricken with a heart attack in his office in Wall Street and was found dead at his desk by a clerk."

"By his secretary," Ballestier amended. "And the office was in Broad Street, not Wall. But no matter. Mrs. Rolfe naturally was prostrated by the news. She had taken to bed when I called with my condolences. It was on the third day following that Doris telephoned to me. Her mother, she said, had been acting queerly. She was up and about again, but seemed like one in a trance.

"What alarmed Doris most was her mother's growing obsession that David Rolfe was trying to communicate with her from the beyond. I asked her at once if she had consulted Doctor Frank Gridley, who has been the Rolfe family physician for years, and I was somewhat relieved to find she had not."

Ballestier caught the other's questioning look.

"Oh, Gridley is a good man, of course, but the general practitioner has a way of complicating matters for the neurologist. When the neurological specialist has a case under observation, it is frequently vital that the patient be not on guard against him. A few words from Gridley, well meant though they should be, might have made it impossible for me to make an accurate diagnosis.

"As things stood, the opportunity was ideal. Mrs. Rolfe had known for more than a year how matters were between Doris and me, and she had not joined in her husband's opposition. She would have been as well satisfied to see Doris married to a fairly successful professional man whom she loved as joined in holy wedlock to a railroad system or a trust company. At any rate, she always had made me welcome in her home. She would not know that my call was not purely a social one. Whereas Gridley——"

He hesitated.

"I see," said Macumber. "And I understand you called?"

"The same evening. Mrs. Rolfe, I could see, was in a highly nervous state. Not once did she mention her husband. I did not wish to lead the conversation in that direction, and I waited until she had gone. Patience, I may say, is essential in neurological practice. Things volunteered mean much more than responses elicited by questioning.

DORIS told me later that her mother thought she was receiving a recurrent impulse toward automatic writing. This, it appears, she sensed first when replying in her own hand—she's an old-fashioned woman, Macumber, remember—to messages of sympathy showered upon her by her husband's employees and business associates. This had been as early as the second day following David Rolfe's death.

"Mrs. Rolfe told Doris that she felt at times as if another hand than her own were directing the pen. This feeling became so strong, she said, that now and again she purposely loosened her grip upon it—and she was sure, Macumber, that at those times the pen moved of its own volition. She says the writing became different, more angular, the characters bolder. She——"

Macumber interrupted.

"Just a moment, Ballestier. Has Mrs. Rolfe, to your knowledge, ever had a predilection toward spiritism?"

"She hasn't," replied the doctor positively. "I don't believe that even now she knows the meaning of the term 'automatic writing.' That's the odd part of it."

"It is odd," agreed Macumber. "Your theory, then, is that it's by the written word David Rolfe is working his posthumous will through her?"

Ballestier shrugged.

"I'm stating no theory; rather reciting a history. Mrs. Rolfe says she still feels the *other* hand on the pen. Once, I have it from Doris, the pen was snatched from her fingers, as if in anger, and thrown down upon the desk. There have been other developments, too. The widow has begun to walk in her sleep."

"An old habit?"

"Absolutely not. It's something entirely new. I know of just two instances, although there may have been more. On both occasions of which I have knowledge, Mrs. Rolfe has been found wandering through the house by Miss Crippen, who fortunately is an exceptionally light sleeper."

"Miss Crippen?" queried Macumber. "I seem to know the name."

"David Rolfe's secretary," annotated Ballestier.

"Ah!" Macumber, whom I have known to worry himself through a whole sleepless night, seeking a connection for some name which had come casually into his thoughts, sighed with relief. "Your Miss Crippen worried me for a moment, doctor. I place her now. It was she who found David Rolfe dead."

"You're right."

"She's living with the family?"

"She has been since old David's death. That was his wish."

"Do you mean she is to remain in the employ of the family—or the estate?"

"No; she is merely staying on as an accommodation to Mrs. Rolfe. Rolfe's affairs, of course, were in no such orderly state as they would have been had his illness been a long one, and Miss Agatha Crippen had been his private secretary for more than twenty-five years. She had been so close to him, even in his biggest transactions, that she virtually placed at his command a second pair of ears, a second pair of eyes, a second pair of hands—almost, you might say, a second brain.

"A very sharp business woman, Agatha Crippen. Not only had Rolfe been generous with her, but she has been wise in her investments. She is quite well to do, I fancy. Apparently, at any rate, she has no need to seek another situation. She told me that, except for the sentiment, she would have retired several years ago to a big farm which she owns up State. Only loyalty to David Rolfe kept her in active service, and it is just that same spirit of loyalty which holds her in New York now.

"She will stay with Mrs. Rolfe, she says, until David's house is in order. Although long years in the Street have replaced whatever womanly charm she may once have had with a conspicuous severity of mien and brusqueness of manner, I'd call her rather an admirable person."

At random Macumber asked:

"The Rolfe household now consists of mother, daughter, Miss Crippen, and the servants?"

"There's David's younger brother, too—Anthony Rolfe," Ballestier informed him. "He's an invalid, and he had been living with David and dependent on him for several years. Quite a substantial trust fund was provided for him in the will, leaving him free to fend for himself. But it seems to be his wish to make no change."

"How old a man is Anthony Rolfe?"

"Past fifty, I should say."

"Married?"

"Not to any one's knowledge. He may have been, though. I imagine he led a more or less strenuous existence before he settled himself as a charge upon his brother." Ballestier looked sharply at the other. "Why do you ask, Macumber?"

"Just because," replied Macumber idly, "it's habit with me to interest myself in the personalities of all who dwell at elbows with interesting happenings."

"You think," Ballestier accused, "that Mrs. Rolfe may have been getting her business advice from Anthony? That's out of the question. Her brother-in-law knew no more about the financial operations of David Rolfe than she. Anthony's totally unlike his brother. Until his health broke down, he had been a roamer, seeking will-o'-the-wisp fortunes in remote places. I believe he contracted the fever which finished his active career while hunting up some mythical gold mine in South America.

BETWEEN him and David there was never a bond of common interest. They hadn't even been corresponding for a dozen years when Anthony wrote from some unheard-of village in Peru that he was down and out. David was no sentimentalist, but certainly he behaved handsomely by his brother. He cabled him transportation and sufficient money to clean up his South American debts, and, on his arrival here, David opened his home to him. But as for consulting him—preposterous."

A deep wrinkle came into Macumber's forehead.

"Where, may I ask, Ballestier, do you get your information concerning this remarkable grasp of her husband's affairs displayed by Mrs. Rolfe."

"From Doris and from Miss Crippen."

"Have they cited any specific instances?"

"Many. In one case the widow asked Miss Crippen about a certain block of Twin Cities Traction stock that she herself did not know Rolfe had acquired. She was forced to refer to his personal records, and among them she found the purchase noted. It had been made only a day or two before her employer's death, and she had not been advised of it."

"Might old David have some time mentioned the stock to his wife?"

"Highly improbable, Macumber. It was a very small deal for Rolfe. Only a few hundred shares were involved."

Macumber blew a series of neat rings and followed the smoke with thoughtful eyes, as it drifted away.

"Can you explain to me, Ballestier," he asked, "why David Rolfe should have troubled to get a whisper through to his widow in regard to Twin Cities Traction, if his interest in the company was so trifling?"

"Again," said the specialist, "let me remind you that I am airing no theories. You will hear nothing except what I

know to be so. In this case, Mrs. Rolfe's actions, since she first spoke to Miss Crippen about the stock of the traction company, have a decided bearing. She is buying more of it."

Macumber set forth another set of smoke rings.

"I shouldn't imagine," he hazarded, "that she would have cash available just now for any major operation in the Street. The estate, of course, would be tied up in probate."

"So it is," agreed Doctor Ballestier. "But that doesn't mean Mrs. Rolfe is without large liquid assets. Some time ago, when he was girding himself for the battle which broke the K. & L. combination—and which might have resulted in his own dissection—old David settled a million and a half on his wife. Thus he secured the family against the poorhouse. In victory he did not withdraw the gift. The money has been at Mrs. Rolfe's command ever since. If she should choose, she could cause a considerable flurry with it in Wall Street on her own account."

Macumber looked up quickly.

"You think she intends to tackle the market on a large scale?"

"I can't tell you," said Ballestier. "I do know that she had gradually been taking on a line of Twin Cities Traction, and that her holdings now amount to several thousands of shares. Miss Crippen thinks she is out to capture control of the company; told me so in confidence. And the astonishing thing is, Macumber, that Rolfe's widow is proceeding with the operation exactly as David Rolfe himself might have, had he lived. The buying is all being done in small lots. The orders are scattered among a dozen brokers, and thus far not even a ripple of excitement has resulted in the Street.

"Miss Crippen tells me that the methods pursued by Mrs. Rolfe are absolutely typical of her husband. The whole thing is beyond her comprehension. The widow silenced her early protests just as David Rolfe would have, and Miss Crippen now is simply following orders—and marveling."

"Has Miss Crippen a theory to account for Mrs. Rolfe's surprising insight into finance?"

"She has," nodded Ballestier. "She believes that her late employer's driving will and dominant intelligence have triumphed over death. In some manner, she thinks, David Rolfe has contrived to smash down the barriers and to proceed through the agency of his widow to carry on some deal on which his heart was set when he died."

"Is this brother Anthony a spiritualist, by the way?"

"I don't know," said Ballestier. "I haven't seen the man more than a dozen times, nor exchanged as many as a dozen words with him. He is a silent and inconspicuous factor in the household, by choice."

"Miss Crippen?"

"I'd hardly call her a spiritualist, Macumber. Like a great many women, who are more concerned with the great mystery of life, after all, than we men, she has looked into spiritualism, I understand. But certainly David Rolfe has not manifested himself to her, if that's what you're driving at. She was almost as slow as I, as a matter of fact, to reach the conclusion that the widow is getting guidance from beyond."

Doctor Hugh Ballestier's hand went out toward the brown bottle.

"I could tell you of other instances in which Mrs. Rolfe's uncanny knowledge of her husband's later transactions have amazed his secretary and Doris," he concluded, "but they're echoes of this astonishing Twin Cities undertaking. You've had, substantially, the whole story of David Rolfe's return. What do you think?"

Macumber did not answer at once. He filled another pipe, rose, and paced the length of the room a half dozen times, his head thrown back and his eyes consulting the ceiling.

"I think," he said presently, coming to a halt beside the chair from which Ballestier had watched his aimless perambulation, "that I'd cheerfully pay five thousand dollars at this moment for the privilege of questioning Mrs. David Rolfe about her husband—living and dead. I mean to say, of course, that

you've roused my curiosity to an extraordinarily high pitch. Do you suppose you could possibly arrange the opportunity for me, doctor?"

To Ballestier the suggestion was startling. Combined with a prodigious swallow of Scotch and soda, it set him to spluttering. Macumber did not wait for his recovery.

"You'd not," he urged, "be necessarily doing an unkind turn to the bewitched widow by bringing us together. Doesn't it occur to you, friend Ballestier, that a course laid by a ghostly compass might well wind up on the rocks?"

WHEN Macumber told Doctor Hugh Ballestier that a chance to inquire into the peculiar circumstances attending the rebirth of Mrs. David Rolfe as a stock-market strategist would have a big cash value to him, he was dealing in no hyperbole.

I do not mean to insinuate that in everyday affairs Macumber is a reckless spender. Rarely, indeed, have I met a person with a better appreciation of the value of money than he. Although his earnings from magic would compare favorably with the income of many a metropolitan bank president, especially with the growing use of illusions invented and patented by him, he is not one to fling gold pieces into the sea.

But in what concerns his hobby—an avocation he facetiously calls "mystery plumbing"—Macumber is never regardful of expense. In unraveling those real-life problems which seize upon his magician's fancy, I doubt the professional detective lives who could compete successfully against the unassuming amateur of criminology with whom it is my good fortune to have been associated both on and off the vaudeville stage for the last ten years. Yet, invaluable as his services have proved to many who could afford to remunerate him handsomely for the time and trouble devoted to their interests, I have yet to know Macumber to accept a fee.

On the other hand, I have known him to go deep into his private purse for a special train which carried him into Duluth in time to hear a certain death-bed confession intended for his ears alone; and I have a clear memory of the check which he drew at another time to set an engaging young embezzler—a victim of circumstances if ever there was one—square with the world. Not only a distinguished amateur of the mystery hunt is the Great Macumber, but decidedly the gentleman amateur, the good sport standing ready always to foot the bills without a murmur.

In the sequence which I entered into my journal under the heading, "Case of David Rolfe, Deceased," Doctor Hugh Ballestier was able to do for Macumber what money could not have done. Through Miss Doris, who came to luncheon with the three of us next day, Ballestier gained Macumber an invitation to the home of the Rolfes.

This daughter of David Rolfe was quite as tall as the doctor; a dark and slender, athletically set-up girl, with a pair of direct black eyes, which I suspected to be an inheritance from her father. Hers was a level head, too, I could see, as well as a more than ordinarily pretty one.

"Do you agree with Doctor Ballestier," Macumber asked her, "that your father and mother are still in spiritual communion, Miss Rolfe?"

The girl met the question as squarely as it had been put to her.

"What else can I believe?" she said. "Mother herself is sure of it. She tells me so every day—and each day she is more certain. You find her rational, do you not, Hugh?"

Ballestier nodded.

"Perfectly," said he.

"There is no other conceivable explanation, Professor Macumber," the girl went on, "for mother's new grasp of business. When father was with us she never could understand Wall Street. Long ago she gave up trying. The stock market was a complete mystery to her. It didn't interest her. She knew nothing about it and wanted to know nothing about it."

"Has she told you how your father—told you, that is to say, in what way the advice on which she is acting comes to her?"

"Not directly. Doctor Ballestier has warned me against asking questions. I suspect, though, that it comes through automatic writing. It all started with the pen, you know. And it is father's own pen she has been using."

"Do you think she might be persuaded to talk to me?" asked Macumber. "I have a sincere interest in psychic phenomena, and I have acted more than once in a semiofficial capacity for the research society. There would, of course, be no publicity."

Miss Rolfe glanced toward Ballestier, who said:

"I'd not object. No harm could be done. Macumber's had considerable experience with such matters."

"Then," said the girl, "you might bring the professor to call this evening. I am anxious myself to know more than I do. These have been hard weeks for me, Hugh."

IT was a stiff and fusty Victorian setting in which we saw Miss Doris Rolfe again some hours afterward. David Rolfe had furnished his drawing-room to his own taste, while his first million was in the making; and no part of those other millions he amassed, obviously, had found a way into the hands of the interior decorator. In his home, as in the Street, old David had preferred to stand on his own judgment. His drawing-room remained as it always had been; eventuated and stayed as he and his wife had first conceived it at the time of David's earliest success.

And a strange background it was that David Rolfe's bleak salon made for David Rolfe's daughter. There was no dating back the gown in which she received us, and no mistaking its inspiration. The mode was of Paris—a mode, I surmised, that even now would be supreme at Deauville.

Not the least formidable features of the drawing-room were two great family portraits on the wall behind her. They were alike in size, and there was a notable resemblance between the subjects, but there similarity ended. It was an indifferent artist who had been responsible for the portrait at the left. For this the sitter had been a red-cheeked old man, with level black eyes under white brows, and a circlet of snowy beard covering his throat—an old man, it was easy to conjecture, who had followed the sea.

In the other portrait, executed by a master hand, I recognized David Rolfe, whose likeness I had seen many a time in the newspapers. He, too, had the boldly arching nose and the keen black eyes—the eyes he had handed on to his daughter—of the venerable seafarer.

The girl caught my glance and smiled sweetly.

"My father—and *his* father," she explained. "Grandfather Rolfe was a master of clipper ships in the India trade." She hesitated, and went on in a lowered voice: "The pen upon which the enchantment seems to have fallen was his before it was father's. His owners presented it to him when he retired."

Macumber had broken off his conversation with Doctor Ballestier at the sound of the girl's first words.

"I'd been thinking of it as a fountain pen," said he.

"When Grandfather Rolfe left the sea, I don't think the fountain pen had been invented. The gift of his owners was an old-fashioned penholder, made of some rare and heavy black wood from the Orient and ornamented with a great gold cap. My father always used the old holder."

"Wood from the Orient?"

There was a note in Macumber's voice that set my fancy running wild, for I knew he had been baffled more than once by faker conjury, which, he asserted, held certainly some element of the supernatural. "May I see the penholder, Miss Rolfe?"

"Mother is quite willing that you should," said the girl. "It was not nearly so hard as I anticipated to persuade her to describe her experiences to you. I hear her now, professor."

A moment later the widow of David Rolfe came into the room, a gray-haired, placid, motherly little woman, who brought with her neither an atmosphere of great wealth nor of new-found worldly

acumen. Her eyes were as clear and their gaze as steady as her daughter's.

IT was apparent that Mrs. Rolfe had been well prepared for the visit of Macumber. She had passed through the period of her first grief, and she answered his adroit questions fully and frankly. It was seldom that she hesitated.

She had never, she said—corroborating Ballestier—taken an active interest in spiritualism.

"Even when I began to have difficulty in writing with Mr. Rolfe's pen," she told Macumber, "it did not occur to me that I was coming under any psychic control. I thought at first it was just that the holder was so heavy and cumbersome—that I would become used to it."

"And automatic writing has since developed?" he asked. "That is to say, you have found yourself writing under another impulse than your own?"

David Rolfe's widow shook her head slowly.

"Not consciously. I mean, never when I have been in full possession of my senses."

I saw Ballestier and Doris Rolfe exchange questioning glances.

"You have been writing while in a trance condition, then?" pursued Macumber.

"Not exactly. Rather, the writing has been done as I slept. Did Doctor Ballestier tell you that lately I have been subject to—to——"

"Somnambulism," supplied Ballestier. "Yes, Mrs. Rolfe, Professor Macumber knows that."

"And while sleeping you have received messages from Mr. Rolfe?" asked Macumber.

"I have recorded them. Waking with no memory of the night, I have found them on the desk in my chamber."

"In your husband's handwriting, or your own?"

"The messages have showed characteristics of both. There is a strong suggestion of my husband's hand, and yet the writing is not definitely his. Neither is it my own."

"Have the communications had reference to business affairs, Mrs. Rolfe?"

"They—— Yes, they have."

"To transactions in stocks?"

"Y-yes."

"Do you understand the purpose behind the transactions? Has any ultimate objective to be attained through them been revealed to you?"

"I must confess I am in the dark, professor. I have been receiving certain instructions almost every night, and I have had them executed on the following day."

"I wonder, Mrs. Rolfe, if you would permit me to examine one of these communications—or several?"

"That I cannot do. I have none. They have been destroyed, always, immediately after I have committed their contents to memory. I—I was asked to burn them. The request was made in the first message of all. I have followed directions in that regard as in everything else."

"And all the messages have concerned Twin Cities Traction stock?"

The widow gasped.

"You know that, too!"

"Doctor Ballestier and Miss Doris have admitted me to their confidence, Mrs. Rolfe. Have I struck the fact?"

"Yes."

"You feel sure your husband would wish you to buy the stock?"

"Naturally I do. The instructions have been plain. I am doing only what I am told to do, nothing else. I am certain that when the time comes for me to know more, the information I need will come to me."

"You have no doubt that the course you are pursuing is a safe and practical one?"

"No doubt whatsoever, professor. How could I have? Even Miss Crippen knows that every move that has been suggested to me is absolutely characteristic of Mr. Rolfe."

"And she also is without doubt that you are not a victim of autosuggestion —that your husband is inspiring the messages?"

"She believes implicitly that they come from him. Miss Crippen has had

some rather remarkable spiritualistic experiences herself. And years ago, she tells me, she somehow got an impression that I was mediumistic."

"This, then, is not her first visit to your home?"

"Not by any means. During his last years Mr. Rolfe had a number of long, though not particularly serious, illnesses. Miss Crippen has lived here for several weeks at a time. We have always thought of the bedchamber adjoining my own as hers. Fortunately that was the room we made ready for her when she came for this final visit."

"How 'fortunately,' Mrs. Rolfe?"

"I think she probably saved me from injuring myself seriously during my early attacks of somnambulism. She heard me stirring and led me back to my room. That happened again and again. I don't think I wander through the house any longer. That, perhaps, was a preliminary stage of—of—whatever has taken possession of me."

Macumber studied the huge crystal chandelier above him.

"I've made a study of many cases of somnambulism," he said. "I fancy that your rescuer must have found difficulty in awaking you, Mrs. Rolfe?"

She smiled faintly.

"Indeed she did. On at least two occasions, when she found me walking about, fast asleep, she did not succeed in bringing me to my senses until she had me safely back in bed. Since then she has been aroused once or twice in the middle of the night and has seen me writing at the desk.

"She woke you then?"

"No; but she kept watch until I had retired again."

"And I dare say you rose in the morning with no recollection of having been up?"

"Not the slightest."

Again Macumber held council with the glittering chandelier.

"May I have a few words with Miss Crippen? She's out? Well, another time, then. There are a few questions I should like to ask her. By the way, Mrs. Rolfe, have you tried using any other pen?"

"Not since Mr. Rolfe passed away. In that, too, I am following his wish."

"Would you mind permitting me to examine the penholder?"

"Certainly not." She looked toward her daughter.

"I'd prefer, if you have no objection, to see it where it is now—where you use it," Macumber said quickly. "I am quite sensitive to psychical influences, myself, Mrs. Rolfe."

IT was Doris Rolfe who led us to her mother's apartment on the floor above, a big room furnished in the period of the salon. An old-fashioned writing desk stood in a corner beyond a door which, the girl told us, communicated with the room occupied temporarily by Miss Crippen.

"In what part of the house is Mr. Anthony Rolfe quartered?"

"Just above us. He has the room directly over mother's."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes; he seldom leaves the house. He is very feeble. It is not often that he is with us even at meals. You hadn't thought of speaking to him? He knows nothing, I can tell you. Since father's funeral I'm sure he hasn't spoken to any one but the servants."

"He hasn't been out at all?"

"Once or twice. I think."

Macumber, walking toward the desk, stepped off his course to look into Miss Crippen's room. I, too, looked into the room. It seemed still to be awaiting a guest. The secretary, it appeared, did not expect her stay to be of any considerable duration. In no way had she chosen to stamp her personality upon it. There was no sign visible of her tenancy. Her possessions—even her toilet articles—she evidently kept within the confines of the big wardrobe trunk that stood upended in the corner behind the connecting door.

"The door is never closed, day or night," Miss Rolfe explained, "since mother began to walk in her sleep. We're all worried about her. I'm afraid Miss Crippen is losing a great deal of rest. But you wanted to see the gold penholder, professor. It's in the little

drawer at the right of the desk—the one in back there. You press a spring beneath. Just a second; I'll open it for you."

A catch clicked at a touch of the girl's finger, and the small drawer shot forward. In it, alongside a tiny fountain pen, whose barrel was ornamented with golden filigree work, lay a penholder that surely, I thought, must have been designed for the use of a man with an enormous hand. It was of about the length and of at least the thickness of the average panatella-shaped cigar. The wood from which it had been cut was jet black and highly polished; and at the upper end, counterbalancing an ordinary steel nib, was a heavy decoration of gold.

"The fountain pen," said Miss Rolfe, "is the one mother used before father died."

"She took care of her her own correspondence?" Macumber asked.

"Always. There wasn't a lot of it. Mother has never been much of a letter writer. She laughed at father when he told her she ought to have a secretary of her own."

Macumber picked up the pen that David Rolfe's father had handed on to his son.

"It *is* heavy," he remarked. "Yes, there's something about it—something that——"

Doris Rolfe regarded Macumber curiously. He stood with his eyes half closed.

"Did you really mean, professor," she said, "that you feel——"

Her question ended in a gasp.

The haunted pen had toppled off the finger on which Macumber had been absently balancing it. He deftly caught it before it struck the floor and replaced it in the drawer.

The girl reshaped her interrupted question:

"Do you sense anything unusual about the pen?"

"I think that later on, perhaps, I should like to try an experiment with it."

"What sort of an experiment, professor?"

"One," Macumber replied gravely, "which may test my own latent powers to open communication with the spirit world."

"*Your* powers!"

He smiled.

"I do have gifts," he said. "But I'm ready for no demonstration of them now, Miss Rolfe. My first concern is with matters more mundane. Why should your father, living or in the beyond, wish to load up with stock of the Twin Cities Traction Corporation?"

The girl turned puzzled eyes upon him.

"Why do you say that?"

"Have *you* looked up the company, Miss Rolfe?"

"N-no. I haven't even the remotest idea what twin cities its lines operate in."

"Has your mother?"

"I'm quite certain she hasn't."

"I," said Macumber, "have inquired. "Twin Cities Traction is virtually defunct. Bus lines and jitneys, paralleling its tracks and giving better and cheaper service than physical conditions permit the company to offer, have all but driven it out of business. And, unless David Rolfe has found some radically different scheme of trolley operation in the other world, Twin Cities Traction is never coming back."

CONTENT with the thought that he had dropped his hint on fertile soil, Macumber made no allusion to the seeming unsoundness of Twin Cities Traction as an investment to Mrs. Rolfe. Before leaving the house his further conversation with her consisted of scarcely more than a request and a receipt of permission to call the following evening.

"There's something mighty wrong about it, lad," he said, as we walked homeward through the park. "With all respect to the judgment of David Rolfe's shade, I don't like the idea of his widow dabbling in Twin Cities Traction. Tomorrow I must find out if the company's transfer books are in New York."

"Why?"

"I own a consuming curiosity."

"To find out how much of the stock Mrs. Rolfe has bought? But would the

transfers have been recorded so quickly, *maestro?*"

I thought the hands which he lifted to shield a match from the wind covered also the ghost of a smile.

"That is a question," he replied. "Nevertheless, I intend to see the books if access can be had to them. My friend Shailer in the Wall Street office of *The Standard* might be of some assistance to me there. In the interim, I wish I could hit upon some tactful way of persuading Mrs. Rolfe to get out of the market."

And, between then and our visit the next evening, Macumber did work out a plan. How elaborately he had schemed I should have guessed from the very indirection and apparent inanity of his approach.

"By the by, Mrs. Rolfe," he said, "am I right in believing your automatic writing has all been done on that creamy-white paper I noticed on your desk."

She nodded, but before she could voice the surprise apparent in her eyes, Macumber, off on another track, was asking:

"Has the name 'Twin Cities Traction' been written out in the messages, or has the board abbreviation—'TC' it is—been used?"

Mrs. Rolfe's lips tightened. Her expression and her voice confirmed an earlier impression of mine; she really was less cordial than she had been the night before. She spoke coldly.

"Just the letters have appeared, a capital T and a capital C, without periods after them. I had no thought of what they might symbolize until I had consulted Miss Crippen. So, you see——"

Macumber seemed pleased, but not beyond quibbling.

"Are you sure," he asked, the C was a capital?"

"I've never had a doubt."

"Circumstances, however," said Macumber, "suggest a very strong doubt to me. Twin Cities Traction, I have learned, is in a bad way. A receivership is imminent, and a receiver could do no better for the shareholders than to rip up the rails and junk the rolling stock. "That, Mrs. Rolfe, is the 'TC' of the quotation boards. But there is another symbol very much like the one which represents Twin Cities Traction. A capital 'T' and a small 'c' stands in the Street for 'Tinplate common,' one of the soundest investments which the stock market offers. So don't you think it's just possible——"

"I do not," said David Rolfe's widow. "It is Twin Cities Traction that is meant. Nothing—absolutely nothing—will deter me from carrying through Mr. Rolfe's wishes. My daughter repeated to me what you told her last night. I appreciate your intentions, professor, and I want you to know it. But I'm afraid that—that Mr. Rolfe does not!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Macumber, and I could see that he'd narrowly escaped letting go a sturdier expletive.

"Mr. Rolfe's pen wrote again during the night—and wrote in regard to *you!*" The widow met his startled glance tranquilly. "This one communication I have preserved, professor, as a constant reminder that I am to accept advice from but one source. I say this so you will understand that I am firmly committed to my husband's judgment. In life, I am told, he was often entering into transactions that others predicted would be his ruin—and coming through them invariably with flying colors. In death, he still has my unwavering faith. His will shall be done."

Macumber was staring.

"May I see the note, Mrs. Rolfe?"

"It was not meant for your eyes. No, I can't show it to you, professor. I am certain Mr. Rolfe would not desire that I did."

"Absolutely certain?"

"*I* have read the message. I judge from its own words."

"May we not make a test, though?"

"A test, professor?"

"As I think I have told you, Mrs. Rolfe—I *know* I have told Miss Doris—I am not without certain psychical potencies, myself. I would ask only that you place this message in my hand, folding it as you will to conceal the writing. Then, if that which is written is meant for me to know, I shall know it." He caught the eye of Ballestier, who again

had been an engrossed listener. "Would you care to see the experiment made, doctor."

"I surely would," said the specialist, mystified, but quick to pick up his cue. And Miss Doris Rolfe, who sat beside him, joined in with:

"Do let him try, mother!"

IT was with obvious misgiving that the widow consented to put Macumber's self-proclaimed clairvoyance on trial. She left the room and returned in a few minutes with a folded sheet of cream-colored paper. Before surrendering it to Macumber, she hesitated.

"Have I your promise, professor, not to try to read the message?" she asked, as she surrendered the spirit note.

"Your eyes will be on it, Mrs. Rolfe; so will your daughter's and Doctor Ballestier's. In fact, I wish only to press the paper to my forehead for an instant before concentrating. There—it is done! Miss Doris shall hold the writing while I seek for a time to disconnect myself from my present surroundings."

Macumber pressed his hands gently upon the girl's. Over her finger tips projected the deckled edge of a creamy-white sheet trapped between her palms.

"Hold the paper just as it is, Miss Rolfe," he cautioned her. "Please don't move, and try to keep your mind an absolute blank."

He walked to the far end of the room and wheeled around a big armchair. In this he seated himself with his back to us, leaning far forward, his face buried in his hands.

For many minutes there was no sound from Macumber and no stirring. The eyes of Ballestier and Miss Doris were on Macumber; but Mrs. Rolfe's gaze, I noticed, never left her daughter's clasped hands.

At length, with a gesture of surrender, Macumber rose.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Rolfe," he said, "that conditions militate against me. I do not get the message clearly. My feeling is that some one in the beyond who has been close to you—and who that is you can imagine as well as I—is greatly troubled.

"He has doubts, I think, even of my own purposes; yet I feel that between us there could exist complete spiritual entente. That may come later. Just now, I have registered sensations which might be taken to reflect a wish of this absent one that this latest communication follow its predecessors into the flames. I have your permission?"

Macumber had walked back to Miss Rolfe and taken the paper from her hands. At the widow's slow nod, and without unfolding it, he tore it into bits no bigger than snowflakes and sent them showering into the fireplace. I watched every motion closely, half expecting him to attempt some last-minute substitution; but it was certainly the cream-colored paper that Macumber consigned to the fire.

Doctor Hugh Ballestier walked back with us to the Rawley later. It was not until he had gone on his way, elevated by two or three liberal nips of the MacVickar, that I spoke of the failure of the experiment.

"I thought surely," I told Macumber, "that you'd floor the three of them by reeling off the contents of the spook message. It should have been easy enough—for *you*."

He looked at me in surprise.

"Didn't you hear me say I didn't get the message clearly? That was the truth of it. The light down the drawing-room was abominably dim." He laughed. "By some odd accident, lad, I'd provided myself with paper to match Mrs. Rolfe's. The sheet that went into the fireplace was blank. The real message is in my pocket."

The paper he handed to me as he spoke held only a few lines of writing. Letters at once sharp and irregular, as if, indeed, two hands had contended for control of the pen that wrote them, spelled out the words:

I am conscious of an alien presence. The influence is antagonistic. It is the man, McCumber, I think. Be slow to place confidence in him. Bear in mind, Letty, I have warned you. I can say no more to-night. Further TC details later.

Macumber was grinning when he looked up from this strange billet-doux.

"Does it not strike you as odd, lad," he asked, "that one on a plane where the 'Book of All Knowledge' stands open should make so unflattering an error? I mean in spelling the tricky name of Macumber?"

ONE trip downtown in search of the elusive Shailer proved futile, but on the day following his interception of the epistle from the spirit land Macumber returned to the Rawley, glowing.

"I've not only seen Shailer," he reported, "but I've seen the transfer books of the Twin Cities Traction Corporation."

I asked if the purchases of Mrs. Rolfe were already on record.

"I've learned what I wanted to know, lad," he answered obliquely. "I may say it's exactly what I suspected. Furthermore, the Twin Cities receivership isn't more than a month away. There's absolutely no salvation for the company. The wisdom of the new David Rolfe is not to be trusted like that of the old, and that's sure."

"What are you going to do? What *can* you do?"

"Sit tight," said Macumber. "And, oh, by the way, I've had a peculiar letter from a person we've both heard of but never met."

"Who's that?"

"Anthony Rolfe."

"The deuce you say!"

"His name is signed to it."

"What does he want?"

Macumber tossed the letter before me, and, as I glanced at the envelope, I caught my breath. It had been addressed in care of the theater at which we had just closed a long engagement, and the name upon the envelope was spelled "McCumber."

"A natural mistake," grinned Macumber. "Half the world spells Macumber that way. Why not read what he has to say?"

The surviving Rolfe had written:

DEAR SIR: I have heard of your visits here and I am anxious to have a talk with you on a matter of utmost importance. Will you not be good enough to make an appointment to see me? I would prefer to meet you away from the house. Your immediate reply will be appreciated. Very truly,

ANTHONY ROLFE.

Without comment, Macumber restored the letter to its envelope and replaced it in his pocket when I had finished.

"Are you going to see him?" I asked.

"There is no need to now. I know what I want to know. The unbosoming of Brother Anthony can wait. I'd prefer to bring matters to an issue in my own way. For now, I'm settling down to follow the stock market."

On the afternoon of the third day after Mrs. Rolfe had received her transcendental warning against him, Macumber threw down an early edition of one of the evening papers with an exultant cry.

"The sheep," he said, "flock once more to the shearer!" He glanced at the clock and rushed to the telephone. "Fourth column, front page, lad!" he added, as he waited for his connection. "Twin City Traction's broken out among the divorces and the murders! I never thought it would run that strong."

THE article he referred to reported an astonishing movement in the traction stock. Whispers had got abroad in Wall Street that "interests associated with the late David Rolfe" were behind a flurry with which the day had opened, and the flurry had become a boom. From a start of seven and a fraction, "TC" had rushed skyward in great, crazy leaps. It had been thirty-two when the newspaper went to press, and the end was not in sight.

Macumber's energetic voice at the telephone diverted my attention from the printed word. He had his connection.

"Sloan, Kidder? . . . Mr. Masefield, please. . . . Hello there, Masefield! Macumber talking. . . . Yes; the same. Sell five thousand Twin Cities Traction for my account. That's right. Jump to it. . . . No, I don't think I need a guardian. . . . No; I don't know a thing. It's nothing more than a suspicion. Thank you. Good-by!"

As he turned from the telephone Macumber smiled at my astonishment.

"I didn't know *you* had any Twin Cities stock, *maestro*," I gasped.

"I haven't," replied Macumber, his grin widening. "Wall Street's the one place in the world where you can sell what you haven't got without inviting trouble with the police. It's just a case of selling short."

"Selling short with the market gone wild?"

"Selling short," he said calmly, "on a dead horse. No amount of excitement in the Street will save Twin Cities from an early grave. Ah! this is the moment I've been waiting for, lad. To-night I'll make another test of my psychic powers in re the shade of David Rolfe."

I suggested that the widow might object to any more of Macumber's "tests."

"Doctor Hugh Ballestier has become a large factor in the Rolfe ménage, lad," he said. "In a few days his engagement to Miss Doris will be announced. He'll sponsor me. It'll be all right."

Thereupon he stoked one of his black pipes and talked to me earnestly for the better part of an hour, tutoring me in a part he'd long been planning that I should play.

Pursuant to these instructions of Macumber's, I was missing from the circle which joined hands in the chilly Rolfe drawing-room that evening.

I journeyed with Macumber to the house, and even entered it with him, but when he walked into the salon he was alone.

Four people awaited Macumber. One was Mrs. Rolfe, another her daughter. The third was Miss Agatha Crippen, a tall, thin figure in rustling black silk, as sharp of outline as of feature. She was incarnate efficiency, humanity done over into the form of a machine. Her small, bright eyes glistened behind her glasses, with the effect of polished bolt heads, and her dress might have been some metallic casing.

Also, there waited the invalid Anthony Rolfe. He was as thin as the secretary, but not so straight. His sparse shoulders fell forward, as if, for all their lack of flesh, they were yet too great a burden for him.

Ballestier came into the room soon after Macumber, and dimmed the lights. The six now present sat in a close-drawn circle, their hands joined. On Macumber's knee lay the pen with which the posthumous messages of David Rolfe had been written. He spoke in a monotone.

"We are here gathered seeking to bring to us one who has gone. Are we all in accord?"

From the chair in which Anthony Rolfe had sunk his withered frame a high and testy voice wheezed:

"This is all nonsense!"

"Try to open your mind, Mr. Rolfe," urged Macumber mildly. "Results would be doubtful, otherwise."

No answer now. Silence held the circle. Macumber's head presently sank forward.

His voice came, muffled:

"David Rolfe, we're waiting!"

From the old clock on the mantel above the fireplace came the only response. Its ticks, in the quiet of the room, beat like hammer blows.

Silence again—silence and darkness. Then the voice of Macumber:

"David Rolfe!"

He was calling for a miracle, and something very like a miracle began to reveal itself.

A breath of air, as if a door or a window had been opened and closed, passed through the circle. Between the drawn shades at the end of the room farthest from where the breathless half dozen sat appeared a phosphorescent glow.

"David Rolfe—David!" repeated The Great Macumber.

And now a voice answered him:

"Yes; I am here."

It was a deep and vibrant voice that sounded strangely in my ears—a voice more a composite of the voices of many dead men than of any one man living. Yet such were the powers of association and suggestion that one present seemed to recognize it. From David Rolfe's widow came a cry:

"David—*David!*"

A spectral figure was advancing slowly toward the sitters. Its habiliments were not of the grave, but rather such as David Rolfe had been accustomed to

wear in life. And the small, square beard was David Rolfe's as well. The apparition halted near the circle, in a pool of ghostly light that seemed its aura.

"Who calls David Rolfe? Oh, it's *you!* You with the pen! Who are you? I don't forget faces, but I never saw yours before."

Macumber passed the chance to explain himself.

"You know the pen, though," he said.

"I don't!" snapped the spectral Rolfe.

"But you do, David," Macumber gently insisted. "You know it as well as you know your own right hand. You used this pen for many, many years."

A racket of thin, eerie laughter filled the room.

"Oh, no! Dear, no! Not *that* pen!"

"Look again, David."

"You're a fool!" croaked the apparition. "You're all fools. No, not Agatha Crippen. She's sharp, always sharp. She makes her mistakes, Agatha does. Goes a little wrong on the market; goes a little wrong in other things—but what a woman! Give her a chance before you ask me about the pen. Agatha knows. She'll tell! I promise you she'll——"

There was a swaying of the whole circle, as if one of the enchained hands had sought to break a neighbor's grip.

Ballestier's voice cut crisply against the specter's.

"Lights, please! Miss Crippen has fainted!"

IT was Macumber who went to the switch. By the time he had found it, David Rolfe had returned to his other world.

Ballestier came to me in the library, directly back of the drawing-room, a little later.

"Miss Crippen came out of it like a trooper," he said. "Macumber's upstairs talking to her. He suggests that you go on alone to the hotel, and wait for him there."

I did, and waited for hours. Macumber didn't appear until long after midnight. He was in his dressing gown and his favorite chair before he spoke.

"You may call it cruel, lad," said he, "but the end has justified the means. I've had the whole story of the haunted pen from Miss Crippen herself. It could have been pried out of her in no other way. Just a suggestion of calling David back set her going."

"You'd have had trouble making good," I remarked, "if she'd taken you up."

Macumber smiled.

"I knew she wouldn't."

I saw that a mood of recapitulation was upon him, and sat by patiently while he packed and lighted his pipe.

"It was my early thought, of course," he said when the tobacco was well caught, "that the queer actions of the old penholder could be traced to some natural agency. And it *was* that—electricity—magnetism. In the upper part of her big wardrobe trunk, which she had placed in a position directly behind Mrs. Rolfe's desk, Miss Crippen had a powerful magnet. She ran a cord to it from a convenient light socket, and at times, when she knew the widow to be writing, switched on the current."

"But the wall——"

"Would not and did not offer an obstacle in the magnetic field. It really made little difference whether the wall was there or whether it wasn't. The effect on the doctor's pen would have been the same in either case. It felt the urge of an unseen force which, while it may not have been what Mrs. Rolfe imagined it, was, nevertheless, as much of a mystery. No man lives, lad, who can say exactly what electricity is.

"With her magnet Miss Agatha Crippen first convinced the widow that David Rolfe was struggling to regain his grasp on his pen. Power of suggestion did the rest. Ethically it was all most deplorable, but as a piece of criminal craftsmanship it was—*gorgeous!*

"The motive was that strongest one of all—self-preservation. And, as a matter of fact, the woman has actually been spared the disaster she sought to avert. She starts this morning for that farm of hers up State. In the circumstances Mrs. Rolfe acted with a rare generosity. Not only did she refuse to entertain the

thought of prosecuting, but she has arranged to take over personally the mortgage on Miss Crippen's farm. That mortgage, after all, was what had driven the secretary to attempt one of the most diverting frauds of my experience as a magician."

"She wasn't as well fixed, then, as Ballestier thought?"

"Far from it, lad. All she possessed, with the single exception of her equity in the farm, was tied up in Twin Cities Traction. How she became involved in the wreck of the company forms a story in itself. Ten years or so ago, it seems, old David took a fleeting fancy to 'TC.' At that time Miss Crippen's savings in cash amounted to nearly twenty thousand dollars, and she also owned the farm, free and clear. It was worth, perhaps, thirty thousand dollars more; so, for a wage slave, she had not done so badly."

"Rolfe's tips," I suggested, "may have helped her."

"Of course they did, lad. But when the secretary saw old David's eyes roving toward Twin Cities Traction she went out on her own. She put not only all her cash into the stock, but she mortgaged her farm. David was wiser. He saw the danger of ruinous jitney competition and backed away. But unfortunately he didn't let Miss Crippen know all he knew."

Macumber drew thoughtfully on his pipe.

"Women are always surprising," said he; "even those who look to be machines. Now, you'd take Miss Agatha Crippen to be absolutely cold and unemotional, wouldn't you? You'd call her safe, sane, and sure. You'd say she'd always have her head about her. But even when her TC stock began its slide toward the basement, she couldn't keep her hands and her money off Twin Cities Traction.

THE cheaper it got, the more a bargain it looked. She knew better, of course; but she was a woman, after all. When shares such as she already had paid forty dollars each for were offered at twenty, she bought them as a matter of course. And so she did when they were fifteen and ten. Her salary went into them; her winnings on other flyers went into them; money raised on her farm went into them. On consulting the transfer books, lad, I found that the biggest individual stockholder in the dying corporation was Miss Agatha Crippen!"

"Oh!" said I. That smile of Macumber's came back mockingly before my eyes. "So that was what you wanted to see the books for. Do you know, *maestro,* I had a feeling at that time that Anthony Rolfe had——"

"And you did him injustice if you thought ill of him," remonstrated Macumber. "Anthony was a poor man who made no demands on a rich brother until he no longer was physically able to look out for himself. And such a man *is* a man, lad, on the very face of it.

"Why, I never thought of Anthony as a party to the fraud. What he had to tell me was that he suspected his sister-in-law was in some way being bilked. The servants had been talking to him. In a house like David Rolfe's, servants know many things which the family think secrets. And having heard of the automatic writing, Anthony thought a magician might be the very man to show up the fake."

"You've seen him?"

"Yes, of course. Was he not in the party at my little séance? Afterward we had quite a chat. I found him a really entertaining fellow. The man's had some rare experiences of life. *He's* nobody's fool."

Macumber paused to refill his pipe.

"It was not until comparatively recently that David Rolfe learned how deeply his secretary had gone into Twin Cities Traction. Had he lived he might somehow have contrived to pull her out, with at least a half skin. To keep the stock alive, as I surmised, when the other facts were before me, he bought small lots occasionally. He may have had other plans in abeyance when he died.

"But with his death Miss Agatha Crippen was thrown into panic. Her employer's passing seemed to her to mean the end of everything—an old age

to be spent in penury. Mind you, the woman's well past fifty now. The amazing solution of her problem came to her, she told me, out of a clear sky. It came, she said, with every detail sharply defined.

"Why should she not make herself again a member of the Rolfe household when that could be accomplished by the mere assertion it was David Rolfe's wish? And why, once there, could she not influence the widow to trades that would lift TC to a higher level and hold the stock there long enough for her to unload?

"Aye, lad, if spirits were at work at all, it was Miss Agatha Crippen they were working upon. Some prince of confidence men on the other side might well have been her control.

"She had a fair duplicate of David Rolfe's penholder made in a rush—with steel under gold plating, and a steel rod through it. She had the great magnet put into her trunk. For she knew where the trunk would stand, lad. The room she had always occupied would naturally be at her disposal again.

"David Rolfe, of course, had no bother about who should be using his pen when his hand no longer held it. But it was enough to say that it was his wish his wife should use it. On that point there was never a question, as the woman had anticipated. And then, with the pen planted and the magnet by, Miss Crippen went to work."

"But," said I, "how about the somnambulism of Mrs. Rolfe? How could that have been foreseen?"

Macumber chuckled.

"Oh, lad," said he, the chuckle turning to a sigh. "Can't you see it yet? Mrs. Rolfe probably never has been a sleepwalker in her life."

"She was found, nevertheless, asleep and walking through——"

"Was she, now?" queried Macumber. "Who saw her? Wasn't it from Miss Crippen that all the information came? Wasn't the widow always in her bed when the woman awoke her and told her she had been strolling about the house in her sleep?"

"Oh!" said I, and swallowed hard.

"To convince Mrs. Rolfe that she had turned somnambulist," he pursued, "was essential to the success of Miss Agatha Crippen's scheme. She must be made to believe that her own hand transcribed the spirit messages. The writing of course, was Miss Crippen's—styled after David Rolfe's. The forgery didn't have to be exact, you see, for the widow would always have in her mind that her own hand and her husband's were both on the pen. And the open connecting door gave Miss Crippen every opportunity to plant the spirit letters on the desk. So there you are lad. If you've any questions, shoot them quickly. It's after one o'clock, and I've left an early call."

"I have no questions, *maestro*," said I, and aired a small grievance. "Do you realize you've not said a word about the part *I* played in the final drama? That helped, didn't it?"

"Of course it did, lad!" cried Macumber, quickly repentant. "The widow was so completely sold on the automatic writing business that our one hope was to turn David's ghost loose on Miss Crippen. Ballestier agreed with me on that, even when I had told him all I suspected and knew. Did he not say as much to you last night before he joined us in the drawing-room?"

"He did. But what I'd like to hear from *you*, *maestro*, is that my small services in the matter——"

The Great Macumber dropped a big hand on my shoulder, and in the pressure of his fingers I felt more affection than most men could put into words.

"Lad," said he seriously, "there was a moment when you almost gave *me* the creeps. The job was done splendidly. You were David Rolfe to the—to the death! But get to bed now, youngster. We'll be off for Atlantic City on the first morning train, wi' the compliments of Twin Cities Traction—and of some wise Wall Street opportunists I hope we'll neither ever meet!"

The Tippler

By Berton Braley

I'VE always sipped the wine of life
And never spilled or wasted it.
In peace and ease, afar from strife,
I've delicately tasted it.

And temperately taught myself
To scent the rich bouquet of it,
Sip, and restore it to its shelf—
For that's the tippler's way of it.

I've let no single drop escape,
But aged it long and prayerfully,
And sipped this essence of the grape
Deliberately, carefully.

I've watched it like a fragile flower
And guarded all my store of it,
And yet—the wine of life is sour
And I can sip no more of it.

Vinegar, now, sans bead or spice—
My tongue is wry and shrunk with it.
Why didn't I, just once or twice,
Get gloriously drunk with it?

Squatter's Rights

By Karl W. Detzer

The age-old dissension over boundary lines takes on a new aspect in this tale of an icebound island up in the North Country—where a young mail carrier stood for his rights against both men and Nature.

HE came ashore from his own boat, at his own pier, in his own harbor, that gusty autumn afternoon, upon the Michigan island of Little Kedge, which he also claimed as his own. Tamus MacIvor was a close-knit, squarely built man, somewhat under middle height and over middle age.

He set his broad soles down comfortably in the sandy path that tipped up to his own village and his own sawmill, and he strode with a proprietorial swagger toward the straggling slab houses. A half pace to the rear, and somewhat to the left of him, walked another man, younger than Tam MacIvor, just as wind burned as he, but taller and less broad of back. He was carrying a satchel by a strap to his shoulder, and under each arm he had a bundle of brass instruments.

A pair of French-Canadian timbermen touched their dark forelocks to MacIvor, as he passed. He nodded to them briefly, without taking the trouble to speak. They did not know the stranger. Because they did not, they eyed him suspiciously.

The path arose impetuously from the wash to the narrow plateau upon which the mill sprawled. Behind it, a tall, scarred hillside ascended abruptly to the table-lands, where standing timber, millions of feet, awaited the ax. Narrow-gauge tramways poked experimentally into the forest, where the slopes were more gentle. Far away to the south, four full miles, hovered the gray smoke of brush fires, marking the edge of the cut.

It was late afternoon and late October, and the sun already had settled behind the hills. Over the eastern horizon night waited impatiently. Lamplight shone in the windows of slab houses. At the top of the first rise the path divided, one fork plunging straight at the settlement and the mill, the other dodging through scrub cedars, toward the north.

Waiting at this turn in the trail, a

young man leaned comfortably against a stout hemlock, hands in the pockets of his dungarees, sou'wester drawn back upon his blond head, unlighted pipe between his teeth. At the sight of him MacIvor hesitated. Then he approached him deliberately.

"Good evening to you," he said. "I'm good as my word, Nelson. I've fetched him." MacIvor's tongue had been brushed early by the heather, and there was a robustious tang in his voice. "I'll make the two of you acquainted. Here's Persons." He indicated the man who had been following him. "He's the surveyor I promised. Persons, here's Nelson. He's the squatter that's made me the trouble."

THE man in the sou'wester looked amiably enough at the newcomer, but did not offer his hand.

"How 'bout the sheriff?" he asked. "You ought to brought him, too. For I tell you, MacIvor—— No, no! I don't trouble myself with 'mister.' I tell you I'll move when I'm put off."

"You'll be put," said MacIvor, "when the line's run and it's straightened out." He started on two paces. Then he paused and once more thrust his knuckles deep into his broad hips. "Had you the sense of a wee child, Peter Nelson, you'd 'a' took my fair offer and my advice. It's not too late yet. I'm in the right, and there's no man can dispute me. Hold—it's me that's talking. To shy clear of trouble, I make you the offer again, decent and aboveboard and free handed. The surveyor's a witness. I'll move the shack for you——"

"My house?"

"Your 'house' I'll call it if it's jarring your pride to hear it called a shack. I'll move it over for you on your side of the line. I've tried to show you the lay of the land, where yours starts and mine ends. If you'd 'a' listened——"

"I did listen! And this is what I gathered. That your deed's right because it's yours, and mine's wrong because it's mine. My father homesteaded forty acres."

"About twenty," MacIvor corrected. "Them twenty belong right enough to you. I paid decent money for the rest o' the island. You're living on my side of the line. There's good timber in question, and I'm here to cut it. What's a mail-boat man like you know about timber? It's a fine position you have, carrying the mails, and the government respect alongside of your cargo, without going mincing in timber. Persons, here, will start the line in the morning. Should you wish to show sense in the meantime, I'll be at home to-night."

"I'm a poor hand at showing sense, the way you look at it," said Nelson. "You best start your line."

Tam MacIvor moved off at once along the path, with the surveyor still silent at his heels. A hundred yards farther on, the timberman turned abruptly through the gate of a slab house and, without taking the trouble to knock, entered a kitchen. A woman was frying sausages over a radiant stove. She looked up questioningly and wiped her hot face on a gingham sleeve.

"Here's Persons," MacIvor said. "This is Tom Kolerick's woman. Tom's my foreman. Here you bide."

He left the surveyor, instruments still in hand, in the middle of the kitchen, and returned once more to the path. An evening wind ran down from the hills, with a frosty bite and a threat of winter in it. MacIvor turned up the collar of his jacket and then turned it down again with a gesture of self-reproach. He grunted angrily and stepped through the gate of a new, unpainted picket fence and strode up a new, wooden walk toward the porch of a snug, new house, that still smelled freshly of unseasoned newly cut timber.

"Evening, Ellen, my dear," he said to the girl who opened the door.

The daughter of Tam MacIvor was taller than he, with none of his bulkiness. As she lighted the tubular wick in the hanging lamp, the glow fell gently upon her face, which was clear-skinned. It reflected pleasantly in her gray, unexcited eyes.

"I was afraid you'd be caught in the wind." She twisted the brass thumbscrew, and the lamp shone yellow. "Peter Nelson said it would blow."

Her father crossed to her and laid his great hands gently upon her shoulders.

"Daughter," he said, "was he here again?"

"Peter? Oh, no. I met him on the path. He was waiting for somebody at the forks."

"Aye. And you stopped and talked? Well, if you've no more self-respect than to go mixing with such, I've naught to say. But a daughter of mine——" He broke off abruptly, scowling. "Supper?" he asked.

THE storm that had threatened before dusk arrived boisterously at midnight and howled for three blasty days. Ellen MacIvor remained within doors, feeding split slabs into the kitchen range. On the second afternoon she saw from her window a young man, with tripod and transit, running a line past the house, with a pair of timbermen slouching ahead, axes in hands, and another couple carrying stakes and chain.

On the third day, while the storm expired in harried gasps, she looked down the hill in time to see the mail boat, *Happy Days,* nosing out of the harbor toward the fog-hidden mainland shore. Something about the mail boat always stirred the girl's quick imagination. She liked the risk it took. She saw romance in its precarious calling. Fishermen could stay snugly in port when winds were threatening. Even the ore barges and great passenger vessels lay under the protection of safe breakwaters, when the weather turned villainous. But not the government mail.

Once a day in summer, twice a week in the other three seasons, Peter Nelson piloted his craft over to the mainland. Sometimes in midwinter he had to leave the boat behind him and cross on foot over wide floes of ice, risking his life repeatedly, with unheroic thoughtlessness, that the dignity of the mails might be preserved.

For this he received nine hundred and sixty dollars a year.

Not enough, Ellen MacIvor thought. In a decent boat it would have been no task for a skilled and level-headed sailor. Bobbing on the harried waters of the upper lakes were twenty such carriers of star-route mail. Most of them were stanch, reliable vessels, rebuilt coast-guard boats, broad-shouldered and buoyant, driven by trustworthy engines of immense vitality.

Alone in all this fleet, Peter Nelson's *Happy Days* bore an unsavory reputation. She was a vicious, spiteful boat, according to fishermen and coast guardsmen. For all her gay name, painted in tall, black letters across her stern, she had drowned two masters, and the upper lakes waited to see in Peter Nelson the traditional third.

For a boat is like luck, so the fishermen on Kedge Island said, or like broken china, or fire. Given it two evil deeds, it will not sink until it has accomplished a third.

Ellen MacIvor watched the frail craft leaping across the tops of dying rollers, pointing heroically toward the mainland shore. She saw the slender, oil-skinned figure on the short decking at the stern, leaning in apparent ease against the cabin, feet about the tiller, fisherman fashion, and she thought uncomfortably of what her father had said.

Why did he object to Nelson? Of course, old Tamus MacIvor would be watchful of her. That was natural. He'd not allow any scalawag to look at his daughter. But Peter Nelson was not a scalawag. Her father had been unreasonable this time. Why should he forbid her even to speak to Peter?

The boat disappeared into the smoky gray bank of fog that lay between Little Kedge and the Michigan coast towns, eighteen miles away.

Ellen stepped out to the porch. Before her lay the village, midway to the beach. Above towered the hills, with their wealth of standing timber. Over to the right sprawled Tam MacIvor's mill.

It was an unlovely building, under its tin roof and tall black stack, with a smoky spark arrester on top of it. It was whining just now, with the raucous melody of circular saws, with the shrill scream of planers, with the thump of immense weights rolled backward and forward on wabbly steel rails.

Ellen MacIvor loved the sound of the saws. All her life she had heard it. Ever since her mother died and earlier, for that matter, she had followed her father on his nomadic search for timber—for great timber in great tracts. As a little girl, she remembered the smell of resin, when his mill had made the dwindling circuit of slaughtered pine. Then the hardwood. Three times in these ten years he had moved. Always farther from civilized shores. Till now, on Little Kedge, with its great forest ten miles by four, he had settled down to his last cut. He had told her it would be his last. After this there would be more lumber, no more trees.

For Tam MacIvor was a lumberman of the old, old type. He timbered where trees were trees. Let other men peck at second growth, at occasional acres of standing pine, at immature hardwood. Not Tam MacIvor.

Ellen was thinking still of Peter Nelson when she reached the company store at the foot of the hill. She made her purchases quickly and climbed back up the path to her father's house.

Tam sat in the living room with the surveyor. He introduced Persons bluntly to his daughter. Persons arose and remained standing, till she had gone through to the kitchen. After a moment her father thrust his square face through the door and spoke to her.

"Lay places for three," he directed.

She understood little of the conversation at dinner. It concerned section lines and original surveys and compass variations and errors of record. Her father seemed to be worried.

"I'm not sure, of course," the surveyor said, as he left. "I'll hunt again. That stake should be somewhere in the swamp. It's been forty years, and, of course, the witness trees are gone. I've tried to find the stumps. That's the trouble with wooden stakes."

Tam MacIvor growled.

"But you think there's a chance the squatter's got a right to it?" he asked.

"It looks that way. Those old abstracts are hard to read. Description by metes and bounds. The only thing I know to do is start in from the original stone corner post, away at the south end, and work back this way. It would take days, maybe weeks, to get it down fine."

"Then days and weeks it will take," said Tam MacIvor. "That's the richest stand of timber left on the lakes. I'm an honest man, Persons. If it's not mine, all right. If it is mine, it's me that'll cut it."

Ellen listened doubtfully. She was puzzled as to what they were saying. She was tempted to tell her father that Peter Nelson knew all about the boundary lines; he had told her so only the other day. But the surveyor changed the subject just then, and she had no opportunity.

Peter was late with the mail that night. He had spent the afternoon in the courthouse at the county seat, with the registrar of deeds. That official was an exacting, nearsighted, elderly man who took pride in the unblemished record of his office.

"It looks right to me, Nelson," he said. "I can't see no way anybody can do you out of it. Just set tight and let him make the move. They're chancy, these timbermen. But I al'ays heard MacIvor was honest. If he harms you, Peter, come a-runnin'. I'll fix you up with three lawing fools that will get good damages."

WINTER settled early on the North lakes that year with unending snows and immense buffeting winds. By the middle of December the roads were clogged, and the harbor at the foot of MacIvor's mill slope was a broad pane of green ice. Timber gangs worked cheerily in the woods, singing as they cut. If the day were clear you could hear them as far as the company store —the noisy cries of men and the gay bells of their ponies, as they dragged hardwood logs to the hilltops at the head of the great skidway above the mill.

Twice each week Peter Nelson tuned up his engine, tossed into his boat a small sack of unimportant mail, and steered unemotionally toward the open lake. The *Happy Days* became mischievous, as the seas grew in size. Twice before Christmas she tried desperately to sink. Each

time, in spite of Nelson's heroic efforts, she filled her hull so full of icy water that the engine halted, and he must pump hours on end, then methodically dry off the coils before he could start again.

He saw little of Ellen MacIvor those days and less of her father. Snow made a great wall about their house on the slope of the hill. Old Tam was out at the logging operations before dawn and came home at night by the light of a lantern. Once, early in January, Nelson carried a bundle that came by express, to the door of the house, where Ellen received it and hesitantly asked him to enter.

"Can't," he said. "Sorry. Some other time."

When he had gone he regretted his refusal. Tamus was up in the woods. She was a lonely girl and a pretty one. Why be so shy with her? Well, there was Tamus—hungry for timber.

He saw the surveyor often enough, as he walked the narrow village paths, smoking. Each time he stopped.

Each time Nelson asked:

"How's the lines? Going to run me off my place yet?"

Persons' reply was invariably the same:

"Snow's too deep, squatter. Lose our stakes soon as we drive them. But MacIvor says to keep at it."

Ice thickened alongshore in January and crawled out rapidly toward the deeper lake. Each week mail became a more difficult cargo. At length, in February, the coldest night of the year, a solid green-and-white floor stretched eighteen miles to the mainland coast.

Peter forsook his boat the next day and, loading his mail on a hand sled, started off alone, with a compass, a cedar staff, and a corned-beef sandwich. Twelve hours he battled ice and wind before he pulled his load triumphantly up the beach at the mainland town. The next day he started back.

HAVING accomplished the return, he took mail in person to beleaguered householders in the settlement. It was late afternoon and dark when he came to the door of Tam MacIvor's house.

"Hello, Peter!" Ellen said. "Come in."

Peter was cold. He entered the door relievedly. Ellen had not lighted the hanging lamp, and the living room was thick with shadows. A man stepped forward to greet him. It was Persons.

"How're you, Persons?" Nelson said.

"Hello, squatter," the surveyor answered.

The girl turned quickly.

"'Squatter?'" she repeated. "What does that mean?"

Persons laughed.

"He's living on your father's land."

"Peter is? No!" There was dismay in the girl's voice. She swung on Persons angrily. "Is that why you are surveying the island?"

"It is," he answered. "How come you haven't known?"

"My father hired you for that?" Ellen MacIvor cried.

"Sure he did," Nelson said. "That's all right, Ellen. Your father thinks the line goes one way, I think it goes another. Got it through yet?" he asked Persons.

"Pretty near." The surveyor's tone was boastful.

Nelson frowned.

"How near through?" he demanded. "Found the boundary?"

"You don't want to know," Persons said.

"I don't? Who says I don't? You?" He stepped forward angrily.

"Peter!" Ellen MacIvor warned.

"I want to know," Peter said stubbornly. He reached for his wet jacket.

"Please stay," the girl insisted. "Stay till my father comes. I want to ask him about this."

Peter sat down moodily. He found himself inarticulate, while Ellen MacIvor talked. There was nothing to tell when she asked about his trip across the ice. Persons coughed behind his hand. Ellen repeated her question.

"It's nothing," Peter said—"just ice, with some air holes. You got to find a place to jump."

Persons coughed again. Ellen glanced at him in annoyance. She talked rapidly after that, to both men at once. Twice

Nelson reached for his jacket. Each time Ellen shook her head.

They were sitting silently when Tam MacIvor strode in.

"Humph!" he said and hung his wet jacket and gloves and cap upon a row of pegs near the stove. "How come? Slippers, Ellen, and dry socks. I'll change in the kitchen. Now, how come? Nelson, what you doing here? Business?"

"I brought a package."

"And come to set a bit? For a nice talk, eh? Come to tell us that you've got your senses and will leave us help you move off? I told Persons you had wits."

"Father," Ellen cried, "are you making Peter Nelson move?"

Tam MacIvor turned in surprise.

"But it's my land!" he insisted.

"I'm not moving," Nelson said.

"No?" asked MacIvor.

"No, not moving," Nelson repeated. "This surveyor claims I'm not interested in the line, MacIvor."

Tam MacIvor turned upon the surveyor. "What advice have you been giving?" he asked.

"None yet," Persons answered, "but I can. It'll cost a lot of money to run the lines all through. I'm near enough now to guess at it. Your boundaries are showing up true enough. Nelson's house—I measured it along the beach this afternoon—is right close to the line, if not over it."

"But that's Peter's land!" Ellen MacIvor protested.

"You're a man of judgment, Nelson," MacIvor said.

"Aye!" Peter Nelson answered slowly. "Judgment, that's what I got. I got judgment enough to know that it's good timber up there on my homestead. I've got judgment enough to know that you want any timber you see. I've got judgment enough to know that sooner or later you'll pay for it, and I'll not stick you beyond a fair price."

"It's my timber," said Tam MacIvor.

"Not a stick of it," Nelson countered. "I got as much right to my opinion on my boundary lines as you have on yours. My father homesteaded my place, and you bought yours at a tax sale. Both ways of getting it are honest enough. But you think I'll get out? Not an inch. I'll be glad to have the boundaries fixed, once for all. But winter's a poor time to be running lines. There's too much chance for mistakes. And I'd trust your word, MacIvor, more than any winter survey."

HE looked across at Persons, who stood comfortably at the stove. Ellen had stopped in the kitchen door to listen, her father's slippers in her hand. Her face was perplexed.

The surveyor laughed.

"I don't quite get that, Nelson," he objected.

"Then I'll make it plainer," Nelson answered, flaring up. "I've not liked you from the start. I've not liked the twist of your mouth nor the slant of your eye. I've not trusted you. Was MacIvor to put a real surveyor on, I've been thinking it over, I'd go half with him in paying the bill. But, as it is, I wouldn't trust your lines, Persons—not to a quarter mile, I wouldn't. You'd put a line where the man that's paying you wants it."

"What's that?" MacIvor cried.

"Father!" his daughter cautioned.

"I'll be going now," finished Peter Nelson.

The three did not move till he went out the door, drawing on his dogskin gloves. Tam MacIvor was the first to speak.

"There's a heap of hot spirit under his scalp!" he commented. "I have a liking for a man that fights for his rights—provided he fights fair. Nelson's fair, even if he's wrong. He's a fine taste for sailing. It's born in him, just as timbering's born in me. If he had a wee bit o' sense——" Then he stopped, grumbling.

THE mail carrier saw nothing of Ellen MacIvor in the next two days, nor of her father, nor of Persons. Snow pelted in from the icy lake that night, piled in great drifts across newly broken paths, blinded windows, heaped into unexpected ranges, where the wind blew, and made a gentle blanket under the trees. Peter

Nelson remained in the house until the third day.

That morning, when he was to carry the mail, he met Ellen MacIvor at the mill store, where his pouch was being made up. She pretended not to see him at first. He crossed over boldly and gave her good morning.

"I'm sorry," he added in a lower voice. "I'm sorry to have spoke like that to Persons. But I don't trust that dogfish —not an inch, I don't."

"My father trusts him," she said uncomfortably.

"Aye; that's the only thing I know in the man's favor."

Ellen MacIvor flushed.

"I don't think you'd better come back to the house."

"I don't either," agreed Peter, "but you should give me your reason."

"Mr. Persons says you've always known you were on father's land."

"He says I have?"

"He says you couldn't help knowing it. He says you admitted it once to him when he first came to the island."

"He claims that? You don't believe him!"

"My father believes him, Peter. He knew you were stubborn—stubborn as a Scotchman, he said. But he thought you were honest. He says now he's through with you."

"H'm! Well, I'm not through with Persons. I'll throw him through the ice next time I see him!"

He made the threat in a voice so loud and a tone so distinct that the storekeeper looked up, frowning, from his handful of letters. Ellen left hurriedly. The storekeeper, who was an old man, glanced down the room. Three lumbermen, lounging near the door, had been listening.

"You'd best keep your tongue in your head, young man," the storekeeper advised.

Four times in the next fortnight Peter Nelson crossed eighteen miles of ice to the mainland, drawing his sledload of mail. Each time he must break a new path. The harried snow grew deeper, piled into higher drifts, as the weather held cold and the sky remained overcast, until, the last Tuesday in February, a warm wind blew out of the south.

On his return to the island that night, Nelson saw that the air holes in the ice were widening. The whole frozen surface seemed to move slightly under his feet. As he approached the shore, with its high white-and-gray bergs, he heard muffled reports, like distant pistol fire. The ice was going. A few more warm days, and his boat could fight her way through.

He decided that he'd make only one more trip on the ice, as he poled up to the shore. There would be an interval, when Little Kedge must do without mail, while the floes were running before the first great blast of warm south wind. A week, or longer, the lake would be impassable, either for ice creepers on his shoes or for a boat. He could get the *Happy Days* in shape in the meantime and be ready.

In the mill store he came upon Tam MacIvor. The timberman scowled.

"Hello, Nelson," he said. He lowered his voice. "What's this I hear? You threaten to throw my surveyor through the ice?"

"I said it," Nelson admitted. "I was hasty. If he lets me alone, I'll let him."

"You'd best have a care how you talk."

"Your daughter never told you——"

"Ellen? She's got discretion, that lass. It wasn't her that told me!"

"I'll back up anything I said, MacIvor. Persons has been playing a dirty game here."

"No, no! Let that rest. I'm warning you, Nelson. I've tried to go slow. I've tried to get you to show sense. You don't appreciate it. It's my land, and the survey will prove it."

NELSON turned abruptly and scuffed his boots along the wet floor to the door. The warm wind persisted all night. Rain arrived with the morning, and the hillside became soggy and gray. Up on the heights timbermen labored with immense exertions, attempting to get the last logs yanked from the cut to the hilltop before the snow should melt.

Nelson climbed the bluff the third morning thereafter and with a pair of

cheap field glasses examined the surface of the lake. It was a clear day, with blue sky flecked over by the ripped edges of white, flying cloud. South winds rolled smoothly across the floes.

Far to the east arose the dark profile of the mainland, with deep grays and blues on the wooded hills and streaks of orange clay on the bare cliffs. It did not look eighteen miles. Between the mainland and the bluffs where he stood, lay the ice, gray and white under the warm sun.

He adjusted his glasses. Feet spread apart in the deep soggy snow, he examined the southern tip of the island. Yes, there was open water. Open water! The ice would break to-day, to-night, to-morrow. In a few days a skillful sailor with a stanch boat might pick his way through floes.

He returned to his house and all day listened to the melancholy drip of water from the eaves. The weather chilled in the evening and hung long icicles to the roof, but on the next morning they snapped off with explosive crashes. Again Peter Nelson sought the top of the bluff, wading the deep, wet snow.

A wide, black streak lay opposite the island now, a mile across. Even his naked eyes could see the floating ice. It was running south, toward the wind. A strange phenomenon. Yet each year it occurred. The shore ice runs south. Scientists explain it; fishermen merely accept it.

"To-morrow," said Peter Nelson, "maybe I can get the boat out, if all goes well."

It had pleased him to labor on his ill-disciplined craft. She lay safely ashore, calked and ready for her new season. Her tricky engine shone with polishing. Just before dusk, while his face dripped with perspiraton, he let her slide down on her cedar poles to the edge of the water, while the iron pawls of his windlass clicked excitedly.

He was up early that next morning. Half the night he had lain wakeful, hearing the throaty reverberations of vanishing bergs. At the first blink of dawn he looked out hopefully from his window. The whole field of ice was moving south, moving with a splendid grandeur, like a gray army on a level plain.

At noon his mail boat splashed into the water. He held her close ashore, for the ice was treacherous still. A sudden northeast wind might pile up the drifts. In that case he would have to work quickly and with immense exertion drag her safely up the beach.

At two o'clock in the afternoon men began to descend the hill in pairs, singly, by threes and fours. Timbermen they were, weary men from Tam MacIvor's hard-working gangs. They were singing drunken songs by four o'clock, howling, fighting spasmodically. It was the end of the season. Peter Nelson knew what would happen that night. There would be turmoil, battle, rejoicing. Another year's cut was done. For two hundred men it was pay day and deliverance.

He mounted the bluff again at five o'clock, just as the first gray of early evening hung upon the hilltop. Apparently all the lake was clear. Small fields of ice patched the black surface. Along the shore tumbled the broken splinters of yesterday's bergs. The wind was warm, unbelievably warm, distrustfully warm for the first week in March.

Nelson had turned toward his house when he was aware of another man approaching up the hillside path. He made out the erect shoulders of Persons, the surveyor. It had been days since he had seen Persons, not since the encounter in Tam MacIvor's house had they spoken. Nelson had avoided the meeting. There was time enough for more argument when the snow was off, which would be soon now, and the island lines could be run. It would be easy after that to protest Persons' findings, to have the county surveyor over to make a check.

HE watched the other's confident swing. He himself halted at a narrow point in the path, where it notched up a steep incline on the face of an almost perpendicular cliff. Below lay the roof of the mill, covered still with snow, and the wet, black, steaming roofs of slab houses. Above loomed the top of the cliff, with its brow of soggy snow.

Drifts as high as a man's waist were

piled at both sides. Low juniper brush grew in heavy patches, making prickly traps for incautious feet. Nelson stepped to the edge of the path to let Persons pass. He had decided against recognition. It was the easiest way to avoid trouble.

"Hello, squatter!" the surveyor cried. "I've come after you. MacIvor sent me. He wants you. Bring your deed. I'm leaving in the morning. The survey's finished and——"

"Finished?" asked Nelson. "Or did you guess at it?"

"Finished." Persons answered, "and finished right. Your deed's not worth the ink that's on it, Nelson."

"It ain't?"

"But MacIvor doesn't know that yet."

"Why not?"

"I've not shown him the plat. I want to talk to you first."

"To me?" Nelson stepped nearer down the path. The two men were of a height, almost of an age. Under thirty, both of them. "I don't quite get you," Nelson said and drew his hands from his pockets.

"It's this way." Persons hesitated. "Favor for favor, Nelson. I can save your land for you. I can tell MacIvor the timber's yours. He'll believe me. I can tell him the line's right where you say it is, or——"

"Don't waste your breath. I'll get the county surveyor."

"I'll do it, Nelson, providing——"

"Provided what?" Peter shouted.

"You keep away, now on, from Ellen MacIvor."

Peter Nelson pondered a deliberate moment. Then he laughed.

"Buy me off?" he asked. "I've a notion," he said, "to bash you good."

Persons struck first. His hard hand reached Nelson's face, and the mail carrier stumbled. He felt the toes of his broad boots yank at a root, as he fell. Sharp snow crust stabbed at his eyes. He got up, choking. He heard a rumble at his back, just as Persons leaped again. The soggy mass of snow was sliding on the path behind them. Their struggle had loosened it. It was moving downward, straight at them.

"Look out!" Nelson shouted.

Snow lunged like a cataract down the hillside. Nelson rolled over twice, then gripped arms and legs around a tree trunk, and held tight. The slide gathered momentum, as it flew past him. He lost all sight of Persons.

Down at the bottom the rumbling havoc swept out until it infolded the first pair of houses, covered fences and small trees. Then silence settled upon the island, a silence broken only by the soft, contented chuckle of a warm south wind.

Men were running from the mill and company store. Tam MacIvor, lantern in hand, came shouting.

"The surveyor is buried!" Nelson cried. "The surveyor, MacIvor! The snow carried him down!"

MacIvor turned, holding the lantern above his head. "Eh?" he did not comprehend. Then with a sudden understanding: "Go find him, men! Dig him out!"

Lumberjacks discovered him in forty minutes. He had been thrown clear of the snowslide and was lying in a shallow, wet drift. They carried him to the mill store and laid him on the counter. There was blood upon his face. He lifted his right hand, moaned, and let it drop.

Nelson pushed forward through the crowd.

"Here's the scamp that throwed him down," said a lumberman.

Persons opened his eyes and looked silently at Nelson.

"What's that?" MacIvor asked.

For a moment no one replied. Then the same lumberman continued:

"He promised to do it. I heard him, right here in the store, a month back."

"Are you talking about me?" asked Peter.

"Surest thing," said the lumberman. "I heard you. So'd some others. Right here in the store. You said you'd throw him through the ice."

Persons opened his eyes and again closed them quickly. MacIvor, who had been leaning over him, stood up.

"He needs a doctor," he said. "Nelson, did you throw him down?"

"No!"

Tam MacIvor scowled.

"Well, I hope you didn't. God help you, if you did, man. Where's Kolerick? Persons needs to get to a doctor!"

The storekeeper spoke up:

"He was down to your boat, sir, a while back. Had the engine tuning up, sir."

"Fetch him," bade MacIvor. "Give Persons a bit o' hot tea. He's cold. Move him over by the stove."

"I've a notion," Peter Nelson said, "that he ain't hurt bad. But as for me throwing——"

"You can tell that to the sheriff, Nelson," Tam MacIvor answered. "I'm going to fetch Persons over to the mainland to a doctor. And I'll fetch the sheriff back for you. I'll have no such rapscallion work on this island!"

He cried again for Kolerick, his timber boss. Men who had run out into the gathering night reported that he was nowhere in the settlement. The boat was at the pier, but not Kolerick.

"I'll take him over m'sel'," said Tam MacIvor. "You boys give me a hand. Yank half a dozen blankets off that shelf. Wrap him up warm. You, Nelson, go home and stay there."

Nelson watched uncomfortably, while the short procession moved down to the wash in the light of bobbing lanterns. He waited until the mill boat, which MacIvor called the *Ellen M.*, put off sturdily across the thawing bay. Twenty minutes it took for the departure. Nelson went home then and kindled the fire in his kitchen range and prepared fumblingly to make fresh coffee. The events of the afternoon bewildered him.

"Bring the sheriff?" he spoke aloud. "Well, let him. I ought to be able to prove something myself."

HE crossed to his kitchen window. Up the beach he saw a jumble of lights moving toward him. A dozen lanterns, carried in unsteady hands, approached along the icy wash. Nelson opened the door. The night had fallen still, except for the gentle knocking of small broken ice against the frozen gravel. Heavy voices were talking angrily.

Peter stepped back quickly into his kitchen and yanked from the wall his Mackinaw jacket and a knit cap. He ran through to the front of the house and let himself out. The men were only a hundred yards off, as he shut the door. They made a dark blot against the snowy beach, with their squatty lanterns swaying ahead of them. There were at least twenty.

They stopped, apparently to consult. Their voices were raised in argument. Nelson heard a man demand:

"Why wait for any sheriff?"

Nelson slipped around a clump of juniper and waded the unbroken drifts through a small wood of balsam. Fifty yards beyond he came out upon the open beach. At a crib of cedar poles and stone, his mail boat, *Happy Days*, lay moored. Without looking back he cast off the half hitches that held her bow and stern lines to the piling. With a pike pole he heaved against the shelving bottom. The boat floated clear. A moment he paused, then made decision quickly.

He would find the sheriff himself. There had been enough shabby dispute on Little Kedge. He would see the circuit judge and the county surveyor. He would tell them the whole sorry tale of Tam's claim to half his land and of Persons' crooked lines.

The boat floated in deep water. From ashore sounded the men's voices. Lanterns were moving swiftly toward the shore.

"He's taken to his boat," a man cried out.

Peter's engine turned over and set up a slow, methodical tattoo. He gripped the tiller between his heels and steered for the open lake.

The *Happy Days* passed safely beyond the last jutted ledge of rock at the eastern extreme of Little Kedge, and Nelson made fast his tiller. He crawled along the coaming, dislodged the side lights, and carried them to the cabin, while he kindled their wicks. He lifted down the white lantern from the short spar, and it too blazed brightly.

Forty minutes he ran, searching the lake ahead cautiously for floating ice. His engine chugged slowly. He dared take no chances. The wind was thickening. He made out occasional red

flashes to the right, indicating Tam MacIvor's boat.

One hour he had been afloat. He must be nearly halfway. Overhead the sky hung black. He felt a chill moisture on his face, and, touching his cheek with a finger, he discovered more snow was falling. He could see it now, pink in the gleam of the portside light, apple green on the starboard.

Ice crunched under the bow. Nelson kicked over the tiller. He heard another crunch, as he did so. He ducked into the cabin and yanked back at the clutch. The engine hummed, as it turned over lightly, the propeller shaft disconnected.

The crunch grew louder. Nelson climbed hastily to deck. The fresh wind was making small rollers that piled up chunks of ice under the bow of the boat. Pole in hand, the master of the *Happy Days* tried to fight clear of the floe. It was a small field, no doubt, drifting by itself. It must be only a small field.

Snow pelted into his eyes. It stuck like frozen paste to his cheeks. Ice still ground under sides and keel. Perhaps he could back away from it. He tried. Ice closed in behind him—behind, in front, both sides.

It piled up in huge slushy cakes about the bow, clawed threateningly against the planks and grumbled under the stern. The wind, pushing out of the northeast, grew more combative. It caught the boat, as a pair of hands would catch it, yanked it backward, pommeled it fiercely, flung higher waves across the bow.

At ten o'clock the lights of Little Kedge showed more plainly for a brief time. At eleven a pair of other lights, one red, one green, poked momentarily into sight through a break in the snow. MacIvor's boat, Nelson judged, not a mile away.

THE *Happy Days* slogged heavily in the floe. Planking was sprung on her port side. Water seeped in. Peter labored with a tin of pitch and ends of rope. It was midnight by his watch. He tacked a sheet of thin iron over a gash, padding it with strips of his shirt.

One o'clock—two.

He was pumping, between two o'clock and three—pumping, ankle deep in water. Ice growled threateningly all about him. Wind played in maniac circles.

Four o'clock.

It was a quarter after four when he felt a sudden release, as if a hand had let go of the boat. He staggered on deck. The snow had ceased. The air was lighter. Far to the right spread the gray ice floe. To the left lay open water, black under the black sky. A single star reflected in the surface. Nelson peered again at the floe.

A quarter mile away shone the green starboard light of a small boat. MacIvor's? The *Happy Days* slipped away from the edge of the ice. She plunged impishly, feeling her freedom. The ice pack spread in a melancholy field to the south. Behind lay the dark hills of Little Kedge. In front, Peter saw for the first time the sallow pierhead light at the mainland town.

He ducked into the cabin. He could make land now. He labored frantically with the broken planks, until water no longer ran in faster than he could pump it out. Wearily he went to work on the engine.

The deadlights in the fore end of the cabin showed gray with morning, as he climbed heavily to deck. Morning. MacIvor's boat was in plain sight. She lay fast in solid floes, with one shadowy figure standing stiffly on the stern deck. He was watching the *Happy Days*.

The mill boat pushed her nose deeper under the ice. Peter grunted aloud, as he stared at her. MacIvor had suffered, too, eh? He tried to feel satisfaction, but, being unable to, scowled. The mill boat canted menacingly to one side. Her starboard rail was slopping water. Ice tumbled aboard her.

Peter hurried forward along the coaming of his own boat. The ice made a solid pack here. The *Happy Days* clung to its edge, as if this were the deep bank of a safe harbor. He yanked the single wrought-iron anchor from its place on the bow deck, turned it over once, made sure of his chain and cable, and let go. The big iron rang on the ice, threatened to slip off, then held. Nelson slid over after it. He dragged it twenty paces across

the floe. Here in a hummock he made fast one of the flukes. He ran back to his boat. In another minute, pike pole in hand, he was crossing treacherous ice, leaping over air holes, swinging around the ends of gaping cracks. With each step he felt the floe move under him.

MacIvor hailed him, as he approached.

"Careful!" he cried. "You can't make it!" Then: "That you, Nelson? Damn it, I told you to stay at home!"

"Heave me a bit of line," answered Peter Nelson unexcitedly.

"Eh?"

"Heave me a bit of line, MacIvor. I ain't got all day."

MacIvor's boat canted farther. There was a rush of water over her side, a cataract that ran down wickedly into her cabin. Her owner shouted.

"I got a hurt man here, remember, Nelson!"

He had tossed the line. Peter made it fast about his own waist.

"Yank me up if I fall through," he said and ran nimbly across the slush ice toward the timberman's boat. Once aboard, he looked into the cabin. "You've not much time," he growled. "Get some of them loose deck planks, MacIvor. Heave 'em here."

The master of Little Kedge obeyed confusedly. He was not accustomed to obedience, except from other men.

"Give me a hand of this Persons," said Peter Nelson. "Sure—heave him on my back. That's it. Now that hatch cover—open it up."

The surveyor was weak from loss of blood. He did not recognize Nelson. MacIvor heaved the boards over to the ice and, with stiff, frosted hands, helped Nelson down. He followed clumsily across the ice floe.

"Now, sir," said Peter Nelson, climbing into his own boat, "give that engine a turn. That's it. You'll find a blanket in the locker there. Throw that over him. I ain't particular how he feels, but I don't want that dogfish to die on me. MacIvor, you——"

"I'm partial to bein' called 'Mister,'" the other said.

Peter Nelson ignored him.

"You take a try at that pump," he went on, "and I'll run the boat."

Twice on the journey to the mainland Tam MacIvor panted to the trap. Both times Nelson ordered him back to work.

IT was seven o'clock when the old *Happy Days* made the mainland harbor mouth. Nelson, watching anxiously over his shoulder, had seen the last of MacIvor's abandoned boat. She had spun around suddenly in the ice, thrust her stern far into the air, and had gone down. She left no mark upon the gray pack.

Boatmen hurried to assist at the landing.

"I got a dogfish down below that's scarred up a bit," said Nelson, "and MacIvor here—he wants the sheriff."

"Tut!" said MacIvor. "It's you I want—private like. Here, you men, go fetch the doctor. Take him ashore? Good enough. For you see," he told Nelson when the two were alone, "we had the idee that we was going to sink out there in the ice. And Persons up and told me—you've no mind how much! It was not a pretty story, sir. I'll get the county surveyor. We'll let him say which one of us is right."

"As to the sheriff?" Nelson asked.

"Will you hear the lad! I've no call for the sheriff, Peter. I've another punishment, and, what's more, you've earned it. I'll turn ye over to a certain lass, and her name's Ellen, and she'll tend you as she sees fit. She's got a keener eye than her old man. Wasn't she telling me all along that I was wrong?"

"She was?"

"She was that!" said Tam MacIvor.

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

ONE of the great metropolitan newspapers of New York recently asked its readers to submit a list of the seven most beautiful things in the city. We did not see the answers to this request, but had we entered the list of contenders for the prize it offered, we should have placed the Brooklyn Bridge among the most beautiful and significant monuments to which the City of New York can point with reasonable pride. In our opinion the Brooklyn Bridge has been for more than forty years not only a perennial spring of joy and inspiration to the artist, but no other aspect of this great city so admirably sums up the architectural gesture of that era in our country when we had definitely abandoned the building traditions of stone and brick and unreservedly committed ourselves to industrialism and science. The building of this bridge is at once a tribute to science and to humanity.

If architecture, properly understood, as W. R. Lethaby declared, is civilization itself, the early period of industrialism both in England and America does not mark an advance in the humanization of man in society. The pioneers of industry founded the Iron Age, and like the zinc and iron statues which graced the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, in 1876, their architectural achievements are things to be forgotten rather than remembered. If Trinity Church in Boston and the Courthouse at Pittsburgh still command attention and carry on the tradition of noble building, though they were conceived and built in the Age of Iron, they represent the fine taste and architectural integrity of H. H. Richardson, rather than the taste or the building traditions of America in the '70s, Richardson does not represent his age, for he was the last as well as the chief exponent of American romanticism in architecture. He has been called "the last of the great medieval line of master masons."

It was the age of the engineers who ignored, and of the jerry builders who had degraded, the art of architecture. That industrialism was capable of better things and could solve its problems with a large ingredient of beauty as well as honesty, where quick turnovers and shoddy workmanship did not restrain its hand, were demonstrated in the building of the Brooklyn Bridge.

No medieval cathedral architect brought to his task a greater singleness of purpose and a more selfless devotion to work than John Roebling lavished on his master bridge. Two years after the inception of his great lifework, which was begun in 1867, Roebling died from injuries which he sustained while inspecting the progress of the work. At once his son, Washington Roebling, took up his father's uncompleted task. Then he in turn became a chronic invalid because of his heroic devotion, in season and out, to his father's master bridge. For ten years the younger Roebling was confined to his house on Columbia Heights in Brooklyn, and from here he followed with a telescope the progress of the work. Like a great general, who directs a battle from an eminence on a hill, beyond the sweep of the enemy's guns, Washington Roebling issued his commands and superintended the completion of the bridge.

The architectural beauty of the strong lines of this bridge and the graceful curve described by its suspended cables, make it the outstanding contribution of science and industrialism to an age which has at last demonstrated that beauty as well as utility are latent in iron. There is a sense of dignity, stability, and unperturbed poise in the Brooklyn Bridge which embodies all that was best in an age of barbarous industrialism.

A Chat With You

IN Germany they are trying out a new sort of circulating library. Any addict who frequents this dispensary of literary wares must write a review of the book before he returns it. How they make him return the book at all is difficult to understand, in this land of the free and home of the brave. Our experience with book borrowers is that they have a habit of disappearing for indefinite periods, while the books have a habit of disappearing forever. Perhaps in European countries, where every one is registered by the police, it is easier to keep tabs on borrowed volumes.

* * * *

ANYWAY, in this Continental library, any one taking out a book is given a blank to be filled out with comment and criticism. How valuable these reviews are it would be hard to say. A natural spontaneous person is generally emphatic rather than illuminating in his criticism. He will say, "That story is rotten!" Or he will say, "That story is great!" But it will be difficult to get him to explain the why and wherefore. If you pin him down he may make an effort to give some reason for his feeling. Generally speaking, the feeling of like or dislike, of interest or boredom, of admiration or disgust, comes first and the reasoned explanation that attempts to justify the feeling comes as an afterthought.

* * * *

ACCORDING to the statistics already collected, biographies are most popular in Germany, especially biographies of women. Next come histories of Europe. The popularly written scientific book which goes well on this side of the Atlantic is not in great demand over there. If the European wants philosophy or science he goes to headquarters and reads the highly technical book.

* * * *

MOST notable American writers are translated into European languages and widely read. In Russia, in Roumania, in the Balkans, and in Dalmatia the good old Western story is a prime favorite. Fenimore Cooper has inspired many a young Bulgarian to don imitation Indian clothes and fancy himself one of the last of the Mohicans. In one Dalmatian town the reading of the "Leatherstocking Tales" started the boys on such a realistic imitation of American Indians that the legal authorities were forced to interfere.

* * * *

IT is difficult for the born and bred American to understand what a land of wonder and romance his country seems to the European. He is used to it. Plenty of land, plenty of opportunity, a chance for every one. Unless a man falls sick he never really appreciates the joys of being well. Unless a man lives outside of the U. S. A. and tries to make his living somewhere else he never knows how lucky he was to live here. We read very little modern European stories. They read a lot of ours, for the hopes of a great many of them are turned in our direction.

* * * *

THE educated people on the other side seem to know more about this country than we do. A Yugoslav will tell you all the towns in Nebraska and their populations. A Czecho-Slovak will furnish you with data on the various North American mountain ranges and the highest peaks thereof. A Swiss or a Frenchman will tell you the exact figures by

which Mr. Coolidge was elected president or Mr. Smith elected governor.

* * * *

TO get back to fiction and criticizing stories we wish we could train people as the librarians are trying to do in Germany. What, for instance, do you like most in the present issue of the magazine? What do you like least? Why not write and tell us and explain why? And for the next number, an announcement of which you will find below —what is there in that to which you look forward most eagerly, and what is there in that that you expect to skip?

The Popular Magazine

In the Next Number, April 20, 1927

Black Marsh A Book-length Novel	WILL McMORROW
Buried Alive	FITZHUGH GREEN
Points West A Four-part Serial—Part II	B. M. BOWER
Special Delivery	ROY HINDS
Piracies	ELINOR MORDAUNT
That Blasted Idiot	ALLISON W. IND
The Broadening Trail A Five-part Serial—Part III	DON McGREW
As Shakespeare Says	GEORGE PARSONS BRADFORD
Manus Quits	CLAY PERRY
The Spy	THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS
The Game Warden Intervenes	ROBERT J. PEARSALL
The Bad Lot	FREDERICK NIVEN
The Wolf Dog	AIMEE D. LINTON

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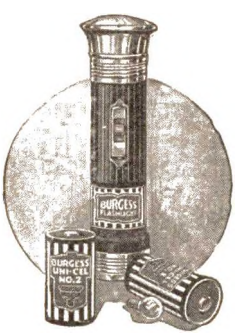

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RAINBOW LANDING	Frank Lillie Pollock
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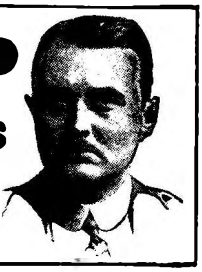

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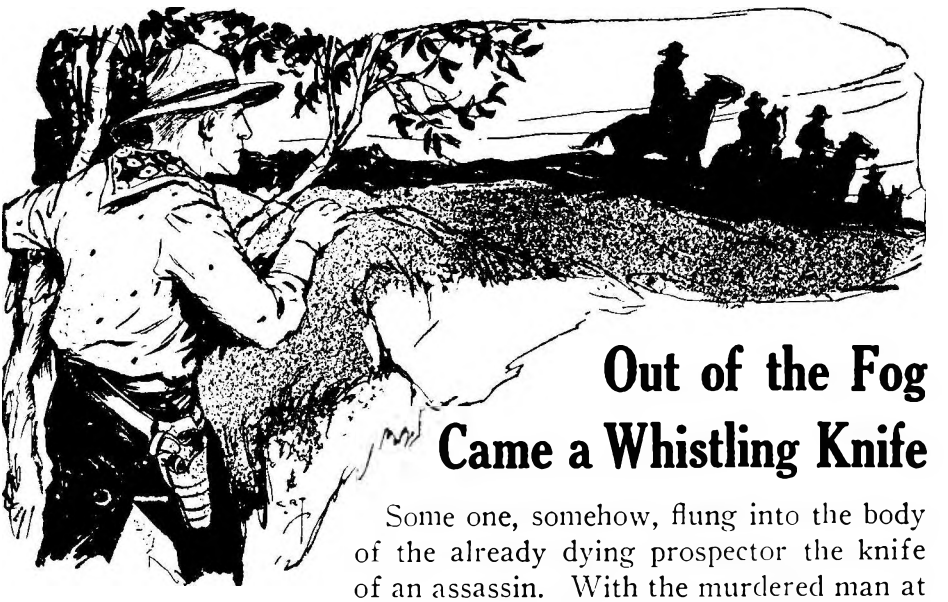

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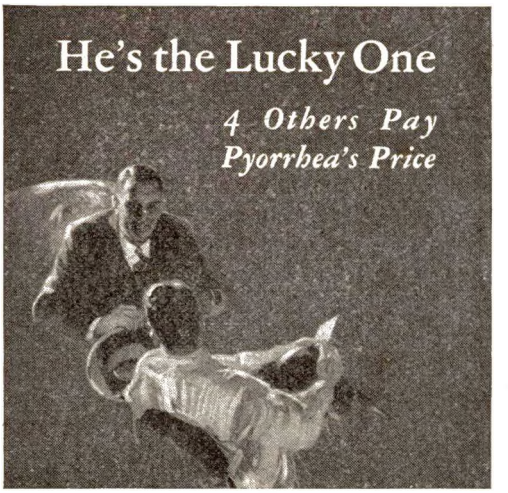

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To Women

Men naturally are attracted to the beauty and charm that mark radiant health. For real beauty is far beyond mere prettiness, and its power over men is absolute. And it is within the grasp of any woman.

LET us face facts squarely: there is no one single cause of poor health so widespread as inactive elimination. That is why active intestinal function aided by Feen-a-mint is so important. It keeps the system free of waste and impurities and frees the blood for its important work of building up the body.

HEALTH PRODUCTS CORPORATION
Newark, N. J.

Do you value and admire clear eyes, bright cheeks, gay spirits? These depend on pure, clean blood in healthy bodies.

Get a box of these i[redacted] refreshing mint-flavored gum tablets and chew one of them whenever you think advisable.