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TWICE-A-MONTH AUG. 7, 1928

The Popular

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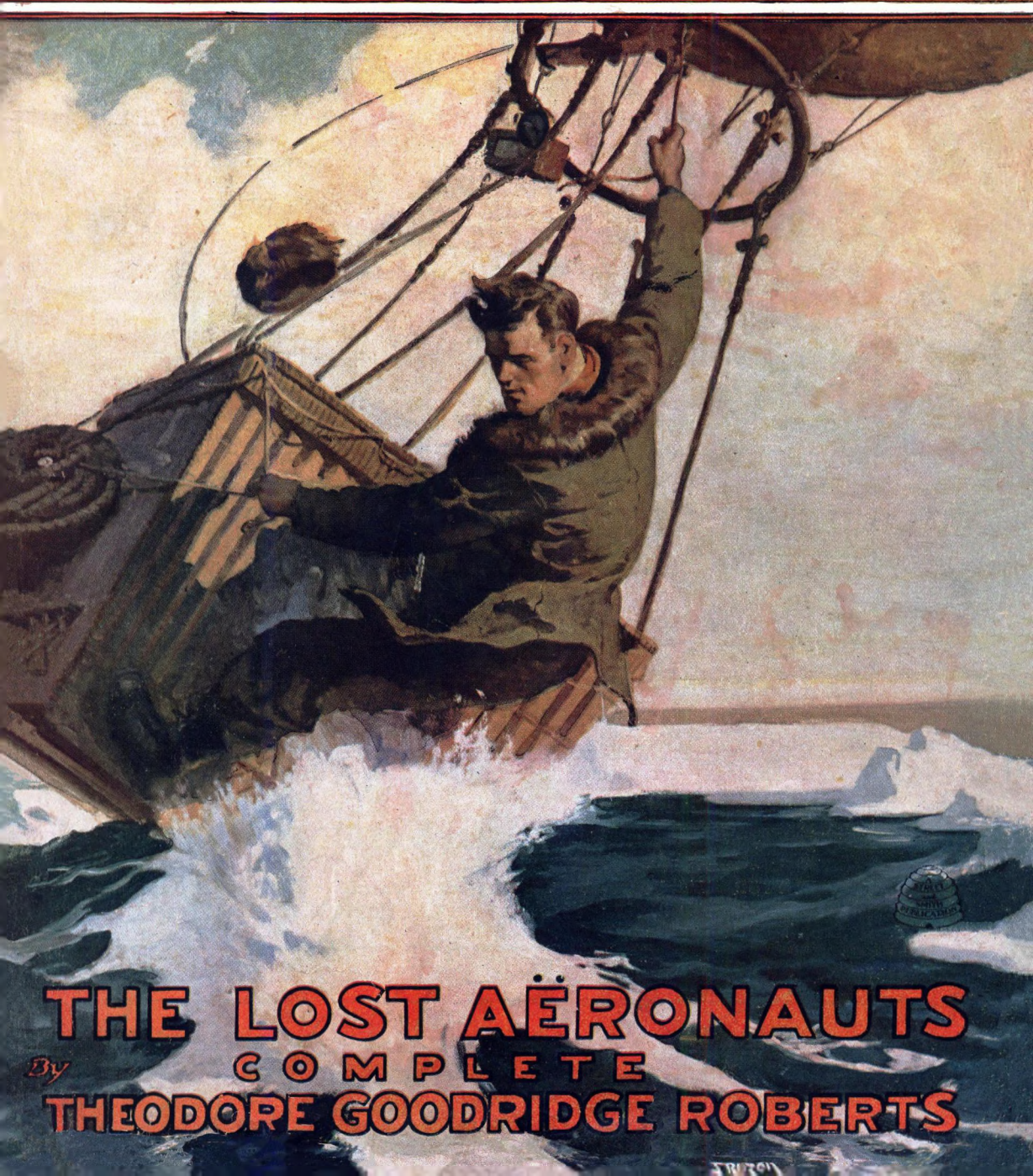

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Volume XCII Number 6

The Popular

TWICE-A-MONTH

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 7, 1928

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. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $3.70. Foreign, $4.40.

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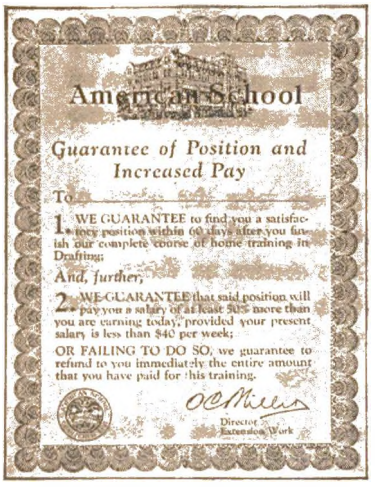

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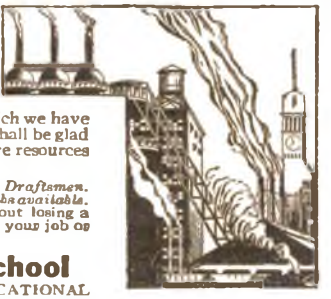

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

THE other day, a hustling newspaper promotion manager started out to find just what features of the daily papers the public liked best. He figured that it would probably be either the sports section, or perhaps the "column," or maybe the short editorial comments or again the manner in which the paper handled local news.

To his great astonishment the investigation showed that far and away the most popular feature of the paper was the serial fiction story which he was running in short installments, and to which, up to this time, he had paid very little attention.

It was a great shock to his journalistic pride to learn that men and women alike were taking his paper primarily to follow the adventures of the hero of this exciting yarn. With all his knowledge of the newspaper business, he had not grasped the outstanding fact that most Americans are born lovers of good fiction.

With the liveliest of imaginations, and with the desire for escape from what often seems a monotonous, machine age, our people everywhere are absorbing the works of those who can put down on paper, romance and adventure, whether in the great West, in the streets of our crowded cities or on the blue waters of the South Seas.

If the newspaper man had gone to a certain great publishing house at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, his eyes might have been further opened. There, at Chelsea House, one of the oldest and best-established publishing concerns in America, he would have seen huge presses turning out the works of America's greatest writers of fiction. Then he would have realized how deep and strong is the hunger for fiction on the part of men and women in all walks of life.

Nothing will ever take the place of a story of adventure, told in racy, pungent style. Such stories as these, for example, of which we can only give you the barest hints:

TONG MEN AND A MILLION, a Mystery Story, by Emart Kinsburn. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It is a gruesome manner indeed with which Mr. Kinsburn introduces the reader to his swift-moving story. Out on a lonely ranch near San Francisco hangs the body of an obscure hired man, his flesh torn with many wounds. Two amateur sleuths set to work to unravel a mystery that led them eventually to the crooked little streets of San Francisco's Chinatown.

On the way, they stumbled across the trail of a million dollars, and became involved in many exciting incidents, which reached their climax in a furious war between the rival tongs of Chinatown's hidden labyrinths.

There is a surprise, and a big one, in store

Continued on 2nd page following

GOOD READING—*Continued*

for the reader who goes with "The Gunsmith of Clay Street" through all the alarms and excursions which Mr. Kinsburn so graphically describes.

SENOR JINGLE BELLS, a Western Story, by David Manning. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When we see the name David Manning on the jacket of a Chelsea House publication, that book is ours in the time it takes to hand three quarters over to the clerk. The man who wrote "Western Tommy," "Bull Hunter," "Gun Gentlemen," and a heap of other high-powered Western stories is one who can write fiction tailor-made for us. The beauty of his prose is that it combines a fine grasp of reality with a glamorous touch of romance on every page.

Who but Manning, for example, could bring to life such a strange and colorful character as he who came jingling into the town of Gloryville, at a moment of high drama? For all Gloryville was on tiptoe that day, breathlessly awaiting what promised to be a life-and-death struggle between two noted killers.

The unexpected arrival of "Señor Jingle Bells" and his subsequent speedy clean-up of both professional bad men served to intensify the drama and set every one wondering who this man in the costume of a Mexican, but with the accent of an American, might be.

You will rejoice in your acquaintance with this romantic character. And there will be chuckles aplenty for you when you read of the antics of "Little Samuel," the Ethiopian in Jingle Bells' woodpile.

We doff our sombrero to you, Mr. Manning. It seems you just can't help writing stories that cut seriously into our evenings. May your typewriter never falter.

HIDDEN HERDS, a Western Story, by George Gilbert. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When we read "The Quick-draw Kid," by Mr. Gilbert, we sent up a silent prayer that there would be lots more about him in other books. And now our prayer is answered by the appearance of "Hidden Herds."

You will remember that the rollicking Western career of the Kid began back in

Continued on page following

GOOD READING—*Continued*

a mid-West city hash house, where his dexterity at drawing coffee and frying edible chow attracted the attention of a group of cowmen who promptly kidnaped him and set him down in as fascinating a Western ranch as has appeared in print in many years.

Now we come up with the Kid again, this time all snarled up into a first-class mystery. With an old prospector for partner, he goes in search of a herd which had stampeded clear out of sight into a hidden valley some time before the story opens.

Both the Kid and the prospector knew that if they could once get that herd out of the encircling hills, there would be plenty of money in the transaction. But there were others who were after the herd, and the race to brand the cattle keeps the reader's excitement at high pressure.

SANCTUARY ISLAND, an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Now come along with Mr. Montague far down to the magic depths of the waters which girdle the South Sea Islands. And among the stranded characters cast up on the burning beaches, meet young Jim Buckley, erstwhile millionaire, but now deserted by all his friends save a fine old judge and his beautiful daughter.

Of a sudden comes news that the girl is kidnaped by the notorious Captain Zero, a latter-day pirate who heads a brotherhood of desperate men, making their headquarters on an obscure island.

Go with Jim as he sets out on the perilous quest to rescue the girl! Read with breathless interest of the death battle between the natives and the whites. In other words, go to your book dealer on your way home tonight and get you this book. It's one in a thousand.

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THE POPULAR

VOL. XCII AUGUST 7, 1928 No. 6

The Lost Aëronauts

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "The Salmon Pool," Etc.

One evening, in the Voyagers' Club, in New York City, an unknown and strange-looking man arrived; and that was the beginning of a magnificent and terrible adventure that led a gallant major and several other people, including two lovely women, out on two long and lonely expeditions into the Canadian wilds, in search of a fantastic mystery.

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

"——THAN A DEAD LION."

JOHN STAVE was the head boy at the Voyagers' Club. His round poll was white with the passage of seventy-two winters and summers. On a certain November night of the year of grace, 1927, he sat in a Gothic chair beside the club's letter box, pleasantly engaged with his private thoughts and yet absolutely on his job. He looked alert, and at the same time plump and benevolent, in his trim livery of maroon cloth and flat silver buttons.

His mind was on his clever grandchildren; and yet he was ready to rise at a moment's notice to give respectful greeting to any incoming member, or a word of direction to door boy or hat boy or any other boy. His chair stood at the top of a flight of five wide, marble steps which lifted gradually from the level of the street to the ground floor of

the club; and he happened to be glancing down at the entrance when the lad on duty there pulled open one panel of the heavy doors and admitted that which—time and place considered—may be called, without exaggeration, an extraordinary figure.

The boy let the door swing to, took a second look at what had come in, then ascended the marble steps in two startled jumps, passing the cause of his perturbation on the way.

"Pipe it, will yuh!" he whispered to John Stave.

Stave got nimbly to his feet.

"Don't disturb yourself, Alfred—nor forget where you are," he said calmly. "Go back down to the door."

The newcomer halted before the dean of boys, blinked, stared and smiled.

"It's you, John," he said.

"Yes, sir. You've been out of town, I presume, sir. Permit me to take your hat and coat, Mr. Smith."

"Smith! Smith?" repeated the other, as Stave peeled a garment of hair and hide from his shoulders and took a cap of shaggy fur from his head. "Smith? That's it!"

Stave passed those unusual articles of attire to the boy in the coat room, and handed to their owner the numbered metal disk which he received in return. He looked at them, puzzled.

"Smith, of course," added the member.

"Of course, sir," returned John, with that boyish, fatherly smile for which he is justly famous.

Mr. Smith hesitated a moment longer, then sighed and smiled and passed on into the recesses of the club.

"Don't tell me that's a member, Mr. Stave," said the hat boy.

"That gentleman is most certainly a member," replied John, with dignity. "*And* in good standing," he added.

"A hair cut wouldn't do him no harm," volunteered the boy.

"Members of this club, Walter—of the Voyagers' Club—can afford to wear their hair long or short or not at all."

"Could he afford to take a bath?"

"Undoubtedly. Do you mean to imply, Walter, that Mr. Smith needed a bath?"

"*And* a shave. Looks like a tramp to me. But he might be workin' on a pitcher. Frozen north. That would account for all the hair an' leather an' whiskers."

"I regret to say that I cannot mistake your meaning, Walter. But permit me to inform you that this is the Voyagers' Club. No member of this institution has any connection with the moving-picture industry. Try to keep in mind the fact that this is the best club in New York."

John Stave returned to his Gothic chair beside the letter box. It was a quiet night at the Voyagers'.

In what is known as the Founder's Study, a small writing room on the second floor, a man who had been given the privileges of the club for two weeks sat writing a letter. The only light in the room was that of the shaded lamp on his table. The writer believed himself to be alone; and when a voice addressed him suddenly from the shadows, he was somewhat startled.

"Hope I don't interrupt you," said the voice.

"Don't mention it," returned the letter writer, whose manners were as sound as his nerves.

The owner of the voice advanced from the surrounding gloom and flopped into a deep chair at a corner of the little table. His appearance contrasted strikingly with his environment. Untidy dark whiskers covered two thirds of his face. The hair of his scalp hung in elf locks. His clothing, which appeared to be all of wool and leather, looked ragged and greasy. His dark eyes shone and glowed.

"My name's Smith," he said.

"Mine's Wembly," returned the other. "A cigarette?"

Mr. Smith accepted a cigarette, and a light for it, and sank back again into the depths of the chair.

"I'm a member," he said. "All this is familiar to me. I knew it the moment I saw the light over the door, so I walked right in—and there was John Stave. His name came to me in a flash—but I didn't know my own until he addressed me by it. Smith. That's it. I knew it the moment he said it. But the devil of it is, that's all I do know about myself—all up to a certain point, that's to say—a certain point in comparatively recent and rather unusual experiences."

He paused as if for comment, regarding Wembly with glowing eyes. Wembly, believing him to be an escaped lunatic and hoping only that his instincts were not homicidal, made no comment.

"I call them unusual experiences," continued Smith, "in spite of the fact that I have no memory of previous experiences with which to compare them. My power of reasoning, which is unimpaired, tells me they were unusual. Have you ever heard of people losing their memories?"

Wembly admitted that he had heard of such cases.

"From what causes?" asked Smith.

"Why, I believe that brain fever sometimes causes it," returned Wembly patiently. "And head wounds. I know two chaps who had all memories of their pasts knocked out of them, for six months in one case and over a year in the other."

Smith nodded. "That's what happened to me, as far as I can work it out. Do you know anything of a man named Gaston Duvar?"

After a moment's reflection, Wembly shook his head.

"He had a balloon," prompted Smith hopefully.

"A balloon? Duvar? But that was a long time ago. I read about it when I was a boy. Gaston Duvar? Yes, that was the name. He went looking for the north pole in a balloon. But that was a great many years ago. He's never been heard of since. Why do you ask?"

"My reason for asking you about Duvar was to prove to you that I am speaking of realities. You say that you read of his attempt to reach the north pole in a balloon, when you were a boy. Doubtless I read of it at the time, too—when I was a boy. That's one of the things I've forgotten. Yes, it was a long time ago. Thirty years ago. And you say he's never been heard of since. I've heard of him since. You don't know what became of him, I take it. I know what became of him."

"How's that?" asked Wembly, puzzled.

"If I had a drink I could tell you."

Wembly pulled a flask from his hip.

"Demerara," he explained. "Thirty over proof. I brought it down from Canada with me."

Smith drank from the flask.

"I didn't know where I was or who I was," he said. "The first thing I noticed was the queer feel of my head. I put up a hand—my left hand—and felt leather and bark and Heaven only knows what else all around and over my head as big as a—well, as big as that scrap basket. But my mouth and eyes were uncovered. I saw a sloping roof of poles and skins above me, with sunshine on it. My right arm was in splints. I saw black eyes staring down at me from a wrinkled, brown face. Those are my earliest memories. Not my earliest now, for many things have come back to me since coming in here.

"The owner of the wrinkled face was my doctor and nurse. He spoke a language I couldn't make head nor tail of; and his name was as long as my leg. I called him 'Bill' for short. Five sleeps

after my first noticing my strange surroundings—but I didn't remember any other surroundings—Bill got me onto my feet and began teaching me to walk.

"Other people came in to look at me—men and women, young and old. They all belonged to the same breed as Bill. I knew there were other breeds of humans in the world, though I could not remember any other. I had reason without memory. Bill took one or two layers of wrappings off my head, and eased the splints on my right arm. I knew it was my right arm. I knew things like that, and their names, the moment I saw them; but though I recognized myself for a man, and one of a different race from Bill and the other people around me, I didn't know my own name. I didn't know my name until half an hour ago, when John spoke to me. Queer, that. Where was I?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in the woods with a bunch of Indians, far's I can make out."

"Yes—but in my story. What was I telling you?"

"The old man was teaching you to walk."

"That's right. Well, it didn't take him long. I was soon able to walk out and around. I saw broken hills black with stunted fir and spruce, and a lake of gray water—that water was as gray and clear as air—and brown barrens and knolls of granite. Northern country. I was down at the edge of the lake when I first saw Julia. Somebody spoke behind me in that crazy language but a different voice; and I turned, and there she was. She stood and gazed straight in my eyes with what might be termed an eager and yet inscrutable look.

"There was more than that in the look. There was pleasure, for one thing. You might even call it joy. And her eyes were not like the eyes of the other people in that place. I knew what the difference was, in a flash. It was not in their beauty only, for savages may have bright eyes capable of flashing and darkling, capable of expressing anger and affection and all the emotions—savages, yes, and animals.

"But hers were the eyes of civilization. She was white. Half white, I suppose, to be exact. But she looked pure white. I was seized by a strange excitement. I think her look must have set a thousand memories struggling for release. But they were not released. It was as if my heart remembered and my brain failed absolutely to respond. I called her Julia—but why Julia, I don't know. I spoke to her by that name—just that one word; and she smiled and extended her hands to me. I took them both in my left hand. I was deeply moved."

He paused. He had not returned Wembly's flask, and he now took a second long pull at it.

"That stuff's thirty over proof," cautioned Wembly.

"I called her Julia," resumed Smith. "Her hands were slender. She was slender. I can't describe her, but I can see her vividly enough!"

"Don't try," soothed Wembly, leaning sidewise and, with a long reach, relieving the adventurer of the flask. "Won't you have a cup of coffee or something? What about something to eat?"

Smith's eyes were agleam with tears. He brushed the tears away with soiled fingers.

"Coffee be damned!" he cried, sitting straight. "I have something else to do than drink coffee." Again he slumped back in the soft chair. "I've much to tell you," he went on in his former drawling tone of voice. "I must tell it before I sleep, for fear I should forget it in my sleep. The human memory is a tricky thing; and I am sleepy. And I must impress you with the vital importance of this matter before I rest. I must return for Julia—but I can't do

that alone, without help. I'll need your help. She's there—Gaston Duvar's daughter—waiting for us to go back and bring her out. She's waiting for me. My first idea was that we should attempt the escape together, but when I discovered that one or another of those people was always spying on her, I realized that it couldn't be done.

"The only thing to do was to get away alone and find help, organize an expedition, and return with a force sufficiently powerful to release her from those people. She belongs to civilization. Her mother must have been one of those Indians, but she has nothing in common with them except the language. I learned only a few words of that language, and she knew nothing of English or French—only a few words of English I taught her; but we understood each other. She knows why I left her. She awaits my return.

"I have a map. Drew it as well as I could, on my way out. I had a compass which had belonged to her father, but I lost it on the way out. I'll show you the map and explain it to you, for you are the only person I've talked to since my return who hasn't looked or behaved as if he doubted my sanity. I don't blame them, for I didn't know my name then nor that I was a member of this club. I lost the compass, but I have the map here—yes, and something else."

He sat up, slipped a hand into his breast and drew forth an oblong package. This was eight or nine inches long, about five inches wide and perhaps half an inch thick. It was wrapped in some kind of thin, oily skin and wound about with leather thongs. Smith plucked at a knot with fumbling fingers.

"Let me do that," offered Wembly, wondering how best to get the poor fellow back to whatever public or private institution he had escaped from without hurting his feelings.

Smith relinquished the packet and sprawled back in the chair. Wembly made short work of the knots and unfolded the oily skin. Inside that wrapper he found another. The second was of soft leather. He unfolded the inner wrapper.

"What's this?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"That's the diary," drawled Smith. "Didn't I tell you about it? Gaston Duvar's diary. My map's on the back of the last page."

"But where'd it come from? How did you get hold of it?"

"I've told you all that. She gave it to me—Julia—Duvar's daughter. How the devil would I've known who she was but for that diary? French. I could read it without any trouble; and as soon as I'd read two or three pages I remembered about that Frenchman and his balloon—though I must have been very young when it happened. It's his log. Look at the last six pages. They're written in pencil—only six pages, but they cover six years. After drifting round in a fog for days, the old bag picked that little lake to collapse into, and Duvar had to swim ashore. They thought he was a god, or a devil, but they wouldn't let him go. It makes interesting reading. His marriage. He mentions the fact, but not a word about his wife. That's queer. Julia must have been two years old when he died. That's my map on the back of the last page. The mother must have died when Julia was born."

Wembly turned the pages of the diary with a trembling hand, pausing now and then to peer at a particular passage, or a marginal date, with incredulous eyes. He stared at the back of the last page, turning it this way and that.

"But how the devil did *you* get there?" he exclaimed suddenly, out of a silence of minutes.

"I don't know," replied Smith in a sleepy voice, without changing his flabby position in the deep chair. "Can't

remember. Couldn't learn from those people—not even from Julia. Not in a balloon. Don't know anything about balloons."

"How did you get out?"

"Walked three days and nights due south by compass. Struck a good river running eastward and built a raft. Two days—and my raft went to pieces. Bad water for a raft. Good enough for a canoe. Hoofed it four or five days and rounded big falls and came upon a family of Indians netting and smoking salmon. One of them took me down to salt water in a canoe; and a half-breed who lived at the mouth of that river took me south along the coast to a Moravian mission. I was taken ill there. I was ill for weeks. But I know my way back. No trouble at all. That mission's on the maps. So's that river. Then up the river to where I first struck it—it's on my map there—and due north, by my map, to Julia."

"Who are you?" asked Wembly. "What's your other name?"

"Smith. That's my name."

"But your first name? You must have two, at least. Try to recall it. Is it John? John Smith?"

"No. I'd know it if you said it. John? That's old Stave's first name."

Wembly turned back to the writing table with contracted brows. He gripped the arms of his chair with tense fingers. His lips moved without sound and his eyes darkened and dulled with a fixed, introspective look. He, too, was trying to recall a name. But his efforts were in vain. He got swiftly and suddenly to his feet.

"Excuse me for a minute," he said, and hastened from the room.

He went downstairs and straight to John Stave's post of duty. John stood up at his approach. He came to a halt very close to John and spoke in eager yet guarded tones.

"This Mr. Smith, the gentleman in —ah—somewhat pronounced winter outing costume and a beard. I've been talking to him. Can you tell me which Mr. Smith he is?"

John reflected for a moment.

"We have six of them, sir. But one's a major, and another's an English baronet. That leaves four misters, so to speak. Yes, sir, I can tell you. The gentleman you refer to is Mr. Gilroy Smith."

"Gilroy!" echoed Wembly, and his voice shook. "That's the name I was trying to recall. But you can't mean that he's *the* Gilroy Smith? The airman? Commander Benn's companion in the east-to-west Atlantic flight of last summer? You can't mean that!"

John looked perplexed.

"Well, sir, he might be that one. I've always thought our Mr. Gilroy Smith was a literary gent of some kind—but he may be a flying gent, too. I can't just say, sir, offhanded—but I can find out for you in half a minute."

"Are you trying to be funny? Great Heaven, man, that was last summer! And they've not been heard of since—not since the crew of a Newfoundland schooner heard a plane going over in a fog! The papers were full of it. Commander Harvey Benn and Gilroy Smith. You couldn't have escaped hearing of that flight if you'd tried."

"Sorry, sir, but I'm not much of a hand with the newspapers. I do most of my reading now in Charles Dickens' novels and my grandchildren's school books, sir."

"Good Lord! But how long is it since you last saw *this* Gilroy Smith? Weeks? Months?"

"It's quite a while, sir. That's what I remarked to him when he came in this evening. It might be all of four months. But I know who could give you the information, sir. Mr. Ankerly. Great friend of Mr. Smith's, sir. He came in only ten minutes ago."

"Lead me to him."

They found Mr. Ankerly standing

alone with his back to a large fire. His attitude was graceful and assured. His cheeks were smooth and pink. The expression of his mouth and eyes suggested complete satisfaction with himself and life. His attire was formal, and faultless to the minutest detail. As they confronted him, he treated Wembly to a glance of polite curiosity and a slight bow, and John Stave to an encouraging, inquiring smile.

"Mr. Ankerly, sir, here's a gentleman wants to speak to you very particular," said John.

"My name's Wembly," said the Canadian, almost before John had the last word out. "Not that my name matters. But can you tell me if the Gilroy Smith who tried to fly from Paris to New York with Commander Benn is a member of this club?"

"Certainly. That's to say, he *was* a member. Poor Gil. One of the best. Salt of the earth. But why do you ask, Mr. Webster?"

"Wembly—not that it matters. But surely there were two Gilroy Smiths in this club?"

"Two Gilroy Smiths? Certainly not—not in the Voyagers', nor anywhere in the world that I ever heard of. There was only one Gilroy Smith—Harvey Benn's companion. I financed that tragic venture. But why do you ask?"

"Because I've been talking to him tonight."

Some of the pink went out of Ankerly's smooth cheeks and his eyes narrowed and glittered.

"If that's meant for a joke, it's in damn poor taste!" he exclaimed harshly.

"I'm quite serious," returned Wembly. "Gilroy Smith is upstairs in the little writing room."

The rest of the pink slipped from Ankerly's face. Even his lips lost their color. Wembly turned abruptly and strode toward the stairs. Ankerly followed, after a moment's hesitation. John Stave went last. Ankerly knocked against a padded chair and brushed a corner of a table. He muttered to himself.

"It's impossible! Gil's dead! The man's a fool—or worse!" He stumbled twice on the stairs.

The Founder's Study was empty except for the sprawled figure in the deep chair near the table at which Wembly had met and talked with Gilroy Smith. Wembly led straight to that corner. The light from the shaded lamp on the table did not reach quite to the back of the chair and Smith's upturned face.

"I believe he's asleep," said Wembly. "He spoke of being sleepy. Do you recognize him? Shift the lamp this way a bit, John."

Ankerly stooped over the sleeper.

"It's him, all right!" said old John Stave, with a truculent note in his voice. "Don't I know our members? Every single one of them, drunk or sober, dirty or clean, dead or alive!"

Ankerly straightened his back, stood swaying for a moment, then retreated unsteadily and sat down hard in the chair which Wembly had recently occupied. His smooth, plumpish face was gray.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed, staring blankly at the puzzled Canadian. "He's lost. Early in August. He's dead."

"Pull yourself together," advised Wembly, producing the flask of rum. "Take a nip of this."

Ankerly snatched the flask and tilted it to his lips with a shaking hand.

John Stave, standing beside Gilroy Smith's chair, uttered a cry of dismay.

"What the devil's the matter with *you?*" demanded Wembly sharply.

"He's dead! Mr. Smith here! He's dead!"

Mr. Ankerly and John Stave left the room. Wembly resumed his seat at the little writing table. He took up the pen with which he had been writing a let-

ter when poor Gilroy Smith had disturbed him. He glanced at the unfinished letter, then at the late Gaston Duvar's diary. The diary lay open, exposing the back of the last written page. He dipped the pen and, on a page of the unfinished letter, he copied the dead man's map. He dried his handiwork on a blotter, folded the letter and placed it in the inner pocket of his dinner jacket. Then he closed the lost balloonist's diary and lit a cigarette.

Half a dozen people entered the room a minute later; and lights flashed on from the walls and ceiling. They were all members of the club. One was the honorary secretary. Another was a physician. All had been acquainted with Gilroy Smith, and now they recognized the body in the big chair. The doctor made a swift examination.

"As dead as if he'd died last summer," said the doctor. "But we must not move him until the medical examiner says so."

Wembly drew their attention to the diary, which lay on the table in its unfolded wrappers of oiled skin and leather. It was passed from hand to hand. It excited astonished and puzzled comment. Wembly was eagerly, and somewhat confusedly, questioned concerning his interview with the dead hero. He answered all the questions to the best of his knowledge and as clearly as possible—but he did not stress the young woman who had given Gaston Duvar's diary to Smith, nor did he draw anybody's attention to the rough map on the back of the last inscribed page.

The examiner arrived, accompanied by a police officer in a bowler hat and a fur-lined overcoat, and old John Stave. The medical examiner studied the sprawled, stiff figure in the big chair and found and declared it to be devoid of life. The detective searched the body thoroughly, questioning Wembly and John Stave and others the while without appearing to listen to their answers. He drew the examiner's and Doctor Vane's attention to a scar on the head.

"That's where he lost his memory," he said, glancing at Wembly. "It's too bad he couldn't remember what happened to Commander Benn."

"Benn must have been killed when they crashed, and been buried by the Indians," suggested Wembly.

The only other discovery worthy of remark was a written statement dated October, and signed by J. Bols, Moravian missionary, to the effect that the bearer, who had lost his memory, quite obviously by an injury to the brain, had been brought to the mission by a half-breed from the north, who had taken him over from a mountaineer Indian from up Smoke River—and so on and so on.

The missionary's account of poor Smith corresponded with Smith's own account of himself, as told to Paul Wembly. It went on to say that the bearer was a highly educated man and doubtless an explorer or scientist of note with anxious and important friends; it commended him to the best attentions of the reader, and charged the world in general with his transportation to New York and his admittance to a good hospital.

"He surely sidestepped the hospital—or he wouldn't smell so much like a wet sheep," said the detective. He lit a cigar and turned to the medical examiner. "I'm satisfied if you are, doctor."

"Quite so," replied the other. "Doctor Vane agrees with me. He died from natural causes, in his own club. But it's an extraordinary case, from a romantic point of view."

Every one nodded. The man from headquarters glanced at Mr. Ankerly and rolled his cigar from one corner of his wide mouth to the other.

"Speaking of the romantic point of

view, Mr. Ankerly," he said in a very smooth voice. "This is outside my province, but let me advise you to consult your lawyer first thing in the morning. I'm entirely satisfied that everything here"—he gestured with a thumb toward the still figure in the deep chair —"is as it should be, mind you; but you don't want to ball things up for the want of a little law and readjustment." He glanced around the circle of attentive, puzzled faces. "You see, gentlemen, a charge of bigamy might start a whole lot of trouble. There's no saying what the newspaper boys mightn't try to make of it. The widow of Mr. Gilroy Smith there was married to Mr. Ankerly at noon yesterday—but she wasn't a widow then, you understand. Well, gentlemen, I'll be stepping along."

CHAPTER II.

THE ROMANTIC MAJOR.

WEMBLY roomed at a middle-sized, middle-priced, middling sort of hotel within four blocks of Gramercy Park and the Voyagers' Club; and there, in his bedroom, ladies and gentlemen of the press caught him at breakfast in pajamas and bath robe bright and early on the morning following his extraordinary meeting with the late Gilroy Smith.

A great many of his visitors sat on his bed.

"The facts are in the morning editions, and what we want now is the human-interest stuff," said a young lady with impressively long legs and a short face. "Are you married, Major Wobbly? And if so, how much? And what are you a major in?"

"Wembly," corrected the Canadian. "Not that it matters in the least. No, I'm not married. I was a major in a war. But what's that got to do with the story?"

"How long have you known Gilroy Smith?"

"I'd never set eyes on him before last night."

"Didn't you have an appointment with him?"

"Certainly not. He happened to wander into that room, and I was the only other person there. So he talked to me. I thought him an escaped lunatic until he produced that diary—Gaston Duvar's log."

"I know all about that Frenchman and his balloon. I read him up in the encyclopedia this morning. Old stuff. But what did he tell you about the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Gaston's daughter. The girl who gave him the diary."

"Well, just that. She gave him Duvar's diary."

"You're hopeless. Who cares about the diary of a crazy Frenchman who went ballooning for the north pole thirty years ago? How many heart throbs does that get? Be your age. What Gilroy Smith confided to you—talked himself to death about—was his love for that girl. Don't try to deny it. He told you that he meant to go back and rescue her from those Indians. He raved about her eyes, didn't he? Be a gentleman, Major Webbly, and say 'Yes.'"

Wembly looked surprised.

"As a matter of fact, I don't recall his saying a word about her eyes. If he did, I missed it. But it is perfectly true that he intended to return and get her away from the Indians."

"There!" exclaimed his interrogator. "I knew there was a heart story in it somewhere."

She scribbled like one possessed; and the others scribbled; and Wembly looked on in wonder. She turned a page and again lifted her friendly but somewhat mocking gaze to Wembly.

"She's a beauty, of course. She'd be dark, wouldn't she? French and Indian. What did he say about her looks."

"He didn't describe her," replied Wembly, good-naturedly. "I got the impression, however, that he considered her very attractive. But I was wrong when I said that he did not speak of her eyes. He said they differed from the eyes of the Indians in looking 'civilized.' Rather a vague description, it seems to me. He used one other term that you may possibly make something of. He said she was slender."

"Great!" exclaimed the girl. "Leave the rest of it, including her costume of sables and wampum, to us. You're a pukka sport, as we say at Sikandarabad. Much obliged. So long."

Left to himself, Wembly resumed his seat before his cold breakfast. He was amused and slightly bewildered. His uninvited guests had drained the coffee-pot and emptied a sizable box of cigarettes.

"Human-interest stuff," he murmured. "Heart-throb stories. So that's how they're manufactured. But surely they could work up some dashed good throbs with the business of Ankerly and the widow who wasn't quite a widow. Heart-interest stuff there, all right!"

Somebody rapped lightly on his door.

"Come in," he invited; and the young woman with the long legs came in.

"Please don't hurl your ruined breakfast at me," she begged. "I simply had to come back to tell you that I'm not absolutely dumb. We've been warned off that story of Mr. Ankerly and Mrs. Gilroy Smith. That's why we have to pick on the half-breed girl for heart interest. Have a cigarette. That swarm of locusts and wild honey left you destitute, I know. But they're decent kids, really."

Wembly took and lit the cigarette.

"Do you mind if I ask you one more question? I should hate to make a pest of myself to a—a man like you."

Wembly bowed.

"Do you know Mrs. Harvey Benn—or Mrs. Catherine Benn—wife or widow of Commander Benn, as the case may be?"

"No," he said.

"You will. And then, good night! And now do you mind if I tell you something?"

"Please do. Delighted. Anything."

"You plan to go north on the quest of the balloonist's daughter."

He stared.

"But—good Lord! I——"

She laughed musically, kindly, yet with a little note of mockery. She moved to the door. He reached the door first. He opened it for her, but with an air of indecision suggestive of reluctance. She paused on the threshold and smiled at him.

"But why do you think so?" he asked.

"Because you're so darned romantic. But I won't tell. It would make a great story—but it's safe with me."

"Why?"

"Because I like you—you're so darned simple—and polite."

And then she left him without another word or glance.

He closed the door and paced slowly around the room, muttering.

"Romantic? Who, me? Perhaps she's right. Simple? Simple! She's crazy! Lucky guess, that's all. But what about Mrs. Benn? What the devil did she mean by that—if anything?"

It had been Paul Wembly's intention at two o'clock that morning, when he flopped into bed, and at nine thirty when he scrambled out of bed and phoned for his breakfast, to check out at noon and commence his homeward journey at one thirty. Now he rang up the office and ordered cigarettes—but he didn't say a word about checking out.

"It would be only polite to wait over for poor Gilroy Smith's funeral," he told himself. "And I may as well try to live up to my reputation in that line," he added.

He lunched at the Voyagers' Club.

Two of the members, whom he had met the night before in connection with the remarkable affair of Gilroy Smith, joined him and talked of the deceased.

"It's a strange thing that he happened on you to have his last talk with in this world—very likely the only man in the club he didn't know personally," said one of them. "An extraordinary case in every way. A close call for Ankerly, that—and the lady. I'm glad Ankerly has money and pull enough to keep the papers off that aspect of the case. Not that I care a hang about G. V. Ankerly, mind you! Or the lady. I'm thinking of Gilroy and the club. We don't want Gil's good name and posthumous fame touched and cheapened."

"We've been through that diary from cover to cover," the other member informed Wembly. "It's Gaston Duvar's log, no doubt of that. We hoped to find something of Gilroy's in it, and possibly some mention of Commander Benn. If Gil could read, surely he could write. But there's nothing of his except a few scrawls which he evidently intended for a map of some sort; and his wife's name scribbled all over one page—which I'll say was a waste of both time and sentiment, all things considered."

"What's her name?" asked Wembly.

"Julia," they told him.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Canadian. "What I mean to say is, that's evidently the only thing he remembered—the only name that survived the crash. What happened is this, in my opinion: Harvey Benn was killed when the plane crashed, and buried before Smith regained consciousness. If I had identified Smith soon enough—but for a long time I believed him to be crazy—I could have reminded him of his companion. That's the way his memory was working. He recognized the front of the club the moment he saw it, you know—and John Stave—and his own name when Stave addressed him by it. He remembered all he had read about Gaston Duvar the minute he saw the name in that diary—a memory of thirty years ago. Benn's dead and buried, beyond a doubt—in my opinion. If Smith had seen him after the crash, he would have remembered him."

One of the two agreed with him and the other didn't.

"I'm with you in thinking that Gil would have remembered and mentioned the commander if he had seen him after the crash. But why take for granted that the reason he didn't see him is that Benn was dead and buried?"

"It's the simplest reason I can think of," said Wembly, good-naturedly.

The member not in agreement tapped the tablecloth with a blunt finger and said that he, for one, would not be satisfied with anything so simple; that simplicity was not the whole of life; and that the club would be doing no more than its duty if it dispatched an expedition for the purposes of confirming Gilroy Smith's statements, and ascertaining the fate of Commander Harvey Benn, and investigating the case of the lost French aëronaut's daughter.

"Is there any chance of that?" asked Wembly.

Both his companions replied that the thing was highly probable.

It was two thirty when Paul Wembly got back to his hotel. There he was handed a special-delivery letter that had arrived about an hour before. He read it at the desk:

> DEAR SIR: I am very anxious to see you in connection with the dramatic and pathetic return and death of poor Gilroy Smith. I shall be at the Brevoort from five to six this afternoon, in the room on the left of the entrance, at a table in the third window from the door—expecting you.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> CATHERINE BENN.

One of the leggy young newspaper woman's cryptic remarks flashed to his mind—"You will; and then, good

night!" He reread the note and somehow, in a vague way, got the impression that the writer felt very sure of herself, or of him.

"She seems to take it for granted that I know who she is," he reflected. "Which is quite natural, under the circumstances. I do know who she is. Wife or widow of Commander Harvey Benn. Does she think that Smith told me more than I repeated? She doesn't waste words in idle explanations. Accustomed to having her own way, evidently."

The letter did not make a hit with him. It puzzled him without exciting his sympathy. It scarcely touched his curiosity. It offended him, if anything.

But, at ten minutes past five, Paul Wembly entered the portals of the hotel.

"This is what comes of being polite," he said. "But I'll be damned if I'm simple!"

He turned to his left.

The lights, low and shaded, were on the occupied tables only. For the rest, the big room was in shadows and soft gloom. Wembly counted the long windows; and at sight of the figure at the little table in the third window from the door, pleasurable astonishment seized him and urged him forward. In his first response to that urge he bumped into a waiter—it may even have been a head waiter—and was scarcely aware of the fact.

It was not until he was within a single stride of his objective that he realized his mistake. He had never seen this person before. His expression changed from that of delighted surprise to one of bewildered disappointment. She was looking up at him with smiling inquiry. He bowed.

"Mrs. Benn?"

"You *are* Major Wembly, aren't you? Please sit down. I've just ordered a large pot of tea and toasted muffins and blackberry jelly—bramble jelly, as you call it."

"Yes—but how do you know that? We've never met before. I've a rotten memory, but——"

She lowered her glance for a second; and that slight action conveyed the impression that she had bowed in acknowledgment of his implied compliment. But he had not intended a compliment. Not exactly. Not quite. She was too dashed sure of herself and her attractions already. He almost wished that he had remained away until half past five. He was flustered, and angry with himself for being so; and he was angry with her for supposing—he suspected her of supposing it—that his agitation was a tribute to her charms. The truth is, at the first glimpse he had mistaken her for the young woman who had led the contingent of scribes against him that morning, and his agitation was due to disappointment.

"You *are* the Paul Wembly who wrote 'Migrating Herds,' aren't you?" she asked.

He admitted it.

"So now you know how I learned of your taste for bramble jelly. The description of the tea party in the preface. It's delightful. So *that* mystery is explained. But now you are wondering why I sent for you."

She was wrong—but he smiled politely. He had ceased to wonder what she wanted of him. Not that he knew. He had simply lost interest in the subject; and the matter of his wondering was that the possessor of that perfect nose, of those radiant eyes and exquisite lips, of that flawless chin and those slender hands, should inspire him with no other emotion than an impulse to crown her with the silver dish of toasted-and-buttered muffins which had just then been placed between them.

She poured the tea. She propped her slender, rounded elbows on the table.

"Will you please tell me everything poor Gilroy Smith said to you?"

He told her.

"But that's no more than the papers have," she protested.

"It's all there is," he returned.

"And not a word of Harvey Benn?"

"I'm sorry about that. Smith would certainly have mentioned his heroic companion if he had remembered him, and he would surely have remembered him if he had seen him after the—the accident. There's no doubt of that in my mind. Any one of a dozen things may have happened. Commander Benn may have been carried off by a different party of natives. The only thing I am sure of is that Smith didn't see your husband after his recovery—Smith's recovery—nor the plane, nor any part of it—or it would have come back to him. That's the way his memory was working."

The lady veiled her fine eyes with exceptional lashes and bowed her head. Wembly tried to feel sorry for her. He was puzzled by his failure to feel sorry for her, for he knew that he had a sympathetic nature and a soft heart.

"You think he is alive?" she whispered, after a minute's silence.

"I hope so," he answered. "His chances were as good as Smith's."

"I'm going up there to find out," she said. "It's that that I must talk over with you. You know that country. I need your help."

She lifted her glance then to read the effect of this announcement in his eyes—but she was not quick enough. The author of "Migrating Herds" was staring into his teacup with the fixed gaze of a fortune teller. A flicker of displeasure touched her eyes and lips.

"Who has a better right to go?" she continued. "Not the Voyagers' Club, certainly! I'm his wife—or widow."

Wembly shifted his gaze to the little dish of blackberry jelly.

"I've never been up that particular river," he said, with the tone and air of considering every word carefully before uttering it. "I have been farther north along the coast, and inland both to the north and south of it. Yes, I suppose I do know that country. In what way can I be of help to you? Do you want my advice?"

"Yes. That, at least."

"Then I advise you to keep out of it."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't like it. A hard trip, at any time of year. You couldn't stand the gaff. What do you know of that kind of work, or that kind of country?"

"Nothing, really—except what I've read in your book."

"That isn't enough," he said dryly. "Even if you had read the two books I've published since 'Migrating Herds,' which are much more to the point, it wouldn't be enough."

"But I do not intend to go alone," she corrected him gently. "I shall be the leader of the expedition in name only. I am asking *you* to be the actual leader, Major Wembly."

Paul Wembly walked, and murmured or muttered every now and then. Some of the people he passed thought him a poet or a philosopher in creative travail. He entered and crossed Washington Square.

"Why did she pick on me?" he asked himself for the fiftieth time. "She's practical, if I'm any judge of character—as practical as beautiful. Hundreds of admirers, dozens of important men eager to help her prove herself a widow—or I miss my guess. But she picked on me."

He walked aimlessly for more than an hour, taking the corners as they came. He thought hard all the while, but so confusedly that little came of it.

At last he decided to return to his hotel, or to Gramercy Park, where he could think comfortably and at the same time steady his mental activity with

food—with food and perhaps a few nips of safe and superior rum. He had brought five flasks of that rum south with him, of which two remained; and one of the two reposed even now on his hip. He halted and looked around him inquiringly. He was in a narrow street of four-story houses and area railings. Seeing a taxicab at the curb some six or seven doors away, he hastened toward it. He saw that the driver had the door open and his head and shoulders inside; and as he came abreast of the vehicle he heard high words from within. He stopped; and at the same moment the driver backed out and into him, swearing furiously.

"What's your trouble?" asked Wembly.

"It's Duff," said the driver, in a voice of utter disgust. "If it wasn't, I'd wring his neck. That's the third time—and the last!"

A man in a dark coat and light hat emerged from the cab. He held a large, silver cigarette case extended in his right hand. He rested the case, and the hand that held it, against the driver's chest, and seemed glad of the support thus afforded him. Wembly saw that he was slight and young and smiling.

"Hereyer, Tom," said Duff. "Gift. Token of frien'ship an' 'steem. No room f'argument."

"Keep yer damn cigarette case!" cried the driver. "All I want's a dollar. What the hell? I don't want yer jewelry. I want my fare. You tried to make me take a gold watch last time. What the hell?"

"Allow me," said Wembly, who not only admired the stand taken by the taximan but was interested in the appearance and condition of the gentleman in the light hat; and he handed the former a dollar.

"Wazzat?" asked the passenger, turning from the driver to Wembly. "Wash great idea? Washername? Wazzer name—'f you get wash I mean?"

"Perfectly," returned Wembly. "You feel that I've taken a liberty in paying your fare. But your name's Duff, isn't it?"

"Duff? Zas right. Duff. Scosh name."

"I knew it. And mine's Wembly."

Mr. Duff considered this statement gravely. He nodded, evidently satisfied.

"There's no harm in him, sir," said the taximan to Wembly; and he waved a hand and drove away.

Duff pointed his cigarette case at the illuminated entrance of the house before which they stood.

"Lesh dine," he said.

They were attentively received within. Their hats and coats were taken, but Duff refused to give up his walking stick. Wembly saw that his companion was well known in the place.

Food brought about a swift change for the better in Duff's condition. His tongue thinned, for one thing.

"We know each other, no doubt about that," he said, when they had been at table less than half an hour. "I didn't catch your name—in no condition for catching anything, just then—but I know your face. I've seen you very recently—to-day or yesterday. Where was that?"

"My name's Paul Wembly," returned the Canadian. "At the Voyagers' Club, very likely. I've spent a good deal of my time there during the past six or seven days."

"Wembly!" exclaimed the other. "The Voyagers'! That's it. No wonder your face is familiar! I've been admiring your physiognomy, as reproduced in the afternoon editions of the *Herald-Star, Times-Mercury* and *Daily Scream* for hours. So you're the man who listened to poor Gil Smith's last words."

"Do you mean to say that they ran my photograph?" asked Wembly.

"It's yours, no doubt of that."

"But where the devil did they get it?"

"Not from me, that's certain. But you were interviewed, I suppose."

"Yes, I was interviewed—at the club last night and in my bedroom this morning. But I didn't see any camera."

Duff smiled at that and sent for the latest papers. When they arrived, he soon found what he wanted—a bust photograph of Paul Wembly in a bath robe with a high, rolling collar. He passed the paper across the table. Wembly took it, stared, swore, then began to read:

The romantic major practically admits his intention of heading an expedition for the relief of the beautiful captive of the wilderness, of whose existence he first heard last night from Gilroy Smith. Major Wembly is at once a dreamer and a man of action, and therefore a sentimentalist. That Gilroy Smith's disclosures, his last earthly communications, should have been made to this romantic soldier-explorer writer from the north, may seem nothing more than a matter of chance to some, but will impress others as an act of fate.

That was enough for Wembly. Anger, disgust and disappointment shook him so that the folded sheets rustled between his hands. Of the three emotions, disappointment cut deepest and shook hardest. He was bitterly disappointed in that girl whose name he did not know, she who had guessed his secret and then assured him that it was safe with her. He felt as if an old friend had played him false.

"She was right when she called me simple!" he muttered.

But Duff paid no attention to his agitation. Duff, who had unfolded the very latest edition of the *Times-Mercury*, appeared to have discovered matter sufficiently significant to concentrate upon.

"You damn fool!" he exclaimed.

Wembly was startled out of his bitter reflections. Duff looked across at him with a grimace of scorn and pity.

"If it isn't too late—if she hasn't sunk her hooks too deep—listen to me," said Duff, his voice at once sneering and earnest. "Back out, man! I'm telling you because I know. I'm telling you because I like you. Chuck it! Beat it! Go home and crawl under the barn—or hang millstones round your neck and jump into the lake. Anything but this!"

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Wembly.

"How long have you known her?" returned Duff. "Or thought that you knew her," he added, with a crooked smile.

"Who?"

"Your partner in the Benn-Duvar relief expedition."

"What? The what?"

Duff sighed and shoved the *Times-Mercury* across, indicating a certain paragraph with a finger.

"That may refresh your memory," he suggested wearily:

A beautiful woman in search of lost hero husband will face perils and privations of mysterious northern wilderness. Mrs. Harvey Benn, who was known as Catherine Cavendish to followers of the silent drama previous to her marriage with Commander Harvey Benn two years ago, will lead a relief expedition to northern Labrador in search of her missing husband who, with Gilroy Smith, late well-known airman and clubman, who expired last night at the Voyagers' Club, flew the Atlantic from France to North America and crashed in the northern wilderness.

The intrepid lady will also investigate the case of the alleged daughter of the late M. Gaston Duver, a French aëronaut, who disappeared into the mysterious north thirty years ago, in an attempt to reach the north pole in a balloon, and of whom nothing has been heard since, until Gilroy Smith's dramatic reappearance last night with the lost balloonist's diary and talk of a half-breed girl whom he believed to be the French aëronaut's daughter.

Major Paul Wembly, who has sprung into sudden fame as the recipient of Gilroy Smith's last words, will act as second in command of the Benn-Duvar relief expedition. His first-hand knowledge of the hinterland of Labrador, gained as a naturalist and hunter, should

prove of value. It is generally felt that Major Wembly is not only peculiarly fitted for the post, but is deserving of the honor.

At the first reading, Wembly doubted the evidence of his eyes. He brushed a hand across his eyes and read again. He was possessed by a cold fury, an icy calm.

"Whoever wrote that is a liar, and whoever believes it is a fool," he said, raising his glare from the printed words and meeting his companion's derisive gaze. "A dirty liar! A damn fool! If you believe it—if you were twice as big and twice as good as you are, I'd slam you one that would scramble you from hell to the horse lines."

"Please tell me all about it first, for I'm a bit vague about the location of the horse lines," returned Duff.

So Wembly told him of the note from Mrs. Benn and the subsequent meeting at the hotel over tea and toasted muffins. He told it all.

"You turned her down!" exclaimed Duff incredulously.

"Ab-so-lutely. But politely, I hope."

"Good Lord! Are you a man of wood?"

"No—but she was too sure of herself—her personal attractions—for my taste. Kept my head—and my manners, I hope—and refused to consider her idea. And look at this!"

"Are you positive that you didn't weaken at the last?"

"Positive, absolutely. To be quite frank with you, I was afraid of something of the kind and so didn't take a chance. I realized that I had to sacrifice something—clinked my manners and clung to my self-respect and walked out on her. Didn't even risk remaining long enough to pay the bill—for I'm not a man of wood. And I take my work seriously."

Duff said that he had never expected to live to hear such a thing as that. He called Wembly one of the seven wonders of the ancient and modern worlds.

"You refused to go expeditioning with Catherine Benn! And then you walked out and left her to pay for the toasted muffins! You are either less or more than human. Nothing like that has ever been done before. I congratulate you from the fullness of my heart—and I know what I am talking about—for you see in me a horrible example of what Catherine can do to the average romantic male fool. But you are above the average. You are—I don't know a name for it; but take my word, you are the first man who ever left her to pay for anything."

"And it is the first time I ever left a woman to pay, to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I'm sorry it happened that way," said Wembly. "But what's her game? Why did she pick on me? She must know hundreds of more important men to make fools of."

"Publicity's her game—free advertising, with a very definite end in view—the ears and eyes and messy hearts of the tens of millions. To be 'The World's Best Beloved,' that is her ambition—and it can be attained only in her old field of endeavor, the silver screen. But the competition is keen, and she's been out of the race over two years now, and she was never among the very best.

"She wouldn't have married Benn if she'd been entirely successful—but why she wasn't, I don't know. She has the looks, no doubt of that—to put it mildly. Lack of heart, perhaps, for she has no more sap of human kindness in her than—than one of the diamonds on her fingers. But she has cleverness, of sorts. Take your case. She saw your importance to her schemes in a flash—a figure created exactly to her purpose in one day by the messy sob writers. Don't you get it?

"Look at yourself as the world sees you to-night—and weep. The he-man from the North who alone of all the

world heard the last words of Gilroy Smith—the last message of one of the only two men who have flown the Atlantic from east to west. If that were all it would be enough. But what else? You are not only a he-man, you are a clubman—a thing very dear to our citizenry—though what the devil a clubman is exactly, I, who shall soon be posted in six or seven clubs for nonpayment of dues, haven't a notion.

"But even that is not all. You are the he-man clubman who, at the mention of the existence of a beautiful daughter of a lost balloonist, laid your hand on your heart and swore to seek and find and rescue her, and restore her to civilization, though it should cost you your life."

Wembly moaned. He clutched all the newspapers and flung them to the floor.

"You are made to her purpose as if to her order," continued Duff, with a suggestion of mirth in his grin for the first time. "You and Catherine and Indians and dogs and a good camera man—Lord, the possibilities! Catherine in search of her hero-husband, and the strong, silent he-major in search of the beautiful, mysterious——"

"Shut up, damn you!" exploded Wembly. "Try some of this—try it in your coffee—thirty over proof—and talk about something else, for Heaven's sake!"

He passed the flask across the table. It was well received.

CHAPTER III.

THE DESERTED SKIPPER.

PAUL WEMBLY did not remain to take part in the imposing semiofficial funeral of the late Gilroy Smith—a ceremony which was attended by representatives of the President of the United States of America and the ambassadors of six foreign powers, by the governor of the State and the mayor of the city and seventy-six members of the Voyagers' Club in high hats.

The major headed for his northern home without further loss of time, taking Henry Melrose Duff along with him and leaving behind him, for the press, a flat denial of the statement concerning his connection with the so-called Benn-Duvar relief expedition.

Wambly was not only a bachelor, but an orphan. He was a bachelor by accident rather than intention, for he possessed a warm heart and a romantic outlook on life. One thing and another had kept him single. He had made his first extensive trip into the wilderness for the purpose of considering his chances with a certain girl, had become involved by an ancient imaginative trapper in the vain quest of a legendary white moose which had kept him absent from the object of his affections from early June until October, and had won back to civilization just too late to tell the girl that he had come to the conclusion that his chances with her were good—for she had set out on her wedding tour the day before. Being very young then, he had made a quick recovery—this with the help of his recently awakened interest in the legends and fauna of the North. In another case, the late war had played the part of the white moose. And so on.

Wembly's home was an old house in a small town. His combined housekeeper and caretaker was a man with an artificial leg who had been his platoon sergeant at St. Julian in 1915.

Wembly and Duff reached the old house at seven o'clock of a cold evening and found a hot dinner awaiting them.

"How's this, Gus?" asked the householder. "I forgot to warn you."

In answer, Gus handed him a sheaf of telegrams. He tore them open in anxious haste, and upon reading each he passed it to Duff without comment. But he kept the last one in his hand for

a full minute, regarding it with a puzzled frown. Two wires were from publishers and three from editors, all expressing flattering readiness to present the literary by-products of the Benn-Duvar relief expedition to the world. These five had been retelegraphed by the manager of the hotel, according to Wembly's instructions. But the sixth had come directly to the old house in the small town. It read as follows:

Have just seen your denial stop my mistake stop sorry.

It was unsigned.

"What have you there?" asked Duff, tossing the other messages into a chair with a contemptuous gesture.

Wembly handed it over, with the remark that he supposed it was from Mrs. Harvey Benn.

"Not it," returned Duff, after a glance at the yellow sheet. "She never admits a mistake. Guess again. It sounds feminine to me—but don't tell me if you don't want to. The less I hear about women from now on, the better I'll be pleased. But don't mind me. What's her name, and what's she sorry for?"

"I don't know her name," said Wembly. "It's a mystery to me. I know very few women in New York."

He took that telegram from Duff's hand and, ignoring Duff's skeptical smile and curious glance, folded it carefully and stowed it away in a breast pocket.

It was still Paul Wembly's intention to be the first to the relief of the late Monsieur Gaston Duvar's daughter, though the sentimental impulse to fly to her rescue was not now as keen as it had been at the moment of learning of her romantic existence and desolate situation, from the bearded lips of poor Gilroy Smith.

Something had happened to him since that night that had somewhat dulled the glamour of his mental picture of the lost aëronaut's daughter—but as to the identity of that something even he, himself, felt no more than a suspicion in his heart which his head condemned as absurd.

So he did not mention it to Henry Duff. He would very probably have sat in comfort until spring, and completed a sequence of sonnets and a book on ice-riding pinnipedia, if he had not been aware of the intentions of Mrs. Harvey Benn and the Voyagers' Club to undertake the same enterprise.

Even so, he was inclined to take his own time about setting forth, arguing that it was unlikely that the others would venture to move before March at the earliest—but Duff made light of his arguments and demanded immediate action.

"You don't know Catherine as I do—and you should be thankful for it—or you'd be on your way this minute if you want to beat her to it. She's all out to cash in on Smith's story and Benn's death; and if you reckon on her sitting back until spring, with the news value and heart interest of her stunt lessening every day, you'll find yourself out of luck. If you want to be before her, start now, if not sooner, and keep as far ahead of her as possible all the way, and sidestep her ever afterward—or you'll find yourself paying for that tea and those toasted muffins until you're beggared in pocket and reputation."

"You can't scare me with that line of melodramatic bilge," retorted Wembly—but he immediately set to work at overhauling his winter campaigning kit.

Wembly and Duff arrived at St. John's, Newfoundland, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the tenth day of December, and left the city by rail on the evening of the same day. They left the train at two o'clock of the morning of the eleventh.

In Figgy Cove they hired two strong men in whiskers and skinnywoppers,

and a sturdy craft of the variety known on those coasts by the name of "bully." In the bully they crossed many bays and arms of cold, green water and skirted many miles of ice-fringed land-wash. They told the bully's bewhiskered crew that they were missionaries; and the simple fellows replied that they had never before encountered missionaries who were so open handed with the rum —high-proof stuff, too.

Wembly had been on that coast before—though never before in midwinter —and he had a good chart and good maps; so he was able to avoid the larger settlements. He did not want to leave any trace of his passage for the information of the Benn-Duvar relief expedition or the Voyagers' Club expedition. Confound them! Let them for themselves discover the most practical methods of coasting the northern bays of Newfoundland in December!

Early in the afternoon of the fifth day of its coasting, the Wembly party was forced ashore by one of those elemental disturbances which in those parts are inadequately termed "flurries," but which are known as blizzards elsewhere. The bully groped desperately for shelter through a whirling, freezing, breath-snatching, blinding white obscurity. The winds, all thick with frozen snow, struck at it from every point of the compass simultaneously.

The crew pulled on the long oars with all they had. Duff bowed his head and shut his useless eyes, and strained air for breathing purposes through his mittened hands. His courage was not shaken—but the thought came to him that it was pleasanter to read about this sort of thing than to endure it. Wembly stood up and tried to pick a prevailing wind and come to a decision on direction, turning his face blindly this way and that—but all in vain. He stooped, took a stumbling pace forward and found Nick Waddy with his groping hands. He stooped lower and shouted in one of the hairy ears:

"How're you heading? What you steering by?"

"Swell o' de lan'-wash," shouted Waddy in answer, ejecting ice and snow from lips and mustache.

They rammed the thin, elastic, black shore ice fifteen minutes later. Nick Waddy's nose had not failed him. The heavy cutwater of the big boat splintered the edge of the ice, then slid up unto it before the efforts of the oarsmen and broke through with the weight of timber and gear.

"Hold 'er into it—an' I'll git a line ashore!" shouted Waddy.

Wembly manned Waddy's oar; and he and Stote stroked their best, thus keeping the boat's bluff bows wedged into the ice, while Waddy stumbled forward with a coiled line, made one end of the line fast to a chock and scrambled outboard. Waddy lowered himself cautiously to the bending ice. He did not let his weight settle on his feet, for he knew the wisest methods of treating all kinds and thicknesses and conditions of ice. In this case, his weight would have to be spread as widely as possible. So, to use his own words, he "slithered 'imself all aboard."

The thin, black film of tough sea ice bent but held under his stomach and chest and flattened thighs and widespread arms. Even his bearded chin was pressed against it. He wriggled. He squirmed away, shoreward into the white and whirling blindness. Inshore, the ice was thicker; and he reached the rocky land-wash in safety. There he took a turn of the line around a convenient boulder and hauled it taut and made it fast.

The others came to land across the ice one by one, following the line. By this time the ice was undulating to the run of the rising seas. Then all four manned the tow and dragged the bully clear out of the water and fetched her

skating ashore. The four huddled, crouching, under her lee. Nick Waddy said that if Trigger Cove was not within a mile of them, they had his permission to call him a liar.

He lit a lantern at the fifth attempt and headed westward along the edge of the frozen tide. Wembly and Duff and Stote followed him closely. The density of the flying drift and the violence of the wind increased; and every now and again one or another of the travelers was forced to halt and crouch so as to catch his breath and clear his eyes and nostrils of choking ice and snow. Duff had been down and up again four times when Waddy turned to the left and commenced climbing among tumbled rocks. The others climbed after him without question, groping blindly for toe hold and finger hold.

They found Skipper Tim Heeny in his little tilt under the top of the cliff. The skipper was smoking his pipe beside his little "bogie" stove, with his thoughts on the days of his youth and deep-sea voyages and foreign ports, when the door flew open and Nick Waddy staggered in with a blast of snow-choked wind behind and about him. A black crackie uncoiled behind the stove and set up a rattle of barking.

The little room was filled with the frost and flurry of the storm; snow hissed and melted on the hot stove; and the skipper could see nothing more of his unexpected visitor than the yellow blur of the lantern. The old man made a dash for the open door, to shut it against the storm; and he trod on the barking crackie, collided with the lantern bearer and barked his shins on a stool before his objective was gained. He shut the door; and the air cleared in a second. He turned to see who had honored him with a visit on such a night —and, to his astonishment, he beheld four intruders instead of one.

In his middle life, Tim Heeny had been the big man of Trigger Cove. Now he was the only man of Trigger Cove. The place had been inhabited for generations. In Tim's prime it had boasted a population of fifteen families —but now, when the skipper's whiskers were white and his joints stiffening, it was a desolation. Death had done something toward depopulating it, but the wood-pulp operations on the Exploits River had done more. Who would not exchange the perilous life and chancy rewards of a bay fisherman for safe work and steady wages ashore in a mill? The last of Skipper Heeny's neighbors had departed for Exploits in 1925; and now, in December, 1927, the skipper was beginning to feel lonely. He told his sad story to his visitors.

"I'd quit Trigger Cove meself could I find a purchaser for me goods an' gear an' fore-an'-after," he said. "An' I'd move up sout' along to 'Arbor Grace an' live soft an' sociable. This 'ere bain't no reasonable life for a sociable man."

Nick Waddy asked him why he had not freighted the fore-and-after with his goods and gear and sailed away and disposed of the entire bag of tricks in Harbor Grace long ago. It was apparent to all that this was a new idea to the old man, for his countenance was open and expressive despite its mask of whiskers—but he did not admit it. After a minute of embarrassed silence, he explained that he could not sail the *Shooting Star* single-handed, though he was still a smart man. And to Nick's retort that all the lads in Notre Dame Bay were not working in the pulp mills, he replied with an air of offended dignity that Skipper Tim Heeny was not one to ask a favor of any man.

"Let 'em come to Trigger Cove if they wants to sign on wid me," he added.

"Ye bes a proud man, skipper," said Nick.

Heeny admitted it readily and related a number of incidents illustrative of

his pride. Waddy and Stote listened with lively interest, but Wembly and Duff paid very little attention to three stories which struck them as feeble and pointless. The fourth story soon gripped their interest, however—to put it mildly.

Two days before—so the skipper said—just when he was about to sit down to his dinner, the crackie dashed out from behind the stove with all his hair on end, and laid his nose to the bottom of the door and snorted and puffed something desperate. So what could he do but open the door to look for the cause of all the excitement? And as he did so a devil of a hullabaloo smote his ears and a queer sight met his eyes.

He stood gaping in the doorway like a man with a witchy spell on him; and the crackie took just one look at what he had been in such an infernal sweat to see, and turned round and went back behind the stove with his tail tucked in.

For down there on the land-wash and the shore ice along the land-wash were sights and goings-on such as had never before been witnessed in Trigger Cove and maybe nowhere else in all the world—twelve dogs and three sledges and two human figures as hairy as the dogs, all mixed up in one grand shindy, and five other humans standing off a piece, and one of them twisting a handle on some manner of contraption up on three sticks, and yelling like damnation. It was minutes before the skipper could break the grip of the spell of astonishment that was on him, but when he did he stepped back into the house and loaded his old swilin' gun. Then he stepped out and down toward the infernal ructions with the gun in his two hands, and he let a few yells out of him—for his temper was flaring by then at seeing all those good dogs getting ripped and chewed.

Most of the strangers looked up and pointed at him, and the fellow with the queer machine swung the machine fair on him. But they couldn't daunt him. His temper was up on end. He waded in among the fighting dogs; and what with batting them about with the butt of his gun and pulling them apart and heaving them abroad with his two hands, it wasn't long before they knew who was skipper of Trigger Cove.

Then he headed for the queer contraption up on three sticks, but before he could get to it four of the strangers were hanging to him like weed to a rock—and then he noticed that two of them were females.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Duff. "*And* a camera!" He gave Wembly a desperate look. "Didn't I tell you to get going?"

"There're other women in the world, and other cameras," returned Wembly. "And he says *two* women. Don't be a fool, Henry!"

"Certainly there were two women," retorted Duff. "You don't know your Catherine as I do." He grabbed the hermit of Trigger Cove by the shoulders. His face had lost most of its new color and his voice shook. "Tell me this, before you go on with your story. About those two females? Dressed the same, weren't they? The same size, weren't they? Same height and shape and so on?"

"Aye, like two pa'tridge berries, or two tots o' rum," replied the old man, nodding his white head. "Ye couldn't pick one from tother widout ye laid 'em gunnel to gunnel."

"And one of them was in among the fighting dogs, wasn't she?"

Again the old man nodded.

"What are you driving at?" asked Wembly of Duff.

Duff smiled sardonically and requested the skipper to get to the end of his story. Here is the gist of the remainder of the old man's yarn: Four of the dogs were in bad shape after that battle—lame and unfit for work; and the three teamsters, who were from

White Hare Bay, said they didn't hire out to have their dogs chewed up. One of the females—*not* the one who had been in the dog fight—soon fixed it with the lads from White Hare Bay.

Then, after she had talked a few minutes with the others, she pointed to the little fore-and-after, which was frozen into the shore ice, and asked the skipper who owned it. He told her. She asked him what he was doing with it; and upon hearing that the *Shooting Star* was idle for want of hands, she told the skipper that it was a lucky day for him that she had happened along. She was going to save him from starvation and set him right up on his feet again by taking him and his little schooner north onto the Labrador with her; and she told him to step lively and show them the way aboard—humans and dogs and sledges and goods and gear.

But the old man's queer pride was already ruffled; and before he could find words for the expression of his displeasure at her high-handed attitude, she added that he had better move fast, as she wasn't accustomed to being kept waiting and knew that she could charter a bigger and better schooner than his farther along at a place called Black Pot Harbor.

That was too much and then some more for the proud skipper of Trigger Cove. After that, he wouldn't have so much as turned his hand over once for that female for the price of a new fore-and-after; and so they went on their way with fleas in their ears and the crippled dogs riding the toboggans.

"What the hell was they wantin' on the Larbordor this time o' year?" asked Nick Waddy.

The skipper did not know and could not guess.

"It's the Benn-Duvar relief expedition, with its beautiful leader, its second in command, its camera man, and its fair unknown to double for Catherine in dangerous scenes, all complete," said Duff.

"Aye, Benn-Duvar was the name she told me," said the old man.

CHAPTER IV.

SEEN THROUGH FIELD GLASSES.

PAUL WEMBLY told Skipper Tim Heeny of Trigger Cove the whole story; and Tim tried to look as if he grasped it in its entirety, but succeeded only in looking flattered and bewildered.

"And now it's up to you, skipper," continued Wembly. "If I don't get down north along to Smoke River ahead of that outfit, I'll be discredited and scuppered; and that's the way I am this very minute—a poor, ruined man sitting here beside your warm stove—unless you take pity on me and my friend. There's only one man in the world can save our faces, Skipper Heeny—and that's yourself. You've got the knowledge of seamanship and the grand fore-and-after, and all I've got's the need of them."

"I got me pride," returned the other. "I knows the Larbordor like the palm o' me hand, an' I knows a civil man when I sees one. I'll sail ye out o' the bay an' acrost the strait an' down along nort' as far as any livin' man could sail ye. I'll be proud to save ye from ruination, sir."

The blizzard blew itself out during the night. In the morning the bully was launched and fetched around into Trigger Cove by Waddy and Stote. Then all hands set to work at preparing the little fore-and-after for sea. That was no light job, though her hull and spars were sound. Deck and spars and rigging and running gear had to be cleared of snow and ice. Gear and rigging had to be spliced in a dozen places. There was mending of sails to do and even some sail making. That was a busy day; and then they patched and spliced until far into the night.

Sundown of the next day found them ready, with all stores, including the skipper's woodpile, snugly stowed. Bright and early on the following morning they chopped the *Shooting Star* loose from the grip of the thin sea ice, spread patched sails to an offshore breeze and slipped out of Trigger Cove with the bully towing astern. They rounded into the big bay and headed due north.

The breeze held. The patches on the sails, even those of Henry Melrose Duff's stitching, held tight. Black Pot Harbor was passed early in the afternoon—gray drying stages and gray tilts against a dark cliff and above a round haven three miles to windward. The skipper pointed it out to Wembly and Duff.

"I hope Catherine made it before the blizzard," said Duff. "I don't wish her any real harm—well, nothing as serious as being frozen to death, anyway. But she made it, don't worry. She's that kind. I only hope that she's there—and damn well stuck there till spring!"

"She's there," said Wembly, who was examining the little harbor through field glasses. "Making a picture, at that. The camera man and the whole outfit—dozens of people—all the inhabitants, evidently—down on the ice doing a mob scene. Good Lord! They're all trying to board a fore-and-after that's frozen in—all of them except those who're manning the craft and fending them off with ears and things. And the camera working like a coffee mill! So that's her idea of a relief expedition! Thank Heaven I left her to pay for the muffins!"

Duff snatched the glasses from his friend and clapped them to his own eyes. He gazed for half a minute, then laughed sardonically.

"She knows what she wants, and that's a picture—and she'll get it," he said. "That's the way to succeed at her game, though not the best way of hunting for a lost husband and rescuing a lost Frenchman's daughter. We must go see that picture some night. Don't forget."

With favorable winds and clear weather, Skipper Tim Heeny's fore-and-after sailed her course admirably until Cape Bauld was passed with a safe offing, and the strait was crossed and better than three hundred miles of the desolate, ice-fringed coast of Labrador lay astern.

Hamilton Inlet was reached without accident; and then the skipper detected signs of an imminent change of weather and beat up for the shelter of that great arm of the sea. He made the entrance just in the nick of time. The wind went around and sprang to a gale, flung the *Shooting Star* from her course, drove her into thin ice to leeward for half her length and all but laid her on her beam.

The helmsman, Nick Waddy, lost his hold on the wheel and took a slide. The skipper went into the scuppers. In the cabin the little round stove broke loose and rolled, disgorging glowing embers and blazing brands of birch and many sparks. The jibs tore clear and flew shoreward like gigantic bats, the foresail exploded at every patch and the mainsail split from gaff to boom. And then the fore-and-after lurched back to a level keel and lay rocking gently in her cradle of new ice; and the skipper and Waddy and Stote dived below and helped Wembly and Duff overpower the stove and extinguish the fire.

Upon learning that dogs and sledges and teamsters were to be had for the hiring right there at the mouth of Hamilton Inlet, Wembly decided to go the rest of the way to and up Smoke River afoot.

So the schooner was left in that safe birth, anchored fore and aft, with the skipper and Ben Stote to guard her and to make and bend new sails. There she

could weather any blow; and even if she had to await Wembly's return until March, when the great ice floes from Greenland would strike and grind along all that coast, not enough of that vast pressure to damage her could reach her there. The skipper said so, and he was entirely familiar with that coast and the ways of the southward-drifting arctic floes.

But Wembly expected to be back at Hamilton Inlet by the first of March, at the latest. If he wasn't—but the skipper had full instructions what to do in that case, all written out in ink. The skipper could read.

Major Wembly resumed his advance with Mr. Duff, Nick Waddy, Peter Sunday, John Christmas and eight dogs. Peter and John were Eskimos by their own telling—and what else? Micmac, more than likely; and the length of Peter's legs suggested a dash of mountaineer-Indian blood to Wembly, who knew a good deal of such things. The dogs, too, suggested at least three strains of blood. They were as high and long and heavy as timber wolves. Their shifting eyes were hostile and calculating.

They traveled the ice and made good time. In the course of the second day, Wembly had to check Peter Sunday twice for lashing his dogs with unnecessary violence.

On the morning of the third day, with everything sliding along prosperously, Sunday laid into his team again without rime or reason. Wembly called a halt of the whole party and grabbed the butt of Sunday's whip. Sunday tried to retain his hold on the whip, but was not good enough.

"I won't stand for that," said Wembly. "Don't think that I want you to kiss and cuddle the brutes—I've been on this coast before—but I won't have you or anybody weakening them, and slowing us up, for no more reason than your dirty temper. Get that straight! Who owns this team, anyway? If you do, you're a fool as well as a beast."

"Belong me," said John Christmas, pointing first at the team under discussion, then at the other.

"Then why do you let this fellow knock them about when there's no need for it?" asked Wembly.

Christmas, his flat face expressionless, made a helpless gesture with one mittened hand. An enigmatic smile touched Sunday's wide lips for a second.

"If I have to speak to you again for slashing those dogs without reason, it will be the last time," warned Wembly, staring into the round and insolent eyes of Peter Sunday until they blinked and shifted.

The expedition strung out and moved on again. Nick Waddy led the way by right of his knowledge of ice. John's team went next, with John sometimes in rear of the sledge and sometimes up beside the dogs; then Peter Sunday and the second team. Wembly and Duff went last.

"You helped yourself to trouble when you picked him," said Duff. "Didn't you see his face before you hired him?"

"The devil take his face!" returned Wembly. "But I had no choice. There weren't any other dogs within twenty miles, so John told me—and we're in a hurry. It was Christmas and Sunday or no dogs. I don't see anything the matter with Johnny Christmas—except that Sunday seems to have something on him."

"And what if he calls your bluff?"

"Bluff, Henry? Who's bluffing?"

"If he tears into his dogs again, and you fire him, according to your threat—what about it?"

"Well, what? Nothing. If Nick can't handle the second team, I can. I've handled as bad, if not worse. I'm not worrying about Peter Sunday—but I confess that I'm uneasy about the activities of Mrs. Benn."

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVER OF MYSTERY.

THE Moravian mission was reached by the Wembly expedition without any further trouble from Peter Sunday. There Wembly met the Reverend Jan Bols, the missionary and physician who had succored poor Gilroy Smith when that unfortunate, memoryless aviator emerged from the Smoke River country. The Reverend Jan had doctored and nursed Smith, clothed him and given him money, procured a passage to Battle Harbor for him and furnished him with a letter of commendation which had enabled him to reach New York and the Voyagers' Club.

No sooner had Wembly mentioned his name than the doctor spoke of Gilroy Smith; for the full story of Smith's amazing disclosures and pitiful death were known to that good man.

"But I didn't expect to see you before spring," he informed Wembly. He chuckled at Wembly's and Duff's expressions of astonishment. "I'm not cut off entirely from the great world," he explained. "I know you to be the romantic major and the only living person who heard that poor gentleman's story from his own lips. That much, and more, was rebroadcast from St. John's. I have an excellent radio here, but no broadcasting apparatus. To tell you the truth, I expected you to arrive in company with that dauntless lady, Mrs. Harvey Benn."

Wembly and Duff exchanged significant glances.

"Then you did not get the whole story," said Duff. "There was nothing to that—except in the lady's eye. Stout old Paul Wembly wasn't having any of it. You would appreciate that more if you knew the lady, sir. This living up here, wherever you call it, has its advantages; and you'll understand my meaning when you meet the leader of that relief expedition. That may be any day now. So don't say I didn't warn you."

The missionary was puzzled and not a little embarrassed by the matter and manner of Duff's remarks. He was a simple soul, and his life was one of many privations, in spite of the radio.

"But I am an admirer of romance," he hastened to say. "I am, in fact, most romantically inclined myself. The thought of that beautiful young lady—for as such she was broadcast—suffering fatigue and hardship in the quest of her heroic husband, moved me deeply; as does the thought of Major Wembly in the quest of the young woman of poor Mr. Gilroy Smith's dying story.

"Yes, I am deeply moved—in spite of the fact that, romantically constituted as I am, I cannot bring myself to believe that unfortunate gentleman's story. I think of the wound on his head, and of the extraordinary expression of his eyes, and I consider the natives of this wilderness as I know them by long experience, and my faith in his story of that beautiful captive is shaken. Shaken. Nay, shattered."

"But he brought Gaston Duvar's diary out with him," protested Wembly. "The Voyagers' Club has it now—the diary of the French aëronaut who tried to reach the north pole in a balloon thirty years ago. There's no denying that. Why doubt his story of the existence of the Frenchman's daughter? Not that I have any sentimental interest in her, mind you! What the papers said in that connection is all bilge—the piffle of the mind of a piffling, irresponsible girl. I'm a naturalist, a scientist. But didn't Smith show you the diary, sir?"

"I saw it," admitted the missionary. "He was in a high fever at the time. I thought it might be his own diary. I could make nothing of it, as I have absolutely no knowledge of the French language, written or spoken."

"But didn't he speak of Duvar's daughter to you?"

"He named one Julia, muttering the word occasionally in the delirium of fever. That was all, I'm sure. But while in my care he was not even as nearly normal as when he talked to you, for he was suffering from sickness and exhaustion, as well as from the injury to his head."

"And have you never heard a rumor of a half-breed girl away up that river?" asked Duff.

The missionary considered that, shook his head, then appeared to reconsider it.

"Not of a half-breed girl," he said. "But that is a river of rumors and mystery. There's an old story—it was old when I first came to this post seventeen years ago—but it will keep very well until after dinner, gentlemen, with your permission, when we can talk and listen at our ease."

The Reverend Jan was a hospitable man. His assistants, a young medico named Olsen and an elderly ex-mariner named Andersen, were hospitable men. Captain Andersen was something of a cook; and among the medical stores were liberal supplies of Hudson Bay rum, schnapps and ancient brandy. That dinner was a success.

There were six at table—the three white men of the expedition and the three missionaries; and a very fat Eskimo with a game leg, an ex-patient and a convert to Christianity, waited, making up with enthusiasm what he lacked in dexterity. And there was good talk, and plenty of it, and a long sea ditty by Captain Andersen, ably supported by the waiter.

When the platter which had held the plum pudding, or figgy duff, had been removed and all the glasses had been refilled, the Reverend Jan told the promised story.

It was an old story, but short for its age. Doctor Bols had first heard it seventeen years ago, from the missionary then in charge. Seventeen or eighteen years before that a stranger had arrived at the mission, told an amazing tale and then lapsed into unconsciousness and died. He had not given his name, but he was a white man and spoke in English. He was from one of the Hudson Bay posts far to the westward. Perhaps he had named the post—but if so, the doctor either had not been told it or had forgotten it long ago. The name of the post doesn't matter now, it happened so long ago.

The man was a chief trader, probably—something important, anyhow—one moving with authority from factory to factory. That is what the old missionary had gathered from his talk and transmitted to young Jan Bols seventeen or eighteen years later. He had visited that post, from stations to the south or west no doubt, in the performance of his duty; and there he had found a white woman. A white woman, mark you, in the Hudson Bay country thirty-five years ago!

"No trick to that, as I've told you fifty times already, doctor," interrupted Captain Andersen, the old sea dog. "She come through Hudson Strait in a supply ship. What was to hinder her, at the right time o' year, and with a husband waitin' for her?"

The captain chuckled a deep-sea chuckle and mixed himself another glass of schnapps and sugar and hot water.

The chief missionary went on with the story in his own way.

However she had come there, there she was, wife to the factor of that post. Young and attractive and buried alive in that desolation with a husband she had grown to fear and hate. The other man, chief trader or whatever he was, had pitied her, then had fallen in love with her. He had, evidently, won her love in return. He had advised the husband to send her home next summer; and the husband, drunk as usual, had

cursed her and struck her. The visitor had flung the husband away from her; and, in the fight that followed, the husband had suffered a broken neck.

Then the man and woman had fled eastward into the wilderness. They had ascended the river at the mouth of which the post was situated—Whale River, probably. In deadly fear of pursuit, they kept to the cover of the tangled bush.

After weeks of struggle they reached the height of land, a desolation of rock and barren and bog, which they crossed in search of a river to furnish them a path to the eastward and the coast of Labrador. Once on the coast, all would be well with them. The man had been in the service of the H. B. C. ever since his boyhood and had done well for it and by it. He had invested his earnings in his old home, England or Scotland.

On the coast they would find some means of passage to one of the northern ports of Newfoundland, and from there passage to Liverpool or London well in advance of any news or rumor of the tragedy in the wilderness. He would lift his money and they would disappear.

They won across the height of land and found the headwaters of a promising river. They had not followed the course of the stream many miles when they were met by a party of hunters of a tribe unknown to the man. The Indians appeared to be friendly.

But when a little village beside a lake was reached, the man was attacked treacherously, wounded, disarmed, overpowered and bound. He was blindfolded and, in a canoe of some sort, was taken on a long journey down water sometimes swift to madness. Sometimes the canoe slid quietly on smooth water. The man's wounds were dressed. He was fed occasionally. He raved and cursed. Once, still bound and blindfolded, he threw himself out of the canoe, only to be dragged ashore and flung back into the canoe. On other occasions he fought his unseen captors like a madman. His wounds reopened.

He was at the mouth of the river when they unbound his eyes and cut his bonds and left him. He was crawling on his hands and knees when first seen by the people of the mission. They dressed his wounds and gave him brandy; and he told his terrible story and then died.

"And what then?" asked Wembly, staring gravely at the Reverend Jan. "Was it true? Was the woman found and rescued?"

The missionary regretted to have to say that the story had never been proved or disproved. The excellent man from whom he had first heard it seventeen years ago had immediately organized a strong party of Christian Eskimos and Indians and led the way up that river many weary days, innumerable weary miles. But he had neither seen nor heard anything of a white woman, nor anything of a village beside a lake. He had not traveled the full length of the river, 'twas true. His companions, those converted Eskimos and Indians, had begun to drag a leg and turn back before a third of the journey was done. They had met a family of salmon fishers who had told them tales of devils above the falls—of one as tall as a tree, with three eyes in its head, and of a monster of whom no human had ever seen more than the footprints and lived to tell of it—but those footprints were longer and wider than the door of a white man's house and always wet with blood. The good missionary had done his best, refusing to turn back until the very last of his company was on the verge of deserting him.

"Others have gone up Smoke River on that quest, both before and since my time," continued the doctor. "There was an English sportsman, for one, who was accompanied by two white

guides and two Micmacs from Newfoundland. They reached the height of land—and saw nothing to the purpose, either ascending or descending—not even a village beside a lake. But the Englishman shot a very large bear and was content. I myself have made three attempts to explore the upper reaches of that river, but have not once got beyond the great falls. My followers always refused to follow at that point. I must confess that I don't like that river."

"I don't believe in devils," announced Captain Andersen. "But I'll tell you what I do believe in. Mermaids. Did I ever see a mermaid?" He made a long arm and tapped the Reverend Jan Bols on the chest. "Did I? Lord bless you, doctor, I kissed two of 'em once—or maybe they kissed me."

Then the old sea dog sat back in his chair and closed his eyes and slept.

That hospitable mission furnished its guests with beds—narrow beds, but soft and well supplied with blankets. The guests were ripe for sleep by the time those beds were reached. Wembly's sleep was filled with confused dreams, of which a fragment of one remained with him for long enough after waking to record itself on his memory.

He stood at the edge of a frozen lake, in a weird twilight, confronted by a man in fur and leather who talked and gesticulated. The man was in a state of desperate excitement. He told strange and terrible things. He had been a prisoner here for six years, but well housed and fed even when the savages themselves were hungry. They believed him to be a god of some sort. They had given him a white woman to wed—six years ago. He had won her love, after years of devotion; and both had been treated as sacred beings—until the arrival of their child. They had lost their sacred character, and their infant had gained it. Their infant daughter was the goddess of these terrible people. Now that the child had no further need of its mother they, the mother and father, were to be sacrificed—a burned offering—to the new divinity.

Wembly awoke, trembling from the horror of that dream.

"Awake?" asked Duff. "It must be time to turn out and get on with our high and serious purpose. These missionaries are a distraction. How did you sleep?"

"I had rotten dreams," replied Wembly. "One in particular. Monstrous! I can scarcely believe my imagination to be capable of such a horror."

"A horror, was it? That was the brandy. I stuck to rum punch."

Wembly lit the candle on the stool between the beds and looked at his watch. It read seven thirty. He flung off his blankets and commenced dressing hurriedly. The air and the uncarpeted floor were distressingly cold; but Wembly's shivers were not due entirely to the low temperature of the room. He was still numb with the chill of that dream, still enveloped in that weird twilight over ice and rock and black bush. He could still see the despairing eyes and pitiful gesticulations of the man in fur and leather; and those terrible words, and their incredible meaning, still rang in his ears and pinched his heart.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost," said Duff, in a changed voice. "Do you feel ill, Paul? Turn in again. I'll fetch one of those doctors."

"A ghost!" exclaimed Wembly, pausing sharply in his hurried movements and staring strangely at his friend. "Perhaps I did see a ghost. What the devil's a ghost, anyway? What I did see——"

Sudden interruption came in the form of Nick Waddy bearing a lighted lantern and registering a high degree of excitement. He announced, with force

and brevity, that Peter Sunday was gone and with him the dogs and loaded sledge in his care.

"Which way?"

"Down nort' along."

"With half our grub!" exclaimed Duff.

"Damn the grub! My Lewis gun's on that sledge!" cried Wembly.

Wembly and Waddy were on their way fifteen minutes later, each with snowshoes and a light pack on his back and a rifle in his hands. The Newfoundlander had breakfasted before discovering Sunday's flight. The major did not wait for breakfast or farewells. He simply told Duff to follow with John Christmas and the rest of the outfit at his earliest convenience, and beat it.

Both Wembly and Waddy were long and strong of leg and wind; and no time was lost in searching for the trail, for it lay plain as print on the thin crust of snow which covered the shore ice. The way was level, the footing was good. Wembly led off at an easy jog, slowed to a fast walk, jogged again, walked again. Nick Waddy kept right at the elbow. They had no breath to spare for conversation, but occasional remarks were exchanged.

"What's his idea, heading north?"

"It be a mystery to me, sir."

And later: "He's got the legs of us on the ice—but we'd gain on him in deep snow—or rough country."

"Aye, 'and over 'and, sir."

And yet later: "He can't shake us, that's a cinch."

"Not widout he t'rows off the load."

"That would suit me."

They halted shortly before noon for a cold snack and a half-hour rest. They reached the wide mouth of the frozen river within an hour of resuming the pursuit; and, to their astonishment, they saw that the tracks of the Eskimo and the sledge turned sharp to the left and ran inland along the southern bank of the river. The track was plain on the skin of crusty snow which covered the river ice.

"This is our way—up Smoke River!" exclaimed Wembly. "What d'ye make of it, Nick? What's his game? Is he crazy? He often acted like it. Perhaps he doesn't mean to steal the sledge and stores, after all. It may be he's just in a hurry to solve the mysteries of the river—in too much of a hurry to wait for the rest of us."

Waddy replied that whatever Sunday's game might be, there was some devilment at the bottom of it.

The snow lay deeper over the ice as the river narrowed. The pursuers had not gone more than three miles from salt water before they were sinking halfway to the knees on the level and to above the knees in the drifts; and such crust as there was in that snow was so thin as to let them through at every step. The depth of the trail told them that the loaded sledge was making heavy going of it. They halted only long enough to transfer their snowshoes from their backs to their feet. Wembly's webs were of eastern Canadian manufacture and pattern, long and wide and requiring plenty of foot room for the best results, but Waddy's were of Newfoundland origin and the style known locally as "pot lids" because of their shape. Wembly's were the better shoes for the river.

Half an hour later, Wembly halted again and pointed to the drift beside the trail. Waddy came up alongside at his best pace, stepping high and flappingly on his round webs.

"He's unloading," said Wembly.

They uncovered two boxes of canned stuff in the drift—apple and several kinds of jam. After stacking the boxes fair in the trail, they went on.

"If he'd jettison the brown duffel bag he could go straight to hell with the rest of it, for all of me," said Wembly.

A Lewis gun and six drums of am-

munition were in that bag, well stowed in extra clothing and blankets, for Wembly had set out with the intention of putting the fear of an old soldier who knew his stuff into the people of Smoke River, if driven to it; and now, since hearing the missionary's story of the fugitive from the west, he felt that he might let off a few drums at the village beside the lake without much driving. He hoped that Peter Sunday was ignorant of the importance of that duffel bag to his scheme of operation.

CHAPTER VI.

A HUMAN BEAST AT BAY!

WEMBLY and Nick Waddy made camp at sundown. They moved aside from the track of the sledge to the slope of the bank and there dug themselves into the deep snow and tangled brush, using their webs as shovels. They found enough dead, dry brush near at hand for a fire sufficient for the boiling of the kettle and the frying of bacon.

They were in their sleeping bags by seven o'clock; and they were out of them again seven hours later; and they were on their way again long before the first hint of dawn. The cold was intense but the air was perfectly still. The frosty stars furnished light enough to follow the track by.

They had not been afoot much more than an hour when they found a large sack of hard bread beside the trail. Wembly searched around in the deep snow in the hope of finding the duffel bag as well, but failed to do so. He began to fear that the Eskimo knew the character and value of the contents of the duffel bag. He discussed this point with Waddy as they hurried onward. Waddy derided the idea that Peter Sunday knew anything of Lewis guns.

Waddy dealt with the matter logically. He named the various articles that had comprised the original load of the stolen sledge. Two cases of canned fruit, a bag of hard bread, two small bags of flour, a bag of mixed groceries, the duffel bag, two stone jugs of rum and a supply of frozen capelin and other fish for the dogs.

He, Nick, had helped to load that sledge alongside the fore-and-after in Hamilton Inlet. He remembered that the canned goods had been placed right up at front of the load, on the nose of the sledge—a bad position for such heavy articles. He had thought so at the time, but had let it pass, supposing that the Eskimos knew more about loading sledges than he did. But what more natural than that the canned goods should be the first to be jettisoned when deep snow demanded a lightening of the load? And the big bag of hard bread, weighing well over one hundred pounds, had lain fair on top of the load; so, of course, it had been the next thing to go.

"And if he throws off some more, what next?" asked Wembly.

"'Twill be yer duffel bag, divil a doubt o' it," answered Waddy, without hesitation. "For it lays atop the bags o' flour, dat be why. And if she bain't light enough for his fancy then, the flour will be hove off, an' the tay an' sugar an' prunes an' bakin' powder nex'. But even if he was to desart the sledge itself, ye'll nary see yer rum ag'in, sir. Divil a fear of it! Be he mad or sane, ye'll nary see naught o' dat rum ag'in save maybe the empty jugs."

"I hope you're right," returned Wembly. "But what's his game? Where does he think he's going? And why? Perhaps he knows this river better than we do—or perhaps he's been sucking at one of the jugs already and only thinks he does. I hope so. Hope he's either drunk or crazy—not wishing him any harm, of course. But he hasn't been traveling like a drunken man. The track and the signs appear purposeful to me."

Soon after that, they came to where Sunday had rested and fed his dogs. Here were the holes in the snow where the dogs had slept after their feed of frozen fish. But no sign of fire was to be seen.

"No hot tea," commented Wembly, with a note of satisfaction. "That should mean a few gulps of rum—a few, at least—to wash down the cold victuals. It looks as if he couldn't have had more than a two-hour start on us, after all—two or three. And we must have been gaining on him ever since getting into the deep snow. I bet ten dollars we'll sight him in the next twenty miles—if he's drinking rum in place of tea."

Waddy agreed. The pursuit was resumed at a smart pace, in high hopes. Dawn broke clear. The sun came up small and colorless, bright but without warmth, and glistened on a desolate landscape of lifeless black and white. There was no smoke of human habitation against the frozen hills or the cold horizon; there was no bird in the pale sky, nor any sign or sound of beast or bird on the white waste of the river. Save for the track which they followed, Wembly and the man from Figgy Cove might have thought themselves the only creatures of warm blood in a lifeless world.

"He be loopin' 'is feet," remarked Waddy. "He be t'rowin' a few fancy curves into 'is course."

Sure enough, the trail ahead showed frequent and unnecessary curves and kinks.

"Here be a bag o' flour," remarked the observant Waddy.

There was a corner of it protruding from the snow close to an edge of the narrow trail. And a few hundred yards beyond that they came to a more significant thing than the jettisoned flour. A circular patch of trampled snow showed that the sledge had been turned on its side and dragged this way and that, and that the dogs had jumped and clawed in every direction, and that Peter Sunday had done some lively stepping on his webs of Hamilton Inlet pattern. Drops of blood and tufts of hair on that trampled snow proved that Sunday had been plying his whip with even more than his customary brutal severity.

"He's just about finished, damn him!" exclaimed Wembly. "Drunk as a fool, or raving mad, to be laying into his dogs like that if he's trying to keep ahead of us. It won't be long now. We'll sight him round the next bend, or the next."

But before they caught sight of Peter Sunday himself they came upon another piece of his brutal, mad handiwork. This was a crawling, wounded dog. The Eskimo's lash had actually cut the poor beast in a dozen places. Wembly cursed savagely and was about to put it out of its agony with a bullet through the brain, when Waddy pushed him aside and performed the merciful act with one blow of his belt ax. Then, stepping around the pitiful carcass, they broke into a run.

They rounded a bend and beheld their quarry out on the white expanse and not more than a mile away. He was in front of the dogs, but the track he was making for them was so crooked that even strong and willing dogs would have had difficulty in following it. Wembly drew slightly ahead of his companion, for his long snowshoes were better for open running than the round pot lids, and his eagerness to come up with the Eskimo was perhaps a little hotter than Waddy's. He was less than half a mile of the sledge, and Waddy was not more than thirty yards astern and still flapping along, when Peter Sunday turned and saw them. Wembly slowed to a walk at that, brushed a hand across his eyes and opened and closed the well-oiled bolt of his rifle.

Peter Sunday stood like a man of

wood for half a minute, with the short-stocked, long-lashed whip held high and motionless. Then he lowered arm and whip. The dogs had halted and lain down at the moment of his turning. He ran back to the tail of the sledge and yanked it broadside to his pursuers and crouched behind it.

White smoke belched from the sledge; and Wembly and Waddy flopped flat in the snow before the report of that discharge reached their ears. Nothing worse than the sound came anywhere near them, though that was terrifying enough.

"That's something you forgot about," said Wembly dryly.

Waddy admitted a lapse of memory. That sealing gun of Peter Sunday's had gone clean out of his mind. But it was an ancient piece, slow in the loading and short in the shooting—and Sunday was half blinded with rum—so why worry?

"We'll work around the sides," said Wembly. "Don't damage him or the dogs—but don't let him get away with that duffel bag. If he takes to the woods empty handed—with nothing but his own gun—let him go, and we'll pick him up later."

They scrambled to their feet and separated, running hard. Wembly went on a left incline toward the nearer shore and Waddy on a right incline toward the middle of the river. Each kept an eye on the sledge as he ran. They saw an upraised arm in motion and knew that the Eskimo was using the ramrod at top speed. At the second belch of smoke, they flopped again. Wembly heard a whisper in the air. He was up again in a moment and running harder than ever.

It was then that Peter Sunday's nerve and luck both failed him. He decided to run for cover without waiting to reload the old sealing gun—to leave sledge and dogs and the unconsumed rum, but to carry off the bag containing the Lewis gun and the six drums of ammunition.

Though he knew nothing of machine guns, light or heavy, he had guessed the nature and something of the possibilities of the Lewis gun and the circular containers of cartridges. He had even made several unsuccessful attempts to solve the mysteries of their mechanism. He had recognized the weapon as an article of power and destruction.

Now, unnerved by the sudden appearance and swift advance of the white men—the rum had fooled him into an entirely false estimate of the speed of his flight—he made a wild grab at the duffel bag. He fumbled it; and the dogs chose that moment in which to spring aside and yank the sledge completely around in its tracks and start for home.

He scrambled to his unsteady feet and gaped blankly after the departing sledge. There he stood with the empty sealing gun in his hands—with that and nothing else—bereft of sledge and dogs, of food and the precious rum and the yet more precious duffel bag—defenseless and offenseless and wide open to the world and his enemies.

He couldn't move. He couldn't think. He saw his pursuers change their courses and close in on the dogs. He saw the dogs slow to a trot, to a walk, to a halt. He saw the white men at the sledge, one of them examining the duffel bag, the other breaking out frozen fish and feeding the dogs. He felt very sorry for himself. This was nothing like the great thing he had imagined so grandly and so craftily planned.

His mind, such as it was, began to function again—but sluggishly. He considered his position dully. His pockets contained a pipe, a clasp knife, a little box of matches and half a plug of tobacco. In his hand he held an empty gun. On the snow at his feet lay a whip. Even his powder horn and

bullet pouch had departed from him on the sledge. A helpless position. He would have to change his plans. He sat down in the snow and filled and lit his pipe.

Major Wembly came up and halted beside Peter Sunday and stared down at him; and Sunday continued to draw on his short pipe and gaze downward at the trampled snow.

"You're a fool," said Wembly.

Sunday had nothing to say to that. He was in no position to argue. He felt no impulse toward argument. The fumes of his potations were passing from his brain and he was trying to think.

"Or worse," added Wembly. "What was your game?"

"Drunk," replied the Eskimo, without an upward glance or the slightest change of position. "Damn drunk."

"Not when you started, when you left the mission," returned Wembly. "You held too straight a course. Crazy, perhaps, but certainly not drunk. Crazy—or why did you head north? And why did you run this way, up this river? Are you an idiot?"

"Drunk."

"To the devil with that! I know when you started in on the rum. That wasn't long before you began to travel crooked and beat up your dogs. You must have been mad with the rum when you cut up that dog—but you're a dirty beast, drunk or sober, and for two pins I'd lay into you with that same whip, you coward! Lord! it would do me good to hear you yell and see you bleed. You're bad, whatever else. Crazy or sane, drunk or sober, you're bad!"

Sunday continued to sit motionless, and silent save for that one reiterated word. He was thinking hard. Wembly stooped and gripped him by a shoulder.

"Snap out of it! What was your game? Why did you stick to that duffel bag? Why did you head north instead of south, and up this river? What use is this river to you? Get onto your feet, confound you! Tell me the truth."

Sunday arose with difficulty and propped himself upright with the long gun. He glanced once at Wembly, but only for a fraction of a second.

"Out with it!" exclaimed Wembly. "What d'ye know about this river? Where were you heading for? Come across—or you'll wish you had never left home!"

He stooped quickly and picked up the whip. He stepped back a few paces and swung the long lash and snapped it in the air. But Peter Sunday did not speak. Neither did he flinch. He leaned heavily on the old gun and gazed fixedly at nothing. He was thinking hard. His abstraction was disarming. Wembly did not strike him, but swore at him warmly and ordered him back to the sledge. He obeyed in silence.

Wembly decided to make camp and wait for Duff and Christmas and the other sledge to come up with him. Waddy broke trail to the nearer bank by the shortest way. The dogs, each heartened by a few pounds of frozen fish, followed willingly. Sunday went next, stepping wide every now and again; and Wembly went last. They trampled and cleared a circular space in the deep snow and tangled brush of the bank, floored it with brush, collected fuel and made a little fire. The three dogs curled up and slept. The three men sat down and smoked. Wembly and Waddy talked together in guarded tones.

"I'll put it up to him," said Wembly. "And if he turns out to be nothing worse than the vicious idiot you think him—well, that will be soon enough to tackle that problem." He turned to Sunday and spoke high and harsh: "Listen to me. I'm sick of your thieving, murdering tricks. I know you're a fool, but I don't believe you're as silly a fool as you look and act. You're up to some devilment, in my opinion—and

you are going to tell me all about it—the truth, mind you!—or I'll give you enough grub to last you back to the mission and kick you out. And when I say kick I mean kick! And devil a cent of wages! Are you ready to answer my questions, or do you want to fill your pockets with hard bread and get to hell out of this?"

Sunday pondered for a full minute, gazing at the fire, then glanced swiftly at Wembly from the corners of his eyes and nodded.

CHAPTER VII.

A FANTASTIC TRIBE.

PETER SUNDAY answered Major Wembly's questions; and the gist of his disclosures was as follows: He knew all about Smoke River, having learned it from his own father, who had been a member of that tribe which held all that country above the great falls. But those people did not live on the river, but to the north of it, in a hidden place. But all the river above the falls, and all that country, were theirs.

They were strong people, and theirs were strong gods. The gods of Smoke River were stronger than the gods of the white missionaries, but they were not merciful. These people had always a white priest, or a white priestess, to stand between them and the wrath of their merciless gods. It had been so ever since the beginning of the world.

Sunday had been told all this by his father who had left that people and that country in his youth and in a hurry—but for what reason, Sunday did not know. But he knew for a fact that his father had never ventured back that way, even as far as the mouth of the river.

Sunday, himself, had been up as far as the great falls three times, netting and spearing salmon. That was as far as any people of the coast dared to go in that direction.

Upon realizing that Wembly's expedition was bound for the upper reaches of Smoke River, with the hidden village of that mysterious and formidable tribe as its final objective, Peter Sunday had conceived a daring and ambitious design. He had always felt a strong curiosity concerning those people.

His father, who had been one of them, had told him extraordinary things about them; and persons who had never been beyond the great falls had told him yet more extraordinary things. It was generally believed by the coast dwellers that, even as the men of that mysterious tribe were the strongest in the world, the women of the hidden village were the most beautiful in the world. Scores of the fantastic tales had to do with the beauty of the women. And Peter Sunday confessed to a strong interest in feminine charms. Nothing but fear of the men of the upper reaches of Smoke River—and perhaps a little of the gods and devils—had kept him from investigating the truth of those rumors of beautiful women.

So, upon grasping the object and purpose of Wembly's expedition—to discover that secret town and attack it with the strange and powerful Lewis gun—he had seen what had looked like his opportunity. He had overheard remarks passed between Wembly and Duff which had convinced him of the importance of the queer little gun. He would steal that gun and, with it, get to the secret town ahead of the expedition. His father had told him at what point to leave the river and head due north. He would win the favor of those fierce men by warning them of the impending attack, and showing them the potent weapon to prove his story, and giving them the weapon.

"I didn't think you had it in you," said Wembly. "And you hadn't. Why didn't you throw off all that stuff at the very start—or before starting? And you hadn't sense enough to leave the rum alone! Any one but a vicious fool

like you would have got away with it, with the start you had on us. But not you! You have a crazy imagination, but no brains—dragging a full load all that distance, and gulping rum, and murdering good dogs! But I'm very glad you tried to pull your stunt when you did, for you might have got away with it if you'd waited until we were nearly there. But that was your only chance. From now on you'll be as harmless as a dead dog."

Duff and John Christmas came up half an hour later, men and dogs alike heavily loaded. They had picked up and fetched along everything that Peter Sunday had discarded in his crazy flight. Wembly explained the situation to them briefly—the mad reason for Sunday's flight, the jettisoned goods, the dead dog.

Duff had plenty to say in return, but John Christmas did not utter a word. His flat face was like a mask. Not a word did he say about his dead dog. He did not so much as look at Peter Sunday, so far as the white men could see. He appeared to be totally indifferent.

The sledge loads were broken out, overhauled and redistributed; and about fifty pounds' weight of canned stuff was cached in a hole well up the bushy bank.

After that and a hot feed, the advance was resumed. Sunday went ahead and Wembly next, breaking trail. Sunday was unarmed, but Wembly toted a rifle. Christmas and his four dogs followed, then the three dogs and Nick Waddy, and Henry Duff brought up the rear.

They made good time. They halted once during the afternoon, long enough to boil the kettle and drink hot tea. They did not make camp until the last tinge of daylight had faded from the southwestern sky. After the evening meal and smoke, Peter Sunday was made fast in his sleeping bag with lashings of strong rope, bound humanely but securely.

During next morning's march they heard a vague, vast sound from far ahead. It was the voice of the great falls, and it grew louder in their ears throughout the day, shaking all that frozen desolation.

On the following morning they came to broken, piled-up ice, and by noon to open water and the great falls. In all that time on the river, in all those white miles, they had not seen any sign or sound of any other life than their own. It was depressing, that lifelessness, and to it now was added the terrific, shaking thunder and *slosh* and crash of the falls. Christmas did not like it. He said so; and you could see in his face that his mind was running on devils and merciless gods.

They went ashore below the churning black pool and climbed up around the falls. It was heavy going. It was slow, hard work. The sledges had to be unloaded and the loads packed up. But they did not halt and rest when the upper level was reached, nor even when they could leave the difficult shore and return to the ice.

Christmas said that he could hear, through the bellow of the smashing waters, the voices of seven devils whom he knew by name and reputation—and even Wembly and Duff almost believed him. They slogged ahead until the daunting roar of the falls sank to a pulsing hum. They made camp then, ate heartily and rested until the morrow's dawn.

Wembly tried out the Lewis gun, just to make sure that all was in order. He flipped off fifteen rounds in five seconds and was satisfied.

The weather held fair, indescribably cold but clear and windless, right up to their point of departure from the valley of the big river—to that point from which they were to head due north, according to Wembly's calculations.

There they cached flour, tea, sugar, bacon, rice, matches and dried peas, in a waterproof bag. There a narrower valley pointed the way north; and Wembly led them up it until dark.

When they halted, a wisp of wind flicked a cloud of dry snow into their faces. While they were digging in, gathering fuel and making camp, the wind swooped upon them a score of times. It was soon blowing hard and steady, and the night was blind with snow as dry and harsh as sand.

The wind continued to blow. Wembly and his companions dug yet deeper and sat tight. They had plenty of grub. Dry brush for the fire was to be had for the burrowing. They sheltered the little fire with blankets and brush. The nights were white and the days were gray with the tides of snow which swept ceaselessly around them.

The Eskimos said that it was the doing of local gods and devils, and that it would continue until every man and dog of them was buried, dead or alive. Duff said that he had never imagined there to be so much wind and snow in all the world. Nick Waddy said he had known a flurry to last a week.

But that blizzard did not last a week. Three nights and two days was the best it could do. The air was clear and still, and the colorless sun shone bright, when Major Wembly's relief expedition began to dig itself out. That was no light task. The little valley, up which they had started on the new course, was choked with snow. John Christmas and Peter Sunday refused to move another step to the northward. Breakfast, and three mugs of hot tea apiece, failed to give them courage to advance farther on that course. But two issues of rum did the trick.

By noon they had dug themselves out and up to higher ground. They kept to higher ground, from which most of the snow had been blown, throughout the short afternoon.

During the next three days Wembly did a great deal of tree climbing. Whenever he spotted a comparatively tall tree in a commanding situation, he made his way to it and climbed it and trained his powerful glasses north, west, south and east over that dismal and monotonous landscape—but mostly, and most intently, northward.

For three days his searching gaze went unrewarded. For three days he saw only the black of stunted spruce and the white of drifted snow, the gray of wind-swept rock, the pale blue of frozen sky—no smoke to tell of human habitation, no wing in the air, no fur or hide astir on crest or flank of any one of those innumerable dreary knolls and hills. It was a lifeless, hopeless, difficult world; and even Paul Wembly's tempered spirit and tough muscles began to feel chills of doubt and weariness.

But when he spotted another likely tree at ten o'clock of the morning of the fourth day, he turned aside to it and climbed it vigorously, hopefully. His first eager survey of the surroundings, made with unaided vision, was discouraging. He saw nothing; nothing but that jumble of lifeless black and white —the very embodiment of nothingness. Maintaining his insecure position with legs and elbows, he pulled the field glasses from their case and brought them to his eyes and took another look to the northward.

Smoke! Smoke, devil a doubt of it! Azure smoke and whitish smoke and ash-gray smoke lifting and thinning above and against the black of distant woods.

"What do you see?" called Duff, from below. "Devil or god of wind—or one of Sunday's imaginary ladies?"

"Smoke," replied Wembly. "Wood smoke, man smoke—and plenty of it."

He continued to gaze a full minute. It was not the smoke of a single fire, but of a score or more of small fires.

He took its bearings carefully, then descended to the snow and told Duff and Waddy all about it. The three held a war council, at which it was decided to use trickery rather than force against the lakeside village—trickery first, anyway. The Lewis gun would be brought into action only in the case of extreme necessity.

Wembly explained that all they wanted of the savages was the white girl, if she existed. Failing her—if investigations should prove that her sole existence had been in the late Gilroy Smith's imagination—they would have to look for some sort of proof of Commander Harvey Benn's fate or of Gilroy Smith's or Gaston Duvar's sojourn there; transportable proof, for choice. But the girl, the alleged daughter of Gaston Duvar, was the vital thing. He had never doubted her existence seriously for a moment. But for his belief in her he would never have moved a yard in the matter.

Major Paul Wembly stood alone on the white lake, facing the village of little lodges on the western shore. He estimated the distance between the nearest point of shore and himself at three hundred yards. A stout, crotched stick stood upright beside him, its butt sunk deep and packed firmly in the crust and snow. The Lewis gun lay at the base of the crotched stick in a folded blanket.

Wembly was smoking a cigarette when the lift of a clear dawn disclosed him to the view of the village's earliest riser. This particular individual riser was an elderly squaw on her way to the community water hole at the edge of the lake. At sight of that solitary figure standing out there against the colorless fire of the dawn, she let fall her buckets of rawhide and the ax with which she had intended to break the night's ice in the deep water hole.

Against that tintless glare the apparition looked gigantic, black and menacing. She did not indulge in a second look but turned and ran for home, yelping like a frightened pup.

Wembly continued to stand and wait, apparently ready for whatever might happen. If he felt any uneasiness, he did not show it. He smoked the cigarette slowly, calmly, and kept a sharp watch on the rocks and brush and clustered lodges before him. Now and again he turned his head for a quick glance to his flanks and rear, but he did not shift his big webs by so much as an inch. He did not carry a pack of any sort, nor a rifle—but the lower pockets of his short, wool-lined coat bulged slightly.

Wembly dropped the stub of the cigarette just as half a dozen men appeared at the edge of the lake and halted there. He saw that one of them was armed with a weapon that resembled Peter Sunday's sealing gun. The others carried short bows. They gazed out at him under pent hands. He hoped that he looked imposing and mysterious with the white lake and the flare of the new day for background. That is what he was there for—to look like a god, or at least like a very important devil; and as he glanced down the loosely folded blanket, and then at the bulges of his pockets, he felt both godlike and devilish.

"Start whatever you want to," he said. "I don't like you."

He turned down the cuff of his left mitten and looked at the watch on his wrist. By this time the group on the shore had increased to a crowd of twenty-five or thirty. Some of them moved to the right, along the edge of the ice, and others to the left. They strung out, as if contemplating an enveloping movement.

Wembly raised his right arm straight aloft to its full extent. All movement ceased for a minute, only to be resumed at a word of command or encouragement from the man with the sealing

gun. The villagers continued to extend right and left from the center, but as yet neither flank had advanced onto the level of the lake.

Wembly lowered his arm.

Wembly and Duff and Waddy had matured two plans for the rescue of Duvar's daughter. In both plans, Wembly was to be discovered by the savages in his present position. According to Plan "A" he was to attract and hold the attention of all the savages, while Duff found the young woman and with her made a get-away to where Nick Waddy and the sledges and the Eskimos awaited them.

Wembly was to keep the villagers interested as best he could until a certain time, but without driving them back to their lodges; and he was then to deal with the savages according to the demands of the situation and follow his companions. Duff, with two rifles and plenty of ammunition and other explosives, would wait for him at the point of departure of the sledges. So much for Plan "A."

Plan "B" differed from the other only to conform with a possible change of behavior on the part of the young woman who was to be carried off. She might take part in the rush to the lake front, instead of remaining alone and unguarded in her lodge; and in that case, Wembly would have to persuade her to join him out on the ice and then do the best he could—with Duff causing a diversion in the villagers' rear—to battle a way to the waiting sledges.

Paul Wembly admitted to himself that neither plan was absolutely foolproof nor safe. But neither he nor Duff nor Waddy could think of any safer or surer method of attempting the rescue. The only way to deal with those people was to get them all out in the open and under his eye, with the men separated from the women and children, if possible. He did not mean to run any risk of shooting up women and children.

The savages on the flanks of the enveloping movement stepped out from the snowy shore to the snowy surface of the lake. Wembly was relieved to see them sink to their knees, and deeper. They had forgotten their snowshoes in their haste. It was evident to Wembly that they reckoned on taking him alive, and he congratulated himself on the forethought which had prompted him to leave his rifle with the sledges and present himself to the attention of the savages in an apparently defenseless and inoffensive condition.

The enveloping movement progressed slowly, cautiously and in a profound silence. Wembly counted thirty-two men in that line; and he saw scores of women and children and old people gazing out at him from the black thickets and white drifts. But he saw nobody who could possibly be the girl of whom Gilroy Smith had told him in the Founder's Study of the Voyagers' Club in Gramercy Park. That seemed to him a long time ago and a long way off.

He looked at his watch again. Five minutes, and he would be free to extricate himself from a position which was growing momentarily more embarrassing—to put it mildly—and which was beginning to fret even his steady nerves. He lit a second cigarette. It was one of those fat, Oriental cigarettes, of a special brand and known as Voyagers' Club Specials.

Four minutes to go. Ten men were out on the lake by this time, six to the right and four to the left. The leading man on each flank was almost in line with Wembly but about two hundred yards distant. They were armed with bows and spears. They moved heavily in the deep and crusty snow. The center of the line, facing Wembly, had advanced ten or twelve yards onto the ice but now stood firm again. Now Wembly counted three guns on his front—

but they all appeared to be of ancient, muzzle-loading pattern.

Three minutes to go. Wembly took something from a pocket, examined it closely but swiftly, then glanced quickly to his right and left. He suddenly became conscious of an uncomfortable dryness of the mouth and throat. Nervousness, evidently. He told himself to brace up.

Two minutes to go; and now several of the villagers were slightly in his rear. He didn't like that. He wanted them all where he could keep his eye on all of them at once. He stooped and lifted the Lewis gun and rested it on the crotched stick; and at that the men on his flanks and rear halted and most of those on his front flopped and lay flat. But they didn't all flop. The three with the ancient guns knelt and aimed. Wembly unshipped the Lewis gun and lay flat just as the three sealing guns belched and bellowed. A flock of lead passed low over him. He scrambled up, replaced the gun and cut loose three short bursts, aimed, then a longer burst high over the village. At that, one of the men who had shot at him collapsed, the other two flung down their guns, all the other warriors cast away their bows and spears and raised their arms and shouted.

The savages shouted all together—once, twice, thrice; and at the third deafening shout they all advanced with their arms still held high and wide.

Wembly looked around him in desperation. All the men in sight, and many of the women behind them, were approaching him with upflung arms; and again they shouted three times, all together. There was nothing of hostility or menace in that outcry. There was something of fear in it, but more of exultation. It was imploring and ecstatic. It was the voice of worship; and Wembly recognized it as such. He had hoped to figure as a god or a devil for a little while, but to find himself an object of active and general worship was more than he had expected.

"This is going too far!" he murmured. "To hell with it!"

He unshipped the Lewis gun, secured it and the drums of ammunition in the blanket, pulled a Roman candle from his pocket, lit the fuse at his cigarette and held it high. The balls of fire lobbed up, white in the pale sunshine, and the golden sparks spurted in enveloping showers.

At that exhibition of godlike or devilish power, the entire group of worshipers halted and prostrated themselves in the snow.

Wembly immediately shouldered the blanket-swathed gun and started for his rendezvous with Henry Duff. He went the way he had come before dawn. He marched at a dignified pace, with the gun on his left shoulder, a lighted cigarette between his lips and his right hand in a pocket; and as he passed between two of his worshipers—they were all on their knees by this time and chanting again—he pulled out and touched off another Roman candle. This second piece threw red balls. The worshipers flattened again.

He marched steadily on his way; and when the chanting was resumed behind him he let off a display of blue balls and green sparks. It was magnificent, but it silenced the outcry and checked the advance of the worshipful and fascinated savages for less than half a minute.

Ashore now, and in cover, Wembly fished out a Very pistol and shot a star shell low over his shoulder. He quickened his pace for a hundred yards or so, then decided to remind the villagers that he was as dangerous as magnificent. He turned and gave ear. They were advancing but still out of the way of danger. He lobbed a Mill's bomb back on his track and lay low until after the smashing explosion. He scrambled up, took one glance at the hole in the snow

and tangled brush, then turned again and legged it.

"That will give them something new and extra to shout about," he reflected. "And it will let Henry know I'm on the way."

Five minutes later, he let go another bomb astern. The chanting of the worshipful savages came faintly to his ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRE.

DUFF was at the rendezvous, with one rifle slung and the other in his hands. "All right?" he asked, as Wembly came up with him.

"All serene. Find the girl?"

"Yes. She's well away. She—she's amazing!"

"Let's go."

They jogged along the deep trail which twisted in and out among thickets and drifts and rocky knolls. Duff was in the lead. They halted every now and then and gave ear. Nothing. Absolute silence.

"Those bombs shut them up," said Wembly.

"Any bloodshed?" asked Duff.

"Had to put a burst of ten into the chief. That was all. Used fireworks after that, and the bombs just to show them what I could do if I had to."

"Wait till they find that the girl's gone."

"Wait nothing! Did you have any trouble with her?"

"Walked right into the biggest lodge, and there she was trying to get out past an old man. I said, 'Good morning, Julia,' and biffed the old man on the ear. She's as white as we are. I pointed to a pair of snowshoes; and she stepped right into the straps and away we went. She was dressed all ready for an outing. By Jove, Paul, she's—she's just——"

"Hark! D'ye hear it?"

"The loudest yell they've let out of them yet. They've missed the girl. No wonder they yell! Who wouldn't?"

Wembly unblanketed the Lewis gun and handed it and the drums to Duff and told him to keep going. Then he spread the blanket to its full length in the deep trail and emptied his pockets on the far end of it. A Roman candle, a package of small firecrackers, four Very lights, a coil of slow fuse in a rubber tobacco pouch, two grenades and the pistol. He repocketed bombs and pistol, then broke open the crackers, attached an end of the slow fuse to their braided fuses and folded them around the heads of the Roman candle and the Very lights. Then he took a turn or two of the long fuse around the whole. He uncoiled more fuse and laid it out on the dry blanket, made a quick calculation, broke the fuse and lit it. Then he went after Henry Duff at his best pace.

Wembly overtook Duff in ten minutes and relieved him of the Lewis gun. They continued to slog along, with an occasional brief exchange of speech and an occasional pause to harken to their rear. But there was nothing to listen to.

"We've got the legs of them," said Wembly.

It was past noon when they came up with the sledges. Their prize, the late Gaston Duvar's daughter, was riding John Christmas' sledge in front. John was showing his dogs the way with all the will in the world. Sunday was at the tail of the second sledge and Nick Waddy in rear of all.

Wembly ordered a halt and the immediate feeding of the dogs and boiling of the kettles. He deposited the Lewis gun on the rear sledge, warned Duff to keep an eye on it and on Peter Sunday, then chopped out a seven-foot fir, knocked off its lower branches and carried it back along the trail a distance of twenty or thirty paces.

He set the fir up in the middle of the

way and draped it with a blanket. It had an appearance of standing with widespread, warning arms. He topped it off with a red-flannel shirt which he had brought all the way from Trigger Cove.

They were all on their way again forty minutes later. Wembly brought up the rear, a hundred yards behind the second sledge, armed with a rifle and six Mills bombs. Duff, similarly armed and with three drums for the Lewis gun in his haversack, kept close to the tail of the second sledge, ready to grab the little machine gun from the top of the load and fall back to Wembly's support in case of need.

So they traveled until the last red wash of day was smudged from the horizon, without sight or sound of pursuit. Camp was made on a treeless knoll in open ground. It was a cold camp site, but it commanded useful fields of view and of fire. The Lewis gun was mounted on a convenient rock. Wembly stood the first watch, Duff the second and Nick Waddy the third. Nothing happened; and they were on the move again at the first icy-gray glimmer of dawn.

Nothing was seen or heard of any pursuer during the second day of the southward flight. The fugitives traveled fast, for the weather was clear, the trail was undrifted and packed, the dogs were well fed and in good fettle and every one was eager to get as far away from that country as possible in the shortest possible time.

Again camp was made on high ground commanding adequate fields of view and fire in all directions—and this within a few miles of the point at which they had turned northward from the river on the eve of the great blizzard. Duff stood the first watch and Wembly the middle watch.

It seemed to Wembly that something moved among the indistinct shadows to the south of the knoll. He started and stared, but the light was bad and there was frost on his eyelashes and he could make nothing of it. He bared a hand and pressed it to his eyes for several seconds, then looked again. The vague shadows of thicket and drift and rock to the south appeared now to be absolutely motionless. He turned slowly and examined all the dim shades in his circumscribed field of vision. He failed to detect any movement anywhere.

"Inflamed eyes," he told himself. "They couldn't have passed us, at the pace we've been going. Frozen eyesight and rotten nerves."

He looked to the south again, then to the north again. He stared northward, then jumped to the Lewis gun and flung aside its protective blanket. The trail by which they had reached the knoll was black and alive.

He fired the first burst high. The dark advance checked, but only for a moment. It widened and came on again.

"The poor fools!" he exclaimed. "They don't believe me—because I only killed one of them."

He let off another burst of ten, short this time. The dark advance checked again, wavered, came on again.

"This won't do," he said. "I must stop ten or twelve of the poor fools for good and all—or they'll get us some night—to-morrow or next night or next. Sorry—but here goes!"

He let go thirty rounds, neither high nor low but with a slight lateral wavering of the muzzle. As he replaced the empty drum with a full one, he glimpsed Duff at his elbow. The little camp behind him was on its feet. He heard Nick Waddy swearing vigorously and Peter Sunday praying. He ripped off the second drum without a hitch.

"Here's another," said Duff.

"To hell with it!" exclaimed Wembly, releasing his hold on the grip of the gun and letting it slip from its rests

into the snow. "I've done my bit! Bow-an'-arrow men! But it was coming to them. Had to be done. Had to get it sooner or later."

"What's that?" exclaimed Duff, turning sharply to the south. D'ye hear it? Look there!"

Wembly heard a breathless, desperate cry even as he turned; and he saw a single dark figure moving among stationary patches of vague darkness at the southern base of the knoll—moving, wavering, stumbling forward. The cry rose again on the frosty air. It was a woman's voice.

"From the south! The other outfit!" he exclaimed; and he started down the snowy slope on the jump..

She was slumped in the snow, limp and speechless, when he reached her. He shouldered her and turned and retraced his steps laboriously. Halfway up the slope, he was met by Duff.

"Your friend Catherine—all alone—and all in," he gasped.

"Don't believe it," said Duff. "Let's look. Set her down."

Wembly lowered his slender, inert burden to the snow and supported her in a sitting position with his right arm and shoulder. Duff stooped and struck a light.

"Thought so!" he said. "It must be the girl she had doubling for her back in Trigger Cove. Trust Catherine to play safe!"

Wembly craned his neck and peered into the fur hood on his shoulder.

"Good Lord! I know her!" he cried.

The woman opened her eyes at that, just as the match dropped from Duff's fingers.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, "an' all in. Wired you to that effect—didn't I?"

Wembly gathered her up tenderly.

"Nip ahead and start a fire—and damn the expense!" he said to the bewildered Duff.

Then he plunged forward and upward again toward the summit of the knoll, wondering confusedly if he were dreaming but hoping vigorously that he was wide awake. He checked and staggered for a moment as a fur-clad arm slipped up and around his neck—but only for a moment.

CHAPTER IX.

JANE CASSELIS.

THE menace from the north was clean forgotten by Major Paul Wembly. He who had refused to allow so much as a spark of fire the night before and earlier this night, now urged his followers to the gathering of fuel and demanded hot water in a hurry.

He administered a tot of rum to the young woman whom he had toted up the southern slope of the knoll. He tucked her into his own sleeping bag and took off his fur cap and fanned the new-lit fire with it, shouting all the while for more and drier fuel. He mixed beef tea as soon as the melted snow in the kettle was hot, and fed it, and several cakes of hard bread soaked in it, to the girl in his sleeping bag. She responded nobly to that treatment.

"They all got cold feet—all of them, sooner or later," she told him, between swallows of soaked biscuit. "Your trail to travel in, too—until that blizzard struck us. Bill Doran was the last to quit—dogs and all—and tried to make me go back with him—but I pulled a gun on him. Knew the best way—safest—to keep on your trail. It showed in places, blown clear again. Better than going back—with those cowards. Sure to come up with you, or meet you coming back—with any luck. Made the turn all right, but lost my way to-night—and my nerve, too—till I heard the battle. What was it all about—that battle?"

"We found that girl and made a clean get-away. She's around here some-

where. I entertained the villagers while Duff grabbed her off. I didn't scare them quite enough, so they followed us. Came up on us in force to-night, so I had to shoot them up. No other way to get rid of them. But you mustn't tire yourself talking now. Plenty of time for that later. Drink the rest of this."

"What does she look like?"

"Who?"

"That girl you came to rescue."

"I've only seen her once. Duff says she's white. Drink the rest of this now and go to sleep."

She obeyed; and Wembly joined Duff and Waddy, who had set up the Lewis gun again and were now peering anxiously to the north.

"Was that by appointment, too, like tea with Mrs. Benn?" asked Duff, with an edge on his voice.

"By appointment! I thought she was in New York. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw her."

"Is that so? Damn fortunate thing for us the Indians didn't come on again with a few feathers! Who is she? And how and why?"

"I don't know her name. Met her in New York the morning after my talk with Gilroy Smith. She was reporting for one of the papers."

"For Catherine Benn, you mean."

"I don't know anything about that. All I know, she's over there in my sleeping bag now. The rest will keep."

Duff sighed and nudged his leader with a drum of Lewis-gun ammunition.

"We'll all keep very well if you don't snap out of it—frozen stiff—till warm weather. How many of these are left?"

"What? Oh, those! Don't worry. We've seen the last of our pursuers. The poor, benighted fools! But it was coming to them for their foolhardiness. I had to do it."

The three white men talked out the remaining hours of darkness. When dawn showed a light, Wembly and Duff went down the northern slope and northward along the trail a distance of a few hundred yards. They found nothing there but a wide area of trampled snow.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Wembly.

"For what, in particular?" asked Duff.

"For this. Don't kick the snow about! They've carried off their casualties—and covered up the blood. Let it go at that."

Paul Wembly was right. Nothing more was seen or heard of their pursuers. They made the return journey to the mission without accident, picking up their jettisoned supplies as they went. Miss Jane Casselis told her story on the way.

Miss Casselis had read Mrs. Catherine Benn's announcement of her intention of leading an expedition into the North in search of Commander Harvey Benn, in company with Major Paul Wembly, and had immediately reversed her opinion of the major. That was not the kind of man she had thought he was. So she had immediately sent her own piece to the paper, dealing with Wembly's romantic interest in the mysterious girl of the secret village. She admitted to a spirit of spite in that action.

Then, still in a spirit of spite and derision, she had called on Catherine Benn and offered her services as secretary or companion; and, after a talk with the camera man, Catherine had engaged her.

Later, upon learning that Wembly had refused to join the Benn-Duvar relief expedition, Jane Casselis had hastened to Wembly's hotel and from there wired to his northern home. But she did not mention Wembly's name to Catherine Benn.

The expedition, with its camera and films, had left Black Pot Harbor in a new fore-and-after. Poor Jane was black and blue by that time from doubling for Catherine. They had sailed all the way north to the mission, without a hitch; and there they had heard, for the first time, that Wembly was ahead of them. Catherine had thrown hysterics and retired—but not until she had ordered the others to advance in Wembly's tracks with as much speed as the recording of perhaps half a dozen dramatic scenes on the way would permit.

So Mark Hands, the actor, Jane, the camera man, three Newfoundlanders and two sledges and eight dogs and Jane had gone on down the coast and up the river. Gully and Flint had deserted at the falls, with one of the sledges. Mr. Mark Hands had turned at noon of the same day, after explaining that his action was not influenced by fear but by a sense of duty to his wife and children, and returned at top speed.

Then the blizzard had descended upon them, and the camera man had hit the homeward trail as soon as the blizzard had blown itself out, leaving his camera and films on Bill Doran's sledge.

Bill Doran had held on, though very much against his will, scaring himself, and trying to scare Jane, with stories of Smoke River horrors which he had heard at the mission. But at last even Bill had quit—but not without an effort to take Jane back with him.

"You're a wonder," said Wembly. "Isn't she a wonder, Henry? How'll Mrs. Benn feel when she reads our official report? 'When five miles north of the Smoke River valley and in the act of repulsing an attack in force by the savages, we were joined by Miss Jane Casselis, the only member of Mrs. Catherine Benn's expedition to venture west of the Great Falls.' How'll that read?"

"Fine," returned Duff. "But despite all the reports and statements in the world—yours and mine and Jane's and Nick's and the three missionaries'—Catherine will present her pictures to the eager public; and pictures speak louder than the statements of facts."

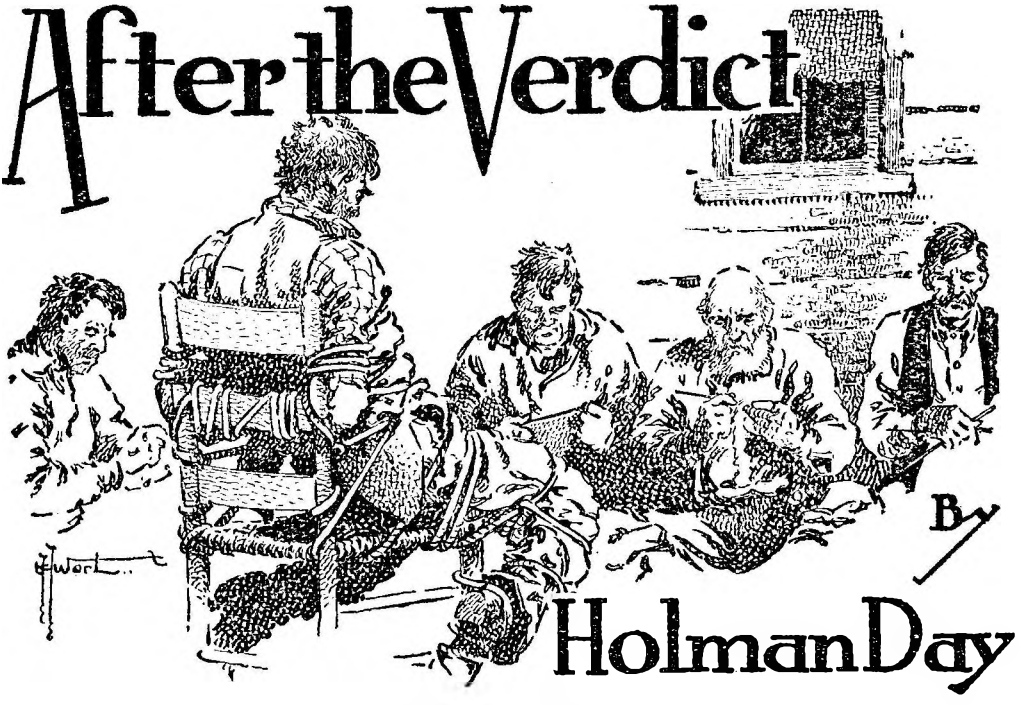
"Oh, no she won't," said Jane Casselis. "I fixed that first lot of fakes at the mission, while she was having hysterics; and I did in the second lot, and the camera, too, just before my parting with Bill Doran."

Paul Wembly is in New York, writing, in solitary industry, every morning and afternoon but dining with Miss Jane Casselis almost every evening. His new book will be well worth two dollars. His and Henry Duff's reports of their expedition into the Smoke River country—with statements by the Reverend Jan Bols, Doctor Olsen, Captain Andersen and Mr. Nick Waddy attached—have not only aroused much interest and some excitement in the breast of the general public but have led to the official recognition, by the French government, of a certain young woman as the daughter and heiress of the late Gaston Duvar. Mademoiselle Duvar sailed for France last week. Mr. Henry Duff, reinstated in the good opinions of his father, will sail for France next week.

It is rumored that Mrs. Catherine Benn is engaged to marry Mr. Mark Hands—but very few people are interested.

Major Paul Wembly, now a full member of the Voyagers' Club, yesterday received a hint from the North that he is soon to be elected to a fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada.

After the Verdict



By Holman Day

Author of "Square Squair," Etc.

The judge decided much remained to be done after the verdict, so he went into the mountains and did it.

A COMPLETE STORY

A GRIN wreathed and wriggled under the beard of the foreman of the jury, when he and the men of the panel came onto their feet at command of the court.

"Not guilty, your honor," reported the foreman, questioned.

"So say you all?" demanded the judge.

"So say we all," was the ragged chorus the jurymen beamed on the judge.

Then the folks in the crowded courtroom whisked united gaze to the man in the prisoner's dock. He had been snatched from the shadow of the noose; the cause on trial had been a murder case.

The verdict surely called for a display of supreme joy; they would not have been surprised to see Jensen Wayter leap and skip and shake his sides in glorious laughter.

There was surprise. It was more than surprise—it was dumfounded astonishment which constrained the onlookers—checked the cheers ready for utterance.

Wayter had scruffed his shaggy mane into horrent fierceness. Greeting the verdict, he pulled down his eyebrows with a malignant scowl. He rolled his lips away from his teeth. His mien was that of an infuriated catamount at bay. His expression took on more savage malevolence when the simpering foreman stepped toward the dock to congratulate.

Wayter roughly dashed aside the outstretched hand and raised a clenched fist as if about to damage a fatuous smile beyond repair.

While the foreman hesitated, another man came bustling forward—the young lawyer assigned to the case by the court as the prisoner's counsel. He was full of the triumph, cackling laughter.

Wayter raised both fists and snarled, now resembling still more ferociously a treed catamount.

Dozens of men in the courtroom had started forward. They stopped in their tracks, fanning each other's ears with whispers and mutterings.

Chadwick, justice presiding, rose slowly, not *from* his armchair, but *with* it. The chair was sticking to his haunches but the spectacle before him was absorbing his attention too closely to make a big chair's weight of any importance, at that moment. Ben Chadwick, so men estimated by looking him over, weighed all of three hundred pounds. "What the——" He shut off his growl and swallowed the expletive, remembering in season, fortunately, that he was now a newly appointed judge, was holding his first term of court, had just finished his first trial of a case. Being a judge, so he sourly reflected, he could not employ his usual hammer-and-tongs language in smashing to the heart of something which puzzled him.

Irefully, communing with himself, he was wishing that he had never consented to be a judge. This was not a new wish; it was merely a continuation of a queer grouch. He had been fairly forced into becoming a judge. Because most men of the law aspire so earnestly to be judges, are so gratified when they become judges, the peculiar mental state of Justice Chadwick should be clarified a bit, even at the risk of holding up the story at a dramatic point.

However, it is not really a holdup. Chadwick bulks in the story as hugely as he did physically, standing there with the armchair sticking to his flanks. The man and his methods, his peculiarities, even, must be set forth at once for a better understanding of his performance in the events to be related—events having to do with Jensen Wayter and others, following on and after that verdict.

In the North Country considerable of a story, by itself, was made out of "Big Ben's" appointment by the governor of the State.

The governor, Timber Baron Sam Chase, was a native of the same far-flung border county and had been a fishing pal of Ben ever since the two were boys. On a teeterboard, when they had become man-grown, the two would about balance each other.

One day Governor Chase rode into the village where Ben had his law office in a small building standing by itself. Taking Ben's size into account, the relative proportions of building and inmate suggested to callers the penning of a great Dane in a regulation dog kennel. In the summer, clients usually found it more convenient to stand outside, lean elbows on the sill of an open window and get their law without the flavor of Ben's pipe smoke.

Well, the governor rolled himself cumbrously off the rear seat of his sagging limousine, plodded up the path, and stepped upon a wooden box which Ben had set out for a doorstep. The box crashed under the weight.

Notified by crash and curses that somebody was without, Ben lumbered to the door and opened it.

The governor was jumping up and down, trying to kick the penning sides of the box from his feet.

Ben critically surveyed the lettering on the side of the box. "What you got your feet in there for, Sam? Can't you read? It says, 'Canned Peaches for the Best Trade.' And you've gone to work and packed in politics."

"You whoodled-doodled old hystramus of a trapdoor spider, is this the way you set your web for the trade you get?" raged the governor, managing to kick out one side of the box casing.

"Outside of those sentiments, Sam, it's a fine day and I'm glad you have called. Howdy! Come in!" He extended his fat hand, grabbed the governor's waving fist, and derricked the caller up. "Straddle, Sam! Straddle high! You'll make it," Ben adjured the irate governor.

In the office the governor demanded, "Why don't you have a decent and sensible doorstep?"

"The box has been stout enough for everybody but you and me. You haven't called round till now. As for me, I always straddle. I take the short cut, Sam."

"Short cut! Yah! Short cut!" Chase barked the words. "You have always preached and practiced the short cut, even when we went barefoot in the woods."

"I still practice the plan, Sam," returned Ben amiably. "In law and life generally! I wish I could make the cuts even shorter in law. But the court system seems made up of circles these days."

"And right now—speaking of courts!" The governor pushed papers to one side on a corner of the table and perched himself there, distrusting the splint chair set forth for clients. "You know how hard it is for the session of the supreme court at the shire to handle matters for this county. County's so big."

"Uh-huh! That's why I paid my expenses and hollered so loud down at the legislature for the special act establishing a superior court up here." Ben leaned back in his broad chair and lighted a corncob pipe.

"Your holler turned the trick. So all right! Now I'm using my say and appointing you the superior judge. Thank the good Lord, they don't vote for judges in this State. Meaning no slur for you!"

Ben leaned forward and banged the pipe on the table, scattering coals and ashes. "I won't take the job—dang me blue if I will!"

The governor thudded down his fist and shouted with a timber boss' manner and vehemence:

"I'm running this State, and when I draft the best man for the particular job, then he shoulders his ax and gets busy. You know *me*, Ben! And another thing: Where's your friendship for an old chum?"

"But I ain't judicial timber, Sam," lamented Ben, touched by the shrewd and sure appeal of friendship. "I'm too much of a short-cutter to be a judge."

From that moment the "hog wrassle" was on.

Men in the street heard the booming of voices, without understanding what Sam Chase and Ben Chadwick were scrapping over.

All they knew was that an hour later the governor rode away in his limousine, grinning complacently, and that Big Ben was outside his office with fragments of the doorstep box in both hands, threatening to heave them.

At any rate, Chadwick became the county's first superior judge. In one especial plan he adopted his own methods, getting the O. K. of the chief justice on the scheme to move the court about to this town and that, using halls, schoolhouses, or even church vestries. Cases could be tried at the heart of matters, he maintained, where witnesses would be handy, costs of travel could be saved, and the truth might be arrived at more surely in surroundings familiar and natural to parties concerned.

Before Judge Chadwick came to hold his first sitting his plan was nicknamed "the cart-tail court."

That first session was at Frayne Center, a village away upcountry in the mountain regions. Court sat in the vestry of the Union meeting house.

He gave the Wayter murder trial precedence of all other cases. "To set my teeth in good!" he told himself.

Jensen Wayter, brawny, shaggy mountaineer, was accused of shooting and killing one Ansy Ward, nailing him through a window when Ward was standing up beside Julia Wayter, Jensen's sister, the two in process of being duly and properly united in marriage.

Jensen, a man who allowed a violent temper to engineer his fists and to slat his tongue all too frequently, had beaten Ward up on several occasions and had threatened to kill him. But the sister had picked her man. She would not admit that Ward was this and that, as her prejudiced brother insisted.

Therefore, the prosecution had established motive.

The county attorney, in addition, produced a witness who swore that he had been outside the parson's house that night and had seen Jensen Wayter shoot to kill. This witness was elderly, saturnine Jode Krause, who spat speech from one side of a sardonic mouth and stoically, even brazenly, endured the judge's boring stare. Whether Krause's grudge was specific or general, Big Ben could not determine; but if he knew men, he informed himself, here was a man consumed by grudge.

Jensen Wayter had refused to hire a lawyer. Ben appointed a young fellow whom he knew and wanted to help in getting a start. Before the trial the case looked good for a tyro's success, because a flock of witnesses from the mountain settlement had volunteered to establish a perfect alibi. And they did so in testimony under oath.

The young lawyer did not put Jensen Wayter on the stand. The sullen accused indicated no desire to take the stand, either. He indicated not much of anything else except black, bitter grouch all through the trial.

And so we come to the moment when the presiding justice, absorbed by a peculiar situation, stood with a chair sticking to his haunches, and an acquitted man was threatening joyous friends. In his soul, Ben Chadwick, who thought he understood man and the workings of human nature, was wordlessly billy-bedamning the puzzle while he plucked the chair off his person.

The clerk of the court stood on tiptoe beside the bench and muttered, getting the judicial ear: "Your honor, I'm afraid Wayter is about ready to blow up."

Murmured the judge in reply: "'Twould be too bad to have a bomb like him wreck the only building where the parsons and the Sunday-school teachers can hold forth." Then he bellowed: "Sheriff, take your bailiffs and clear this room!"

The crowd obediently flowed from the open doorway.

Wayter sat back on his chair in the dock.

Noting that his aids were having no trouble with the throng, the sheriff strode and clapped the acquitted man on the shoulder.

"Hyper out of here, friend! What are you waiting for—a thirty-day notice on a post card of how you've been let to go free?"

"I don't want to go out o' here just yitawhile," the man grumbled.

"Court has ordered——"

But the judge broke in on the sheriff's loud tones.

"Court orders a recess. Court orders Wayter to be escorted to my chambers."

The twist of a smile worked on the broad face when Big Ben mentioned "chambers." His retiring room was the cubby-hole where the books of the Sunday-school library were kept.

"Better come along, Mr. County Attorney," the judge suggested. "Something queer here. The verdict usually is the last page. But there seems to be a 'continued in our next' in this case."

"Yes, your honor." Walking behind the bulk of the judge the attorney glanced over his shoulder at the visage

of Wayter. The man was coming willingly enough with the sheriff. But the visage was still an arabesque of ugly resentment.

The expression was not mellowed one whit when Wayter stood in front of the judge. The latter pulled his corncob pipe from a pocket, a little canister of tobacco from his hip, grunting with effort of reaching, and stuffed the blackened bowl.

"Well, brother," he said, "pretty nice crowd of neighbors you've got."

The mountaineer scowled more deeply. He muttered.

From the window, while Wayter remained silent, the sheriff reported: "I'll say you must be popular up where you live, my man! The whole crowd of witnesses is still standing by out there in the street. Guess they're going to give you three cheers and a ride on their shoulders."

Wayter cursed in growls.

The judge tamped down his pipeload and lighted it, after dragging a match across a wide expanse of trousers leg. When he had spouted a soulful puff or two he fanned away the smoke with a hand that would match measurably a small ham. His pipe putting him back to normalcy, he suspended his judicial rôle and became plain, blunt Ben Chadwick, curious as a magpie, always solicitous in the troubled affairs of a fellow man.

"Look a here, Wayter, what the hell is the trouble with you, anyway?"

That down-to-earth, matter-of-fact, man-to-man query jumped the other. Surprise wiped off his countenance some of the hostility.

"I'm not on the bench right now, brother. I'm loafing and smoking and I'm Ben Chadwick. And it's my nature to hist the cover and see what's bubbling over a hot fire. Now what's it all about, your imitating a fussed-up bobcat when I mentioned how nice your neighbors are?"

"If there's anything up in my place hated more than they hate me, it's a skunk stealing chickens," said Wayter.

"So—*so!*" purred Ben. "For a special reason or on general principles?"

"I've sassed most all of them in times back, and have licked a plenty. I've got a tantrum temper."

"Usually doesn't get a man a thing. However, in that case just ended, they fixed you out with a perfect alibi, brother."

But the gimlet did not penetrate as a borer had hoped.

Wayter cursed again.

"Trig that stuff!" commanded the sheriff. "Don't forget this is Judge Chadwick."

The justice flapped his hand tolerantly. "Oh, go ahead and ease off high pressure, brother. I do a little cussing, myself, on occasions." He pushed shut the glass door of one of the book cases. "Sunday-school books!" he commented significantly. "Brother, didn't I hear you slip the word 'liar' into that string of cuss words?"

"That's what they done on the witness stand—they lied."

"Huh! Thought that alibi was a speck too perfect for an honest one," stated the judge, after he had swapped looks with the county attorney.

"I'll take the gaff on the thing! I never asked 'em to lie," declared Wayter. "Gimme the noose—I don't care."

Ben, puffing smoke, signaled to the prosecutor.

"Wayter, you have been acquitted of the charge of killing Ansy Ward," stated the attorney. "We can't hang you after that verdict. We can't try you again on the same charge. That's the law."

"If that's law then law better be tinkered up to make it sensible—make it fit what a man is asking for," growled Wayter.

"Are you aiming to confess you killed Ward?" drilled the attorney.

"I didn't kill him, but I want to save the bother of another trial. I never killed nobody. But they're expecting me to go ahead now and kill a man. They all want him killed. That's why they swore me off to make me the goat. They think I'm bound to do the killing. I'll prob'ly do it. I'll be put through hell till I do. So go ahead and arrest me."

The sheriff shook his head when Wayter walked toward him.

"You can't be arrested for mere tongue wagging," protested the attorney. "It wouldn't be the law."

"What the blue blazes is the law good for, then?" It was shouted savagely.

The judge chuckled. "I've asked myself the same question about some of the law—as the law is administered," he confessed, smoothing his statement with a smile. "But I warn you not to do that killing, brother."

"But you don't know what kind of hell I'll be put through when I get back to the mountains."

"Suppose you give us a peek by lifting the lid of that hell?"

Wayter slashed his flattened hand through the air, refusing. "I've been told right now and here as how telling ahead ain't took no account of by the law. What's the use? It's mountain stuff. I couldn't make you understand. You'd have to see it." He was again in a state of high excitement. "The law can't do nothing, hey? It can only stand back and let things happen, hey? Well, take your cussed old law and rub it with arnicky and sing it to sleep." He went to the window and shook his fist at the men massed before the building. He swore ferociously at them.

"Look here, brother," Ben protested; "that's hardly the kind of stuff to be coming from the window of a judge's chamber, and in the presence of Sunday-school books. You'd better go to some spot where there's a good breeze —and cool off."

Wayter glared at the sheriff. "I'd like to go back to that cell to wait for that gang to get tired, if I can't sit in the courtroom or stay here."

"The judge says for you to get out. If you don't go sudden, I'll be heaving you out."

Big Ben beamed complacently on the noisy departure.

"But, your honor," pleaded the prosecutor, urged by the nature of his office, "seems as if we ought to put that man under bonds."

"I'm afraid bonds won't handle this matter, Mr. County Attorney. I'm letting him go because I want him to go. To be sure, we have had a trial and an acquittal. That's as far as the court can go. But it looks to me as if the main trouble must be attended to after the verdict."

Ben arose ponderously and walked to the window.

Wayter came in sight, leaping from the main door. He stopped on the top step. The crowd gave him three cheers while he shook his fists over his head and clamored threats.

A spokesman stepped forward. "Jense, hain't ye got no more gratefulness for friendly doings than what you're showing? We're lotting on making a perade of it back home."

"You damnation old bumblebees, do you think you're fooling me for a second? You're torching the fire and blowing the bellers and gitting ready to make me white-hot and use me. Gimme free passage and stay away from me."

The throng did not disintegrate.

Announced the spokesman: "We have stood behind you, Jense. We didn't let grudge git ye! Not our grudge nor anybody else's spite. And that's being blasted high-minded on our part. If you ain't got no gratefulness nor sense of duty left in you, it'll be *put* in—*proper*. And you know why it ought to be done. Enough has been said."

"On the saying part, I agree with you," acknowledged Wayter with venom. He proceeded instantly to action.

Iron rails guarded the sides of the building's stone steps.

Revealing his brute strength, Wayter wrenched free one of the rails; the cement holding the standards had crumbled in weather stress.

Whirling above his head the formidable weapon, he drove at the throng of witnesses whose words on the stand had brought him free of the hangman's rope.

Panic seized upon them; they ran in all directions.

Shaking his head and flopping his shaggy mane, Wayter strode off along the street leading out of Frayne Center. Before he turned a corner and disappeared he seemed to remember that he was carrying property which was not his own. With the motions of a hammer thrower, he whirled the heavy rail and heaved it toward the building from which he had taken it.

"Indicating a certain amount of inherent honesty!" the judge remarked.

"I'm afraid something mighty bad is in a way to happen up in the hills," mourned the apprehensive county attorney.

The judge looked in turn at sheriff and prosecutor. "I'm sure I can trust your discretion as county officers, men. If you let your hold slip on that discretion, I'll raise the devil with you. You understand, eh?"

"Yes, your honor," was the earnest pledge in duet.

"As I have said, and as I believe, the big thing too often happens *after* the verdict; when that verdict is acquittal and the grudge is left sharp and is even rewhetted. I understand perfectly well a judge is not expected to meddle after the verdict. But I warned Governor Chase that I am not good judicial timber. I have no business being on the bench. I'm afraid I'm too cussed human. Too much curiosity in me! I'm starting in to make a regular plumb fool of myself. Because I'm going to suspend court right now and go up in the mountains. I'm aiming to find out what the blue blazes is the matter with Jense Wayter and the rest of 'em."

"It's what I call good sense, even if it isn't regular judicial procedure, your honor," indorsed the county attorney.

"You bet it's a good plan," the sheriff agreed. "I'm knowing to it there's been a lot of trouble up there, though it isn't clear what it's all about. I haven't been called on to make arrests and so I don't know the inside."

"Let's hope I'll get on the inside," prayed Big Ben.

"I'll go along and see that nothing happens to you, your honor," pledged the sheriff pompously.

"Same here—and in the interests of the prosecutor's office," said the attorney.

The judge straightened, threw back his shoulders. Never had Ben Chadwick loomed more hugely within four walls. Supremely efficient, for himself and by himself, looked he!

"Gentlemen, wherever did you get the notion that I need nurses or guards, no matter where I go?"

Both stammered disclaimers, surveying his bulk with respect.

"Mr. Sheriff, court will convene."

While his honor stood behind the desk on the platform of the assembly room, allowing the sheriff to go through with the proclamation: "All persons who have anything to do before the honorable justice——" the judge reflected that few persons that afternoon were displaying any more interest in the aforesaid court, following the verdict in the Wayter trial.

All mere spectators had departed. Inside the bar railing a dozen lawyers were thumbing their dockets in the civil suits which were to be tried. A dozy

and drab atmosphere had succeeded the excitement of the murder case.

"Proceed, gentlemen!" requested the judge, after he had wedged himself between the arms of his chair.

An elderly lawyer rose. "May it please your honor, the case of Bangs versus Simpson, in which cause I appear for the plaintiff, is marked for trial succeeding the criminal case. But I was wholly unprepared for such celerity in the Wayter trial. I believed it would continue for at least two more days. Therefore, my witnesses and——"

"I see, I see, Brother Doane," snapped the judge crisply. "And I take it you other gentlemen are in the class of Brother Doane—not ready for the word 'go,' eh?"

They arose in a body and regretfully confessed.

"No blame is attached," said his honor. He beamed. He was relieved. As a lawyer he had guessed at their unreadiness when he was talking to the county attorney. "I will give you all day to-morrow to make your preparations. In the meantime"—he drawled and smiled and made the situation insignificant by what seemed to be jest—"in the meantime, I say, maybe the court will go fishing."

He walked back to the cubby-hole "chambers," escorted in due form by the sheriff.

Again he filled his pipe, meditating, his eyes on vacancy. When he had lighted up and was haloed with smoke wreaths, he pulled close to the table, secured a pen and a sheet of paper, and prepared to write.

Over his shoulder, after penning date and place, he said, "Mr. Sheriff, go get a hitch for me, with driver, and have it ready in front of the tavern. Two horses and——" He hesitated a moment in order to chuckle. "Better make it a jigger wagon, if you can't find a double-stout buckboard."

The sheriff repressed his hilarity till he was outside on his way to the livery stable. All this was new stuff from a judge, he reflected, but it showed more promise of getting results in that peculiar region than the usual methods of cut-and-dried law.

And Ben wrote this:

To His Excellency, Governor Chase:
State House.

See here, Sam, I value the honor and so forth and so on, but I haven't the time right now to express my full appreciation. But you know how my heart stands in your case. You slipped the banana peel of friendship under me and I fell. I'm slow and heavy, but I'm on my feet again. Once more I tell you I'm not judicial timber. I'm hanging up court to go chasing after something which hasn't been settled by a verdict, so I feel. If the chief justice ever hears of such a play by a judge—meaning me, because no other judge in the State would be such a damphool—aforesaid c. j. will throw a fit. So I'm resigning. This doesn't sound formal, but it is. It's the way you and I have to talk to each other, you old hardshell turtle. Get me? I'm off on a job. Maybe killing somebody, for all I know. So you'd better announce the resignation p. d. q. to save scandal for your judgment and the administration.

Hastily, but meaning it whole hog,
Benjamin Franklin Chadwick
(Official when thus signed in full).

He rammed the folded sheet into an envelope, licked the flap, pounded his fist to seal it.

"That's ethical, at any rate!" he declared, using the fist for emphasis.

Likewise he enunciated, when he again pounded his fist to secure the postage stamp: "And it saves my hide as judge!"

On the way to the tavern he dropped the letter in at the post office and grunted relief.

He used the same kind of a grunt to express satisfaction when he tested the strength of the buckboard, sitting in and filling the middle seat. His baggage was a saggy little valise.

"Looks like I'm intending to make quite a stop of it, Mister Sheriff," he

remarked, when the officer handed over the satchel, holding it out on a forefinger. "But court will be in session day after to-morrow."

This promise was based on Ben's resolve to turn the civil cases over to the Frayne Center trial justice. They were minor affairs and could come within that limited scope of jurisdiction.

At the foot of the mountain Chadwick ordered his driver to hang up at a wayside inn till the next day.

"But I can git ye up that ro'd all right, judge. It's steep and crooked, but my critters can make a haul of it, though."

"I can't afford to have the prevention-of-cruelty folks after me, Dick. I'm an honorary president of the county society. And the doc tells me I can stay down around three hundred, if I walk enough."

So Big Ben, chuckling, tackled the mountain road.

He went slowly for two reasons: the climb was tough, and he wanted to enter the settlement after dark.

Nightfall did not bother him. He was in familiar territory. Beyond the settlement toward which he was bound there was a trout pond where he had spent many a successful day in times past, paddled by old Ike Trufant in a flat-bottomed boat.

It was comforting to Ben when he reflected that now "Angleworm Ike" might serve as a helpful guide in matters apart from fishing.

So, plowing ponderously through the darkness, unobserved, meeting nobody, because Ike's cabin was on the outskirts of the little village, the judge came at last to his destination. No other habitation was in sight.

Ike was within, alone. The judge peered through an uncurtained window and made sure. Then he walked in without knocking.

"H'lo!" said Ike casually.

Just as casually Ben replied with a, "Hello!"

The old chap was rewinding the joints of a rod. He kept on with the task after the caller had dropped himself between the arms of a chair, the sturdiness of which had been tested by him in the past, pulled out his pipe and stoked plentifully.

"How many hosses did it take to haul you up the hill?" queried the host with caustic humor. "You must weigh down a lot heavier now, being as how ye're a jedge."

"Eight! And hard pulling!"

"Yas? No doubt they skinched the team, considering what the lo'd was. Come fishing?"

"Maybe! Are they biting?"

Ike shifted his quid from one jaw to the other.

"You're going to lie. I know the symptoms. How good the fishing was last week—how good it'll be next week, if I'll stop over," snapped Ben. "You can't tell the truth about fish. But I want the truth from you about another matter. What the blue lick is all the trouble up here—Wayter and the rest?"

"I'm keeping out of it—toes, tongue, and tripe. You know my style, 'Hippo.' Goshamitey, excuse me! A jedge don't relish nicknames no more."

"You stick to 'Hippo.' as you've always done, Angleworm. If you try to call me 'Judge' while you're talking to me you'll be climbing a five-barred gate all the time. Now out with your yap on what I asked of you."

"Shan't talk."

Ben hoisted himself out of the chair's depths, shook the cabin with pterodactyl tread and stood over the scrawny old man.

"I ain't on no witness stand," Ike quavered. "You can't put me there. They tried to yank me down to court and I wouldn't go."

"Along with the rest of those liars? Of course not. It was good sense!

You're ace-high in my estimation, and always have been, Angleworm. I have come to you for some truths. It's only between us two, like we have passed the bait can and the bottle, times past. Nobody is going to know what you tell me."

"You won't be yanking me into court?"

"Angleworm, I have resigned as judge. The job doesn't suit me. I'm merely up here as an everyday man to straighten things out."

"There's nobody who can do it better, Hippo," declared the old fellow with unction. "And that being the case, I ain't going to be backward with help."

Ben went back to his chair and puffed complacently, clouding the air.

"To save time, what don't I have to tell you?" asked Ike. "You heard a lot in court, of course."

"I heard enough, even from those liars, to settle this much in my mind: Jense didn't shoot Ansy. Somebody else took advantage of the gab threats and the general situation, and did the shooting. Who?"

"I'm only guessing, Hippo. But you're shrewder and can guess better. What do *you* say?"

"Calling no names, understand, and putting a lot of smoke around it"—Ben blew a big ring in front of his face—"Jode Krause."

"I'll step up and stand even-steven with you on li'bility—perviding walls have ears. Jode Krause has been my own guess." Angleworm was emphatic.

"Why did he do it?"

"First and foremost, out o' general cussedness of his nature, which is all grudge b'iled over hell-fire. Ansy and Jense, both of 'em, had whaled him for using his old stinger of a tongue on Julia. Standing on the side lines and watching sharp like I always do, I caught on as how Jode, the blasted old widderer fool, was trying to shine up to the girl. He knowed well enough that Jense would never let him marry her, even if she lost her mind complete and would take on the old whoopus. 'Sides, she was in love with Ansy and everybody was knowing to it. So, Jode's fool notion went to working and he saw a chance, as he looked at it, for more or less of a clean sweep. Hippo, Jode Krause has sure got hellishness down fine. He has made a study of it. Gits his spice o' life that way. If I was wanting to keep you up all night I could tell you about the scandals, fambly bust-ups, and even killings, he has been back of."

"And getting away with no nicks in his skin?"

"He has been a fox monkeying with geese, Hippo. It's all well enough knowed but northin' has been proved. Gawdamitey! With him a-hovering, we ain't really living up here. We're only standing 'round with both arms hooked over our heads but not expecting the arms will save us from being cracked a gol-socker most any minute!"

"Anybody ever thought of shooting him?" queried Ben mildly.

"Plenty o' talk along that line, but never no doing. But when he went onto the stand to swear Jense into the noose, the thing seemed to be shaping up about to the queen's taste. So the boys made a bee of it, and swore Jense off. Looked like Jense was the right and proper chap to do the job!"

"And would be fixed out with another perfect alibi, hey?"

"Waal, the boys have now had some practice and could do even a slicker job next time," averred Ike, grinning. "Here's Jense with every namable and square man's reason to do it, after the plaster laid on by Krause. But Jense went to work and turned himself into a dod-gummed fool after the verdict. Didn't show a mite o' public sperit!"

"He showed *sperit;* but I wouldn't call it civic pride, from what I observed," drawled Ben.

"Waal, the boys are now putting it into him, whatever is the best name to call it. They're going at it tough and rough, but I guess it's all called for in his case."

"Why did the blame fool come back here? He knew what would happen. He said as much in my hearing."

"Once o' the mountains, allus o' the mountains! And his home is here, his work is here. He ain't the rover style. He may go crazy, but he won't go anywhere else."

"What are they doing to him?"

"Guess you'll have to do a little peeking and see for yourself. It wouldn't seem hardly sense and reason if I only set here and told it to you. It ain't what level-headed men of your kind would do. But it's the best the boys have been able to think up on short notice."

The old guide plucked his cap from the prong of a deer's head on the wall. He blew out the lamp and the two went forth into the night.

Ike led the way along bypaths until they were close to a well-lighted cottage. The windows of the front room were opened wide; the room was crowded with men, and plenty of air was needed. No curtains were drawn; the men of the settlement felt no call to hide their activities; espionage by outsiders was not apprehended.

Therefore, lurking in the darkness, away from the fan of light, the interloper was able to see and hear.

Jense Wayter was swathed with knotted ropes and was secured in a big chair.

Whispered Ike in his companion's ear: "They had a turrible tussle, ketching him foul and gitting the ropes on him. And he has been hollering something awful. But I guess they're gitting him consid'able soopled. Seems as if, anyway."

Wayter was rolling his head to and fro against the back of the chair, his purpled visage suggesting an apoplectic head of steam.

Men surrounded him, sitting on chairs or squatting cross-legged on the floor. They were all busy with the frippery tasks with which housewives occupy the time between the sterner duties of the home. Some were fussing at bungling work of knitting. Others were making a more horrible mess of fancy work which had been grabbed away from resentful wives whose civic pride was not up to having pretty things ruined for the sake of making a citizen realize his duty to the community.

All the unwelcome guests, speaking to the pinioned man, called him "Mis' Wayter," with emphasis of offensive politeness. They held in front of his face pieces of work and purred queries about purling or drop-stitching and divers other matters of purely feminine concern.

After a time a spokesman served the cause. "Jense, I'm asking you again! Are you ready to show you're a man and ready to do a man's honest work after a skunk has done his best to put your neck into the noose?"

"'Honest work,'" quoted the prisoner, hoarse and savage. "A damn fine name you're plastering onto murder."

"Well, we've already argued it all out as how it ain't murder. It's saving this place from more damnation. A man here ought to be hung; but he never will be, because law ain't wuth a cuss in gitting at a slippery devil like he is. Hung he ought to be, I say again! Shooting him for what he tried to do is letting him off mighty easy. We ain't saying a thing about a killing we know he's guilty of; that killing done you a good turn, in a way, because cheap Ansy Ward would have been a husband to put a woman in hell."

"I swear to the Lord I won't bring blood on me!"

"In this case you wouldn't have a thing on your conscience," protested the

spokesman. "The rest of us ain't got the same excuse as you have."

"No! I won't do it!" yelled Wayter.

"So you may be thinking to-night, Mis' Wayter, madam," said the provoker, returning to his sarcasm. "But when you've had a good sleep and pleasant dreams, and after another session with us over fancy work, I reckon you'll be seeing new light. You're going to sleep in that chair, damn ye, Mis' Wayter, madam! Being such a feeble old lady, you're going to have your victuals brought and fed to you from a spoon. We ain't going to take the resks of another tussle, Mis' Wayter. So we'll be saying a fond good night and thanking the lady o' the house for a sociable evening. Much obleeged, too, for your idees on tatting and so forth."

Dreadful profanity constituted the sum of Wayter's speeding of his guests.

They left one man to guard and attend on the captive, promising to send a relief at midnight. "Swap receipts for pie and cake and keep Mis' Wayter interested," suggested the leader.

Following behind the guide, Ben made a quick get-away when he saw the meeting in process of breaking up.

"Ike," said the judge, "I didn't understand what Wayter meant when he told me he'd be put through hell to make him do a thing. But he didn't put it any too strong. They'll make a lunatic out of him, and then he'll break loose and do almost anything."

"Yeah! They're lotting on the sort o' temper Jense packs," admitted the old fellow placidly.

"Do you know of any way to stop this persecution?"

"I can't think of northin' sensible at present writing."

Ben smoked one more pipeful before turning in. Ike resumed work on the rod, winding the silk thread. There was no more talk between the two men.

Then Ben knocked the dottle out of his pipe, yawned vociferously, pulled off his collar and necktie and threw them on the floor, heaved coat and vest in another direction, and rolled into a bunk, with underwear for night apparel. He did not open his valise.

Ike, warned by past association, pulled bits of cotton batting from a ragged quilt and stuffed his ears. This precaution dulled measurably the racket of Ben's snoring.

"He ain't been doing all that thinking without something sure to come from it," muttered Angleworm. "Well, we'll see what the morrer brings forth, as the pote says."

The "morrer" brought forth Big Ben out of his bunk before Ike had opened his eyes.

A tremendous clatter at the stove was the alarm.

Ike offered no comment or criticism on this activity of the guest; from past experience he knew how dead-set was Bachelor Ben Chadwick on doing for himself in getting up a meal.

The guide went out and chopped more wood, set the table, and stood around until breakfast was served.

There was no conversation. When Big Ben was busy over a stove he was always wholly absorbed. When he sat to eat he attended strictly to the business in hand and mouth.

Then, while Ike did the dishes, the guest idled and smoked with the air of one who had not a feather's weight of care or concern on his mind.

Angleworm recognized the symptoms in Ben Chadwick. "It means as how lightning is going to strike somewhere —somehow," mumbled Ike, cascading hot water from the teakettle on the heaped dishes.

However, as hour after hour passed, Ike became impatient. The anticipated storm seemed a long time a-gathering. For Ike it was not completely a consolation to reflect that the delayed lightning might be all the more effective be-

cause the charge was given plenty of time to accumulate.

Ben loafed and smoked. He did not talk.

Along toward noon he asked casually, "Are the menfolks drifting back from the choppings, Angleworm?"

Ike took a glance from the window. "Yep! Quite a bunch is gabbing in front o' the store, waiting for the dinner horns."

Ben put away his pipe and lifted himself out of the chair. He plodded to the wall and took down Ike's rifle.

"Magazine full?"

"Yep!"

"Better come along. Not to help. Not to get mixed in. But something may happen and you don't want to miss it."

The two went out and walked slowly along the road toward the general store.

When they passed Jode Krause's house they saw him in the yard, chopping kindlings for his noontime cook fire.

He straightened and gaped at Judge Chadwick, finding no ready explanation of that gentleman's presence in the settlement.

"Howdy, Krause!" called Ben cheerfully.

Jode "plocked" his ax into the chopping block and growled unamiable reply.

Pursued the judge: "Hope you are not laying it against me because Wayter went free after your testimony against him. But when a man is on the bench there's only about so much a presiding justice can do, holding strictly to the letter of the law."

"Law ain't much good in handling things, near's I can find out," snarled Krause.

"You and Jense Wayter seem to be agreed on that, no matter how far apart you are on other questions." The judge beamed amiably while he shifted the rifle to the other arm. It was as if he were putting emphasis on the weapon.

Jode goggled in puzzlement. "What's the idee, jedge? Ain't court still on?"

"Yes, but I'm taking a day off."

"Going hunting, hey?"

"That's it—I'm hunting." He walked on. Then he called over his shoulder, "By the way, Krause, I'm intending to say something about you down in front of the store. You may not want to miss it." It was deliberate and calculated challenge.

"I don't stand for no slurring from nobody," the other bawled.

"Ah-hah!" called the judge. "Slipping on all too sudden a coat that fits, aren't you? Isn't there anything good that can be said about you, Krause?"

He walked on.

"You're poking him with a pretty sharp stick, Hippo," observed Angleworm.

"With full intent and malice prepense," admitted the judge, grinning. "I suppose the law would call it that. But I want Jode Krause on hand and hot!"

As soon as Ben and Ike were well on their way, Krause trotted into his house. When he came out he was settling something on his hip, under the flap of his coat.

The men in front of the store surveyed the judge with apprehensiveness —revealed a sense of guilt; they were wondering how much he had learned about their perjury, how much he knew concerning their methods of "making a man" of Jense Wayter. A jurist descending on them with a rifle in the hook of his arm was, at any rate, a figure suggesting strange menace.

On his own part, Ben ran his eyes over them with the utmost benignancy.

"Howdy, folks! We can be more sociable to-day than we could be in the courtroom yesterday." Then he jumped them, with full enjoyment of the situation. "By the way, somebody run and cut Jense Wayter loose. This being a reunion, as you might say, we

mustn't be stingy about letting everybody in. Oh, I know all about your handling of Jense!"

The individual who had been spokesman at Wayter's the previous evening now moved away from the group, going on the errand.

"Guess you've caught us foul, jedge," he confessed, abashed.

Ben shook his head, his broad face crinkly with smiles. He went to the store platform and paced to and fro, waiting for the arrival of Wayter, knowing well enough that the infuriated man would come rushing to headquarters.

Jode Krause merely slinked along the road, however, and took his stand apart from the others.

With ropes hanging to him in knots after he had been cut free, Jense came staggering to the scene on stiffened legs. He was working his arms to rid himself of the numbness. But his temper was full of vigor.

"Jedge Chadwick, jest as soon as I git some of my strength back I'm going to begin killing off this pack o'——"

Ben flung up his hand, then he patted the rifle, breaking in on the hoarse raving. "Jense, the instant you lay hand on any of these men, I'll bore one of your legs. I'm an awful good shot, as Ike, here, will testify—and it won't be the kind of alibi testimony that was given yesterday in court. A word to the wise! You get me, the whole of you, I reckon! I'm hoping and expecting you're all going to be nice boys here to-day. But if not——" Slowly he raised his mammoth hand over his head and as slowly brought into a clinch the sturdy fingers. "You get me, don't you?"

All were silent except Jode Krause. He had brought a gun on his hip and in his heart his everlasting, acrid grudge against all men—and at the moment the grudge was centered on this man who threatened to make talk.

He took a few steps forward and sneered, "I've seen some pernickety sights in my life, but the limit of all I've ever seen is a jedge a-swaggering around with a rifle, telling folks where they git off!"

"I agree with you, Krause. It would be queer if it were so. But I'm not a judge any longer. I've jacked the job. One reason for doing it is so I can stand here in this town of yours on my two feet as only a man with men. Hell is to pay here, and I'm going to uncover what it's all about."

He was silent for a moment, letting the statement soak in. He swung the rifle out of the hook of his arm and held it at his side in both hands, ready for instant use.

"On the way here, I called to Jode Krause in his yard and advised him to follow along. I told him I intended to say something *about* him. He is here and I'm going to say it *to* him!"

Krause set a hand on his hip and started to back away. "I ain't going to stay here and be houted!" he proclaimed fiercely.

"Take your hand away from your hip!" roared Big Ben. "Quick! Else I'll nail you in the leg."

The threatened man obeyed, cowed, dominated by that looming bulk on the platform, by that ready rifle, by the steel of eyes which matched the steel of the weapon.

"Now, Jode Krause, I'm telling you face to face, and before these men who know you, that you are and have been in this community a worse pest and plague than the smallpox crossed with the black death and the seven years' itch. You're a misbegotten hybrid, damned by the devil's mother and sired by an imp of hell. And I beg for the forgiveness of your real folks when I say it; but they wouldn't own you, if they were back on earth to know what you have been doing. You have lied to swear a man into the noose. I have got the

goods on you, Krause. No matter how. I'm making it my own business and keeping my own secret. You'll now stand by to get yours—and get it plenty. Go home and wait. If you run away into the hills I'll call on these men and we'll comb the woods like combing a dog for fleas."

Krause went slowly away.

Shouted the god of the machine, making sure that the accused heard: "Go to your dinners, men. I'm not leaving town for a while. I'll be in Ike's cabin for the afternoon, writing out the facts about Jode Krause. They'll be handy in case anything happens to me."

The plotter came down from the platform, exhibiting complacency. According to his belief, he had compounded a compelling batch of bluff and provocation.

Ike, walking beside Ben, twisted queer, uncomprehending glances at his companion.

"Angleworm, you're wanting to tell me I'm playing a mighty queer game with Krause," the judge suggested. "But you needn't say so. I know it myself."

"You've scared him so blue he'll run away surer'n blazes."

"Oh, no! He won't run, Ike. Didn't you hear me announce I'd be writing out facts?"

"Of course I heerd you."

"Well, Jode Krause is of fool's caliber, that's all! He'll be figuring on a way to suppress both me and the facts. He can't see beyond that! Now, Angleworm, you get busy; but don't act as if you are busy. You simply loaf around from house to house and drop word to the men of this place, saying it's from me, that they're to walk away into the woods, all naturallike, after they eat dinner. Not in a bunch, but going as they usually do. Then they're to swing around under cover of the trees and post themselves out of sight but where they can keep sharp eyes on the back of your camp."

"My good, gracious gosh! You ain't aiming to let that hellion shoot at you, be ye!"

"Maybe!" admitted the judge placidly. "But you needn't make that any business of yours. Your business is to tell those men what I've said. Then you come to the camp, get your fishing rod, and go off toward the pond, making sure you pass Krause's house and let him see you."

"Hippo, you're too big a target!" mourned Ike.

"Target, eh? By thunder, Angleworm, you've given me a new and a clinching idea. I hadn't thought of something rather special."

Ben marched on, after admonishing his aid to attend to the job assigned.

When Ike returned to the camp to get his rod, Big Ben was out behind the cabin setting up a makeshift target.

"By the way, Angleworm," he called, "holler out good and loud in the village, making sure Krause hears you, telling one and all that none of the women and children are to be frightened if they hear shooting. But advise them to keep away from this camp. Tell 'em I'll be out having a little practice with your rifle."

"And all this ain't fooling, even if it looks like it, hey?" demanded the guide.

"No, it isn't fooling, no matter how it looks," returned Ben. "Now hustle your boots and leave me alone."

Ike moved leisurely enough when he left the settlement, after he had duly attracted the attention of Krause, who was glaring through the dingy pane of a window, and when he had delivered in Krause's hearing the admonition for the women and the children.

However, when the old chap had gained the covert of the woods, he legged it in good earnest, circling to post himself within sight of the rear of his camp.

He came upon others who were lurking according to orders. But he was not contented to remain on the ground. He climbed a spruce tree and peered from concealment, crouching behind the boughs.

At last he saw Jode Krause make a sortie, sneaking from the rear door of his cottage. He was carrying a rifle.

At about that time Big Ben came out of the camp and popped away at a target, emptying the magazine.

Then he trudged back into the cabin.

Krause hid himself and waited, as if to make sure that Chadwick had not gone in after more ammunition. But prolonged delay apparently satisfied Jode. He began his cautious stalking of the camp, using for covert the hollows of the rough ground, stealing from one clump of bushes to the other, as he advanced.

With coat and vest off, Ben appeared at an open window, holding a sheet of paper to the better light. Then he moved away with the air of one purposing to keep on with his writing job.

Stooping, Krause made a run of it to the corner of the camp. After a pause, holding close to the side of the building, he moved slowly toward the open window, doubling forward. Cautiously he raised himself on the sloping, double doors which covered the cellar rollway. From that vantage point he quickly swung up his rifle and cracked several shots into the camp.

And then something else happened.

The double doors were flung up and flapped open as if a dynamite blast had operated them. It was the eruption of the bulk of Benjamin Franklin Chadwick! That bulk filled the open space of the rollway.

The prodigious upheaval tossed Krause in air. He came floundering down on his back and then three hundred pounds lighted on him, squatting on him, rendering him as helpless as if he were pinned down by a steam roller.

And that was about all there was to it, except for tying him up securely after the men had come scampering from the woods.

"Angleworm, I used all the bedding you own, stuffing that up to proper size," stated Ben, directing their gaze by a flap of his big hand.

They massed at the window, looking in.

With broad back toward the window was a fairly good simulacrum of Ben Chadwick, sitting in a chair, elbows on the table, bent over in a posture of a man engaged in writing.

"Go in, boys, and make note of how many bullet holes are in the back of my coat," directed Big Ben. "And you saw the man who did the shooting. All you've got to do is keep him as he is till I send up the sheriff. I'm starting for Frayne Center right now."

"Will there be enough ag'inst him to hang him?" inquired a citizen, while Ben was pulling on his coat after the inspection.

"All I can promise right now is that his address will be the State prison for some little time, boys. And after that, we'll see—we'll see!"

Then, with his familiar chuckle, he turned to Ike. "You'll find some holes in your bedding, Angleworm; but it needed ventilation, anyway. You don't air your place out enough." He straddled across the prostrate prisoner, whom they had laid in the yard. "So long, Krause! I'll see you in court."

Big Ben trudged away down the mountain swinging his little valise.

Less than a week later, Governor Chase came again to Ben's office building. The door was open. There was a new box in front of the threshold—a box labeled: "Clean-wash Soap."

To the caller, Ben was revealed through the doorway.

"H'lo, Ben!"

"H'lo, Sam! Step in!"

"Take notice, old spider: I'm straddling, this time. Short cut!"

"Yeah! A lot of fuss, fobbing, and foolishness can be saved by a short cut, Sam. Glad to see you taking up the idea."

The governor straddled, grunting with the effort, and entered. "It was considerable of a short cut you made upcountry in that Wayter case."

"Pretty short. You're right, Sam. Heard about it, eh?"

"I've made it my way to hear all the facts before coming into this office."

"I thought I might as well prove to you that I'm not good judicial timber. Hope the resignation has been acted on."

"It has been. Don't worry."

Big Ben's visage became a scroll which could be labeled: "Map of Supreme Content."

"However, I'm a little previous in saying it has been acted on," corrected his excellency. "I'm really acting on it now."

From his pocket he pulled Ben's letter of resignation. He tore the sheet into bits and snowed the flakes over Ben's head and shoulders. "You blasted old hippopotamus, you know what that means, don't you?"

Ben pitched high his voice in protest. "But look a here, Sam, it isn't in me to be a proper kind of judge!"

"Confound you, you're the best pick for a judge I've made during my administration."

"It ain't so—by a damsite. And you know it!"

"Well, Ben, in the interests of peace and perfect understanding, I'll compromise a mite. You're the best judge *for*"—he stressed the word—"for what you're up against in this neck o' woods. And don't I know the cussed critters exactly as well as you do! Just think of another sort of judge tackling the thing!"

"You're right, Sam!"

"I'll raise particular hell with you if you presume to tell the governor of this State he's wrong," declared his excellency.

Another story by Holman Day will appear in an early issue.

A TEST OF GIRL NATURE

CHARLIE McCLINTOCK, veteran dramatic press agent, was discussing the modern girl with his friend, Percy Heath, author and director of motion pictures.

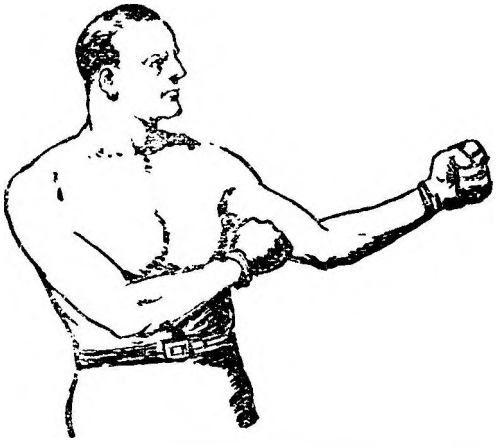
"Remember, years ago," queried McClintock, "when the handsome and high-strung actor charmed 'em into hysterical giggles every Saturday afternoon and waked up every Monday morning to read hundreds of mash notes from the gals and young matrons who 'simply adored' his deep-brown eyes and leonine locks?"

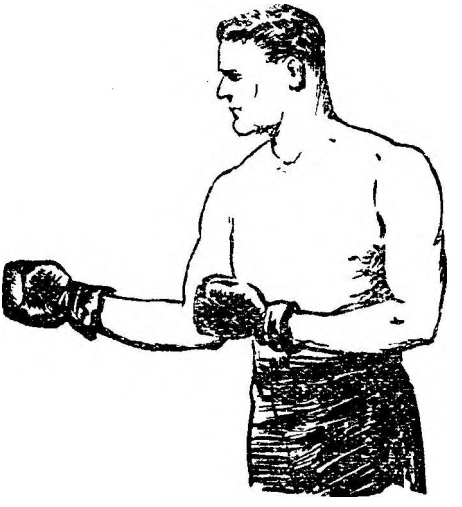
"I do," replied Heath.

"Well, all that's out now," said the oracular Charles. "The matinée-idol business has gone up the flue. These 1928 flappers know their onions, and they waste no time on such guff."

"Wait a minute," requested Heath, and went to a telephone in the next room.

"I got some reliable information that shoots your idea all to pieces," he declared when he came back; "and to be fair about it, I picked a fellow who's been in the movies just about two years. He is Charles Rogers, familiarly known as Buddy Rogers. Last month, his director tells me, Buddy got 17,860 of these mash letters."





John L.'s Battle for a Century

By William Hemmingway

Author of "Jim Brady Doctors His Right," Etc.

The entertaining and authoritative Mr. Hemmingway tells about one of the great Sullivan's little known but highly interesting early fights.

A COMPLETE STORY

BEFORE he became the favorite of fortune, John L. Sullivan was richer than he ever was afterward. He was rich in energy, in vitality, in belief in his own supremacy that nothing could shake, and in a combination of strength, speed and destructiveness that the ring had never seen before his day—and has never seen since. Corbett was faster; Jeffries and Dempsey were stronger; Fitzsimmons was wilier, McCoy trickier, and Tunney a better thinker; but no other man combined all the qualities that make a champion to the amount and in the degree that Sullivan then had them.

I have already told in these pages of Sullivan's early battles with such able men as the exceptionally strong and brilliant Harvard amateur, young Guiteras, and the undefeated middleweight champion of the world, Mike Donovan, at his best. In those contests he showed much of the genius that made him unique among fighting men, but it was not until he had proved his genius on Joe Goss, a heavyweight of long experience and recognized champion of the world, that the critics proclaimed his wonderful powers.

Formal battles for the championship were few and far between in those days, because they were against the law; the fighters and their backers had to steal away to their rendezvous with the utmost caution in order to avoid interference by the police and the militia, and the danger of imprisonment, if they were caught; all of which was so expensive that the winner might lose money on the enterprise—incredible as

that sounds in these days of three-million-dollar fights, protected by law and promoted by the athletic commissions of the various States!

So that Joe Goss, champion though he was, gained a meager living by giving boxing exhibitions in theaters and halls, instead of lolling in luxury like his successors, with their managers, secretaries, attorneys, et cetera. By no flight of the imagination can you conceive of Mr. Goss being invited by a distinguished professor of English literature to address his class at the university, as the titleholder of to-day has been invited, to give the boys his impressions of Shakespeare. Honest Joe was so preoccupied with the risky business of digging out three square meals a day and sufficient ale to moisten them that he had no time for literature or any other of the polite arts, though he was good at his own craft.

Somehow it makes you think of the neglected poet, the divine boy Chatterton, starving in his garret, to recall now that the great Joe Goss had to resort to a testimonial benefit to eke out his scanty means. Think of that, and think of the raw dubs, who know nothing about the art and science of the game, drawing hundreds of thousands of dollars to-day for a few rounds of clowning with gloves on their unskilled fists. But Joe had to take a benefit or stop eating, and he was delighted when his friends hired the Boston Music Hall—Hercules in the shrine of Euterpe and Melpomene!—for the evening of April 6th, 1880. Early advertisements declared that the long program would be put through by "a host of volunteers."

But that was not enough. The volunteers were mostly ambitious lads, eager to shine before the public eye, and perhaps a few of them would provide punches worth looking at; but, after all, they were to serve as mere appetizers for the hot feast of fists when the great beneficiary should appear. Put a good man in front of him, and the house would be crowded; while if the champion could find no better adversary than a sparring partner, the gate receipts would not amount to much.

The good man was found. After his bewildering experience in the whirlwind of Sullivan's blows, Mike Donovan announced to the world that the "Highlands Strong Boy," or the "Roxbury Strong Boy," as others termed him, was the coming champion of the world. Wise men knew that Mike's judgment was of the best, especially when, as in this case, he could verify it with exhibition of his broken nose and broken right hand. The name Sullivan in those days was noted in law and in politics, but the name of John L. Sullivan meant nothing to the man in the street, the man whose dollars would make the benefit a real benefit. Goss went over to the Highlands and invited the Strong Boy to go on with him in the wind-up of the program—for a very few dollars, of course.

When it was advertised that "The wind-up will be between the beneficiary and John Sullivan, the Strong Boy of the Highlands, the coming champion of America," there was a rush for seats in the music hall, just as there would be to-day for boxes in Madison Square Garden, if some strong, fiery and ambitious lad were going on with millionaire champion Tunney at his benefit. (His benefit!) The Goss exhibition was really a championship contest in all but the name. By the time the first pair of featherweights went on, you could not have squeezed one more man into the hall with an order of the court or a hydraulic press.

No man can rise to the heights of world champion unless he has a fair amount of brain machinery as well as muscularity, and Goss was no exception to this rule. On the day he made

his little arrangements with Sullivan he looked him over carefully and remembered all Donovan had said about him. So he casually remarked that he had not had a fight lately and was not, therefore, in the best of condition.

"I cahn't go on with you, y' know, unless you'll go a bit light," he explained, in his best English accent.

"That's all right with me," said Sullivan. "Don't worry. I won't hurt you."

No one who ever looked into Sullivan's clear hazel eyes and frank countenance could doubt his sincerity, and Champion Goss went home happy in the reassurance that his title was safe and that the Highlands Strong Boy would be content with his small fee and the advertising incident to his showing in public with the master. If poor Goss had only been true to his own pledge to take it easy, he would have been happier yet—and stayed so. But he was fifteen years older than the lad barely of age, had lived in a hard world, and therefore can be pardoned something of his sophisticated behavior toward a mere promise.

Yet the champion was cautious. As he stood beside Sullivan in the wings of the stage, awaiting the call to the ring, he reminded him again of his promise. The Strong Boy looked at him in indignant surprise that he should think any reminder necessary.

"I remember," he rumbled. "Come on; I won't hurt you. But don't you try to get gay!"

Thus it happened that when time was called and the two began to box, the spectators got full value for their money right there in the first round. Sullivan leaped from his corner, chopped down Goss' guard, and swung his beamlike right arm for the big man's neck. But he "pulled the punch"—that is, he took all the impetus out of it just before it landed; so that it did no more harm than a soft snowball. Goss shook his battle-scarred head, stepped back, came on again, jabbed Sullivan's face with a lightning left, and followed with a right to the body. Sullivan rushed again, but kept the power out of his blows. He was not yet an adept at boxing, of which thus far he had learned very little; but he had an inborn sense of balance and poise which enabled him to govern all his efforts with nice skill.

To the uninitiated, which included most of the crowd, and to the few wise ones in the hall, that first round looked like a nearly even exchange, with the champion making the pace and the Highlands Strong Boy running second pretty well—still, distinctly running second. As the two went to their corners at the end of the round, a great wave of handclapping, stamping and cheering swept the hall. "That's the boy, Joe! Eat him up, Joe!" and similar advice rang out clear above the volume of noise.

And, in an evil moment, Joe took the advice seriously.

At the next call of time, both stepped forward briskly, Goss masking his attack with a smile that Malvolio could not have bettered. He led, and his left found Sullivan's chin. He stepped away, and easily avoided the big lad's next rush. Then he danced in again, feinted with his left for the ribs, and thus drew down Sullivan's guard. Instantly he followed with a right-hand drive—a straight, hefty smash, that landed full force on Sullivan's chin. He jumped back to give the young fellow room to fall clear.

The Strong Boy blinked and shook his head. Then he let forth an inarticulate roar that sounded like the voice of a lion awakening the desert, and jumped at Goss. Chopping down his guard with his left, he shot his right like a cannon ball on the champion's mouth. Goss sat on the floor with a crash, as if his feet had been yanked

out in front of him, then rolled over. Sullivan strolled to an off corner and meditated bitterly on the treachery of Goss' attack after his request to go easy. As he meditated he scowled, blacker and blacker. The crowd began to boo him for getting rough at a benefit. They had not noticed the provocation.

At the count of six, Goss arose, bleeding at the mouth, and was about to start another attack, when Sullivan leaped at him and smashed him in the ribs with a straight right that knocked him halfway through the ropes. Joe clutched instinctively at the lower rope, and so kept himself from diving out into the music auditorium. Then he knelt, staggering, on one knee, and the crowd hissed and booed Sullivan and yelled for his blood. It looked as if they were going to mob him. He calmly went to the ropes nearest the front of the ring and raised his arm.

"Gentlemen," he rumbled in that deep voice whose overtones reverberated and thrilled like the diapason of a mighty organ—"gentlemen, I'm hitting this fellow as easy as I can. Don't worry. I won't hurt him." The booing and yelling stopped, and Goss, much heartened by the Strong Boy's words, arose as the referee was counting eight. But he was a changed champion. No parlor athlete on ladies' day at the club could have tiptapped more gently than he dabbled at Sullivan for the rest of the round. And John L. spared him.

When "Time and wind-up!" was called, for the third round, Goss came out with a propitiating smile, a handshake, and an apology. Most of the blood had been sponged off his damaged features, enough that his expression could be readily seen, and the shaking of his knees gave emphasis to his words as he declared that his first hard blow had been accidental.

"That's all right," Sullivan rumbled. "Try it again, if you like."

Goss didn't like; so he lived to walk out on his own legs after the end of the bout. Sullivan cherished no ill will because Joe had broken the promise of light hitting he had been so eager to make. From first to last, there was never a mean or petty streak in Sullivan's make-up. He became Goss' friend and helped him train for his ring battle with Paddy Ryan a month later. Joe and his crowd stole away to Collier's Station, West Virginia, where Ryan beat Goss in eighty-seven long-drawn rounds, bare knuckles, on the turf.

"Don't worry; I'll lick Ryan for you," Sullivan assured poor, battered Joe when he got back to Boston. "This Ryan was born in Ireland. That's all right; but he's the last foreigner that'll be champion for a while. The champion of the world ought to be an American. I'll take care of that." This prediction was not fulfilled until a year and a half later, and meantime Sullivan fought the best battles of his career.

Luxury had not yet begun to weaken him. This period might be called the golden age of Sullivan, when he was in his prime and was really the mightiest man of fists the world had ever seen; but it is remembered now only by a few old men whose voices are never heard when critics try to prove to-day who was the greatest man that ever fought in the ring. Ask Muldoon. He knows.

See how fame grows. John B. McCormick, husky athlete of an earlier decade, turned promoter of and writer about boxing in Cincinnati, went to Boston on his vacation, late in the summer of 1880. He delighted in the change, as a Boston man would delight in Casco Bay or the Grand Canyon. He dropped in for a chat with Patsy Sheppard. Patsy was a rugged little man, with a square torso that might have been carved out of oak, punishing

little hands with gnarled knuckles, and bright eyes that glowed and sparkled above broad and ruddy cheeks and seemed far younger than the gray temples behind them. Patsy had been lightweight champion long ago, but for years now he had retired to the ease and dignity of keeping a "place," known as the Champion's Rest, in Washington Street, where he taught the art to a few select pupils and occasionally put on a bout with gloves in the room back of the bar.

"What's the good word?" Mr. McCormick inquired, after they had moistened their clay and asked for the health of mutual friends.

"Why, something pretty good," Patsy answered, as he slowly shifted his glass and stamped a pattern of wet rings on the polished surface of the table. "Something pretty good. I think we've got a comer."

"Boston fellow? What weight?" Mr. McCormick asked, mildly interested.

"A big one," said Patsy. "Big and a hummer. Why, here a few weeks ago he stopped Joe Goss with a couple of punches."

"Phew! Stopped Joe Goss?" the visitor exclaimed sadly, as if he heard of a shrine defaced. "Was Joe sober?"

"Sober as a judge, and John stopped him cold the minute he cut loose," Patsy declared. "First I heard of him, he dusted off a big pupil of mine —the fastest and best big fellow I ever saw, for an amateur. Why, he's knocked out Steve Taylor at Harry Hill's in New York, and he come near putting away Mike Donovan! He's the coming man, I'm telling you—strong as a bull, quick as a cat, ready for anything!"

"H'm!" said Mr. McCormick, catching the enthusiasm of his friend, whose judgment he knew was excellent. H'm! A comer, eh? I could use a good big man in Cincinnati. Let's go look him over."

"He lives out in Roxbury," Patsy explained. "You drop in to-night, and I'll have him here. His name is John Sullivan."

The youth came in after dusk, roughly dressed and with the brim of his derby hat drawn far down over his eyes; refused to drink anything but sarsaparilla; and gladly stripped to the waist in the back room when Mr. McCormick asked him.

"I was amazed at his development," the veteran told me long afterward. "I never saw such driving power as he showed in the big, loose muscles back of the shoulders. I said: 'Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. You ought to be able to whip any man in the world.'"

"I'll fight any man in the world," said Sullivan. "I offered to go on with Paddy Ryan at Springfield the other day, and he told me to go get a reputation. I'll get it—and get *him*, too."

Mr. McCormick offered the youth one hundred dollars, his railway fare, and board at a first-class hotel if he would go to Cincinnati and box four rounds with a good man. Sullivan seemed surprised at the idea of traveling so far from home, and said:

"A thousand miles! That's a long way!"

The great sum of one hundred dollars surprised him, too, and he eagerly asked to have the agreement put in writing. This was done, and young Sullivan went home overjoyed. He had actually got a battle for a "century," as the boys called one hundred dollars.

The promoter tried to get in touch with Joe Coburn, a championship contender, and with George Rooke, another good man. But he had no luck. He wrote Steve Taylor at Harry Hill's resort, but wise Steve rubbed his sore jaw and made no reply. Months

passed; Sullivan kept writing to ask when he was to have his chance; and Mr. McCormick was about to reply that he could not find a match for him, when John Donaldson called at his office, told him he was champion of the Northwest, and showed newspaper clippings to corroborate his claims. He was glad to accept fifty dollars and his board for his services. And Mr. McCormick telegraphed Sullivan to come on.

The Highland Strong Boy arrived on a night in mid-December. In honor of the visit he wore a new suit of clothes; but he had no overcoat, though the night was cold.

"Where's your coat?" asked the manager.

"I haven't got an overcoat," said Sullivan.

When Mr. McCormick proposed a good, stiff drink to warm him up, Sullivan took a hot lemonade, and refused to put a "stick" in it. (If he had kept on that way, how different boxing history would have been!) He stared so hard at the change of a five-dollar bill that Mr. McCormick asked him: "How are you fixed?" For answer the Strong Boy took a big copper two-cent piece out of his pocket.

"That's my cash capital," he said. Yet he refused to take the change for pocket money until the promoter promised to let him pay it back after the match. When his employer called a cab to take them to the Florentine Hotel, the big boy protested against such extravagance.

"Ain't there any street cars in this town?" he asked reprovingly.

Mr. McCormick boomed Sullivan in his paper, the *Enquirer*, and the commotion he stirred up agitated the lad.

"You're making me out a hell of a fellow," he protested. "Wherever I go they're pointing at me and saying: 'That's him, the young Boston fighter, Sullivan!' You want to cut that out."

A wealthy local fight fan wanted the visitor to go to the Vine Street Opera House and applaud too loudly, so that "Big Mike," the bouncer, would try to throw him out, and Sullivan could give him the thrashing he needed. If Sullivan would do this, the fan would give him the best suit of clothes in town.

"I'd like a new suit," the Strong Boy decided, "but I won't get it that way. I don't mind licking this duck, right off the reel, if they tell him what he's up against; but I won't cop a sneak on him. If he's any good, he'll take his chance; and if he won't take a chance, he's a cur and not worth punching."

Colonel Bob Lynn, a high-rolling gambling man, was so pleased with young Sullivan's nice sense of honor that he took him to his tailor to have him measured for a nobby suit of clothes; and he enjoyed the youth's straightforward talk so much that he had his tailor make him an overcoat, too—a fine one, silk-lined, worth one hundred dollars, a lofty price in 1880.

Paddy Ryan, it will be remembered, was the man who took the championship of the world away from Joe Goss; so Mr. McCormick was able to publish an attractive bit of news and at the same time boom his show by printing in the *Enquirer*, a few days before the Donaldson match, this challenge:

> I am prepared to make a match to fight any man breathing, for any sum from $1,000 to $10,000 at catchweights. This challenge is especially directed to Paddy Ryan, and will remain open a month.
>
> Yours respectfully,
>
> JOHN L. SULLIVAN.

Fame was growing. When he signed the agreement to go to Cincinnati and fight, the Strong Boy wrote his name as John Sullivan; but now that he was beginning to be a personage, he remembered his middle name, Lawrence. He always included the L., after this, even when he established the

unique custom of orally signing his speeches. Responding to tumultuous applause, he would say: "I remain your warm and personal friend, John L. Sullivan."

In the news stories before the battle, as well as in the advertising, Mr. McCormick described Sullivan as the champion of the East, and Donaldson as champion of the West, which appealed to sectional pride and stimulated the calls for seats and boxes at Robinson's Opera House. Then, too, the Strong Boy's magnanimous self-denial in refusing to knock out the bullying Big Mike, while incognito, won friends for him everywhere, and the new friends proved their loyalty by coming to the show. The date was December 20, 1880, and it was notable in more ways than one. That night Mr. McCormick made the startling innovation of paying real money to all the lads who went on in the preliminary bouts—ten dollars to the winner, five dollars to the loser. A good, showy prelim boy nowadays can get as much as five hundred dollars, or even one thousand dollars if he is known to have any followers who will bring their dollars to the box office. But imagine the grateful surprise of the mid-Western lads that night to find that they would receive money, real money, for their efforts.

Up to that time managers used to persuade local talent to volunteer, and advertised their names in advance, but most of them would run out on the night. Their places were filled by amateurs, novices, or by poor old has-beens who were glad to get a few drinks of whisky as their reward. As Mr. Tunney might say, "*Tempora mutantur, et nos in illis.*" In lighter words, "We manage these things better nowadays." That memorable occasion was the first time, Mr. McCormick assured me, in which every boxer on the program was paid for his work, and all of them came on as promised.

Robinson's Opera House was jammed to the doors, and even those who came late and had to stand were glad they were present. Donaldson, with three years of steady and successful campaigning behind him, was a little older than Sullivan, stood an inch and a half taller, and outweighed him by fifteen pounds. He was a genial fellow, and he assured his friends that he would put the Strong Boy away in jig time. Possibly his enthusiasm cooled ever so little when they met in the center of the ring. Sullivan crunched his hand as they were introduced, glowered at him from hazel eyes almost black with concentrated passion, and warned him: "You want to look out I don't break you in two!" They returned to their corners.

At the call of time, the big men came forward, Sullivan rather cautiously, as he remembered how far from home he was and facing a "professor" who was said to have a great many ring tricks at command; while Donaldson's luxuriant brown mustache draped a smile that bespoke resolution and belief in his undoubted superiority. As he faced his smaller adversary, he forgot the deep rumble of his warning speech, and made up his mind to do him and do him quickly. He pranced into hitting range and sent a short left blow at the head, missed, and stepped aside. But he had got the range, and he felt sure he would sting the Strong Boy on his next try.

Again Donaldson dashed in, this time with a hard-driven left for the chin. Sullivan chopped the arm down and drove his right fist in on the ribs. If the blow had gone a little lower, that would have been the end of the show; but he allowed too much for the height of the tall Westerner and sent his punch too high, so that it landed on the chest. Even so, it drove Donaldson back, spilled him against the ropes and sent him halfway through them. He

just managed to catch himself and save a nasty fall. He knelt on one knee, took a deep breath, and carefully followed the counting as the referee slowly tolled off the seconds with downward sweeps of his right arm. The opera house was in joyful uproar: this show was worth the money and more, too.

It is a wise general who can change his battle plans instantly when he faces impossible odds. And the seasoned Professor Donaldson was above all else a wise general. When the referee called out "nine!" the professor arose to full height—and ran like a stag with the pack in full cry. The Strong Boy followed, as fast as he could go; but, with an agility astounding in so tall a man, Donaldson ducked, turned, doubled and twisted every way, and kept out of reach of the fists that whizzed at him like bombs. Twice it looked as if Sullivan had him cornered, but just as the big fellow let drive his knock-out punch, his right foot slipped back, and the blow fell short. When time was called at the end of the round, there followed more handclapping, stamping and shouting than the old opera house had ever heard before.

"I'll out him in the next," the Strong Boy remarked as he settled back in his chair.

"Not if your feet keep slipping," McCormick said to him. "What's the matter with your shoes?" Sullivan poised his right foot on tiptoe, and the promoter looked.

"Why, the sole is polished like a piano top!" he exclaimed. "How the dickens are you able to stand up in them, let alone strike a blow? Rub your soles in the resin box!"

"Not in a hundred years!" Sullivan's deep voice rolled back at him in defiance. "That's the first pair of shoes made to order I ever had. Bill Lee made 'em. They're just like London-ring shoes, except there's no spikes. I'm dead stuck on them. I had the soles shined, and I'll keep 'em shined. Ain't they elegant?"

They certainly were the last word in elegance, polished until they shone like panels of ebony or onyx—but slippery as the feet of the wicked.

It did not take Donaldson long to discover in the next round that all he had to do to keep out of range was to suddenly dart away at a right angle from Sullivan's attack. He tried skipping backward once, and the right swing that caught him on the elbow spun him like a coin; but he noted that every time he dodged right or left the Strong Boy stumbled and nearly fell to the floor as he unavailingly tried to twist after him.

"Knock him out! Now you've got him!" the crowd yelled again and again, as Sullivan closed in on his victim. But always at the last moment the taller man dived out of range.

"Listen to me, young fellow," McCormick commanded, as the Boston boy returned to his corner. "You rub your shoes in the resin or you're liable to break your leg if one of 'em turns under you. And you'll never catch Donaldson, either."

"The big stiff! Let him stand up and fight!" Sullivan growled. "But I won't spoil my shoes for him, nor any one else. Ain't they beauts?"

It was very like the tragedy the poet tells: for want of the resin the shoes were lost; for the want of the shoes the knock-out was lost. During the third and fourth rounds the champion of the Northwest must have run a full measured mile; for he did nothing but dodge and run all the time, and a mile in six minutes was nothing for a man in his prime condition. Sullivan followed him, slipping, sliding and slithering like a beginner on skates, shooting punch after punch, but not getting any of them home. Two or three of them banged Donaldson against the ropes,

but he bounced off and away before the growling, rumbling nemesis from the Boston Highlands could finish him.

As a matter of fact, Donaldson was so exhilarated by his luck in lasting through the four rounds that he made a ten-round match with Sullivan a few months later and got himself properly licked. Sullivan wore rough soles.

Sullivan repaid Mr. McCormick's loan and went home to Boston, happy, with most of his hundred dollars to give to his mother. Mr. McCormick, Colonel Bob Lynn, and other admirers of fistic virtue, gave him a fine supper and made him free of anything he might care to drink; but all he took was a modest glass of ale to wash down a thumping, big porterhouse steak. Oh, that that modesty had endured! John L. would probably have lived to this day.

Look for another contribution by William Hemmingway soon.

SLEEPY EVENINGS

"THESE here summer nights," remarked Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "a lot of tramps flop on the grass in a fence corner, and a lot of solid citizens flock into a hall and go to sleep on some political bunk."

THEIR LOVE OF THE GAME

EVERY now and then some wise guy mentions his pet baseball player and remarks: "Now there's a real baseball genius, and he's so good at the game because he loves it. Wouldn't it be a fine thing if every man in the major leagues played ball because he loved it?"

But the fact is that all of those who reach stardom on the diamond do love the game. They play to earn the money they are worth, but they are worth so much because their enthusiastic love of the hustle and excitement of a ball season makes them great players. To them, baseball beats any other profession, trade, or calling, on the list.

This is proved when the years creep up on them and they begin to talk about retiring. Ty Cobb, a wealthy man, has been quitting for three years. In the fall, with the tumult of the World's Series dying on the wind, he is through! But in the spring the old witchery begins to work, and in a few weeks he is signed up and at the training camp. Walter Johnson, with an assured comfortable income, stuck with Washington until Father Time doomed him to slower company, whereupon he stepped out and got the job of managing the Newark Bears. "Gabby" Street, who caught Johnson many years ago, is now more than fifty years old, a man of means and a citizen of standing in his home town; but he is manager of the Knoxville club in the South Atlantic League and catches a majority of the games his team plays.

These princes of the national pastime and many more like them stick to the game so long because it holds them with an irresistible fascination. They love to play ball. Enthusiasm for the game is still in their hearts. Their only regret is that the heart cannot pump the old pep into leg and arm as fast as it once did.

The Ghost Captain

BY Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Senator Maguire," Etc.

When Goring saw the captain of the steamer he was traveling on, he knew he was in danger of death.

A COMPLETE STORY

RALPH GORING got off the train from the nitrate fields at Antofagasta in a state of mind. His clothes were covered with yellow dust, his nose was full of it—and his throat, his soul was sick of the dreariness and nastiness of the sodium-and-potassium desert, and he was almost frantic with anxiety to get out of the country to the civilization and luxury of Valparaiso.

Although he was dying for a bath and a drink, he told the taximan to drive immediately to a steamship office, where he received the bad news that the next passenger liner south sailed in four days. He looked about. A town of yellow plaster-and-brick houses, of streets deep with yellow, irritating dust—a bustling, commercial, prosperous oven of a town, as dismal and distressing as the fields he had left so joyously. Four days in this hell.

At the hotel, which was a good enough hotel in its way, he succeeded in cleaning himself of the powder of the nitrate fields which was clinging to his body. And he absorbed two highballs in quick succession and got his throat clear; but his nose still itched annoyingly. He went down to lunch and found the place as hot as Hades because all windows were closed to keep out the flying yellow dust—and even that precaution was not entirely successful. It did not seem to him that he could endure this place for four days. The arrival of Peter Larkin, who traveled for a British house in Valparaiso and who was an old acquaintance, cheered him slightly.

"I hate Antofagasta," admitted Larkin. "It's the meanest port on my list, though the best from the standpoint of business. However, if you want to get away you don't have to wait for the mail boat. The *Captain Lynch* is sailing in the morning for Valparaiso via coast ports."

"What kind of a craft is she?" Goring asked eagerly.

"Terrible. A Chilean boat—dirty, bad-smelling, vermin-infested and only two thousand tons. Seven days to Valparaiso. The mail boat will be there as soon as the *Captain Lynch.*"

"A funny name for a Chilean steamer," Goring commented.

Larkin laughed. "Lynch was captain of a Chilean warship in the war with Peru. As I remember it, he tackled two Peruvian ironclads with a wooden frigate, and when they had blown the bottom out of her, he boarded them with his crew and captured them. One of their great naval heroes. If it's any inducement, I'm going on her to Caldero. Her captain's an Englishman, so you can depend upon her navigation. Name of Brown."

"Get me aboard," Goring said recklessly. "If you can stand it, I can."

"Right-o."

Ralph Goring was an assignment man for a big American weekly, and his business in Antofagasta and the nitrate country was to supply the million readers of that publication with a vivid pen-picture of one of the world's greatest and least-known industries. At nine in the morning, accompanied by Larkin and followed by a small Indian boy staggering under the weight of his two big suit cases, he climbed the gangplank to the deck of the *Captain Lynch.*

The description of the vessel supplied him in advance by the salesman was utterly inadequate, he decided, as he looked about. The ship's hull was an expanse of rust, with here and there a few flakes of black paint. Her funnel was rusty and looked as though it might momentarily topple. Her deck house had once been white but was now blue with filth. Her deck was cluttered, her crew ragged; and the captain, who stood by the rail, was much the worse for drink.

"Good Lord!" Goring exclaimed. "Do you think she'll reach port?"

"Always has," grinned Larkin. "Brown is a good seaman. He's drunk now, but he'll sober up at sea."

"You'd think an English skipper would make some effort to tidy his ship."

"Oh, he doesn't give a damn."

A half-naked steward's boy conducted them to their staterooms, two dirty cubby-holes which Goring inspected with disgust. They opened off a small, noisome cabin containing a dining table with six fixed chairs.

"We eat with the skipper," Larkin explained. "He's been on her ten years; and if the food hasn't killed him, it won't kill us."

If he had not been ashamed to let Larkin see his distaste for roughing it in this manner, Goring would have returned to the distasteful city of Antofagasta; but while he hesitated the lines were cast off and he was doomed to make the passage. He walked out on deck and came face to face with the captain, who nodded indifferently and passed. But Goring uttered a gasp of astonishment and dismay. He saw a man who ought to be about forty-five but looked ten years older, a man with silver hair and a fat red face mottled and pimpled and a nose which was as bright as a tomato. He wore a slovenly uniform of whites, open and advertising the fact that there was no shirt covering his paunch. He was at least thirty pounds overweight, and the very evident victim of drink—as different as possible from the man whom Goring recognized by the cold, pale-blue eyes.

The ship was already out in the har-

bor, a harbor alive with seals of a nonfur-bearing type. They were swimming in shoals away from the sharp bow of the slow-moving freighter. Goring resisted an impulse to jump overboard; but for the first time in an adventurous life he was afraid. He had recognized this man. If Captain Brown recognized him, something would happen to him.

He turned and went abruptly to his cabin. Larkin came out of his den and entered Goring's cabin with him.

"How long before we get to Caldero?" he demanded.

"Twenty-four hours."

"I'm going ashore with you."

"But there's no decent hotel. It's an awful hole."

"I don't care. Meanwhile I'm seasick. I don't stir out of this cabin."

"Are you crazy? You can't live in this frightful closet. Bad enough to sleep here."

"Listen. I've got to keep out of this captain's way. If he recognizes me, he might kill me."

"You are crazy!"

"No. I'm responsible for what's happened to him; and he knows it. I'll tell you all about it when we get ashore. But I wouldn't blame him for murdering me; and he could get away with it, on this ship and on this coast. I'm in seclusion until it's time to get ashore."

"But you've paid your passage to Valparaiso."

"I don't care."

Goring spent a dreadful day, though he managed to open the tiny port. He could hear the conversation at meal hours—hear the loud, hearty voice of the skipper, who apparently liked Larkin and insisted upon his sharing a bottle of whisky with him. As the sea was smooth and even this old tub was as steady as a church, the captain joked loudly about the passenger who was seasick; but betrayed no desire to visit him.

Larkin looked in several times during the afternoon and evening to find Goring in his berth with his face turned to the wall.

"Call me when the boat is ready. At the last possible moment; then I'll make a run for it," he instructed.

About ten thirty next day the ship dropped anchor about a mile from Caldero, a cluster of dusty huts on a sandy shore. The Andes rose abruptly behind the village—monstrous piles of sun-baked dirt and rocks. Nowhere within the vision of those on the steamer could be seen a tree or a patch of green grass; yet Goring, looking through his port-hole, blessed the sight of it.

"Boat ready," called Larkin.

Goring was also ready. The steward's boy carrying his luggage, he followed his friend out on deck toward the accommodation ladder and saw, to his dismay, the captain standing beside the opening in the rail to bid farewell to his passengers. Goring had to face him.

"Well, Larkin," boomed the skipper, who seemed to be sober this morning, "see you soon again.

"Sorry, sir, you are ill," he said to Goring. "No doubt our agents will refund your passage money."

"Thanks, it doesn't matter," Goring mumbled.

The skipper regarded him curiously, some twinge of recollection twanging his rum-soaked mind.

"Seems to me—— Didn't I meet you somewhere?" he asked.

"Most likely. I'm a great traveler. Good-by, captain."

"Good-by," said the captain slowly.

Goring descended into the boat, and the boatman immediately pulled off. They had traveled fifty feet toward the shore when there was a shout from the ship. Captain Brown was leaning over the rail.

"Come back here!" he shouted. "I know you! Come back, you—— He

finished with a string of curses in English and Spanish which were hair-raising.

The boatmen hesitated.

"Ten pesos to keep on rowing!" cried Goring. They were poor boatmen, not members of the crew, and this decided them. They bent to their oars.

"He's insane," said Larkin, who was looking back. "Goring, you were right to hide. He would have murdered you. What on earth did you do to him?"

"Wait till we get ashore," replied the correspondent.

In a café, half an hour later, he consented to explain to the curious salesman.

"Do you remember when the *Morovantha* went down?"

"Never forget it," said Larkin. "I had a brother on her."

"At the time, I was a water-front reporter in New York, working for the *Daily Sphere*. I consider that the greatest news story of all time. She was the biggest ship afloat and making her maiden voyage. Her passenger-list contained the cream of English and American society—big-business men, members of the nobility, railroad presidents, authors, musicians. Nearly two thousand passengers, and twelve hundred lost their lives; went down with the ship while the band played 'Nearer My God to Thee.'"

"She struck an iceberg. The sea was smooth and the whole outfit could have been saved if there had been boats enough," said Larkin. "The women and children and a few male passengers and members of the crew were all that got off. Brown wasn't the captain; he went down with the ship. Do you mean to say he escaped?"

"No. He lost his life, all right. All the newspapers in America went insane that night, and stayed insane until the steamer with the rescued passengers docked in New York. From a newspaper standpoint the story was the greatest that ever happened, because the interest was sustained five or six days. The *Montana*, which saved the passengers, sent by wireless the list of those rescued. But the wireless was in its infancy in those days—it was before the war you know—and amateurs kept cutting in so that the lists were all garbled. The steamship owners refused to permit any details of the disaster to go over the wireless. A score of steamers and tugs were sent out by the newspapers to meet the *Montana;* but she sailed right by them, refusing to permit anybody from them to come on board, and the story broke on the dock in New York."

"I remember all that. What has it got to do with this Captain Brown?"

"Wait. From statements by passengers and members of the crew, it was evident that a big steamer was close to the *Morovantha*. She struck the iceberg at eleven at night, and an hour before they had passed within a few miles of this steamer, which was going the same way, only much more slowly. That meant that she must have been within ten or fifteen miles at the time of the disaster, and within sight of the distress rockets, and, of course, in hearing of the wireless. Had she come to the rescue of the big ship, she could have taken off the entire company; for the *Morovantha* floated three hours after she struck the berg.

"My city editor called me in, the day after the survivors landed in New York, and called my attention to those statements.

"'There is a big follow-up on this story,' he said. 'We have got to find the ship that failed to aid the *Morovantha* and show up the dirty coward who commands her. Investigate every vessel in port, and all that come in within a few days. We are wiring all American and British ports to do the same.'

"Now there was a steamer at Halifax, the *Colchester,* which had come in the day before the passengers of the *Morovantha* were landed, and a boat at Boston which arrived the day after. And two days later the Bullard Liner *Commorforth* arrived at her dock in New York. All these ships cleared themselves perfectly. I saw the captain of the *Commorforth* myself, a very agreeable fellow named Lossington. He was commodore of the fleet, and the *Bullard* line owned ten six-or-seven-thousand-ton Atlantic freighters. They carried out grain and live cattle to England, and brought in manufactured goods. I sat in his cabin, and he gave me a drink.

" 'Bring in the log,' he commanded his steward. And he opened it and showed me his position on the fatal night at eleven o'clock. The *Commorforth* was sixty-five miles from the spot where the *Morovantha* went down.

" 'About six o'clock that night,' he told me, 'we entered a field of ice which grew thicker as we proceeded. We had been running through fog for two days, and I had been on the bridge continuously; but this night it was clear. We saw bergs all around us; and as we are not on any mail-boat schedule, I decided to take no chances. I stopped the ship until daylight. We carry only one wireless man, and he had been on duty for forty-eight hours continuously; so I told him to go to bed. The second officer was on watch from eight to midnight, the first officer from midnight to four a. m. I turned in myself. At six in the morning the wireless man got up and opened his key. He heard the ships talking about the loss of the *Morovantha* and immediately came rushing down and waked me. That's the way we learned what had happened.'

"That disposed of the *Commorforth.* Even if she had received the wireless distress signals, she was a fourteen-knot ship and could not have reached the *Morovantha* in the three hours that she floated. Two other ships came in which might have been in the vicinity, but they all had clean bills of health, and reports from other cities and England were as decisive.

"I decided that the phantom ship was just a phantom. People who are greatly excited will make things up, and there were survivors of the *Morovantha* who were not above telling sensational stories to get their pictures in the paper. Meanwhile a committee of the Senate in Washington was investigating the disaster, and our columns were full of the proceedings.

"Going about my regular business, a couple of evenings later, into a saloon where they sold an unusually big schooner of beer for a nickel, I got talking with the barkeep, a good friend of mine.

" 'Say,' he said, 'why don't you show up this ship that saw the *Morovantha?*'

" 'Why don't I make a trip to the moon? There is no such ship.'

" 'Yeh? There was a donkey engineer in here from the *Commorforth* last night that got full and began to cry in his cups. Next thing I know he was cursing out his skipper as a disgrace to the British merchant marine; and I started kidding him.

" ' "Say," ' he said, ' "we could have saved everybody on board the *Morovantha* if the skipper wasn't a dirty coward." '

" 'Know his name?' I demanded eagerly.

" 'Jones—Peter Jones. Just a drunken dream, I bet.' "

" 'Oh, sure,' I agreed. Other reporters might come in.

"It was about eight o'clock at night, and I hotfooted it down to the dock. Docks at night, when no work is going on, are about the most fearsome places in the world. No lights, just a vast black warehouse and a pier where a false step would toss you overboard.

"I was trying to build up a case against the *Commorforth*. But there was the log and the straightforward statement of the captain, against which a drunken remark of a member of the crew would count for nothing. If Lossington had falsified his log and browbeaten his officers into agreement, they had made themselves criminals by that act, and their attitude to a newspaper man caught on their ship in an attempt to investigate their actions would be decidedly hostile. Even if they were innocent, they would resent my presence on the steamer at night, uninvited. It would be necessary for me to slip on board unnoticed.

"I crept along the lip of the pier hidden by the shadow of the hull until I came to the gangway, and then I saw a seaman on guard leaning against the rail of the ship. This was unusual, for when a steamer is in her dock, her captain is content to depend upon the watchman at the entrance to the pier—whom, as it happened, I had passed with a nod, for I knew him well.

"I retired into the shed, moved cautiously along until I had passed the midships section of the *Commorforth*, and then returned to the uncovered edge of the dock. The ship's deck was about ten feet above the pier, and she lay a couple of feet out from it. I looked dubiously at a two-inch hawser which passed from the pier to the deck of the steamer at the stern. It would carry me out over the slip which was choked with ice cakes, and I hadn't done rope climbing since I was a youngster in a gymnasium. Nowadays I would say that no story was big enough to take such a risk; but I was a kid reporter then, and my assignment was the most important thing in the world. Taking off my gloves, encumbered by a heavy overcoat, I went up that swaying hawser, and overhand, leg over leg, until I crawled out on the deck.

"I knew the crew of this steamer were berthed in a stern deck house and not quartered in the forecastle; and I descended from the stern deck to the main deck, pushed open a door marked 'Crew,' and entered boldly.

"'I'm looking for a donkey engineer named Jones,' I said to a seaman who blocked my passage through a narrow passageway.

"'Jonesey,' he yelled, 'a gent out here to see ye.'

"A door opened and I got a glimpse of a cabin in which eight berths were jammed and in which half a dozen men were on the floor shooting dice. One of them scrambled up and came out.

"'You was wantin' to see me, sir?' he asked doubtfully.

"'Yes. Something important. Come outside on deck, if you don't mind.'

"'Wait a minute till I slip me arms into me reefer,' he said. 'It's bitter without.'

"In a jiffy he was following me out on the dark, bare deck. We sat ourselves down on a hatchway. Jones was an undersized cockney, ugly as sin, with a big mouth and small, ratlike eyes, unprepossessing and suspicious.

"'I'm a reporter,' I said bluntly. 'You were shooting off your mouth in a saloon that this ship could have saved the people of the *Moravantha*.'

"He looked frightened. 'I don't know nothin',' he said.

"'You're a hell of a British seaman,' I replied in apparent disgust. 'Don't you want to punish the scoundrel that let twelve hundred people, mostly your own countrymen, be drowned?'

"He snarled. 'It ain't for the likes o' me to punish nobody.'

"'I don't believe you know anything, anyway,' I sneered. 'Just a blatherskite.'

"'Is that so? If I was to tell what I know——' He shut up.

"'Why don't you?'

"'I'd lose me job and never get another.'

"'Listen. I want facts. I can pay for them. Your testimony is no good, and you won't appear in the thing. But, if I have anything to go on, I'll get the real story higher up. Here's twenty dollars.'

"He took it.

"'All right. I was sick to me stummick that night,' he said, 'and I had to have fresh air. I come up on deck 'bout ten o'clock. I was leanin' on the rail, thinkin' o' nothin', when one of the watch comes by.'

"'"Big one, ain't she?" says he, pointin'.

"'I look; and five or six miles to south of us I see a long line o' lights—a big passenger steamer headin' the way we was but passin' us fast.

"'I thinks no more about it, but holds me head, that was aching; and pretty soon I go down again. In half an hour, maybe, I come up for more air, my head fit to split. And a few points off the port bow I suddenly sees a rocket o' distress.

"'"Some one's in trouble," says I.

"'Presently I see another; and thinking they might not have noticed them from the bridge—though how they could help it I don't know—I sing out to the second:

"'"Did yer see them rockets, sir?"

"'"Aye," he calls down. "We seen 'em."

"'We was stopped because we was in ice. It was a clean night, and I seen the rockets bright as day. But it was none of my business, so I go down and turn in. Next mornin' comes the news the big ship was the *Morowantha*, and, of course, them was her rockets. I sneaks up to the second officer and spoke to him about it.

"'"You're crazy," he says. "We saw no rockets."

"'"But I sung out to you; and you said you seen them."

"'"I was humoring you," he says. "You open your face about this and there'll be one donkey engineer missing."

"'Well, I talk to the man that was at the wheel, and he saw them, and he said the second went down and woke the captain, and the captain said not to notice 'em.'

"By this time I was so excited I could hardly speak.

"'Get off this ship and come with me,' I said. 'I'll see that you get five hundred dollars for your story if you give me an affidavit of what you have told me.'

"'A hundred pun!' he gasped. 'Do yer mean it? And it's only bleedin' justice, at that.'

"'Meet me in an hour in Maguire's saloon,' I instructed him.

"Next I had to see the second officer. I had the advantage now of being on the ship, so that I could knock at his door without being questioned by seamen; they would naturally suppose I had a right on board, since I was there. If I could handle him, fine; but if he called the captain, warned him of the danger to both of them—— Well, a water-front reporter might make a misstep and fall off a dock on a dark night with nobody to blame. I took the chance.

"I found the second officer sitting alone in his cabin, a clean-cut young Englishman with honest eyes and an expression of profound discouragement. There was a bottle on his table and a half-empty glass. It's a bad sign when a young seaman drinks alone. His name was Jackson.

"'I'm a reporter for the *Sphere*, Mr. Jackson,' I said abruptly, entering and closing the door after me, before he had time to demand my business. 'I'm here to give you a chance to do the decent thing. I know your part in this filthy job was done unwillingly.'

"'Damn your eyes!' he said angrily. 'You get the hell out of here before I knock——'

"'You've got twelve hundred lives on your soul!' I said sharply.

"The fellow suddenly slumped. 'What—what do you know?' he asked without any spirit.

"'I know this ship was within twelve or fifteen miles of the *Morovantha* when she struck the iceberg. I know your captain falsified his position and forced you to sign the log. I know you saw the distress rockets. And I want to know why the devil you didn't behave like a man.'

"His mouth opened and closed like a fish. 'Did the captain try to blame it on me?' he asked weakly.

"'He'll blame it on you, all right, unless you beat him to it. Will you tell me the facts?'

"'Yes,' he said. 'I'm damned glad to have a chance to tell them. Lossington is the guilty man. We officers have to obey orders. You understand that, don't you?'

"'That won't keep you out of trouble for falsifying the log unless you beat him to the confession.'

"'All right,' he sighed. 'I was on watch from eight p. m. until midnight. About a quarter of ten we saw a big steamer, going west, pass some distance to the south. Half an hour later we stopped our engines because we were in field ice and might run into bergs. The skipper turned in. About eleven fifteen we saw distress rockets to the west, nearly dead ahead. We didn't suppose it was the steamer—nothing happens to big liners—but I thought some fishing schooner might have hit a berg and was sinking. I went down and woke the captain. He figured it was a fishing schooner, just as I did; and he cursed like a streak.'

"'"Some blasted Yankee fisherman with all hands asleep hits a rock and I'm supposed to risk my ship. Morse to her."

"'Why didn't you use the wireless, instead of using Morse lights?'

"'The wireless operator was asleep,' Jackson answered, 'and I asked the skipper if I should wake him up.

"'"Fishermen don't carry wireless,"' he said; "'and if it's some blooming tramp freighter, there is no reason why we should take a chance in this ice of running down to her. If we don't wireless, he won't get our name."'

"'Wouldn't he get it from your Morse signals?'

"The second officer grinned mirthlessly. 'He couldn't see them at his distance. We'd put it down on the log we got no answer to our Morse signals, so we had done our duty.

"'Well, I hated to be caught in a fix like this; but the skipper's word is law, and I could see his reasons. It was dangerous to travel in that ice, and if he hit a berg and lost his ship for the sake of some confounded fisherman that only wanted the Sunday newspapers, he couldn't explain to his owners.'

"'Didn't you know that couldn't be the reason for the rockets?'

"'It isn't the first time that a ship has ignored signals of distress,' said the second. 'I admit I felt badly about it, but there was nothing I could do. I told the first officer when he came on at midnight to wake the captain if there were any more rockets; and I turned in. At six in the morning the whole ship was up, for the wireless man reported the loss of the *Morovantha*.

"'An hour later the skipper called me into his cabin. He had thrown away the log sheet of the previous day and put in a fresh one.

"'"I want you to sign that," he said. I looked at it; and it placed our position at eleven at sixty-five miles from the *Morovantha*. The first officer had already signed the page.

"'"In case there is any question, I want you both to sign this page," he said. "We're in a terrible situation, Jackson. It was the *Morovantha* whose rockets you saw and reported last night.

If we had known, we could have saved her people. Now we have got to show we were so far away we couldn't have helped, or we'll all come in for censure."

"'"I reported it," I told him.

"'"I'll deny it," he said. "You sign this or I'll restore the old page and place all the blame on you. See if you'll get another berth anywhere on the four oceans."

"'I signed it.

"'"I asked you to wake the wireless man," I told him.

"'"Of course I deny that, too. I couldn't risk my ship for some filthy sailing vessel. If I had known it was the *Morovantha*, it would have been different. I am as sorry as you for those who went down, but we've got to think of ourselves."

"'Well, I haven't slept since,' the second said. 'I can see all those dead faces.'

"He began to blubber; and I felt sorry for him.

"'You'll have to come ashore and make affidavit,' I said. 'They'll want you at the investigation.'

"'No,' he retorted. 'If I'm summoned, I'll tell the truth; but I can't go out and voluntarily report on my captain. You don't understand sea ethics. I'd never get another berth, no matter how good my motive was. Besides, I've signed the log.'

"I saw what to do with him. 'All right,' I said. 'You'll be called before the committee, and then you can state facts.'

"I left him and walked boldly down the deck until I came to the gangway. A man was talking to the watchman. He turned, and I saw it was Captain Lossington. 'Who in hell are you?' he demanded.

"I faced him. 'Hello, captain,' I said. 'I'm Goring, of the *Sphere*.'

"'A reporter! Why are you prowling on my ship at night? What do you want?'

"'I came back to see if I could find any members of your crew who were related to the crew of the *Morovantha*.'

"'You damned sneaking news thief!' he yelled; and he swung for my jaw. He was a bigger man than I, but I always was a good boxer. He rushed me, after missing the first one, and I sidestepped and caught him on the side of the ear. He came in again, and landed one on my temple that dropped me. Then he started to cave in my ribs with the toe of his boot, but I rolled out of his way and was up again. I saw the watchman pull a marlinspike out of the rail and try to sneak up behind me; so I let out a yell and dove straight at the captain, taking a blow in the face to get him in the stomach. I heard him grunt. And just then the watchman swung with his iron club. I dropped to the deck and it whizzed over my head. I was up again, standing off the captain, who was like a wild man. I fancy they would have done me in; but a flash light suddenly played on us and a customs inspector was demanding:

"'What's the row about?'

"'One of my men trying to desert,' said the captain quickly.

"'Hello, Joe,' I said.

"The customs man was a friend of mine. He laughed in Lossington's face.

"'This fellow is the reporter of the *Sphere*. Better go ashore with me, kid,' he said.

"Lossington had to see me walk off scot-free. His conduct would have convinced me of his guilt, if I hadn't the confession of two of his crew. Of course he had lost his head, for he was ignorant that the whole story was in my hands.

"I made my way to the barroom, and waited an hour. Then Jones came in with his duffel bag under his arm.

"'How did you get off the ship?' I demanded.

"'Slid down a hawser,' he grinned.

'The skipper is on the rampage and nobody is allowed ashore.'

"The saloon keeper was a justice of the peace. I wrote out the confession and got it sealed and signed, then called up my managing editor and told my story. He was a quick thinker.

"'Great!' he said. 'Don't lose that sailor. Bring him into the office with you and write the story as though it was all dope—no names of witnesses. Then take the train for Washington, get hold of Senator Munson, chairman of the committee of investigation, and have him summon the captain and second officer to the hearing——'"

"Lossington is Brown," interrupted Larkin.

"Obviously. Well, all the other papers sneered at our story, while I took the limited to Washington. The poor donkey engineer was completely overcome with the luxury of the train and was afraid to accompany me into the dining car, but I assured him that nobody would pay any attention to him and he would be all right if he used the same knives and forks that I did. All went well during dinner until the waiter placed before each of us a gilt finger bowl upon the top of which floated a slice of lemon.

"'I could have used this earlier. What's it for now?' he demanded.

"I dipped my fingers into my bowl and wiped them with my napkin. His eyes widened.

"'You wash in lemonade?' he demanded.

"'Cer'ainly,' I smiled.

"He followed my example gingerly.

"'There's many a night in the crew's quarters,' he said, smacking his lips with anticipation, 'when we sit around and spin yarns of what we've done and where we've been, and strange places we've seen, and strange adventures we've 'ad with women and wild men and sich. And some night, soon, we're all sittin' around, and after they've all told their tall stories of things that 'ave 'appened to 'em, then I'll speak up and tell 'em of the time I washed my 'ands in lemonade.'

"I had some trouble reaching the senator in Washington, because he was a very busy man. In truth, he was the worst possible chairman for such a committee, because he came from an inland State, had never made a sea voyage, and didn't know a winch from the galley stove. But he was a pleasant, honest old codger, trying to get at the bottom of a nasty mess.

"I showed him the affidavit and he told me to bring the man to see him. When I returned to the Willard Hotel I found the seaman in his stocking feet. He said he didn't dare walk in his shoes on the wonderful carpet in the room.

"He was tremendously impressed in meeting a United States senator, and he carefully repeated what he had stated in the affidavit. His evidence convinced Munson that he would have to summon the captain and second officer of the *Commorforth*, and the summonses were issued immediately.

"Lossington arrived as bold as brass, for the story we had published had convinced him we had no real evidence. He gave out interviews that our statements were made out of whole cloth, just a sensation manufactured by a sensational newspaper. He was called to attend the afternoon session of the senate committee, and he talked big to reporters in the anteroom, while he waited to testify. He told them that I had tried to blackmail him and, upon his refusal, I had concocted this story.

"Senator Munson called the second officer for testimony first, and to the astonishment of the committee and the audience, he repeated the story he had told me. The door to the anteroom was left carelessly open and Lossington heard all the evidence. You can imagine his feelings. However, he had a wonderful nerve.

"Now, mind you, there wasn't a man on the committee who had any knowledge of the sea, and the attorney knew as little. I was seated behind Munson, at his request in case he wished to ask me any questions. Lessington made a good appearance when he came in and took the oath.

"'Please give your version of the events of the night of January 18th, was Senator Munson's question.

"'Well, sir,' he began, 'I had been forty-eight hours on the bridge, and then ran into ice. About nine thirty I gave orders to stop the ship for the night and turned in. My wireless operator was all worn out from constant duty, and it was not our custom to keep him on at night except in case of emergency. About eleven o'clock at night, the second officer awakened me, just as he has said, and reported he had seen a single rocket. He asked me to wake the wireless operator, but I said any vessel which fired rockets was undoubtedly a sailing craft which had no radio, so I told him to use Morse lights. He got no reply. At six next morning the radio man went on duty and immediately picked up the report that the *Morovantha* had gone down at eleven the night before. I realized then, of course, that it must have been she that sent up the rocket, but it was too late to be of service to her.

"'It was most unfortunate that our wireless man was off duty. I confess now to a violation of regulations due to the instinct of self-preservation. I knew we should be severely criticized, innocent as we were, if it came out that we lay within fifteen miles of the *Morovantha*, and I did change our position on the log after consultation with my officers—merely to escape undeserved odium, for we had answered the signals and it was not our fault she failed to reply to them. I confess the fault I did commit, but I want this committee to know that had I any evidence that any vessel, sailing craft or otherwise, was sinking near us, I would have risked my ship, started the engines, and gone to her aid. I have been a seaman for twenty-five years, and I know the duty of a seaman.'

"It was a manly, straightforward statement, and his manner was admirable. Senator Munson was stumped. I saw he was fishing around for questions and couldn't think of any; and I was in a funk lest he permit the man to get off with the confession of what seemed to these laymen to be a minor fault. A log book didn't mean much to them—nor what was written in it. They frequently made speeches and gave something entirely different to the *Congressional Record*.

"I hastily scribbled two questions on a sheet of paper and handed them to the senator.

"'Don't reverse these; ask them in order,' I whispered.

"He adjusted his glasses and read the questions.

"'They seem of no moment,' he said in a low tone.

"'Ask them, for Heaven's sake!' I pleaded.

"'Ahem!' said the senator. 'How far off was that vessel which sent up the rocket?'

"'Oh, a good fifteen miles,' said the captain boldly.

"'Yes. Ahem!' He leaned toward me. 'Er—what's this word—— Oh, yes.

"'Captain, how far can Morse signals be seen at sea?'

"Captain Lessington's red face turned a greenish white. His mouth opened and closed. He choked, he put his hand to his throat, he swayed back and forth in his chair, and then he toppled over on the floor in a dead faint—to the consternation of the roomful of people.

"'My, my!' said Senator Munson. 'Most unfortunate. I can't understand

this. It seemed a most innocuous question. Young man, why should it cause him to faint?'

"All eyes were on me. It was my moment.

"'Because he would have had to tell you that they cannot be seen more than six or seven miles,' I said slowly. 'When he admitted that the vessel which sent up the rocket was at least fifteen miles away, he admitted that he had ordered his second officer to Morse to her because he knew that the ship in distress was so far away that his signals were invisible.'

"Everybody was talking at once.

"'See?' exclaimed the attorney to the senator. 'He did not want the sinking vessel to read his signals, because then he would have been compelled to go to her rescue. By doing what he did, he was able to put in his log that he had replied to the rockets and got no answer, and was therefore justified in doing nothing.'

"'But it wasn't in his log at all,' protested the senator.

"'Certainly not. Next day, when he found that the *Morowantha* had gone down, he could not admit being near enough to her to see a rocket without admitting his dereliction from duty. So he falsified his position.'

"Lossington had recovered and wanted to speak. But they refused to listen to him any longer, and the hearing went on to another phase of the matter of the sinking of the *Morowantha*. However, in the finding of the committee it was stated that the captain of the *Commorforth* was equally guilty with the captain of the *Morowantha* for the loss of twelve hundred lives.

"This committee had no jurisdiction over a British vessel at sea and could not punish Lossington in any way; but the British government could, and was eager to do it. The British Board of Trade confirmed the decision of the American committee and canceled Lossington's master's certificate. Then the British government tried to catch him, to jail him on some charge or other; but Lossington faded away from view immediately after the session of the senate committee. He never went back to his ship."

"Whew!" exclaimed Larkin.

"You can imagine my consternation," the reporter went on, "when I recognized him in that horrible rum-soaked skipper of the foulest old tub I ever saw in my life. From his standpoint, I was entirely responsible for his ruin. No layman understands the duty a reporter owes to his newspaper and the public, and Lossington undoubtedly believed I exposed him, after he had neatly covered everything up, from no other motive than pure malice.

"Had he recognized me on the high seas, he would have shot me out of hand, and claimed that I had mutinied; or he might have knifed me in the dark and tossed me overboard. You saw his rage when he realized who I was, as the boat was pulling away from the steamer. Had those boatmen obeyed his order to return I'm not sure he wouldn't have murdered me right here in port. He was insane with fury."

They left the café and came into view of the harbor. Faintly across the water came the creaking of the steam winch lifting the anchor of the *Captain Lynch*. As they watched, the steamer began to move, and got under way to the southward. They watched her in silence until she was hull down.

"If this story gets out, he'll lose that ship," said Larkin.

Larkin shuddered. "I'd hate to have his dreams."

"He's in hell now!" exclaimed Goring. "Just a ghost of a captain. A modern flying Dutchman, working out his damnation on the four oceans. Let him alone."

Another story by Fred MacIsaac will appear in an early issue.

Water Magic

By

Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Forced Down," Etc.

The natives on that unknown South Sea island were superstitious, and their explanation of the Devlin mystery was a mystical one. Even a white man, though, hearing of it, could not but be mystified.

A COMPLETE STORY

DEVLIN quit. All men in the South Seas will tell you that. He, the last, worst and wildest of the pearl pirates, abandoned his ship and several fortunes in loot, and fled. But where and why? Particularly, why? You will get no answer from a white man. In such a matter, of course, the natives have all the advantage. They will explain, wide-eyed:

Water magic! Devil-fish magic, even! Devlin had an *anting-anting*—personal devil—but at the bottom of the sea another and fiercer *anting-anting* entered him, changing not only the nature of his soul but his physical shape as well. Behold, he was, and was not, but had become another. He had flayed and robbed the pearl fishers, flayed now his Malay crew, driving and harrying them. Madness came upon him, so that, after many days, he piled his ship at night upon a flour-white beach, plain under the moon, and fled after his fleeing, terrorized crew, leaving his wealth behind.

Which is, of course, a ridiculous tale, save for the well-authenticated ending. Water magic! Bosh! And yet——

In the hour before dawn, when the mist comes in from the sea and the stars are veiled, Manning, the beach comber, awoke. To his lazy senses there had come an impression that something, somewhere, was different than it had been. Languidly, protestingly, he lifted himself and, sitting upright on his bamboo sleeping mat, tried

to pierce the darkness and silence of his one-room nipa hut.

But there seemed nothing. In the quiet air hung the heavy fragrance of frangipani bloom. There sounded a faint tap-tapping of palm branches, and occasionally from the coral beach below the village, the dull, drumlike sound of a wave on the coral beach. Through the unshuttered window, Manning watched a single star gleam dully through the mist and then fade again; down the slope toward the village, he saw the shadowy, silver trunks of the coconut trees motionless under their heavy crowns of fronds.

Still he waited, surprised to find himself tense. A vague and nameless dread stole into his consciousness. For him, it was a very unusual feeling. He shrugged it away with a peevish and reluctant effort of his will.

"Nerves!" he told himself. "That's what comes o' good fortune. Pshaw! Nothin' ever happens here. Nothin' ever will happen."

Perhaps a gecko had cried from the edge of the swamp, or a lizard had scampered over the floor. Or maybe old Marihini had died—she who had picked Manning from his half-wrecked vinta and tended him back to health two summers ago. She was very far gone. Maybe the native idea was right. Maybe spirits hung around and paid visits.

Death! That happened even here, of course. But why should Manning shiver?

Death just came here—with no trouble about it.

Damn good fortune! Just as he was restin' easy——

For over two years, that had been Manning's enviable lot. And it satisfied him. He had wanted nothing better than to spend the rest of his days on this palm-crowned island, over which a sense of leisure, deep and exhaustless, brooded like another sea. If he'd ever had ambition, he'd forgotten it. Come to think of it, he'd never had it, in the sense that it meant a struggle. He'd struggled a lot—sailored before the mast, stevedored in a dozen ports, "bounced" in as many saloons. He'd done a bit of everything, had he, and always pretty well at that. He'd hated each job, but—a funny idea, this!—he had thought he had to have one to live. Rather odd notion, of course.

Then that last job in Bongao, island of Tawi Tawi. He'd had to jump quick out of there. That *vino* was bad stuff and it had got him. What deviltry it put into a man's mind! Lucky there wasn't any here, nor *babub*, either. Course, that diving business got you just about as bad, but there wasn't anybody to quarrel with but the fish. A queer thing, that! Did it affect everybody the same?

All in all, though, it had been a lucky wind that had caught the vinta in which he fled from Bongao, and driven him southward for five thirst-tortured days. Here he was safe. No vessel ever touched the island. True, a few of the natives made semiannual trading trips to Borneo, exchanging gutta-percha and pandanus mats for cloth and knives and the like. But if they talked of him, no matter. Who'd care for a miserable beach comber? Miserable! Manning grinned.

For there was no trouble here, little work, and none at all for Manning. Not that he was a parasite in his own mind or the people's. Consider his gifts of knowledge—for instance, the use of *tubur* roots. Thrown into pools, they stupefy fish, which come belly up to the surface. Gathered in nets and suspended in water, the fish quickly recover and are good as ever for eating. Also there were better methods of trapping he'd learned from the Cuyonos. Best of all was the use he taught them of a certain device that a year ago had been washed ashore, crated, probably

from some distant wreck—a deep-sea diving outfit.

Easy to anchor nets with that! The yield of the "men who take from the sea" had doubled. And it was safe enough, once you knew how to handle the sharks and where were the haunts of the devilfish. True, in the beginning Manning had been caught by one of those latter—a terrible experience. It was Mauarato that had saved him then, diving down again and again, and cutting away the suckers. If it hadn't been for him—Lord!

Good little Mauarato! Foolish little Mauarato, too, with his perpetual smile, his soft eyes, his timid adoration. "You my *caybigan.*" Friend—brother—what did it mean? A Tagalog word, wasn't it? Mauarato was the grandson of old Marihini. Funny how from the first the boy had adopted Manning. It was nice to be adored and trusted. No one before had ever——

It was going to be hard to leave this island, hard to leave Mauarato. But after all, money is made to be spent, and there were several different kinds of loafing Manning thought he would like to do. And those pearls over there in the corner represented money—a quite considerable lot of it. More than he would ever spend, likely. If it all went, he could come back to—wherever he was now. Manning thought the island was probably one of the Sibutu group, the southern tip of the Philippines.

Pearls! Half a gourdful. None of the very first quality, but fairish, all of them. Manning remembered how, when he found the bed, he hadn't been thrilled at all. He had almost left them there. It meant work, a lot of trouble to get the shells out and scrape them. It meant—— What was that?

Nothing—or maybe an early riser in the village. And his own—nerves! Now, that was what was the matter with wealth; that was why it was hardly worth having. Ever since he got those pearls, he'd been that way. Bah! If a pearl raider came, he'd make no trouble. Think of people letting themselves be tortured over pearls!

He'd give up easy enough. But what *was* the matter? Something—some one sure was *here*. Old Marihini's ghost—but that would be a friendly presence. Again he stared around the room from which the darkness had lifted a little. There was the bamboo table with the calabash water jug, the chair he had made from *narra* wood, the—the open door framing a black, man-shaped patch that didn't belong in it.

Nerves? No. This meant business. All right. No trouble, now!

"Got you! Put 'em up! Grab the roof!"

At the beginning of the words, sharp, metallic, seeming to be flung at Manning, a blinding light shot from something in the intruder's left hand straight into Manning's eyes. Blinking through it, he glimpsed a leveled revolver.

He wasn't scared, now that he faced reality. He'd been at both ends of this gun business himself before. The fool only wanted the pearls. Let them go, and the trouble they made go with them. With his hands at the level of his ears, Manning chuckled:

"What d'ye think you're wantin', hombre?"

"Shut up! Stand up! Turn around!"

The intruder's voice was low, but every word whipped at Manning like a curse. Nonchalantly he turned, but he was grateful for the indifference that made submission so easy. He knew now what had awakened him and filled him with that queer unrest, even horror. There was certainly something about this man that you *felt*, like the feelers of a devilfish brushing you. A devilfish! Ugh!

His hand went over Manning's clothes, lightning quick. Then, raising his voice a little, he spoke to some one behind him:

"There'd ought to be a lamp here, or something. Look around, Kimiachi."

"He won't find any," Manning said. "We don't——"

"Shut up! But never mind, Kimiachi. He's probably telling the truth." He caught Manning by the arm, jerked him around, and rammed the muzzle of the gun into his stomach.

"Where are them pearls?" he demanded.

"Why, the pearls," said Manning as easily as he could, "they——"

"No use lying, now. One of the boys blabbed the last trading time in Tawao. So it came to me. I'm Devlin —see!"

He pronounced the name as though Manning ought to know it. There were few men in the South Seas who didn't, for Devlin thoroughly believed in advertising. In the pirate business, speed is of the first importance; and the more terror attached to his calls, the quicker he could be through with them. People *would* make a fuss, but the shorter it was cut the better; so in the spirit of efficiency, he tried to make each call swell his reputation for brutality and so make the next one easier.

Manning knew none of this, but he had no idea of either lying or refusing to talk. Especially since a half dozen shadowy, half-unclad figures, Malay creeses in hand, were standing back of Devlin. But as he was ignorant as well as nonresistant, there wasn't in his voice the fear to which Devlin was accustomed.

"Just tryin' to tell you. They're in that gourd over in the corner." He pointed.

"Eh? Hold him, you two." A suspicious note came into Devlin's crackling voice. Two of his followers seized Manning's arms. It was still so dark that Manning caught only the outlines of their muscular brown bodies and thin, vulturine faces. Devlin turned away, and at that moment there came a scream from the village, chopped off suddenly.

"Objection overruled," said Devlin meaningly over his shoulder. "You see what happens——" He strode to the corner while Manning listened to other ominous noises from the village—low cries, scamperings, sounds of fright and confusion. He imagined the natives surprised, confused, dazed, always a little slow witted, helpless before the raid of another piratical party.

Well, probably the pirates wouldn't expect much—certainly they wouldn't get it. The ease with which he had surrendered his pearls should help them all a bit. Devlin was shaking the gourd now, pouring out some of the pearls and studying them with his flash light. Suddenly he growled with rage that seemed a trifle counterfeited, put down the gourd, and strode swiftly, crouching a little, toward Manning.

"Now, where's the rest of 'em?"

"There ain't any rest. That's——"

Devlin struck Manning hard and low. It was a torturing, almost paralyzing blow that doubled Manning like a jackknife. He did not fall, because Devlin held him up with one hand and slapped his face with the other.

"Old trick, that. Think you can fool Devlin? Them's mostly buttons, turtlebacks, ringarounds—with some good ones thrown in for appearances. Where's your real pearls? Where's your real pearls?"

Between each sentence he slapped Manning. The blows were dizzying, but Manning retained enough sense to realize the mistake he had made. He had yielded his treasure so easily that Devlin, accustomed to concealment, resistance and the necessity of torture, could not believe that he had really

yielded it. In attempting to avoid trouble, he had involved himself hopelessly in it, for he could not give up what didn't exist. Devlin flung him away, and Manning clutched the corner of the shack and stared at his tormentor's shadowy figure through weakly blinking eyes.

"That's just a taste," said Devlin. "You tell, or——"

More men were coming through the door. Devlin turned to look. Manning saw it was two of Devlin's crew with one of the islanders between them. He looked closer; it was Mauarato, his *caybigan*—friend, brother—what did the word mean? Manning had sometimes thought, blushing, that it was more as if Mauarato was his son. As soon as Mauarato saw Manning, he began straining to reach him, silently. But the men held him easily and one of them said to Devlin:

"Massa, people all gone. People all run to jungle. Only thees man, he run theesaway. So we catch heem. We breeng heem. Eh? All lite?"

Manning understood. Mauarato, wakened by the uproar, terrified to the depths of his gentle soul, had thought first of his *caybigan*. He had thought to warn Manning. Then Manning made another mistake. He cried out something in a voice so hoarse with fear for Mauarato that it was inarticulate. And at that, Devlin chuckled with understanding. There were men like that—weak men who must love some one!

"Eh! It's that way. Come here, you!" He seized Mauarato and dragged him forward. "Maybe he'll tell if you won't. Eh! What d'ye say?"

"No! He don't know——"

"So you'd say." He turned to Mauarato and switched to a native lingo near enough to that spoken on the island that Manning could understand. "Your master—he have pearls. Not these"—picking up the gourd and shaking it. "Other pearls. Bigger pearls. You know where. You tell where."

He caught Mauarato's left arm and began twisting it.

"You tell, I stop. He tell, I stop. Neither tell, I break—so!"

Manning completely lost his head. He shrieked protests, but in English. The boy couldn't tell, he couldn't tell; there weren't any other pearls. He didn't realize that Mauarato couldn't understand, nor what must be passing through his mind, until Mauarato began pleading like a child: "*Caybigan, caybigan!*" Then he knew that Mauarato's simple mind would never suspect that Devlin was proceeding on a mere supposition. Far less could he fathom Devlin's understanding, confirmed by Manning's struggles and agonized cries, that Mauarato's torment would be likelier to make Manning talk than any punishment he might give Manning. Mauarato thought that Manning, if he would, could save him from torture.

Manning began to talk to Mauarato. Then he realized it was too late. The boy was hanging limp in Devlin's grip. Devlin flung him roughly to the floor. For a moment he listened unmoved to Manning's curses. The curses didn't matter, of course, but Manning's ungovernable rage had meaning for him. Clearly, Manning was carried away past thought of self. Consequently, there were no other pearls, or Manning would have revealed them. Things were simple, like that, to a man who understood them. He made a signal to his men, and they turned Manning loose.

"Guess I'll take your word, after all," said Devlin.

Manning rushed at him, a little clumsily. Devlin laughed, dodged, and struck Manning half a dozen times before he hit the floor, though the first blow was the only one that Manning felt. Then Devlin left with the pearls

and the comforting knowledge that he had seared his lesson of terror on the soul of another white man.

It was not yet quite light when Manning came to himself. Mauarato lay as he had fallen, on his side, with his face turned away from Manning. He, too, had recovered consciousness, for when Manning touched his bare shoulder, he twitched a little, seemed to shrink away. A shudder ran through Manning at that.

"*Caybigan! Caybigan!*" he whispered.

Mauarato didn't reply, didn't even turn his head—his body only stiffened. Manning knew what he was thinking. He said:

"I couldn't tell. There were no other pearls."

"They're gone away now," said Mauarato.

But there was no joy of the fact in Mauarato's tones. Rather, there was sadness. It was several seconds before Manning understood that. Then he realized what the departure must mean to Mauarato. Manning, placed under torture himself, had proved more yielding than when Mauarato was being tortured. While Mauarato lay unconscious, Manning had given up his secret, else why had he been left able-bodied and conscious?

"No, no!" cried Manning. "You don't think——"

"I think nothing, *caybigan*," but in that last word there was subtle derision, added to the very great sorrow of shattered trust, betrayed friendship.

"I didn't tell. I couldn't tell. There was nothing——"

"No, *caybigan?*"

Mauarato had got to his feet and was moving toward the door, his left arm dangling. Manning crossed to the door in front of him. He couldn't let Mauarato go like that, and yet—what was the native saying? "Windy words!" Words were really no use. Words were yesterday's development among these people. Action—but what action? Against the brightening eastern sky, Manning saw Devlin's sloop riding in the lagoon. From the deserted nipa village down the slope, Devlin's men were carrying their loot—gourds of rice, mangos, papayas, coconuts, cloth. Three shore boats were resting on the beach, and near one of them Devlin stood waiting. Inwardly, Manning cringed at sight of him. Action! But what action?

Manning's eyes flashed again to the sloop. There were ports on her that were probably painted, a deck house that was probably collapsible. In that light, Manning could not make out her name, but it would likely be changed tomorrow. His old seaman's brain took in her lines—a fast and handy craft, but, by her shape and the way she rode, of wood. Wood! Ah! Now he knew what to do.

"Wait! Wait, Mauarato!"

"I go to find Marihini."

"No. She is gone. They are all gone. I need you."

From the wall near the door, Manning picked two knives, slender and sharp of point. He thrust them in his belt and turned to Mauarato.

"Come," he said.

Mauarato looked at him and then at the knives. A shadow of perplexity, perhaps even of fear, crossed his face—then he smiled faintly. Silently Manning led him from the shack, past the landward end of the village, and into the brush beyond. Then he curved to the left and in a few minutes came to the beach, beyond which the water of the lagooon rose and fell uneasily from the impulse of the outer sea.

It was as though stirred by the breathing of some sleeping monster, and for a moment Manning studied it almost in dread. Then he glanced at the sloop, at the shore boats that were now making way out to it, and down at

a heap of diving gear that lay where he had abandoned it the day before.

He leaned over and, without lifting it, dragged it back into the thicket, and then to the left a little way until he came to a cavelike niche opening right into the water. Into this niche tumbled a little creek from the center of the island, almost lost in a screen of shrubbery and waist-high reed grass. Carrying the diving gear down to the bottom of it, Manning saw he could not be seen from Devlin's sloop.

"I put 'em on," he said to Mauarato. "I be out there a long time. You pump."

Mauarato looked at the water, just now sprayed by a school of flying fish steeplechasing from their enemies. He looked in the direction of the sloop he could not see. Then, small head tilted sidewise, dark eyes startled, inquiring, wondering, he looked at his *caybigan* whose life he would presently hold in his hand.

"Better some other man. Me one-arm man now."

"You pump, Mauarato."

He stripped off his tattered garments, leaving on only a singlet. Then he pulled on the air-tight canvas dress, with tight rubber bands at ankles and wrists, and the heavy boots weighted down with brass. He laced the corslet, put on the heavy helmet; and clumsily, with his one hand, Mauarato screwed on the chest and back weights. All the while, Mauarato pondered, groping in the depths of his soul for some explanation of this act of his *caybigan*. But his mind worked as always, slowly, in confusion, blackness and bewilderment, when he tried to fathom motives. All that he could see certainly was that, in a very few minutes, he could take full revenge for the evil that had been done him by simply ceasing to pump.

Now he began pumping, and Manning stood there in his swelling diving dress, which seemed to cut him off from the world. Very lonely he felt, indeed—the loneliest of all mankind; for not by a look had Mauarato signaled understanding. The air pulsed into his helmet, the pressure increased, and he forced himself to step off the coral bank and into the water. But as he did so, he turned his head, and suddenly Mauarato let go the pump handle and ran to him. Through the thick glass eye pieces of his helmet, Manning saw Mauarato's old-time smile, his brown eyes glowing with golden luminosity, and felt his warm breath like a caress on his hand as Mauarato lifted it.

Then Mauarato pumped again, and Manning advanced, knowing, however, that half his work was done. Somehow, from the depths of himself, Mauarato had drawn the knowledge that no man puts his life into the hands of one whom he has wronged. Mauarato was again *caybigan,* but the torturing of *caybigan* was still unavenged.

In his left hand, Manning carried the two knives. The bottom slanted steeply downward, and in a minute seaweed and coral trash were about his feet and the water over his head. From the escape valve in his helmet, a stream of tiny bubbles rose to break upon the surface. Manning wondered how plainly they could be seen from the deck of the sloop.

As he got into deeper water, he found himself walking in a very forest of coral, growing out of a white, sandy bottom, dotted with starfish.

The branches of this coral were of all shapes and nearly all colors—rose, amber, and heliopora coral black as night. Fishes darted, drifted and slowly swam in and out among them—beautiful fishes, misshapen fishes, fishes drab and green and yellow and red and gorgeously variegated as a bird of paradise. The bolder of them followed Manning and circled inquisitively around his helmet.

A very beautiful world—but sud-

denly ahead of Manning appeared the horror of the deep—a giant devilfish half in and half out of a lonely grotto, its tentacles fanning the air hungrily. With every cup and sucker, it felt its way to murder; and Manning recoiled a little, as he always did, with unspeakable hatred and shrinking. The vilest of all created things, it seemed, and he wanted to use his knives upon it.

Indeed, he was very irritated. Always he had that feeling, which affects all deep-sea divers in proportion to their nervous susceptibility. The pressure of the air, probably the superabundance of oxygen, is like the harshest of intoxicants. Manning had always resisted before, but now it would make it easier for him to do the thing he had determined on.

In a few minutes more, looking up, he saw the sloop. She lay above a very jungle of coral, through which and over which Manning climbed, careful to keep his air hose and life line clear behind him. There were the anchor chains, fore and aft, wavering down through the water; and, as Manning had expected, the natural drift of the ship had brought the forward chain close along the hull, extending backward.

As he clambered toward it, a great, gaunt shape rose slowly from the tangle of coral, then darted away with a sinuous lightning sweep of its tail. At a little distance, it turned and hovered uncertainly.

Keeping an eye on the shark, Manning moved on. By the time he reached the anchor chain, the gray murderer of the sea had been joined by another. Their incessant weaving back and forth in the water might have unnerved him at another time, in spite of his knowledge that they are cowardly killers who usually attack only inactive or retreating men. But the diver's intoxicant—true water magic—had been working on him, and in the sloop above were the men he hated, Devlin and the Malays alike. No room was left in him for fear.

With his free hand he gripped the anchor chain and lifted himself out of the coral. The inflated suit made him a featherweight. He saw he could climb easily. Then, when he reached the bottom of the hull, he could twine his legs about the chain and have both hands free to work. It might take long, but the wood would yield before the steel—a hole would be made in the sloop's bottom. Large enough that no pump could keep pace with the inrush; small enough that it would not be discovered until the ship was well out to sea. Then, of course, the issue would be up to fate. They might be able to beach the sloop, or they might be driven to the lifeboats. The Sulu Sea is a graveyard of ships, anyway. What Manning hoped for fervently was a storm.

On shore, the plan had contented him. Now, however, with that subtle intoxicant, that nerve-jangling stimulant which only the diver knows, working upon him, it seemed inadequate, almost paltry. Not worthy, certainly, of such a man as himself, fit mate of the sharks, the killers. How could he ever have submitted so tamely on shore? What he wanted now was to come to hand grips with his enemy. Vaguely he considered the altogether mad plan of boarding the ship by the anchor chain and attacking Devlin and his whole murderous crew.

Encouraged by his momentary pause, the sharks had weaved a little closer. But now one of them, as though stirred by some new perception, some other presence in the water, half turned and shot in a great curve upward. The other followed. Manning, starting to climb, looked after them. Then he checked himself, his muscles tensing.

Another dark, wavering shadow had entered the water beside the sloop's

hull. Slowly it drifted downward, a grotesque, sprawling shape of changing outlines.

Manning dropped quickly, crouching in the coral branches. He looked around, seeing with relief how like the twisted seaweed were his line and air hose, stretching shoreward along the bottom. Again looking up, he saw the sharks hovering, twisting sinuously, heads turned toward their new visitant, who could be no one but Devlin.

Devlin, still eager for pearls, bent on exploring the bottom of the lagoon in which Manning had found his treasure. Devlin, pirate and murderer, torturer of the helpless, delivered by a fate which was now taking a hand in the game.

Devlin settled slowly, while Manning, with little but his helmet showing above the tangle of coral into which he had sunk, watched. Always Devlin was careful to face the sharks, which settled with him. As he reached the floor of the lagoon, suddenly one of the sharks turned with incredible swiftness and shot toward him.

Manning held his breath. But Devlin thrust out both his arms, and by twisting his wrists inside his rubber wristbands, he loosed two strings of silver bubbles big as dollars. At the same moment, he strode forward. The ancient divers' trick succeeded once more—the cowardly murderer of the deep sheered wide of its mark; and Manning breathed again.

Devlin strode forward, gesturing at the sharks. Evidently he was bent on continuing his explorations. Manning watched the movements of his enemy, while that deadly, almost stifling rage increased within him. How easy it was going to be to avenge himself, Mauarato, and all the others who must have suffered from Devlin!

Devlin would pass about twenty feet away from him. His attention would remain on the sharks. All Manning had to do was to wait until he had passed, and then cut life line and air pipe. Never was there a more merited killing, Manning assured himself. And yet——

The sharks still retreated. Devlin undoubtedly felt himself safe from them, and he probably would have been safe, had there not just then occurred a terrible thing.

Manning, watching, saw a convulsive movement run over the distended garments of his enemy, saw him struggle to tear his feet away from something that had clutched them from out of the branches of coral, saw him bend and grasp other branches which broke under his hands as he vainly strained to pull himself loose. Manning saw nothing more, but that terrible sight was enough.

It told him that Devlin was doomed, without Manning himself raising a finger.

Manning had counted the sharks as his allies in holding Devlin's attention. Another ally had lurked in the coral grotto, and Manning now needed to do nothing but watch vengeance shape itself.

To be sure, the sharks had retreated when Devlin began to struggle, but they would return again. Instinct or rudimentary reason would tell them enough of the situation to assure them of their victim. They would know that the devilfish had lain in wait there, in his shadowy retreat.

"As I lay in wait here," thought Manning.

Now muscular brown tentacles, tough as leather, rose from the tangle of coral and twined around Devlin's legs. Manning glimpsed a horny beak striking and striking again.

"As I would have struck! As I would have struck!"

Suddenly Devlin flung up his hand and jerked twice on the life line. Almost instantly it tautened, but there was

no hope there—the twining tentacles were stronger. Manning was witnessing a tragedy often enacted in the South Seas, but he doubted whether a human being had ever witnessed it under such circumstances before.

Certainly none had without moving to help. To help!

Manning found himself trembling. He told himself it was certainly neither from fear nor irresolution. It was from ever-increasing rage, directed now partly against himself. Against that weakness in him which in the long ago had sometimes driven him into strange actions, of which others spoke resoundingly, but of which he was vaguely ashamed. That weakness which now suggested helping Devlin. Helping *Devlin!*

But, on the other hand—*to side with a devilfish!*

Now the tentacles of the monster were so tight about Devlin's legs that he could not move them. Above his head, he gripped the life line, for fear it would be torn loose. So he was almost motionless, and Manning found himself with poised knife, knowing what was to come. But he would not—he would not——

He flung himself upward, thrusting out with his knife. Close above his head a shark was darting, turning belly up. The knife went home, and Manning was lifted from the bottom and carried along with the shark in Devlin's direction. He sprawled among the coral as the shark swerved up and away. And as he fell, he cursed himself inside his brass-bound helmet.

"Idiot! Idiot!"

But the shark was coming again—or rather, it was the shark's mate. Not for Manning, but for the man who was helpless. But they were close together, and Manning gesticulated with his knife. The shark sheered away, following the taint of blood in the water. Manning found himself slicing with his knife at the leathery tentacles that held Devlin.

"I'm no—mate for a devilfish."

Then the wounded shark returned, in a flurry of mad gyrations. The other was close behind. What happened, Manning never knew. The sharks were entangled with all the lines, and he was being jerked about giddily. He knew the devilfish hadn't loosed its hold on Devlin. Something was slipping past him—a line. Devlin's life line, it must be. He grasped it, hardly knowing that he did so, and found himself being pulled fast through the water. In a moment he was clear, and he saw Devlin's air hose trailing beside the life line to which he was desperately clinging.

He caught it. It was slack below.

His head popped above the surface of the water. Above him, he saw the Malay crew lining the sides of the pirate sloop, their dark and vulturine faces downturned. A great buzzing was in his ears from the pressure of the air pump, and a madness in his brain. But it was a subtle madness, for he saw the thing that might be done—the thing that he must do. No man of those above would know him—had seen his face in the light.

"The sea has taken away their master, but the sea has given another. An *anting-anting!* Magic! Water magic! Yes, even devilfish magic!"

Manning knew the weird superstitions of all the Malay sea prowlers. He knew how such as Devlin played on them, making themselves as gods. With that maddening exhilarant which is true sea magic working on him, he saw himself again in one of those strange postures which had been part of his mainly wasted youth, and of which men afterward said resounding things.

"Anting-anting! I'll be *anting-anting."*

Then, reaching down, with one slash of his knife which he then threw away,

he cut his life line and air hose, and, clinging to those which had been Devlin's, was hoisted to the deck of the sloop.

That is the reason why white men will tell you merely that Devlin quit. The natives' story is altogether too absurd to repeat: how another Devlin, changed in spirit and in form, came from out the diving dress, beat the doubters among the crew into submission with fiercer blows and curses than ever they had known before, and with sustained madness drove them and the loot-laden sloop until it piled upon a snow-white beach on Borneo. In the South Seas, strange things happen, but there is no devilfish magic.

Manning might tell you more, but then, he is scarcely white. An old beach comber, with peace in his eyes, on an island which is maybe one of the Sibutus, companioned mainly by an aging native whom others call Mauarato, but whom he calls *"Caybigan."* In the jungle back of the village there is a moon-faced, placid wooden god, and around its neck some pearls are strung.

In an early issue, there will be another story written by Robert J. Pearsall.

TRUE TO THEIR HERITAGE

WHEN a Long Island pastor asked the flaming youth of his community what it thought about the companionate-marriage idea, he got no satisfactory response from the boys one way or the other, but the girls were emphatic and unanimous in their replies. Companionate marriage, they said, was "the bunk," and permanent wedlock was the only thinkable thing when a man came along who was capable of supporting a family.

These flappers, whose speech and manners have so flustered and upset some of the elders, are true to their ancient heritage. The institution of the home has been built up at the behest, and under the inspiration, of woman. It is the only system of relationship with the male that offers her security. It is what the average woman wants. She enjoys the game of attracting a man while she permits him to believe that he does all the pursuing; but, with the game won, she wants to set about the business of running a home and running it with the conviction that it cannot be taken away from her.

Such attitudes and feelings have been made impregnable in the typical woman by her experience through countless centuries. The Long Island flappers who were against companionate marriage were, in a sense, merely the trumpets through which all the trials, struggles, ideals, and conquests of their sex urged civilization to uphold monogamy and the home. They did not have to think the thing out. They "felt" the right and wrong of it as automatically as the tin pan resounds to the blow of a knife handle.

Female youth may "have its fling," and enjoy a hearty giggle as it shocks its elders, but it knows what it wants in regard to man and marriage. It wants what the accumulated experience of its sex has found to be best for woman. And as long as this is true, the companionate-marriage advocates have a rough and stony road ahead of them.

Sunset House

By George Marsh

In Four Parts—Part III

Author of "Breed of the Wolf," Etc.

Jim Stuart, factor of Sunset House, remote Hudson Bay Company trading post, is being beaten out by Louis LeBlond, factor of the Northwest Trading Company across the lake. Having saved LeBlond's daughter, Aurore, from drowning, Stuart begins to fall in love with her, and she with him. Stuart pays a visit to his chief, Christie, who tells him he has one more year to make good. Jim renews his friendship with Mary Christie. She seems ready to offer him love, but he is too taken up with Aurore. Returning to Sunset House with Omar, his loyal half-breed, Stuart is ambushed by an Indian acting for Paul Paradis, LeBlond's head man, who loves Aurore, and with whom Jim has had several run-ins. Jim forces LeBlond and MacLauren, his partner, to send Paradis to work far from the post. Jim then keeps a secret tryst with Aurore, and they confess their love to each other. As she is to go back to Winnipeg in September and Jim is immediately starting on a long trading trip, they will not meet again until spring. Then Jim starts north with Omar and Esau, resolved to wrest the Ojibwa fur trade from LeBlond. They have learned that Jingwak, potent medicine man, has been bribed by Paradis to tell the Indians that Sunset House was cursed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NIGHT RAIDERS.

LONG since, the embers of the fire had grayed and died, leaving the camp in gloom. Overhead the night had thickened, masking the stars. Through the spruce no air stirred. Like a blanket, the murk had settled upon the great lake. Except for the heavy breathing of three muffled figures, there was no sound.

Curled near his master, nose buried under bushy tail, Smoke dreamed of snowshoe rabbits leaping before him, of lurking timber wolves and the white sterns of fleeing caribou. Then, of a sudden, his visions of the chase faded and he stirred uneasily in his sleep. Presently a faint sound drifted to his pointed ears. He slowly lifted his head. His black nostrils quivered, but the air told him nothing.

Again his keen ears caught an almost

imperceptible sound. The great dog rose to his feet, his back hair stiffening, his nose testing the air, as he listened. Then, satisfied, with a roar he leaped toward the lake. There was a muttered warning, the sound of moccasined feet, the churn of paddles, as the husky reached the beach to snarl his challenge to the unseen enemies who had faded like ghosts into the gloom. Then Omar, grasping his gun, followed by Esau and Jim, reached the shore.

Seizing the dog by the nose to choke his yelping, Omar listened, head close to the water, to get the direction of the retreating canoe; then fired twice.

"Take dat!" he muttered.

"Light a candle, Esau. They were after the canoe when Smoke heard them," said Stuart. "They may have ruined her!"

Already Omar was groping with his hands over the upturned Peterboro on the beach, seeking possible damage, when Esau returned with a lighted candle.

"Not a mark," he announced. "Dey want to steal her; but Smoke, he hear dem too quick."

"Well, we know now what to expect from the Pipestone country," said Jim gloomily, with a shake of his head. "Do you suppose it was that Wagosh?"

"No," said Omar, "he know de dog was here."

"We'd better paddle straight to the islands in the morning and talk to them as if nothing had happened."

"Ah-hah, we go to de camp, first t'ing. I see w'at dat Wagosh say. We go early, too."

By sunrise they were on their way. As the strange canoe approached the fishing camps on the islands, groups of shawled women gathered in front of the tepees. Men, visiting their gill nets set in the channels, stopped their work to call to each other, curious of the identity of the strangers. For the canoe of a white man had seldom nosed its way over the waters of the Pipestone Lakes, deep in the heart of Kiwedin.

A rabble of wolfish dogs met the canoe as it slid into the beach of an island. Leaving Esau in the boat, with the challenging Smoke, who, with stiff mane and bared fangs, answered the snarls of the Indian huskies, Omar and Jim stepped ashore.

"We are from the Lake of the Sand Beaches," announced Jim in Ojibwa to an old Indian, with face seamed with wrinkles, who left the group of women by the tepees and met them. "I wish to speak to the hunters who trade there. Send word to the other islands."

With face immobile as stone, the grizzled veteran scrutinized Jim and Omar through keen minklike eyes, before he replied.

"What are your names?" he asked quietly.

"I am Stuart, of the old company," said Jim, "and this is Omar, my head man." There was a shrewdness, an intelligence, in the rugged features of the old man which impressed Stuart, and he wondered if he, too, were under the spell of Jingwak, the sorcerer.

"You have journeyed far. What have you come to the Pipestone to tell us?"

Irritated by the calm insistence of the Ojibwa, Omar broke in, "You will hear when you have called the hunters together. Send these boys here with word to the other islands."

The weathered skin of the Indian's face creased with a dry smile as he countered: "Who are you to give orders in the Pipestone country?"

Omar laughed good-naturedly as he passed the Indian a plug of niggerhead. "My father has swallowed the fins of a doré and they prick his throat. There is tobacco and tea in the canoe. Send for the hunters."

With a grin, the old man ordered some boys, who stood near the group listening to the talk with hushed interest, to take Stuart's message.

"What d'yuh think of him? Has Paradis got him?" whispered Jim to Omar.

"Hard to tell."

Jim sauntered to the old Indian as he talked rapidly to the group of curious and awed squaws near the tepees. "You have seen many long snows come and go," Jim said in Ojibwa. "You have lived long and seen the faces of many men. Look at me! Do I speak with a single tongue?"

The old Indian met Jim's eyes with candid gaze. He removed the pipe he had filled with Omar's tobacco, spat, then replied: "I know the face of the white man. In my youth I voyaged many long snows for the old company down at Fort Hope on the Albany. There I learned from the Oblate father that there is no truth in medicine men. But the people here will not listen to me."

"They believe this *wabeno*, Jingwak?"

"Yes, many believe him and the Frenchman, Paradis."

Jim was stirred by the open speaking of the shrewd old man. Here was a possible ally. He must be cultivated.

"What is your name?"

"Ovide Zotaire, they called me at Fort Hope; my father was half French."

"Where is this Jingwak, now?"

"He summers in the Sturgeon River country, three days' journey toward the big water."

"Have you ever seen this Frenchman, Paradis?"

"Yes, he was here the last long snows; he came with a dog team."

"What does Jingwak tell the Ojibwas about me and the post of the old company to keep them from bringing me their fur?"

Old Zotaire laughed as he replied: "He says that the good spirits he talks with tell him that the House of the Setting Sun is the home of devils. He says you have the evil eye."

"And the people believe him?"

"Some do, but not all."

"What do you think?"

"Jingwak is a *jassikib*—a liar. Paradis keeps his tepee filled with tobacco and flour."

Jim glanced at Omar, who listened beside him. The face of the half-breed was black with rage. The muscles of his square jaws bulged as his teeth crunched. His little eyes snapped, as he leaned toward the old Indian.

"You show me de trail to de Sturgeon Rivière?" he asked.

Zotaire calmly gazed into the blood-filled features of the half-breed.

"I am an old man, and it is far," he answered.

A look of satisfaction touched Omar's fierce eyes. "In our canoe is flour, tobacco, and tea. You are a wise man and our friend," he said significantly. "The old company will not forget Zotaire."

Gradually the bark canoes from the fishing camps assembled at the island where Jim and Omar waited. Some of the men and women came forward with friendly *"Bo'-jo's,"* and shook hands with the strangers. Others hung back, conversing in whispers, their grave, questioning faces picturing their misgivings concerning this white man from the House of the Devils. From the actions of the men and squaws it was evident to Stuart that Jingwak's efforts, successful as they had been in keeping the trade of these people from Sunset House, had failed to instill a fear of him personally, except among the most superstitious. For at his request, they had come to look at him and listen to his words.

After passing tobacco to the men, Jim told them that their fathers for two hundred years had traded with the old company, and always had received fair treatment. To save them from a longer journey south, the old company had built a post on the Lake of the Sand Beaches, and wished to trade with them. But Paradis had come among them with

lies which only children would believe. In his pay was a false shaman who lived on the bounty of the Northwest Company.

As Jim mentioned the name of Jingwak, from a group of young men in the rear of the Ojibwas rose groans of protest.

"It is a lie!" shouted a youth.

But the voice of Zotaire lifted above the clamor of dissent.

"*Bisan*—keep quiet!" commanded the old man. "You listened to Paradis when he said that this man who speaks had the evil eye and talked with devils. Now listen to him, and judge for yourselves who speaks with a double tongue."

Jim's heart leaped at the old Indian's defense of him. Here was a friend in need. Then Jim told the Indians that he would come in December, the little moon of the spirit, with dog teams loaded with honest trade goods, and save them the long trip south.

At the announcement there was a nodding of heads among the older men, but from the rear of the assembly, groans and catcalls. However, when Omar told them of the disgrace of Paradis by his own chief—how he had been knocked down in the trade house and sent to Nipigon, a hush fell upon the swart-faced audience.

Shaking hands with most of the older men and women, Jim returned to the canoe, to find Esau and Omar squatted on the sand beach, watching Zotaire trace with his fingers a rough sketch of the trail north to the Sturgeon River.

CHAPTER XV.

A SHATTERED PIPE.

THROUGH the afternoon the three friends paddled down the first of the Pipestone Lakes and made camp on an island near the outlet. To the north lay other and larger lakes of the Pipestone chain, which formed the headwaters of the Sturgeon River. Eating their supper of bannock, fried pike, and tea, they considered the situation as they smoked.

"Too bad old Zotaire wouldn't come with us," regretted Jim. "He seems to have influence with these people."

"He had fear to travel to de Sturgeon," replied Esau. "He tell me dey might keel heem eef dey foun' heem wid us."

"Paradese and Jingwak got plentee fr'en' up dere," added the brooding Omar.

"We're in for trouble on the Sturgeon, I guess. But I'm going to find that crooked faker, trouble or no trouble," snapped Jim. "I've got just one year to get some of that fur, or quit."

For a space, Omar looked at his discouraged chief, as he sat, elbows on knees, head in hands. Then the half-breed rested an iron-hard hand on Jim's shoulder, as he said:

"We stay een dees countree and hunt for dat Jingwak until de ice drive us sout'."

"But suppose we do find him, how're we going to break his hold on the Indians?"

"Leave dat to Omar and Esau."

"What d'you two intend to do? You can't kill him, you know, you old wolf. You'd ruin me if you did. And they'd get you before you got out. Remember, you've got a family."

The black eyes of Omar twinkled as they met the sphinxlike gaze of the old Indian. "Esau and Omar find de way to feex dat *wabeno*."

But Jim saw little hope in the situation. He had recklessly undertaken to double the trade of Sunset House within the year by getting some of the Pipestone and Sturgeon River fur from LeBlond. But would these Ojibwas trade with him when he stole a march on his rival and came to them on the snow in December? However, there was but one line of action open at pres-

ent, and that was to visit them, show himself, and talk to them as he had talked to the fishing camps up the lake. Then the thought of the girl who had begged him to stay at Mitawangagama until she went south drove his present quest from his mind. Was he ever to see her again? Would she come back in the spring? If she did, she would find a defeated fur trader, out of a job, who had had the boldness to make love to a girl who could only pity him.

As the quiet lake went rose-colored under the flush of the afterglow, and the shadow-packed spruce of the adjacent shore of the mainland deepened from purple to violet, Jim smoked with his bitter thoughts, while Omar and Esau talked together in low tones. Then, as his clouded gray eyes lifted from the embers of the supper fire into which he had been staring, a cold nose touched his hand and a massive, hairy head nudged his arm, while a pair of slant brown eyes sought his.

"Hello, Smoke!" Jim circled the neck of the dog with his arm. "Smoke loves Jim, even if he's a poor fur man, and a fool to love her."

As if sensing the mood of the man who held his devotion, the dog whined, his red tongue caressing Jim's hand.

"They'll take her away from Jim, down there in the city, Smoke. They won't let him have her. But Smoke'll always love old Jim, won't he?"

So the man and the great dog he had once carried inside his fur parka as a puppy, sat side by side, in perfect understanding, while the flush of the sky slowly faded in the mirror of the lake, through the long Northern twilight. Then, as Jim held a lighted match to his pipe, in the indigo gloom of the spruce of the mainland across the strait there was the flash and roar of a rifle, followed swiftly by another.

A bullet wrenched the shattered pipe from Stuart's teeth. Then he dove headlong for the bushes, as Omar and Esau took cover on the opposite side of the dead fire.

"You heet?" called Omar.

"No!" growled Jim, hunching toward his gun, which stood propped against a bush. "If they want war—give it to 'em!"

Again the twilight silence was split by the guns on the mainland, and bullets spattered around the camp, while the excited Smoke yelped as he raced back and forth, still untouched.

"They'll ruin the canoe if we don't stop 'em!" stormed the maddened fur trader, as he drew himself within reach of his gun. "Here, Smoke, they'll get you! Here! Down!"

Then the rifles of Omar and Esau opened on the ambush two hundred yards across the strait. Shortly the repeating guns of the three men, firing at the flashes, made the opposite shore too hot for the single-shot rifles in the ambush. The shooting stopped.

"Well, the war on the Pipestone is on, Omar!" called Jim. "I think they're making their get-away—afraid we'll cross in the canoe in the dusk and hunt 'em."

Knowing that rifle sights were now invisible in the murk of the opposite shore, Jim stood up, to find Omar calmly examining the canoe.

"Now who do you suppose pulled that trick, Esau?"

"Dose young men follow us from de camp."

"I suppose they're some of Paradis' people—only they don't know that they'll never see him again."

Omar approached Jim and thrust a face into his, the fierceness of which even the gathering dusk did not soften. "Dey follow us and shoot to keel. Do I use dees now, w'en I feel de neck of dat Paradese?" The half-breed pointed to the long skinning knife slung from the sash at his waist.

"Yes, I guess you're justified in using anything, now. They're after us, and

they'll get us, too, in this country, if we're not careful. Came pretty close with that first shot. Got my pipe right under my hand. I didn't know an Indian could shoot so straight"

"Dese peopl' goin' follow us," said Esau. "W'en de moon go down, we drop down de *rivière* an' wait for dem een de mornin'."

"Ah-hah!" agreed Omar. "We mak' a leetle ambush for dem."

As the night thickened before the moon died at midnight, the Peterboro from Sunset House silently left the island, and dropped down through the shadows to the outlet and into the river. A few miles downstream they turned in and made camp.

Jim wrapped himself in his blanket with Smoke beside him, to wrestle with a difficult problem. Clearly the Indians who had followed them down the lake would stop at nothing to drive them out of the country. With these paid henchmen of Paradis on his heels, he could not go on. But to allow Omar and Esau to shoot them out of their canoe in the morning, much as they deserved it, would be bad generalship. They had kinsmen among the Pipestone Ojibwas who would take up the feud thus started; and Jim's mission was one of conciliation. Yet he had to defend himself and Omar; and Esau would be hard to handle.

The sun was high in the sky on the following morning before the three who waited in the river willows saw a canoe turn the bend above them. Clearly the two paddlers were confident that the Peterboro was somewhere far ahead of them downstream, for the men in the willows plainly heard their voices.

There was the muffled click of steel on steel as three rifles were cocked. And, as the birch-bark canoe drifted abreast of the ambush, there was a roar, as the guns spat from the shore. The paddle of the bowman fell, splintered from his hands. With a cry of terror the stern man swung the nose of the craft toward the opposite bank, as the rifles again exploded.

In his fear the Indian in the bow of the canoe plunged headlong into the river and made for the shore, while his mate flattened on the floor of the canoe. Then from the willows, two men paddled rapidly across the stream to the drifting canoe, while the third covered the craft with his rifle. Running the Peterboro alongside, Omar stepped into the birch-bark, lifted the Ojibwa in his arms, and threw him into the water.

"We not shoot *jijag*, de skunk, an' we not shoot at you, dis tam!" roared the infuriated half-breed, deprived of his vengeance by the commands of Stuart. "But de next tam, I weel split your t'roat lak' I stab de caribou."

As the frightened Ojibwa swam for the shore, Omar returned to the Peterboro and finished the work of the rifle shots in destroying the canoe, by opening great seams with his knife. Then he tossed overboard the bag of provisions, with the rifle of the Indians, and abandoned the water-logged craft.

"Now travel home in your moccasins," called the half-breed in Ojibwa to the Indian reaching the shore, "and tell them how we gave you a swim and let you go!"

Wondering what further evidence of Jingwak's hostility awaited them, but forced by the necessity of breaking the conjurer's influence in the Pipestone country if Sunset House were to survive, Jim continued down the river.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OMINOUS WARNING.

THROUGH the Pipestone chain of lakes traveled the canoe from the south, visiting the fishing camps, and denouncing Jingwak as a false shaman, an impostor, the paid agent of Paradis and LeBlond. Often the appeals of

Jim and Omar were met with sneers and shouts of dissent. More than once, superstitious Indians refused to talk to them, and frightened women herded their offspring into the tepees at the coming of the white trader with the evil eye. But, to Jim's satisfaction, most of the older Indians listened, while many were friendly. And notwithstanding sullen and black faces among the younger men, the progress of the Peterboro through the Pipestone country had not been again molested. But one night an old Ojibwa came to their camp on the Lake of the Great Stones, which emptied into the Sturgeon.

"You are going down into the Sturgeon River country?" he asked, accepting the tobacco and dish of tea Jim offered him.

"Yes," replied Jim in Ojibwa, "this false shaman, Jingwak, has turned the hunters against us for the pay of Paradis. We are going to find him and make him eat his lies."

For a long interval the old man smoked, his slitlike eyes on the fire. Then he said:

"Do not go. He is waiting for you."

Jim glanced at the interested faces of Omar and Esau. Was this man friendly or a spy, he wondered.

"I am glad," he said. "I feared he would run away."

The old Indian lifted questioning eyes to the bronzed face of the white man. For a space he seemed to measure the mettle of the speaker whose cold gaze met his scrutiny. Then he quietly said, as he again looked into the fire: "You will never come back."

Jim studied the wrinkled mask of the old Ojibwa, framed in its long, grizzled locks. Had he come to warn them as a friend, or was he seeking to learn their plans, only to send the information ahead of them?

"You have lived through many snows," he said. "Wisdom has come to you through the years. You know that Jingwak is a liar or you would not sit here and look me in the eye. This Paradis has filled his tepee with flour and tea and tobacco. Why? Because Jingwak keeps the hunters from trading with the old company. But this is finished. LeBlond has sent Paradis far south to the Nipigon."

The old Indian looked up with puzzled eyes. "You say Paradis has gone south?"

"Yes."

The seamed visage of the Indian stiffened in thought as his narrowed eyes sought his moccasin. Then he said: "He has put a spell upon the young men on the Sturgeon River—this Jingwak. If you go there, they will kill you."

At the words, Omar Boisvert rose to his feet, shaking with rage. Thrusting his clenched fists at the Ojibwa, he opened and closed his fingers.

"With these hands," he stormed, "I will choke the breath from the lying throat of the *wabeno*. Go back and send your young men to tell him we are coming. Tell him that Omar Boisvert, who broke the neck of Big Pierre, at Fort Severn, with his fist, is coming to drive him out of the Sturgeon River country. Tell him if he stays, Omar Boisvert, who sets bear traps with his hands, will tear his tongue from his throat."

Inflamed with passion, Omar stood over the squatting figure of the old Indian, who gazed up at him with a look of mingled surprise and regret.

"You think me the friend of Jingwak and this Paradis," he said calmly. "You are wrong. I come here because I am their enemy. Jingwak took my daughter from me."

In silence the Indian rose, shook hands, and went to his birch-bark. As he pushed out from the shore, he said to Jim, who followed him with the customary *"Bo'-jo's."* "Your canoe will never pass this way again."

"Well, what d'you make of him?" asked Jim of the silent figures of his friends. "Was he nosing around trying to get some information from us, or was he really bringing a friendly warning?"

"He is fr'en' of Jingwak," said Esau, "and Jingwak is scare'."

"Ah-hah!" agreed Omar. "He ees scare'. He got no Paradese to help heem now."

But in spite of the confidence of his men, Jim was troubled. What he desired was to bring about the downfall of the sorcerer by peaceable means—to gain the friendship of the hunters—but it looked as if he would fail. If the old Indian was to be trusted, they would be lucky to get out of the Sturgeon with whole skins. How far the adherents of Jingwak were prepared to go, he already knew. In the end it meant bloodshed; and that meant defeat—the enmity of many of the hunters whose trade he sought.

And defeat meant good-by to Sunset House—and Aurore LeBlond. For he would have not even a future in the company's service to offer her. As he brooded with his thoughts, the day on the island with the daughter of the man whose wiles were fast drawing the net of defeat about the little fur post seemed more like something he had read—more the fancy of a dream than reality. Those brief hours of unalloyed delight had been given him to torment his memory in the years to come. She would never return to the Lake of the Sand Beaches.

The following morning, Esau left them. Traveling in a small birch-bark canoe he had got by trade from an Ojibwa, the old man started ahead of them down the Sturgeon on his lone search for Jingwak. Time and again Jim had endeavored to learn how he hoped to circumvent the medicine man who had such a hold on the hunters of the sturgeon, but Esau had kept his own counsel. With a smile, the wily old Indian had replied:

"Eet may be Esau ees too old. Hees back no longer carry de beeg load for de companee. His leg are stiff for de winter trail. But he has seen manee t'ing and hees memory ees long. Eef he navaire come back, eet mean hees head, also, ees no good."

More he refused to say; and Omar, when questioned by the curious Jim, had shaken his head doubtfully as he explained Esau's reticence. The old man's plan was so wild in its details and depended for its success so largely on luck that Esau dared not divulge it to his chief.

So Stuart parted with his friend with misgiving in his heart. The loyal old Indian was going down the Sturgeon into the enemies' country, alone, to fight for Sunset House. What could he do to Jingwak there, in his stronghold, one against many?

He gripped the old Ojibwa's hand in parting. "I don't like to have you go alone, Esau," Jim said. "We ought to fight this out together."

"You an' your fader was de good fr'en' of me," replied Esau, his eyes bright with feeling. "I am ole man. Soon I go talk to your fader. W'en I meet heem, he ask, 'Esau, how you leave de boy?' I wan' to tell heem de boy ees ver' fine wid de beeg trade at de House of de Setting Sun." The old man's fingers gripped hard on Jim's. "Dat ees w'y I go to fin' Jingwak."

Turning, Esau shoved off the canoe and was soon out of sight behind a timbered point. In the gray eyes of Jim Stuart, as he watched the dip and swing of Esau's paddle until the bent back of the old man disappeared, there was the mist of memory and the emotion of a full heart.

The father he had buried on the shore of far God's Lake—what would Jim not give to-day for his companionship and his counsel?

CHAPTER XVII.

"SMOKE! SMOKE!"

IT was September, the moon of the mating of the caribou; September, when through the wild valleys, the lifting sun rolled back curtains of mist, veiling ridges touched here and there with yellow and gold by the magic wand of the frost; September, when the muskegs were blue with ripened berries, and the loons, restless with the urge of far journeying, called at sunset across nameless lakes. North, on the vast marshes of the great bay, the legions of the geese were assembling for their autumn rendezvous—later to ride the first stinging winds south over the green seas of the spruce and the flaming islands of the hardwood ridges.

Passing over the spawning beds of the sturgeon, at the outlet of the Lake of the Great Stones, where, for a mile, on the sandy bottom, the dark shapes of the huge fish were visible beneath the Peterboro, Jim and Omar entered the river from which the old Ojibwa had warned them they would never return. Two days' journey downstream, where the river widened to form a large lake, Jim hoped to find the man they sought. How, when he found him, he was to break the power of the sorcerer, he did not know. But the future of Sunset House depended on it, and in his desperation, Jim was prepared to go far—how far, the man who realized that failure in the trade would mean in the end the loss of Aurore LeBlond, did not dare admit to himself.

All the morning the Peterboro rode the swift current of the Sturgeon. Toward noon the drumbeat of rapids, which the old Ojibwa had warned them they could not run, sounded in their ears. Then, as they dropped with their poles alongshore, toward the first broken water, they saw the portage trail leading from the river shore back into the timber.

They landed; and Omar, first swinging to his back on a tumpline a haunch of the yearling moose they had shot at daylight, balanced the heavy, water-soaked Peterboro on its center thwart across his thick shoulders and walked briskly off up the trail. To Omar Boisvert, the man who had packed five bags of company flour a half mile without resting, this back load, while awkward to balance in the thick brush, was a toy.

With his tumpline Jim lashed the two guns to a provision bag, swung it to his back, adjusted the head strap over his forehead, and piled on the rest of their outfit, while Smoke thrashed off through the bush after snowshoe rabbits. For a half mile the trail held to the high land back from the river, then turned toward the water. Bent under his heavy load, Jim followed the moving legs of Omar under the Peterboro. From the slowly increasing clamor of the rapids, Jim judged that they were nearing the end of the carry and approaching the river, but his sweat-blinded eyes did not lift from the moccasins of the man in front.

Suddenly, the legs of Omar came to a halt. Curious, Jim raised his head banded by the tumpline, but the canoe on Omar's broad back, blocking the trail, alone met his blurred eyes.

Then, to his startled ears, came Omar's hoarse whisper: "De gun! Quick!"

"What is it? Game ahead?" Jim asked, as he slipped off the head strap.

As his load slid to the ground he wiped the sweat from his eyes and squinted past Omar toward the river. With a bound his heart started drumming against his ribs. There, twenty yards up the trail, leering at the waiting Omar, stiff as a spruce under the canoe, stood Paul Paradis.

"Trapped!" muttered Jim, working desperately to free the rifles from the knotted tumpline which bound them to the pack.

Again came Omar's whispered warning: "De gun! Tak' to de bush! Queek!"

Followed by the jeer of Paradis: "So you have come to viseet me?"

With his gun almost free, Jim heard a movement in the bush, and looked up to see two Indians hurl themselves at the man waiting, legs braced, under the canoe.

As they came headlong on, with a lunge of his great shoulders Omar pivoted and swung the heavy Peterboro crashing into their heads, at the same time slipping his tumpline and avoiding the falling boat. Then with a roar the enraged half-breed met the rush of a third man and, lifting him above his head in his viselike grip, flung the writhing body to the trail. Leaping over the stunned Indian, he made for the surprised Paradis.

Dodging into the brush to escape the charging Omar, Paradis shouted: "No knives!" as two Ojibwas catapulted into the half-breed from the rear, bringing him to his knees.

But they were fighting to take alive a man whose strength was a byword from God's Lake to the Barren Grounds. As he tripped and fell with two clawing Indians on his back, legs twined around his, Omar snarled:

"I tak' you, too, Paradese!"

When Omar clubbed his first assailants with his swinging canoe, Jim, with his hands on his lashed gun, was hurled to his face by the impact of two heavy bodies. As he fell the realization that all he had worked for—all he loved—hung on the next few seconds, flashed through his consciousness.

They had not knifed him! Thought they could take him and Omar with their bare hands, did they?

The old fury he had known in many a trench fight overseas returned as Jim fought the men on his back who sought to pin him to the ground. A desperate heave and he twisted and thrashed in their clinging arms until he reached his knees. A wrench, and he had a hand free, as they fell to the trail—a heap of straining, panting men. Chin clamped on chest to cheat their clawing fingers seeking his throat, again and again Jim hunched his fist over the shoulder into the jaw of the man who faced him, then by sheer strength bent back the head, until, with a groan, the fellow, unable to stand the torture, fainted dead away.

Desperate with the knowledge of the white man's superior strength, the remaining Ojibwa clung like a cat to Stuart's back; but wrenching himself from his grip, Jim beat him to the ground. On his knees, the hands of the dazed Indian fumbled with something on the trail, as Jim rose panting to his feet. Then, with a blind lunge he lurched forward with Stuart's recovered knife, to meet the crash of a swinging fist which crumpled him in a heap.

Omar!

Picking up the knife, Jim hurried ahead to aid his friend. As he approached, from the limp bodies of two men rose a pair of massive bleeding shoulders, from which a shirt hung in tatters. His heart checked as the sun flashed from a knife blade and a crouching figure left the brush to run at the square bulk of Omar's back.

"Behind you, Omar!" warned the running Stuart.

At the words, Omar leaped far to the side and turned to face the danger. But the courage of Paul Paradis was not equal to meeting the black fury of the unarmed half-breed, and he dodged into the spruce and disappeared toward the river.

"We get de gun!" panted Omar. "Dere are more of dem!"

Tearing their rifles from their lashings, Jim and Omar followed Paradis. As they ran, from the direction of the stream sounded the yelp of Smoke.

"He's struck 'em! Hurry up or

they'll get him!" cried Jim, increasing his speed.

Again above the distant drumbeat of the rapids lifted the angry yelp of Smoke. Then two rifle shots drove Jim headlong, his heart cold with fear for his dog. At last the panting runners reached the river. But neither dog nor the canoe of Paradis were in sight.

"Smoke!" Jim called. "Here, Smoke!"

There was no answering yelp. Then Omar, closer to the water, suddenly dropped to a knee and fired down river. Joining him, Jim looked to see far below a canoe paddled by two crouching men. Again and again the two took careful aim and fired at the distant craft, but the range was great, and the riflemen panting from exertion. At last the canoe turned a bend.

Back and forth through the thick bush near the landing Jim searched, calling the dog he loved—hoping, if he were alive, that the hurt animal would answer with a whine. But Smoke did not answer. The two friends widened their hunt, thinking the wounded husky might have crawled off somewhere to die. Finally Jim was forced to the conclusion that the dog had been shot in the water and carried downstream.

Poor Smoke! Sick at heart, Stuart bathed his grimy face and arms at the shore as his thoughts went back three years to the puppyhood of the friend he had lost. From the time when a fluffy ball of fur, Jim had brought him south from the bay to God's Lake, man and dog had known no separation; together they had faced the drive of the blizzards and the slant of the spring rains; shared the hardships of the white trails of the long snows and the summer white waters. Two great tears ran down the bronzed face of the man who knelt by the river, for the slant eyes of his dog would never again shine with idolatry as his deep throat rumbled at Jim's caress or his plume of a tail beat frantically to Jim's call as he yelped in answer.

"Good-by, Smoke!" sobbed the man, turning his face twisted with grief from the sober eyes of his friend. "I loved every black hair on you. Jim will never forget! Good-by, Smoke!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOOMED?

WELL, you wanted to meet him again and you had your wish," said Jim, as they filled the magazines of their rifles and started back for the canoe. "Now did LeBlond lie to us and send him here to hide, or is Paradis disobeying orders? It is certainly hard to decide. I wish I knew."

The muscles ridged on Omar's clamped jaws as he scowled his disappointment. "Eef he onlee jump me wid dose oders," he sighed. Then his hand slid back to the empty sheath on his sash. "Dey get my knife w'en dey hit me from behind. Dey get your knife, too? You have moch trouble wid dem?"

"They got mine, too, but I picked it up?" Jim smiled at Omar's matter-of-fact reference to his struggle to free himself of the two Ojibwas. "We must wash these scratches, Omar," he went on, examining the bulging shoulders protruding through the ripped shirt of his friend. "They clawed you like a lynx."

Omar's marked face wrinkled in perplexity. "W'y you t'ink dat Paradese try to tak' us wid hees hand? Ver' strange t'ing!"

"I don't know. Maybe he wanted to keep us in a cage to show us to the Indians up here," laughed Jim. "One thing's certain: if he'd caught us we'd have never seen home again. But that was a clever trick of yours, clubbing them with the boat, you old wolverene. These young bucks of Paradis won't forget the trimming you gave them.

There were three or four decorating the trail when I got loose and started to help you. How they'd laugh at God's Lake at these people trying to take Omar Boisvert with their hands!"

Omar's mouth widened across his square face. "Dese young feller on de Sturgeon keep dere hand off Omar Boisvert, ah-hah," laughed the swart son of Anak. "Dey got sore neck, all right."

"D'you suppose they've come to, and are waiting for us with guns to come back for the boat?"

Omar shook his head. "We go an' see. I t'ink dey got dere fill for today. Paradis run; dey run. He keep dere gun een hees canoe. He want to tak' us alive, he not dare geeve dem de gun."

"You didn't kill any of 'em—break any necks—with those bear traps of hands?"

Omar thoughtfully scratched his head. "Wan, mebbe. I twist hees neck ver' hard." Then the narrow eyes of the half-breed suddenly clouded. "Esau!" he gasped. "Dey know we come; by gar, dey get Esau!"

The canoe of the old Indian, a day ahead of them on the river, must have run into the party of Paradis.

"He told me he would travel only at night."

The deep chest of the half-breed lifted in a heavy sigh. "Widout Esau we are no good," he said, as they started back to the canoe.

"He may have missed them. Esau is too crafty to be trapped. There's nothing to do but keep on."

Cautiously, deep in the bush on either side of the portage trail, the two men approached their canoe. As Omar had said, it was unlikely that Paradis had allowed his men to carry rifles to the ambush, for in their excitement the Indians would have used them, and for some subtle reason he wanted to take Omar and Jim unhurt. Nevertheless, the two men stalked their canoe as if sure that trouble awaited them. But the Ojibwas, recovered from their rough handling, had disappeared, leaving the canoe and outfit, with Omar's knife, lying on the trail, untouched.

"Dey were scare' we come back wid our gun, and dey make for dere canoe."

"Yes, they must have had another boat downstream."

As the Peterboro was brought to the river, and slid into the water, Jim pointed at a patch of mud.

"Look! There they are—Smoke's tracks!"

The two men bent over the deep impressions of a dog's feet in the mud of the shore.

"He jumped from here; there's where he landed. See that moccasin print? He was right after them as they put in the canoe! They couldn't miss him—shot him dead!"

Foot by foot Jim and Omar searched the mud of the shore, but found no further traces of the vanished dog.

"Smoky, poor old Smoky!" mourned Jim. "You died like a soldier, facing 'em! And Jim can't give you a decent grave."

Stuart straightened, and gazing downstream where the stiffened body of his dog rode the swift current on its way to the sea, brought his hand to his forehead in salute.

The friends dropped a mile down river, and, cutting back into the timber, made a small fire and ate. To avoid a possible ambush, they waited for the moon; then, hugging the shadows of the shore, traveled until stopped by the churn of broken water ahead.

At dawn they carried around the white water, which seemed impassable, and all day lay hidden in the brush below, watching the river and wondering what chance two voyageurs who had beaten their young men would have with the wild Ojibwas of Sturgeon Lake. Since the meeting with Paradis

and his men, the mission to Sturgeon Lake in search of Jingwak seemed but a forlorn hope to Jim Stuart. The presence in the country of LeBlond's man had put a new face on things. At the best, the Indians would refuse to listen to them once they had heard of the fight on the portage. At the worst, it looked as if the prediction of the old Ojibwa at the Lake of the Great Stones would be fulfilled—the Peterboro would never return up the Sturgeon and they would never come back alive.

Of course, Jim knew that he and Omar could not disappear off the face of the earth without a search by company men and the Provincial police. The first sledding snow would bring dog teams from the south into the Sturgeon valley—lean-faced trackers who would follow Indian or white man, wanted for murder, into the uttermost North—clear to the frozen sea, and beyond. There would be trouble in the Pipestone and Sturgeon River country if the factor of Sunset House and his head man did not come back. But unless Paradis was betrayed, how were these grim man-hunters from the south to prove that the missing men had been shot out of their canoe from ambush or stabbed as they slept? Whom could they accuse? Unless, by some miracle, Esau returned to Sunset House, all that men would ever know would be that three voyageurs and a dog had, like thousands before them, faded into the North, leaving no trace.

Yes, the two friends agreed, having shown his hand, there was no doubt that Paradis, for his own personal safety, would hunt them down when he found they had continued north to Sturgeon Lake. In keeping on and attempting to find Jingwak, who was now supported by LeBlond's man, they were paddling into certain disaster; for after the lesson on the portage, Paradis would never again try to take them with bare hands. And yet, as they planned while they waited for darkness, and the deep-set gray eyes of the factor of Sunset House met the knotted squint of Omar's swart face, no suggestion of turning back was voiced by either. Ahead of them, they hoped against hope, a dauntless old man still traveled on his lonely mission to Sturgeon Lake —a mission which would mean, if he were met and recognized by Paradis, the swift disappearance of Esau Otchig. They had let him go alone, on this mad search for the sorceror. They would follow and find him, if alive, and make their fight together. Jim would have as soon deserted the old Ojibwa in his present need as he would have left a wounded man between the lines in Flanders.

As the moon rose and they pushed off into the shadows of the river shore, the words of Aurore LeBlond: "You'd die for love, so you say; but your duty ——" haunted Jim's thoughts. Had he played fair with this girl who had so frankly shown him her heart? He had allowed a sense of duty, of loyalty to the company, to cheat them of priceless hours together before she went south. And now this loyalty was to rob them of their birthright. For even the masterful Omar admitted that Jingwak and Paradis would never allow the Peterboro to return to Sunset House. And now that he felt in his heart that he had said good-by forever, Jim lived again and again each treasured moment he had spent with her. Once more, as the boat slid past the shadow-packed river shore, he felt the warm caress of her lips, heard her low whisper, gazed into the dark depths of her eyes, and crushed her to his heart.

"Good-by, Aurore!" he murmured, and above the fret of the river on the near shore, he again heard her: "Good-by, magician, don't forget me!"

But he had forgotten her, the brooding bowman told himself, when he left her and came north to his doom.

CHAPTER XIX.

JINAW, THE RATTLESNAKE.

IN the gray dawn the canoe nosed out of the river through the blanket of mist masking the still surface of Namegami, the Ojibwa's Lake of the Sturgeon. Here, living largely on their sturgeon set lines and whitefish nets, many hunters came with their families to pass the swift weeks of summer before they returned to the far valleys and muskegs of their trapping country. Here, the Pipestone Indians had told Jim and Omar, Jingwak made his home; and from here, in December and June, he led the hunters south to the trade at LeBlond's.

Before the rising sun cleared the smoking surface of the lake, Jim and Omar went ashore and, hiding their canoe in the brush, ate and slept. From now on, the price of their safety would be eternal vigilance. Their escape to the south would mean that henceforth Paradis would be a wanted man—an outlaw. For him the dog teams of the police would comb a thousand miles of forest. From Rupert House to Fort Severn, his appearance at a post would mean arrest. The very existence of the Northwest Company would hang on their repudiation of his deeds in their behalf. LeBlond might have secretly sent him to hide on the Sturgeon; but if Stuart returned south, the master of Bonne Chance must forever wash his hands of Paradis. And this, Paradis himself only too well knew. So in the search to learn the fate of old Esau the men from Sunset House must use the caution of the hunted creatures of the forest.

But the lake was a large one, with many islands. Other connecting lakes lay beyond. And the sole means of learning whether Esau had avoided Paradis and reached the Sturgeon was by talking to the Ojibwas who might have seen or met him. In time some of these Indians would carry the news of Jim's presence to Paradis. But it could not be avoided. They were here, now, to save old Esau, if alive; then, if possible, to get out of the country. The expedition against the sorcerer, Jingwak, had come to this—a bare fight for life. And neither Jim nor Omar thought they could win.

After dark the Peterboro started down the lake with muffled paddles. On the shore, in the distance, a fire twinkled like a star, for the nights were growing cool.

"Shall we make a stab and see what they know?" suggested Jim. "By daylight Esau would have passed in sight of this camp."

"Ah-hah, dese peopl' are alone here. Eet might be long tam before dey see oders an' tell dem about us."

So they landed at the camp. Jim approached the small fire with the customary, *"Bo'-jo's,"* while Omar squatted in the gloom at the bow of the canoe. His right hand, which rested inside the gunwale, gripped a cocked rifle.

"Bo'-jo'!" The old Indian at the fire rose at Jim's approach. Stuart's roving eyes saw that he was alone. The fire glow fell upon a tepee of caribou hide, the door flaps of which were closed.

The bright, minklike eyes of the old hunter measured the tall figure of the white man from felt hat to moccasins, but his weather-cured face, seamed by the years, evidenced neither excitement nor curiosity, as he said in Ojibwa:

"You come far."

"Yes," Jim answered in the same tongue, "we come far to talk with the people of the Sturgeon country."

"What have you to tell them—that Jingwak, the shaman, grows fat on the flour and sugar of the trader, Paradis?"

Jim searched the shrewd eyes of the Indian for signs of the derision which the speech implied, but found none. Still, the Ojibwa had used the identical

words employed by Stuart at the Pipestone Lakes. This was interesting. He would draw the old man out and learn about Esau. Handing the Ojibwa a plug of tobacco, he filled his own pipe.

"I have much to tell them," Jim answered. "It may be that you have much to tell me. Are you alone? Where is your family?"

The Indian gestured toward the tepee. "She is sick."

"Your wife?" Here was a stroke of luck. Stuart carried a small medicine case. It might be that the woman had some slight ailment that he could aid. He had often dressed wounds for the Indians, and knew the use of simple medical remedies.

"Yes. She cut her hand and her arm is large, with much pain."

"Infected," thought Jim. "If it hasn't gone too far I can clean it up. That means gratitude—the friendship of these people. They may be useful. And there's no time to waste."

"You have no son to help you on your trap lines this winter?" Jim asked.

The old man gazed grimly into the fire as he shook his head. "I am alone. I had a son, but he is a son no more. He left me to follow the trader, Paradis; and the long snows I have seen fall, and melt to swell the rivers, are many."

Here was luck! "Omar, come up here!" Jim called in English to the sentinel at the canoe.

"Go into the tepee and look at the sick squaw," came the guttural demand from the gloom beyond the firelight.

The wily half-breed was not to be drawn into a possible trap. With cocked rifle, he waited for proof of the Ojibwa's story. Invisible, he commanded the tepee and the fire.

"I have medicine and have cured many Indians at the Lake of the Sand Beaches," Jim said. "Your wife has poisoned her hand. The poison moves fast up the arm. It may reach her neck; then her heart. If you would have her live, I must see her at once."

For a space the Indian scrutinized Jim's frank countenance, lit by the fire glow. Then he entered the tepee, from which directly issued a muffled conversation broken by low moans.

That there was no treachery here, Jim was satisfied.

The Indian emerged from the tent and said: "She is very sick. If the medicine of the white man will help her, she is willing to see him."

Lighting a torch of rolled birch bark, the Ojibwa led the way into the tepee. As Jim followed, a crouched, invisible figure held a rifle lined on the lodge. Omar was taking no chances.

On a pile of skins Jim found a squaw writhing in pain. The hand, cut while cleaning fish, was red and swollen, the inflammation reaching to the glands of the forearm. And her head was hot with fever.

As he had guessed, it was a bad case of infection; but there was a chance of checking it, as it had not progressed to the shoulder. Returning to his canoe, he took his medicine case from a bag, and had the old man heat a kettle of water. Then he said: "This will give her pain. The wound is full of pus—of poison. It must be cleaned out and washed with medicine. Does she understand it will hurt her? Can she stand the pain?"

The old man smiled grimly. "Has she not been in pain for two sleeps? She says the little knife can be no worse."

So, in the flickering light of the birch bark, Stuart opened the inflamed hand, cleaned out the wound, sterilized it with bichloride of mercury, and bound it up, while the drawn, gray face of the old squaw, wet with the sweat of her agony, held to its stoic immobility.

They went outside to the fire, and the stiff features of the Ojibwa softened as he said: "The white man's

medicine is strong. She will be well again."

"I do not know," replied Jim, considering the situation. He might pull the old woman out of her infection if he stayed and dressed the arm. But that meant the risk of showing themselves to camps in the vicinity. And time was precious, if they were to help Esau. Omar would never agree to it. But then, there was the brave old soul in the tepee who had not so much as whimpered as he opened the wound, helpless without him. How could he leave her?

Out of the murk Omar suddenly appeared at the fire.

"This is Omar, my friend," said Jim, as the two men exchanged *"Bo'-jo's,"* and the customary handshakes. "You have not told me who you are, nor what is your name."

The old man's seamed face expanded in a chuckle. "My name is Jinaw."

It was Ojibwa for "Rattlesnake," and Omar's black eyes snapped as he said, significantly thrusting a menacing face into that of the other: "You got your poison fangs ready for somebody?"

With unblinking eyes the Indian answered the strange question. "My fangs are waiting for the trader, Paradis, and Jingwak, the shaman."

Jim glanced at Omar's surprised face. Could it be that they had stumbled upon a possible ally, or was Jinaw leading them on to betray the object of their search? And yet he had trusted Jim with his squaw's arm.

"Why did you ask me if I had come to tell the Ojibwas that Jingwak grows fat on the flour of Paradis?" Jim demanded.

"Because, the sun before the last sleep, Jingwak was here and said so."

"He was here?" Jim was thrilled. This old man might have news of Esau.

"Was he alone?" Jim asked.

"Yes. He was waiting for Paradis, who had been upriver."

"Did he say why Paradis went upriver?"

"He said that Paradis went to drive from the country the trader who had been telling the Indians at the Lake of the Great Stones that Jingwak was a false shaman. I told him he could prove that a lie by curing my squaw, who was sick."

"What did he do?"

"He said he had no time to set up his medicine lodge, but would drive the devils from her arm," said the old man with a grimace.

"And he proved he was a *wabeno,* for the devils stayed," laughed Jim.

The face of Jinaw twisted with hate. "That is why the fangs of Jinaw wait for him," he said.

"Has Paradis returned?"

"I have not seen him."

"Have you seen an old man in a bark canoe traveling this way?"

"No."

"Your son went with Paradis?"

"Yes. Jingwak said there were nine with him, in two canoes."

Then, with a glance at Omar, Jim said: "Your son is not killed. We spared him."

Jinaw's face reflected his amazement. "You met them—ten of them—and they did not stop you?"

"My medicine was too strong for them. We left them lying on the trail, but they are not hurt."

For a long space Jinaw's shrewd eyes scrutinized the frank countenance of the white man. Then he said quietly: "You have the face of one whose heart is a stranger to fear; you should have killed them. They will never let you leave this lake alive."

Ignoring the cheerful prophecy, Omar broke into the conversation, which had been carried on entirely in Ojibwa. "Do all the people here believe in this *wabeno,* Jingwak?"

"No, but many of the young men do."

"Will the old men listen to us if we talk to them?"

"They will listen, but Paradis will find you with his young men and kill you."

Omar grimaced in Jinaw's grave face. "The medicine of this white man laughs at knife and bullet. Ask Paradis what he did with his nine men." Then Omar's swart face hardened into a menacing mask. "The fangs of Jinaw seek the trader Paradis and this *wabeno*. They also are *our* enemies. Jinaw is old, his son has left him, and he needs friends. We will be his friends."

The three filled their pipes and sat down by the fire, while Omar, now convinced that the old Indian was sincere, lost no time in planning to make use of him in their search for Esau. As an earnest of their friendship, Omar brought from the canoe, flour, sugar, tea, and tobacco, none of which the old man had, and gave the sick squaw a dipper of stimulating tea, which she gratefully swallowed. Then, heartened by the good fortune which had led them to the tepee of Jinaw, they paddled a mile down the shore and hid canoe and outfit as the young moon broke through clouds above a lake drifted with shadows.

While the sky cleared and, here and there, the mirror of the lake picked up the stars, one question harassed the thoughts of the two men who had been told by Jinaw that their canoe would never turn south up the racing Sturgeon:

Where was Esau?

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS.

AS the night deepened and the moon dipped toward the black buttresses of the spruce ridge flanking the western shore, its beams touched two blurred shapes stretched in an open space beside a stony beach. Far out on the lake the funereal night wail of a loon lifted from the shadows. Then, for a long space, forest and lake slumbered, until, at last, on the heavy silence of the timbered shore broke the deep-toned *"whoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, whooo-whooo!"* of the horned owl. But the shapes in the blankets lay like dead men.

Again the hush of the tomb returned to the forest, while the moon rode from sight behind a drift of cloud, and murk swallowed the muffled figures on the shore. For a time the patrols of the forest night gave no voice, then the hunting call of the feathered assassin of the shadows again marred the deep peace. But the shaggy sentinel, Smoke, no longer kept guard beside his sleeping master. The sinister sound was unheard. The blanketed heaps did not stir.

Time passed and the moon broke from its curtain of cloud to light the lake shore and touch the wrapped shapes near the hidden canoe. Then, close by, like the stealthy movement of padded feet, sounded a faint rustle. For a long space, silence; and the sound was repeated. Again, silence, while the night grew older; until, with the noiselessness of a snake, something left the packed gloom of the scrub and writhed into the moonlight.

Near the two still shapes now lay a third.

Again movement in the black murk of the brush, the swift progress of a dark body, and where two had lain—now lay four.

Heavy with silence the forest slumbered on.

Then a moonbeam touched bright metal in the lifted hands of two kneeling men as they struck at the huddled figures between them—struck again. But their knife hands did not lift for the third blow at the sleeping men, for, like the rush of stalking wolves, the impact of two heavy bodies ground their faces into the soil, as the skinning

knives of Omar Boisvert and Jim Stuart drove deep into their backs.

Leaving the tricked henchmen of Paradis stiffening beside the blanketed heaps which the men from Sunset House had cunningly arranged to simulate the shapes of sleeping men, Jim and Omar listened in the murk of the shore willows for the sound of muffled paddles or men moving in the forest in the rear of the camp.

"I tole you de trick would work," Omar breathed into the ear of his chief. "Jinaw, he fool me, but I have fear jus' de same. He tole dem we go little piece down de lak' to sleep."

"Old Jinaw! To think he would betray us!" murmured Jim, bitter with the thought of the treachery of the Indian whom he had befriended.

"Dey see us from de lak' w'ile we talk to de Rattlesnake at de fire. Hees fang weel spit no more poison w'en Omar squeeze hees t'roat."

"And his squaw, poor old soul!"

"Ah-hah! She ees de moder of wan ov dose who come to keel us een our sleep, mebbe. You sorry for her?"

"Yes, I am sorry for her. She was so game when I hurt her. I believe I could have saved her, too. Now she'll die—if you put Jinaw out of the way."

"*Shish!*"

The steel-hard fingers of Omar closed on Jim's arm as the straining ears of the two waited for the repetition of a sound back in the forest. Shortly it came.

"Rabbit!" growled Omar, as the familiar thumping of the hind feet of a buck snowshoe was repeated.

"What're you going to do? Hunt up old Jinaw in the morning and accuse him of this?" whispered Jim, as, with rifles across knees, they settled down to their long watch for the possible appearance of others of the Paradis band.

"Ah-hah! For he tell Paradis all he know about us. I close hees mout'."

There was no disputing the fact that the old man's knowledge of their search for Esau would be a grave menace to their safety. Yet it was unlikely that he would leave his wife to die alone while he hunted for Paradis. And to the white man who sat through the hours beside the implacable half-breed who had already pronounced sentence of death on the ingrate, it was unthinkable that the courageous old squaw should be deserted to a slow death. But in holding Omar's hand, in giving her a chance of recovery from the infection, Jim realized that he was gambling with his own life and that of his friend—forgetting what he owed the girl at the Lake of the Sand Beaches. And yet he could not bring himself to do otherwise.

At dawn, the watchers on the shore, now confident that the would-be assassins had come alone, started a search for the latters' canoe, which they soon found not far away, and drew up and hid in the brush. Then, leaving their own canoe, for they did not wish to be seen, they started through the timber for the tepee of Jinaw.

Squatted by a small fire, over which simmered a tea pail, they found the old Indian frying a pan of fish. At the sound of their approach, to Jim's surprise the Ojibwa hailed them with a "*Bo'-jo'!*" without turning his head.

"How is the woman?" asked Stuart in Ojibwa.

The deep lines of the old Indian's face softened, as he rose and faced the hostile eyes of the white man and the half-breed. Then a look of bewilderment shaped itself on his hawklike features as he glanced curiously from one to the other. "Sleep has come to her," he said. "At the first light she said the pain had grown little in her arm. The medicine of the white man is strong."

Old Jinaw stared quizzically at the wrath in the black face of Omar, who stepped forward and started to speak,

when the raised hand of Jim checked him.

"Heat some water," ordered Stuart. "I will wash out her hand."

Putting a pail of water on the fire, Jinaw led Jim into the tepee. His entrance was greeted from the pile of skins by a low: "*Nia! nia!* You have come! Your medicine is strong, for the pain has grown small."

Jim placed his hand on the wrinkled forehead. The fever had dropped. Then he took the bandage off the arm and washed the incision he had made in the hand, while the squaw, mumbling her gratitude, stoically refused to voice her pain. Sending Jinaw for more water, Jim quietly asked her:

"Was it your son who stopped here the last sleep after I put medicine on your hand?"

The eyes of the old woman, sunken with hours of agony, widened at the question. There is no subterfuge here, thought Jim, as, without the slightest hesitation, she whimpered:

"My son, here, the last sleep? No, he has forgotten—he comes no more. There was no one here."

As Jinaw entered with the warm water, Stuart said: "We thought that you had sent two men to knife us in our sleep and we came here to make you pay."

"I saw it in your eyes," said the Indian, calmly meeting Jim's gaze, "but I did not know why your hearts had turned bitter. The men of Paradis found you, but your medicine was too strong?"

"They will stalk no more sleeping men." Jim closely studied the wrinkled mask of old Jinaw, but in the expression there, he found only mild surprise.

"It was, then, the moon on a wet paddle, as I thought."

"You saw their canoe?"

"No, after you left I saw, far on the lake, a flash. Then the moon was hid."

"We thought you had sent them to find us."

Sorrowfully the Indian shook his head. "Jinaw has little to give the white trader for his good medicine, but his friendship. He gave him that the last sleep, when he touched hands. Does the trader from the House of the Sunset believe Jinaw now speaks with a single tongue?"

Rising, Jim gave the old man his hand. "I do. We shall be friends."

CHAPTER XXI.

SHAMAN OF THE RAPIDS.

WHEN Esau left Jim and Omar and started down the Sturgeon River on his mad mission in search of Jingwak, he traveled all the first night, watching the passing shores for the red embers of a dying fire. For once Paradis was warned of the coming of the men from Sunset House, he would lose no time in guarding the river road over which they must pass. So the old man rode the swift current through the shadows, his eyes straining for the glow of a camp fire on the foliage of the shore.

Before dawn the roar of white water drifted to his ears, and he landed. For he would need the light to inspect the strange rapids and decide whether he could run them or would have to carry around. So Esau hid his canoe, went deep into the forest, boiled his tea over a diminutive fire masked from the river by thick timber, ate, and slept.

Later in the morning he walked downstream to the head of the rapids. Across the river was the cleared space at the end of a portage trail. The white water was impassable; the Indians carried around it. But the veteran, who had passed his life on the wild rivers of western Kiwedin, did not return to his canoe and drop down to the portage. Along the opposite shore he followed the rock-scarred white water as it foamed and churned and thundered

through a half mile of clamoring chaos. Then he returned to his canoe and started downstream for the head of the portage; for not even the trained eyes of Esau Otchig, who, in his youth, had run the Chutes of Death on the Winisk and the Long Sault of the Mad River, had found a way through for his canoe.

The old Indian was crossing the river a quarter mile above the rapids, when, to his consternation, two men suddenly appeared on the portage.

With a lunge of his paddle Esau swung the nose of the canoe to the opposite shore. Was it Paradis on his way upriver, or traveling Ojibwas, who would pay him slight attention? He had paddled but a few strokes when he saw a canoe carried from the forest and slid into the water. Leaping into the boat, the two packers started straight across the head of the rapids. They were trying to cut him off! It was Paradis!

Furiously Esau drove his paddle, angling across the current for the opposite shore, as his keen brain grappled with the situation which confronted him. He could land and take to the bush—ambush the two men in the canoe if they dared follow him up. But there were others behind them on the portage. That meant losing canoe and outfit—defeat. Without these he could not reach Jingwak.

Then, at the head of the carry, a third man appeared. There was a puff of smoke, a faint explosion of a rifle above the drumming of the rapids, and a bullet whined past Esau's face.

As the two canoes swiftly approached each other, the old Ojibwa made his decison. Life meant little to him, now. There was one chance in ten of his coming through; but he would make the great gamble for that one chance—for Jim and the memory of Jim's dead father. The trail to Jingwak led through the half mile of white fury ahead.

He stopped paddling, reached for his rifle, and fired at the bowman in the boat cutting across his course.

Hit, the paddler slumped back into the canoe. Close to the suck of the first drop, the stern man seized his pole and fought to check the drifting canoe, as a second shot passed over Esau's head.

Then, at the head of the portage, the old man saw another canoe leaving the beach, as again an Indian fired at him from the shore.

"Ah-hah!" he cried, his furrowed face glowing with the exaltation of his mad purpose. "So you catch old Esau? Waal, come on! Catch heem!"

Deliberately, as his canoe rode the swift current toward the head of a long chute, Esau sighted his rifle and fired at the stern man battling with his pole to free the canoe from the fierce suction on the lip of the flume.

Splintered by the bullet, the bending pole snapped in the Ojibwa's hands. He lunged headfirst into the racing current, and, followed by his yawing canoe, was swept into the rapids.

Shifting his load forward to make the canoe bow heavy, Esau rose with his setting pole. Stiff as a spruce, he stood in the drifting boat, narrowed eyes searching the churning white water before him for a way through for his birch-bark. Then, as his boat slid toward the dip of the long chute, the old man waved his hand at the pursuing canoe and the men on shore, as his cry of defiance, "Come and get me!" was drowned in the drumbeat of the rapids.

No rifle shots followed the doomed figure standing with setting pole in the stern of the birch-bark, as it leaped forward, caught by the suck of the flume. In awe the men of Paradis watched the mad canoeman deliberately steer his craft into the maw of death.

Down into the maelstrom of broken water plunged the canoe, guided by the spruce pole of the gallant old Ojibwa in the stern. Following the black-water channels past boulders mounded with

foam, and knife-edged rocks thrusting through the spume, checking with his pole when the way was blind, then on, grazing calamity by a paddle's breadth as he rode the roaring reaches, went the dauntless old voyageur. Drenched with spray, his leaking canoe scarred with wounds from a hundred rocks, the indomitable Ojibwa fought his way until, suddenly, the river widened into an unbroken barrier of white water. With a groan, Esau read his doom written in the buried boulders which barred his path. The frail craft would strike, fill, and break up.

Brushing the sweat from his eyes with a sleeve, the jaws of the old white-water man clamped, as he faced the end. He had made the fight, taken the long chance for Jim, and now it was over! But Esau Otchig would go down fighting!

Into the chaos of foaming boulders dropped the canoe, "snubbed" by the bending pole. The bottom grounded on a rock, was lifted off by the pole; the boat was caught and swung into another by baffling cross currents; but still the old man fought—unconquered in the face of certain disaster. At last, the unleashed river caught the shattered canoe, like a straw, and dropped it on a huge boulder, over which the water mounded. Pivoting on the rock, the canoe rolled and started to fill. It was the end!

With a desperate leap Esau was in the water, his feet braced on the submerged rock. A heave, and he freed the rapidly filling boat, swung her with the current, and fell gasping on his knees inside, clutching his pole. Shortly he was clear of the shallows.

Then on down, through the riot of plunging river, the bent figure in the stern steered his boat, the glitter of victory in his black eyes. He had hung, for a space, on the lip of death. But he had won!

As the half-filled canoe nosed into the "boilers" at the foot of the last drop, the spray-drenched old man dropped exhausted to his knees and took his paddle. Then his heart sank as he saw a canoe below him. Desperate, he took his rifle from where it lay at his feet in the water, and boldly drifted down on the waiting canoe.

As he neared the craft, the faces of the occupants watched him with awe.

"Are you a manitou—a spirit," gasped an Ojibwa, "that you pass alive through the Rapids of the Windigo?"

Esau put down his gun.

"I am a great shaman in the land where the sun goes to sleep," he said. "I fear no rapids." Here was an opportunity to impress the Indians of the Sturgeon country, and the keen-witted old man swiftly made the most of it.

"The spirits are your friends, for the Windigo allows no man to pass his rapids."

Esau gravely nodded. "*Enh-enh*—yes, the spirits are my friends."

The Indian exchanged frightened looks with the awed squaw who cowered in his canoe.

"Jingwak, the shaman, fears to pass these rapids in his canoe. Your medicine is stronger than his."

A look of contempt crystallized on the face of the old man. "Jingwak is a *wabeno* who deceives the Ojibwas to get their fur for the trader Paradis. The spirits do not know him."

"You go to the Lake of the Sturgeon?"

"Yes. Tell the people there that you saw the shaman from the land of the setting sun, who comes to talk to them, pass unhurt from the Rapids of the Windigo."

"You come to make medicine at the Lake of the Sturgeon?"

"Yes. I have traveled many sleeps to find Jingwak, the false shaman who speaks with a double tongue to the Ojibwas, and drive him from the country."

With a sweep of his paddle, Esau

left the spellbound hunter and his squaw, and continued down the river. Going ashore behind the first bend, he rested, then carried the canoe into the thick bush, built a fire to dry his outfit, and with pitch and spruce roots started the necessary repairs.

As he worked over the rock-scarred craft, the wrinkled face of the old man lit with smiles of satisfaction. He had beaten Paradis and lived through white water that no canoe had passed, to start on its way the story of his charmed life and miraculous powers, which would travel swiftly from tepee to tepee up and down the lake. The Indians he had met would lose no time in spreading the news of the coming of a great shaman from the west. For a time he would hide, while his mysterious appearance swayed the talk around the supper fires. For he knew his people. Then he would strike.

CHAPTER XXII.

GLORIOUS NEWS.

FOR three days Jim and Omar camped near Jinaw while the infection in the arm of the old squaw rapidly cleared under Stuart's care. Then, when she could travel, the grateful Indian started down the great lake to endeavor to learn the fate of Esau. Until he had talked to the widely scattered fishing camps and picked up the gossip of the movements of Paradis and Jingwak, he urged his friends to keep under cover. So, two nights later, the canoe from Sunset House waited at the rendezvous the Rattlesnake had set in a deep cove near the foot of the lake.

Restless from days of doubt and forced inaction, in which the absent Esau might have so sorely needed their aid, Jim and Omar sat beside their hidden canoe, listening for Jinaw's return.

"How we get back up dat *rivière*," asked Omar, "wid men watchin' for us?"

"Looks as if we were trapped, unless we can shoot our way home. He knows if we get away he'll be hunted for years. If the Indians stand by him, he'll never let us get out."

"Dere ees Jinaw," announced Omar as a shadow slid in toward the shore.

"Esau is here, on the lake," began the old man, who spoke no English.

"Esau! Alive!" The hands of Jim and Omar gripped, as they voiced their relief. "Good old Esau! Bless his soul, he got past them!" cried Jim in his delight. Then he turned to the Indian.

"What did they tell you?"

"I have talked to the hunters at many camps. A strange story has passed down the lake."

"What is it? How do you know Esau is here? Have they seen him?" demanded Jim with impatience.

"Seven sleeps ago an Indian and his woman saw a canoe pass out of the Rapids of the Windigo. In it was a great shaman who told them his name was Otchig and he sought the sorcerer, Jingwak."

"He ran those rapids!" Jim peered triumphantly into Omar's startled face.

"By gar!" grunted the surprised half-breed. "How he do dat?"

"No canoe has ever before passed the Rapids of the Windigo," added Jinaw. "The woman who saw it says the boat had wings, and never rode the water. They talk of nothing else around the supper fires."

"How did he do it?" cried Jim, elated with the good news. "Now, where are Paradis and Jingwak?"

"Paradis returned, and the families of four of those who went with him are asking for their sons. But he will not speak."

"But Jingwak, what does he say? Is he afraid of this medicine man who ran the rapids to reach him?"

"There are many stories," answered Jinaw. "Some have asked him, if his is the stronger medicine, why he has

never run the Rapids of the Windigo. Others have demanded that the two meet at the Great Medicine Stone and show their power."

"What does he say?"

"He tells them that his magic will destroy the stranger."

"Do the Ojibwas believe that?"

"They are of many minds."

"Did you see your son?"

"Yes. He said that Paradis and two others saw this shaman drive two men with their canoe into the rapids, but Paradis has closed their lips. Two more, who hunted for the white trader on the lake, have not returned."

"*Umh!*" Omar grunted. "He weel wait long tam for dem."

Far into the night the three discussed the situation. Omar wished to go in search of Esau at once, but Jinaw objected. Above all things, he insisted that they must not run the risk of a fight on the lake.

"There is now fear in the camp of Paradis. The young men are worried about this strange shaman from the west. I told many hunters I had seen his magic canoe pass, high above the lake. Let me go again to the fishing camps and talk to the people. The time is not yet right for you to show yourselves to the Ojibwas."

"But we must find Esau," urged Jim.

"I will find him and return in two sleeps to this place," said the old man, as he stepped into his canoe.

Chafing under the lack of action imposed upon them by the old Indian, Jim and Omar spent two more days in hiding. With Paradis and his men on the lake, to show themselves at a camp, as Jinaw warned, might not only mean trouble with some of the Indians, but interfere with the plans of Esau. For the shrewd old man must have learned of the excitement over his appearance. But where was he, and what was he going to do?

On the second night Jinaw returned, and the news he brought quickened the sluggish blood in the veins of the two who listened. An old man had stopped at the camp of Jinaw and talked to his wife. He told her he came from the Winisk country and was traveling far south to winter with his son on the Pipestone. But when she showed him the healed wound in her hand and told him of the white trader from the south who had befriended her, the surprised Indian had left this message for Stuart:

"The medicine of Otchig is strong. His fame grows among the people as ice thickens in the freezing moon."

Then Jinaw told them that some of the older Indians had demanded that Jingwak prove his superiority over the stranger whose magic canoe had been seen on the lake. And so, word had gone out to the people of the Sturgeon Lakes that the shaman, Jingwak, would erect his medicine lodge at the Great Medicine Stone, and prove his magic stronger than that of the sorcerer who had come among them only to hide.

"Esau's smoked him out! Good old Esau! Here's his chance!" cried Jim. "But what under heaven is he going to do, Omar?"

"We go and see," grunted the half-breed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ESAU'S BIG MEDICINE.

FOR two days canoes from the four winds had passed the hiding place of Jim and Omar, on their way to the medicine making on the island where, from time immemorial, the conjurers of the Ojibwas had pitched their lodges beside the mammoth boulder known as the Great Medicine Stone, and invoked the spirits.

As he sat watching the moving canoes through his binoculars, Jim wondered how, in the face of the odds which confronted him, the little old man hoped to outwit the sorcerer. Thanks to Jinaw and the people who had seen him

come through the rapids, Esau had acquired overnight a reputation as a magician—a worker of miracles. But how was he to live up to it? What could he contrive before these gaping red men to make the faker, Jingwak, a laughingstock in the eyes of his own people? To this Jim had no answer. And when Jingwak called on Esau to prove him a false shaman, what tricks could he offer against the medicine drum and rattle of the *wabeno*—what necromancy, with which he could overcome, in the eyes of the benighted Indians, the howlings of the spirit voices in the tent of Jingwak?

And in Omar Jim found no comfort.

"Eef Esau ees dere an' Jingwak and Paradese bodder heem, dere weel be wan dead *wabeno* on dis lak' to-night."

"But that'll mean we'll all be wiped out."

"Ah-hah! Eef Esau do not mak' de beeg medicine, we navaire see home."

Further than that Omar would not go. "What is he holding so closely behind those stiff lips of his?" Jim ruminated. "He certainly has some idea about what Esau will do."

When the twilight died and the lake lay muffled in shadow, Jim and Omar slipped their canoe into the water and started for the island. A few hours, now, would tell the tale. Already, across miles of quiet water, the huge fire, kindled at the Great Medicine Stone, glowed like a beacon through the dusk.

As his paddle silently dipped and swung, and the nose of the boat thrust aside a low ripple, Jim wondered if this was the end. In the mad hope of saving Sunset House, he had put aside his love for the girl who had begged him to stay. And now, on the desperate chance of Esau winning over the Indians by some sleight of hand, some artifice of the conjurer, learned from his father, they were giving Paradis odds of ten to one in a knife fight in the dark. As he paddled through the dusk, Aurore LeBlond traveled at his side, while Jim Stuart said his farewell.

At last, off the shore where the expectant Ojibwas were gathered before the fire, the Peterboro drifted in the murk. Above the snapping of the birch logs floated the low hum of voices. A short distance from the fire, dimly outlined in the shadows at the foot of the Medicine Stone, stood a small tepee of caribou hide, ornamented with the grotesque shapes of serpents and animals. It was the medicine lodge of Jingwak.

"We wait for heem to mak' de beeg howl, den we go ashore below here," whispered Omar.

"Can you make out Paradis?" replied Jim, searching the rows of silhouetted backs, and the line of grave faces of those who sat where their lit features were visible to the canoemen.

"Paradis keep een de dark until he see how de magic of Jingwak work. Eef eet work, we have to fight for Esau."

Presently, the rattle of shells, mingled with the beat of the medicine drum, drifted from the tent. The low hum of the squatted audience died. The sorcerer had begun his invocation of the spirits.

After a time a droning singsong joined the rhythm of drum and shells, increasing in volume until, at last, it burst into maniacal cries and caterwauling: then rose to the crescendo of a long wail which quavered through the black forest. For an interval, the voice in the tent was still, while from the eyes of the credulous hunters looked a nameless fear. Then the unearthly cries rose anew to taint the silence, and climaxed in a piercing scream. At the fire swart faces turned gray with dread.

Suddenly, out of the hush, lifted a voice as from the grave. A spirit was speaking. With caught breath the audience stiffened.

"The stranger from the land where the sun sleeps is no shaman. He came from the trader at the House of the Setting Sun, the home of devils."

Concealed in the gloom outside the fire glow, with knives loosened in sheaths and loaded guns, Jim and Omar watched, tense with strain.

"Where is this conjurer," asked the sepulchral voice, "who tells the Ojibwas his magic is stronger than that of Jingwak, my brother? He is not here! He fears the wrath of Jingwak, the great shaman."

Jim's muscles stiffened. The moment had come. It was time to strike! But where was Esau?

Again the voice of the spirit in the tepee challenged the strange shaman to appear and work his magic. Still the sorcerer who had ridden the Rapids of the Windigo did not answer.

"He's not here!" whispered Jim. "We'd better work toward the canoe."

But the man at his side, whose fingers clamped on the horn handle of a knife as he peered at the medicine lodge, stood motionless.

"The stranger has the heart of a rabbit. His mouth is full of lies. He hides from the magic of Jingwak!"

With a glance at the spellbound Indians, Jim took Omar's arm. "Come on! They'll go crazy in a minute! We'll be cut off from the canoe!"

Then the iron fingers of Omar dug into Jim's arm as he muttered, "Look!" Beside the medicine lodge stood an apparition. From the nodding head, above a chalk-white mask with eye holes and a grimacing mouth, rose the antler of a caribou. On the skin-clad body writhed painted snakes. At the sash hung the medicine bag and shell rattle of a conjurer. A suppressed *"Ah!"* swept the startled Ojibwas. "The shaman! The strange shaman!"

Then, from the horned head lifted shrieks of despair, groans of agony, the wailing of a creature in torture. There was a pause. Wide-eyed, the electrified Indians waited for the funereal voice from the mask.

"I have come, oh, Jingwak! Otchig, the shaman from God's Lake who fears not your magic, is here!"

Silence, ominous, foreboding, blanketed black forest and murk-shrouded lake. Then the drunken scream of a loon broke the spell. A shudder, like a wind ripple across still water, swept the Ojibwas.

But from the tepee of Jingwak came no sound.

"Come forth, oh, magician with the split tongue! Otchig, the shaman from God's Lake, laughs at your medicine!" Still the lodge of Jingwak was silent.

From the squatted Ojibwas rose murmurs of surprise. Why did not Jingwak speak?

Suddenly, in the gloom across the fire, sounded heated words. Jim's eyes turned from the horned shape by the medicine lodge. An inflamed face, lit by the glow, faded into the darkness. It was Paradis.

"Does Jingwak, the friend of the trader, Paradis, fear the magic of Otchig, that he hides his face?"

Low groans greeted the strange behavior of the mute conjurer in the tent.

"He's afraid to come out!" whispered Jim excitedly. "What's Esau done to him?"

The half-breed's answer was a fierce squeeze of the arm.

Shortly, above the murmuring of the Indians lifted the voice of Jinaw, the Rattlesnake: "The strange shaman has put a spell upon Jingwak!"

There was a movement in the medicine lodge. The door flap was thrust aside and the conjurer crawled slowly out. As he rose, the ratlike eyes in the painted face, avoiding the mask of Otchig, shifted furtively from side to side. The hand holding the shell rattle shook.

"He's quit! Esau's got him! We'd

better work around behind to hold 'em off, if they rush!" breathed Jim.

"No, de Indian believe Esau. Wait! I tak' care of Paradese!"

"Look, men of the Sturgeon, on the great *wabeno!*" jeered the voice from the chalk-white mask, as Jingwak's hunted eyes fell before the rows of fire-lit faces. "His friend, the spirit, asks me for magic! Behold the medicine of Otchig!"

Thrusting both hands dramatically above the antlered headdress, the shaman made mysterious passes, as he crooned a wild singsong. Then, with an ear-torturing scream, he stiffened his arms and sliced the air, downward, to his side.

"Without blood I have taken his ears!" announced the voice from the mask. "Go to him and behold the magic of Otchig."

The desperate Jingwak turned to escape into the blackness of the spruce, but Jinaw and two Ojibwas were on him and dragged the panic-stricken sorcerer back to the fire. Pushing aside the long hair which hung to his shoulders, the Rattlesnake exposed the sides of Jingwak's head to the view of the astounded Ojibwas.

The ears had been removed close to the skull!

For a hushed interval the awed Ojibwas gaped in wonder at this proof of Otchig's magic. Then, with a roar, there was a rush for the impostor who had deceived them with his boasting. But the terrified Jingwak wrenched free of the arms that held him and disappeared in the blackness.

At the same time Jim and Omar cut back to the shore to head off Paradis. But he had foreseen defeat and his canoe had lost itself in the shadows. Furious at having the man who had hunted them slip through their fingers, Jim and Omar returned to the fire.

Then Jinaw shouted for silence, while the triumphant Esau gathered the fruits of his victory. To the rumors which had carried his fame through the Sturgeon Lakes he had now added the testimony of the naked eye. The last doubter was convinced. Jingwak had lost and was shamed forever.

Eagerly the mercurial red men waited while the great shaman, Otchig, removed his costume. Then Esau addressed them. Going back to God's Lake, he told of the respect for fair dealing in which the Indians had held the elder Stuart and his son; how many had wept when Jim was sent to the Lake of the Sand Beaches; how, because he loved him as a son, he, himself, had followed. The devil story of Jingwak, the liar, which had kept the hunters from the post, was the invention of Paradis, to hold the fur trade. No devils would dare live where the shaman, Otchig, made his home, for he would cut off their heads as well as ears. Jingwak and the Frenchman, they would never see again. Esau told them, if the people wished it, he would come each summer and make medicine at the great stone. And soon, in the little Moon of the Spirit, when the trails were broken for sledding, he would bring flour and trade goods for those who found the journey too long to the House of the Sunset.

In turn Jim and Omar spoke to the hunters, warning them that Paradis was now an outlaw, and inviting them to Sunset House. Then, shaking the hand of the Indians, some of whom Stuart had reason to believe had fought him and Omar on the portage trail, Jim and his men headed back to camp.

As his paddle tore the water, he laughed in his relief and joy: "We've won! We've won! Aurore! D'you hear, down there in the city? I'm coming back to you, girl. I've won!"

To be concluded in the next issue.

Yellow?

by

Frederick Niven

Author of "The Lonesome Bandit," Etc.

Walt Williams, the ranch foreman, learned that he must never be too quick to underestimate a man's courage.

A COMPLETE STORY

THE boys of the old J. J. Ranch were riding into Medicine Meadow. Sid Peploe, who rode like a centaur—he and his horse in exquisite limber accord in every movement—suddenly reined in with an inspiration.

"Say," he said, "how about going over by the new bridge?"

"Bridge!" ejaculated "Red" Palmer. "It ain't built. We've still got to make the circumbendibus to the ford."

"I know it ain't built," replied Sid. "But they've got a stringer clean across. We could hobble the horses this side."

It would be a short cut, a saving of miles, and perhaps a bit of diversion from the usual. Unanimously they wheeled and loped across the rolling land straight to the river.

At first sight of what had been done there by the bridge builders, it was clear that not even the most sure-footed pack pony should be asked to attempt the crossing.

"Gosh!" said Bud Evans. "This is a tight-rope act. Wish I'd brought a Japanese umbrella to help balance me getting across!"

"Shucks, that's easy," declared Peploe.

Afoot, Red Palmer—who showed, for his lower half, legs that were an inverted capital 'U,' from having been curved around horses all his life, even from before the times when he had properly set—looked at the stringer and laughed.

"Wow!" he said.

Another of the riders, Arthur Beverley, said nothing, because what he wanted to say was: "Oh, let's go back

and take the ford. I don't think I could walk that plank." He wished somebody else would say it first, but nobody did.

All the horses hobbled, off the men set to the bank, the proposer of the attempt in the lead. Arthur watched him go out on that narrow and elevated path and felt in the pit of his stomach something like the squeamishness of seasickness. One by one the others followed —Red Palmer, Bud Evans, Hank Schmidt, and the "Ohio Kid." The foreman, Walt Williams, stood watching them.

"Go on, boys," he said. "I'll come in the tail and dive after you when you lose your nerve and fall in. Go ahead, Art."

"After you," said Arthur.

The foreman launched him a searching look, then stepped onto the stringer and set off. Beverley made a swallow and followed. Once, looking up, he saw Peploe, in the lead, hesitate, even wave an arm to left, an arm to right, balancing, for all the world as though the stringer were indeed a tight rope. The others, also noticing that diffident balancing above the river's center, whooped derision and began to play act at balancing, too, as if it were a game of follow-my-leader.

But as for Arthur, he was going slower, slower. He had to tell himself that it was as safe as houses, that if he could walk on one narrow plank on a sidewalk he could walk on this narrow plank, even though it was high up over a surging creek. The whirl of the water below caught his eye and made him feel that the stringer was rushing up-creek sidewise. He crept on slower, slower. Darn it all! If the river were only running the same way as the stringer it would be different. Its flow would not put him out so. Slower. Slower.

The leaders were across and looking back. They shouted advice, roaring with laughter, though he had a suspicion that some were really relieved to be successfully over. He laughed back, but he could not look at them and it was a sort of twisted laugh. Suddenly he crouched down, and that did it. The last few feet of that stringer he negotiated sitting astride it and advancing in little bobbing motions like those of the game leapfrog, but not nearly so vigorous.

"It's your eyes. I bet you you've got this here astigmatism," said Hank Schmidt. "You ought to have shut one. Then you could have made it on the run."

"It's bile in the system," declared Bud Evans. "I seen in the paper where it said they had a talk with a steeple jack and he said he always had a pill or two before starting a particularly tricky job if he did not like it. Your liver is out of whack."

"Yes, I guess it is," said Walt Williams.

The way he said it! Arthur understood that what the foreman meant was that his liver was white. But he let it go at that. At any rate, Bud Evans admitted that he nearly got down the same way himself.

"Vertigo is a hell of a thing," he said. "The way I kept on was remembering I could swim."

That was a good suggestion to Arthur. He, too, could swim. He must remember that on the way back. To do so might supply the necessary confidence. Actually, going back, he crossed gayly, but he did not do so because of remembering that he could swim. He crossed erect and with shoulders back, swaggering indeed, because he had just the right load of Dutch courage under his belt. One could get Dutch courage at some of the drug stores, and other places, in those days, even though they were prohibition days in the northwest. And Arthur had quaffed it by intent, in preparation for the return that haunted him all the while he was in town.

At the period of this story there was no barbed wire from Calgary southeast to the Dakotas, or from Calgary south to Benton. There were cattle and horses, and a few buffaloes—diminished herds, but still to be seen. The railroad had just gone through, and the half-breeds gathering round Riel were maneuvering for a scrap with the encroaching conquerors.

That incident of walking the plank bothered Arthur. He was quiet for days thereafter. An ignominious memory he had of himself bob-bobbing across that stringer. To have walked back erect—even with liquid courage—might have satisfied some, but it did not satisfy him. In vain that he had played his part in turning a stampede one night—night herding in a spring round-up—when the cattle might have gone clear into the sleeping camp. In vain that he had faced blizzard and kept cheerful in cloud-burst.

All such things were but the routine of the days and the nights and the seasons. Had he failed in them he would just have been sent packing. At his work he was as good as the next man, which was actually saying a lot. And he was no shirker. He was liked, too, by his fellows. As a matter of fact, they all thought a great deal less of that incident of the stringer than did he—all except the foreman of the J. J.

Williams remembered it. He remembered it about as well as did Arthur. A great, blazing fellow was this boss of the J. J. He could not speak but that his eyes flashed; he could not turn his head slowly even to ask the how and the why if any one had a different view from him, but had to do so with a combative whirl. He was, in fact, perilously near to being a bully by the excess of his belief that it was a world for red-blooded men. Had he only known it, the boys of the J. J. had dismissed any suspicion that might have come to them that day, crossing the river, that Arthur was yellow, or had a tinge of yellow. But they had still, and always, a lingering suspicion that he, Walt Williams—well, if he were not properly met, might show a strain of the bully.

One day there was a brute of a horse came their way, and Walt made up his mind to have it ridden.

"Say," he said to Arthur, "I want you to get on that jumping buckskin today."

"The jumping buckskin!" exclaimed Arthur, not in any white-livered mood for a certainty, but with a sense of fitness, of proportion, for he had never ranked himself as a horse breaker.

"Scared?" jeered Walt.

Arthur rose up and faced him.

"Scared nothing!" he snapped. "There is a difference between being scared and knowing what one can do. All the same, if you put it that way, why—dang it, I'll get on it! Don't know how long I'll stay, but I'll show you."

Walt peered in his face with a particularly keen, steely gaze.

"You don't want a little Dutch courage first, do you?" he suggested. "Same as you needed to cross the stringer."

Buckling his belt, Arthur stood pat and returned that look without a word. It was rather a long silence. The men felt it, standing by.

"The way you talk about this horse," said Arthur at last, "I begin to wonder if you're not scared of it yourself."

In return for that the foreman glanced round the room at the others. By their blank faces he could not tell whose partisans they were—what they thought, one way or another.

"I'll show you," he said.

In fact, he surmised that he had gone too far and that, to recover prestige, he'd have to show Arthur, to show them all. Employees were not slaves. They took orders but, addressed unfittingly, they squared the matter by replying in

kind. A man was not fired for "insolence," but he might quit for aggrandizement. Arthur was going to obey the order. There had been no need for taunts.

It took five of them, wrestling with that horse, to get it saddled and bitted. It took them all of half an hour to do that. One had his great toe broken by being tramped on by a forehoof of the hellfire creature; another had, on one side of his face, the big blue stain of a bruise where the horse, flinging its head to one side, had whacked him. It felt, inside his head, as if the brains had been jarred loose like the works inside a dropped watch.

Red Palmer, slipping in to take that man's place as he fell back, giggled to himself.

"What's the joke?" bawled Williams.

"Private thoughts," replied Red.

He had wondered what would happen were he to ask the foreman if he'd not like to imbibe three fingers or so of courage himself before elevating himself on top of that equine firework.

"Hang on," said Walt, "till I get a chance to pop up in the saddle."

The beast, that for a moment had been standing limp and forlorn looking, dilated its nostrils. The brown of its eyes almost disappeared, showing white, and the white was bloodshot.

"Hang on!"

"I got him!"

"I got him, too!"

"All right!"

Pantings and wrigglings. Curses and chuckles.

"Let him go!"

All this was in the big yard. One side of it was the ranch house, on another were outbuildings, a third was the pole wall of a corral, and the fourth was half space into the bald prairie, half a row of wagons, head to tail.

The horse leaped up and rushed toward the house, wheeled there and grazed Walt's shoulder along the edge of the open shed that was the summertime cookhouse, then whirled and dashed over at an angle to the wagons.

"Gosh, he's staying with it!" whooped Arthur, as though he had doubted if the boss could.

The horse made its own cyclone. It changed its direction halfway to the wagons and dashed at the corral bars. There it halted abruptly and bowed forward; but Walt did not soar in air, nor get the horn in his midriff. With a snort it dashed across the yard again, but not for the offered spaciousness outside, though the foreman tried to steer it thither. It headed for the wagons.

Then something happened to it. A tremor began at its outspraddled hind legs and undulated up the haunches, in the first movement of a "caterpillar buck." That tremor ran into the man, whose body responded to it as with a continuance of these waves—and then, when he looked as though he would remain in place, he did not.

He went up in air and on, crashed into the wagon before him, slipped, fell; and the horse, coming down from the rampant attitude that ended the caterpillar buck, grazed his jaw with a forehoof. Then, snorting, it backed away, puffing at the man with its nostrils and looking more like a griffin of heraldry than a horse—or some vindictive descendant of the pterodactyls that once upon a time gave the heebee-jeebies to the cave men.

The exhibition was over, with Walt in debt a broken rib, a broken collar bone, and a slit cheek.

He was driven to the hospital at Medicine Meadow, over the completed bridge, by a subdued Arthur Beverley, Bud Evans going along to help him into the ward.

It did not take Williams long to heal up again and be about. He was a more restrained, but a glummer, boss on his return. The thing rankled. It need not have done so. Even the riders of the

J. J. could not think contemptuously of a man who had such an adventure in the high saddle with such a horse. But Walt bore Arthur a grudge. That "danged yellow kid"—so he put it to himself—had got out of the job neatly. That was how he brooded.

However, the work of the J. J. went on in its wonted way, and eventually the incident of the stringer was ancient history, and the incident of losing the wrestle with that bad horse.

Some weeks later they went into the Cedar Hills to fell some trees for a new pole corral. In the wagon on which the poles would be piled went their grub and blankets, and they rode gayly alongside—Arthur, Bud Evans, Red Palmer, Hank Schmidt, the Ohio Kid, Walt, and Tommy Leng, the cook, whose sobriquet was very obviously, and somewhat appropriately, "Hash."

The low, blue smear of Cedar Hills, like a cloud on the horizon, drew at last nearer. As they used to say in those old days of prairie travel, they came "in sight of land." The blue, that might have been a cloud, solidified. The soaring humps of actual earth were lined up and down, from base to crest, with timber. There was an old cabin at this end of Cedar Hills that legend accredited to some dead-and-gone trapper of the days before even the arrival of the big longhorn herds. And the J. J. outfit had, tinkering it up, made it again habitable for a base on such expeditions.

There they made their headquarters and began operations.

It was on the first night there that Arthur—let us call him highly strung a bit, and leave it at that for the moment—wakening, heard a queer throbbing sound. What it was he could not tell. He wondered, in fact, if it was just blood in his ears. He wondered if it was made by some boring insect in the wood of the shack. He got up on an elbow to listen. He was puzzled.

"What's that noise?" came Hank's voice.

"Any of you awake? What's that noise?" Hank asked again.

It was Walt who replied.

"Ask Art," he said. "He's been raising up on an elbow, listening." But, though saying that, he answered himself: "It is an Indian dance somewhere in the hills."

"Oh, that all," said Arthur, and lay back again.

The talking awoke others.

"Sure. Didn't you ever hear it like that?" said Walt Williams. "It'll carry miles."

When they rose early in the morning there was no sound of any drumming near or far, only the sound of little winds running at times in the treetops. After these passed, the silence seemed deeper still. They went off into the timber, crashing their way through the brush, Walt blazing trees that he selected to be felled.

Away on in the day they sat down to rest on a little knoll that, between the tops of lower trees, gave a lookout onto the plains. And as they did so they all had their gaze caught by a procession off there. Over the long, slow undulations of the prairie that rose toward the hills, were Indians on the march. Midgets they were in the distance, yet in the clear air vivid enough. The V wedge of a travois trailed here and there behind a horse. All that was a common enough sight on the prairies in those days, and yet——

"Gosh! there's a lot of them, gathering for a heap big dance," the Ohio Kid ejaculated.

"They won't bother us," said Williams.

"You never know," replied the Ohio Kid who, youthful though he was, had ranged the plains from the "nor'west territories" to Texas. "They'll maybe think this here forest is their special own winter fuel. They're mighty up-

pish these days, I heard last time I was in the Meadow."

"We got a timber right here," said Red Palmer. "If they come along and object all we got to do is to tell them to go and tell the shemogenes" (mounted police) "what we're doing."

"Yah. Or tell them to go to hell," suggested Williams.

Arthur made no comment. He was a trifle sore on one subject—the subject of being scared. Nowadays they'd say he had developed a complex that way, since the day of the foreman's tauntings over the stringer incident, and by reason of the raking up of that incident, with a gibe regarding his courage, when he showed what he thought of his capacity to tackle that "jumping buckskin." There had been other gibes, too, since then from Walt—not definite enough to reply to, but oblique remarks he could take or leave—and had left—innuendoes.

He did not say what was in his mind; for what he was thinking was that the whole northwest was restless and that the Indians might not listen to any such rejoinder—either to go and report what they were doing to the police, or to go to hell! But he knew that if he said that he'd have Walt asking him if he was scared.

Below the knoll a haze of blue rose, thickened, and then smoke came up voluminously. The cook was stoking his fire down at the old cabin. High as an Indian smoke sign on a still day, that column rose. The Indians out on the plain there would see it and know it was not made by their own folk. It was no signal of that sort. But the lines of the traveling aborigines continued unchanged at a long tangent into the hills beyond where the white men were.

Nor did any scout ride aside to find the significance of that blue column on the peninsulalike end of the hills. But they had not, as the slang has it, "passed it up." And in the gray of the next dawn, when it was just light enough for the Indians who had stalked quietly up outside, peering in at the slot of window, to see where the occupants of the shack lay, they opened fire.

The first shots got two of the men. One, Hank Schmidt, remained still. The other, Bud Evans, rose on an elbow, fell back, reached for his gun and failed in the attempt.

Straight at that aperture the rest of them fired, the sleep still in their eyes. Their shots roared, in the compression of the cabin, loud as cannon it seemed. Outside, taunting yells responded. In undervest and drawers they peered at what crannies or chinks in the logs they knew of, ready to shoot if any enemy showed in the scrub, while the Ohio Kid sneaked to the edge of the window space and slowly presented there his hat on a stick.

The reply was immediate in a fusillade of shots. Ohio had not been careful enough. A hidden Indian out there had got a shot in at an oblique angle, and Ohio wheeled, wounded in his forearm, his face drawn.

"Here, tie this up, will you?" said he. "Some bones splintered, I think, too, but we got to stop the bleeding."

Sid Peploe bound a cloth round the forearm and, inserting a stick, twisted it slowly round to make a tourniquet. Bud Evans then had their attention for a scalp wound that looked worse than it was by reason of the way the crimson ran over his forehead and into his eyes.

They were alert for another attack. Arthur Beverley picked away the calking from between two logs where already was a chink showing of the outer day that was dawning, so as to make a loophole through which he could fire. Hash, the cook, was similarly employed in another place. And suddenly, stealthily, he raised his rifle, slipped the barrel's end through, and *crash!* went his shot. Almost simultaneously came a

scream, a scream that seemed incompleted, stopped midway. Shots responded through the window space at various angles. The safest place, it seemed, was on the window side.

After that exchange utter silence fell, broken only by the occasional sigh of a wind in the trees. The men in the cabin watched at their loopholes, but not a sigh of any of the besiegers. The day wore on. They ate little, but drank coffee and smoked and kept on the alert.

"No use trying that hat-showing trick at the window again, to see if they are still there, I suppose?" suggested Arthur.

"Nope. Too light," said Williams. "They'd see it was only a hat and not fire."

"How about opening the door as if we were going to make a rush out?" asked Palmer, the daring and hot-headed, though genial one.

"Well, if they are still there, guess they have a few rifles pointed at it for sure, and they would not shoot till a human target showed in it," Williams replied.

In the soaking of cloths with water to put on that slit of a scalp wound of Bud's, most of the water had been used. Little was left after the coffee making. Hash, wanting a drink, took up the dipper and then dropped it:

"Not much water," he commented. "Better save it."

"Sure," agreed the foreman, and crouched low against the wall to light his cigarette.

"When it gets dark I'll see if I can sneak out to the creek and get a bucket filled," said Red Palmer.

"We can draw lots for who's to do that," said Walt.

Then, aslant, he looked at Arthur. That look may have meant anything or nothing. It may have meant that he wondered if Arthur would be scared to go. It may even have signified that his veiled suspicion of Arthur was, boomeranglike, coming back on himself and that—remembering the incident of the bad horse—he wondered if Arthur was thinking that he, as boss, should make that dangerous trip. There's no doubt there was a veiled rancor against Arthur on Walt's side and a hidden resentment of it on Arthur's.

Anyhow, Beverley then considered to himself: "When it does get dark I'll just take up a bucket and say, 'Well, I'm off for water.' That will show him."

But when the dusk crept along it was different. He was not so eager to go. If the lot fell on him he'd go, of course, but there was no sense in cutting off his nose to spite his face.

The foreman took out a pencil.

"Before the light fails," he remarked, "we'll see who's to go out for that water."

He fumbled a notebook from a pocket, tore out a leaf or two and began to write their names down.

"You need not put down Bud's name," said Arthur. "He looks too sick. I guess we can——"

"Sure, cut out Bud," said Red Palmer.

"No, no," growled Bud, but in so thick a voice that Walt knew he was in no fit state to tackle such a job.

"I'm all right," declared the Ohio Kid. "Don't you go leaving me out." He waggled his bandaged arm in proof.

"All—right," drawled Walt, looking at him.

The five slips he folded, put them in his hat, shook it to and fro. Then he held the hat to Arthur.

"Here, you draw," he said.

Arthur put his hand in the hat, took out a paper, opened it, held it up to the fading light and glanced at it.

"All right. When it gets dark I'll go," said he, and thrust the paper into his pocket.

There was a queer expression on his face. Walt, sitting back on his heels in

a corner, listening, listening, for any faintest sound without, looked at him thoughtfully under his brows.

"There's a moon," said he quietly, "comes up about ten to-night. You'll have to go for the water between dusk and then."

Arthur stepped over to the pail and then, looking round, found an empty gunny sack and, tearing it up, stuffed the shreds round the handle where it hooked into the pail.

"Got to do this quietly," he remarked in a voice that was quite steady.

"Well," said Red, as if trying to bring forth evidence that the exploit was necessary, "I guess it's got to be done, and the sooner the better. We could hang out a few days without water, but the longer we hang out the more of them will come and sit around to hold us in——"

"Sure," said Walt, continuing the rumination for him, "till they gather numerous enough to rush in on us without regards to the casualties in doing it. There's maybe only a little scouting party out there yet."

The dusk crept into the cabin. The corners were obliterated in the last shadows of day. They watched still at the chinks, watched and listened. Soon they were only listening there. No sound that night of drums beating for a dance in the hills. No sound at all but, as they strained their ears, the lisping of the little creek a hundred yards off. And then came the *whoo-whoo* of owl calls—of veritable owls or of the red men signaling one to another.

"All right," came Arthur's voice.

"All right," replied Walt, knowing what was implied.

They had all taken it for granted that Beverley would go out of the window, and, with their eyes accustomed to the dark, they sat looking at that small square of dim night to see it obliterated by his egress.

"Do you want a hand out with the pail after you climb through the——" began Hash Leng.

"Sssh!" came stealthily from the other end.

Arthur had opened the door. They saw, at the top of the slit of its opening, a handful of stars. It shut slowly, without a creak as, without a creak, he had opened it thus far.

That was the last of Arthur for that night.

They waited and listened, but never a sound save that lisping of the creek came to them and now and then the *whoo-whoo* of an owl. Those who wore watches could hear them tick—those who did not, indeed, could hear them, too. It seemed too quiet for anything. They watched, or listened, each at one of the cracks. Suddenly Bud Evans, who had been sitting down low, back to a wall, babbled incoherently.

"Fallen asleep," growled Walt. And then he realized the truth even as the Ohio Kid voiced it:

"Guess it's worse than that. Got fevered a bit, light headed."

It was a grim waiting with Bud babbling ever and again, adding to the sense of the dismal they already felt heavily enough, knowing that under a blanket lay Hank Schmidt, his spirit gone out on the lone trail.

"He's taking a long time," Hash hazarded at last quietly.

No one answered.

"Do you suppose," Hash inquired of the darkness, "that they've gone off, all of them, to round up more help, taking it for granted we dassen't think of sneaking off in the dark?"

"I'd suppose, if it was so," replied Walt, "that Arthur would have come back with the water all safe by now—maybe," he added, some dark thought flitting into his mind, but unspoken.

Then suddenly there was a crash of shooting, but some way off.

"Gee, that's a bit away, ain't it?"

"Uh-huh. Queer."

"Yah, queer. It's sure queer," said Walt. "Quite a bit off, and he's surely had time to crawl an inch at a move to the creek and back. Queer."

There was a sound outside, faint as the sound of tissue paper blown across a table, faint and crackling.

"Here," said Red, "we don't want just to shoot at anything that shows up. It might be Art. Remember that."

"Sure."

"Sure."

"'Tis the wind and nothing more,'" the Ohio Kid quoted from some verses he had learned at school.

Then the window space brightened. The beginning of a moon mist was outside.

"Hell, I can't stand this," said Walt. "Here, can't we rig up some kind of a dummy and show it at the window?"

They rolled up a blanket and stuffed sack shreds in the sleeves of a coat they buttoned round it, and atop they set a hat and then, by aid of a stick, thrust that scarecrow through the window, carefully, recalling Ohio's accident on a like feint earlier.

"Surely they can see that," muttered Red. "There's nobody watching the shack. They've beat it."

They hadn't. They were only waiting to make sure. The rifles crashed from out in the bush as soon as the whole bulk of that dummy went over the sill. At once, stepping to the loopholes on that side, Hash and Red responded, firing at random.

"Save the cartridges," warned Walt. "We may need them. Guess you don't see anybody to shoot."

Just before dawn, when its first light and the moon's were blended outside in a ghostly radiance, an owl call sounded to one side. Another replied, from the other, and then there was a lull.

"Do you suppose that was a real owl?" asked Hash.

No one had an opinion to voice. But, after the lull, no doubt to let those Indians on one side steal away, a fusillade broke out. The bullets smacked in the cabin logs with dull impact. Some came through the window and with splintering or thudding sounds were embedded in the farther wall.

"Hold your cartridges," cautioned Walt again. "We may need them."

It was clear they were very definitely beleaguered! It was obvious that for a man to show at door or window meant death. They might jest at Indian marksmanship, but the Indians clearly had the range.

"They're liable to tire of just sitting waiting," said Red suddenly.

"Yes. And start firing arrows with rags dipped in pitch and set alight to the shack," the Ohio Kid replied.

"Well, well. All right. That would be a show-down," growled Walt. "But in the meantime we just got to sit tight and hold our shells—unless anybody can think up some better scheme."

"We could show a white sign at the window and have a palaver to see what they are up to," Hash suggested.

"Yes. We could. But I'd rather have them open such proceedings."

"That's right, too," agreed Hash. "Well, it's queer about Art. There was no sound bar that shooting a long ways beyond the creek."

"I'm plumb suspicious of him," Walt broke out. "Looks to me as if he made the creek all right and thought he had got through their circle—and beat it."

The papers on which he had written the names for the drawing of lots to decide who was to undertake that venture lay on the ground where he had dropped them the late afternoon before, when putting on his hat again. Crouched on his heels to rest once more, he absently picked them up, turned them over in his hands. He unfolded them, smoothed them absently, his thoughts elsewhere, trying to think out a better plan than that of the white flag on their side and a conference.

And suddenly he stared at these papers. Absently he had been reading the names that he had written, and one gave him a jolt. It was this: "Art Beverley."

"Well, what do you know!" he exclaimed.

"Got a scheme?" asked Hash.

"A scheme! Oh, no. But look, see here." He held forth the papers. "Here's his name on one."

"His name! Well, whose did he draw—and pretend that he had drawed himself?" asked Red.

Williams read them over.

"Seems he drawed mine," said he. "Mine ain't here."

"Then he drawed yours all right—according to Euclid, as they taught me in school Q. E. D.," said Ohio.

Walt sat staring at the earthern floor, wondering, wondering. And what was before his eyes then gave a jog to his mind. The cabin floor was but of earth.

"We can bury Hank right here in the cabin," said he.

"Guess we better."

They had only their axes for that work, but two at a time, while the others watched, they worked, save Bud Evans who was better but groggy and the Ohio Kid who, when he took a hand, reopened his wound. They had just finished when——

"Look up!" shouted Red at a crack, and fired through it.

There was a padding of moccasined feet at the door and the crash of a battering-ram. A dozen of them had suddenly, carrying a felled tree between them, charged at the door and swung the butt end against it. It creaked. It splintered.

At the same moment an Indian leaped to the window, throwing up his rifle there. But a shot from Walt got him in the forehead and he went down like a dog. There were shots all round them. Through the window the foreman continued to fire, aiming in a grim rage. All were grim, and in the midst of that grimness was a sense of elation that it had come to action.

The door cracked down the center where the ram hit. A long splinter fell inward. And through that slit Ohio and Hash let loose rapid fire. Then the besiegers turned and in a zigzag scurry took to cover again, hauling off—if the count were right, though the tussle had been too short and exciting to be sure—two dead and three wounded.

As that storming party drew off, Walt heaved a big sigh.

"Give me a hand here," said he.

The top of his left thumb had been shot away.

"Well," said he, "if that shot had been coming straight it would have gotten me in the eye." And then, "Damn that Art Beverley!" he exploded with seeming irrelevance.

When they had Walt's hand tied up, Sid Peploe stood back looking at him.

"Guess they'll be willing to palaver after that," he said. "If we showed a flag we could——"

What he was going to suggest they could do, he had no opportunity to say.

"I'll see them damned first!" roared Walt. "Aw, there they come again. Look up!"

There was rapid fire without. A rain of bullets hit a wall. But that was all. There was no charge. After that fierce fusillade they heard sounds of running and trampling, breaking twigs, swishing bushes.

"Look up!"

"Watch out!"

Then came the sounds of shooting again but, mysteriously, no bullets hit the cabin that time.

At their peepholes they turned wondering faces one to another. A shot, another, intermittent shots sounded. There was no "bow at a venture" about that. Something had happened out

there. These separated shots were aimed ones, at sure targets.

"Gee, what's this?"

"Do you suppose——" began Hash.

But what he was going to ask if they supposed there is no knowing.

"Hullo! Hullo!" came a shout outside that caused him to stop in the midst of his inquiry.

Peploe and Red Palmer rushed to the door to open it, but Walt restrained them.

"Half a minute, half a minute, boys," he begged. "They got half-breeds with them, I guess. This may be a ruse. Some of them half-breeds talk our lingo as white-man sounding as that."

"Ruse nothing, Walt. It's the Mounties!" replied Red, and next moment the door was open.

It was the Mounties. The J. J. boys passed out of the cabin and stared. There were a sergeant and two corporals, dismounting. Beyond, in the deeper woods, was raucous warlike shouting in white men's voices. Ululant Indian screams blended with these; and intermittent shots roared and echoed, receding with the cries and countercries.

"What——" began Walt, and tried again, staring. "What——"

The sergeant duly explained. The half-breed rebellion had broken out, and the half-breeds had got the Assiniboines and the Crees on the warpath, too. At Medicine Meadow the police had been swearing in civilians for extra duty.

"Sure. That rebellion's been simmering," said Walt. "But how did you find us here?"

"Why, I'm telling you. The fellow you sent out to see if he could sneak through and get a relief party to you! He *made* it all right just when we were at that job there. Lifted one of the Indian's horses. Got wounded on the job, too. But he made it. Got into the Meadow just when we were swearing in extra——"

"He! Who?"

The sergeant wondered what ailed Walt.

"Why, that fellow in your outfit," he replied. "Art Something."

"The hell you say! And where is he now?"

"In the hospital at the Meadow."

"Well, what do you know?" said Walt; and drawing a long breath tried to recall just what he had said aloud to the boys regarding his suspicions of Art Beverley.

"A bunch went out to the J. J. Ranch," said the sergeant, "in case they were raiding there. The rest of us came right along here to the Cedar Hills where he said. He's sure got some sand, that Art fellow. He was bled white with his wound when he got in to tell us. Then he keeled over."

But now the pursuers of the besieging red men began to return. There was an agitated stirring, a nervous wheeling of horses all round the old cabin. The Indians were in full flight.

It seemed they preferred the horses of the J. J. outfit to their own. Their first task, surrounding the cabin, had no doubt been to make up to them where they grazed and lead them off circumspectly. But the rescue party drove back with them what horses they saw dashing to and fro in the excitement of that flight and pursuit.

Thus there were horses to ride.

Back in the bush was the wagon, full of dry cones and clots of pitch. Maybe the Indians had been going to set these on fire and then, a party of them starting it going downhill, send it blazing against the cabin. It looked that way, as the Mounty sergeant said.

It was not back to the J. J. that Walter Williams went first, but to Medicine Meadow. He had something on his mind. This lover of the red-blooded had an apology to make, if the apologee —if we may coin such a word—was fit to hear it.

The doctor said the man could certainly be seen—no temperature, no fever at all, doing fine. There was none of the usual blaze and brusqueness as Walt approached the cot. He stepped like a cat on wet earth. He sat down by the cotside.

"Say, Art," said he, getting straight to his personal relief, "I've said this and that to you one way or another. I guess you know what I mean. But I got to hand it to you."

"Aw, that's all right," answered Arthur. "I'm glad I made it. Glad you don't mind me leaving you without water. You see, when I found I'd made the creek without a hunting knife in me or a war club in my skull, I had a brain wave. I thought I might do better than fill that bucket. I could hear their horses tearing grass beyond, and sneaked on under the creek bank, and got across, to the horses. But just as I was leading one off an Indian back that far saw me. He called something in Cree. It struck me then that I ought to have been interested enough to have learned some of their language—it was sure a lesson to a person to improve his education! When I had no answer for him he let fly. Gee, I was sure feeble by the time I got to the police barracks here."

Walt sat there nodding his head up and down, up and down, listening to the wounded man's recital.

"Well, I take back any kind of—you know what I mean, Art—what I mean to say—any kind of aspersions on your grit, your sand. Get me?"

"No," lied Arthur. "I can't say I ever noticed anything that way."

Walt almost blazed then to say: "Why, of course, you know what I mean!" But he doused that flame. He drooped his lids.

"Then what in hell," he said slowly, "prompted you to pretend you had drawn the lot for yourself to go? I been kind of figuring it out, since I heard what you did, that maybe you pretended you had drawed your own name so's to danged well let me see you had sand all right, all right, because of these there remarks I made to you one way or another—whether you noticed them or not!" he ended with a snap in his voice.

Arthur thought that over, gazing into distance. So they had looked at the other slips after he left them! Oh, well! He made a decision. He would tell the truth.

"Maybe a wee bit of what you suggest, Walt, did kind of influence me," he said. "But I don't mind telling you —honest, it was mostly to show myself I could do it."

At that the foreman sat back and surveyed him with profound admiration.

"Your right hand's all right? Your right arm's all right?" he asked.

"My right arm? Why, sure. It's just over my left hip he creased me."

"Then here, you darn son of a gun, you, shake! And shake good! I'm proud to have a man like you in the J. J. outfit."

"Aw, that's all right," said Arthur, taking the great hand in his, and he laughed. "That's nothing."

And neither it was in a way. He had proved to Williams that his liver was not white, that his blood was not yellow, or whatever was the inclusive phrase for the foreman's earlier but half-veiled innuendoes. But he had done better than that. He had proved it to himself. It was good of Walt—yes, especially a man like Walt—to come and say all this. But he had achieved a private point of view now that made him, deep within, not care a hoot what Walt Williams thought one way or another!

Another story by Frederick Niven will be published soon in this magazine.

Leguerre of the Lost Division

(Between the Acts)

By Howard Fitzalan

Author of "The Mercy of Kwan Yin," Etc.

Our old friend Leguerre, secret agent extraordinary, does some dangerous work in Europe with the help of a beautiful opera star.

A COMPLETE STORY

IN a stage box at the State Opéra of Felsenburg, as the curtain fell on the last second-act encore of a signally thrilling "Aida" and the great house sprang alight, a dowager countess, who was cousin to a princess, offered a pair of pearl-barreled glasses to her companion—who was, to be sure, the princess herself.

"Observe, my dear!" she invited, not without a trace of petulance. "Observe the complacency! No, no, Louisa! It is the box to the left of where you look! Where Velklan, the impresario, sits!"

In her eagerness, the countess relapsed into the *gaucherie* of pointing.

"Ah!" murmured her cousin, sweeping over the glasses. "The tall youth with the dark hair which curls? And that is the rich American who has come to bribe away our sweetest songbirds? But he is, at least—not unpleasing." She tapped a plump neighboring wrist with her fan. "It comes to me, my angel, that you could have looked upon such a one twoscore years ago with no gathering of your pretty brows!"

"*Ma foi!*" ejaculated the countess in her guttural French. "I could have better afforded to court a wrinkle then than now; and I dare say, though you will not let me forget my few impressionable moments of the past—*never* will let me—that at the weakest I should have had less thought for his person than the thing for which he stands. Those dollars, piling to the heavens, pauperizing aristocracy, suffocating culture!"

The princess wafted away philosophy with a languid motion of her filmy fan.

"Pounds, francs, lire, marks—what difference? Are they not as gregarious as dollars? Do not all, in time, lend polish to the fingers that touch them? Look again, angel, at the youth beside Velklan! Is it complacency—or the true *savoir faire?* Yet, man of the world though he appears, I am to believe he comes from one of the inland American cities? Is it, then, Shee—Shee——"

"It is Detroit," replied the countess. "Where millions of motor cars are manufactured each year. A city of noisy works crowded close one onto another, stretching into infinity. Such is the capital to which this incredible Monsieur Stanton would transplant the flower of our opera!"

"*Zut!*" exclaimed the princess. "Stanton? Is it not a Stanton who is the genius of those swarming wheeled gnats which even here in Felsenburg are——"

"The father, I have been told, of the young Fortunatus. But yesterday one of the insects splashed mud upon the metal work of my Mercedes. And to-day, flying down from Paris, grandly alone in a chartered airplane which is designed, if I am to believe it, to carry six—to-day comes this heir to the gnat millions!"

"But his purpose, my dear?"

"There was an article in the *Presse* this morning—a Reuter's special message from Paris—which revealed it. It is not enough that he should flaunt his gold about the operas of the greater capitals, but even Felsenburg may not escape. Had I been Velklan, I should have forbidden him the door of the State Opéra. What are mere Felsenburg contracts worth, when——"

"Monsieur Velklan," observed the princess calmly, "does not seem oppressed. His is the art of the counting room, one must remember. Here, perhaps, we see him as a retailer. But contracts are contracts, my love. What would it mean if Klembarth's contract should pass from Velklan, of Lancia's or Breggold's—what, in the counting-room art, would it be but a sale of song at wholesale? No, for our impresario I shed no tears. He will not, I promise you, fare—— But already the baton lifts, dear cousin. Attend you!"

In no degree, true enough, had Monsieur Velklan been cast down by the coming to Felsenburg of the flying American. Indeed, he had made it a point to be present when the chartered sky-ship from France, fulfilling the prophecy of his morning newspaper, gracefully winged down on the plateau beyond the ancient Felsenburg Schloss.

"Certainly," he had said, "I can accept it only as an honor that monsieur journeys to Felsenburg to hear that so splendid operatic company which I have been fortunate in assembling. To-night, if he will condescend, he shall enjoy the comfort of the director's box at the State Opéra—my guest."

Which, seeming to suit young Stanton well enough, came to pass.

"There is one voice," he languidly confessed to Monsieur Velklan in the course of a chat over *café noirs* after the final curtain, "just one, which I find really interesting. I don't mean to say, now"—either in deference to Velklan's sanguine attack upon that tongue, or for lack of any other, he was talking English—"don't mean to say that you haven't quite as well-balanced an ensemble as I've heard anywhere on the Continent. But, upon my word, it's no aim of mine to leave any company crippled."

Whereupon cried the small and bald impresario:

"M'sieu'! Believe from my heart, I wish to place no restriction upon you. To the strong I will ever bow. That is my philosophy. Yess; it is life!"

Nor had Monsieur Velklan suffered any diminution of generous impulse

when, pursuant to a brief request at parting, he appeared at the American's hotel on the afternoon following and sat with him at luncheon.

"It would be an untruth, m'sieu'," said he, pecking cautiously into the lower strata of an apparently unfamiliar salad, "if I should tell you that I would not be desolated by the loss of any of my company. My people are my children.

"Yet, in this new world, I am consoled to realize, it is the exceptional family which does not eventually spring apart. If I am a father, I must also be a good father. I must not stand in the way when opportunity beckons. My contracts? Pah! They can be put aside—at least, adjusted. So, if you tell me it is Breggold you would carry off to your wonderful and open-handed country—yess; even was it my beloved Breggold——"

The American, listening abstractedly, stifled an incipient yawn.

"Oh, pardon!" he murmured. "You know I had the deuce of a time sleeping last night. Missed the roar of the airplane engines, I fancy." Deprecation flickered in his eyes as he shook his head. "It's really a remarkable gift that Breggold has, Velklan. But we're jolly well off for tenors as it is, over in the States."

The small, fond eyes of the impresario betrayed the passage of a cloud behind them. But he said, manfully enough:

"You will tell me it is Klembarth! Ah, well, m'sieu', mine are not treasures that can well be buried—nor is Andre Velklan the man to bury them, if they were! Come, I shall take you at once to Klembarth. You will see that I have not spoken idly."

The other shrugged.

"But you do wrong, Velklan, in assuming that it's a male voice I'm after. It is the mezzo—Madame—was it Landseer?"

The cloud passed once more behind Velklan's eyes.

"Lancia," he said in a low voice; and now he seemed stricken indeed. "Lilia Lancia—Mademoiselle."

For a little he was silent.

"To be frank, m'sieu'," he said, after a time, with his gaze fixed very seriously upon the American's, "you have me at a vast disadvantage in the case of Mademoiselle Lancia. All things cannot be done in a day, as you will appreciate, m'sieu', and the contract which I have intended to offer to her for the next season remains to be signed. Where Klembarth and Briggold were concerned, I should have left it to yourself to do by me what was fair in the transfer of the arrangements."

The American smiled into his teacup.

"Please consider, Velklan," he said softly, "that any business I may transact with mademoiselle will leave you no worse off than if the ink were already long dry on her contract for next season—or many. My question is, will you be so kind as to arrange a meeting?"

Velklan's brow had cleared. He clapped his hands, and was himself again.

"The word of m'sieu'," he cried, "leaves me no doubt that my interests will be forgotten. Lancia's apartment is but a moment's walk from the hotel. If you will permit me to telephone to her, and advise her of our coming, we shall go at once."

To Monsieur Velklan, ever as great a connoisseur of acting as of singing, it later occurred that Mademoiselle Lilia Lancia carried off the situation with a rare artistry.

Her large dark eyes no more than met the rich American's when the long-lashed lids fluttered demurely down over them. Color swept into her cheeks, and a moment passed before she found voice to acknowledge the introduction.

"Monsieur Velklan," she said in a faintly accented French whose nuances suggested in no small measure the warm beauty of her singing voice, "has revealed to me in advance the object of your visit, m'sieu'. What can I say but what is the banal truth—that I am overcome."

The impresario rubbed his plump hands together.

"America!" he murmured ecstatically. "How many of our own splendid artists have been called there—I will not say to a greater appreciation, but ever to a better fortune? And now it is my dear Lilia——"

With finger tips pressed poignantly to his heart, Monsieur Velklan made a movement preliminary to seating himself. He approached a deep chair, spread the tails of his long professional coat.

Beneath the downcast eyelids, Mademoiselle Lancia had been observing him. Her voice, with not all the music which it had carried but a short moment since, arrested that gentleman before his knees had bent.

"But no, Andre!" she exclaimed, almost sharply. "I cannot ask it of you. You have been already too kind in bringing this gentleman personally to me. I cannot permit, knowing the many details awaiting your attention, that you should——"

Monsieur Velklan made a gesture of deprecation.

"My time—if it possibly has value: my advice——"

Creases were in his forehead again, but the diva flashed a dazzling and disarming smile upon him.

"Be sure, Andre," she assured him, "that I hold your counsel beyond price. But things are not done so quickly—even by these rushing Americans. Monsieur will wish to be acquainted, doubtless, with many details of my career that are already familiar to you. Why should you be forced to listen? Is not this the day of your auditions. And is not two the hour appointed?"

Monsieur Velklan glanced unhappily at the little gold clock on the drawing-room mantel. In turn his distressed eyes passed on to Mademoiselle Lancia and the American. He signed audibly, clicked his heels together and delivered himself of a pair of farewell, formal bows.

"You are thoughtful of me, Lilia," he said, but with no convincing warmth of gratitude. "So, with your permission, I go to my duties and leave you together, *mes amis*."

With a try for gayety, and with his shiny, low-crowned silk hat now pressed upon his heart, he added:

"Later, if in any manner I may be of service, I beg that you command me."

At the drawing-room door he bent gallantly over Lancia's slender and bejeweled hand. She stood looking after him until another door had closed upon him beyond. Then with rapid steps she crossed back to the caller who remained. Her hands lifted to his shoulders and tightened upon them; and now suddenly she was breathless and pale.

"You!" she whispered. "Monsieur Leguerre—Nugent! Why is this? I thought I should have fainted when of a sudden, with no warning, I saw you standing there before me!"

The prodigal air passenger from Paris smiled down upon her as her hands slipped slowly along his arms.

"There are few women in this world," he sincerely told her, dropping facilely into French, "whom I would have dared risk the surprise on. You rallied magnificently, as I was certain that you would. Velklan saw nothing to reveal we were not strangers to each other."

Her color heightened in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"But this is madness, Nugent!" she protested. "At this time, as you must

know, Felsenburg is thronged with secret agents of the dictator. Only last night, seated back in the shadows of a box at the opera, I was sure I saw Wolff himself."

The man of two names nodded.

"You were not deceived," said he. "I, too, was at the opera, and saw him there. But why be uneasy about Wolff? Surely he has no more standing in Felsenburg than have we. Either he comes as a gleaner or as a merchant—to sweep up scandal or to sell it."

Mademoiselle Lancia's hands dropped to her sides, and a shudder vibrated her slim shoulders.

"But do you not make it possible for Wolff to sell—you? Coming here to Felsenburg, you deliver yourself into his hands. You know the oath which he has sworn across the breadth of Europe. Seeing you here, he would have but to denounce you to Ryckoff to have his vengeance upon you."

"The man's oath and his problematical revenge have cost me little sleep," said Leguerre lightly. "You forget, Lilia, that I am possessed of a certain advantage over Monsieur Wolff. On that occasion in Grassnow—does it not come back to your memory?—his face was in the full light. To him, mine could have been no more than a blur. I could meet him here or anywhere, I promise you, without the wink of an eye."

"I believe you, Nugent. Ah, those eyes of yours! They can say so much or so little. But all foreigners, believe me, are now suspect in Felsenburg. Already, if you are not now aware of it, your luggage will have been——"

"Of course," smiled Leguerre. "It had skilled attention last night while I was enjoying the opera. I have a trick of folding a pajama coat, though, that they couldn't quite duplicate. Surely, Lilia, you do not imagine I left cards strewed through my bags to inform the curious as to my—ah—private affairs?"

"But if all the clothing were newly bought—unmarked——"

"It isn't. The bags and their contents belong to a quite authentic Mr. Stanton. He's still in Paris, lying low like the obliging fellow he really is. He was even good enough to give that interview to the Reuter correspondent which heralded my arrival here. Surely you read it? Happy thought, was it not?"

They had moved to a divan. Leguerre, placing himself at her feet as the diva curled upon it, offered her a cigarette.

"You do not need to tell me," she said, waving back the case, "that some extraordinary emergency has arisen to bring you here."

Leguerre blew out a thin ribbon of smoke.

"Naturally. I will admit, Lilia, that to have heard you again in 'Aida' was the full worth of the journey. But you know that my traveling is seldom for pleasure. If it were—why, I ask you, come to Felsenburg?"

Her eyes narrowed.

"Tell me!" she commanded. "Have I not——"

Leguerre lightly touched her arm.

"Never have you served your country better. I have come to aid you, Lilia, only because the time is shorter than any of us had counted. In the last week Bergotti has shown signs of weakening under a new and tremendous pressure brought upon him. What that pressure is, you will at once surmise. Bergotti's eventual yielding—the adding of the last signature to the Barrier Pact—may be only a matter of hours distant."

Mademoiselle Lancia's hand went to her throat.

"But certainly with the information laid before him—all that I have learned in Felsenburg——"

"Unfortunately," said Leguerre, "Bergotti is in so ambiguous a situation that any information must be docu-

mented if it is to stiffen him to a refusal. Without positive proof of Felsenburg's secret intentions, he will sign. And what that would mean to your country and to mine, to all the nations now honorably coöperating to preserve the world's peace, you know as well as I. You have done your part superbly, Lilia. It is another part—not a woman's part—which I have been sent here to do, with your help."

There was a quick question in her glance.

"But who, Nugent, sends you?"

"Both my own government and yours. I bring their joint authority, as a matter of course. As to the proofs, what of these letters you lately reported having seen? They will not have been destroyed, surely. Would they not serve?"

"Yes; of that I can be positive, although I saw only two, and of them was permitted but a glimpse. I had located them in a locked cabinet in Ryckoff's library, but never have I been more than a moment alone there.

"It was many days, Nugent, before I succeeded in learning where the first letters of the correspondence were; many more days before I could get the impression of the lock; and yet many more before my opportunity came to open the cabinet."

Leguerre leaned forward.

"Beautiful! And the letters are still there?"

She bit her lip.

"If I had only known when they were actually in my hands! But where else would they be? Why should they have been removed? As Ryckoff lives, surrounded by the agents of his dictatorship, fanatically supported by the peasants, he has a sublime faith in his invulnerability. But, Nugent——"

Leguerre grinned cheerfully.

"I am always an optimist," said he, "but do you know, I *did* expect to find my errand much more complicated? I hope, Lilia, that you haven't mislaid your key to Monsieur Ryckoff's file? If you will be so good as to turn it over to me, and to sketch for me a diagram of his excellency's dwelling, in so far as you have become acquainted with it, I shall go souvenir hunting at some propitious hour between now and to-morrow morning."

Mademoiselle Lancia was staring at the glistening tip of her tiny shoe.

"Perhaps," she said slowly, "it can be accomplished with a still greater simplicity. To-night I am bidden to dine again with Monsieur Ryckoff—at his home." She made a *moué* of distaste. "It is not always a pleasant experience, Nugent; but for once I shall go gladly. If no direct chance is given me to slip alone into the library—trust me, I shall manufacture one. Ryckoff is to escort me to the opera after dinner—to-night it is in 'Tannhauser' that I sing. You can come to me there. Come to my dressing room, and——"

Leguerre interrupted her.

"For reasons which seem to be quite obvious and sufficient," he said, "I cannot fall in with your proposal. When the loss of the letters should be discovered—what of you? Ryckoff isn't quite a fool. Whom would he suspect—immediately?"

"I might be accused—yes. What of it? And if I were to deny?"

"Deny or not, I fear you would not soon be leaving Felsenburg. Ryckoff for the time being is supreme within his borders. He molds the laws to his desire. In the present precarious state of the world's balance of power, your own country could make no adequate move to save you, even though your very life were at stake. You must realize that, Lilia."

Her eyes flashed.

"My life!" she cried. "What is it to consider against the fortunes of my country?"

"Isn't it possible," questioned Le-

guerre gently, "to have a due and proper regard for both? Can you not see, Lilia, that there is a simpler way yet? What better could the gods have given to us at this time than Monsieur Ryckoff's dinner? Certainly it will not be served in his library!"

Hesitatingly, thoughtfully, she said:

"N-o-o. But——"

Leguerre stroked his cheek.

"I shall want that diagram presently, Lilia," he said. There was a light of amusement in his eyes as they lifted to hers. "Have you not observed," he asked, "that the dinner hour is much favored by the housebreaking fraternity? Do you not read your newspapers? When people are dining, burglars know they may have the run of the house with small danger of being surprised at work. Food alone could be expected to absorb Monsieur Ryckoff's attention. But with you across the table from him, Lilia—it will be child's play."

Again she interposed. "But——"

Leguerre would not listen.

"You, Lilia," he pressed on eagerly, "must not be for a moment gone from Ryckoff's sight. What better evidence in your favor could the man have than the evidence of his own eyes? If his cabinet is rifled, presumably at a time when you are in his house; if his insane and criminal scheme is brought to nothing—can he in any manner hold you accountable? Can he tell himself it was you who suggested dining with him?"

Leguerre, while she pondered, took a gold pencil from a waistcoat pocket, and from an inner pocket of his coat produced a small notebook.

"At this time of year," he remarked, "I'll gamble there's not a house in all Felsenburg which hasn't at least one window standing open. So if you'll give me an idea of how the land lies, something tells me I'll manage."

The uneasy and in many respects sinister régime which Felsenburg knew between the forced abdiction of King Carolus and the return of Prince Joachim was, by self-description, a "dictatorship of the proletariat."

Although it has long since ceased to be a secret that Kurt Ryckoff profited very handsomely out of the public funds while he held the reins of government, he at least forestalled criticism during his heyday by living with all the outward simplicity fitting in a ruler risen from the people..

He might have lived like a veritable king, had he chosen, in a castle that had been the seat of a line of kings extending back over three centuries. But as bachelor head of a communal state, it was his preference to make his home in a manor house of no great pretentiousness, suburban to his capital.

It was here that Mademoiselle Lilia Lancia went to dine with Monsieur Ryckoff on the evening of the Felsenburg State Opéra's final and gala and astonishingly curtailed performance of "Tannhauser."

Leguerre, arriving not long after Mademoiselle Lancia, approached the house from quite another direction—one which involved the scaling of a six-foot garden wall.

Beyond the wall he had waited perforce, with an anxious eye ever consulting the dial of his wrist watch, until the night shadows lay heavy among the trees.

It was already after seven when he mounted the wall and dropped lightly into the garden. From the covert of a tree trunk he considered the house, a square stone mansion of the many-gabled architectural style indigenous to the mountain states of south central Europe.

Above, the place was in utter darkness. It merged into the night with only the faintest suggestion of silhouette. But on the lower floor light streamed from many windows, lying in

broad bands along the close-cropped grass.

Leguerre lingered, before deserting his shelter, to make certain he had the garden to himself.

And that, it speedily developed, was just as well. He hadn't.

As he strained his eyes into the deepening darkness, he became suddenly aware of movement near at hand.

Some one—evidently a patrolling watchman—had turned the corner of the house. The figure presently detached itself from the heavier shadows, crossed one streak of light, then another and another.

"Nice thing to know," said Leguerre under his breath. "Now that I know you're roaming, I'll be looking out for you!"

He watched the guard out of sight, and then stealthily and swiftly negotiated the cleared space near in to the house. Beside one of the dark lower windows he halted. All through the afternoon he had pored over the diagram until every detail stood clear in his mind. This window was raised and uncurtained. He could see that it opened into a hall, at the farther end of which a faint light glowed.

The light, he knew, would be in the central hall; and the second door to the right, unless Lilia Lancia had been mistaken, must give entrance to the library.

Noiselessly opening the hall window to its widest, Leguerre climbed through it. A moment later the diva's diagram had vindicated itself.

The second door to the right on the lighted main corridor did give into a library. Yet, with the objective attained, he found himself the victim of a contretemps. He had been warned that Ryckoff would be dining with Lilia in the next room beyond, but he had not reckoned on the chance that he might find the intervening door standing open.

But open it was—and a wide, drapeless door, too!

Light flooded through it, and squarely in the beam of it stood the metal cabinet which Mademoiselle Lancia had described.

From where he stood, just over the threshold, with the hall door softly drawn to behind him, Leguerre could see half of the vis-à-vis table in the next room—Lilia's half. The full beauty of her profile was presented to him as she chattered animatedly across a service of gold and glittering crystal which perhaps once had gone with the dining hall of the castle that Ryckoff had turned his back on.

He surmised that mademoiselle's host, with the slightest turn of his head to the right, must have the cabinet in plain view. As he hesitated, undecided on his best move, Lilia glanced into the library.

Even though her eyes went immediately back to her companion across the table, Leguerre felt sure that she had seen him. After a moment he caught a gesture which might have been meant for him—a gesture in which he read the caution: "Wait!"

Squeezed back against the wall, he whole-heartedly regretted his decision against coming armed on the Felsenburg expedition. A gun in his hand, if he were discovered here, would at least keep Ryckoff quiet; give a chance to open the cabinet, and a fair break to get away.

The conversation through the door became coherent to him after once he had caught up a thread of it: and then, all at once, his heart was standing still.

Ryckoff, away on the subject of his ruling passion, was proposing to back argument with text.

"Dear lady," he was saying, "this thing which I have told you is written down in books—books that the world should know far better than it does. In the printed type I will show you, word for word, what I have quoted. These are doctrines which in time will rule

the whole earth. If for a moment you will excuse me——"

There was a sound that suggested the scraping of chair legs over floor boards. Leguerre saw Mademoiselle Lancia's hand go out protestingly.

"Please do not leave me," she begged. "We have so little time left."

Evidently Ryckoff found something in that to please him. His heavy laugh boomed out.

"But it is right here by us, my library. Through that door. Yes, you must permit me——"

Leguerre could imagine the terror that must be in her heart, and he marveled at the even and unflurried quality of her voice.

"Books have no eloquence for me, Monsieur Ryckoff. I prefer to increase my education by listening—when it is the understanding voice that speaks."

All her splendid vital magnetism was striving in her eyes. Ryckoff, half risen, dropped abruptly into his chair.

"That is something good to hear," he said, and there was now a new and rapt note in his voice. Directly it sank to a lower key and his words, for all the unleashed passion in them, were lost to Leguerre.

After a little they were rising from the table.

Lilia Lancia, though her color had heightened to a degree perceptible even at a distance, had been robbed of no whit of her poise.

"We have yet nearly a half hour before we must go," she said. "Shall we not stroll in the front garden, you and I together—Kurt?"

Leguerre caught another motion of her hand as she crossed the lighted door and passed from his sight. Once again his heart had begun to beat at its normal tempo.

"Good girl!" he applauded, and turned briskly toward the cabinet.

An hour after he had climbed the garden wall, Mr. Nugent Leguerre sauntered back into his hotel facing Felsenburg's rechristened Platz Populi.

"M'sieu', a telegram has come!" greeted him.

In a quiet corner he arched his brows over the message. For a minute or two he stood in thought, his strong, sun-bronzed fingers mechanically shredding the blank. Then, strolling idly out again into the night, he climbed aboard a taxi which he whistled in from the square.

"There is an old inn below the castle," he said. "Is it the White Rabbit? Good! First take me there."

In the taproom of the inn, seated alone, he found the dapper French pilot who had brought him to Felsenburg.

"It is to-night, captain," he said. "Make your preparations at once, please." Standing close, he passed to the other a ribbon-bound official envelope. "This is—you understand? At any cost it must pass beyond the borders of Felsenburg to-night. Be ready at your controls. If strangers appear upon the field, take off immediately for Paris."

The flyer's eyes were alight as he sprang to his feet.

"*Magnifique!*" he cried. "But—but *you*, m'sieu'?"

Leguerre smiled grimly.

"I shall have a guest to fly with us to Paris—else, probably, I shall be remaining!"

And then, with an unlighted cigarette between his lips, he rode back into the lower city.

"To the State Opéra," he directed as the machine rolled into the Platz Populi. "And there you will wait for me."

Before the taxi stopped, he flung open the door and leaped out. Velklan stood before him as, moderating his pace, he stepped into the lobby. The impresario beamed, and his hands came softly together.

"M'sieu'! You have come to terms with Lancia?"

"Our business is not concluded. May I have the privilege of speaking with her—before the end of the performance?"

"But certainly. Come!"

Velklan pushed open a door; led down a dark aisle whose side wall gave thunderously back the crash of the Wagnerian brasses.

The second-act climax was approaching. Breggold and Lancia had the stage. Leguerre thrilled to a sense of drama transcending the libretto, more vibrant than the pulsing music. His eyes turned from the stage to scan the boxes opposite the aisle he traveled at Velklan's heels.

He saw Ryckoff's heavy face, and with a start recognized another face close beside it that could be only Wolff's. His whisper was at the dictator's ear. Then Wolff was rising, backing out of the box.

Velklan held open a door. He pointed.

"It is here that Lancia will exit. I shall see you later?"

A cowled and cassocked figure—one of the pilgrims of the chorus—loitered in the near wings. Leguerre, after a keen glance into his face, addressed the man in German.

"Can you direct me to the dressing room of Mademoiselle Lancia?"

"Ja wohl."

It was on the corridor to the left, the pilgrim said—the first door.

Leguerre went on. The door yielded to his pressure. He stepped through it and closed it softly behind him.

The music of the brasses, ever mounting in volume, came throbbing to him as he waited. Bitterly he regretted now those minutes remaining before the curtain's fall—minutes become so precious since the arrival of the Paris telegram.

It was some sixth sense which presently warned him that the dressing-room door again was opening, for at the moment his back was turned upon it. But Leguerre was prepared.

He wheeled to meet a stare less startled than insolently questioning. Wolff!

"You seek Mademoiselle Lancia?" asked Leguerre coolly. "Step in, monsieur."

And then he knew by the swift widening of Wolff's eyes, by the tightening of his lips, by the darting of a hand into a sagging coat pocket, that the man must incredibly have recognized him as the adversary of his never-forgotten and never-forgiven defeat in Grassnow—knew it before the choking cry was out.

"Leguerre!"

Wolf's hand had come from his pocket clutching a pistol.

"So *you* play in Lancia's little game!" he gloated. "Here in Felsenburg our score shall be evened."

Leguerre shrugged. His eye had measured the distance and found it too great.

"Are you certain, *mon ami*," he asked, "that you do not mistake me for another?"

His hand, groping over the surface of a dressing table behind him for some likely weapon of defense, had encountered only a futile squat cylinder of pasteboard—a powder box.

But even as his heart sank, appreciation of a desperate chance flashed upon his mind.

Futile? Perhaps not!

His fingers closed upon the box. His arm swung around. The pistol flashed—but it was a man blinded who had pulled the trigger.

Straight into Wolff's face, filling his eyes, choking his nostrils, had gone the contents of Mademoiselle Lancia's powder box.

The bullet went wide. The tumult of the orchestra at crescendo, drowned the report and its echoes.

Leguerre snatched the gun away as with the knuckles of his left hand Wolff gouged desperately at his eyes. Clubbed, the pistol rose and came down. Wolff crumbled at its impact, his cursing silenced. Leguerre stepped over him and closed the dressing-room door upon him.

How telling his blow had been he could not know. It might be only a matter of seconds before Wolff had recovered his senses and the alarm was raised.

Only a matter of seconds, Leguerre knew—but also he knew it was impossible that he should desert Lilia now.

A pilgrim cassock hanging over a chair down the corridor while its perspiring shirt-sleeved owner leaned out a window offered inspiration.

Leguerre descended to petty larceny. He appropriated the robe, slipped into it, and pulled the cowl over his head. That made him a pea in a pod, not to be identified until a deal of sorting had been done. Back stage, there might have been fifty people so garbed roaming about.

Behind the footlights the last notes of the finale were ringing. Mademoiselle Lancia, as she stepped into the wings, found her way exasperatingly blocked. Chorus people were wont to draw aside for her, but this tall pilgrim seemed deliberately intent on holding her back.

"If you please!" she said impatiently.

Then, peering under the cowl, she gasped.

"Quick!" whispered Leguerre. "We must go! Follow me!"

Pulling her behind him, he found the stage door. In the alley beside the opera house she faced him.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Away."

"No, no! That is absurd. In five minutes——"

Bewildered, half resisting, she felt herself propelled toward the avenue.

"In five minutes, if you have no understudy," Leguerre was cheerfully observing, "Monsieur Velklan's 'Tannhauser' must proceed without an *Elsa*. Your season in Felsenburg, my dear, is closed. There has been a leak in Paris. Your activities here are known. Even within the last ten minutes, Ryckoff himself has been informed of them. And so, whether you will or no, you must fly with me."

Leguerre's cab, faithfully waiting where he had left it, had deposited them beside the chartered airplane before Mademoiselle Lancia had a comment on that.

"Only to Paris?" she murmured, when she had been helped into the cabin. Her eyes, resting upon Leguerre, were suddenly misty. "I believe if you were to ask me, Nugent, I would fly with you to—the end of the world!"

Watch for another story by Howard Fitzalan soon.

THE LURE OF WASHINGTON

WHEN the United States Civil Service Commission announced that it would hold examinations to fill two thousand five hundred positions in the Prohibition Bureau, nineteen thousand men and women applied for the jobs. This shows how hard the American people are ridden by the delusion that government jobs are soft snaps. Ninety-nine out of a hundred such workers in Washington grow old, poor, and discontented, cursing the day when they took a government clerkship instead of sticking to a business in which promotion and big money would have been possible.

A Chat With You

MUCH that we know about old civilizations has been dug out of the ground. That is because some cities were covered, after many centuries, by drifting sand; or because treasures of art were buried to hide them against the ravages of invading barbarians. Sometimes, as in the eruption of Vesuvius which devastated Pompeii, huge natural cataclysms did the work of obliteration. The result is that we have but fragments of the ancient world. It is marvelous, when you come to think of it, that we have preserved as much as we have.

* * * *

AN archæologist in Egypt uncovers a Pharaoh's tomb that has been lying under sand for ages. Scholars puzzle out the weird hieroglyphics—and presently they tell us of the wonders they have found. Bit by bit, from these investigations, the Egypt of the remote past reassembles in our minds, and we can picture, with fair accuracy, the daily lives of its people, their trades, religions, customs, conflicts and arts. So with Greece. Excavations are going on right at this minute in modern Athens. Perhaps a new Homer will be unearthed; perhaps the work of a sculptor greater yet than Praxiteles.

* * * *

THE statesmen, historians, philosophers, poets, artists and other splendid geniuses who, without the benefits of modern conveniences or apparatus, nevertheless managed to leave behind them deathless records of their times and thoughts, have earned the eternal indebtedness of mankind. It is said that men have not always treated works of art with veneration and care. What a tragedy it was when the Vandals of old ruthlessly demolished so many of the masterpieces of the Roman Empire! But generally, among civilized men, there is an instinct to preserve the irreplaceable records of their predecessors.

* * * *

EACH one of us owes thanks to the finders of those old relics. It was lucky for the world that when the Venus di Milo, for instance, was found, its artistic perfection was recognized. There was an odd sidelight, in Italy, on the finding of long-buried works of art. Peasants, coming upon marble gods and goddesses beneath their farms, feared that the deities of the pagans were coming back to rule the world, as interpreted from a scriptural prophecy.

* * * *

ITALY, because of its vast artistic and historical part in the growth of mankind, is one of the precious jewels of the world. Poets sing of Italy again and again. Robert Browning wrote:

> Open my heart, and you will see
> Graved inside of it, "*Italy.*"

How would you like to go to Italy—to Naples? We extend you an invitation right now. Go royally, too; go like a prince of the "Arabian Nights"—on the magic carpet of imagination! Roy Norton will take you there in the next issue of THE POPULAR. His complete novel, "The Sleeping Hercules," is the tale of a young American's escapade in Italy. The hero is an archæ-

ologist, and he finds, under an old house, a famous statue of Hercules. You will bask in an atmosphere rich in Old World antiquity; you will revel in a story that fairly quivers with the promise and swift fulfillment of audacious adventure.

* * * *

WE have become so enthusiastic over the novel that there is not much room left to tell of the rest of that issue. But we want to tell you that each story listed below gave us, in its own way, the same unique thrill. Holman Day's vivid yarn is about a chap who tackled a whole town of hard-bitted people. Mark Reed is there with a new one of the series about Pete Dugan, the plucky little boxer; Robert J. Pearsall contributes a tale that is pungent with the flavor of the West. Others will also appear in that issue, including that author who can make you breathe and see and feel the North Woods—George Marsh. What is your personal test of a good story? One of ours is whether it makes you glow inside. All these authors can do that.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, August 20, 1928

The Sleeping Hercules A Complete Novel	ROY NORTON
Snaffling Stola	HOLMAN DAY
Trout and Moose	MARK REED
Counterfeit	ROBERT J. PEARSALL
Sunset House A Four-part Story—Part IV	GEORGE MARSH
A Chat With You	THE EDITOR

And Other Stories by Favorite Writers

CROWDED DAYS The jangle of telephones, a sea of papers on your desk, a stampede of interruptions — and the day is over before you've accomplished all you intended to. Night after night you go home really tired — with nerves perhaps a bit on edge. Then your Gillette Blade has a double job to do in the morning — but it *must* give you the same easy comfort that you get on more leisurely days.

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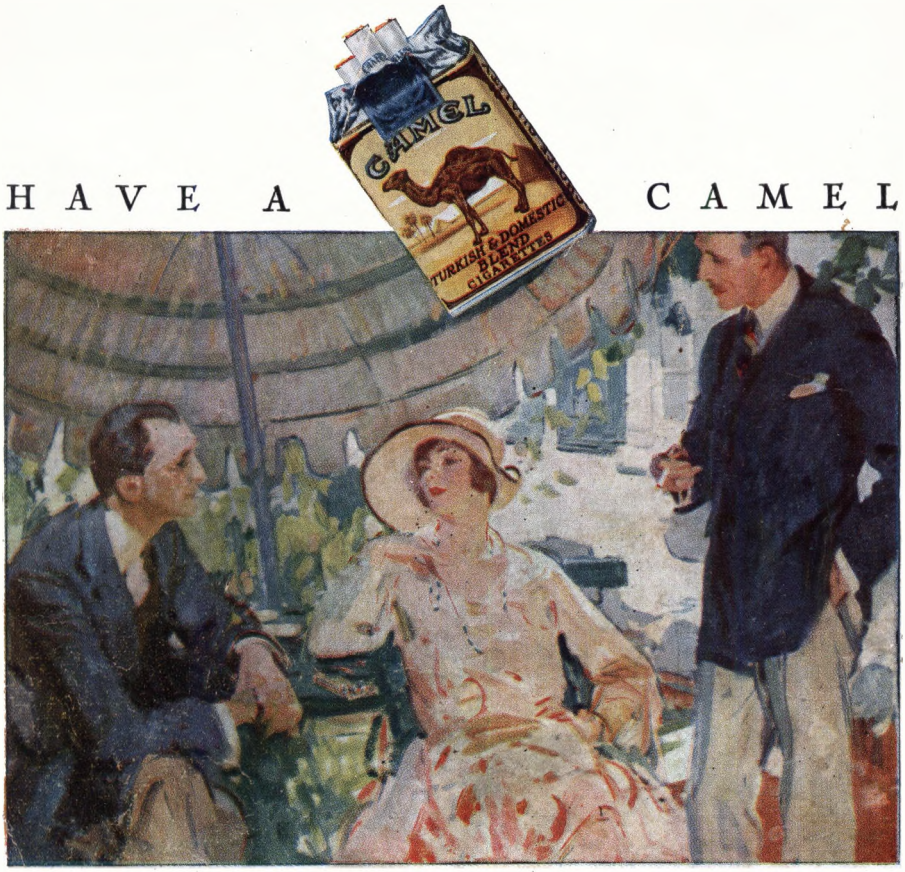

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