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NOV. 7, 1924

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Announcing The New Pettijohn's

WHOLE WHEAT CEREAL

AFTER a long time spent in making it *just right*, here is the finest Whole Wheat Cereal Food ever produced—the New PETTIJOHN'S. Its popularity is bound to be *quick, complete,* and *permanent*—because—

Finest of Whole Wheat—the New Pettijohn's gives you *all* the wheat, precooked, processed to develop the flavor, rolled, and delicately toasted.

Quick Cooking—the New Pettijohn's cooks *through* and *through* in 3 to 5 minutes.

Served Hot—the New Pettijohn's makes a generous, grateful breakfast—oftentimes a welcome change for luncheon—and the finest of hot suppers for growing children.

25 Per Cent Natural Bran—the New Pettijohn's brings you Natural Bran in a shape that you can *enjoy.* Every taste of the New Pettijohn's is *mellow and rich,* and gives you the gentle *laxative* benefit of good bran.

1. Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.
2. The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts.
3. A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.

Vitamines and Mineral Salts—the New Pettijohn's brings you all the Vitamines, Lime, Iron and Phosphorus of the Whole Wheat.

Appetizing—eat the New Pettijohn's fresh and hot, with good top-milk or cream, and the flavor is something to be grateful for.

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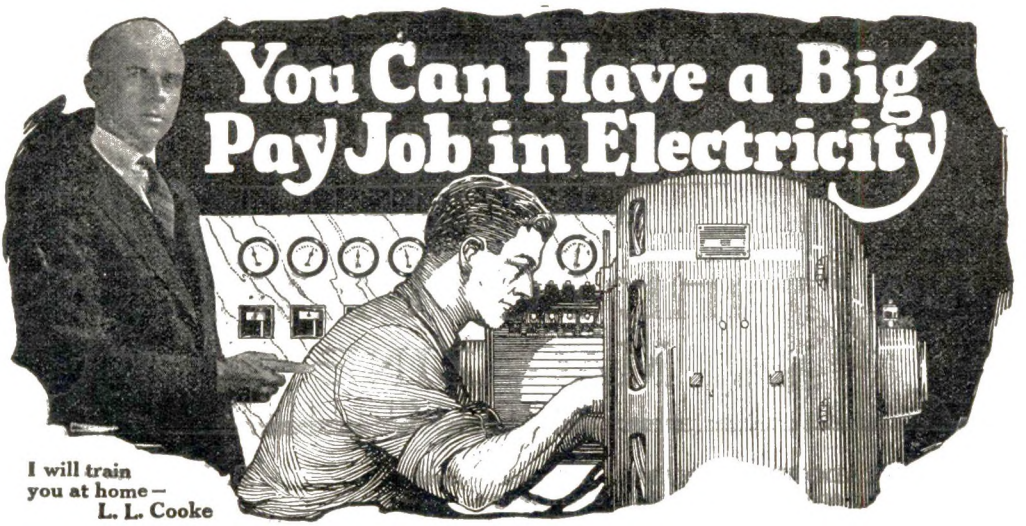
At your Grocer's—A Generous Package.

The Quaker Oats Company

CHICAGO, U.S.A.



You Can Have a Big Pay Job in Electricity

Electrical Experts Earn $3500 to $10,000 a Year

Now you earn $20 or $30 or $40 a week. In the same six days as an Electrical Expert you can make $70 to $200 and make it easier — not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a "Bossing" job — be an "ELECTRICAL EXPERT."

$3,500 to $10,000 a Year Is Easy to Get

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Get in line for one of these "Big-Pay Jobs" by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

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You don't have to be a High School Graduate — it isn't even necessary that you should have finished the grades. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need, and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough, successful and practical in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a few short months, an "Electrical Expert" able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

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With me you do practical work—at once. In my first few lessons I show you how to make money doing Electrical work in your spare time. (Over half of my students are paying for their course in this way.) I show you, also, how to get started in business for yourself, and then help you to get started.

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To do spare time work you'll need tools, etc. These I give you — FREE — a whole kit, including measuring instruments, a real electrical motor (no toy) and other things — the greatest value ever given by any School.

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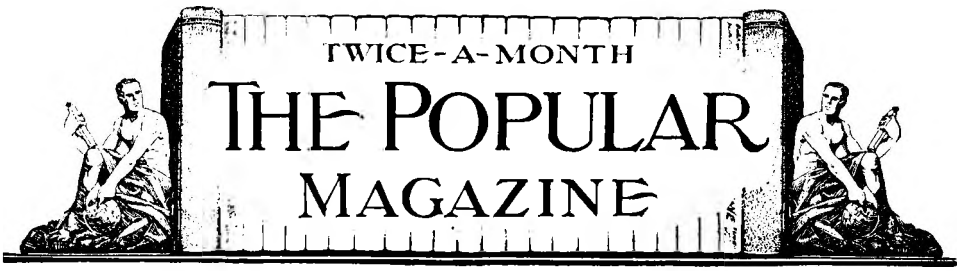
Vol. LXXIV NOVEMBER 7, 1924 No. 2



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Loses 23 Pounds With Madame X Reducing Girdle

In only 2 months—without diet, special exercises or drugs. Just by wearing the comfortable Madame X Reducing Girdle—which makes you look inches thinner at once and soon brings real slenderness.

"I HAVE just stepped from the scales and was overjoyed to find that the hand pointed to 142 pounds.

"Previously I found that no matter how I tried I could not bring my weight below 165 pounds. I was hopeless. I did not bother, thinking it useless. Finally, being so uncomfortable in heavy bone corsets I decided to try the Madame X Girdle for comfort if nothing else.

"During June and July I wore it constantly as it improved my appearance immensely. I noticed that I was gradually getting smaller. My friends say I look years younger, having lost 23 pounds with a decided improvement in health.

"I am three or four inches thinner in waist and hips.

"Everyone has noticed the change. I shall continue to wear my girdle as it is so extremely comfortable."

[signed] Anne L. Kenney,
509 W. 170th St., New York.

Miss Kenney's experience is by no means unique. Women everywhere write us enthusiastically to tell us of amazing reductions which this marvelous girdle has quickly brought about.

Special hand-turned hem absolutely prevents splitting or tearing.

New Clasp-Front Model

The Madame X comes in two models, the original "step-in" and a new "clasp-front" illustrated here—Both have adjustable back lacing.

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The instant you put on the Madame X, which is worn over the undergarment, in place of a corset, you appear several inches thinner at the waist and hips without the slightest discomfort. And day by day, as you wear the girdle, it gently kneads away the excess fat and moulds your figure to new beauty and slender grace.

Women usually lose from one to three inches the very first week, and almost before you know it, four, five and sometimes even ten inches have disappeared for good from waist, hips, thighs, and you look and feel younger and better.

Physicians endorse it

The Madame X is based on scientific principles of reduction by *rubber massage,* long advocated by health authorities and professional athletes. The rubber is scientifically cured by the dry heat method, so it will be specially strong and resilient.

You can exercise—work, play, sit—in perfect comfort, for it is so soft and flexible, it allows the utmost freedom of motion.

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The new Madame X Brassiere does for the upper figure just what the girdle does for waist, hips and thighs. Made of live, flesh-tinted brocaded rubber of the same high quality. Carefully moulds the figure without binding or bulging and gently massages away the fat.

See the Madame X for yourself. Get a fitting today at any good store where corsets are sold. Insist on the original patented Madame X.

Miss Anne L. Kenney after reducing 23 pounds with her Madame X

Send for free 24 page booklet showing why the Madame X Reducing Girdle reduces you so quickly and how it brings renewed health and energy. Address The Madame X Company, Dept. G-4611, 404 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

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For one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-six weeks he paid *at least $24 a week for the doubtful privilege of staying in the ranks of untrained men.* His neglect of this one main avenue of business progress cost him—leaving simple and compound interest out of the reckoning—the appalling sum of $47,424—a fortune in itself!

* * * *

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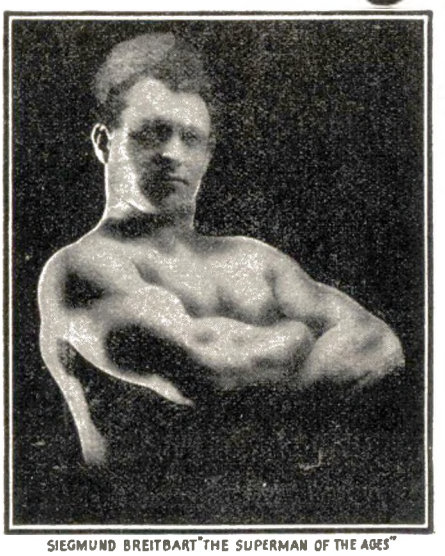

SIEGMUND BREITBART "THE SUPERMAN OF THE AGES"

Every Man Can Have It!

Most people think I was born strong, in fact they remark, "It was born in him." Let me tell you I was *not*. From the time I was born I was the same as any other human being—normal. My talents were always directed toward physical development. I liked to lift, pull, perform feats of strength and to exhibit a huge muscle. Sort of natural for a boy, isn't it? As I grew older, I gave more time and study to the scientific development of strength.

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I can spare you many a wearisome hour. I tried all manner of courses and none came up to my expectations. Naturally I could only resort to my own resources for the development of a practical scientific course which would satisfy myself. I learned by actually performing. Thus I am able to offer a course which is fundamentally sound, tried and true. I don't ask you to accept something that isn't practical.

Breitbart Reveals It All

You can acquire strength and power as I did, by simply following the methods I outline to you. And in a remarkably short time! Then you too will say, "I didn't think it possible."

What Breitbart Does

I am talking from the bottom of my heart. I am telling you only the plain truth. I bend half inch iron bands around my arm as a piece of ribbon. Bend horseshoes with my hands more easily than the village Blacksmith. Drive nails thru oak planks and metal. Support four thousand pounds of Vermont granite on my chest while six husky men slug away at it with heavy sledge hammers. Is it beyond reason that I am continually referred to as "The Super-man of the Ages?"

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The Meadowlark Name

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Meadowlark Brand," "Desert Brew," Etc.

Marge Brunelle felt that the West had treated her badly. She had journeyed clear to Smoky Ford to find Romance, and as far as she could see there was nothing there but annoyance and boredom. The West, she decided, was an overrated country. It came nowhere near specifications. If Romance was there, it hid its face from Marge. This is the story of what Marge missed, of the swift and deadly drama that passed almost under her nose and yet escaped her eyes. It is the story of the Meadowlark's fair name—how it was dragged through the mire to emerge untarnished and shining more brightly than ever. Not since "Chip, of the Flying U," has B. M. Bower given us a Western tale so packed with mystery, action, suspense and that elusive thing called atmosphere which sweeps through these pages like the breath of the prairie winds.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE ROBBERY AT SMOKY FORD.

DUST lay deep in the trail and spurted up in little clouds from under the tired feet of "Bud" Larkin's sweat-streaked sorrel. Smoky Ford squatted as always with her board shacks huddled about her one street and the rear windows staring stupidly at the swift-flowing river. The afternoon was half gone and the mid-July wind was hot and dry, and Bud had been in the saddle since early morning. He rode up to the hitch rail in front of the Elkhorn Saloon and dismounted, wondering a little at the crowd uproariously filling the place. Moving a bit stiffly with the long hours he had spent in the saddle, he went inside; the big rowels of his spurs making a pleasant *br-br-brr* on

the boards, the chains clinking faintly under the arch of his high-heeled boots as he walked.

The whole of his high gray hat, the brim turned back and skewered to the crown with a cameo pin filched from the neck of a pretty girl whom he had kissed on the mouth for her laughing resistance, looked as if it were afloat on a troubled sea of felt as he pushed through the noisy crowd and up to the bar, his thoughts all of beer, cold and foaming in the glass. The cameo pin and the pretty girl were forgotten, the smoldering eyes under his straight brown brows held no vision of gentle dalliance; though Bud was a good-looking young devil of twenty-two who gave blithe greeting to Romance when he met her on the lonely trails. His mouth, given easily to smiles that troubled the dreams of many a range girl, was grim now and dusty in the corners, and he waited thirstily for the tall glass mug ribbed on the outside and spilling foam over the top; took one long swallow when the busy bartender pushed the glass toward him, and turned, elbowing his way to an empty table against the wall where he could sit down and rest himself and take his time over the refreshment.

Negligent greeting he gave to one or two whose eyes he met but for the most of them he had no thought. It was not his kind of crowd, being composed largely of the town drifters and a few from the neighboring ranches. The cause of their forgathering was not far to seek. Steve Godfrey was present and deeply engaged in letting his world know that he was having one of his sprees, during which he loudly proclaimed that he was prying off the lid, taking the town apart, painting 'er red—whatever trite phrase came first to his loose lips. On such occasions he did not lack friends nor an audience.

"*Ev*-rybody dance!" Steve was shouting drunkenly, his face turned toward the doorway where a man was entering whose back bore certain scars which Bud's Uncle Lark could explain better than another. "Lock the door! 'S my saloon—I bought 'er for the next two hours. Drink 'er dry, boys—and *ev*-rybody dance!"

Palmer laughed sourly and shut the inner door with a bang, pushing the bolt across. There was a general stampede for the bar, behind which Steve Godfrey was pulling down bottles with both hands and laughing wide-mouthed as they were snatched from him. Bud's lip curled.

A young fellow at the next table was sketching rapidly in a notebook, glancing up after each pencil stroke to catch fresh glimpses of some face in the crowd. Bud lifted his glass, took a sip and set down the mug, watching sidelong the careless, swift work of his neighbor. A stranger in the town, Bud tagged him. A tenderfoot by the newness of his riding clothes, the softness of his hands, the pallor in his face. He looked up and smiled faintly with that wistfulness of the lonely soul begging for a friend, and Bud's scornful young mouth relaxed into a grin.

"Great stuff—all new to me," the young man confided and nodded toward the massed backs before them.

"Bunch of booze fighters," Bud condemned the crowd tersely.

"Whyn't you up here drinkin' with the rest?" Steve Godfrey, standing on a keg behind the bar, bawled angrily at the artist. "You, I mean, over there by the wall. What's the matter with you? Sick at the stummick?"

"Why—no, thank you just the same. I don't drink liquor."

"Don't, hey?" Steve scowled and spat into a corner. "You—well, if you won't drink, git up an' dance!"

Bud moved his slim body sidewise, wriggling so that his gun hung handily within reach in its holster. The young man shrugged his shoulders, closed his notebook and put it away with the pencil. The crowd had swung round and was staring and waiting to see what would happen next.

"I don't mind dancing for you," smiled the artist, "but I can't dance without music, you know."

"Can't, hey?" Steve was happy now, bullying some one who wouldn't fight back. "Say! You git up an' dance to *this!*"

The young man looked at the six-shooter in Steve's hand, looked at Steve and heaved a long sigh, stifling a yawn.

"I've always called this dance-to-six-gun-music a fake, invented by some Eastern novelist for melodramatic incident," he said pensively. "I never believed you cowboys ever tried a stunt like that, and I believe yet you got the idea out of some story. Now I don't mind dancing for you, but you know you couldn't beat time with that gun. Six shots, and I'd have to stop and wait

while you reloaded. It's simply impossible to do it in real life. If you could furnish some real music——"

"I've got a mouth harp," Bud announced unexpectedly, and finished his beer with one long swallow. The tenderfoot seemed to have the earmarks of a real man. It amused young Bud to see the stupid indecision on the face of Steve Godfrey who lacked the wit to handle an old range joke when it took a new turn.

"Good!" The young man smiled frankly. "Clear a space over there by the door, will you? That's large enough." He looked inquiringly at Bud. "If you can play a——"

"I can play anything you can dance," Bud grinned reply, well pleased with the small diversion. "How about a good old buck and wing?"

The stranger nodded, cast another glance toward the nonplused bully, Steve Godfrey, who stood on the keg with gun sagging in his hand and his mouth dropped half open, staring.

"All right—buck and wing it is," said the tenderfoot, and took his place in the center of the makeshift stage.

Bud shot him a glance of puzzled inquiry not unmixed with a certain tolerant contempt. Why should any man dance at the bidding of this drunken riffraff of the range? The young fellow's manner had given no hint of fear, and Bud did not like to think the tenderfoot had seized the chance to show off, to get into the limelight of so sorry an audience.

However, it was no business of young Bud Larkin's. He polished the harmonica on his sleeve, moistened the boyish lips that turned so easily to smiles, cupped his hands around the little instrument so dear to the heart of a cowboy and swung into a jig tune. Sitting on the edge of the table with his head tilted to one side, with his eyes half closed and watching the dancer while a well-made riding boot tapped the beat of the measures on the rough board floor, Bud never knew the picture he made.

The dancer's eyes studied the lines of his clean young face and throat, the tilt of his hat with the cameo brooch pinning back the broad brim, the slim, muscular body and long straight legs—studied and recorded each curve and line in a photographic memory. And he could dance the while—Smoky Ford had never seen anything like it. Hornpipe, Highland fling he did, never taking his eyes off Bud but mechanically fitting the steps to each tune Bud played. Even the free whisky was forgotten as the crowd pressed close to watch.

Then Bud awoke to the fact that his lips were raw from rubbing across the reeds, that time was passing too quickly and that he had urgent business in another part of town. He put away his mouth harp and started for the door.

"Hey! Come back here with that music!" Steve Godfrey shouted arrogantly. "Where the hell you goin'?"

"Where did you get the crazy notion you could give orders to *me?*" Bud flung contemptuously over his shoulder as he slid back the bolt.

"You stay where you're at! That door stays shut till I give the word to open it!" Steve was off the keg and plowing toward him through the crowd.

"You'll stay shut a heap longer," flared Bud, and gave Steve an uppercut that sent his teeth into his tongue and jarred him cruelly. Behind Steve a lean face leered at Bud; the face of Palmer, who was edging forward as if he meant to take a hand. The key had been turned in the lock and removed—by Palmer, Bud would have sworn. The knowing look in his eyes betrayed that much.

Steve was coming at him again, gun in hand and mouthing threats, but the stranger who had danced managed to hook an agile foot between Steve's legs and throw him so hard he bounced. Then he swung a chair, and the crowd backed.

Bud opened the door by the simple expedient of shooting the lock off it, and went out with belled nostrils like a bull buffalo on the rampage. The strange youth followed close, the chair still held aloft and ready for a charge.

"Come on, 'Lightfoot,'" Bud snorted. "That bunch fights mostly with their mouths." A little farther and his temper had cooled perceptibly. "I guess I quit kind of sudden, but I wasn't tired of watching you dance. You're a dandy. But I have to get into the bank and it's about time they close up. I just happened to think about it."

"I wanted to leave, and meant to the first chance," the stranger he had dubbed Lightfoot confessed. "They're a pretty tough bunch, but I thought it was better to stand

in with them. I really want to get acquainted, you know, and shake down into the community and be considered just one of you."

"Are you classing me with that bunch?" Bud looked at him.

"No-o—I meant the whole country, of course. I'm a stranger, and it seems pretty hard to get acquainted." He shook his head ruefully. "Now I'm afraid I've made matters worse, fighting like that."

"That wasn't a fight. That bunch is lapping up booze, by now, and don't know anything happened. Dirty sneaks, most of them are, and the less you have to do with 'em the better." He went up the steps of the little bank at the end of the street, rattled the doorknob and looked at his watch. "Three minutes to three," he commented. "They've got no business locking up ahead of time. I've got to get in, that's all."

"There's a side door," the stranger suggested, and Bud nodded and led the way around the corner of the building. A man with a pack horse was riding out from the open lot in the rear of the bank, going toward the river. Bud gave him a casual glance, tried the door and found it locked, an unusual circumstance at that hour. He gave the door a kick or two by way of protest.

"This is the heck of a town!" he snorted. "Let's try a back window. The cashier must be inside. "I'll raise him, if I have to take the darn bank apart."

"I'm afraid I am partly to blame," apologized the other. "I didn't know you were in a hurry."

"I wasn't—much. The bank doesn't close till three, and a fellow can get in the side door any time for another hour. It's got no business to be locked up like a jail, this time of day." They were inspecting the rear windows, which were closed and barred and looked out on the vacant lot. "Lightfoot, don't ever tell me you're here because you like the town, or I'm liable to take a dislike to you!"

Lightfoot grinned.

"I'm here because my sister and I liked the name on the map, and it seems to be located right in the heart of the cattle country, where local color should be at its best. Our name isn't Lightfoot, though. I don't know how you got the idea it was. It's Brunelle. I'm Lawrence Brunelle, and my sister's name is Margaret—Marge and Lawrie. We've only been here a week."

"Uh-huh. That's a week longer than I'd want to stay. You picked about the meanest hole in the country when you came to Smoky Ford. I wish to thunder I knew where that snide cashier went. Say, if I stand on the doorknob and get a squint over the curtain, could you hold my legs and steady me? The darn knob might bust." Bud stooped to unbuckle his spurs. "I tell you, Lightfoot, there's something funny about this bank being closed up tight as a drum this time of day."

With the ease of any other young bronco fighter he mounted the doorknob, balanced there on the ball of one foot and bent to peer in through the three-inch space above the green shade that had been pulled down over the glass panel in the door. An awkward position, but he did not keep it long, and when he dropped and faced Brunelle his eyes were wide and black with excitement.

"He's dead in there. Whole top of his head caved in. The vault door's wide open!"

With his spurs in one hand with his crumpled gloves, Bud led the way across the street and down several doors to where Delkin, the bank president, ran a livery stable—he being a banker in name only, as is the way of bank presidents in small towns like Smoky Ford. Delkin was swearing at his hostler when they arrived, but he gave over that pastime long enough to hear the news. His face went tallow white.

"I told you first, Mr. Delkin. The rest of the town is boozing in the Elkhorn. And I hate to put my business into this mess, but Lark sent in a check to be cashed. He's got to have fifteen hundred dollars. Will this make any difference?"

"Difference?" Delkin broke his tottering run to stare at Bud. "Hell, if the vault's cleaned out you can't get fifteen cents! Man, we'll all be broke!"

"Oh, say!" Brunelle's voice held panic. "My sister and I brought all our money with us and banked it here, just last week!"

Delkin was nervously trying to fit a key into the lock of the side door, and he did not seem to hear. They pushed in together, Bud thoughtfully closing the door behind them with some vague idea of staving off the excitement that would follow hard on the heels of the town's enlightenment.

Delkin lunged through the partition door, rushed to the open vault, gave one look and turned to the gruesome figure lying a-sprawl on the floor. He looked at the shelf behind the cashier's window, at the pulled-out, empty drawer beneath and slumped into a chair, his whole form seeming to have shrunk and aged perceptibly.

"Cleaned out—ruined!" he wailed. "And Charlie dead—my God, what can I do?"

"Do?" Bud's eyes snapped. "Get after the gang! You can get the money back if you pull yourself together. They can't eat it, and—the way Charlie's still bleeding, this happened only a few minutes ago." He turned to Brunelle, the cameo brooch looking oddly out of place above his hard eyes and grim mouth. "You raise the town, Lightfoot, and I'll fork my horse and get after that pack outfit we saw leaving here as we came around the corner."

"You think he robbed the bank?" Brunelle looked startled. "One man couldn't have——"

"He did or he saw the bunch leave here," snapped Bud. "Delkin, you stay here. I'll send some one." He whirled and was gone, running swiftly down to where his horse was tied.

CHAPTER II.

A SCHOOL-TEACHER FOR THE MEADOWLARK.

STILL, clear moonlight and the far hills painted black against the stars when Bud, having ridden far and fast, jogged wearily into town and dropped reins before the bank, where a light shone through the windows and figures were to be seen moving behind the green shades. He knocked, and after a hushed minute Delkin himself admitted him. Bud walked straight up to the grated railing and leaned his forearms heavily upon it, his cameo-pinned hat pushed back on his head by the pressure against the bronze volutes of the barrier.

"Well, I rode the high lines," he announced huskily because of the dryness in his throat. "I saw the bunch from town go fogging along the trail down river, but I was off on the bench, following a mess of horse tracks that took off toward the hills.

"There's something darn funny about this deal, Mr. Delkin." Delkin had retreated immediately behind the partition. "Here's how she lays right at present. I got on my horse and rode back up here and out behind the bank, so as to pick up any trail they had left. The only horses that had been tied close to the bank was a pack outfit that left just as that dancing tenderfoot and I came around the corner, trying to get into the bank to cash a check. I followed that outfit and overhauled it at the ford. It was 'Bat' Johnson, that works for Palmer. He'd angled down through the willows along the river, on that stock trail, and he told me he'd seen four riders loping along through the draw to the ford, ahead of him. Just got a glimpse and didn't know who they were. He'd left his outfit on the lot back here while he went across to the blacksmith shop for some horseshoe nails to take along with him, and he hadn't paid any attention to anybody in the bank or coming out—hadn't noticed any one at all.

"I went back to the draw and picked up the trail of the four horses, only there were more than four. Your posse crossed the ford while I was in the draw. Then I followed the trail across the river. The bunch ahead of me didn't seem to notice the tracks, but kept fogging down the road all in a bunch like they were headed for a dance." Bud cleared his throat and spat toward the nearest brass cuspidor, then continued his painstaking report.

"Well, Mr. Delkin, four horses—shod all around—took straight out across the bench beyond the Smoky, heading for the hills. Here's the funny part, though: They never hunted the draws where they could keep out of sight, but sifted right along in a bee line, across ridges and into hollows and out again, until the tracks were lost where they joined a bunch of range stock that's running back there on the bench about eight miles. From there on I couldn't get a line on anything at all. I rode after the bunch, but they're pretty wild and they broke for the hills. There were shod horses among 'em. And Mr. Delkin, the thing that struck me hardest was, those four horses didn't travel like they had riders. I'd swear they were running loose, and beat it to join that bunch of range horses."

"And that's all you found out?" Delkin's voice was flat and old and hopeless.

"That's the extent of it. It was a blind trail, and your holdups went some other way. Maybe that posse will pick up some sign."

The other men there asked a few questions, their manner as hopeless as Delkin's. Bud knew they were the directors and the

other officers, and he sensed their helplessness before this calamity. The body of the cashier had been removed, and these were staying on the scene simply because they did not know what else to do.

"How's the bank? Cleaned out?" Bud was still conscious of his own personal responsibilities.

"Everything," Delkin nodded apathetically. "We're so far from other banks—and Charlie slept right here—we kept more cash on hand than was safe, maybe. We had to accommodate the different outfits that would rather handle hard money than checks. With Charlie gone——" He moistened his lips and looked away. "Of course, we'll know when the bank examiner comes and checks up, but I'm afraid we're done for, Bud."

Outside, Bud almost collided with young Brunelle who caught him by the arm with an impulsive movement.

"I recognized your horse. Come over to our cabin, won't you, Mr. Larkin? I've been watching for you to come back, and Marge—my sister Margaret—has supper all ready for you. We don't have many visitors," he added wistfully. "People here seem to be very clannish and cool toward strangers."

"That's because they're roughnecks and know it," said Bud, and picked up the reins of his horse. "If you'll wait till I put my horse in the stable I'll just call you on that invitation to supper. Only I'm liable to clean you out of grub if I once start eating. There's over six feet of me, Lightfoot, and I'm all hollow."

"That'll be all right." Brunelle smiled perfunctorily. "It's yours while it lasts—and that may not be long, if the bank is really closed for keeps."

Delkin's hostler took charge of the Meadowlark sorrel and the two men walked on to where a light shone through a cabin window set back from the main street in an open space that gave a view of the hills. It is to be feared that Bud's ready acceptance of an invitation to supper was caused chiefly by his unhappy knowledge of the hotel cuisine; though the dancer's evident loneliness and his likable personality were minor factors in the decision.

"My sister," Bud's host explained on the way, "is an author of short stories. She has had some of them printed in papers and magazines, and the editors have given her quite a send-off, even on the ones they didn't print. Back where we were raised there didn't seem to be much to write about, though, and Marge was afraid she'd run out of interesting subjects. So when mother died we decided to come West and write up some cowboy stories, with me to illustrate them with pictures drawn from life. They ought to take pretty well with magazine editors—being done right on the spot, with pictures of the real characters.

"That's why we came here to Smoky Ford, but we are not telling every one our purpose in coming here, because that would make people self-conscious in our presence. We want to win the confidence of the people—that's why I danced when they asked me to in the saloon; to show I am friendly and willing to be accommodating. We let it be known that my sister is out here for her health. It isn't so far off, either, because she was about worn out from taking care of mother, and the doctor advised her to try a different climate. So we sold the property—and every dollar we had was in this bank. We thought it would show our confidence in the town and help us get in with the right class of people."

"There isn't any right class," Bud told him bluntly. "Not in Smoky Ford. It's a rotten dump, and the better you know it the less you'll like it. I'd drift to some other range if I wanted to feel confidence in my neighbors."

Budlike, he wondered if the sister was pretty and young. And, tired as he was, interest picked up his feet and pulled the sag out of his shoulders as they neared the open doorway that looked at the hills. He took off his hat and held it so that the cameo brooch was hidden within the palm of his left hand, and gave his rumpled brown hair a hasty rubdown with the other as he entered—silent, positive proof that the young woman was good to look upon.

He ought to be hurrying back to the ranch that night, and he told them so and then permitted himself to be persuaded into staying, sharing the bed of his host whom he persisted in calling Lightfoot in spite of one or two corrections.

"Oh, I know why you call Lawrie that," Marge exclaimed in a pretty, eager way she had. "It's a custom of cowboys to give names to strangers, just as the Indians do. You know, Indians name their young after

the first thing that strikes their attention, and strangers in the same way, the names suggested usually by some mark or trait in the individual. Lawrie told me how he danced in the saloon while you played for him, and of course your custom demanded that you name him after the dancing. Don't you see, Lawrie? Your cowboy name will be Lightfoot. You are initiated into the tribe—made a member of the clan!"

Bud looked at her with smoldering indignation in his eyes. He did not think much of Indians, and less of their customs—he having known them long and too well. Nor did he approve of any one calling cowboys a tribe. He had barked knuckles on a man's jaw for less cause before now, and he set his strong young teeth into his underlip to hold in a retort discourteous. But Marge was a pretty girl with gray eyes like stars all a-sparkle with vivid lights and life, her skin was soft and whiter than any range girl could ever hope to attain, and her mouth was red and provocative, daring male lips to kisses.

"And now, what are you going to call me?" she asked him with more assurance than any girl Bud knew would venture to show.

"Oh, I don't know." Bud smiled faintly. "But when I do call you—you'd better come."

"I asked *what* are you going to call me." Marge's eyes were a-dance with amused interest.

"Well, I think I'll call you—early," drawled Bud.

A range girl would have let well enough alone, after that.

"Not Queen of the May?" Her eyes teased him. "And now just one more question I want to ask. Why do cowboys wear their sombreros pinned back like that? You know, I'm gathering local color for a story, and I like to get right at the meaning of everything. Is it some especial mark—an insignia? That means a mark showing some certain rank," she explained for his ignorance.

"Yes," said Bud, "but it's a secret order and I can't explain. It means quite a lot, and you won't see many fellows wearing the badge. It's the range sign of the Golden Arrow."

"The Golden—Arrow? I don't—did you ever hear of that order, Lawrie?"

"No." Lawrie shook his head. "Mr. Larkin and I were going over to see if that posse has found out anything, Marge. If the bank doesn't get that money back, we're in a fix!"

"I know—but I want to know about this secret order among the cowboys, Lawrie. If I don't study cowboys when I get the chance, how can I write successfully about them? Can't you say anything more about the Golden Arrow, Mr. Larkin? It's so interesting!"

"Well, it's awful old," Bud elucidated gravely. "It was handed down from the first savage——"

"Of course! It's an Indian lodge! The arrow of gold—why of course, that's pure Indian! And you're a member! But why does that cameo stand for the arrow? Can you tell that?"

"Sure," said Bud, getting up to follow Lawrie to the door. "It's the paleface sign, Miss Brunelle." And he went out, holding his lips carefully from a grin.

The volunteer posse had returned much soberer though no wiser than they had set out, and Bat Johnson had come back with them out of curiosity, to see the corpse and attend the inquest that would be held as soon as the sheriff and coroner arrived from Sand Cañon, the county seat. In the meantime Delkin had sent frantic word by telephone to the nearest points, and men were riding into town on sweaty horses, eager for the man hunt that lacked only a leader.

"For half a cent I'd borrow a horse and take the trail alone—with grub enough for a couple of days, anyway," Bud confided restlessly to the artist. "I'd do it, only Delkin says we'll be wanted at the inquest to-morrow. Seems funny—the way they plumb disappeared and never left a trace. Bat Johnson claimed to me that he saw four riders heading for the ford ahead of him, but now he says he only got one glimpse and can't swear to it. Might have been loose horses. But what in thunder would range horses be doing right here in town, almost? The whole thing's off color. I wish Lark was here—maybe he could figure it out."

"There must be some way to catch them and get the money back," Brunelle worried. "This leaves Marge and me in an awful hole, Mr. Larkin. All you people have got homes and property, but here we are, perfect strangers—and a little over five dollars to our names! We didn't think it would be

safe to keep any money in the house, out in this wild place—and every dollar we had was in that bank. I wonder how much the robbers got?"

Bud shook his head. "Delkin doesn't seem to know exactly. Charlie Mulholland, the cashier, did all the work. The other fellow has been down sick and Charlie was alone. Steady little jasper he was, and never went anywhere. So Delkin claims he doesn't know—but they got a plenty if it busted the bank. It's going to hit a lot of us pretty hard, Lightfoot. Hard luck on you folks, though—what are you going to do?—were you thinking of getting work of some kind?"

"Yes. Marge could teach school, of course. And once she gets a stand-in with the publishers she can sell all the pieces she writes, and I can sell pictures to go with them. And I can get a job as cowboy for a while, till we get started, I suppose." His jaw squared. "We'll never go back, that's one thing sure; not even if we had the car-fare. All the neighbors said we'd make a fizzle of things if we left there. I suppose there's a school somewhere to teach, isn't there?"

"I don't know—well, the Meadowlark needs a school-teacher," Bud blurted impulsively, having caught another disturbing sight of Marge with the lamplight shining on her hair.

Bedtime came all too soon for young Bud Larkin, that night, though he never guessed that he was being drawn out and studied as a perfect specimen of the genus cowboy.

Marge would go to the inquest next morning, though Bud warned her that it would not be exciting and she would only get herself talked about. She would go, she said, because she was sure to need murders and posses and sheriffs in her Western stories, and this was a wonderful opportunity to study the types at close range. Bud laughed and would not explain what he was laughing at, and presently he left her with a parting jibe which Marge could not understand.

So to the inquest she went, and thereby shocked the citizens of Smoky Ford who liked their womenfolks shy and retiring. She mistook the big blacksmith for the sheriff who was small and kept his badge hidden under his coat. She was disgusted with the coroner, who was fat and who chewed tobacco frankly and spat where he pleased. Moreover, the corpse was in a back room out of sight, and Marge could not bring herself to the point of walking in there to see how a man looks who has been murdered. Then, after a few tedious preliminaries, they all trooped off to the bank to take a look around, and left Marge all by herself in the empty storeroom. It did not help her temper any that Bud asked her afterward how she liked the wild, wild West as far as she had got.

"That man Palmer, who had deposited five thousand dollars just before he came into the saloon, looked at you kind of funny when you were giving your version of the story," Brunelle observed irrelevantly, thinking it best at this point to change the subject.

"He can't help that—he was born funny," Bud retorted. "Meanest old skinflint in the country. Took a quirting in front of the whole town here, a couple of months back, from my uncle Lark, and never made a move to get back at Lark for it. Maybe that's why he looks funny when he sees any one from the Meadowlark. Afraid we'll jump him again for something, maybe."

"But he sneered as if he thought you were lying," Lawrie persisted.

"Yes, and I sneered, too, when he told about depositing five thousand dollars. I bet he keeps his money buried back of the barn."

"I wish we'd buried ours," Marge sighed. "Or the editors would wake up, or something. We'll have to hunt something to do——"

"Oh, Mr. Larkin knows of a school you can teach. He says the Meadowlark needs a teacher. And perhaps I can get a job there as cowboy, for a while. Do you think I could, Mr. Larkin?"

"How do we get there?" Marge began to untie her apron as if she meant to start within the next five minutes, and her eyes were the brightest, dancingest gray eyes that Bud had ever looked into. His own kindled while he gazed.

And that is how it happened that young Bud Larkin, leaving his own tall sorrel in Delkin's stable as hostage of a sort, drove blithely to the Meadowlark with a hired team and a spring wagon and two passengers, with three trunks piled high behind the seat.

CHAPTER III.

TWO BLACK BRONKS.

HAVE you ever stopped to wonder what will happen if the wise men one day show us just how to read one another's thoughts? As it is, men and women go cooped within their bodies and the most we can do is guess at their real selves and manner of thinking. We listen and look and think we know, and all the while it is our own mental reactions that impel us to make friendships and to break them, and sometimes we pass by the great loyalties we might have had and give them never a thought.

This by way of introducing "Maw." As a matter of fact she was nobody's mother, or if she were no one at the Meadowlark had ever heard of it. Lark had chanced upon her just as she was being headed for the poorhouse, without a friend or a dollar to her name. She was sitting on the depot platform at Chinook, with a telescope grip as lank as an empty sack beside her, and a tear slipping disheartenedly down the cheek next Lark as he came up the steps. Lark stopped and asked a question or two, picked up the pathetically light grip and hooked a hand under the arm of the little old lady.

"Poorhouse my granny!" he had snorted. "Not while the Meddalark is all out at the heels for want of a woman to darn our socks. My Jonah, it was beginning to look like I'd have to go and git married! She's a long drive, Maw, but I betcha you ain't going to mind that."

Just like that, without a word to any one asking if he might, Lark had taken the queer, dwarfed little old woman home with him. A pitiful little old body was Maw's. Under four feet in height, with a big, round head, thin, graying hair which she wore in a tight little knot on top of her head like a handle—and the biggest, kindest heart in the world; a soul beautiful, sweet and wise with the wisdom of goodness she had, shut up in that pitiful caricature of a body.

When the hired rig from Smoky Ford swung through the gate and up to the porch, with young Bud grinning impudently at his world from the driver's place, and a strange young woman wedged in between him and a young man who bore all the earmarks of a pilgrim, and three big trunks lashed to the back of the vehicle to say these visitors had come to stay, Lark looked slightly dazed. He was boss of the Meadowlark and hospitality had been bred in his bones, but he stood in the doorway and stared for a full minute and hadn't a word to say in welcome.

But Maw did not hesitate nor question. She hurried out under Lark's braced arm in the doorway—walking erect with plenty of room to spare—and waddled to the edge of the porch, smiling unabashed welcome.

"Get down and come right in," she cried. "Supper's about ready. As luck would have it I killed that speckled hen that wanted to set, and cooked her with dumplings. We're almost ready to sit down, and I'll bet you're hungry!"

Bud had swung his long legs over the wheel and landed beside her, and Marge was shocked to see him lift the misshapen creature clear of the ground and kiss her on each leathery cheek before he set her down again. He turned immediately to help Marge out, and his clasp did not linger—as Marge had half expected it would.

"Maw, this is Miss Brunelle. She's going to teach school here. And this is her brother, Lightfoot. Hello, Lark. I promised Lightfoot you'd give him a job, so he can be with his sister while she teaches school. Where's Skookum?"

"Oh, he went off to feed the cougar. I'm so glad we're going to have a school!" cried Maw, without batting an eye. "Larkie's real glad, too. And of course he will put Mr. Lightfoot right to work. Now come right in, folks, and wash off the dust while I put on another couple of plates. Buddy, I'm afraid we haven't a room ready for Mr. Lightfoot—or would you want——"

"He can bunk with me," Bud put in easily, glancing up from unroping the trunks. "Say, Lark, the bank was robbed and Charlie was killed, yesterday. That's why I didn't get back quicker. I stayed in for the inquest. No sign of the bunch that did it." The trunks thudded one by one to the porch. "It happened just before I went to cash that check—so I didn't cash it. His name's Brunelle, same as his sister, Maw. I called him Lightfoot, just for—instance." He stepped on the hub of the front wheel and went up, unwrapping the lines from around the whipstock as he did so. Lark came to life, then, and climbed in and stood behind the seat while Bud drove back to the stable. Sprawled before the

bunk house, the Meadowlark riders were taking in the smallest details of the amazing arrival and trying not to appear curious or even interested. But Jake, an old fellow with a leg permanently stiffened from having a dead horse lying on it through one whole night, got up and limped leisurely down to the stable to take care of the team. Lark saw him coming and hastened his speech.

"Where in the name of Jonah did you pick up them pilgrims, Bud? And what's this here joke about a school-teacher for the Meadowlark? Where'd you git 'em—and their trunks?" The last three words sounded much like a groan.

"Say, I didn't *steal* 'em." Bud flashed back, aiming at a late unpleasantness created by Lark himself, who had lifted Palmer's grandson to his saddle and ridden home with him—a story already told. Skookum, they called him, because they disliked any name reminiscent of Palmer.

"I'll bet you didn't need to. I bet they hypnotized you——"

Bud whirled on him, straight brows pulled together. Perhaps Bud himself was seeing the foolishness of his act, though he would never admit it.

"Look here, Lark, these are nice folks and they were up against it the minute the bank was robbed and they couldn't get a two-bit piece of their money back. Strangers fresh from the East somewhere, come out here with the idea of writing stories and making pictures to go with them, and selling them to magazines. Maybe they can do it, I dunno. Sounded fishy to me. And they were *broke*, I tell you! So she wanted to teach school or something, and you know darn well, Lark, that Skookum ought to be learning to read. And Lightfoot won't be the first tenderfoot that had to learn which end of a horse is the head." He stopped and glanced toward the house, where Maw was calling through the dusk that supper was all on the table. "And my thunder, Lark," he added as a clincher, "you never leave the basin without bringing back something to take care of and feed. You'd have done it yourself."

Lark lifted his hat, pawed absently at his hair and set the hat at a different angle as they started back up the trail to the house.

"Shore you'd 'a' done it if the girl had been cross-eyed?"

"No, I dunno as I would," Bud admitted with shameless candor. "She isn't any prettier than Bonnie Prosser, though—and she hasn't got half the sense Bonnie has. I'll bet if you pinned her right down to it she'd admit she thinks cowboys wear horns and eat grass! She'll make a hell of a job writing stories about us, Lark. You ought to hear the questions she asked, coming out! Lightfoot's all right—he'll get broke in a heap quicker than she will. That jasper'll be all right when he gets some sense. And Marge is a darn pretty girl, even if she is kind of empty under her hair. She can teach Skookum——"

"Oh, all right, all right," Lark yielded wearily to end the argument. "But if this habit of hauling in the helpless is going to run in the family—we'll have to start in ridin' with a long rope and a runnin' iron, son, to feed 'em all. And what'll Helen say? And a dozen other girls that've kept their dads broke buyin' hair ribbons to decorate yore bridle with?"

"What they'll say won't hurt anything," Bud retorted with some resentment. "I'm not halter broke yet by any girl—if you want to know, Lark." He walked stiff-necked to the porch, where Marge stood looking out over the dusky basin to where the moon was beginning to gild the clouds on the hilltops beyond the Little Smoky.

"You know, I never dreamed you had frogs away out West in Montana!" she cried as the two approached. "They sound exactly like the frogs back home in Iowa."

"Well, they're Iowa stock, bred up on alfalfa swales," Bud explained carefully. "When the first white woman settled in this country and started in to teach her kids that song about 'There was a frog lived in a well, humble-jumble-jerry-jum,' the kids kept at her to know what frogs were. So the next time a trainload of cattle went to Chicago she had the boys stop off in Iowa and catch a lot of pollywogglers and bring them back. There was twice as many as she wanted, so she sent some over to the Meddalark. They've done real well," he added, stopping to listen to the steady sing-song chorus down in the meadow. "One trouble is, they brought in mosquitoes same time, to go with the frogs. Said the farmers back in Iowa told 'em frogs wouldn't live where they couldn't get mosquitoes in season. They sure brought a-plenty—or else our breed of frogs are light eaters."

"Well," said Marge, all unsuspecting, "of

course I knew the frogs must have come from *some*where, and I noticed they sounded just like the frogs back home."

And that is why Lark kept eying the girl curiously all through supper.

But the unexpected addition to the Meadowlark group of two exceedingly tender tenderfeet could not crowd from Lark's mind another matter more vitally important, even if less stimulating to the imagination; nor from the uneasy thoughts of Bud, who carried his own guilty conscience. The two gravitated together without a word or look that signified intention, and Bud silently led the way to a boulder set against the bluff so conveniently out of earshot and so happily within sight of everything that transpired outside the buildings that even in Lark's somewhat tempestuous youth it had been called the Council Rock. A faint trail led to it along the base of the bluff—proof enough that it was still a popular place for the exchange of confidences. Bud walked out on the square, gray rock and sat down, dangling his legs over the edge while he produced tobacco and papers.

"That check—Lark, I feel that I owe you fifteen hundred dollars," he began abruptly. "I was so darn thirsty and hot when I came down off the reservation that I didn't go straight to the bank. I stopped at the Elkhorn for a drink. And then Lightfoot let himself be badgered into dancing for Steve Godfrey's bunch of souses, and I played for him. I guess I wasted half an hour, almost, before I started for the bank. At that," he added, pausing to run the tip of his tongue along the edge of the filled paper. "I was in time—if the bank had been left alone. But if I'd gone there straight I'd have been in time, maybe, to head off the killing and cash your check."

"Damn expensive beer the Elkhorn's got," Lark commented dryly, knowing well what drink Bud would choose on a hot day. "What about the Frying Pan?"

"They've sure got a dandy lot of horses," Bud told him, relieved at the change of subject. "I had to do some haggling for you, Lark, but I got the promise of a hundred head—forty young mares and the rest geldings, two and three years old. You might be able to stand them off for the money, but I dunno. I told them it would be cash down. 'Kid' said they couldn't be bothered with a check. You had the right hunch there. He hinted pretty strongly for gold; said he was nervous over paper money because he'd burned a thousand dollars one time by accident."

"Yeah, I wouldn't wonder if he's nervous!" Lark chuckled under his breath, having been reared in an atmosphere of tolerance toward the deeds and misdeeds of his neighbors. "My Jonah, I sure do want that bunch of horses! You say the bank's put out of business, son?"

"That's what Delkin said. They may get organized again after a while—or they may get the money back. I'd have thought maybe it was——" He stopped, emptied his lungs of smoke and shook his head. "But I saw the whole outfit. 'Butch' Cassidy's working for them this summer. They promised to hold the bunch close in, because I told them you'd be right over. I expect they're watching the trail for us, right about now."

"Too bad!" Lark absently reached for his own "makin's." "Forty young mares, you say. Bud, I expect my old man would just about peel the hide off me if he was alive, but I'll be darned if I can set still an' let that bunch of horses git out from under the old Meddalark iron. I'm goin' to hit the trail for Glasgow and borry a couple 'r three thousand dollars. That'll run us till shippin', if Delkin don't make the grade. First time the Meddalark ever borried, but I've plumb got t' have them horses."

"I'll give you a bill of sale of a thousand head of my cattle, Lark. I could have saved the bank, maybe, if I'd gone on about my business and washed the dust out of my throat afterward. I—I hate to think of Charlie Mulholland butchered—knocked on the head like a blackleg calf, while I sat in that saloon playing the mouth harp for Lightfoot to dance. You're right, that was damned expensive beer. It cost a man his life, besides all the money in the country. I'll write a bill of sale, Lark, and you use that to get money on. I'll feel better about the whole business if you do, and it will save the Meddalark from having a mortgage plastered on it."

"You keep what cattle you've got, son. Can't tell when you might want to set up for yourself. I can——"

"Say, I'll sell out the whole bunch if you don't shut up. I want you to borrow on my stock, if you've got to have a loan—and I suppose that's the only way out. Those

Frying Pan horses are sure dandies. Only one favor I want, Lark. I'd like to pick me a couple of the geldings to break for my string. There are two blacks, dead ringers for each other, that are beauts. I want them both. Half brothers, I'd say; going on four, maybe; clean limbed and short coupled, with fore quarters like a lion, and their eyes are plumb human. They'd make a peach of a matched driving team, but I want them to ride. 'Butch' says he got a saddle on one and started to ride him. He says it pitched hell out of him and it was a relief to get thrown over the fence. I'll bet I can gentle the two of them so they'll be just the same as pet dogs. I want them, Lark."

"I wouldn't wonder if you did," drawled Lark. "All right, son. I'll take the bill of sale for security on a loan—I know where I can get it in Glasgow without the hull darn country knowin' the Meddalark's borryin' money—and you can have your two black bronks for keeps, kinda like int'rest on the use of your stock for a few months or a year. How's that?"

"That's fine and dandy, Lark, but maybe you'll want to back down when you see them. I admit I'm playing it low-down, begging for them before you've seen them. But darn it, I know I'd have to fight for them if the boys get a sight of them before they're plumb promised to me. And I had a long, hard ride in the wind, going to the Frying Pan, and I talked myself black in the face getting a hundred head for fifteen hundred dollars. Lark, Kid asked two thousand flat for the bunch. But I made him see where the cash in his hand was worth something, and selling the bunch right on the spot. Any other outfit would very likely have stood him off for part of the money, and he knew it. By the way, don't forget that the boys want it in gold. Better figure on carrying the extra weight, Lark. If it's all gold you might get them to throw in a few good-looking colts they've got over there. Most of these mares have got sucking colts running with them, by the way."

"I'll borry three thousand, and get it all in gold," Lark planned. "I can carry it, easy enough. I'll take a valise along, for I reckon I'll spend a night in Glasgow, mebbe two."

"Make it a quick trip, Lark. You must bear in mind that the boys expect us tonight. I'll die if I lose those two black bronks!"

CHAPTER IV.

SKOOKUM.

WHEN he sauntered down from the Council Rock in the moonlight, left Lark to enter the house alone and continued to the bunk house where the boys still lingered by the doorway, young Bud did not look like a man whose life depends on getting a pair of coal-black bronchos into his possession. Cigarettes pricked little red stars in the line of shadow before the long, low-roofed building. Certain voices ceased emulating the frogs as Bud came up and squatted on his boot heels alongside a figure which he identified even in the shadow as his particular friend, Frank Gelle—called "Jelly" with a fine disregard for proper pronunciation.

"Have a good trip, Bud?" Not for a top horse would Jelly have betrayed the curiosity that burned within his breast.

"Pretty fair. Hot as blazes riding across the reservation yesterday. Oh, by the way, 'Rosy,' I didn't get those socks you sent for. I meant to, but I didn't have money enough. When the bank was robbed——"

"Get out!" Gelle was merely expressing surprise. "Some of these days, Bud, some feller's goin' to kill you and drag you outa the trail and leave y' there. Who's the girl you brought in?"

"The girl? Oh, she's Lightfoot's sister. She came to teach our school."

"School?" chorused six shaken voices.

"Now I *know* you're lyin', Bud," Gelle mourned. "Some of these days, Bud, I wanta have a real serious talk with you, over on the Rock. This habit of lyin'—it might run along and run along till it gits you into serious trouble. If you'll walk over now with me I can tell you a lot——"

"It's him that'll tell a lot," a voice broke in ominously. "Us fellers have stood enough from Bud. They's a certain Meddalark that won't have a chirp left in 'im, time we git the pinfeathers all plucked out."

"Another case of a prophet in his own country," sighed Bud, reaching out a hand for Jelly's tobacco sack because he was too lazy to reach into his pocket for his own. "The bank *was* robbed, boys, and Charlie Mulholland was killed. That's a fact. Lightfoot and I discovered him——"

Half an hour went to the telling of the

story, Bud relating each small detail with accuracy, each in its proper place. For after all the jokes were pushed aside he appreciated the hunger of active minds shut away from the world outside for days and even weeks at a time. The fellows had been plugging hard on round-up until just lately and they were sick of their own stale selves. So Bud gave them all he had. By the time he had finished with the subject each man could visualize the whole affair, just as Bud visualized it; that is, so far as the bank robbery was concerned.

They discussed the mystery of its quiet perpetration on the edge of banking hours and with forty or fifty men within gunshot, and then Tony Scarpa—more American than his name implied—swung to the more immediate event.

"Who's Lightfoot and who's his sister, and what's all this school-teachin' stuff you handed us?"

"Straight goods." In the narrowing shadow as the moon swam higher Bud's eyes gleamed with mischief. "Lightfoot's a pilgrim—an artist, so he says, and a dancer I can swear to, for I saw him stepping handsome. His sister's a pilgress, and they went broke when the bank did, and had to rustle jobs—having a bad habit of wanting to eat every few hours. She wanted to teach school. He wanted 'to be a cowboy and with the cowboys sta-and'—and I, being an accommodating cuss generally, furnished the jobs. I figured there's a lot you fellows don't know yet. And while you're learning things you should, she can study your types. She——"

"Study our *what?*"

"Study your types. She's going to write stories about cowboys, and she's looking for good types to study."

"Sa-ay!" Tony's irrepressible drawl flowed musically into the silence. "Lend me your type, will yuh, Bob? I ain't got none."

"I will not! Is she purty; what's she look like, Bud?"

"She sure is, Bob. Big, devilish gray eyes that can drown a man's troubles so deep he'll swear he never had any. And her mouth—well, if her mouth's never been kissed it ought to be!"

"It will be," murmured Tony, and made a motion of rising to his feet. Big Bob Leverett yanked him down.

"Bud's givin' *me* the dope. You gwan to bed, Tony. You ain't goin' to be needed, so you needn't set up."

"Lawsy, boss!" exclaimed a big young man with unbelievably small feet thrust straight out before him in the moonlight. "I'll sure never be tardy to her school!"

"You—you fellers can go to school, but I won't!" A young, rebellious voice came from within the door.

"Skookum!" Bud leaned and peered into the darkness. "Come out here, pardner. Why aren't you in bed?"

"How'd the kid git in?" Gelle swung his lean body sidewise, reached out an arm and plucked a small boy expertly by his middle. "Here he is, Bud. Clumb through the window, I reckon."

Skookum wriggled free and sat down in the dirt, crossing his legs and folding his stubby arms in imitation of Bud's favorite pose when at ease among his fellows. He glanced up and down the row of cow-punchers leaned against the wall, the moonlight gilding his hair and making his eyes look like deep, dark pools.

"I don't like her," he stated flatly. "She turned up her nose at—at Maw, and she asked her brother if he s'posed that hid-hid-e-ous creature was—was any relation to Bud. She said she couldn't eat her cookin'. She said it was 'pulsive. And it was chicken dumplums and—and pie!"

Dead silence for a space, then Gelle spoke half apologetically, half resentfully.

"We get you, Skookum. But Maw—Maw had ought to be took kinda gradual, just right at first. Maw's a kinda hard looker till you git kinda used to her."

"Maw's the purtiest woman in—in Montana!" Skookum declared hotly. "She—she's cute and sweet. When I get big I—I'm a-goin' to marry Maw. I asked her. And she said she would. You—you better shut up about Maw. She's purtier than that darned old girl! Ain't she, Bud?"

"You know it." Bud's voice had a queer note in it. "You stand up for Maw, Skookum. I'm right with you. But I don't believe Maw would want you to pass up a chance to learn. She sure was pleased when she heard you could go to school right here at home. It's that, or go to a boarding school away off somewhere, and be hazed around with a bunch of other boys, just like a herd of calves in weaning time. I don't believe Maw could stand it to have you away from her like that, Skookum. It

strikes me your duty to her would hold you here, and make you learn just as fast as you can from Miss Brunelle."

"She's a mean ole——"

"Now listen, old man. Let's be fair. She's an orphan—her mother just died, and of course that has upset her a lot. And then she's among strangers, and she was all tired out. And Miss Brunelle will gentle down and get used to her. It's like a horse getting used to a yellow slicker," he added gravely. "He'll always stampede at first, and pitch and strike and raise Cain—but there always comes a time when that same old yellow slicker feels mighty good spread over his back when he's humped up in a cold rain. We won't say a word, pardner. We'll just go along and look wise and say nothing, and watch how Miss Brunelle learns to love Maw same as we do, before she's through with the Meddalark."

Skookum nodded acquiescence, heaving a great sigh af relief.

"I was goin' to tell Maw what that—that girl said. But I'm glad I never."

"Real fellows don't tell what's going to hurt some one's feelings. You remember that, pardner. If you'd told, probably Maw would have cried."

In the moonlight they could see how the boy's big eyes brimmed suddenly.

"Maw does—every time I change my shirt. It's where grandpa quirted me and—and the marks is there."

"Grandpa—hunh! I'll grandpa that old devil if I ever run acrost him," growled Frank Gelle.

"There's Maw calling you to go to bed, Skookum," Bud reminded him unnecessarily, since Maw's voice was full sized and not to be ignored.

Skookum sighed and disentangled his legs, prolonging the start in hope that Bud was coming, too.

"You leave grandpa alone. I'm waitin' till—till I get big as Bud, an' then I'm goin' to—to fix grandpa. He—he's my meat." Skookum's voice did not sound so childish, somehow; as if the man within spoke a prophecy merely approved by the child.

"You'll need to do a lot of sleeping, if you want to grow my size," Bud told him. "Come on, pardner. I feel like rolling in, myself. Let's go pound our ears, as Shakespeare says."

But when Skookum had been safely delivered to Maw, Bud did not at once carry out his implied intention of going to bed. Instead he strolled back to the Council Rock, as being a quiet spot in a barren place and almost free of the humming hordes of mosquitoes that infested the grassier places of the basin. Thinking was not a popular sport with young Bud Larkin, as a rule, but there were times when he wanted to get off alone and mill over late impressions and events, and this seemed to be one of the times. He had been too much diverted by Marge's presence hitherto, and events had moved too swiftly.

For one thing, he felt more responsibility in the matter of the bank robbery than he had owned to Lark. There was no getting away from it—he might have prevented the double crime. When he remembered how that one glass of beer had cost a man's life by holding him laggard from an errand to the bank, Bud felt as if he never wanted another drink in his life. He rolled and smoked a cigarette while he recalled each incident of yesterday afternoon.

Palmer's peculiar look when Bud had first tried to open the saloon door, for instance. Did that mean anything more than a malicious satisfaction in knowing that the door was locked? Palmer had just come from the bank, according to his own voluntary statement at the inquest, followed by the showing of his pass book with the deposit entry made in Charlie's meticulous figures, the date unmistakably in Charlie's writing. Palmer, of course, couldn't have robbed the bank—Bud felt sure that Charlie had not been dead so long as that would mean. The locking of the saloon, with every idle man in town uproariously celebrating inside, was not without precedent; Steve Godfrey frequently "bought" whatever saloon he chose for his big act, when he had sold some stock and so felt rich for a day or so. Buying a place in which to entertain the town loafers was merely a figurative purchase, meaning that all drinks were free for an hour or two, and that Steve would pay double price and go home with a head the size of a barrel—according to his opinion—and would forswear strong drink for a month or two. No, Bud decided, the locking of the Elkhorn door had been merely a coincidence that facilitated the murder and robbery.

But there was the mysterious incident of the four shod horses which had no riders,

scurrying out across the river to mingle unrecognizably with the herd on the high plateau—mostly saddle horses and half-broken bronchos turned loose after the spring round-up to fatten on the sweet bunch grass of the higher ground until September brought shipping time and the next big round-up.

The Meadowlark had horses grazing across the river, and so had several other stockmen. Bud had not ridden close enough to make sure of the herd which the four had joined, but he felt certain that they were not Meadowlark horses. As a rule a man knows his own saddle bunch as far off as he can distinguish sizes and colors.

Why had four riderless horses left the fringe of town at that particular time and galloped out across the range to the west? To hide for a time at least the route taken by the robbers, Bud was sure, and admitted that it was theoretically a clever ruse, spoiled only by the quick action he himself had taken.

There was Bat Johnson, a Palmer man and the only person Bud had seen in the vicinity of the bank at that particular time. But Bat had made no attempt to escape, and he had told Bud about the horses going down to the ford ahead of him. Bat had not taken the trail through the dry wash back of town where the four horses must have been concealed. His pack horse was barefooted, he explained at the inquest—which Bud knew was the truth—and the wash was all gravel and loose rocks. Bat had gone a bit farther, keeping to the sand grass along the river bank, and the robbers presumably had gone down the wash and kept out of sight. According to his statement to Bud and at the inquest, Bat had a glimpse of four horses moving out of sight among the willows near the ford, and had taken it for granted that riders bestrode them. But his pack horse, a little pinto, was hard to lead at the beginning of a trip, and Bat had been busy arguing the matter—his part of the argument being the end of the lead rope, Bud guessed shrewdly.

"I guess that lets him out," Bud muttered finally. "And I can't sleuth it out to-night. But there's another day coming—and Marge will have to be blindfolded, I expect, and led into what we're going to name a schoolroom. H'm-m-m. Asked me where the town is, as we started down through the pass. Wonder what time Lark wants to start in the morning? Have to explain to Lightfoot what a horse is, and show him a saddle. H'm-m-m. I like that geezer, somehow. He's the goods, even if he is green. Wel-l—I guess I'll go to bed."

This merely to show you that young Bud Larkin could smile into a pretty girl's eyes and, thus far in his life at least, go right along about his business afterward, untroubled by dreams and fancies.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOAT.

LARK rode moodily up to the rim of the basin where he had been born and had passed the subsequent thirty-five years that had made him lord of that domain and the brand that went with it, called the Meadowlark. Bud's Walking Sorrel would have hurried on down the hill through the narrow pass in the sandstone ledge that had been widened and smoothed for the road, but Lark reined him out upon the level patch where the cliff broke down sharply for a windowlike opening that gave a photographic view of the valley below and the piled hills behind it, with Little Smoky River boiling past over boulders and beds of quicksand that made it a barrier between the basin and the land beyond. Lark loved the place, and he had been away for four days. His brow cleared a bit as he sat there on the horse and gazed down upon meadow, field, small orchard and the chain of corrals—with the house and two or three cabins sitting back against the bold cliffs that shut in the upper end of the river valley like a wall. Ages ago the river had gouged and dug at the hills, and had made a fair retreat just here along its bank; had shrunk as the climate dried and left the valley fertile, with seeds of trees and grasses and wild flowers imbedded in the soil. Birds had come there to nest, and in the spring the air was vibrant with the sweet, rippling notes of meadow lark and robin and the little wild canaries.

Old Bill Larkin had ridden into the valley by chance and had liked it well enough to take possession of the place and build himself a home there. Meadowlark Basin he called it, having come in the spring. And having a whimsical sentiment of his own he fashioned for himself the crude outline of a bird, called it the Meadowlark brand

and stamped it deep in the hides of every hoof of stock he brought into the country later. Some called him a rustler—said his cattle and horses were mostly "wet" stock—and more declared that he was a killer. Perhaps they were right. At any rate, old Bill managed to hold his own among wild times in a wild country, and to leave his son a few hardy traditions and a prosperous ranch.

Now, Bill Larkin, Jr.—called Lark in whimsical affection—stared glumly down into the basin and wished his old dad was alive and able to take a hand in what was coming. But old Bill lay deep in the grove of cottonwoods between the river and the house, and Lark glanced that way as he swung back into the road. The Walking Sorrel tilted his ears forward and picked up his feet with the springy, eager gait of one glad to be home after an absence. At the foot of the hill he broke into a gallop that Lark did not check until they reached the hard-packed space between two corrals with sheds and stables at the end next the gate that led into the acre of yard that separated houses and barns.

Lark slipped out of the saddle and was untying the valise behind the cantle when Bud strolled down to greet him. Lark glanced over his shoulder and nodded as he lifted the grip to the ground. Bud stooped, picked it up and set it down again with a grin.

"Got it," he observed with mild satisfaction. "Wasn't held up, then. I thought afterward that maybe I ought to have gone along with you, Lark."

Lark jerked off the saddle and led the sorrel to a corral and turned him in without speaking. Bud had taken up the grip again and the two started for the house, walking side by side up the faint trail that broadened the pathway.

"Are the boys all here?" Lark spoke abruptly.

"Sure. They're eating supper. Butch Cassidy rode over from the Frying Pan yesterday to see why we hadn't come after the horses. He's waiting to ride back with us." Bud changed hands on the grip, for ten pounds added to the ordinary weight of a leather valise packed with various things is distinctly noticeable. "Have a good trip?"

"Yeah—but there's liable to be better comin'. Take that grip on into my room, kid, and then come on over to the bunk house. I got a war talk to make to the boys."

"*Oh*-oh!" Bud exclaimed under his breath, and made off in a hurry. Lark on the warpath meant action a-plenty, and action meant joy in the heart of young Bud Larkin. He hustled, passing Marge without a word of teasing—which gave that young woman the idea that she had somehow offended her one perfect type of cowboy.

"Now's a good time to break the glad news to you pelicans," Lark began grimly when the preliminary greetings were over and Bud had arrived and stationed himself on the vacant end of the long bench by the table where the boys were eating supper. "Butch, it won't hurt nothin' for you to set in on this, yourself. Suspicions is like measles; they spread in the air.

"To cut it short, they're tryin' their helldarnedest up Smoky Ford way to pin that bank robbery and the killin' of Charlie Mulholland onto the Meddalark. Soon as they find out where Bud come from that day, they're liable to throw in the Fryin' Pan for luck. And my Jonah, I lost over fifteen thousand dollars in cold cash to them thieves!"

"Pin it on us!" Young Bud voiced the incredulity of the group. "How do they make that out, Lark? I was in the Elkhorn——"

"Yeah—and Delkin told me they're sayin' that you was in there spottin' for the bunch that pulled off the holdup, son. You left there and went to the bank—made sure it was all over and done without a hitch—and then you put out across the hills just for a blind. Delkin don't believe nothing like that, of course; but that's what's bein' circulated around town. He just gave me the tip in a friendly way, so we'd know how to shape our plans."

"Pull in the corners, hunh?" Frank Gelle snorted.

"Pull in nothin'!" Lark's kindly hazel eyes hardened. "I'll tell you now, boys, I went on to Glasgow and borried some money to buy them Fryin' Pan horses and run the outfit on till the bank kinda pulls itself together again. While the money lasts, I'm goin' to pay you rannies in *gold*, and if you're scared to show it you can go hide it under your bunks. Delkin said he'd try and find out who's doin' all the gabbin' about us. He says it's jest a lot of dirty

talk started by somebody that's got a grudge agin' the Meddalark. And my Jonah, I can think of plenty that has! You dang pelicans go larrywhoopin' around lickin' this one and that one till they're *all* down on us, chances are."

"Couldn't be somebody *you've* run a sandy on, of course," Frank Gelle hinted mildly, and lowered the eyelid farthest from Lark.

"Palmer, you mean?" Contrary to their expectation Lark failed to rise to the bait. "Could be. Still—I was waitin' to git my ticket, and my grip was setting on a bench behind me in the waitin' room, and two different jaspers moseyed along too dang careless to be honest-minded about it, and hefted my valise. Didn't know I seen 'em, but I shore caught 'em out the tail of my eye. *And that was goin' out!* At the time I thought they was lookin' for easy stealin', or mebbe was curious to know if I had a gun or a bottle cached inside. Now I know they was plain suspicious. Detectives, mebbe. She was ten pounds heavier when I come back, but I kept 'er close by me. I told Delkin about it after he'd spilled his news, and he swore the bank never sicked no detectives onto us, nor anybody else in particular. Bank's got its hands in the air. They don't dare give a guess who done it, looks like to me."

"The thing to do," Butch Cassidy advised, "is lay low till they tip their hands. They'll do it—never knowed it to fail." He grinned and reached for the sirup can. "Way Bud was tellin' me, I'd say that holdup job was a strictly home product. What do you think, Lark?"

"My Jonah!" Lark gave an exasperated snort. "I ain't any artist in that line, Butch. Looks to me like a daylight robbery with murder throwed in is something that takes nerve. Them town roosters ain't qualified, if you want my opinion."

Butch chewed and swallowed a huge bite of hot biscuit all dripping with sirup, his eyes staring vacantly before him as if he visioned things afar. Lark was calling for a clean plate and a cup of coffee, his long ride having given him a clamorous hunger that the supper table only aggravated.

"Bud was tellin' me about a few head of loose horses bein' hazed out of town and across the river right after the job at the bank," Butch came out of his trance and spoke again to Lark. "Looks to me like that was meant for a blind. Otherwise the feller that pushed 'em across the river wouldn't make no bones of tellin' all about it. No way of finding out what brands they carried—there's several brands runnin' on them benches. And here's a point you don't want to overlook, none of you: Smoky Ford sets wrong for a bank robbery to be pulled off in the reg'lar way. Bank's down at the wrong end of the street, and them cut banks and washes where the bench breaks down to the river bottom ain't rideable out this way. A bunch would have to take back through town and either cross the river or ride up the road to the bench. Two bad trails, if the town's awake. Them loose horses shod all around and takin' out across the river to the hills—that looks too much like a blind trail. After a play like that, what I'd guess they done was drop down river in a boat." Butch Cassidy, owning a vague, rumored reputation as something of an outlaw himself, was listened to with considerable respect when he spoke of get-aways.

"River's too dang treacherous, down below the ford," Lark objected with his mouth full. "It could be done, but nobody'd ever think of doing it. Moreover, what with rapids and bars and quicksands, there ain't a boat on the river anywhere; not that I know of."

"My—my grandpa was make—makin' a boat," the eager voice of Skookum broke in upon them abruptly. "In a shed where—where calves was weaned."

"Palmer, hunh?" Butch turned and stared reflectively at the boy, whom no one had noticed in the bunk house. A silence followed; a somewhat startled pause, as if each mind took hold of the statement and turned it about and eyed it with surprised attention. Only Butch's light-blue eyes held a gleam all their own.

"When was this, Skookum?"

"That was—'fore I come here with—with Lark. And—and——"

"Here! Quit that stutterin', kid, and take your time." Lark spoke sharply, his eyes darting inquiring glances at Bud and the others. "Now. Tell it slow, Skookum, and be dang sure you tell it straight. You say your grandpa was makin' a boat. Did he say what for?"

Skookum shook his head, his eyes big and round with the thrill of giving information to all these gods and heroes whose

deeds and lightest words were things to dwell upon.

"When they caught me—peekin' in—through a crack, that mean ole Bat Johnson—s-shook me and swore. And—he took me where grandpa was. And grandpa——" Skookum shut his eyes tight and opened them all shiny with tears. "I—I can't tell it, if you please. It's when—when he made them—cuts on——"

"You can skip that," Lark gritted while the others shuffled their feet uncomfortably, their faces going glum with anger against Palmer for his brutal beating of the boy. "Yore gran'paw's got more marks than what you've got, son."

"He oughta be strung up by the heels over a slow fire," Tony Scarpa muttered viciously.

"Go on, Skookum. They didn't want you to know they was makin' a boat. Is that it? Well, then, did you hear anything about what they meant to do with it?"

"No—only Bat said a plug in each end ought to—to sink 'er—quick enough. Then he seen me peekin' in."

"There's the clew to the whole thing!" Bud leaned forward, the light of revelation in his eyes. "It's the last thing any one would think of, and about the easiest thing to do. Bat Johnson could have hazed those horses across the ford, hoping no one would see him. He may have done all the dirty work in the bank, too. He could have slipped out the side door, packed the stuff on his horse to the river, tossed it off the bank to some one waiting under the willows in a boat, and then ridden on to where those loose horses had been tied, and turned them loose and thrown them across the river. Simple—so damned simple it was practically safe.

"And a boat could slip down the river from Palmer's place, keeping close under the bank all the way. Who would there be to see it? The farther bank is too rough a ride, and too barren for anything but snakes, and the current swings over that way and cuts close to shore. This side it's boggy wherever you can get to the bank, and the willows are thick as hair on a dog, most places. Until you get down to the ford the river is plum' useless and nobody ever monkeys with it. Why, at three o'clock even the kids were all in school down at the other end of town, and every foot-loose man was ganged inside the Elkhorn—*locked* in, by thunder! And Lightfoot and I played right into their hands, holding the crowd bunched together there with his dancing."

"Palmer was in town, didn't you say?" Butch Cassidy's eyes had squinted half shut as his mind focused upon the robbery and shuttled back and forth across the scene.

"Darned right he was in town. He came from the bank, by his own testimony. It was Palmer who locked the door, and it was Palmer who seemed to hate the idea of having it opened when I started to leave. Steve Godfrey did the bellowing, but Palmer's face gave him away. He wanted that door to stay locked. And I believe it was he who took out the key; on the sly, because I saw him shoot the bolt across—which should have been enough, you'd think, without using the key. He'd deposited five thousand dollars in the bank, and he's been making quite a holler, I guess; did at the inquest, anyway. But maybe he just put that money in for that very reason, to give himself something to holler about. What do you think, Lark?"

"I'd bet on it," said Lark, and with a three-tined fork turned over several pieces of beef fried so thoroughly that the meat was tender simply because it was too young to be tough under any mistreatment. He selected a particularly crisp piece, sawed off a corner with his knife and poised the morsel on the end of his fork.

"Ought to be some way to get the goods on that outfit. I'll bet it was that old devil started the talk around about the Meddalark. I've a dang good notion——"

"Better let it ride for a while," Butch counseled soberly. "If it's them, they're bound to tip their hands. Wonder what they done with the loot. Any of that outfit pull out, that you know of?"

"Palmer don't keep more'n three or four—— Say, how many men does yore gran'paw have workin' for him stiddy, Skookum?"

"All the time he's got Bat Johnson and—and Ed White and—and 'Mex,' and Blinker. But—but Blinker's crazy and—and does the chores. He—he won't talk—to *anybody*. 'Cept he whispers all the time and—and shakes his head. He—he's afraid somebody is goin' to—to kill him. He won't go anywhere. And then the cook;"

Skookum added slightingly. "He's a darky."

"They're all to home," Frank Gelle ended the discussion. "I and Rosy met all three riders just yeste'day; they was drivin' a big bunch of horses out toward the reservation."

"They'd be crazy to pull out," Butch averred. "Got the stuff hid somewhere around the place, most likely. That is," he amended cautiously, "if they done the job. Thinkin' ain't proof, you want to remember."

"Dang right," Lark agreed sensibly. "We're just talkin' among ourselves, now, you want to recollect. That Maw, callin' supper, Bud? You tell her I've et. By Jonah, I can't get no comfort out of a meal with them two pilgrims settin' there watchin' and criticisin' m' manners. I'll eat Jerry's cookin' for a spell. Ain't going to put me in no book."

"I'm goin' to—to eat here," Skookum announced precipitately. "I can't get any comfort, either. That ole teacher's makin' me learn table et-etiquette! She makes me hold my fork like—like *this* all the time, and—and I can't get no comfort out of a meal!"

"Say," drawled Tony Scarpa, "send her over to learn us some of that etiquette, and you two gwan an' eat where you belong. Me, I never did know how to hold a fork in m' life. And you tell 'em, Skookum, that we all want to git the hang of makin' peas ride our knives without rollin' off. You ask her if it's proper to mash 'em like Jelly does, or do they ride straight up. Gwan—you tell her we need to learn some manners over here. Tell her Rosy's got a bad habit of blowin' his soup 'stead of whistlin' it. Gwan, kid!"

"Yeah. I want to find out whether it's proper to say 'Pass me those m'lasses,' or 'Gimme them m'lasses.'" Big Bob Leverett heaved a prodigious sigh. "I'm liable to go to a party some time an' I oughta know. Gwan, kid, and ask 'er."

"Tell 'er I got another type she can study," Jack Rosen put in. "You tell 'er it's a sure-enough dinger, and shall I let it keep on swearin' or should I learn it purty language. Tell 'er this type's that sow-ayve kind you got t' have in stories. Gwan, kid."

"Soo-*ahve,* you damned, ignorant knothead! That's what Bud calls it, and Bud's had about five thousand dollars' worth of schoolin'."

"And look what it done to him!" yelped Mark Hanley—he of the little feet and the shrill voice.

"Bud can tell her," Skookum stated calmly, and straddled the long bench to sit beside Lark. "I'm goin' to eat with—with Lark."

"And give Maw the cold shoulder?" Bud looked artfully amazed at the treachery. "She'll think you don't like her cooking any more. I'd hate to hurt her feelings like that, but of course you can suit yourself about it, old-timer."

"Aw, shucks!" Skookum turned and straddled back across the bench. "Maw's the best cook in this—this whole world. I don't care what that darned ole teacher says."

"You go awn and eat, and then come back and I'll take you for a little ride and show you how I can call—you know, kid, what we was talkin' about. I'll learn you the trick—which is more'n I'll do for most folks," Butch Cassidy followed him out to say confidentially. "I'm leavin' with the boys in the mornin', so I'll have to learn you this evenin'—off somewhere by our lonelies. You slip down to the c'rell and I'll be waitin' for you."

"What's it all about, Butch?" Bud stopped and regarded the Frying Pan man with a shadow of suspicion in his eyes.

Butch laughed and lowered an eyelid at Skookum, who was looking slightly bewildered and very important. Not for a pony would he have confessed that he did not remember any flattering secret shared with this fascinating rider from the Frying Pan.

"Just a trick I've promised to learn the kid, so he can pull it on the boys some time. Hurry back, kid, and don't tell nobody. But, he won't give us away."

Bud frowned, but presently he forgot the incident. Marge was on the porch waiting, which was reason enough for any man.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE FRYING PAN.

IN that rare half hour just at sunrise in midsummer, when the breeze blowing across a meadow seems saturated with sweetness and the vivifying essence of all life, as if here for a moment one may inhale the very breath which God breathed

into His image of clay and awakened it to consciousness, seven riders mounted at the Meadowlark corrals and went galloping down the meadow trail, bound for the Frying Pan Ranch, a long ride of forty miles through rough country. Quivering drops of dew, scattered by the eager hoofs, blinked in the first mellow sun rays and vanished from sight. Birds chirped and sang and flew here and there seeking breakfast for their hungry fledglings that would soon learn for themselves the art of surprising the early worm. Every man's face was eager and alert, glad for no tangible reason save that it was good to be alive and on a horse and riding out in the cool of the morning once more after the leisurely two weeks just gone.

Lark was not among them, having made the excuse that he was all in from his trip to Glasgow; merely an excuse, for Lark could stay in the saddle as long as any of them when the need arose. In reality he was minded to leave this horse-buying deal to Bud. He wanted to accustom the young man to bearing responsibility, and he was curious to see the bargain Bud would make with the Frying Pan. He was inordinately proud of his handsome young nephew who had come to him an orphan not much older than Skookum. He had "raised" the boy after certain ideas of his own which, if you asked him, went something like this:

"Humans are like horses. When I get hold of a good colt I turn him out in the meadow with plenty of feed and water and let him grow the way nature intended. Schoolin's all right enough, if a kid grows up thinkin' he wants it. Let 'im alone. He'll ask for what's good for him. That's what he should have." Since Bud had spent six years away from the Meadowlark, going to school, he must have shown some desire for learning. Now that he had returned, of his own accord, and was riding the range with the best of them, Lark had artfully relaxed and let Bud forge ahead.

The Meadowlark needed to build up its horse herd, and Bud had suggested that they see what the Frying Pan had to sell. Lark had told him to go ahead. He did not know what Bud thought about the Frying Pan—but Lark himself would have been willing to bet that they were working off a bunch of "wet" stock on Bud; meaning, in range parlance, horses that had been driven hurriedly up from Wyoming or Colorado or some other remote range, by night and by devious trails. Lark didn't know, but he suspected. Wet stock is usually good stock —and cheap, for cash. Let Bud go ahead and learn these things. If this bunch was stolen from some range to the south, and if the owners found them and claimed them, well—that would be a dandy situation for the kid to figure out for himself. Lark knew what he would do in that event; he was mightily interested in watching young Bud's mental processes. So he did not tell Bud anything of his own belief. If the kid wanted advice he'd ask for it. Like the bank robbery which Lark was inclined to let Bud study out if he could, this matter of buying horses from the Frying Pan was range training given indirectly and according to Lark's pet theory.

So Bud rode at the head of the little cavalcade, with fifteen hundred dollars in gold wrapped in his slicker and tied behind the cantle, and the cameo brooch pinning back his hat brim and a blue-satin ribbon of Marge's tied in a careful bow—braided into the short hairs of his horse's mane, to be exact, so that the bow rested perkily between the twitching, sentient ears. And Bud, the young devil, was not thinking of girls at all. He was filling his lungs again and again with that vivified air, and he was dreaming of those two shiny black horses he meant to own, and trying to find names good enough for them, leaning—as is the way of youth just out of school—to the classics, yet hesitating to betray himself to Marge who still believed him barely able to read and write. Stirrup clashing with his when the trail narrowed, Frank Gelle rode beside him and sent a glance over his shoulder to see how close were the next riders when they slowed for the climb up through the pass.

"What was Butch quizzing Skookum about last night, Bud?" Gelle broke ruthlessly into Bud's untroubled meditations.

"Butch? From what little I heard, it was some bird call he had promised to teach the kid." Bud, brought back to the present, bethought him that now was a good time to roll a smoke. He slipped the reins daintily between his third and little fingers and reached for tobacco sack and papers.

"Didn't sound like no bird call to me. He was pumpin' the kid about somethin'. I couldn't ketch none of the words, but I could tell by the tonation of his voice that

he was askin' one question right after another, fast as the kid could git the answers out. Do you reckon, Bud, he was snoopin' around the kid, tryin' to find out things about our pilgress?"

"Marge? No reason why he should pump the kid about her, is there? That girl's an open book—printed in large type. She and Butch were having a great old talkfest down by the corral yesterday, when he was showing her stunts with a rope. You saw them, Jelly. I heard her giving him her life history—you know how she is; never had a secret in her life and wouldn't know what to do with one if she had. Must have been something else Butch was asking about."

"She's a purty girl and a good girl with no mother to guide her," Gelle eulogized solemnly. "No bonehead rustler like Butch Cassidy can come right into the Meddalark and git gay with her. If I was dead certain——"

"It wasn't Marge—and anyway, she can hold her own with any of them. Butch may have been trying to find out something more about Palmer's outfit and that boat business. He seemed pretty much interested last night, I thought."

"I wouldn't put that bank job past the Frying Pan boys, do you know it? Only, I guess they couldn't figure the get-away—from what Butch let out I took it that they'd done some studyin' on the subject. Wouldn't you think so, Bud?"

"He did seem to have the town figured down pretty fine," Bud admitted. "Soon as we get back with these horses, Jelly, we're going to do a little scouting around. Or I shall. That yarn about how I was spotting for the gang that killed Charlie and robbed the bank—that's going to be pinned on the guilty parties before I'm through. And Jelly, I may need you before it's over."

"Well, now, you'd have a hell of a time keepin' me out of the muss." Gelle laughed to himself. "Here comes Butch, so I'll drop back with the roughnecks. I wouldn't open up to Butch if I was you, Bud. He's a nice feller and all that, but I wouldn't trust him far as I could throw a bull by the tail. Never did know a man with that kind of eyes in his head that wasn't slicker than wet doby."

Bud was grinning at that when Butch rode up on his high-stepping brown horse, but he did not pass along the joke. Gelle tightened reins and waited for Tony, who had been Butch's riding partner up the pass, and the day's journey began when they swung to the right and went loping along the trail that led to the southwest toward the bad lands that bordered the Missouri.

The Frying Pan Ranch, so called because of the brand most used by the owners who had many brands recorded in their names and found occasion to use them all, lay a long thirty-five miles away from the Meadowlark. A town might have stood on the level plateau against the hills, but as it was the Frying Pan had a clean sweep of pasture land with a long lane running straight back to where the house and corrals stood against the butte. Had the owners planned the place with an eye to strategic possibilities they could not have improved the smallest detail. First the house, a big two-story log building set well out in the open with a well and hand pump in one corner of the woodshed built against the kitchen. Beyond the house stood the barn, another log building with ample room for hay sufficient to winter eight or ten horses. Behind the stable were built the corrals, three of them in a string with a branding chute between the two smaller ones and with a pair of funnellike wings that never failed to ease the wildest broomtails into the inclosure left open to receive them. A somewhat elaborate arrangement, on the whole; but the Frying Pan was primarily a horse outfit and they were making money faster than the cattlemen, and their ranch equipment was apparently justified by the volume of business—buying and selling horses by the hundreds as they did.

Range gossip is quite as malicious as a small-town ladies' club. Range gossipers grinned at the Frying Pan brand, a blotched circle with the handle pointing downward; very convenient, they hinted, to burn the frying pan over any small brand and blot the original mark completely; handier still to have the choice of left hip or left shoulder. One might guess that some small brand was buried beneath that burned circle, but who could swear to the fact?

Whether Bud knew the gossip or not, he did know good horses when he saw them and it was with a glow of pride that he climbed the fence of the largest corral and roosted on the top rail with the other Meadowlark riders, all staring down at the circling, kicking, squealing, nipping herd

which the Frying Pan boys had just whooped down the wings and inside. A pretty sight they were, and more eyes than Bud's were shining with the horseman's inherent love of a fine animal.

"I trimmed the bunch down to about three hundred while we had them up waiting for you to come over after them," Kid Kern called out, climbing up to straddle the rail beside Bud. "I knew pretty well what you didn't want, so I'll let you pick your horses from this bunch. Some good stuff there, hunh?"

"I've seen worse skates than these," Bud grinned. "Got any fillies you want to throw in as a kind of honorarium to me? I got Lark to dig up the shining yellow gold for you, Kid. That ought to open the floodgates of gratitude."

"Say, Bud, if you bring any honorariums onto the ranch, by golly, you'll have to break 'em yourself!" Tony yelled carpingly, and winked at Rosen. "They're tricky as hell. Last time I rode one of them birds——"

"Oh, cut it out! You're a bonehead, all right, but you aren't that ignorant," Bud squelched him impatiently.

"If you look at it that way," Kern told him carelessly, "I don't know but what I might add half a dozen head—for you, yourself. Gold is going to be mighty useful to me, boy. I want to get me a *real* horse or two, and it's cash money that talks the fastest, these days. I sure appreciate the way you've treated me in this deal."

"You talk like good old greenbacks ain't money, no more," Bob Leverett chided. "Me, I'd manage to git along somehow if I had plenty of paper money."

"I'm afraid of fire," Kid declared firmly, and Butch Cassidy sent him a queer smile as he turned away from the group.

"Afraid of the numbers," Tony whispered to Gelle with his head tilted so that his broad hat concealed his face from the others. Frank nodded and nudged him to caution.

"There's a black gelding I'm goin' to build a loop for," he volunteered, and pointed to where a magnificent neck and head showed over the shoulder of a sorrel, the big, brown eyes regarding the row of strange railbirds curiously.

"There's his twin, by golly, and he's my top horse," Tony cried eagerly.

"And they're both mine," Bud announced calmly. "Lark gave them to me for making the deal. You'll need darned long ropes, you fellows, if you go after those two."

"My gosh, he collects both ways from the middle!" wailed Tony. "Pries six fillies away from Kid for bringin' gold money, and then he claims the best two bronks in the layout for makin' the deal! Bud Larkin ain't a darn bit bashful, don't you know it?"

"Bud knows two good horses," Kid grinned. "Them two blacks came"—he stopped abruptly, glanced toward Butch and went on—"darn near queering the sale. I did think I'd reserve them two but I seen Bud had his eye on them in particular, so I let 'em go with the rest. You'll have two dandy mounts, Bud, if you break 'em right."

"I don't intend to break them." Bud's eyes softened wonderfully as they rested on the nearest black horse. "All they need is to be taught. I'll have them both following me like pet dogs inside a month."

Butch lounged over and leaned against the fence where Bud was perched. He stared into the restless herd that crowded the far side of the corral away from the strange human things they feared were enemies, and his lip lifted a bit at one corner.

"One of 'em's a man-killer at heart; mebbe both," he stated. "You'll have one hell of a time makin' pet dogs out of them, Bud. I'd advise you, if you go learnin' 'em to eat sugar out of your hand, to have your six-gun cocked in the other. They'll take hand an' all if you give anything like an even break. I'm tellin' you straight."

Bud's cheeks darkened with the hot blood of anger. He did not like Butch's tone, and moreover he had caught that scornful lift of lip.

"Thanks for the advice," he drawled "When I need more, I'll send word over."

The Meadowlark boys stopped breathing for a moment and sent swift, sidelong glances at one another, but nothing came of the sudden tensing of the atmosphere. Supper was called in a long, loud bellow from the kitchen door, and Kid Kern slid to the ground and led the way laughing as if nothing had been said beyond the usual cowboy banter. Butch was counted a bad actor when he was roused or thought he had a grievance, and as for Bud, he was too lately home from school to be anything but the unknown quantity. Wise men wait

until such have proved their mettle, and Bud came of fighting stock—an added incentive to caution, in Kid's mind. He walked close to Butch and spoke one muttered sentence, and the dove of peace folded its frightened wings and tarried with them for a time.

"We'll vent and brand out early in the morning, Kid," Bud told him unemotionally over his second cup of coffee. "I want to make it back home to-morrow. I'll go down again right after supper and look the bunch over and get an idea of the ones I'll take, if you don't mind. And since they're all bronks and likely to be pretty wild, I'd like to borrow mounts from you to do our roping out. We'll all want fresh horses when we start riding home with that wild bunch."

A Frying Pan rider at the end of the table tittered and sent a leering glance at his neighbors.

"Ast Butch how they drive, why don't yuh? He'd oughta know, he——" There he stuck, his eyes held by the cold stare of Kid Kern. "He rode his horse to a whisper tryin' to c'rell 'em alone," he finished lamely, and swallowed his supper and left as soon as possible.

"We did git quite a josh on Butch, a while back," Kern made careless comment. "But once you git them horses strung out on the trail you won't have no trouble, I reckon."

"Oh, we don't mind trouble." Bud's eyes went across to Kid and Butch. "I hate to ride a tired horse, is all. Roping out bronks takes the prance out of a horse about as quickly as anything I know, so we'll borrow from you and save our mounts."

Kid assured him that it was all right and customary, and soon after that Bud left the table and strolled back to the corral, his riders trailing after him and the Frying Pan boys straggling into a group of their own. Bud was thoughtful. As he climbed the fence for another leisurely survey of the horses penned within he looked at Frank Gelle with a sudden sardonic twist to his mouth.

"Murder and robbery doesn't seem to interest the Frying Pan much—in public," he remarked. "These boys are as gossipy about that Smoky Ford crime as a dozen clams. But I'll bet you, Jelly, they know more of the ins and outs than we do." Then his attention wandered to his latest loves, the two black bronks; standing close together, now, touching noses and nipping with little, playful lip bites that betrayed their close friendship.

"I don't like the feel of this place, Jelly. I want to get out of here as early as we can in the morning, and I don't want to seem to be riding herd on the boys this evening. I wish you'd come with me while I turn over the money to Kid and get his bill of sale—and then I wish you'd slip the word to the boys that I'll be glad to have them turn in early and keep out of any games or drinking. They think I'm young and green. I suppose they also think I'm too thick skulled to pick up the hints that have dropped around here. But it's like this, Jelly: We need this bunch of horses, and I've *got* to have that pair of blacks. I want that bill of sale signed and witnessed to-night, and I want you and a few more to see me pay Kid the money. After that —well, if these horses are slightly damp, it's Kid's funeral, not ours. Any horses we lose he'll settle for with the Meadowlark—don't think he won't!

"And when we've got them turned into the basin pasture," he added after a reflective pause, "I'll have Lark pay off the boys and let them go and spend some good money at the Elkhorn. And you and I, Jelly, will take a little trip for ourselves—just us two."

"Betcher life!"

"So come on, now, while the boys are all in sight, and we'll dig up the gold and those black beauties will belong to me. You boys can each pick a couple for your own strings, in the morning. The paper will cover one hundred and six head; forty-six young mares and sixty geldings, two to four years old as I choose them. That's the bargain I made with Kid. I wanted you to know—that's why I came down to have another look at the bunch. Nothing like being young and innocent, is there, Jelly?"

"No, there ain't," Jelly agreed soberly. "I never did have much use for the Fryin' Pan, and that's the truth. Now Butch is with 'em they don't stack up near so good. I just wondered how trustful a boy you are, Bud: now I'm satisfied. Come on and git that gold money into Kid's hands before they steal it. That's how *I* feel about 'em!"

CHAPTER VII.

BUTCH ASKS QUESTIONS.

HAVE you ever watched a herd of horses come trotting down a hill at the end of a day's hard travel? There's a thrill in it such as comes when soldiers march by. First a drifting haze, which is the dust cloud kicked up by the traveling herd; then the faint muffled sound of feet, then the heads of the point riders seen dimly through the cloud, and after them the upflung heads of the leaders. As the freshly branded horses sighted the delectable green of the basin, smelled the river rushing out from the rugged hills, they came streaming down through the pass in complete forgetfulness of the weary miles behind them. At the foot of the hill riders spurred out from the veil of dust, swinging closed loops and shouting to hold the eager band close to the bluff and away from the alluring green of the meadows. Tired muscles tensed again. Heads went up, dusty nostrils belled and quivered with the mingled scents of the valley. The leg-weary colts, dusty, lagging behind and then making sudden, shrill uproar when they missed their mothers, were sought with frantic whinnyings by the mares. Once found, they were torn from eager, thirsty nuzzlings by the threatening rope ends of the riders and the hoarse, insistent "Hie-*yee! Hie!*" that all day long had dogged the laggards on the trail.

Even Maw left her endless pottering around the house and waddled down to the corral where Lark already was propping open the big gate, when Skookum came running with his body slanted perilously forward while he yelled that the horses were coming. Marge went back for her notebook and pencil, because you never know when cowboys are going to say something odd and picturesque or a killing may take place after a hot word or two—as she confided to her brother in passing. As a matter of fact, Marge was beginning to complain about the paucity of dramatic happenings at the ranch where she had confidently expected to find action galore. For however much the boys might boldly proclaim their open admiration for the girl, Marge saw them mostly at a distance and found them hopelessly shy of conversation when they were brought face to face with her. Young Bud talked with her gravely and misleadingly upon occasion, and him she called bashful and "slow" when in reality he was largely occupied with other things. This is why the coming of the new herd was an event that promised something in the way of Western color and drama.

With a last flurry of hard riding and hoarse shouts the leaders were swung away from the tempting meadows and inside the wing fence that slanted down from the corrals to the road, the precipitous bluff forming the other barrier. The herd galloped in mass formation to the very gate before they realized that here they faced again one of those hated periods of captivity. They swerved toward the bluff, hurtled back along it and met the implacable Meadowlark riders; milled briefly and thundered again down the funnellike throat of the wings toward the corral. With a last flick of heels, a last surge of upflung dust they dodged inside. The big gate slammed shut behind them and the chain was pulled around the great post that looked as though rats had gnawed it just there, the hook rattled into a heavy link and that particular job was finished and the horses held safe and milling inside just as they had circled round and round inside the Frying Pan corral the evening before and that morning. Six tired cowboys rode over to the open space beside the shed where saddles were kept, and with a backward swing of saddle-stiffened legs over the cantles they thankfully dismounted. A hot, windy ride—and the wind in their backs most of the way. Their throats were raw and parched from the dust and the shouting.

"I'm goin' to put sideboards on my chin, to-morrow, and plug up my ears. That way, I can hold more beer." This from Tony, who wished his world to know how dry he was.

"Yeah—if we get to go," Jack Rosen qualified pessimistically. "Lark may not let us off to-morrow."

"He'll let *me* off, if he has to fire me!" "Big Bob" threatened with a surface vehemence not meant to be taken seriously.

"I'll see that you boys get a couple of days off, all right." Bud had ridden up and swung from the saddle, his face a gritty, gray mask from riding point in the thick of the dust. "I'll fix it up with Lark this evening. It's a good time to find out just what this talk amounts to, that's going around about us. By the time you boys put two or three gold twenties into circulation, you

may hear something to our advantage. All I ask is that you boys keep your ears open and let me know what you pick up."

"Nice bunch of horses, Bud." Lark had walked over from the corral and stood among them. "You boys goin' to the Ford to-morrow? Better not say anything to Lightfoot about goin'. He ain't able to ride with you bunch of young hellions and he's just fool enough to think he ought to be game for anything that comes along. So don't go buildin' no hopes of takin' the boy along and dealin' him misery just because he's green. I'd hate to tell him he *can't* go—so if you'll leave without hollerin' it all over the place it'll suit me jest as well. I'll be over to the bunk house after a while; you can draw what money you want, then."

"Now ain't that hell?" Tony had let his horse into the lane to the pasture and was free to speak his mind. "What's the use of takin' a vacation if we're robbed of what little pleasure there is in it? I been lookin' forward a lot to the fun we'd have with Lightfoot, and here we got to let him go on livin'! Lark, you're a good boss in some ways, but you'd keep men workin' for you a heap longer if you was kind to 'em!"

Since no man ever left the Meadowlark of his own free will, even the weariest man laughed at that, Lark with the others; but his eyes held a shadow and he tilted his head toward the house when he caught Bud's eye, and the two walked away together.

"What do you think of my two blacks? Aren't they peaches?" For the first time Bud's tone betrayed the fact that the black bronchos were not absorbing him utterly but were being used to make conversation.

Lark grunted. They walked farther before he spoke.

"Horses are all right, I guess. Say, Bud, did you meet a man ridin' a chunky little bay with the Acorn brand on its hip? Feller rode in here yesterday and stopped all night. Snoopy kind of cuss. Claimed to be a stock buyer, but he didn't show no credentials nor talk like he wanted to buy anything in p'ticular. Asked questions of everybody but me, seems like—mostly things that wasn't none of his business. He left right after dinner and said he was ridn't over Landusky way and would mebbe meet you boys somewheres on the trail. See anything of him?"

"Not a darned thing, Lark. I don't see how we could have missed him if he kept to the trail, either. How did you grade him, Lark? A detective?"

"Had the earmarks, son. Sicked onto us by some of them damn granny gossips in town. You goin' in with the boys to-morrow, Bud?"

"I—well, I thought I'd take a ride around and see what sign I can pick up. On the quiet, Lark—and I'll take Jelly with me. I don't want the boys to know anything about it. They'll proceed to tarry with the wine cup, the first thing they do, and what they don't know they can't let slip when their tongues loosen a bit. They won't do any harm, otherwise. Have a fight or two, perhaps. I hope they do stir things up and keep the Ford boys interested enough so Jelly and I won't be missed."

"Purty late to pick up anything on the range. Seven days, now, it's been. That alleeged stock buyer said they ain't got no clew yet. He might of lied, though. Prob'ly did. You goin' to take a look around Palmer's place, Bud?"

"I thought we would, if we get the chance. That's one reason why I wanted the boys to ride in ahead of me. I want them for a decoy. I believe Palmer and his bunch will follow them in, if they see a bunch of Meadowlark boys go riding into town. They'll want to see what's taking place. Guilty or innocent, I think their mental reactions will pull them into town."

"Mebbe." Lark lifted his hat while he pawed at his hair. "I never went into fizzyology, so I can't lay no loop on their reactions nor nothing like that. That's what I went and let you edgeycate yoreself for. If you say it'll do so, I ain't got the papers to say it won't. But what's the rule for preventin' a killin' if Palmer does run into our boys, and our boys is lit up?"

"That's a small matter of subtraction," Bud laughed. "You could send a note in to Delkin—or I will, Lark—and have the boys leave their guns with the bartender. They will, if he gives the invitation soon enough."

"Mebbe. Mebbe not. *I* wouldn't give up *my* gun, but these hellions is more peaceful. I don't want no killin' goin' on when I ain't present, and I got a little job here at the ranch I want to tend to. Think mebbe"—Lark paused, looked over his shoulder and tilted his head toward Bud's

so that the effect was as if he had dropped abruptly into a whisper—"mebbe the Nest might come in handy some time. My old dad would raise up in his grave if he knowed how things has been let run down. And with all this talk goin' around about us, no tellin' what might happen.

"You go on and carry out what you got in mind, son. If it's necessary I'll buy in later on. But this is kinda yore fight, if you want it that way. I wish't you'd send one of the boys back after me if it looks like things is comin' to a head. I'd go," he added, "if it wasn't for this job here. Once these troubles gets started there's no tellin' where it'll wind up, Bud. Callin' us a hard outfit to go up against is one thing—nobody minds that none. But when it comes to passin' the word that we killed a man so as to rob the bank where we do all our business—my Jonah, but that's damn hard to swaller!"

"We don't have to swallow it. Where's Maw? I'm about half starved!"

Maw was coming, taking short, quick steps and waving the mosquitoes off with her apron. Behind her, Marge was walking while she wrote something in her notebook. Whooping along in the rear came Skookum riding Lightfoot's shoulders and flailing him unmercifully with his hat to keep him at a high gallop. Bud's eyes lingered on the bent head of Marge, and his mouth relaxed to a smile. Then, his glance wandering to the boy, his face hardened again with the purpose that filled his mind.

It was after he had eaten and when Marge was hoping he would talk to her after the deadly monotony of the past two days, that Bud managed somehow to get Skookum off by himself without appearing to plan anything of the sort. He wanted to know what it was that Butch had been talking about; but Skookum, unfortunately, had promised not to tell.

"Well, that's all right, old-timer. If you promised, don't go back on your word; unless," he added, "it was something mean. Then you'd be doing right to tell."

"It wasn't mean," Skookum stated after due consideration. "I was just tellin' him something; about grandpa."

"Oh! About that boat." Bud's tone was so casual that although Skookum looked at him sharply he could discover nothing that could alarm his conscience.

"You see, pardner, that peeking you did was a pretty good stunt after all. Your grandpa was up to something mean, or he wouldn't have cared what you saw. I'm not asking you to say what it was you told Butch—you keep your promises, pardner. But it seems to me that if you would tell Butch things about your grandpa's ranch you'd—well, I can't believe you'd tell Butch things you wouldn't tell me. And I'm a heap more interested than he is, because your grandpa is saying I helped rob the bank in town, and maybe killed a man. So there you are, old-timer. Just suit yourself about it. If your grandpa and Bat Johnson robbed the bank they would probably hide the money somewhere around the ranch where they could watch it. And if I knew where they'd be likely to hide it—you see how it would work out, don't you, kid? The bank could get it back. I'm talking straight out in the open to you, because we're friends and I know you keep your word and wouldn't give me away. Does that sound reasonable to you, old kid?"

"Butch asked questions," Skookum observed after a pause for reflection. "I—I didn't tell him any more'n I had to. Not—not as much as I'd tell *you*, if—if you asked questions like Butch did. I wouldn't hold out on—on you, Bud. You're my pal."

Bud could have hugged the boy. There was a chance, then, that Butch had not learned so much more than they all knew. He did not see what use Butch meant to make of what information he gleaned but he knew fairly well what he himself wanted to do. When he went to bed that night he kept smiling in the dark. So did Skookum, for that matter—because he now owned a certain pinto pony that had been Bud's; a pony too small for a grown man to feel comfortable on, with white eyelashes, one blue eye and a doglike tendency to follow his master with slavish devotion.

Their mutual satisfaction must have continued through the night, for both were up and out in the cool, dewy dawn when a thousand birds nesting in the basin were ruffling feathers and puffing throats in rhapsodical melody.

Sooner than would seem humanly possible Skookum went wading through dew-drenched meadows that straightway wet his feet, a frayed rope end dragging from the coil hung over his arm and in his two

hands a battered bucket holding oats enough to founder the pinto pony—or so Jake Biddle would have told him. The pinto proved to be a willing partner to the new alliance, and he even let Skookum climb on his back and ride to the stable, obeying the guidance of a hand slap on the neck, just as Bud had said he would. Picture any ranch-bred boy of eight or nine in full possession of a new and gentle pony, and you will have Skookum fully accounted for; riding reckless circles around and between Maw's flower beds to show her how Huckleberry—the pony—neck-reined; sending terror to the timid heart of a certain mother hen when he galloped full tilt at her brood; roping gateposts, calves, old Jake, Lark—anything that stuck up so that a loop could settle on it. That was Skookum, for the next few days.

As for young Bud, he was up and under the primitive shower he had fashioned with coal-oil cans, and was down in the corral with a rope on one of the blacks before Skookum had so much as glimpsed the pinto pony. There was a certain shady corral with running water and a pole rack for hay, called the bronk corral, where he meant to leave them until his return. He heard the boys making hectic preparation for the trip, and thought they must certainly be faring forth to carry out plans carefully laid in many conferences; whereas no man save Bud had any plan at all. They meant to ride to Smoky Ford and put a stop to the talk about the Meadowlark—how they did not know.

"Funny Lark wouldn't do something about it," Jake Biddle grumbled when the boys were saddling after breakfast. "Ain't like the old days—not a damn bit. Old Bill would have rode into town with a gun in each hand and a booie knife in his teeth, hollerin' his opinion of sech damn liars. The fellers that started it——"

"I wish't he'd of lived to show us how to cuss and hold a knife in our teeth at one and the same time," fleered Tony. "You old broken-down riders makes me tired. Think us boys is kids?"

"Yeah. Where're you get the idee we're goin' to run home bawlin' for Lark to tell us what t' do to them bad men that's sayin' mean things about us?" Big Bob Leverett turned a shade redder. "Mebbe we ain't got the knack of carryin' a knife in our teeth, but I betcha we can holler our opinions just about as loud as old Bill ever done. And as for wavin' a gun in both hands—why, me, I can look scarey enough with one gun to put Smoky Ford on the run. Come awn, boys. We're keepin' Jake from settin' in the kitchen tellin' Jerry how he'd do it!"

"Ain't Jelly goin' to town?" As they swung to the saddles Tony missed the tall rider. "Hey, Jelly!"

"You boys go on!" Gelle called from the far corral. "Bud and I'll be along after a while. If we don't overtake you, you boys ride on in and make yoreselves right to home."

"Foolin' with them black bronks," Rosen made indulgent comment. "Let 'em throw away good minutes that a way, if they ain't got any better sense. Let's be movin'."

They moved to such good purpose that presently a slow-settling dust cloud alone remained to tell of their haste.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEADOWLARKS GO TO TOWN.

PALMER'S RANCH, called so because the man himself came first to mind when one thought of his outfit, which bore the brand called the Roman Three, lay fairly along the road down the river from Meadowlark Basin. Palmer had fields stretching for a mile up the road, but his house and stables stood where the river swung back toward the Indian reservation and the hills. At that point the road, running fairly straight, drew close to the house and not more than a long rifle shot away from the willow-fringed river. Smoky Ford lay nearly seven miles farther down the river—not a long ride for men accustomed to wide spaces and long days in the saddle. Indeed, the Meadowlark boys thought of Palmer's Ranch as being almost on the edge of town and called their journey nearly done when they came loping up to the place.

"Let's wake the old devil up!" cried Tony, and fired two shots into the Palmer roof tree.

"Yeah—let him know we ain't sneakin' past his door, scared he'll sick his dog on us!" Jack Rosen lifted his gun and had the satisfaction of seeing a shingle torn loose.

"Aye—Palmer! Your roof's leaky!" Big Bob Leverett yelled in a voice trained to

carry across a restless herd, and splintered another shingle.

The front door opened and Palmer stood briefly revealed to the four riders halted in the roadway. Palmer waved a rifle and yelled epithets until Tony stopped him with a leaden pellet planted neatly between his feet. Palmer jumped, banged the door shut and took a shot through a near-by window. Evidently he had no intention of killing in broad daylight, for he shot high.

"His loyal henchmen must be gone somewheres," Tony surmised shrewdly. "The old devil could hit some one if he'd wanted to. He knows damn well we'd go in and git him if he did, so he's jest makin' believe, same as we are. What say, boys? Shall we take him along with us to town?"

"Hell!" Jack Rosen's voice was heavy with disgust. "What we want *him* for? He shore ain't good comp'ny."

"Oh, I jest thought mebbe we might take him along because he wouldn't want to go." Tony was slipping fresh cartridges into his gun. "There goes that foolish jasper. Rest of 'em must be in town. Well, how about it?"

"He likely started the talk about the Meddalark," Bob considered. "What say we ride on in and see how she lays, and find out if the rest of these birds is there? If so we can clean up on what's in town, and come back here later on. Mebbe Palmer'll foller us in. Be jest like him to sick the town marshal onto us, don't you know it? I'm goin' to rip off another shingle and go awn about my business. I'm dry as a bleached bone."

They proceeded to rip off several shingles, but Palmer did not choose to retaliate, so they rode on, yelling derisively until they were out of hearing. Within a mile they had settled down to a walk and were tardily making plans nicely calculated to stir Smoky Ford out of its lethargy and give it something to talk about. The idea was Tony's and he was so proud of it that he could afford to give some credit to Bob as a true prophet when they topped a rise and had a glimpse of a horseman just riding out of Palmer's gate. Following them in, no doubt meaning to stir up trouble for them before he was through. Well, let him. Trouble was what they were looking for to-day, and they would hail it with joy if it came from Palmer.

"I can see now how he come to take a quirtin' from Lark," Mark Hanley said contemptuously. "He's yeller as mustard, without the bite. Jest the kind that would cave in a man's head when he wasn't lookin' —like they say Charlie Mulholland was killed. 'Twouldn't 'a' took much nerve to shoot up the bunch of us, him in the house like that and us in the open. We got to get that jasper in a corner, somehow. Now Tony, that idee of yourn——"

"It's a darn good idee," Tony defended prematurely. "They could guess everything else and lay plans to block it, but they never could guess that. I'll be the one—but say! First off, we better ride in a bunch to Delkin's stable. Puttin' up our horses is excuse enough——"

Stirrups tangled, they rode so close together. Often a man would laugh and glance back at the trail to see how close Palmer was riding. One who knew them well would guess that Smoky Ford was due for a sensation; a logical surmise, and fairly accurate. It never occurred to them, however, that they might possibly interfere with Bud's activities. Perhaps they did not realize that Bud meant to start something himself.

However that may be, they trotted up to the very door of Delkin's stable and dismounted, leading their sweaty horses back into the cool dusk of the interior to the corral beyond. Saddles pulled and placed to their liking, blanket and bridles on top and ready to be snatched up hastily if the need arose, they went trooping back down the long floor, spurs heralding their passing with faint sounds blended in pleasant clanking. Slightly bowed in the legs they were, pulling hats and neckerchiefs to fresh angles with that unconscious impulse of the young male to preen his feathers when the young female may be near. At the screened door which led into the office, Tony halted and peered in; saw Delkin sitting gloomily before his desk, and pushed open the door with a slight swagger.

"Oh, hello!" Delkin's eyes went from one to the other in apathetic greeting. "You boys in for a good time, eh?"

"Yeah. We just stopped by to let you in on the fun. See anything of Bat Johnson or any other gazabo from Palmer's?"

"Why, they rode in an hour or so ago, I think. They don't put up their horses when they come to town, you know. Post hay is cheaper." Delkin did not know just

how much resentment was in his voice, but his mood was bitter against the world just then.

"How's the scandal comin' along, Mr. Delkin? Still talkin' about the Meddalark?"

"Oh-h—about the same, I guess. But they'll never make me believe your outfit had anything to do with it." Curiously, the mind of Delkin was so obsessed with the murder and robbery that it did not occur to him that scandal could focus on anything else.

"Well, we shore appreciate that, because we got a scheme for stirrin' up the bandits some. It's my idee," Tony informed him proudly. "I'd like to see what you think of it, before we go to work on it. And mebbe it might be jest as well if you'd call in some more of your bank officers, so in case of a kick-back we won't git lynched without nobody to put in a word for us. That there," he added slightingly, "is Rosy's idee. He's scared to turn himself loose like he claims he kin, unless he's shore his imagination ain't goin' to be bad medicine. He claims he's such an eloquent cuss he's liable to get hung. Get the ones that's the handiest, 'cause we're darn dry and I can't hold these pelicans away from the flowin' bowl much longer."

Delkin glanced out through the open window, got up hastily and called to three men who were talking on the street corner just opposite. One threw up his hand in reply, and they came over, tapering off their conversation on the way. Inside, they looked at the four Meadowlark men and nodded, turning questioning eyes on Delkin immediately afterward.

"I want you to hear what these boys have framed. I don't know myself what it is, but it ought to work. The Meadowlark has the name of putting through whatever it starts, you know."

Again the three nodded, smiling a bit at certain recollections.

"We were just wondering if the Meadowlark was going to take any action in the matter. I overheard one of Palmer's men telling some one that we had put a bank detective on the trail of Bud Larkin and that the whole Meadowlark outfit was under suspicion. I'm sure I don't know where they got that idea. We certainly haven't done anything of the sort." Mr. Bradley, vice president of the bank and proprietor of the town's principal general-merchandise store, seated himself and tucked thumbs into the armholes of his unbuttoned vest, thrusting out his legs before him in the attitude of one who has the habit of taking his ease whenever possible. He knew the boys well. He could have told you exactly how much each man there had paid for the shirt he had on—though what had been his profit would have been withheld as a dark secret of his own. Every mouthful of food that went down the throat of a Meadowlark man when at home came from Bradley's store unless it had been produced on the ranch. The other two men were also in business there in town; one with a hardware store and the other a small, fly-specked drug store. The boys could not have chosen four men more to their liking for this particular conference.

"Well, we figured like this——" Tony began rolling a cigarette as an aid to eloquence, and stated the plan.

The audience grunted and looked doubtful, then Delkin gave a short laugh.

"I admit that it's original," he said dryly. "And it's a good thing you told us beforehand. You might find yourselves in an awkward position, boys, if we all were convinced."

"Only danger," Bradley opined, "is making too big a success of it. We've been watching Palmer and his men pretty close, and I must say we haven't a thing to go on, except that Palmer was the last man in the bank before Charlie was killed, and Bat Johnson was the first man seen near the bank after the crime. On the other hand, Bud and that young stranger——"

"Say, that young stranger's wearin' the Meddalark brand, Mr. Bradley," Tony interrupted meaningly. "He's a right nice boy and he wouldn't rob a bird's nest even. Well, we're dry, and thank Gawd our duty calls us to get pickled right away soon. And here," he added in a tone of extreme satisfaction, "comes the he-one of 'em all. Palmer follered us in. Come awn, boys. Le's go get drunk. And oh, say," he cried, reaching into his pocket, "I never showed you the evidence agin' us! Lark went to Glasgow and borried some money—I guess he told you himself—and us boys is plumb rotten with gold twenties and tens. So don't get nervous and think we're spendin' your good money in righteous livin'. We worked for this. Every dime was earned

in sweat and sorrow. Ain't that right, boys?"

"Damn right that's right," they agreed solemnly.

"I'll take Bat," Tony announced as they walked across the street to the Elkhorn, thumbs hooked inside their belts, hats a-tilt, eyes seeing everything. "Lordy, how this town's growed since I seen it last! There's a new dog layin' right on Bradley's steps. Now wouldn't that puzzle you?"

"Who's goin' to tackle Palmer?" Big Bob wanted to know. "Me, I wouldn't come within ropin' distance of that old coyote. Rosy, you take 'im."

"Have to play the cards as they run," Tony warned them, pausing with one foot on the platform. "Make it look stagy and my idee's plumb wrecked. Come on in—like you hated to but had to. And we'll keep together right at first, hunh?"

"Shore. I wish't Jelly was here, and Bud." Bob cleared his throat, hitched up his belt and lounged in, the other three at his heels.

The four drank together, inviting the bartender to join them. Other occupants of the room may have noticed that they held their beer mugs in their left hands, and that they drank with their faces half turned to the room. Tony it was who paid, in silver. They talked afterward among themselves in tones slightly lowered. Had they been men burdened with too much knowledge of evil, on guard against some overt move of an enemy, they would have worn that same air of aloofness, that faint challenge to the world hidden under the guise of careless ease. The dozen men lounging within knew without being told that the Meadowlark men were aware of the talk about them and felt themselves observed, probably with suspicion. Indeed, they must have seen how these four watched the room in the mirror of the back bar, and how they studiously kept their right hands free and hovering near their belts.

It was the bad-man attitude, beautifully done. Had they murdered three men and robbed a dozen banks they could scarcely have been more careful. And they had the attention of every man there, thinly disguised but all the keener for that. Bat Johnson, playing pool at the far end, lifted his lip in a sneer while he deliberately chalked his cue and raised a leg to rest it on the corner of the table for a difficult shot. But he did not make any audible remarks about the Meadowlark men, and he did pocket four balls in succession to show how steady were his nerves. In the back-bar mirror Tony saw that only two men were playing and that the game had just started. There was plenty of time, then, for certain necessary preliminaries.

Jack Rosen bought a bottle of whisky and paid for it with a ten-dollar gold piece. Bob Leverett watched the transaction and decided that he, too, wanted to drink out of a bottle and stop when he pleased. Bob fumbled in his pockets, looked uneasily over his shoulder and pushed a double-eagle across the bar as if he were ashamed of having it. Indeed, Tony gave him a frown of disapproval and a shake of the head, and this was not lost upon the bartender nor upon others who were covertly watching the quartet.

"Well, gimme a bottle, too. It's cheaper that way." Mark Hanley also paid with gold, explaining behind his hand to the others that he just had to have change, and he guessed it was all right. And thereupon Tony borrowed the price of a bottle from Mark, and they went clanking out and across to the stable, leaving tongues tickling to talk behind their backs, and a thoughtful look on the face of Bat Johnson.

In the far corner of the corral Tony was carefully spilling whisky on his undershirt and emptying the remainder of the quart on the ground.

"This is a hell of a way to get a jag on," he mourned plaintively, "but we gotta keep sober and act drunk. Keep 'er on the outside, boys, till we put over this play. Actin's an art and you can't be too clear-headed fer the parts you got."

"Ah, gwan!" Jack Rosen pulled the cork from his bottle and took a long, rapturous sniff. "Only way to act drunk is to get drunk. Me, I always get a glassy look in my eyes, and my face gits redder'n hell. I can't get that way by pourin' three drops on my shirt front like it was perfumery. If I'm goin' to play drunken cowboy with no brains a-tall, I gotta put at least a pint under m'belt."

"Rosy, you *can't!* When you're drunk you want to fight and beller out everything you know. We gotta play this thing fine." The anxious author of the idea snatched the bottle and broke it against the manger. "Say, you can get soused to the eyebrows

when this play actin's over. We'll *all* get drunker'n fools. Jest stop and think what they're tryin' to pull on the Meddalark! Ain't that enough to make a man stay sober, if he's got to, in order to block their play? Come alive, here, boys. We got a good chance t' make Palmer's gang show their hands. Do we go after 'em, or do we pull up to the bar and make hawgs of ourselves?"

"Oh, shut up! I'll bet yo're fixed before the rest is, Tony. No use addin' to our misery by chewin' the rag about it, is they?" Bob Leverett poured whisky into his palm and proceeded to wash his face with it. "Gawsh, that's coolin'!" he exclaimed afterward, licking his lips as far back as his tongue would reach. "Refreshin'est thing in the world. Bet you there ain't a feller in the outfit dast try it—wallop it all around your mouth without lettin' any go down. Bet you I'm the damnedest strong-minded cuss in the bunch!"

"Bet you five dollars," piped Mark Hanley, and swept off his hat to give his hair a whisky shampoo.

Jack Rosen washed face, neck, ears and hair, and saturated his handkerchief as a final flourish.

"By golly, that shore *is* refreshin'," he testified earnestly with his face lifted ecstatically to the hot wind. "Gimme some more. Tony went an' got fresh and busted mine. You owe me two bottles, dontcha ferget that; one for smashin' mine, and one for misjudgin' yore betters."

They went swaggering through the barn and stopped at the office where Delkin's three visitors still sat talking of the one big subject. The four sniffed and leaned away.

"That's stage settin's," Tony informed them equably.

"Overdone," Bradley snorted, waving a hand before his face. "They'll think you fell into the barrel."

"Damned refreshin'," Bob told them soberly. "You fellers ought to try it in hot weather. You wouldn't never wash in nothin' else."

They backed out and went weaving across the street, arm in arm and stepping high. They were the most intoxicated punchers that ever spent money over the Elkhorn bar, and their aloofness had been forgotten. They entered the Elkhorn singing raucously a sentimental ditty which must never see print, and Jack Rosen on the outside of the group stopped and attempted to embrace Palmer in almost tearful joy at seeing him. The others pulled him along to the bar and Tony swung round upon the crowd.

"Everybody drink!" he shouted thickly. "Drown your sorrers while we drown ours. Money's made to spend—come on, boys, an' help us squander it!"

There is only one answer to that, in a saloon. Not a man in the place but had a convincing whiff of the reason why the boys from the Meadowlark had suddenly changed their tone. The curtain was up on Tony's play.

CHAPTER IX.

JELLY MAKES A CALL.

"THERE goes old Palmer himself," Bud exclaimed with some eagerness as he and Gelle rode out from behind a low hill and started down the long, straight stretch beside Palmer's field of grain, fenced and rippling a green sea of wheat heads. "Now if the rest of the bunch is out of the way, it will be smooth riding. You know what to do, Jelly. You just ride up to the house and do whatever you damn please, so long as you hold the cook and Blinker and any of the other men who happen to be home, right there at the house. I hope they've followed the boys to town, though. It's the logical thing for them to do unless they're bigger cowards than I take them to be."

"Say, if you're goin' to sneak up to the stables, you'd better be drifting right now," Gelle told him. "If there's anybody down around the c'rells I'll have 'em up to the house before you need their absence very bad. Don't you worry about that, Bud."

"All right. I did intend to ride past the house and come back the other way. It's just about as close. But this will do. Give me a few minutes' start, will you, Jelly?" Bud grinned, waved a hand in casual farewell and reined his sorrel out of the road and into the tangle of chokecherry bushes that grew in a shallow gully leading back toward the river.

Once away from Gelle, however, the grin left his face and a smoldering purpose glowed in his eyes. He was on enemy soil. If any of Palmer's men were at home and he were discovered he would probably find himself dodging leaden slugs before he got

away. Midday was not the best hour for invading a man's dooryard almost, but he had decided that it would be safer after all than midnight, when Palmer would be easily alarmed. Besides, the dogs were chained during the day and turned loose at dusk. Skookum had told him that; and for what he wanted to find he needed the broad sunlight.

Straight through the thicket he rode until he reached a barbed-wire fence extending up the river for a considerable distance. This, Skookum had told him, was the cow pasture which he would have to cross on foot, keeping one eye peeled for the big black bull that had once killed a man and liked it so well he had been trying ever since to repeat the experience. Bud tied the sorrel well out of sight, unbuckled his spurs and hung them on the saddle horn, hitched up his belt and pulled his gun forward, and crawled through the fence. Skookum had advised him to pass the house, hide his horse in the bushes and come back up the river, keeping in the willows on the bank. In that way he would run no risk of the bull, of which Skookum seemed to be in terror almost as great as his fear of his grandfather. This was shorter, however, and would leave Gelle on guard at the house for a few minutes only. Bud remembered how terrible a cross bull can look to a small boy; to a man it is not so formidable.

This end of the pasture was brushy, full of the twitterings of bird families, the scurrying of small furred creatures. Blue-bodied flies poised humming just before his eyes; great long-legged mosquitoes made a whining chorus around him. He made his way quickly toward the river, where the bank rose abruptly in a worn sandstone ledge. The pasture gate was built close against the ledge, and it was this point that held most of the danger. Some one at the stables might see him—Skookum had told him that the gate was in sight of the stable, but that the ledge was mostly hidden by the trees. Bud guessed that he would be obliged to walk in the open for a few yards, but with Gelle bullying the cook—or whatever it was he meant to do—even the dogs would have scant attention for any one moving down by the pasture gate.

Once, when Skookum had ventured into the pasture after a rabbit that had been caught in a trap and lamed, the black bull had come grumbling ominously from the bushes. Skookum had scrambled up the ledge out of reach of the bull and had waited so long in the shade of a jutting rock that he had gone to sleep. When he awoke the bull was gone but his grandfather was coming in at the gate, which was almost as bad, so he had cowered down out of sight and waited for that threatening presence to pass. His grandfather had stood for two or three minutes looking back at the house while he pretended to be fastening the gate behind him, and then he had walked on past where Skookum was hiding, and had begun to climb the ledge.

"And—and I didn't tell Butch what—what I done after he—he climbed up on the ledge," Skookum had declared earnestly to Bud at this point. "I mean, I never told Butch 'bout me sneakin' along after—after grandpa went back to—to the house, and lookin' to see what—what grandpa was doin'. So I—I found all his money—but I never took any. I—I was scared!" Skookum was very careful to let Bud know what he had *not* told Butch, since he had promised Butch that he would not tell a soul the things he had revealed during the quizzing. Skookum believed in the letter of the law.

"I couldn't see grandpa after he climbed up on the ledge, because the—the rocks was in the way," he had explained further—and because he had told Bud so much more, Skookum was now in beatific possession of Huckleberry, the pinto pony.

"He's a smart kid. I suppose with the wrong training it would develop into foxiness like his grandfather. He sure described it perfectly," Bud made mental comment when from a safe covert of wild-currant bushes he surveyed the ledge. He could even recognize the place where Skookum had scramled up to get away from the bull, and the rock jutting out and away from the main ledge where he had curled up and gone to sleep. From that point Skookum had drawn what he called a map, and crude though it was Bud felt sure that he could find the place of which the boy had told him in a scared half whisper.

He did one foolish thing. In crossing the open strip of trampled grass just inside the gate he nearly stepped on a huge rattlesnake lying asleep in the hot sunshine. To pass so venomous a thing without killing it went contrary to all Bud's instincts

and training. Rangemen have a way of reasoning that every rattlesnake left to crawl away may sink its poison fangs into the next unwary passer-by, and that death may be the result of some one's carelessness. Bud picked up a rock and sent it straight at the ugly head, following with other rocks to make absolutely sure of the job. When the snake was dispatched he took long steps into the fringe of concealing bushes and climbed to the rock which Skookum had described so accurately.

At the house Frank Gelle was holding in his horse that backed and circled restively, fighting the tight rein. Gelle himself was insisting loudly that Palmer had better come out, or he'd go drag him out. No use hiding under the bed, he argued contemptuously. He wanted to talk to him a minute, and he would stay until he did talk to him, if he had to sit there till his horse starved to death.

"Boss ain't heah nohow!" "Black Sam" protested, rolling his eyes so that the whites showed all around. "You Meddalahk boys done plowed up ouah roof a'ready wif youah bullets, an' Boss he gwine awn in to talk to Mist' Shur'f Man. He jes' plumb *kain't* come out, 'cause he ain't heah. No-suh, ain't pawss'ble fo' him to come out, nohow."

"I think yo're lyin' to me, 'Snowball,'" Gelle declared firmly, and shook his head. "You gotta prove it."

"Lawsy, Mist' Meddalahk, how Ah goin' prove nothin' like dat ah, 'cep'n you git off'm dat hawse an' look fo' youah se'f? B-but 'twon't do no good nohow, Mist' Meddalahk, awnes' it won't! Dat ole house ain't got nobody into it a-tall. Ain't nobody undah no baid, Mist' Meddalahk, Ah swah to goodness dey ain't. Blinkah, he's somewhah on de place, but he don' count no moah'n Ah counts, an' Ah don' count nothin' a-tall." Sam backed warily toward the kitchen door as Gelle pressed closer "Blinkah, he ain't got no sense nohow, Mist' Meddalahk, an' Ah'm jes' an ole black cook what doan' 'mount to nothin'. Boss, he's in town—leastwise he's awn de way. Yessuh, yo'-all kin ride awn aftuh him, Mist' Meddalahk, suh, an' tawk all you'm a mine to. Yessuh."

Sam was so scared, so plainly and honestly helpless, so anxious to placate the man he believed a dangerous foe, that Gelle hadn't the heart to bully him further. At the same time he must give Bud time to make a thorough search. He looked around for Blinker, but that peculiar fellow was nowhere to be seen.

"Got any coffee?" Gelle demanded, for want of something else to hold him there.

"Yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk, Ah got whole pawt uh cawfee, yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk."

"All right, bring me a cup. No sugar, Snowball."

"Lawsy, Mist' Meddalahk, we doan' nevah have no sugah a-tall! Boss, he buy silk foah dishrags soon as eveh he buy sugah foah cawfee an' sech." Sam grinned in spite of his terror, showing the strong, even teeth so characteristic of the negro race. "We got milk, 'cause milk doan' cos' nawthin'."

"How about buttermilk?" Gelle was better pleased with his task now. He thought he could keep this up for an hour if necessary.

"Yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk, Ah jes' chuhned dis mawnin'. Buttah doan' cos' nawthin', neithah, an' it saves meat. An' aigs, we got aigs—hens, dey doan' deman' no wages, Mist' Meddalahk." Sam chuckled with a wry twist to his big mouth, as if the joke was barbed.

"What wages do you git, Snowball?" Gelle's tone indicated that he was prepared to be sympathetic.

"Me? What wages do Ah git? Ah doan' *git*. No-suh, Mist' Meddalahk, time Ah wuhks out de cos' of pants an' shuht an' shoes an' hat. Ah doan' *git!*"

"You don't?" Genuine surprise was in Gelle's voice. "Get out! Say, Snowball, slavery days is over, don't you know it? You don't have to work for *no* man that's too damn stingy to buy sugar for coffee, an' runs a sandy like that on you for pay. Judgin' by them garments yo're draped in now, Snowball, I'd say you must spend as much as five, ten dollars mebbe a year on clothes. What wages does ole Palmer claim he pays you, if it's a fair question?"

"What wages? Wa'now, Mist' Meddalahk, Ah doan' rightly know. Boss, he claim lak Ah eats moah'n what Ah kin earn nohow, cookin'. He talk lak he pay me ten dollah, mebbe. Mist' Meddalahk, suh, Ah wuhk an' wuhk, an' mos' Ah kin do is eat an' sleep, an' nevah much of dat. Doan' seem pawss'ble to git ahaid mo'n one shuht." Sam wiped a ragged sleeve across his perspiring face, turned and went into

the house, his terror of the Meadowlark man erased from his simple soul by the note of human understanding and sympathy. He returned presently with a big tin cup full of cold buttermilk over which Gelle promptly bent his eager lips.

"Say, Snowball," he remarked when he came up for air, "our cook at the Meddalark gets sixty dollars a month. And he *gets* it—and buys his own pants and shirts. You're bein' robbed and you don't know it. And say! Lark buys sugar, five sacks at a lick, and nobody gits the bad eye for dumpin' three or four spoonfuls into his coffee. Tain't none of my business, Snowball, but I hate to see a fellow get the worst of it like that. Say, here's a dollar. Don't let that ole Palmer ketch you with it though."

Sam's eyes would not stand out farther if he were being choked. He was too stunned by this munificence to put out his hand for the money, so Gelle tossed the dollar in his general direction, finished the buttermilk in one long drink, set the cup down on an upturned barrel near by and rode back to the gate to meet Bud who was coming at a swift gallop. Bud pulled up, his eyes snapping with excitement.

"Go back around the corner of the fence, Jelly, and down the gully about fifty yards," he directed crisply. "I left that dumb jasper there, tied up, and I want you to stand guard over him until I can ride into town and back. He came up on me before I could get away in the brush, and all I could do was glom him and bring him out with me. I won't be gone more than a couple of hours, but it's too hot a day to leave an old man tied up with ants and mosquitoes and flies raising merry hell with him. Will you do it, Jelly?"

"Sure, I'll do it. Thank Gawd for that buttermilk! Say, you ain't leavin' me out of anything like a scrap, are you, Bud? If you are, I'll pack m' prisoner in under my arm but what I'll go to yore party."

"No—don't think there'll be a word of trouble. I'll be right back, Jelly, and then we'll both ride in and make merry. We'll have a right." He was galloping down the road before Gelle could answer him.

Even in his haste he took thought of the curiosity he would probably excite if he came pounding down the hill with his horse in a lather; and once on the subject of precautions it struck him forcibly that perhaps Smoky Ford would be just as well off if it failed to see him at all. At the foot of the hill, therefore, he turned sharply off the road on a dim trail that meandered up a wash and rounded an elbow of the bluffside, and so came out at the rear of Delkin's livery stable, where four Meadowlark horses took their ease in the corral, the sweat scarcely dried yet on their backs. The sight of them reminded Bud that after all he had not been so far behind the boys, who were probably still feeling the thrill of their first cold drinks. Indeed, they had not been gone on their odorous adventure more than ten minutes when Bud led his lathered sorrel into a shadowy stall and went burring his spur rowels down the long stable so lately echoing to the footsteps of those other Meadowlark riders. With considerable abruptness he pulled open the screen door and stepped into the office, his eyes flashing quick glances at the four men who sat there talking about the one big subject.

"Howdy. Glad to see you all here, because you're the men I came after, and I don't know just how quiet you want to keep this business. I've found your money—or the bank's money, rather. If you folks will ride out with me, I'll show you where it's cached. I went on a still hunt around Palmer's, on my way in; saw he was headed for town, so I took advantage of his absence. His grandson, the one he abused so that Lark took him away, told me some things that gave a key to the whole business. Palmer's gang came down river in a boat, hid under the bank and then took the loot back upriver, and sunk the boat. That's the way I've doped it out. At any rate, I can show you the stuff, and you can bring it in—if you hurry. You'll have to get it and get back here before Palmer goes home, unless you want him to get wise——"

"No!" Bradley's chair legs came to the floor with a thump. "My heavens, but you Meddalark boys work fast when you get started! There's those young devils over there in the Elkhorn, pulling off a bit of play acting to make Palmer's gang fight their heads for a while—and here you come busting in with the——"

"No time for argument," snapped Delkin. "You men come along and bear witness to this. Those boys over there will keep folks interested for another hour or two, if I'm

not mistaken. Bud, are you alone, or is your uncle with you?"

"No, he's home. I left Jelly on guard, back there—had to take that crazy old fellow at Palmer's and tie him up. He came and caught me at the cache. If I can have a fresh horse, Mr. Delkin——"

"By the Lord Harry, you can have anything I've got, down to my last shirt!" Delkin, once the news took hold of his imagination, was like another and much younger man than he had been an hour before. He led the way from stall to stall choosing mounts for his companions, and shouting orders to the scurrying hostler. Stauffer and Kline, the two other bank directors, ejaculated futile profanity as an emotional safety valve, but failed otherwise to contribute anything but their presence to the scene; there are always men of that type in any gathering. They have little to say, they never take the initiative, but they do add the force of numbers.

"Better tie on what saddlebags you've got, or take a grain sack or something. There's quite a lot of stuff, remember. Twenty-five or thirty pounds of coin, I should say—though I was in too much of a rush to take an inventory. And we'll go out the back way, where I came in. And Mr. Delkin, you ought to know whether your man here needs a gag or whether he'll keep his face closed without it."

"You needn't to worry none about me, young feller," the stableman retorted brusquely. "If it's that bank money you've got located, seven hundred and thirty dollars of it belongs to *me*. I ain't liable to spill no beans off'n my own plate, I reckon."

"Good enough!" Bud gave a boyish laugh at the tone. "Well, are we ready to go?"

Five saddled horses, following docilely five spurred men who held the bridle reins in their left hands in unconscious preparation for any unforeseen emergency, walked springily out of the doorway and into the hot sunlight that lay on the dim trail that half circled the town. The stableman stood with his hands on his hips and his back bowed in, and watched them go, his jaws working in absent-minded industry on a tasteless quid of much-chewed tobacco.

"I golly, looks like I'd get m' money back after all!" He followed the departing horsemen to the doorway, stood there looking out until not even their bobbing heads were longer visible as they trotted up the trail, and turned back grinning to his work.

CHAPTER X.

THE LOOT.

"THIS seems a pretty tame proceeding," Bud observed whimsically when they had dismounted in the hollow where Gelle was sitting cross-legged in the grass, on guard over a gaunt old man who lay sound asleep in the shade of an aspen tree. "By rights there should be some shooting at the wind-up of a robbery the size of this one. I did take a prisoner, though, didn't I? But the old pelican doesn't seem to be very fierce—how'd you make out, Jelly?"

Gelle looked up sourly and pointed with his thumb. "I been keepin' the flies off your treasure-trove, Bud, just as long as I'm a-goin' to. If this is all they is to bandit huntin', I'm goin' home and bug p'tatoes for excitement. Where you goin' now? Snipe huntin'? Wherever it is, I'm goin' along. Who's goin' to hold the sack?"

"I'll watch this fellow," Kline the druggist offered promptly. "Give me a gun, somebody, in case he wakes up. Lord, that sun's hot!"

"Yeah, it's nice an' shady here—if shade's what you're lookin' for," Gelle told him dryly. "Bring any lunch baskets? Right nice, shady dell for a buck picnic, and I could eat without bein' forced. And say, Bud, any time you feel like tellin' me what you found or expect to find, I'll be willin' to listen."

"Come along and I'll show you," Bud grinned. "Palmer's whole outfit's in town, Delkin says—excepting the cook. We're going to investigate a rat's nest down here by the river."

"Yeah?" Gelle looked from one to the other, and then grinned in slow awakening amusement that spread to his eyes and left a twinkle there. "Judgin' from that praise-God look on these plutocrats' faces—oh, well, come on!"

They filed down through the bushes after Bud, who led the way straight to the ledge and up over rocks that left no trace, to the place where Skookum had seen his grandfather at work like an old badger. A broken fragment of ledge lay piled there, and behind the rocks, hidden from sight until one climbed the pile and looked over, a dry, deep niche, narrow of mouth and

roomy inside, lay revealed. Within it they saw a jumbled heap of sticks, dead leaves and twigs—a rat's nest, any chance observer would have sworn. But Bud picked up a larger branch and thrust away the litter. Delkin crowded past him eagerly and began clawing at the nearest of three ribbed, iron kegs with tight-fitting lids, such as are used for storing blasting powder.

"Gosh, is that money?" Gelle, peering over Delkin's shoulder, spoke in a hushed tone. "Gosh! Lemme heft one of them sacks, Mr. Delkin!"

His face red and sweating with excitement, Delkin tilted the keg on its side, picked up a canvas sack as if it were very heavy, and put it in Gelle's eager, outstretched hands. He laughed foolishly at the look of astonishment on the long cowpuncher's face, and reached for another sack. He was like a boy clawing gifts out of his Christmas stocking and truly believing in Santa Claus. Bud, who had seen how despair could rack him, swallowed a lump that appeared mysteriously in his throat. It was worth a lot, he told himself, to see a man so overwhelmingly elated and happy.

"Brad, here are those bonds of Morgan's —why do thieves take stuff they never can use? Stauffer, here, you take charge of these—notes and mortgages, I guess they are. I wonder if Palmer was foxy enough to take out that note of his that the bank holds! God, if we could get Charlie's life back with the rest, I'd be the happiest man on earth! Well—that's two kegs emptied. Here's the currency—and I'm sure that's all the gold coin, and yes, here's the silver in this keg! Well, that's all, I guess. No-o —but this isn't the bank's. This must belong to Palmer."

"Glom it!" Gelle advised grimly, but Delkin shook his head.

"No, all we want is our own. Well, no use putting back the rubbish, is there? If they come here at all they're bound to find out the bank's property has disappeared. And if we have any luck at all they'll never get back here. Jelly, do you want to carry the gold?"

"I should smile!" Gelle grinned widely to prove it as he held open the grain sack. "Any chance the gold might some of it rub off on m' shirt? Gosh! How much is they, Mr. Delkin?"

"A little over twelve thousand dollars, according to the books. Brad's carrying three times as much—yes, Brad's got forty thousand dollars right there in his hands."

"Yeah?" Gelle cast a mildly disdainful glance at the packages of bank notes which Bradley was stowing away in a bag. "Mebbe so, but it shore don't carry the same thrill as what this gold money packs. That why you left all that good money in the keg?" He turned, shoulders slightly bent under his load, and stared at the emptied powder kegs and at the one which was not empty. "It shore is a crime to leave all that good money there," he complained. "Chances are Palmer stole it, anyway. Me, I don't believe the old hellion ever did get an honest dollar in his life. It'd burn his fingers."

"But that doesn't give us any right to it," Delkin told him firmly. "We're taking what is ours, and we're mighty thankful to get it back so easy."

"Yes—too darned easy to be true," Bud made pessimistic comment. "Some one is liable to come on the long lope to see how about it. You fellows go on ahead, and I'll bring up the rear. And remember, that open stretch down there is in plain sight of the stables, so you'd better take it on the trot."

Gelle did better than that. He sprinted for the bushes ahead of all the others, got hung up in the wire fence because he tried to crawl through without slipping the sack of coin to the ground and so caught a barb fast in the canvas and had to be helped by Bud, who overtook him while he was still wriggling like an impaled bug.

Delkin, Bradley and Stauffer went on and were jubilating in hushed voices with Kline when the Meadowlark contingent arrived. They stood apart from the old man who still snored comfortably with his lips puffed out through his thin whiskers. Bud's capture was likely to prove embarrassing.

"What'll we do?" Bradley asked impatiently. "Can't turn him loose here—and Kline says he's been asleep all this while so he doesn't know yet we've come onto the scene. Jelly, can't you stay right here and watch him for a while—till Bud comes back?"

Gelle stood with the sack of gold between his feet as if he meant to protect it from all claimants, and stared glumly from one to the other.

"I can, yes. But I shore hate to like

hell," he admitted sourly. "You'll go on in and have a scrap, chances are, and I'll be settin' here like a knot on a log, watchin' this old pelican's whiskers wave in an' out. Excitin', ain't it? Damn fine way to spend an afternoon! When it comes to thinkin' up things for me to do, you shore have got bright idees!"

"Seems to be about the only thing we can do about it, Jelly," Bud said soothingly. "We could tie him up, but even then it wouldn't be absolutely safe. He might get loose, and warn Palmer in some way. You can't blame these bankers for not wanting to take a chance of losing all this money, now they have it back. We'll go back by a roundabout way through the hills, just because they don't want a soul to know they've got the money. Once that's safe, we'll go after Palmer and his bunch, yes. But you must see, Jelly, that——"

"Oh, hell, go on and leave me to m' thoughts!" Gelle pulled down the corners of his mouth, stepped over the gold, turned back and gave it a kick as if he would show his familiarity with it, and grinned at Bud. "I never did have no luck, nohow." He lounged over and sat down beside the sleeper, and spat disgustedly into the lush grass near by. He waved them toward town, made a derisive gesture and began to roll a smoke, giving them no further attention.

"Jelly's a fine boy, all right, and it's a darn shame he has to stand guard—but I'm darned if I'm sorry enough for him to stay in his place," Bud observed with futile sympathy when they were riding townward by devious trails which kept to the hills and concealed them from any passer-by on the road. "Still—are you dead sure Palmer's bunch will stay in town?"

Bradley laughed.

"The way Tony and the boys had it framed, Palmer's gang will give no heed to the passing hours. You know, of course, what the boys meant to do?"

"I didn't know they meant to do anything," Bud confessed. "Darn 'em, they must have held out on me."

"Well, now, if they don't hang before we hit town, they may stir up something interesting. The idea was to play off drunk, and when the crowd was pretty thoroughly worked up, seeing them spend money—gold money which they acted sneaking about—each one of the boys planned to get a Palmer man off in a corner, do the weeping drunk and confess that he went down river from Meadowlark Basin in a boat, killed Charlie and robbed the bank, and that he had the stuff cached and wanted a man he could trust to help him get the stuff safely out of the country. They had it planned out to the last detail; how long it ought to take them to get so drunk they'd confide in a man they never had chummed with, and just how they'd manage to lead up to the subject. Tony said he'd take Bat Johnson into his confidence, and Rosen was to tackle Palmer himself, I believe. Bob and Mark were going to buttonhole Ed White and the Mexican. It sure sounded like it might work—if they don't get lynched, as I said.

"They figure that one or all of the Palmer gang will get so uneasy there will be a general stampede to where the money's hidden to see if you Meadowlark boys have any of you found out where it's cached. Either that, or they'll give themselves away by wanting to fight, or something. Of course," he added, glancing down with a grin at the bundle tied at the fork of his saddle, "they didn't know we'd have the stuff safely put away long before they could trail any one to the spot where it was hid."

"And they expect to stay sober long enough to put that over?" Bud's lips tilted upward with amusement.

"You bet they did! Just before you showed up they'd poured whisky all over themselves, by the smell. On the outside," he added meaningly. "I don't see how they'd dare light a cigarette—they were sure saturated."

Bud touched his borrowed horse with the spurs.

"We'd better be riding," he called over his shoulder. "If I know anything about that bunch, something's about due to pop!"

CHAPTER XI.

JELLY GETS ACTION.

NOTHING is more disconcerting than to make elaborate plans which provide for every mishap save the one which afterward looks absolutely inevitable. Tony had been deeply concerned over the integrity of his actors, and having concentrated all his energies upon keeping himself and his companions sober, he quite overlooked the obvious result of a meeting between

Palmer's men and the Meadowlark boys. A feud had existed since early spring, and Tony should have remembered that; better still, he should have taken it for granted that the Palmer gang would not forget, especially since they had circulated falsehoods enough just lately to render them self-conscious and a bit too ready to defend themselves if a Meadowlark man but looked their way.

Tony, absorbed in playing his part, was forced to take a drink or two at the bar—along with the three other members of his amateur comedy company—before he could plausibly detach himself from his fellows and wabble over to the pool table where he stood grinning a silly grin and applauding Bat Johnson's mediocre game. Tony did not know it, but his eyes held an unfriendly, calculating gleam and they clung rather tenaciously to Bat; which was not exactly reassuring to a man with as much on his conscience as made Bat's slumbers uneasy and troubled with bad dreams. A man with that silly grin stretching his lips, while above the simper his eyes stare with a malevolent intentness, need wear no other mark to warn a sober man. Bat Johnson was sober.

"Yo're a good man, Bat," Tony gurgled when Bat had reached up his cue and slid the last set of buttons toward the center marker. "Y'played out y'r string, Bat—played out y'r string, ain't you?"

"What's that?" Bat whirled upon him. "What do you mean by that, you drunken four flush?"

"Y'r a good—what'd you say? Four-flush? Me a four-flush—me?" Tony remembered to shake his head in drunken grief. "Bat, I—I never thought you'd shpeak t' me like that. I——"

"It ain't me that's played out my string," Bat told him viciously. "You wait till a few Meddalark necks get twisted! A string or two's played out there, my fine buckaroo. Folks is gittin' damn tired of them birds. You're one of 'em, and you've about warbled yore last song. Git outa my way b'fore I kill you!"

Even the best of actors may forget his part when the cue is not given. Had Bat been friendly, or even neutral, Tony would have swallowed his feelings and gone ahead with his original lines. But you simply can't confide your guilt to a man like that, no matter what vital issue is at stake.

Still, Tony was vastly surprised at himself when he knocked Bat headfirst over the pool table, because not even two unaccustomed drinks of whisky could convince him that this was a diplomatic opening to the confidential talk he had planned to have with Bat. He wondered dully whether he had spoiled the whole thing, or whether Bat would forgive the blow on account of Tony's irresponsible condition, and still consent to listen to the story which Tony had so carefully prepared to pour out at the urge of a drunken impulse.

But then Bat picked himself up and came at him with a billiard cue, and Tony decided quite suddenly that what he really wanted, and the only thing he wanted, was to show Bat exactly "where to head in at"—quoting Tony. He snatched up the cue ball and laughed when he saw how it bounced off Bat's head, leaving Bat dazed and waving the cue vaguely until his head stopped spinning.

"Yeah—you better go get into your boat and drift on down the river," Tony chortled recklessly. "I don't reckon you had a billiard cue handy at the bank, did you? Think nobody's wise to you and yore bunch, aye? Think you kin spread tales about the Meddalark and make it stick, aye? Well, you and——"

A big, firm hand slipped over Tony's mouth and stopped him at that point, and the arm belonging to the hand seemed in a fair way of throttling him.

"You damn drunken fool," Bob hissed in his ear, "think us boys all stayed sober jest for the fun of seein' you drunk an' shootin' off yore mouth that a way?"

Jack Rosen jumped a card table and kicked over two chairs, but he landed on Bat Johnson in time to spoil his aim. Big Mark Hanley grabbed Tex and Ed White, a hand on each collar, and butted their heads together while he whooped his glee at the way things were going. Other men scattered when they saw these two clawing for their guns.

"Hey! I ain't got nobody t' lick!" wailed Tony, seeing how the other boys were occupied, the whisky beginning to boil angrily in his blood. "Where's Palmer?"

No one seemed to know, or if they did they gave no sign. They made way for Tony's headlong rush to the door, where he saw that Palmer was already riding out of sight up the street. For a moment he was

tempted to follow him; but time would be lost while he saddled his horse, and Palmer would have a start that would make it difficult to overtake him if he wanted to hurry. Moreover, sounds in the saloon behind him indicated that at least two fights were progressing with much vigor. Tony turned back to the fray and let Palmer go.

Had he ridden a bit faster Palmer probably would have seen Delkin and his party cross the road and turn into the hills on their way back to town with the bank's money. As it was he rode at his usual racking trot and so arrived home not long after Gelle had taken his prisoner to the house and locked him in a room off the kitchen, where he promptly went to sleep again.

"Dass way Blinkah, he always do, Mist' Meddalahk, when Boss he go awn to town. Gittin' old, he is. Yessuh, Blinkah he do need a pow'ful lot o' slumbah. Wha'foh yo'-all want wif dat ole cuss,' skusin' de question?"

"Hell, I don't want him," Gelle denied, pensively. "All I want is another drink of that buttermilk, and mebbe a bite of somethin' to eat, Snowball. It's Bud that wants the old man. He come leadin' him along to where it was shady and cool, and then he told me I had to go and set with him for comp'ny. I don't want him a-tall. I'm jest keepin' cases till I find out what Bud's idee was of havin' me day-herd the old coot. He ain't done a thing but sleep, ever since I went on guard."

Sam grinned, showing an amazing lot of teeth.

"Yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk, he sho' kin sleep when chance come along. Boss, he make a great ole niggah-drivah-down-Souf —yessuh, he sho' do so! Ain' much sleepin' when Boss is home; nothin' but wuhk fo' ole Blinkah 'n' me.

"Ah sho' admire to git yo'-all somethin' to eat, if Boss, he doan come ketch me. Lawsy, Mist' Meddalahk, ef Boss, he come ridin' along home, Ah'd sho' 'preciate it ef yo'-all lock up ole Sam jes' lak Blinkah. An' ef Boss, he s'picions Ah nevah made no resistumce, Ah'd lak li'l', small cut, mebby, on ma haid to show. Boss he's pow'ful s'picious man, Mist' Meddalahk, yessuh, he sho' is!"

"Say, the boys call me Jelly. Don't be so darn formal, Snowball, or I'll likely give you a lump about the size of a goose egg to show. You set out the grub, and I'll mebbe lock you up jest for a josh. I dunno but what I like the idee."

Thus it happened that Gelle was sitting with his mouth full and his jaws working comfortably when Palmer rode up to the gate, leaned and unlatched it, sidled his horse through and closed the gate afterward. Perhaps he noticed fresh horse tracks that were strange, though Gelle's horse now stood tied in the bushes at the place where Bud had left Gelle. Perhaps Palmer saw the imprint of Jelly's boots. Whatever the cause, he eyed the house as if he knew some danger lurked within—or perhaps he was merely estimating the amount of damage done to his shingles.

Gelle had not expected him back. He finished off his glass of buttermilk and washed down the mouthful of bread and butter with one huge swallow, drew his hand hastily across his mouth and did a rapid mental calculation in miles and minutes.

"Yo're my prisoner, Snowball," he said over his shoulder. "I might give you another dollar if you done a good job of playin' dead till I holler when. Go on in and take a nap with the old man while I talk to your boss."

From the yard a harsh voice called Sam, and after a minute's hesitation Gelle signed him forward.

"Act natural, Snowball, or I'll spill you all over the room," he muttered.

"Boss, he pow'ful mean man. He kill dis ole niggah——" Sam held up two shaking hands, the palms pinkish as if he had worn off the color.

"Gwan—answer him! He ain't goin' to have a chance at you. I want to get him inside, Snowball. Gwan."

Palmer shouted again, and Sam caught up a chipped yellow bowl and stood forth bravely enough, though Gelle, standing just out of sight behind the door, could see how his legs were shaking.

"Yessuh, boss, yessuh." Sam ducked his head propitiatingly.

"Sam, who's been here to the house! No lies, you worthless black whelp!"

"Heah? To dis yah house? Ah dunno 'zackly, boss. Ah-h——" He took another breath and plunged. "Sho'ht time aftah yo'-all ride off, Boss, man he comes lopin' along. Wants to speak wid yo'-all, 'cawdin' to what he says. Ah says yo'-all ain't heah an' 'tain't pawss'ble he kin speak

wid yo'-all. He hang eroun' awn his hawse, but he doan shoot no gun, an' bimeby he ride awn off."

"Did, aye? Anybody you know?"

"No-suh, Boss, Ah doan reckon Ah knows dat cowboy nohow. But Ah notice, Boss, he's got Meddalahk brand on he's hawse."

Palmer swore such fluent, heartfelt oaths that Gelle grinned and whispered to Sam that there was one thing old Palmer wasn't stingy with, and that was cuss words.

"Which way—here, come back here, you damn' lazy idiot, and tell me which way he went!"

" 'Clah to goodness, Boss, Ah so plumb tickled he's goin', Ah doan rightly know! Awn uprivah som'ers, Boss." Sam rolled his eyes in terror, for Palmer was climbing down from his horse in the manner that promised blows delivered upon the first luckless object within reach.

"Scoot!" whispered Gelle, pointing toward the door of the small room beyond. Then, remembering that the door was locked, he strode across on his toes, unlocked it and thrust Sam headfirst inside. He had turned the key and faced the outside doorway when Palmer came up and stepped in.

Surprise halted him there just an instant too long, for Gelle gave a long leap and landed a blow of the fist that rocked Palmer and brought both hands up and away from his gun, vaguely attempting to ward off another blow that landed full on the nose. Tears of pain started to Palmer's eyes, but he fought back viciously and shouted for Sam.

"Sam's locked up," Gelle told him between clenched teeth. " 'Twouldn't help you none to have him here. Leggo that gun! Damn you, I could have shot you down like a dog, if I'd wanted to!"

Before he had finished Gelle was tempted to regret his fair dealing. They swayed the full length of the kitchen, locked in each other's arms. Palmer managed to get him by the throat and beat his head against the wall until points of light whirled before Gelle's eyes. He tore loose, filled his lungs with one great gasp and tripped Palmer, who pulled the table over on top of them as they went down clawing like fighting cats. Gelle got the edge of a board in the ribs and felt a sickening crack and after that the flaming agony of a splintered rib prodding tender flesh, but he clung tenaciously with knees and fingers and managed to stay on top.

The fight ended when Gelle snatched up the heavy earthen pitcher that had held buttermilk and had come through the upheaval without a crack. He swung the pitcher aloft by the handle and brought it down on Palmer's head—breaking both. At least there was no doubt about the pitcher, and as for Palmer, he gave a convulsive shudder and went limp, and a cut on his head began to swell as the blood oozed out.

Gelle pulled himself up, grunting with the pain in his side, and looked down at the havoc he had wrought. He would have set the table back on its legs, but the effort was too painful, so he went staggering over to the bedroom door and unlocked Sam, bringing him out with an imperative, beckoning gesture, Palmer's gun in his hand. Sam came as if he were being kicked out, with his back bowed in and his fingers spread ready to ward off a blow.

"Get a rope or something and tie him up," Gelle ordered sharply. "I ain't goin' to hurt you, Snowball—not if you behave. That'll do. Pull his hands around behind him—no, he ain't dead. He'll come to after a while. Get a wiggle on."

"Yessuh, yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk."

"All right—fine. Now, just drag him in there, will you, Snowball? And lock the door; or no, just drag him in there. The darn cuss *might* take a notion to die on my hands, and I want him alive. When he comes to himself, I want to talk to him."

"Yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk, yo'-all sho' am a hahd man to git shet of bein' talked to!" Now that Palmer was safely tied, Sam could afford to take a full breath and to grin once more at his new friend. "When yo'-all say you wanta talk wif a man, 'tain't no use foh to avoid de cawnvusashum —'tain't no mannah of use a-tall. Might as well make de bes' of it an' *talk*. Yessuh, Mist' Meddalahk, yo'-all sho' am detuhmined!"

Gelle laughed, but that did not cause him to relax his watchfulness.

"What about the men that work here, Snowball? Pretty good friends of yourn, ain't they?"

"Friends uh mine? Bat 'n' dat ah Mex, 'n' Ed, friends uh mine? No-suh, Mist' Meddalahk, dey ain't no friends ob nobody but deyselfs. Dem fellahs, dey so plumb mean an' awnery dey jes' about hate dey-

selfs mos' awl de time. No-suh, Ah ain' got no friends—not awn disheah ranch, Ah ain'. Cusses an' kicks, dat 'bout awl Ah evah gits aroun' heah."

"Oh, all right. I just wondered, because if they come lopin' in I'm liable to need more rope. Snowball——"

"Yessuh, yessuh, Ah gits moah rope direckly, Mist' Meddalahk. Lawsy, how dem fellahs do lie to disheah ole niggah 'bout you gemmen at de Meddalahk! Yessuh, dey sho' do lie!"

"Got anything to bandage a broken rib?"

Sam gave him a startled roll of eyeballs and hurried out, presumably after bandages. Gelle heard him clumping around overhead for a few minutes and wondered what he was up to. But when Sam came down he had a sheet, yellowed and smelling a bit musty; and over his arm was hung a coil of cotton clothesline.

"Onlies' sheet in de house is up in de lof'. Big trunk awl wrop up wid disheah rope. Mist' Meddalahk, suh, Ah mighty sorry yo'-all done bruk a rib, kase mo' fightin' sho' is boun' to come when dem three gits heah, an ole Sam, he ain' no good nohow."

"You can tie 'em up, if I can git 'em into the house and pull down on 'em with my gun. Pretty tame way to git 'em, but I guess it'll be best to play safe. How soon you reckon they're liable to come?"

But Sam, of course, did not know. All they could do was wait and hope for action before dark. There was, Gelle knew upon reflection, small chance that the three Palmer men would be left to ride unhindered out of Smoky Ford, once Delkin's party arrived. Palmer they had of course missed on the way, but unless his men left soon after he did they would be captured and held in town until the sheriff could come and get them. It was just a bit of good luck that had sent Palmer into his hands.

And then, not more than half an hour after they had finished their preparations and time was beginning to drag, a scattered fusillade of shots came crackling thinly from the pasture, down near the ledge.

Gelle got up too carelessly and was obliged to sit down again. Sam was goggling at him as if in Gelle's face he could read the explanation of the sounds.

"Our boys chased 'em out, mebbe," Gelle muttered, speaking in that repressed tone which comes of not being able to take a deep breath. "Still—I dunno. Gee, I'd love to be down there! All I get out of this deal is sittin' out while the rest plays. Listen at 'em, Snowball! Darn the luck, anyway!"

CHAPTER XII.

BUD MAKES A MISTAKE.

LIFE would sometimes be simpler if events were more evenly spaced and periods of inaction put to a better use by letting them hold the incidents that otherwise must pile on top of one another and crowd one day overfull of excitement. But so long as we remain unscientific enough to take things just as they come and let our emotions rule our hands and feet, life will continue to go steady by jerks.

Take this day in Smoky Ford and at the Palmer ranch, just seven miles out, yet well within the trouble zone. If there is anything in thought vibrations, Tony and Bud must have owned powerful mental dynamos and set them working full speed that morning. The pity is that they did not work altogether in harmony, but instead set up different currents of violent thought action—and most of the mental activity gyrated around that money looted from the bank.

The money itself was safe enough, once it reached Delkin's stable. Delkin was a shrewd man when sudden misfortune did not upset him, and his method of safeguarding the bank's property was truly ingenious. Among his horses was one with the significant name of The Butcher. His character lived up to his name, and with the exception of the stableman and Delkin himself not a man in Smoky Ford would venture within reach of his teeth or his heels—and both had an amazing reach, by the way. Delkin studied long and deeply over the safest place—barring the bank—for the money and papers, and his cogitations brought him finally to The Butcher. The bank, he considered, was out of the question for the present. Some one would be sure to see them carrying the stuff inside, and the news would spread like a scandal, a thing to avoid. Until Palmer's gang was safe behind bars it must be taken for granted that the money was still missing.

This naturally left Delkin thinking of The Butcher, and the more he thought of

h'm the easier he felt in his mind. The Butcher had his own little corral for exercise, his own box stall. Moreover, the manger was built high and had a false bottom nearly two feet from the floor. Who in Smoky Ford would ever dream of finding anything in The Butcher's box stall, even if they dared look there?

Delkin did not say a word until they reached the stable and he had sent the stableman up into the office to watch for chance callers. The Butcher was out in the corral, and Delkin closed the stall door to make sure that the horse would stay outside for a while. Even then he took only Bradley into his confidence, after the others had gone to see what was doing in the saloons and whether the Palmer men were still in town, and what the Meadowlark boys had gained by confession. Not even Bud suspected Delkin of having a secret, but supposed that the money would be kept in the office until it could be transferred to the bank vault. Instead, the two men carried it into the box stall, pried up a board in the manger and dropped everything underneath, replaced the board and the hay in the manger and heaved sighs of relief. Then Delkin waved Bradley out of the stall, opened the outer door and called The Butcher in. He came, nickering softly for a lump of sugar; got it and nibbled daintily while Delkin slipped out and shut the door. It was a bit early to shut up The Butcher, but the stableman would not bother with him unless he had to—Delkin knew that.

"There! We needn't worry about anybody stealing it to-night," grinned Delkin. "Unless the stable gets afire we're dead safe, Brad. We can leave it right there till we're ready to open up the bank again. Now, let's get after old Palmer and his gang."

They met Bud coming with four much-ruffled Meadowlarks, a small, rat-eyed Mexican hustled along in their midst. Bud's eyes were once more snapping with excitement, the others inclined to glassy stares through red and swollen lids.

"Here's the one they call 'Mex.' Took two knives off him, and the boys got a gun. Haven't located Palmer and Bat yet," Bud announced as the two bankers hurried toward them.

"Aw, they crawled off t' die, som'ers!" Tony pompously declared. "We licked 'em to a fare ye well. Didn't we lick 'em, boys?"

"Shore enough did," Mark Hanley boasted. "Put 'em both on the run. One of 'em chawed m' ear off, purty near, but I got 'im."

"Sh'd say we licked 'em!" big Bob boasted. "Now I'm goin' to have a good time."

"Yes, y'betcha!" Jack Rosen approved gravely.

"Betcha they know now who the thieves is an' who the murderers is," Tony cried exultantly. "Told 'em myself. Called the turn on that boat—made 'em swaller twice, that did! Told 'em I could put m' hands on——"

"Good Lord!" Bud gave Delkin and Bradley a quick look that had in it a good deal of consternation. "They'll beat it out of the country, now. Gone for the loot, and they won't stop short of the bad lands. Tony, you damn chump, why didn't you keep your face closed?"

"Why? Had t' open it, didn't I, t' swaller a drink or two? Me, I don't drink only with m' eyes, I tell you those! Had t' open m' mouth anyway—thought I might as well use it. Wha's matter with that? They *are* thieves 'n' murd'rers, ain't they? Told 'em so—licked 'em to a frazzle. Didn't we, boys?"

"Damn right," three voices growled in chorus.

"Palmer, he run out on us, 'r we'd 'a' licked him too," continued Tony. "This Mex, here, he's licked. Howled like a pup. Didn't yuh, Mex?" Tony turned gravely to the cringing captive, who nodded sullen surrender.

"Well, get your horses," Bud snapped. "You've got some riding to do now, you're so darn gay and festive. How long have they been gone? Do you know?"

They thought they knew exactly, but their answers were so conflicting that Bud and Delkin finally took the word of a boy, who volunteered the information that Bat and Ed White had ridden out of town about ten minutes ago, headed along the road toward home.

"We'll have to fan the breeze, boys, and we may wind up in the bad lands. Mr. Bradley, we better take a little grub—sardines and crackers, or something like that. Because if we don't overhaul them at the ranch we'll just keep on going."

"I'll bring some stuff to the stable," said Bradley, and started on a trot to the store.

"Oh, hell, and we don't get drunk at all!" Big Bob Leverett complained disgustedly. "Wisht I had the whisky I washed m' face in. A hull quart of Metropole gone!"

Bud whirled on the group and stared angrily from one to the other.

"You're drunk enough," he said contemptuously. "You fellows seem to think this is just a picnic. Do you want me to round up a posse here in Smoky Ford, and tell them that we've got the goods on the gang that killed Charley and robbed the bank, and that we're going after them, but our own men are too drunk to be of any use? I can take a town bunch, if you say so, and let you boys stay here and swill whisky. It would be a consistent finish to the damage you've done already—telling the gang that we're wise to them, roughhousing a while like any other drunken chumps, and then letting them all get off except this greaser who may not know a thing about it!" His lip curled in a sneer. "A hell of an outfit you are to round up a bunch of outlaws!"

"Gwan and get your Smoky Ford possy if you want to, Bud," Tony said stiffly, the whisky fumes swept clean from his brain by the hurt Bud had given. "While you're getting them, we'll hit the trail. Come on, boys."

They took the remaining distance in a run, and they were saddled and ducking under the stable doorway and racing off up the road and out of town while Bud was still waiting for Bradley to come with the supplies, and Delkin was telephoning the sheriff to come as quick as the Lord would let him. Smoky Ford itself saw only that the Meadowlark boys were in town and raising Cain again, never dreaming that their one big tragedy of the summer was reaching a fortuitous climax under the guise of a fight in a saloon.

The Mexican, dropped unceremoniously when the boys ran for their horses, would have ducked out of sight completely if Bud had not seen his first furtive sidling and caught him by the collar. Him they turned over to the stableman for safe-keeping. He would be kept safe, for the stableman hated any man not of his own race, as is the way of certain cramped souls.

"Now we'll have to fan it," Bud cried impatiently, "before those fool punchers of ours do some other crazy thing. How soon will the sheriff get here, Mr. Delkin?"

"Wel-l, it's about four thirty now—little more. Oughta make it by ten or eleven. I was lucky to catch him in the office. Just got in off a wild-goose chase down river, he said. I told him if we aren't here or at Palmer's, he better pick up our trail there. Didn't mention getting the money back—too darn many mule ears on the line. Didn't say anything definite, only I needed him right away, and he'd find me out at Palmer's or somewhere beyond. He'll come on a long lope. And say, Bud, the way the boys shot out of the door and took off up the road, I don't believe they were so darn drunk, after all!"

"Why?" The harsh judgment of youth still held Bud's reason in thrall. "Think it takes brains to stay on a horse? I never saw our boys when they couldn't ride, Mr. Delkin. It's all right—if they take it out in riding and don't attempt to *think*."

Unconsciously Bud maligned those four. They weren't so far from being sober, once they were out of the atmosphere of the saloon and pelting up the road in the cooling breeze of late afternoon. In spite of Bud's opinion of their mental condition, the four were beginning to think.

"Know what old Palmer done?" Bob Leverett, soberest of the four, half turned in the saddle to face the others as they raced along. "Went after the dough they took from the bank. I'd bet money on it. He heard them cracks you made to Bat about the boat, Tony. That's about when he beat it. Great friend, ain't he? Quit his men cold at the first word you let drop. Betcha he's got the money an' gone with it."

"Betcha we ain't far behind 'im," Tony flashed back. "Bud, he makes me sore! Tell you right now, I don't like the way he r'ares up and gives us this high-schoolin' talk when things don't go jest to suit his idees. Drunk! Hunh!"

"Bud, he's a good kid enough, but he's *just* a kid," Mark Hanley opined. "Swell-headed; knows it all; thinks a little schoolin' gives him a license t' ride herd on us boys like we was yearlin's turned out in the spring. C'me on—mebbe we can round up the bunch 'fore he gets there. Learn 'im a little somethin', mebbe."

"Well, I don't want to make any brash statements," said Rosen, "but I betcha,

Bud, he'll wish't he'd trailed with our party, 'stead of his own, 'fore he's through. We got 'em runnin' for the boodle, and now we'll fog along behind and glom 'em just about the time they get it."

Bob Leverett nodded and pricked his horse with the spurs, and the others lunged ahead to keep pace with him. They were yet some distance from the house when they, too, heard the distant pop of gunshots—the unmistakable pow-w of a .45 fired several times in quick succession, or else one or two shots from several guns. And, riding hard to the gate, they were not too late to see the telltale blue haze down by the pasture gate to show where the shooting had taken place.

Bob, in the lead, opened the gate and let it swing wide, to where the weight sagged it down so that it dropped against a rock and remained there. The three pounded through and took his dust to the stable and beyond, passing the house without a glance toward it.

"It's dem Meddalahks dat shot shingles off ouah roof, suh," Sam called excitedly to Gelle, who was standing in the kitchen door with his six-shooter in his hand and a longing look in his eyes. "Now moah shootin' takes place direckly, Mist' Meddalahk. Yessuh, dey shuah kin shoot!"

"My luck—always settin' around in the shade watchin' the rest of the bunch have all the fun!" Gelle turned back, walked very circumspectly to the bedroom door, turned the knob and looked in. "Your boss is showin' signs of life, Snowball. Guess I better camp here, seein' he's the old he-one of the bunch. Tell you what you do, Snowball. You go on down there and tell the boys Jelly's here with a rib broke into a thousand pieces, and old Palmer hog tied so I can't leave, nohow. Will you do that?"

"Ah—Ah do anything awn uth fo yo'-all, Mist' Meddalahk. Ah—ef dey-all shoots ole Sam, Ah wish yo'-all 'd kinely keep disheah dollah fo' tokum ob mah gratefulness, Mist' Meddalahk, suh."

Gelle took the dollar, looked queerly at Sam and gave it back. He took what was left of the sheet, thrust it into the negro's shaking hands and grinned reassuringly.

"You wave that, Snowball, and they won't shoot. I'm kinda afraid they might go out the other way, up along the field to the road. You ketch 'em, Snowball, and I'll give you another dollar when you bring 'em back. Tell 'em what I said—I got Palmer hog tied, but my rib is stickin' through my liver or somethin' like that, so I can't fan down there. Gwan."

Sam went, waving the torn sheet every step of the way; a brave thing to do, considering how scared he was. And Gelle, watching anxiously from the doorway, wondered why the shooting did not begin again now that his fellows were at hand. For that matter, since it was not the Meadowlark boys who had started the gun fighting in the pasture, down by the ledge, who was it? He had Palmer safe, and so far as he knew Bat Johnson and the others had not returned from town. Certainly they had not passed the house, or Sam would have seen them. Yet they must have left town, or the Meadowlark boys would not be here.

"If I don't find out how about it right pronto, I'll bust!" Gelle complained to a lean cat that came walking up the path with a chipmunk in its mouth; earning its board, Gelle thought irrelevantly while he waited, sight and hearing strained to catch some indication of what was going on down there. It was too quiet. Gelle did not like it at all.

And then, from the road to town came the *plucket-pluckety* tattoo of galloping horses, and Bud, Delkin and Bradley swerved without checking their pace and came racing through the gateway; saw Gelle standing in the doorway and reined closer to the house. Bud's horse stopped in two stiff-legged jumps within ten feet of the door.

"It's down in the pasture, whatever's goin' on," Gelle called without waiting to be asked. "I got Palmer tied up in here—the boys went foggin' past—there was some shootin', but it quit before they got there. For Lord's sake go bring me some news!"

At that moment the boys came loping around the end of the stable, riding loose and in no great hurry.

"Show's over," Tony bellowed, with possibly a shade of mean triumph in his voice—for Bud's benefit that was. "Bat and Ed, they're down there in the pasture deader'n last year. That Mex and ole Palmer's about all there is left to hang, and we glommed the Mex and Jelly's got Palmer. Bud, you might as well go on home. Us boys has wound things up for you."

"Yes? Did you get the money back?" Bud was young enough and human enough to take that fling at them.

"Oh, no-o—but that's a mere deetail. We ain't come to that yet." Tony's manner was still charged with triumph.

"Say, who shot Bat an' Ed White?" Gelle's mind had seen and pounced upon the one puzzling point in the affair. "You fellers didn't. There wasn't a shot fired after you boys passed the house."

"Why—we figured they shot each other. Bat's gun was still smokin' when we got there, and Ed's gun was warm. Bat had fired three shots and Ed White two."

"Yeah? Who fired them other four or five shots? I counted nine or ten, I wasn't sure which. How many'd you hear, Snowball?"

Sam had just arrived puffing from haste and excitement.

"Jes' what yo'-all heah, Mist' Meddalahk, yessuh. Me, Ah doan count good nohow, but Ah's shuah Ah huhd shootin' lak dey nevah would run outa bullits. Skuse me, Mist' Meddalahk, Ah counts mighty slow, but Ah huhd jes' as many as what yo'-all huhd."

"Sounded like more than five, to me," Bob Leverett declared, now that the subject was opened. "More like about four guns in action than two; three, anyway. Reckon there's more in the gang that we don't know about?"

"That," said Delkin, "is what we must find out."

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPICIONS.

WITH two of the boys—Mark Hanley and Bob Leverett—on guard over the bodies of Bat Johnson and Ed White, the whole party returned to the house in a thoughtful mood. Certain small details puzzled them, and Bud appeared to be the most worried man among them, though he did not say much. What he did do was give Gelle a meaning glance and tilt of the head when no one was looking, and then stroll out to the well some distance away and downhill at that—too many ranchers seeming to believe that the cook needs exercise. In a couple of minutes Gelle came walking circumspectly down the slope, his face twisted with the pain of moving.

"What's eatin' on you, Bud? Thought I told you I got about four inches of rib stickin' out through m' back," he complained as he came up.

Bud's eyes were somber as on the day of the bank tragedy, and he gave no sign of sympathy—proof of how worried he was.

"Jelly, there's going to be a kick-back in this thing if we aren't mighty careful. Bradley and Delkin are wonderin' right now how polite they can be about Palmer's money being gone. Are you sure he came straight here to the house from town?"

"Yeah, I saw him ride up to the gate, open it an' ride in. I wish't now I'd throwed down on the old coot before he got into the house. I'd 'a' saved me a busted rib. But I was scared maybe the rest was right behind him, Bud, and I wanted to get 'em all. Gettin' Palmer inside the house, what I done to 'im wouldn't be public. That's what comes of bein' a hawg," he added glumly. Then he came back to the meat of Bud's question. "Why, Bud, is Palmer's cache missin'?"

"Yes, and Bat Johnson and Ed White were dead before they reached the ledge. They didn't have any money to speak of; a little chicken feed in their pants pockets is all. Our boys don't know where the stuff was hidden, and I went with Delkin and the others to town and came back with them. So you see, Jelly——"

"Yeah. I see, all right." Gelle's eyes went cold as they bored into Bud's mind. "Well, what d' you think about it yourself, Bud?"

"I?" Bud looked at him straight. "Whatever you say, Jelly, goes with me."

Gelle stared longer, exhaled a long breath and relaxed to a mirthless grin.

"I oughta lick you, Bud, for needin' my word. But friendship wabbles when they's money in sight, so—I never went near the damn place after I packed that back load of gold away from it. You was behind me—behind us all, for that matter," Gelle's grin turned a bit sardonic. "Still, whatever you say goes with me! I can be as good a friend as you can, Bud."

Bud had to laugh, though he felt little enough like it.

"You win, Jelly. I'd have had to do some quick work, but I suppose it would have been humanly possible for me to duck back up the ledge, grab Palmer's money and come along with it until I saw a place to ditch it where I could come back after it. Fast work—but I did stand in the fringe

of trees by the ledge and watch the stables here until you fellows were out of sight. I wanted to make darn sure you weren't seen.

"Well, I didn't go back, either. But the fact remains that the cache is cleaned out—in a hurry, by the look of things around there. And those two dead men dropped in the open, just inside the gate and before they had been to the ledge. For one thing, Jelly, our boys weren't so very far behind them, so Bat and Ed wouldn't have had time to get the stuff, hide it somewhere else and then get into a fight over it and kill each other off before our boys came. They'd have had to do faster work than I would to have raided the cave while you fellows crossed the open down there."

"And on the other hand, you fellers rode off and left me in easy walkin' distance of the money, and the old man sound asleep and snorin'." Gelle reasoned it out soberly, stating the evidence against himself quite as impartially as Bud had done in his own case. "Yeah, I'm the pelican, too, that told Delkin to grab the works. Looks like I'm bogged, right now, and sinkin' fast. Bud, on the face of it you'n me both is guilty as hell. Ain't we?"

"On the face of it, yes." Bud studied the evidence while he finished rolling a cigarette. "Of course, we can't tell yet just how it will affect the case against Palmer. Not at all, maybe. That's something we have nothing to do with. I wanted you to know the money Delkin left in the cache is gone—how much, none of us know, of course. It's mighty mysterious, don't you think? Say, Jelly, what about those shots? Are you dead certain you heard more than five?"

"Shore I am. But I couldn't prove it, Bud—not in a thousand years. Snowball, his word ain't no good, so there y' are. I believe in my heart somebody else was after that boodle, and Bat an' Ed White, they run into 'em, going after it theirselves. But that ain't proof. Say, Bud, d' you s'pose Butch Cassidy rode over on the quiet——"

"I've been thinking of Butch. He's that stripe, and so is the rest of the Frying Pan outfit, in my opinion. But as you say, Jelly, opinions aren't proof. Besides, Skookum says he didn't tell Butch where his grandfather had his money hidden. I'll take the kid's word. He wouldn't lie—not to me, or any one he likes. Butch tried to pump him, all right, but Skookum says he didn't tell Butch anything much that we didn't hear in the cookhouse."

"Did the kid say what ole Palmer's money was—gold or paper or whatever?"

"He said he saw a lot of gold money, in a sack. You were looking over Delkin's shoulder, Jelly. What did it look like to you?"

"Gold. Jest about what the old thief would take and hide, Bud. Prob'ly most of it was stole, and bills has got numbers on. Then ag'in gold ain't spoilable. What you laughin' at, Bud?"

"At us, Jelly. Delkin certainly must know Palmer's money was in gold. And Lark's loaded up with gold coin——"

"So we got our alibi right there, Bud. Far's that goes, the Fryin' Pan's got some honest gold money——"

"And there is *their* alibi. And Delkin is sure to consider Lark's gold as an 'out' for us, just as we can believe Butch would account for any gold he flashed."

"Can't we catch 'im? Why don't you take out after 'em, an' see if you can't pick up their trail? Gosh, Bud, if the money's gone, you'n me *knows* Butch must have glommed it. I'd go, only for this damn rib."

"Better have one of the boys hitch up a rig and take you in to town, Jelly. Old Doc Grimes isn't much force, but he ought to be able to fix you up all right. I'll take Bob and see if we can't pick up the trail. He'll keep his mouth shut."

"Yeah. Talk is what we want damn little of, Bud. One word is all them pelicans would need to send 'em down into the breaks—and I ain't a doubt in the world but what they got hideouts down in there where they kin live a year if they feel that way, and never show a head. You beat it now, Bud. I'll go on down and take Bob's place. I can walk slow. And I'll have some lie thunk up for Delkin and Bradley, time they get t' askin' questions about you. They're so tickled to get their claws on Palmer that they won't say much. We'll let on like you'n Bob had t' go home for somethin'. I'll fix it."

At the house Delkin and Bradley were having quite enough to occupy their minds without watching the coming and going of the Meadowlark boys. Palmer was conscious, sitting up in a chair and getting somewhat the best of an amateurish third

degree which Delkin and Bradley were attempting to give him. Palmer had a wet towel tied around his head, and the loose folds collected extra moisture and sent it trickling down his seamed, sallow face and into his collar. Palmer's eyes were just as human as a snake's, with an opaque, impersonal glitter that masked effectually the thoughts shuttling back and forth in his brain. Now and then he barked a question of his own which proved how well his brain was working in spite of the gash on his head.

"Killed two of my men, aye? Come onto my ranch and shot down two men in cold blood—that what you're tryin' to tell me I'm responsible for?"

"We didn't shoot your men," Delkin explained, though he should not have replied to the charge. "They shot each other. They were after the loot from the bank, and they're lying down there inside your pasture fence, waiting for the sheriff to look them over when he gets here. Even you thieves and murderers can't hang together, it seems. They meant to get the plunder and leave you in the lurch."

"Plunder? What plunder's that?"

"The stuff you folks stole from the bank."

"Looky here, Mr. Delkin. You be careful what you say! It ain't safe to make charges you ain't prepared to prove. I'm just remindin' you now that there's a law that takes care of malicious slander. I can't answer for Bat an' Ed, but I want you to understand the bank owes me over seven thousand dollars that I had on deposit, and that was stole—so you claim. You been hand in glove with the Meddalark right along, and I'm the loser by it. If I was you folks I wouldn't shoot off my mouth too much about that bank robbery."

Delkin and Bradley withdrew to talk it over, and it was then that they discovered that Bud and Gelle were missing. With Tony and Jack Rosen on guard at the house, they hurried down to the pasture and found Gelle reclining in the grass with his hat over his eyes to shield them from the slanting rays of the sun, and Mark Hanley sitting cross-legged beside him, killing time by carefully whittling a stick to a sharp point and cutting the point off so that he could sharpen another—an endless occupation so long as the stick lasts.

"Bud? Him an' Bob, they went home quite a while ago. Us boys can't all of us be away more'n a few hours at a stretch, an' Lark, he give them first four a coupla days off. I jest come on in with Bud for the day, but now I'm kinda laid out so I can't ride, and Bob, he went home in my place." Gelle vouchsafed a glance apiece to Delkin and Bradley before he let the hat drop down again over his face. They could not know, of course, that beneath the hat his lips were twitching with ironic laughter.

"Yes, they been gone half an hour, mebbe more," Mark contributed idly. "How long do we have to set here an' keep them unlovely dead from feelin' lonesome an' deserted?"

Without answering, Delkin turned and walked back to the house, Bradley following close.

"What do you think about it, Jim?" Bradley asked when two thirds of the distance had been covered.

"Brad, it doesn't matter what we think or don't think," Delkin told him irritably. "We'll do well to keep it to ourselves, no matter what it is. We won't mention Palmer's money to the sheriff, Brad. The Meadowlark boys have done a lot for the bank—we mustn't overlook that. I suppose they felt they had a right to collect their own damages from Palmer, for starting all that talk about them."

"They?"

"Bud and Jelly; one or both. I wouldn't think Bud would have had time to do it, or the inclination. But you can't tell what's going on in a man's mind. Jelly, of course, had the chance, and he's the one that suggested taking it. But we can't thrash the matter out and find which one did it. No, sir, we've got to keep our mouths shut; for the present, anyway."

"Let it look like them two down there—Bat and Ed White—got away with it," Bradley suggested, all in favor of protecting customers as good as the Meadowlark outfit. "We've got Palmer dead to rights, anyway, and we've got the bank property back. I guess we can afford to let Palmer hunt his own money, eh?"

"They were both in on it," Delkin went on glumly. "I saw them holding a little private confab down by the well. Bud felt as if he'd better get the stuff into the basin, I guess, before we asked him about

it. But damn it, Brad, I can't believe either of those boys would steal money!"

"You heard Jelly. They don't call it stealing, Jim, when they annex something a thief has cached away. Buried treasure, maybe, is what they'd call it. Anyway, they'd have a name that made it sound all right. Well, we'll have to let it go for the present. But I wish they'd kept their hands off that money!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BUD'S HEADACHE.

THE two had ridden for a mile or more through the foothills bordering the western line of the Indian reservation; boring into the wilderness to the east of the Little Smoky, following no trail but taking the easiest course, Bud leading the way. Certain horse tracks had led off in this direction from a rocky hollow across the road from Palmer's fence corner, and Bud, having determined that point while Bob was sneaking their horses away from the corral where the others were tied before piles of Palmer's treasured new hay, was following a general course without attempting to trail the horsemen who had left their mounts in the hollow.

"Bud, if it's a fair question, I'd like to ask if we're the hunters, or are we the game?" Bob cocked an inquiring eye toward his grim-faced leader.

"Both," Bud made laconic reply.

Bob studied that for a while, reins held high, big body poised lightly in the saddle, while his horse negotiated a particularly complicated descent through rocks to a gully bottom.

"All right with me, Bud," he said pensively, when they could once more ride together. "What's on my mind right now is, when do we feed this purty face of mine?"

"Didn't you eat in town?"

"Nh-nh. Tony, he went and got an idee in his head, and us boys was rung in on workin' it out. It was a hell of an idee, Bud. It started off with bathin' in whisky like they say the Queen of Sheeby done in asses' milk, without drinkin' none. Would you b'lieve that could be done? Well, it can't. But I done it, Bud. Tony, he got t' beefin' around about us fellers gettin' too dawg-gone lit up t' carry out this swell idee he had, so we done it. And then I'll be darned if Tony, he didn't get jagged and queer the hull entire play by tyin' into Bat Johnson! Made me so darn sore—and then after that, Bud, we was too busy whippin' them pups of Palmer's to go eat like white men. Gosh, I'm holler!"

"Well, so am I, if that will help you any."

"Don't feed a thing but my imagination, Bud. Whatfor party *is* this? Don't tell me a thing—but did you pick me to go off and starve to death with you? I'm a pore companion, Bud. Don't say no thing—I don't want t' hear a thing!"

"I know you don't, so I'll make it short. I found out from Skookum where Palmer cached his money, and I found all the stuff they'd stolen from the bank. Delkin and his outfit took that to town, and left Palmer's where it was. Now it's gone. They think Jelly or I got it—we could have if we worked fast enough. I think I know where it went, Bob. I think Butch Cassidy got more out of Skookum than the kid realized, and went after the dough himself. We'd beaten him to it, and the bank money is safe. But Jelly and I are in wrong unless we can locate the stuff we left in that cache."

"So you and me is headed fer the Fryin' Pan by our lonelies, thinkin' we can make Butch let loose of Palmer's stuff—supposin' he's got it?"

"That's one way to put it, Bob."

"Well," sighed Bob after a long interval of deep meditation, "all right. Me, I'm a chancey cuss, anyway. I crawled into a wolf den once, and the old she come and crawled in with me by another hole I didn't know about, and caught me with about four pups in my arms." He heaved another reminiscent sigh. "D' you pick on me, Bud, b'cause you knew I had the heart of an angry lion?"

Bud's brown-velvet eyes smiled briefly into his.

"I picked you primarily because I knew you'd keep your mouth shut afterward."

"Primarily, it's a cinch I will," Bob agreed with melancholy assurance. "Dead men tells no tales out of school. That's why."

"Oh, I don't think it will be that bad. They can't be far ahead of us, Bob. We may not have to go clear to the Frying Pan."

"No, boy, we might not live that long. But that's all right—only I always did hate

the thoughts of dyin' on an empty stomach."

"Why the sudden pessimism?" Having worries of his own, Bud leaned to sarcasm.

"Gosh, I'd *eat* that word if I could chew it!" Bob muttered longingly. "Say a softer one about that same length, won't you, p'fessor?"

"Go to the devil!" growled Bud angrily.

"I might, at that. I feel m'self slippin' that way," sighed Bob. "If it's a fair question, just what do you aim to do when we meet up with Butch? Ride up and say, 'H'lo, Butch, I'd thank yuh for that money or whatever you swiped from Palmer,' and then fall back graceful outa yore saddle, or what? B'cause Butch is bound to shoot. Don't make no mistake about that."

"What I do," said Bud shortly, "will depend on circumstances. I'm not fool enough to draw a chart. If Butch has been over here, he got that money. If he got it, I'm going to get it away from him and turn it over to Delkin. Only a fool would plan the details at this stage of the game."

"Yeah, that's right," Bob admitted meekly.

For a time they rode in silence, Bud leaning over the saddle horn to study the loose soil of the cañon bottom. Bob, riding close behind him, studied each wrinkle and draw with eyes narrowed to keener vision in the soft half lights of early evening when the shadows were sliding higher and higher on the western slopes and the peaks stood out all golden, clean-cut against the tinted clouds.

"Two horses," Bud looked over his shoulder to announce. "Both shod, but I've a hunch there's only one rider. Butch is so darned foxy I'm going to outguess him, right here." He pulled up and swung round so that Bob, halting likewise, faced him. "Bob, you've done a good deal of riding over this way, so I'll let you take the lead from now on. Never mind the tracks. I believe Butch thought he'd try the loose-horse stunt, and brought an extra along with him. Farther on he'll turn him loose and haze him up a different cañon—scatter the tracks. But I happen to know the shoe marks of that high-stepping brown he rides all the while. He's ahead of the other one, and back there where those rocks are lying helter-skelter Butch rode ahead and the other one followed him like a led horse. Riders would have picked, different trails among those rocks. You didn't follow my tracks, you remember. Each rider has his own notions of such things, and no man likes to trail right after another rider unless the path is so narrow he's got to. Ever notice that?"

"Ye-ah, now you speak of it. Gosh, you'll be a smart man, Bud, when yo're growed up."

"Well, right ahead here, I'll bet you a new hat the tracks will jumble a bit and then separate. And Bob, I'm betting on another psychological twist. I bet you Butch will angle through these hills, and won't make straight for the Frying Pan. He'll be watching out behind—that's one reason why I'm holding back, just here. We don't want to crowd him, come to think of it. What we want to do is hit straight for the Frying Pan, by the shortest trail we know. Or the shortest you know. I lost a lot of trail lore in the years I had to spend in school."

"Yeah, I get you, Bud. I know a short cut through these hills all right. But what if he don't show at the Fryin' Pan? Looks like a long gamble, t' me."

"He will. He's working there, and the Frying Pan is a bad bunch to break with. Butch is foxy. Also, he wants the big end, if I'm any judge. I'll bet you he hasn't said a word to Kid or any of the others about this deal. Didn't you see how Butch's eyes kind of glittered when I counted out that fifteen hundred to Kid? It was a pretty sight—gold twenties and tens stacked like poker chips on the table. Fifty twenty-dollar gold pieces—ten piles, five high; and fifty ten-dollar pieces, five piles ten high. It was enough to make any one's mouth water for gold money,. wasn't it, Bob? I saw Butch's face when Kid raked the gold back into the bags. I saw how his tongue went licking across his lips and——"

"Made me lick m' chops, too, Bud. And I ain't no thief," Bob put in fairly.

"Then think how you'd scheme if you *were* a thief!" Bud flashed back. "Put yourself in Butch's place. If you knew about where you could annex a fortune in gold and paper money—stolen goods that every one knew you couldn't have taken from the bank—and all you had to do was to ride over on the quiet and swipe it away from thieves—would *you* tell anybody else, and have to divvy? You know darned well

you wouldn't, Bob. Neither would I. I'd want it all.

"And by thunder! Bob, that's why he brought along an extra horse! I'll bet you he thought he might need one to pack away the bank loot. He wouldn't know exactly how bulky it was, you see. Well, maybe it was partly that, and partly to make enough tracks to confuse Palmer's bunch. If he got the stuff to the Frying Pan, and needed help to hang onto it, he could cache most of the gold and then take Kid in on the deal and split the rest. At least, that's what I'd do."

"And is this what you'd do, too? Set here chinnin' all night an' let him get the money all spent b'fore we take in after him?" Bob's voice had lost its humorous patience. "Me, I'm ready to swaller m' saddle strings, like they was egg noodles! You want to get over to the Fryin' Pan by the shortest route. Nothin' like hunger to drive a man, Bud, so I'm goin' to lead you back to them rocks and take on up over the ridge. It'll be nasty ridin' after dark, so I advise you to pry your eyes loose from them tracks and come on, if yo're goin' with me."

He reined his horse around and rode back the way they had come without another word or glance, and Bud perforce followed him. Plainly, Butch had chosen to keep to the cañons where he could duck out of sight or even lay an ambush if necessary. That way must be longer, and in spite of the rough going Bud counted on making time.

The stars were out in a velvet sky when the two loped unhurriedly up the long lane which was the only feasible approach to the Frying Pan, and pulled up at the high, barbed-wire fence that warded off intruding animals from the dooryard. Kid himself came walking stiltedly down the beaten path to the gate, and behind the green-curtained windows the boisterous talk and laughter stilled. In the shadow of the house, away from the seeping light from the windows, darker shadows indicated the blurred outlines of Frying Pan men who were making unobtrusive investigation of these unheralded horsemen.

"Why, hello, Bud," Kid cried distinctly for the comfort of his men. A note of genuine surprise was in his voice which Bud wished had been pitched in a lower key. "That you, Bob? Turn your bronchos in the big corral and come on in. Had your supper?"

That word brought a groan from Bob so lugubrious that Kid laughed.

"Hey, Bill! Come take the boys' horses to the corral, will you? Bob's groanin' for pie—I know that tone, Bob." Then he added carelessly, "Butch didn't come back with you, eh?"

"We've been scurruping around—looking for a couple of those horses," Bud lied. "Butch will be along, maybe. Was he coming back to-night?"

"Said he was, when he started out this morning. But I dunno, Bud. That Eastern girl's a strong drawin' card, looks like. Guess you folks'll just about have to carry rocks in your pocket for Butch! Any time you ketch him ridin' into the basin, you just rock him home, will you?"

"You know it!" Bob made emphatic declaration. "Say, our little pilgress ain't to be dazzled by no such a hypnotizer as Butch. Say, d' you mind if I clean the Fryin' Pan plumb out of grub? I got an appetite, me."

Kid laughed and waved him toward the kitchen. He and Bud followed more slowly and Kid's mind still tarried with Butch.

"Butch kind of wanted to go back with you fellers, I guess," he remarked. "He never said a word about it, though, till you'd been gone an hour or so; then it was too late—I had to use him. B'sides that, I kind of got the idee you and him didn't hitch very well. Butch is kind of funny, that way. Takes streaks. You don't want to pay no attention to him, Bud."

"Why," said Bud carelessly, "I never had a word with Butch except that little sneering remark he made about those black horses. I didn't mind that. They'll all be jealous before I'm through."

What Kid replied Bud could not have told five minutes after. His mind was keyed up to meet a crisis, and this desultory talk irritated him, distracting his thoughts at a time when he needed to be most alert. One thing he knew: Kid either was wholly ignorant of Butch's design, or he was playing his part so carefully that he would be dangerous later on, when Butch came riding home.

Yet there was another point which Bud wanted to think upon. If Kid Kern knew of that bank money and bonds hidden away in Palmer's cow pasture, would he let Butch

ride alone after it? Just one possible reason for that occurred to Bud, and that was Kid's wily caution that would think first of establishing an alibi that could not be broken. On the other hand, Palmer would never dare to accuse him openly; moreover, he would immediately suspect the Meadowlark. So far as Bud knew, the Frying Pan outfit had never been mentioned in connection with the tragedy at the bank, save as he and Gelle had spoken of the possibility of the Frying Pan's implication. In the face of Kid's untroubled manner and his evident indifference to Butch's movements, Bud decided that Butch was indeed playing a lone hand; snap judgment, he knew, because he was not left alone long enough to reason it out.

"Come on in and eat," Kid was urging hospitably. "I guess Bob ain't licked the Fryin' Pan clean, already." He laughed at his own joke, standing poised on the doorstep, perhaps wondering why Bud lagged behind.

"I don't feel like eating, just now, Kid. Just let me sit out here in the dark for a while. One of those splitting headaches—I don't want the light in my eyes."

"Cup of coffee'll do you good, Bud." Kid turned back with a solicitous air that was extremely well done if it was assumed to lull suspicion. "Tell you what. You go on upstairs to bed, and I'll send up some coffee. You know where you slept last time; you go crawl in there."

"No." Bud's tone was sharp and decisive. "It's cooler out here, and—if you'll send out a cup of coffee, I'll drink it. And for the Lord's sake, Kid, don't go and baby around about me! If you bawl it out to the bunch I'll take a fall out of you, sure as you're born, when my head quits jumping. All I want is to be left strictly alone for a while."

"Well, I could lick you, but have it your own way, Bud. Sick folks has got to be humored, they say."

Bud, lying on the ground with his head on his arms, wished with all his healthy young appetite that he dared go in and eat his fill. But that was a joy he must postpone—and then it struck him that Kid might dope the coffee!

The door opened and shut with a bang. Bud rolled over on his face, reached back cautiously and drew his gun from its holster and held it concealed under his folded arms. Lying so, he was as ready for instant action as is a cat that has drawn back its feet and tensed its muscles for a spring.

His nerves relaxed, his mind once more was at peace concerning the immediate future. Lying there on the ground, he could hear the faintest sound of far-off hoofbeats when Butch came riding home. And unless Kid or some other began shooting bullets into his prone body without warning, he could take the initiative, could dominate any situation that might arise.

The cup of coffee he waved away when Kid brought it, though the delectable aroma maddened him after his long fast.

"Would you take a headache powder, Bud? I got some that sure would knock that pain." The voice of Kid Kern was full of friendly sympathy. He never dreamed that Bud's six-shooter was looking at him bleakly over Bud's left forearm.

"No—this is fine. I'm easy, so long as I don't have to move." This was true enough, as Bud recognized with a fleeting grin. "Don't bother any more about me."

"Oh, I'll set with the sick, any time." Kid squatted on his haunches, after the manner of outdoor men, and began rolling a cigarette. "Keep the boys from gittin' curious. They'll think we're talkin' private out here."

Silence fell, save for the creaking of crickets, and the whisper of a cool breeze through the grass next the fence. Kid smoked, his big hat tilted back on his head, his eyes turned thoughtfully up toward the stars. Bud lay quietly with his face on his folded arms, his gun against his cheek, ready to come up shooting at the first breath of need. The cooling coffee sent faint whiffs of torturing fragrance to his nostrils. His eyes, half closed under the pinned-back brim of his hat, regarded Kid with unblinking attention. His ears, like faithful sentinels set on guard by his intrepid spirit, listened for hoofbeats down the lane.

CHAPTER XV.

FAIR WARNING.

BOB came out fairly licking his chops over the enormous supper he had just gorged; took in the situation at a glance, hovered there helplessly for a space and announced that he was going back in to have a game or two of high-five with the

boys. He kicked Bud's foot in passing; a hint which Bud could interpret as he pleased, though what Bob meant to signal was his intention to guard against treachery in the house.

Kid asked Bud how he felt, received a mumbled assurance that he was all right, and rolled and lighted another cigarette. A tactful companion was Kid Kern upon occasion; one who knew the Indian art of absolute passivity. It shamed Bud a bit to know that if he had been really suffering as he pretended to be, Kid would have sat right there all night if necessary, with never a complaint.

Then it came—the far-off *clupet-clupety-clupet* of a shod horse loping up the lane. Bud moved his long body a bit, drawing up one knee for leverage when the moment came to spring erect, and shifting his forehead so that his left hand pressed palm downward on the ground.

"How's she comin', Bud?" Kid poised his cigarette between two stained fingers while he peered down at Bud through the bright starlight. "Worse? Better let me get you that powder."

"No use—it's easing up—by spells." In the pauses Bud was listening, gauging the swiftness of the approach. Kid, he could see, had not yet caught the sound that had come clearly to Bud's ear pressed against the sod. His heart began to thump heavily, high in his chest. He could feel his face grow hot with the uprush of blood, and knew it was not fear that rioted within his body, but battle fever instead; the excitement that sends hot young blood leaping when conflict is near.

"Somebody comin'. Butch, I guess." Kid ground his cigarette stub under his heel as he rose.

The action and the announcement together gave Bud the excuse to rise also to a half-crouching position, poised on the balls of his feet like a runner waiting for the signal to go; a posture that would pass in the starlight as the squatting of a man whose interest is not sufficient to bring him to his feet. A full minute they listened to the nearing hoofbeats, then the dim outline of a horseman showed in the lane.

"Yeah, that's Butch. I'll go open the gate. Er—no, that horse of his is broke to gates, come to think of it."

Bud said nothing. He was watching Butch Cassidy sidle up to the gatepost, lean and push back the heavy wooden bolt, nip through as the gate swung open, catch it midway and sidle back, pushing it shut as he went. The horse stood quiet while the bar slid into place, then Butch came riding toward them.

"What's takin' place here? One of them garden parties you read about?" Butch laughed and swung a leg over the cantle to dismount.

"Yes. It's my party, Butch." Bud was up and standing so close behind him that Kid, ten feet away and in front of them, could not have shot without hitting both. "Keep your hands up—just like that." He reached forward, twitched Butch's gun from its holster and thrust it into his own.

"Why—what's wrong with Butch?" Kid's voice was surprised but it had not lost its friendly note.

"Nothing much, only he shot a couple of men and stole a few thousand dollars out of Palmer's cow pasture, and the blame rests on Jelly and me until I take this pelican in and return the money."

"Aw, he's full of prunes, Kid. Don't you b'lieve a word of that." Butch stood with his hands raised—any man will who feels the muzzle of a gun in his ribs—and stared at Kid. "I ain't been near Palmer's place. Are you goin' t' stand for this kind of a holdup, Kid, right in your dooryard?"

"I dunno, Butch, till I see how she lays." Kid's tone took on a silky smoothness. "Seems funny Bud would take the trouble to ride way over here just for a josh, to hold you up and accuse you of a thing like that. Must be a little something to it."

"He's crazy, that's all."

"I suppose you didn't leave a couple of horses tied in a draw, just across the road from Palmer's fence corner! I suppose I didn't find your tracks, heading this way, when Bob and I struck out to overhaul you? I happen to know how you pumped Skookum, to get all the information you could. He doesn't know how much he told you, but it was enough to make you feel sure you could put your hands right on the money the bank lost! Well, I took Delkin and some others out there, so they beat you to it, Butch. The trouble is, they left a lot that belonged to Palmer, and that's what you packed off with you, after you'd shot Bat Johnson and Ed White. They were after it, too, I suppose. Some

of our boys in town scared them till they beat it out of town, and they caught you there at the ledge. You downed them both, and got away with the stuff.

"Kid, I don't think for a minute that you'd go in on a deal of this kind—but I'll bet a horse Butch never gave you a chance! That's playing real square with you, isn't it?"

"No, Bud, it ain't. I never dreamed Butch would pull a thing like this, and him workin' for me. I hope you don't look on me as bein' capable of rusty work like that, Bud." He took a step forward, then halted. "How about this? Think you c'n trust me to help you go through Butch and see if he's got that money? How much was it? If he's got it with him, by Harry, he'll come clean. I hate t' turn in one of my own men, but I'll do it—I'll turn him over to the sheriff myself if there's a scrap of evidence t' hold him on. Can I come and look in his slicker, Bud?"

"I wish you would, Kid." Bud caught Butch by the slack of his coat and pulled him backward, away from the horse. "I trust you, yes. Sure, I do! But I'll put a bullet through you, Kid, if you try a double cross."

"That's all right. Can't blame you, Bud. Butch working for me, it does look kind of leery around here. But you can't do two things at once, very handy, and I'm damned if I'll stand for any man of mine pulling off a stunt like this and giving the Frying Pan a black eye with my neighbors."

"Go ahead and *look,* why don't you?" Butch challenged mockingly. "Sure, you'll try 'n' keep your stand-in, Kid—you ain't got a man that don't know you'd quit him cold in a pinch, and save your own bacon! Go ahead an' *look!*"

"You bet I'll look!" Kid picked up the reins, ran his hand reassuringly along the shoulder of the brown horse, grasped the horn and gave the saddle a little shake, and began untying Butch's slicker from behind the cantle, his fingers probing into the folds. "How much was it, Bud?"

"I don't know. It was gold, and there must have been several thousand dollars, at a rough guess. Nobody meddled with it—except the man that took it. Three or four regular coin bags, there ought to be."

Kid pulled off the slicker and slapped it on the ground, wide open and empty. Butch carried no saddle pockets, and there was no place on the saddle where a package of any size could be hidden.

Butch laughed unpleasantly.

"There ain't a darned thing, Bud." Kid turned and looked at the two. There was an awkward silence.

"Well, ain't somebody goin' to apologize?" Butch still had that mocking tone. "Bud's had a pipe dream, that's all. Now, I'll tell you where I been, and Bud c'n prove it easy enough. I been over to the Meddalark. I admit I went over there t' see Lark about gettin' a job. I stayed to dinner, and all the boys is gone but that pilgrim; your black horses is in the bronk corral, Bud, and the kid's ridin' a pinto pony around he calls Huckleberry. Need any more proof, or does that convince you that I was *there* all right?" Butch's tone was arrogant, though he was careful to make no offensive movement.

"Oh, you were there, no doubt. That doesn't let you out, Butch. Tell me where you were between four and five this afternoon!"

"On the road home," Butch drawled.

Bud twitched off Butch's hat and held it up in his left hand so that the edge of the brim was silhouetted against the stars.

"Look here, Kid. I suppose he'll say he bit that nick out of his hat brim! Ever see a prettier bullet mark? Just about the size a .45 would make, as nearly as I can tell in this light. Just for curiosity, Butch, how did you get that?" Bud's voice, that had been merely grim and unyielding, rang with triumph.

"None of your damn business! Is that plain enough, or shall I spell it?"

"No," said Bud softly, "you needn't spell it, Butch."

Followed another silence, which Kid broke placatingly.

"If Butch done what you think he done, Bud, I'm after him like a wolf. But if this is all the proof you got, why—you ain't got *any,* that's all." He stopped on the brink of saying more, and looked from one to the other.

"Yeah. You ain't got *any,*" Butch echoed, with that same faint mockery in his voice. "Goin' to hold me here all night? Me and my horse is hungry."

"Didn't anybody see him at Palmer's?" Kid asked doubtfully. And when Bud shook his head, Kid made a similar gesture. "Honest, Bud, I don't see what you're goin'

to do about it," he said. "I'm with you, if you've got any proof. But——"

"I'll get it," Bud declared harshly, and lowered his gun. "All right, Butch, this time you've got the best of it. But remember, I'll get that proof, and I'll get *you*. And I don't mean, necessarily, that I'll kill you, either."

"What do I care what you mean?" Butch took down his arms, rubbing his muscles unthinkingly. "Only—if kids are bound to get underfoot, they're liable to get stepped on. You goin' to give me my gun back? Or are you scared to?"

Bud gave him his gun, haughtily, butt first according to the range code of good manners. Butch slid it into his holster and reached for the bridle reins.

"Kid, you spread my slicker, so you c'n pick it up off the ground," he said, and pulled the reins up along his horse's neck. He mounted, sat looking down at Bud for a minute, gave a grunt eloquent of tolerant scorn and rode away to the stable at a careless lope.

The two stood looking after him until his figure blurred with the deeper shade of the barn.

"Bud, I'm sorry it turned out the way it did," Kid said under his breath. "I believe in my soul Butch done it—but what does that prove? I want to warn you, though. You've made an enemy there that ain't liable to forget you. It's a darn good thing I happened to be out here with you, boy. Butch don't dare pull nothin' underhand when I'm around, but if you'd tackled him alone out here, it maybe wouldn't 'a' turned out so peaceful." He gave a little inarticulate exclamation. "Say, Bud, next time you bump into Butch, remember *he packs two guns*. He could of got you any time he wanted to, to-night. Next time you pull a gun on Butch Cassidy I'd advise you as a friend to pull the trigger at the same time. May as well play safe—then it won't be you we'll have to bury."

"I suppose that's a friendly tip, and as such I thank you for it, Kid." Bitterness was all that was left to young Bud at that moment.

"Yes, and I wouldn't give it to everybody, either. Might as well come along in and have some supper, Bud—now your headache's cured."

But Bud shook his head and said he couldn't swallow a mouthful, so Kid did not urge him. Perhaps he knew what it means when a young man must swallow his pride.

Bob came out to them, and all he learned was that they were going back home that night. Once again Kid did not urge Bud to modify his decision; instead, he approved it.

"Butch will shore be on the peck, now, and it'll be just as well to sidestep. Here he comes—you boys can get your horses out, and I'll keep an eye on Butch. Too bad, but there ain't a thing more I can do, or you either."

"No," said Bud dully, "I guess not. I made a fool of myself, that's all."

They were riding down the lane before Bud came out of his black mood of depression, or Bob dared open his mouth to ask a question.

"It's a cinch he stopped and cached the money somewhere along the way," Bud cried hotly when they had gone carefully over the whole thing together. "What we have to do now is try and find it."

"Yeah, and beat Butch to it," Bob reminded. "Now, I know all this end of the rese'vation like a book. Butch, he'd hide that money purty close in, I betcha, but not along the trail nowhere. Can't backtrail him to-night, but by daylight——" He stopped there for a time. "Tell you, Bud, what we better do. On a piece here is that crick, and I betcha we could pick up Butch's tracks there, where he cut across into the hills. It's about the only place where he could leave the trail without making sign a blind man could read; what's more, it's the only place where he could get into the hills without ridin' an hour or more extry.

"What we better do is you go on home and get some chuck inside you, and take a sleep. I'll bed right down by that crick till daybreak, and pick up Butch's backtrack. I can just about read that jasper's mind, Bud. You put Kid wise, and Kid'll be watchin' Butch like a hawk. It'll be kinda funny if Butch gets a chance to ride back here for a day er two. Right now is when he's got to take a big chance and leave the money where it's at. When you get ready, you come on back with some grub. Foller the trail we took comin' over, and I'll meet you, Bud, right where that spring comes up under them sandstone cliffs. You know—where we watered our horses. They's feed, and we c'n make camp there

if we have to. I know where we c'n crawl under a shelf if it storms, even.

"So you do that, Bud. It'll save time, and we'll find the dough—never you mind about that!"

"If it takes until snow flies, we've got to find it," Bud declared doggedly. "Well, I'll tell you when we reach the creek, whether I'll do that or not."

CHAPTER XVI.

"NOTHING EXCITING."

TWO motley roosters and a black Minorca were craning necks to outcrow one another before the dawn. Out of the chill dark came Bud, the Walking Sorrel swinging automatically along in the long strides of the running walk that gave him his name and made him better than most horses on a long, hard trail. When he stopped, the sorrel's legs trembled with exhaustion. Bud's spurred boots dragged like an old man's on the path to the house, and his head buzzed until the roosters, the frogs and the humming of mosquitoes blended in one muffled, discordant chorus.

As he stepped upon the porch Maw sat up, rubbing her eyes, and got out of bed dragging a faded, big-flowered kimono over her nightgown and thrusting tiny, bare feet into a shapeless pair of slippers much too large for her. Her muslin nightcap went up to a peak at the crown of her head. She looked like a female goblin fleeing from a midnight rendezvous as she came pattering into the kitchen with a lighted candle held aloft in her hand, her round eyes blinking with sleep.

"My, I bet you're about starved, Buddy! When a boy gets in this time of night, I *know* he's hungry. I set back a whole berry pie for you, and the cream for it is all whipped and ready. I thought I wouldn't spread it till you come, because if it stands too long the crust gets soggy. And there's plenty of cold fried chicken—I saved you the gizzards, Bud, and three wings. I know how you like them parts. Nev'mind washin' your face. You set right down and I'll have you eatin' in two seconds."

That was one of the reasons why the Meadowlark worshiped Maw.

"Drink this, Buddy. It's last night's milk—poured right off the top of the pan, cream and all."

Slumped into the nearest chair by the table, Bud put out a hand slowly and took up the glass, spilling milk on Maw's white tablecloth and down his shirt front because his hand shook so. But the rich milk refreshed him like a draft of wine, and when he had set down the glass—empty—he turned hollow eyes with some interest toward the plate heaped with chicken fried a golden brown as only Maw could do it. Maw was spreading fresh bread for him, two great slices, and she seemed blessedly unconscious of Bud's wolfish feeding once he started to eat.

But finally, when Bud had finished the third wing and was biting into the bluish knob of a gizzard, Maw hooked her slipper heels over the top rung of her chair and nodded her head like a witch over her caldron.

"Things kinda slipped up, I s'pose. They will do that, no matter how careful we plan. I heard enough of what you and Skookum was talkin' about, last night——"

"Last night?" Bud looked up in dull amazement. "Is that as long ago as it was, Maw?"

"Well, o' course it's most mornin', now so I s'pose I can say night b'fore last. When every minute is crammed and jammed with happenin's, it does seem to take an awful lot of 'em to make a day. The day has gone real quick for me, too. And there's Margy, sayin' Cranford would be real excitin' alongside this place. She got real put out t'-day, because you boys went off first thing this forenoon, and then Butch Cassidy come over and spent most all the time foolin' around with Skookum and didn't talk to her much, and somethin' or other went wrong in her story—she was tellin' me all about it while we washed up the dishes.

"Margy's getting real friendly," Maw went on, after a pause spent in studying Bud's face and in deciding, no doubt, that he was not yet ready to talk of his own affairs. "This afternoon she come right up and put her arm around me, and patted me on the shoulder! I didn't s'pose she'd ever get used to me so she could look at me without scringin', but she's got all over that, and it ain't much more'n a week since she come. She's just as sweet as she can be, and she tells me all about everything, real confiding."

"Cranford! Ye gods!" Bud exploded tardily, the full enormity of the outrageous

comparison striking him in the middle of his demolishing the plate of chicken. He dropped a clean-picked thigh bone on the heap beside his plate and looked at Maw with a shadow of his old, impudent grin. "If Marge were a man I'd show her some excitement, maybe."

"She's writing a bank-robbery story, Bud, and—maybe I hadn't ought to tell you—she's got you for the hero of it. She makes——"

"Me for the hero? Good Lord!"

"Well," said Maw, blinking at him across the table, "looks to me as if you'd had about all the adventures she's put you through in her story, except I don't s'pose you've been arrested for the murder and throwed in jail and incarcerated, like Margy had 'em do to you. She says it's awful hard to make up exciting things, when she come out here expectin' that things would happen right along that she could use fine. She says she's goin' to have the Indians break out and start massacreeing the whites, and she wanted all day to ask you about some secret order; Golden Arrer, she says it is. She wants to make it a religious outbreak of some kind, and either let 'em catch you and start in to torture you, or else have you save the girl from bein' tortured. She tried to get Lark to tell her, but Larkie's kinda queer about some things. She couldn't get a peep outa him. He told her there wasn't no such thing, but of course she knew he was just denyin' it for some reason of his own. She thinks maybe he's mixed up and implicated somehow—maybe a high priest of the order; but I told her I didn't hardly believe he was."

Bud gave a whoop and choked, so that Maw climbed down from her chair and came around and thumped him between the shoulders until he could wave her off with weak gestures of refusal. He came to with his face red and blinking tears, but he had no sooner got his breath than he began to laugh.

"I s'pose I've said somethin' funny, but I don't see what." Maw spoke tartly when the first outburst had subsided. "I guess you oughta be in pretty good shape, now, after gorgin' the way you have. I'll go call Lark, and then I expect maybe you'll see fit to tell us what's happened, and what brings you home this time in the morning looking like a string of suckers, and eatin' like you'd starved for a week. And all I can say," she stopped to say pettishly, "is tnat small matters amuse small minds. If I used a word wrong, that's *my* business!" She scuttled off huffily before Bud could manage to explain.

Maw was further shocked to find Bud emptying the pantry of cooked food when she returned to the kitchen. Four loaves of fresh-baked bread reposed neatly beside half a baked ham, and the cookie jar was in his arms.

"For the love of Moses!" snapped Maw. "Didn't you get enough to eat *yet?*"

Behind her, Lark glanced appraisingly at the devastated table and grinned. The pile of chicken bones beside Bud's plate was enough, to say nothing of the remnant of pie with the whipped cream scraped off in streaks.

"For the time being, maybe; but I may possibly want to eat again, Maw, before Marge has me put in jail and incarcerated!" Bud was still badly in need of sleep, and Maw's tone had not been conciliating.

"I ain't responsible for that word, Bud Larkin. Margy used it herself, and if it don't meet with your approval, it's none of *my* funeral. Here's Lark, wanting to know what you've been up to, and why you come draggin' your feet into the house this time of night. Are you goin' to take *all* them cookies, Bud? I can't make any more till I get some sour cream. I churned every bit that I had."

"You did? Fine! Bob's out in the hills, and fresh butter will go dandy with this bread. You know, Maw, there's only one real bread maker in the world, and she's just about four feet high and cross as a she-bear with toothache."

"I ain't no such a thing! Do you s'pose you could carry a pie if I wrapped it up good?"

"Sure. I'll carry it inside, however. Then I *know* it will be well wrapped. Lark may want to carry one. How about it, Lark? Want to go hunting with me, after I've had an hour or so of sleep?"

Lark hitched up his belt, picked up Maw and set her on a corner of the table. Then, ignoring her indignant protests, he began his preparations significantly in the gun closet, choosing what weapons he would take. Bud eyed him from under straight brows while he wrapped the bread in one of Maw's choicest dish towels which she kept for "comp'ny," when some range

woman would insist upon helping her with the dishes.

"You won't need a shotgun—and I'll just omit that hour of sleep. Maw's pie is a real rejuvenator."

"It ain't no such a thing! Bud, ain't you goin' to tell what you've been up to or where you've been? My land, I never saw such carryin's on!"

"Nothing exciting, Maw. Nothing that Marge could use in that story of hers. Come on, Lark."

CHAPTER XVII.

MAW GOES TO TOWN.

WELL, so long, Lark." Bud held his nervous buckskin to a prancy circling while he and Lark indulged in one of those last-minute dialogues without which two persons seem unable to part in complete satisfaction. "If you can get Jelly off to one side, you might tell him that Bob and I are going to stick to the trail like a bur to a dog. And of course you'll know what to say to Delkin. Use your own judgment about telling him the facts."

"You better bed down somewhere and take a snooze," Lark advised perfunctorily. "I'll go 'long and meet Bob. I know these hills better than anybody, I guess. You go on in to town and get into bed somewhere. Then you can attend the inquest, if they hold one. Mebbe they might not, seein' it's a clear case s' far as they know. You go on, Bud, and let me handle this deal."

"No. This is my job, Lark. I'll take that rifle of yours, though. I was so afraid Maw would pump something out of me and tell it to Marge that I rushed off without anything much except the grub. I wanted it cooked, so we won't need to make a smoke. No, you go on in and say I came back home and you sent me out on the range. And Lark, if I don't bring Butch in and turn him over to the sheriff, it won't do any good whatever to say anything to Delkin and the others. They'll believe what they please—and that won't be very favorable to Jelly and me. Just let it ride; and don't worry about Bob and me, will you? No telling how long we'll be out. One of us will ride in to the ranch if it's necessary—and I'd a good deal rather handle it without interference, if it's all the same to you."

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it, Bud. You shore got me up early enough—jest to ride a piece down the road with you! Go ahead and handle it without interference, then! Mebbe later on you'll be darn glad of a little plain old help! Needn't think Butch is goin' to be easy to take—he'll go down harder 'n cod-liver oil. But all right—have it your way; you will anyhow." Whereupon, Lark put spurs to his horse and loped on down the trail toward Smoky Ford, talking to himself. He had been coolly pushed aside, robbed of a share in what promised to be a risky piece of business. Impudent, he called it, and forgot how he had deliberately pushed Bud to the front and encouraged him to use his own judgment.

No, Lark would have done it differently; followed old Bill's methods more closely. Old Bill would have taken his riders and gone boldly after Butch, and made what he would have called a clean-up, over at the Frying Pan. Bud might believe that Kid was ignorant of Butch's plans, but Lark did not. It would not surprise him to discover that Kid was in on the deal. Still, Bud might wake up to facts, and realize that after all an older head might hold a few ideas worth considering.

Bud, however, was not awake to much of anything save the fact that he was beginning to lose interest in everything but sleep; and that the buckskin was a tricky brute in the hills and not to be compared with the Walking Sorrel. The buckskin had a way of climbing hills in leaps that gave no thought to secure footing but left him winded at the top. His manner of descending a steep slope was quite as reckless and consisted of a series of slides interspersed with dancing sidewise and taking fright at various objects. Bud had saddled him because he happened to be in a corral where he was handy, but he was wishing now—when he roused sufficiently to wish for anything except sleep—that he had taken the time to catch a horse out of the pasture. It might have proved quicker in the long run.

So, slipping, sliding, fighting the buckskin and guarding as best he could his burden of food, Bud arrived in the course of time at the spring beneath the sandstone cliffs. By that time he was indifferent to everything. It would have taken Butch Cassidy himself to rouse Bud to the fighting point. He was glad, in a dull, apa-

thetic way, that he had made the trip from the ranch so that Bob could eat before he got as hungry as Bud had been. He managed also to picket the buckskin in the middle of good grass, and to put the supplies up on a shelf of rock away from small prowlers. After that, Bud lay down in the shade of the cliff, pulled his hat over his eyes, gave one huge sigh and dropped like a plummet into the oblivion of dreamless slumber.

At the Palmer ranch Black Sam was shuffling back and forth across the kitchen, clearing away the débris of a scanty breakfast well cooked, where nine men had eaten silently and gone their ways; all except Gelle, who had volunteered to remain on guard over Palmer until the sheriff was ready to take him away to the county seat. The coroner had just arrived, and was down in the cow pasture looking over the scene of the double killing and arguing with the sheriff in the intervals of rolling a fresh chew of tobacco relishfully from cheek to cheek.

Sam turned scared eyes toward Lark before he remembered his manners and ducked his head in what passed for a bow. Gelle, on a bench before the door, grinned cheerful greeting.

"You must have heard the news and got up b'fore breakfast," Gelle bantered. "Bud get in last night?"

Lark swung down and sat on the bench beside his "top hand"—as Gelle loved to consider himself.

"Bud got in this morning before daylight. Hauled me out of bed and started me out thinkin' I was goin' to get some excitement, mebbe. Then he hazed me on in while he took out across country to meet Bob."

"Which means, I guess, that they didn't have no luck last night." Gelle's voice betrayed his disappointment.

"Depends on what you call luck," Lark retorted. "That fool kid rode over to the Fryin' Pan, laid out in the yard with Kid Kern till Butch come ridin' in, then up and sticks a gun in Butch's ribs and tells him to come clean with that money he'd stole out of the pasture, here. What's more, the darn chump got away with it, and come home without a bullet hole through him. I dunno how it strikes you, Jelly, but I'd call that *luck*."

"And didn't he get the money?"

"Naw." Lark stopped while he lighted a cigarette. "He got the laugh."

"How's that? I been on the anxious seat all night, Lark, worryin' about Bud and that damn gold of Palmer's. Aw, he can't hear. I've got him tied to the bed, back in another room. And Sam's only about half there. Go on, Lark. I'm achin' to know what happened."

"That's jest the trouble, Jelly. Nothin' a-tall happened. Kid, he sided in with Bud and said if Butch had come over here and robbed Palmer's cache he'd turn him over to the sheriff himself. Bud thinks he meant it, but I dunno. Butch didn't have nothin' on his saddle but his slicker, and he give Bud the laugh. That's about all there was to it, far as I could make out. Bud, he come shackin' along home about three this morning, ate everything in sight and packed off what's left, to feed Bob with.

"Bob stayed out in the hills. They got the idee they can backtrack Butch and find out where he cached the stuff. But I dunno—like lookin' for a needle in a haystack, to my notion. My Jonah, what a mess! How'd you bust your rib, Jelly? Bud said you'd done it, but he never said how. Gimme some facts, for gosh sake!"

By the time Gelle had told all he knew, had heard or surmised, Delkin, Bradley, the sheriff and the coroner came walking up from the pasture, still arguing. They greeted Lark, then drifted back to the subject of the two dead men. The sheriff sensed the work of a third man there, but the others insisted that the killing had been an impromptu duel, the coroner holding that the position in which the men lay had no bearing upon that point, since death was not instantaneous in either case and both had evidently staggered a few feet before falling.

"Kinda funny they'd both be facin' the same way—toward that ledge where you folks got your money," the sheriff pointed out with a stubborn tilt to his chin. "If they went down fightin' each other, wouldn't they be likely to fall *facin'* each other? They hadn't started to run, neither of 'em. Looks to me like they both went down shootin' at somebody up on that ledge. You can think what you please about it—that's what *I* think."

"There couldn't have been anybody on the ledge," Delkin stated positively. "Bud

Larkin was with us; Jelly, here, was at the house with a broken rib, Palmer and the old man were tied up in the bedroom and Sam was here in the kitchen. The four Meadowlark boys had left town ten minutes behind the two Palmer men, and not more than five minutes ahead of us. They heard the shooting as they rode up. The four will swear that Jelly and Sam were here at the house—and as a matter of fact, the rest of us arrived so soon after the shooting that it would have been physically impossible for these two to get back up here."

"Well," retorted the sheriff, "are these all the men there is in the world, Mr. Delkin?"

"All that could possibly have known anything about what was on the ledge. Bud Larkin found the money and came straight in after us, leaving Jelly to guard the old man that works here. We came right back, got the money and took it on in to town, still leaving Jelly on guard out here. He brought his prisoner to the house—a very wise thing to do, I may say—and so was here when Palmer came, and while capturing him he broke a rib, as you know. You can ask the doctor here whether he would be able, with that broken rib, to run from the pasture up here in, say, one minute."

"Couldn't have done it without a broken rib," stated the coroner, expectorating a generous amount of tobacco juice. "They shot each other. No reason why they shouldn't, is there? They were both after the money, and each man wanted to get there first. Be funny if they *didn't* fight over it. Guess we better hold an inquest and thrash this thing out before a jury. How soon can you get a jury together, Stilson?" The coroner must have been out of humor with the sheriff, because usually he addressed him familiarly as Jim.

"Hour, maybe. That quick enough? You get your witnesses together, and a few *facts* to show, and I'll have the jury ready to listen to 'em quick enough to ketch 'em before they melt." He probably referred to the facts.

Lark, sitting quietly on the bench during the discussion, wondered why no one mentioned Palmer's money—or what was tacitly conceded to be Palmer's money—which had been left in the cache and was now missing. Delkin and Bradley seemed to avoid any unnecessary reference to money. Lark was on the point of mentioning the one great inducement to murder, the one thing that would call a man to the ledge. He was even tempted to tell what he knew of Butch Cassidy.

But while the others wrangled his caution came whispering and urging him to wait. If Delkin and Bradley failed to mention the mysterious disappearance of Palmer's gold, it was for one reason. They were grateful to Bud and to Gelle and meant to protect them. Lark appreciated that spirit even while he resented their suspicions. Both emotions held him silent after the first impulse to speak had passed. They knew all about that money being gone, he reflected. If they saw fit to cover up the loss before the sheriff, it would ill become him to drag the thing to the surface and tell the sheriff something that might throw suspicion—or worse—upon the Meadowlark. He joggled Gelle unthinkingly with his elbow, cautioning him to silence, and brought a yelp of pain from that tightly bandaged young man, and a stealthily vicious jab afterward to show that Gelle had not missed Lark's meaning.

There followed the usual commonplace running to and fro on horses sweating under the urge of their riders' haste to be somewhere else immediately. The coroner's inquest was called, and practically all of Smoky Ford bustled out to Palmer's Ranch and squatted on run-over boot heels and drew diagrams in the dust with little sticks, explaining gravely to any who would listen that the robbery, the murder, and the killing of Bat Johnson and Ed White took place in this or that particular manner.

All I can say is, Marge should have been there with her notebook; two or three notebooks, rather.

Figuratively speaking, the various Sherlocks placed the noose on Palmer's neck a dozen times, for a dozen different reasons. They openly mourned that Bat and Ed were past hanging, and there was not a man present who had not known all along that Palmer was at the bottom of the whole thing. So much for the loyalty of neighbors of that type, when a man of Palmer's type is called to account for his sins.

The inquest might well be called an anti-climax, since the citizens of Smoky Ford had the thing all settled in their minds before the investigation was officially begun. Palmer puzzled and disappointed them and

came near to a lynching, that day, merely because he refused to testify and would only say, with baleful self-possession, that since they were all set on laying the guilt on him, they could go ahead and think what they pleased; his lawyer would have something to say about it when the thing came to a trial. It was at this time that Palmer edged close to death.

The sheriff, being just a bit keyed up by opposition, made a clean sweep of it and took Black Sam along with Palmer, and the old man Blinker as well. They might or might not be implicated in the crime, but at least they should prove useful as witnesses.

By mid-afternoon the inquest was over and the sheriff had left for the county seat with his three prisoners, leaving his two deputies ostensibly in charge of Palmer's Ranch pending a more satisfactory arrangement. In reality the sheriff had some hope of solving the mystery of the shooting of two men in broad daylight and within sound of the house, and he had left two men where one would have been sufficient, with secret instructions to make a careful search for some clew to an unknown member of the gang.

The last shovelful of moist, rocky soil had been carelessly tossed upon Bat Johnson's heaped grave, and the two rough mounds marked by stakes driven into the ground, each bearing a name and date burned hastily with a hot iron. The burial party, in haste to join their fellows, were riding through the gate on their way to town when Maw appeared.

Maw was mad. Never before since her arrival at the Meadowlark a few years before had she been treated as Bud and Lark had treated her that morning. Never before had they failed to tell her all that happened or was about to happen, and Maw did not propose to stand it much longer. She had waited until nine o'clock and then had ordered old Cap and Charlie hitched to the beloved "top buggy" which Lark had given her, and she had bundled Marge and a lunch basket in beside her and started for town. They needn't think, said Maw, that she was going to sit and fold her arms and act like a fool just because they treated her like one. Wherefore she challenged the nearest horseman, who was eying Marge with interest.

"How-do? See anything of Bud Larkin around here?" Maw was pretty fair at reading signs, and the trampled yard just across the fence with jumbled tracks leading through the gate had told her a story of events.

"No mom, Bud ain't been here t'-day a-tall."

"Lark been here? Bill Larkin?"

"Yes mom, Lark was here and he left right after the inquest." The horseman fiddled with his reins and kept his horse backing and sidling, showing off before Marge.

"Inquest! For the love of Moses, has old Palmer been killed at last?"

"No mom, he's been took to jail. It's Bat Johnson an' Ed White the cor'ner has been settin' on. They was shot yeste'day."

Maw opened her mouth to speak further of her astonishment, then closed it abruptly, took the buggy whip from its socket and struck old Charlie smartly across the rump. Maw's face had gone the color of rancid tallow. There, conjured vividly before her by unreasoning fear, rose the vision of young Bud staggering into the kitchen hollow eyed and ravenous; wolfing food sufficient for two ordinary appetites, and going off with a sackful of supplies.

"I do hope I'll get some decently exciting material out of this," said Marge, all in a flutter. "Do you suppose something worth while has actually taken place, and I'll——"

"Put up that everlastin' notebook!" snapped Maw. "Things ain't picturesque when they're happenin' to your own!" She pulled the indignant horses from a lope as expertly as a man could have done, and sent them trotting their best down the road to town. "I've got to find Lark and see what's to be done—and it ain't a bit kind or p'lite to use the troubles of your own folks, Marge, to put in stories. If Buddy's on the dodge for killin' a couple of men, you ain't goin' to put him into no story—you mark what I tell you, Buddy don't *want* to be no hero. And if he don't want to be, he shan't be. Time I put my foot down, I guess."

"I'd make Palmer the murderer, of course," Marge placated absently. "What's he been taken to jail for, do you suppose?"

"I dunno—and I don't care. Buddy's on the dodge. I knew it when he cleaned out the pantry without sayin' a word about where he was going!"

Maw tapped both horses across their broad backs with the whip, and went lurching on down the road to town, leaving a cloud of dust behind her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SWIMMING HOLE.

FIVE days may not seem long as a rule, but Bud's nerves were ragged with the strain of searching foot by foot the likely places along the trail Butch Cassidy had taken; with eating just enough to allay the sharpest hunger pangs, and with sleeping where dark overtook him, with no pillow save his saddle—which is mighty uncomfortable even though it may sound picturesque to those who have not tried it. Bob grew daily more lugubrious, but Bud began to talk rather wildly of riding again to the Frying Pan, getting Butch Cassidy by the throat and choking the truth out of him. A reckless notion which appealed to him more and more as the fruitless quest continued. He began to imagine how it would seem to go galloping up the lane, meet Butch and lash out at him with biting words until they fought. A vengeful dream that grew upon him.

On this fifth day Bob had ridden early to the basin for more food; the baked ham being no more than a wistful memory, the cookies likewise and the four loaves of bread a dwindling, dried-out fragment. It was insufferably hot down in the cañon where Bud was dispiritedly searching the craggy walls for safe hiding places and thinking, among other things, that the country between Palmer's Ranch and the Frying Pan held places of concealment for all the gold coin the world contains. Probably he was right. There surely was an ungodly amount of rough ledges and cliffs and heaped boulders along the route indicated by the occasional hoofprints they identified as Butch's horse. In five days they had covered perhaps twice as many miles.

Off to the southwest a ragged blue-brown ridge of storm clouds crept slowly over the high peaks. A swashing rain would render their quest more hopeless still, for they would lose the tracks that now guided them sketchily from gully to bare ridge perhaps and into another cañon. The outlook was not cheerful, and the heat radiating from the rocks became unbearable.

It was then that Bud, climbing to a promising splinter of rock thrust upward like a crude needle from the broken ledge beneath it, sighted the cool, still pool sunk between banks of rock and gravel so that from the cañon floor it was invisible. Some sunken stream had risen there for a look at the sky, perhaps. Bud gave a hoarse whoop, forgetting caution in his joy, and began to climb down as eagerly as if he had sighted the gold.

The frivolous buckskin had long lost all desire for prancing or taking the steep hills in jack-rabbit leaps. He stood half asleep in the shade of a rock, with trickles of sweat running down thigh and shoulder; a tamed horse that had learned to conserve his energy and put aside his play. Bud mounted and rode to the pool though it was almost within pistol range.

Side by side he and the buckskin drank their fill before Bud stripped and went into it in a long, clean dive from a rock thrust up into the sunshine and so hot it curled his toes with pain during the few seconds he stood there poised for the jump. The water was cold, the shock to his fevered skin a gorgeous sensation of sheer physical thrill. Bud went deep, tilted and shot to the surface and spouted happily, the cobwebs washed from his brain, the gnawing rancor from his soul. For the moment at least he was his normal, carefree self; hungry, I grant you, but enjoying to the full this glorious swimming pool set apart from the haunts of men, passed by a dozen times or a hundred, perhaps, without discovery.

And then, swimming and diving, floating and treading water and splashing in pure devilment, he heard some one laugh; a chuckling sort of subdued cackle which Bud knew quite well. By treading water and craning his neck he could see the spot where he had left his clothes, and Butch was there, sitting with his knees drawn up and his ungloved hands clasped around them, smoking and grinning between puffs, with his hat pushed back on his head and the knot of his neckerchief askew under his ear—where he would maybe wear a knot of another kind one day, Bud thought balefully. Butch looked a very good sort of fellow, a pal perhaps who had no whim for a bath that day. But he was not at all like that when he spoke.

"Divin' for it, Bud?" he fleered. "Better claw around there on the bottom, why don't you? Gold sinks, you know—or don't

you? I savvy you've had lots of schoolin', but that don't mean you got good sense. What time you expect Bob back with the grub? Ought to be showin' up, now, most any time. I heard him say when he left he'd get here b'fore three o'clock. It's way past that now, by the sun." He squinted upward, then spat reflectively toward the pool.

"Of course you'll stay and eat with us," Bud invited urbanely. "Bob promised to bring some fresh eggs and a couple of chickens."

"Yeah, I know he did. I heard 'im." Butch's narrow, light-blue eyes were studying Bud's black head, sleek as a wet muskrat, with some curiosity. He had expected a blasphemous series of epithets—and, I may say, fifteen minutes sooner and he would have heard them. He had not reckoned upon the steadying effect of that cold plunge.

"Then of course you'll stay." Privately, Bud was certain that Butch was not to be shaken off before he had accomplished his purpose; and frankly, Bud believed that murder was his purpose.

"Might, seein' you insist. I'm purty well hooked up with grub, but my *kcw*seen don't include chicken. How you goin' to cook it, Bud?"

"Broil mine—and rub it with butter, salt and pepper now and then. How you want yours?"

"Sounds good t' me. I'll take the same."

To gain time for thought, Bud curved in his body and dived, expecting that he would come up to meet a .45 slug somewhere in his brain; between the eyes, he guessed—since Butch was called a good shot. As may be surmised, Bud did considerable thinking under water, but he could not think of anything better than he was already doing, since his manner was puzzling Butch and what puzzled Butch Cassidy also worried him. Still, he might shoot, and there was just one way to find out. Bud came up, shook the water from his eyes and saw that Butch was apparently much interested in the pinned-back hat brim.

"Where'd you make the raise, Bud? I been kind of curious about that pin."

Bud hesitated. There is a fiction that two men must never let a good woman's name pass between them, but there was nothing secret about the pin—except before Marge. Every cow-puncher who went to dances in that country should have recognized it.

"Grandma Parker's," he lied shortly, and dived again as if he enjoyed diving.

When he came up, Butch had laid aside the hat and was looking speculatively at Bud.

"Course, I could shoot you," he mused aloud. "Lots o' things I could do. S'pose it'll be a bullet. Ain't you about ready to come out? Bob'll likely be startin' supper, 'bout now. Come on—get into your clothes." Butch spoke as he would have admonished a small boy.

Because there was nothing else that he could do Bud came out of the pool, nipping over the hot gravel to where his clothes lay in a heap ten feet from where Butch sat smoking. Butch had moved while Bud was under water, and Bud's gun and belt had moved with him; also Bud's big clasp knife that was useful for so many things.

Bud dressed as unconcernedly as if the man sitting there in the shade had been Bob. Butch spun Bud's hat to him—without the cameo pin—and eyed Bud sharply when he picked it up and looked at the flopping brim with the two blackened pinholes. Bud looked up at him, his eyes black with anger.

"Pretty small, Butch! I knew you were a thief, but I did have some respect for you for taking a chance, anyway. A stunt like this is so low-down you'd have to climb a ladder to scratch a snake on the belly!" He stared a moment longer, and put on his hat. To move toward Butch would have been one way of committing suicide, and even in anger Bud was no fool.

"Yeah—one more reason why I'll kill you, Bud. Some day." Butch got up, dusting off his trousers with downward sweeps of his palms—close to his gun, Bud saw with a curl of the lip.

"Yes? Well, you'll have to go some, unless you play safe and do it now."

"I'll be willin' t' go when the time comes," Butch retorted. "Move on—my mouth's waterin' for chicken."

They moved on, Bud in the lead. Lark's rifle, he saw, was gone from the saddle. A foolish thing he had done, and a costly, to go swimming in that pool as carelessly as if he were down in the basin pasture. He could find no excuse for it in his belief that

he had the hills to himself that day. After so long a time he and Bob had both come to the conclusion that Kid Kern was watching Butch so closely that there would be no attempt made at present to retrieve the loot, and that they were therefore perfectly safe to search where they would.

At Butch's command Bud dismounted some distance from the spring where they had made a makeshift camp. They approached the place on foot and so came upon Bob when he was least looking for callers, the supposition being that Bud would search until close to sundown before coming to camp. It was Butch's casual tones that brought Bob facing them in blank astonishment.

"I got a gun against Bud's backbone," Butch announced in a cheerful, conversational manner. "He'll get it, right plumb through the liver, first crooked move you make. Toss yore gun into the spring. It won't hurt the water none."

"Get him if you can, Bob," Bud countermanded. "Let the damned skunk shoot if he wants to; he will anyway."

Bob looked at Bud, glanced over his shoulder into Butch's narrowed eyes, drew his gun and threw it into the spring with a muttered oath. Butch grinned.

"Got a knife? Throw that in, too. All right, boys, let's go on and have that chicken dinner. I an' Bud's been talkin' about it all the way over."

"'Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred thereby,'" Bud quoted under his breath with a grim humor not lost upon Butch, who overheard him.

"Nh-nh. This is goin' to be stalled chicken an' hatred thereby," he drawled. "An' I bet a dollar I'll hate harder'n the both of you put t'gether. Want to bet?"

The two ignored him and set about cooking their dinner, knowing that Butch would kill the man who made a hostile motion.

"Lessee. This is the first time you've had a fire since you been down here," Butch observed pleasantly. "I'd 'a' dropped in on you b'fore, but it looked like purty slim pickin's. Then this mornin' I heard Bob say chicken, so I plumb knowed you was goin' to have comp'ny for dinner."

"Sa-ay," drawled Bob after further small talk of the sort, "I'd rather be shot than talked t' death, Butch."

"Yeah—but I'd rather talk," Butch grinned. "Pass over the pepper 'nd salt, will you, Bud?"

"Certainly," said Bud politely, though his eyes were murderous.

They ate and were filled, but two of the trio did not enjoy the meal. Butch persisted in desultory talk, friendly on the surface but with a sting beneath. Now and then Bob grunted, while Bud relapsed into absolute silence.

"Can't figure out no way that'll work, Bud," Butch told him impudently when the three were smoking afterward—Butch performing nonchalantly the art of rolling and lighting a cigarette almost entirely with one hand. "Y' see, in the first place, I got your guns. Y' won't jump me, so that lets you out. Anyway, I got t' be goin' in a minute. Main reason I give m'self an invite to supper was t' tell you fellers I'm shore tickled at the way you're combin' these cañons. Y' see, I dunno but what you might run onto somethin', way yo're goin' about it. You shore ain't leavin' no stones unturned.

"When you've crawled all over these hills, mebbe you'll believe what I told you over to the Fryin' Pan, Bud; that I never got no money over to Palmer's place. Still, I dunno. You're so damn pig-headed you won't believe nothin' you don't want to. Well, go ahead an' look. Look your eyes out, for all me. You won't find nothin'. An' don't forget I'll be right there, close handy by all the time. So long—shore enjoyed that chicken!"

While he talked, Butch had backed toward the bushes that grew near. At the last moment he drew something from his shirt pocket, looked at it, gave a snort of scornful amusement and tossed the object so that it fell between Bud's feet. Then he disappeared.

Bud stooped, picked up the cameo pin and turned it absent-mindedly in his fingers. His sign of the Golden Arrow. The red blood of youth crept upward and dyed his cheeks at the thought of the ignominy he would have suffered had he been obliged to go and confess to Bonnie Prosser that he had lost her pin; that Butch Cassidy had taken it away from him! In the pressure of events since that day when he had ridden blithely across the reservation with the cameo pin worn proudly above his forehead, he had not thought so much about it. Had fancied himself invulnerable to

the young archer's barbed darts. Now—now he was suddenly aware of a great hunger, a longing that engulfed even his hatred for Butch.

"Hell!" said Bob, thinking of his gun lying at the bottom of the spring.

"Hunh?" said Bud, thinking that he had time a-plenty to ride to Prosser's ranch before dark.

"Hell, you damn' fool!" Bob looked at him with his mouth drawn down at the corners like a child about to cry.

"Oh. Sure," Bud agreed, without having the faintest idea of what had been said.

Bob's mouth opened, closed again very slowly. He was staring from Bud's face to the brooch in Bud's hand, and at the fingers softly caressing the carved face of the woman.

"Looks like her," said Bob with much sarcasm.

"A—a little." Bud's forefinger closed tenderly upon the profile.

"Say, come out of it!" growled Bob. "What about Butch?"

"Butch? Why, Butch will get killed if he crosses my trail again. Why?" Young Bud's eyes turned surprisedly toward Bob.

"Goin' to keep up the hunt, knowin' he's p'pared to jump us just the minute we find it?"

"Why, sure! You don't think Butch cuts any figure with me, do you?"

Plenty of time—and he could get there before dark, if he hurried.

"No—course he don't!" cried a mocking voice somewhere among the rocks.

Bud started, closed his fingers upon the brooch and turned toward the voice. The softness had left his eyes, which snapped with their old fire.

"You know it, Butch! You heard what I said." Strange, how the flinging of that cameo pin at his feet brought Bonnie so vividly before him that even his quarrel with Butch seemed irrelevant, a matter of secondary importance.

Now he knew that the illuminating truth had come upon him at the pool, when he picked up his hat and saw that the brooch was gone. It was like losing Bonnie herself—and of course he had always known, deep in his heart, that he meant never to lose Bonnie Prosser out of his life; that some day—— But the time of easy assurance was past, and it had taken the rough hand of Butch Cassidy to tear away the film from his eyes, just as he had torn the pin from Bud's hat.

"See you later, Butch!" he called defiantly, and started on a run for his horse.

"Yeah—you're damn' right!" Butch's mocking laughter followed him, echoed and was flung back again and again from the farther wall of the cañon.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUD IS DISARMED.

"GOT your notebook handy, Marge?" Young Bud, looking altogether different though not so handsome in a tailored suit left over from college, and a new straw hat that gave no excuse for wearing cameo pins in the brim, crossed the lobby of Fort Benton's best hotel to where Marge was sitting beside Maw, staring out at the shifting crowds with puckered brows, her thoughts no doubt dwelling upon picturesque effects. "This is Miss Bonnie Prosser, and I thought you might like to make a note of the fact that she is the high priestess in the temple where I worship; the goddess of the Golden Arrow, and——"

"For the love of Moses, what kinda talk is that, Bud Larkin? Bonnie's too sweet and pretty a girl to be made fun of right in public, like this. I been waitin' for a chance to get you two girls acquainted," cried Maw from the depths of a leather rocking-chair.

"Why—why—she's *exactly* like my heroine!" cried Marge, her eyes dancing with excitement. "I wrote the sweetest love scene just before we left home——"

"Too late, too late," crowed Bud, his lips curving into the smile of a happy boy. "I beat you to it, Marge."

"Now, hush," drawled Bonnie in a voice amazingly low and sweet and vibrant—just the voice one would want to hear from that smooth young throat and lips formed for laughter. "I'd love to be your heroine, Miss—may I call you Marge? I've so wanted a girl like you to come into the range country and give me a sympathetic ear now and then. Ever since I first heard about you I've been planning to come over and steal you. We live right next to the reservation, and there's the dearest old squaw I want you to write up. And I know so many places where I want to take you. When this trial is over I want you to come home with me. We're going to be the best

of friends. I always know, the moment I look at a person. Don't you?"

"Them girls don't need you, Buddy," Maw shrewdly observed. "Set down here where I can talk to you. Lean over here. Are you and Bonnie engaged?"

"Yes ma'am," Bud confessed meekly. "Have been, Maw, for almost a month."

"Well, I ain't a mite su'prised, and I'm real glad. Set down, can't you? Let 'em alone till they get acquainted. I want to talk to you private. Now. What kind of luck did you have, Buddy? Are you goin' to be able to give that money back to Palmer—or the bank, or whoever it belongs to?"

All the joy went out of Bud's face. He shook his head, his lips pressed tight.

"Who told you, Maw?"

"Lark told me. Who else do you think? *You* wouldn't, I notice. I was so scared and worried when you stayed out in the hills like you did, Buddy, that I thought Lark ought to get you out of the country some way. I thought you was on the dodge for killin' them Palmer men, mebbe. So Lark told me what it was all about. Butch is in town—did you know it?"

Bud lifted his shoulders in a gesture of bitter defeat.

"I didn't know it, but I can't do anything, anyway. I saw Kid, and he told me he's been watching Butch and he hasn't got a thing on him. I'm certain Butch did it, but—Maw, there isn't a gopher hole between Palmer's and the Frying Pan that I haven't searched. Kid claims he combed the ranch, too. If he turned up anything, he's keeping it mighty quiet—but I don't believe he has. I think Butch has simply outguessed us."

"Well, don't you have no trouble with Butch. You didn't bring no gun, did you, Buddy?"

"Butch took my gun away from me when he caught me in swimming." His eyes evaded hers. "You heard about that, I suppose."

"Yes, I did—and I heard too that Butch give your gun and Lark's rifle to Kid, and had him send 'em over home. Bob took 'em back down to you, so you needn't to think you can lie to me, Buddy. Don't you pack that gun around this town, or you'll get yourself into trouble, sure. You think what that would mean to Bonnie. I'm real glad she's got some say in the matter now, Bud. She'll hold you down—I'm sure I can't!"

"What do you expect me to do, if Butch makes a crack at me? Stand and take it?" Bud's eyes grew stubborn.

"Butch won't make no crack at you. Kid told Lark he'd had a talk with Butch, and Butch promised him faithful he'd keep his own side the road. He ain't goin' to crowd you, Buddy, and you mustn't go glowerin' around edgin' him up to a fight. Them eyes of yourn git terrible stormy when you're all wrought up. You just think about that nice girl, and forget about Butch."

"You dragged me away from two nice girls, Maw, and opened the disagreeable subject yourself."

"I know I did, but I was kinda lonesome for you, Bud. I ain't seen anything of you skurcely since that money was stole. Lark says Palmer's goin' to hold the bank responsible for it if it ain't returned. Palmer claims there was six thousand dollars, and he just as good as accused Delkin of takin' it himself. It'll likely come out at the trial. Lark says if the bank does have to stand good, he'll pay Delkin himself, rather than have 'em think——"

"And admit that Jelly and I took the money! I thought Lark had a little sense. Maw, if Lark does that I'll choke the truth out of Butch Cassidy, if I have to do it right under the judge's nose!"

"Now, now, Buddy, don't you go and get on your high horse again! You know as well as I do that Lark's soft hearted as any old woman you ever saw. He can't bear to have Delkin feel——"

"Fine way to salve his feelings and sharpen his belief that Jelly and I are thieves! Where's Lark? I want to have a talk with him."

Maw stood up and looked around the lobby and sat down again with smug satisfaction.

"Lark ain't here. I dunno where he is, Bud. He was talkin' about ridin' out to some ranch or other to look at some cattle they wanted to sell. You wait and see how things works out at the trial. I heard some one sayin' the jury's most all chose, and the show'll commence in the mornin'. They say that Melrose feller that Palmer's got to keep him from gettin' hung is a wonder, Buddy. It's kind of s'spicioned around that he's got a pretty strong de-

fense. I don't see how he can have. Can you?"

Bud brought his wandering glance from the two girls sitting in a corner with their heads together in confidential whisperings. He looked at Maw and cleared the impatience from his eyes. After all, who was more loyal than Maw?

"Palmer has an alibi, you know, and Bat Johnson and Ed White are conveniently gone where they can't turn State's evidence, even if they wanted to. A good lawyer can do wonders with a situation like that, Maw. Where's Lightfoot? He came with you, didn't he?"

Maw gave a sudden laugh. "Lightfoot got right out of the hack as we was comin' from the depot, and started in drawin' pitchers of that Injun camp up there on the hill. I wouldn't be a mite su'prised if the sheriff had to go up there after him when it comes his turn to testify in court. Buddy, you ought to take him over onto the rese'vation some time. He never seen any Injuns in Smoky Ford—and I never told him why the Injuns all hate that place so. Thought I'd leave that to you. There! See that big, fine-lookin' man comin' across the street, Buddy? That's Palmer's lawyer. They say the county attorney would give a good deal to know what he's goin' to spring on 'em to-morrow. Here comes the girls. Ain't they pretty and sweet? I bet they're up to somethin', the way their eyes is dancin'!"

Arms twined around each other schoolgirl fashion, the two girls came up and perched on either arm of Maw's great, upholstered chair. That buried Maw from sight of everything, so they laughed and accepted the chairs Bud was placing for them. Bonnie leaned forward, took one of Maw's tiny hands in her own and patted it affectionately.

"What shall be done to punish a young man who tells lies to an innocent young lady from the East?" she asked gravely. "I have just heard some awful whoppers which a certain person told Marge. And Marge," she said impressively, "is my best friend. I have heard about the Iowa frogs and the——"

"I surrender," Bud interrupted her and threw both hands in the air.

Maw glanced at Bonnie's hand that had one finger extended and pointing like a gun at Bud.

"Yes, disarm the prisoner, Maw," said Bonnie. "I've got the drop."

Maw reached out and got the gun tucked inside Bud's waistband where it had been hidden from sight; looked at it, blinking tears from her round eyes, and shoved it down beside her in the big chair.

"You may take down your arms, and march ahead of us to that drug store on the corner. Two maidens in distress want lemon soda. Will you come, Maw?"

"No," said Maw in a voice that shook perceptibly, "I don't believe I will. You children run along and—and have a good time!"

"Listen, Maw. We'll bring you some—some——" Bonnie leaned and whispered in Maw's ear.

"Yes—yes—all right—yes-s——" Maw's hand closed convulsively over the gun.

"And thank the good Lord for that!" Maw breathed fervently while she watched the three cross the street. "My, my, what terrible liars men do make of us women—keepin' 'em outa trouble." She got up, looked shyly around to see if any there observed her deformity, and waddled away to her room, the gun hidden in a fold of her skirt.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRIAL.

"MY, my, are you getting all this down in shorthand?" Maw leaned over and whispered to Marge—of course being obliged to look up, as a child must do.

"No," Marge whispered back, "it's too tiresome. I'm only making a few notes of funny people here. The trial itself is commonplace; hopelessly commonplace. I never saw such a tame crowd—and to think it's right in the West!"

"Tame, did you say?" Bonnie, on the other side, had caught the word. "I wonder what you're used to, Marge." She glanced across to where Butch Cassidy stood leaning against the wall with his hat dangling from his left hand, his arms folded—with his right hand hidden, Bonnie observed—and she smiled to herself.

Those tame persons most concerned did not consider the trial a commonplace affair. Palmer's lawyer was earning his money, and Palmer had reached the point where he could lean back in his chair and look the jurymen in the eye—though a close observer would have noticed that he avoided the

judge's cold gaze. It had been proven beyond a doubt that Palmer had no visible connection with the murder and robbery. The facts so far as known were in his favor, and his testimony, given calmly under the adroit questioning of his lawyer, brought to the attention of the jury many points which, though ruled out after sputters of argument between the lawyers, nevertheless carried their weight; just as was intended. Melrose was a clever man.

For instance, Palmer was not stopped before he had stated that he knew nothing whatever of the bank money being hidden on the ledge in his pasture. He had chosen to use a certain secluded niche in the rocks as a natural safe, he said. He had never placed much confidence in Delkin's bank and did not like to keep his last cent there. Something might happen. He had stored away six thousand dollars in a powder keg, just in case of need. He had not visited the place for a month. No, he did not go often to see if his money was safe. Nothing could bother it unless some one stole it, and he had felt sure that no one knew of the hiding place.

Yes, he understood that the bank's money and papers had been found there. He could not account for that, except that Bat Johnson and Ed White had discovered the place and had hidden the money there because it was the safest spot they could find. Well, although he had trusted them, he guessed if they knew he had six thousand dollars hidden away in there his life wouldn't be any too safe. He had no theory, except that if they were in a hurry they could have overlooked his money sacks. He admitted that was unlikely, and repeated that he believed he would have been killed if he had gone there before they removed the money.

Yes, he had been told that the money—his money—was gone. He thought that those who took away the bank money should be held responsible for his six thousand dollars. They may not have taken it, but they certainly knew it was there, whereas he had no idea that the bank's money had been secreted on his ranch, in the very place where he had stored money of his own.

About the boat he was equally outspoken. The men had built a boat in which to cross the river, where there was a little feed and where stock occasionally drifted in to graze. Sometimes cattle mired in the mud while trying to drink; when the river was low that often happened. His men had built the boat so that they could cross the river and haul out mired stock. He had never dreamed that it might be used for a more sinister purpose, but he could see how that would be possible without his knowledge or approval.

On cross-examination he named approximately the date of his last visit to the ledge. He had decided to store away six thousand dollars as a nest egg that could tide him over if hard times came upon him. The last time he had gone there was in the middle of June, when he had taken five hundred dollars in gold and put it away with the rest. That amount just rounded out his six thousand, he said. There had been no occasion to go there after that.

"Ain't that old pelican the darnedest liar you ever seen, Bud?" Gelle whispered behind his hand. "Gilt-edged, though. He'll get away with it."

Bud nodded gloomily. He had been watching Butch Cassidy, and wishing hotly that he had a gun. It began to look as though Butch was going to get away with something—ride off scot-free and leave a smirch on the good name of the Meadowlark that, in the minds of the Smoky Ford Bank's officers, would be harder to erase than *Macbeth's* haunting bloodstain.

Butch glanced at the two, and his light eyes narrowed under frowning brows. It was evident that Butch also had something on his mind. Beside him Kid Kern leaned against the wall, careless on the surface but never missing a look or a movement anywhere, and paying especial attention to Butch and Bud.

"Gosh!" Gelle ejaculated under his breath. "Pore old Snowball's goin' to be pumped dry now—and he don't know a darned thing about nothin'."

"Character witness, maybe," Bud made ironical reply.

"It'll be a pippin," Gelle predicted. "Snowball don't know nothin' good about that old coot."

Sam rolled his eyes in mental anguish, probably imagining that he himself was being accused of something. He stuttered and didn't know anything he was expected to know. He was palpably terrified, and whenever he caught Palmer's eyes upon him he shrank pitiably in his chair. And then,

mercifully, his wild eyes strayed to Gelle's face and clung there as to his savior. He blinked, swallowed twice, gripped the chair arms and began to talk—to his beloved Mist' Meddalahk, who had given him human sympathy and a dollar. He admitted that he could not read or write, and that he had never had any money, "moah'n a dollah, or mebby two-bits." Other questions he answered intelligibly. Then, abruptly, his tongue-tied fear dropped from him.

"Yessuh, yessuh, Ah doan know nuthin' 'bout no doin's, mah Boss, he been up to. Boss, he want his dinnah awn time—dass all ole Sam consuhmed about.

"But one mawnin', 'long about noon, heah come dem Meddalahk boys a-ridin' and a-shootin'. Yessuh, Ah 'member what tooken place awn dat day. Considubble, suh, happens right along 'bout dat same time. Mist' Meddalahk, he come ridin' along, aftuh Boss he go awn to town. Yessuh, boys dey calls 'im Jelly, but Ah doan see nothin' respeckful 'bout names lak dat. Ah calls 'im Mist' Meddalahk, an' we talks along an' talks along, 'bout one thing an' anuthah—yessuh.

"Mist' Jedge, suh, Ah got somethin' awn mah min' don' consuhn yo'-all. Ah been hearin' little sumfin now an' ag'in 'bout some money what come up missin', and 'pears lak, some gemmen, dey 'clined to think mah frien', Mist' Meddalahk ova theah, he done mebby *took* dat money. Ah doan rightly know jes' how dat come about, Mist' Jedge, suh, but Ah'd lak fo' to tell yo'-all——"

"I object, your honor, on the ground that the witness is taking up valuable time to no purpose," cried Palmer's counsel, springing to his feet. "Your honor, this witness is mentally deficient, ignorant and altogether incompetent."

"This witness is trying to tell what he knows about some missing money, and I suppose he has intelligence enough to recognize money when he sees it," the judge rebuked. "Objection overruled. Go on, Sam. Tell us all about it. Plenty of time, so long as we get the truth."

"Yessuh, Mist' Jedge, dat what Ah's comin' to right now. Mist' Jedge, it come about 'count of ole Blinkah. He go wand'in' off an' Ah hunts him up, 'cause some time he jes' go to sleep 'mos' anywhere. Mist' Meddalahk, he bin gone fuh some time, an' Blinkah, he bin gone fuh some time, and Ah jes' starts off lookin' fuh Blinkah. Yessuh, Mist' Jedge, Ahm lookin' fo' Blinkah.

"Time Ah gits down pas' de stable, Mist' Jedge, I seen fo', five men walkin' crost cow paschah. Mist' Meddalahk, he's one, Mist' Delkin, he's one, Mist' Bud, he's one—looks lak mebby Blinkah he down thah an' mebby sick uh somepin'. So Ah goes awn down, Mist' Jedge, an'—an' awnes', Mist' Jedge, Ah doan' mean no hahm!

"Ah goes along in some bushes, lak, an Ah watches t' see what all's takin' place, 'cause if it's Blinkah, an' he's daid, ole Sam he ain't gwine be dah—no-suh! So Mist' Jedge, 'clah to goodness, dem white folks dey diggin' aroun' an' talkin' 'bout *money*. Ah crope along, an' crope along, but Ah doan' see all dat money—no-suh. Ah waits, an' dey pack off all dey wants, an' Mist' Delkin, he say he leave wha's left.

"Mist' Jedge, Ah been luhned not to waste *nothin'*. Boss, he mighty p'tic'lah 'bout wastin' *nothin'!* Dey takes all dey wants, Mist' Jedge, and den Ah goes an' looks, and 'clah t' goodness, Ah seen *gol'* money lef' right dah! Mus' be hund'ed dollahs. Ah—Ah tuk it, Mist' Jedge. Ah got it in mah baid, upstairs. Cawdin' t' what Ah huhd, Mist' Jedge, dat money consuhns mah friend Mist' Meddalahk.

"And moah'n all dat, jedge, Ah seen Butch Cassidy in de bushes right in back ob de stable, Mist' Jedge. Ah don' think Butch seen me come from de cow paschah. Awn my way back, Ah jes' stopped at de hen house and got a bucket of aigs, 'cause Mist' Meddalahk, he ack kinda like he's gonna want some dinnah ef he come aroun' ag'in. So Ah had mah bucket of aigs, and Ah had all dat money in dat bucket, and Ah goes right along up to de house and doan let on like Ah seen Butch a-tall. And Ah watched from corner of pigpen and Ah seen Butch crope along, aidgin' toward de cow paschah. And 'clah to goodness, jedge, Ah's dat upset by all dem goin's on Ah done fohgot all about Butch, 'pearslike. Looks lak mos' everbody in de country, Mist' Jedge, was a-pesticatin' round dat ah cow paschah. An' ol' Sam, he ain't a-goin' to git hisse'f in no moah trouble, no suh! An' next Ah knows of anybody bein' roun' dat ah cow paschah, Mist' Jedge, it's Bat Johnson and Ed White goin' down dah and gettin' deyse'fs killed. 'Pears

lak mebby dey quarrel wif Butch er sumpin', 'cause Mist' Meddalahk and me, we both huhd right-smart shootin' down in dah. And dat," he added with a huge sigh of relief, "is all Ah knows about it!"

"Whoo-*eee!*" yipped Gelle before he could stop himself. "That cinches Butch!" He caught the stern yet understanding eye of the judge and subsided, red to collar and hair line.

"That's the first dramatic moment I've seen since I came West," Marge confided to Bonnie, who was biting her underlip and staring straight before her to where Bud's head had lifted and turned, his eyes seeking hers. Bonnie's eyes were bright and her lashes were wet, and she did not hear a word of what Marge was saying.

Bonnie stood up, forgetting everything except that she was going to Bud. It was almost as if Bud had been cleared of some criminal charge—as if he had been the prisoner before the bar. But when she had taken a step or two down the aisle, Bonnie stopped, a queer little sound in her throat that may have been a laugh or a sob, or both. She turned and caught Maw by the arms and lifted.

"Stand on the seat, Maw, and look over there! The sheriff's going straight to Butch to arrest him! Oh, did you see Butch jump out of the window? It's going to be next to impossible to catch him if he gets to his horse."

Maw, up on the seat, looked in the wrong direction and never knew it, because her eyes were so full of tears she could not have seen anything anyway.

"Yes, it's awful," she quavered. "They called a recess, didn't they?"

"Say, Maw," Lark leaned over her shoulder to shout, "Sam's goin' to spend the rest of his days at the Meddalark and help you cook. Darn his black hide—lemme past, will you, Bonnie? I want to catch him b'fore he gets outside. My Jonah, Bud! Grab Snowball an' tell him he's hired! These wimmin has got me penned up here like a pet calf!"

"Moses, what a jam!" quaked Maw, when a dozen persons in her immediate vicinity began milling aimlessly in the aisle. "Larkie, I just hope Palmer gets let out. I don't believe any man on earth would lie like that under oath and all, and if he was tellin' the truth he ain't no more guilty than I be."

"I don't think he is guilty at all!" Marge complained. "I came clear up here to see a man sentenced to be hanged by the neck, and he isn't even going to jail! And now they're going to arrest Butch Cassidy if they can catch him! It's perfectly idiotic. Why, Butch is just as nice as he can be. I don't believe he'd shoot two men!"

"Oh, Maw!" cried Lark into the babel, "we got a new lark to set and chirp on our bough. Snowball is goin' to start in on the pay roll quick as we get back."

"I'm real glad," said Maw. "I wisht, Larkie, you could find somethin' for that poor old Blinker to do. Seems a shame—they say Palmer's bargainin' already t' sell out an' leave the country, quick as they let him go."

"Well," young Bud's voice rose cheerfully above the clamor, "court's adjourned while they haze Butch into the bad lands, I guess. They'll never get him."

"Gosh, let's *all* go have some ice cream," cried Gelle exuberantly.

"Me, I'll take mine in good ole Metropole," Bob pushed up and confided in Gelle's ear. "Say, it looks like a cinch, now, that Palmer'll be cleared. Guess the old coot's got it comin'."

"Well, I'm real glad," Maw repeated. "It would be awful, wouldn't it, to think little Skookum's grandpa was a murderer? I guess they's good in all of us."

"Come on, girls—and that means you, too, Maw. It's all over now but the shouting, and I'm too dry to shout. Let's round up Lightfoot, and all go hunt that drug store. What do you say?"

"I say that means you want to get Bonnie out of here," Marge retorted. "I'd rather go with the other boys and Maw. I want to ask somebody a lot of questions, anyway. I've got a new story in my mind."

"Ask me, little pilgress, why don't you?" Frank Gelle whispered. "I could answer more questions a minute—if you asked 'em—than you could ask the bunch in a year."

"Oh, all right. I don't think the rest heard me, anyway. Come on, Maw."

At the steps, Bud and Bonnie looked back and saw them coming; smiled and nodded, caught a warning scowl from Gelle and decided they would not wait.

The complete novel in the next issue will be "The Return of the Range Rider," by William MacLeod Raine.

An Ostrich Egg for Hackensack

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "One Night in Zanzibar," "Four Bells," Etc.

Martin Donnelly, machinist's mate, U. S. S. *Toledo*, takes a shore leave in Africa—and learns that there are eggs and eggs.

WHEN he went ashore at Durban, Martin Donnelly, machinist's mate, had something on his mind. It was the task of finding another souvenir of this African voyage for the vigorous, elderly woman to whom he fondly referred as his poor old mother in Hackensack. The U. S. Scout Cruiser *Toledo* had touched at the romantic island of Zanzibar where this dutiful son had bought a massive ebony elephant with ivory tusks and toenails. He had prized it as an ornament for the parlor mantel of the Hackensack cottage, but in a gorgeous ruction with a superior force of British bluejackets he had been compelled to use the ebony elephant as a weapon. As a final, victorious gesture, he had hurled it at the Sikh sergeant of police who rashly intervened. Freedom was worth the price, but the brawny machinist's mate bitterly regretted the lost elephant and had found nothing to replace its singular appeal.

Durban appeared to be a city of much charm and variety. The South African people were much like home folks and displayed a cordial hospitality toward the Yankee man-of-war. Donnelly looked forward to a pleasant, placid liberty as contrasted with that tumultuous night in Zanzibar where a jinx had followed him. This hairy, rawboned sailor from the black gang was not one to go surging after trouble. His looks belied him. The harsh, somber features were forbidding. When he rolled into a café or dance hall strangers looked for their hats, expecting him to mop up the place on some slight provocation. It grieved Martin Donnelly to be so misunderstood. He never cleared for action unless the other party started something.

Innocently he amused himself through a summer afternoon in Durban. The heat was no hardship after the hellish temperatures of the fireroom. There were taxis and electric trams for tired bluejackets, but Donnelly preferred to ride in a ricksha hauled by a strapping Zulu. He liked a fine, upstanding man. These Zulus were superb, a race of warriors now tamed who raised corn and cattle or pulled rickshas through the streets of Durban. Donnelly's Zulu wore a fantastic headdress of polished buffalo horns, ostrich plumes, tufts from a lion's mane, and a band of leopard skin. His bronze legs were adorned with white paint in decorative patterns. Proudly he trotted where the pavement was level or pranced beteen the shafts when the ricksha rattled down a hill. The machinist's

mate called him Gus and yearned to carry him home to Hackensack.

At length they tarried at the shop of the African Curio Company. Donnelly was no unsuspecting tourist to buy junk at random. His was an errand requiring thought and deliberation. Gus, the high-stepping Zulu warrior, waited outside while the sailor inspected pottery, fans, boas, beadwork, oxhide shields, and broad-bladed spears. His interest was not aroused until his eye was caught by a shelf of ostrich eggs which had been emptied and cleaned through a small round hole in one end. The very bigness of them was sensational.

"The shell seems strong enough to stand a voyage," said Martin to the shopkeeper, "unless it may be the shock of a practice salvo from all the twelve guns at once. Then I will tuck the ostrich egg in my bunk, same as we do with lookin'-glasses and such bric-a-brac. 'Tis a present for my poor old mother. And it'll be an object lesson to hang in her hencoop now and then to encourage her Plymouth Rocks. "'There, you slackers,' says she, 'see what a South African pullet can lay when it tries. Now get busy.'"

Some of the ostrich eggs were painted in bright colors, bits of African landscape which appealed to Donnelly's simple taste. He was no art critic. He selected one of these, a vividly green palm tree, a grass hut, a black native fishing in an outrigger canoe, a foreground of blue water. It accorded with his mother's idea of what Africa was like, including as it did a sample of the heathen whose souls her missionary money was helping to save.

Martin was a man of very strong likes and dislikes. This was the one painted ostrich egg in the shop for him. He regarded it as a treasure. With a ponderous paw he waved the curio merchant aside.

"This egg wins," said he. "The old lady will throw a fit. Now I don't feel so bad about losin' my noble elephant. Wrap it in tissue paper and put it in a box, if you please."

Carefully packed, the ostrich egg was stowed in the bottom of the ricksha. The six-foot Zulu with the towering war bonnet was warned to watch his step and avoid collisions.

"You bust that egg, Gus, and I'll just naturally have to bust you, big as you are. I'm a man of peace sailin' the world in a man-of-war until somebody threatens my souvenirs."

The afternoon had drawn to a close. Martin Donnelly's large placidity became disturbed by a sense of uneasiness. Until now one diversion after another had enabled him to smother it. He was staying ashore for an elaborate banquet at the Hotel Royal. In the ship's company were twenty-four Elks, mostly chief petty officers and warrant officers. For weeks they had been talking about a fraternal celebration ashore. It was to be staged regardless of cost, with the best of food and drink and professional entertainers. As a loyal Elk, Martin Donnelly would be there. What made him so melancholy was the frightful fact that in a weak moment he had let the committee put him down for a speech. He had been bullied into it. It was the mistake of his life.

"Here's where I blow my tubes and have to be towed into port," he grumbled as the ricksha steered in the direction of the Hotel Royal. "I have my merits but God knows I'm no spellbinder. Why didn't I punch the chief carpenter instead of fallin' for his blarney? If it wasn't for my respectable record I'd buy me a bottle of booze and tell Gus to run me plumb to Zululand. Seems like something happens to put a crimp in every liberty I make."

A dismal figure, he sat on the hotel terrace until his fellow Elks began to drift along, fresh and fit in white uniforms and in the best of spirits. Soon they were gathered in a private dining room where an orchestra welcomed them with "Strike Up the Band, Here Comes a Sailor." The dignified commander of U. S. S. *Toledo* and his executive officer arrived as special guests of honor. They appreciated the courtesy as indicating the spirit existing between the enlisted personnel and the quarter-deck and wardroom.

Martin Donnelly made a huge effort to be genial. As an Elk and a shipmate, he was full of loyal, kindly emotions, but he looked more like a man sentenced to be hanged at the yardarm. Why in the name of common sense had he permitted this grand evening to be ruined, as far as he was concerned? They had played a bum joke on him. And here was the captain of the cruiser, all dolled up in his white mess jacket and primed to hand 'em a smooth line of talk. It was his august

presence, more than anything else, that made Donnelly lose his nerve entirely. He was a victim of stage fright in its most acute form. Usually abstemious, he gulped down two glasses of ruddy Cape wine. It made his head buzz but failed to push the clouds away. He was horrified to discover that he had forgotten every word of a speech which had been laboriously memorized and rehearsed. To himself he muttered:

"I need fresh air and to get by myself a few minutes. I surely am all shot."

He upheaved himself from the chair and lumbered out of the dining room. Passing through the hotel lounge he stood on the terrace and let the breeze fan his fevered cheek. He was coming out of his trance, but the thought of returning to face that dread ordeal made him shudder. A man of proven courage, he was behaving like a rank coward, and he knew it.

There came strolling past the hotel a blithe, careless young seaman named William Sprague, his round white hat miraculously sticking to the back of his head. He appeared to be looking for company. Here was friendship and sympathy for poor Martin Donnelly who called out:

"Hey, 'Kid!' What's the hurry? Going back to the ship?"

"Why, hullo, Martin, old-timer. Merry and bright as usual? Why aren't you lockin' horns with the other Elks? Did they give you the bum's rush?"

"Come on up and set down a minute, Kid," invited the machinist's mate, with an imploring quaver in his deep voice. "I got a fierce headache. I had to come out for a little spell."

"Headache so early?" scoffed young Sprague, as he dropped upon a wicker settee. "I thought you were a sober man."

"'Tain't that, son. It would do me no good to get stewed to the gills. I'm desperate. A speech was wished on me."

"Have you shot it off? That's plenty to explain why they gave you the gate."

"No, there's several ahead of me, Kid. Stand by. Don't shove off yet. Where you been?"

"In a kind of club about five minutes' walk from here. No rough stuff. I met a good guy—a clerk in the Durban town hall or something, and he dragged me around to this dump of his. Three or four lads from my division were already in there. The people treated us right. These other gobs beat it to go to a band concert at the beach. I had a hunch they might get noisy so I quit 'em."

"A social club? No speeches?" asked Donnelly.

"Politicians and storekeepers and so on—free and easy—just like home. Nothing swell, but darned comfortable."

"It sounds good to me, Kid. This Elks' banquet has me sunk."

"Why not kiss 'em good-by, Martin? They won't miss you. Gee, the chief petty officers' mess and warrant wardroom are all cluttered up with hot-air artists just straining for the word. You look like a sick man, honest."

The craven machinist's mate fought with the temptation. Panic fear made him perspire at each new resolve to return to the banquet table. After a weighty silence he said:

"I don't feel real well, Kid. That's the truth. Maybe it's a touch of this African chills and fever. I might ramble around to that club with you, just for the sake of the walk. If I feel better, I can get back to the hotel in plenty of time for my speech."

"All set," replied the Kid. "You do seem to be flyin' your ensign upside down. We'll have a nice quiet little session."

The sufferer stole into the hotel to get his hat and the painted ostrich egg. It was a proper precaution. He might recover and stage a comeback, and again he might not. His condition was too serious for positive prediction. Grateful for a respite he accepted the escort of young Seaman Sprague who remarked:

"On the level, Martin, I'm surprised at you. I never did see you go dead on your feet before."

"Pipe down, Kid, and maybe I can remember the wise cracks I was all fixed to electrocute that audience with."

They moved in silence until the guide convoyed his sad-eyed comrade into a side street of small retail shops. In the second story of one of these buildings were the rooms which beckoned as a haven of refuge. They entered a bar with a bald-headed man in a white jacket behind the counter. Beyond this was a larger room in which several men were playing cards. Others lounged in comfortable chairs and mingled beer with conversation.

All this brought comfort to the har-

rowed soul of Martin Donnelly. It reminded him of the Third Ward Democratic and Outing Club of Hackensack. He could forget all questions of rank and etiquette. Kid Sprague introduced him to an alderman, a greengrocer, a haberdasher, a sunburned trader from Zululand, and the master of a British tramp steamer. With a contented sigh, the machinist's mate clasped a stone mug in his right hand and joined the talk.

Now and then he glanced at the clock on the wall. He was feeling so much more like himself that he had brave moments of intending to cruise back to the Hotel Royal and do his duty. After several postponements he confided to Kid Sprague:

"Listen! The boys will razz me something cruel to-morrow if the Elks' party has to report me as a deserter. I think I'd better crash in for a little while. I feel sort of steadied down. Do you mind taking a souvenir to the ship for me? Handle with care, understand? It's the most beautiful ostrich egg in Durban. Something tells me that the Elks may finish strong. Safety first!"

"Let me see it," demanded William with the ardor of the bluejacket to whom curio hunting is a favorite pastime.

The precious package had been left in the custody of the bartender who had placed it on a shelf among the bottles. Carefully Martin removed the wrappings and revealed the huge egg with the African landscape painted on the smooth, ivory-tinted surface. The Kid expressed his admiration. It was a swell picture, said he, and ought to knock Donnelly's poor old mother cold. The native and the palm tree were the real goods, and the bright water of the Indian Ocean would bring back to memory the cruise of U. S. S. *Toledo*.

William was about to return the egg to its pasteboard box when a stranger entered the room. He came from the outer hall and moved rapidly to the bar. He was short of breath, as though the stairs had been climbed in a hurry. A tall man with heavy shoulders, he looked like an athlete rather gone to seed. He carried too much flesh, with a bulge at the waistband. A flabby cheek beginning to mottle marred the pugnacious effect of a square jaw.

He was smartly dressed. A good tailor had turned out the gray suit. The Panama hat was finely woven. There was a flashy touch in the red tie, the shirt pattern, and the gold band of the Malacca stick.

A breezy, affable person he showed himself to be. The sight of the American naval uniform seemed to please him. He shook hands and insisted on buying drinks. An Englishman by his accent, he had something to say about the splendid coöperation of the allied ships and sailors in the Great War. He had served as a captain in the South African Rifles, so he said. Parkinson was his name.

Martin Donnelly was polite but by no means effusive. This Captain Parkinson somehow failed to pass muster. He awakened a vague distrust, even as a casual acquaintance. A rough-and-ready student of human nature with a varied experience, Donnelly suspected that the friendly Britisher was laboring under some kind of strain. He poured himself a whacking peg of Scotch and tossed it down. This was unlike the leisurely custom of his race. His hand was unsteady. His glance roved in a flickering scrutiny of the clubrooms.

Upon the bar he had placed an odd-looking package, something covered with a crumpled newspaper and no twine to tie it together. Turning to the bartender he said:

"Can you find me a small box or a carton, Charlie? My luggage was packed and sent down to the steamer a couple of hours ago. I am sailing for Southampton in the morning. There was no room for this curio without smashing the bally thing. I picked it up for a young niece of mine in England."

"I'll do my best, Captain Parkinson," replied the bald person behind the bar. "What have you got there? Ah, I see. Some stiff cardboard and a little straw will do it up very nicely."

He pulled off the crumpled newspaper and disclosed an ostrich egg. Martin Donnelly stared and nudged his shipmate. Here was a coincidence, indeed, for on Captain Parkinson's egg was painted the same crude landscape of a palm tree, a grass hut, a native fishing from an outrigger canoe, and a splash of blue ocean.

"Where did you buy yours, sir?" demanded Martin, intensely interested.

"In Johannesburg—saw it in a stationer's window and knew I'd have no time to go shoppin' about in Durban. I came down to-day and have been frightfully busy.

Rather a gay old egg, what? A daub, of course, but a schoolgirl at home will fancy it, don't you think? I had to find her something."

"You bet it's good," replied the Yankee sailor in his very earnest manner. "I found one just like it, here in Durban. Show it to him, Kid."

William Sprague exhibited Donnelly's treasured ostrich egg. Inspection went to prove that they must have been turned out by the same artist. The respective natives fishing from the canoes might have been twin brothers. Palm tree, grass hut, ocean, the paintings were identical. This so fascinated the machinist's mate that again his important engagement at the Hotel Royal was shoved into the background. He felt kindlier toward Captain Parkinson. There was a bond between them.

The Britisher drank another potent slug of Scotch. He appeared to need this kind of nourishment. It occurred to him to say to Kid Sprague:

"By the way, I have a lot of things to do to-night. I wonder if you'd mind leaving my ostrich egg at the Union Castle mail boat when you go back to your own ship. Just give it to the man at the gangway and tell him to put it in my stateroom. It would be awfully good of you. I may leave the confounded thing somewhere while running about town, or get it smashed."

William thought the request reasonable enough. A few more drinks and an ostrich egg might be a poor risk for the thirsty Captain Parkinson. And a man with various things on his mind might easily forget his curio. The Union Castle wharf was close to the quay where the *Toledo's* launches landed. Captain Parkinson was grateful. Disdaining the bartender's assistance, he wrapped his egg in straw and cardboard, making a fairly neat parcel for William to tuck under his arm,

"Now pack up my egg, Kid," commanded Martin Donnelly. "I am due to join the benevolent Elks, God help me. I can sidestep it no longer. This reprieve has put heart into me."

Captain Parkinson was also compelled to attend to his other affairs. He would walk as far as the corner with them. They tarried at the bar a minute or two longer while the Kid was engaged with Donnelly's ostrich egg. To emphasize a remark, the Englishman made a sweeping gesture. His arm jogged the Kid's elbow. The egg rolled a few inches, just enough to bring about a lamentable disaster. The Kid's fingers muffed it. The egg eluded him. It struck the floor with a sharp "spat" and flew into a dozen pieces. It was dry and brittle. The painted shell was a devastated African landscape.

Martin Donnelly gazed down at the fragments. His rugged features reflected more sorrow than anger. He said nothing. Words could never mend a tragedy like this. First impressions had been sound. This Britisher with the red necktie was no good. Another jinx had crossed Donnelly's path. In accents of the deepest regret, Captain Parkinson exclaimed:

"Tremendously sorry, my dear old chap! Rotten awkward of me. Of course I'll pay for it. What did it cost you?"

"Four shillings, but that ain't it," answered the bereaved machinist's mate. His black frown indicated a temper sorely tried. The calm was ominous. The Kid foresaw stormy weather. "The *Toledo* sails at six o'clock to-morrow morning, Captain Parkinson, two hours ahead of your mail boat. I can't buy me another ostrich egg with a picture on it like that. It was a present for my poor old mother in Hackensack."

"But your cruiser will stop at Capetown, I understand," suggested Captain Parkinson. "The curio shops carry this same sort of stuff."

"That may be, but I can't be dead sure of finding another egg painted with just that same combination," stubbornly pursued Martin Donnelly. "I am a man that likes what he likes."

The situation was embarrassing, even tense. Not rudely but with a certain finality did Donnelly convey the verdict that money could neither appease him nor salvage his loss. His own feelings ruffled, Captain Parkinson slapped four shillings on the bar and ripped out:

"My word, but you are a cross-grained beggar. There is the price of another egg. What more can I do?"

With this he picked up his own ostrich egg and made for the door. A hairy, tattooed hand clamped down upon his shoulder. He swayed under the weight of it and halted as though anchored. It had been a trying evening for Martin Donnelly in more ways than one. He was not in the gentlest of humors.

"Before you call me names," he rumbled in his captive's ear, "you and me will discuss this matter. Your steamer stops at Capetown. Go ashore and get yourself another egg. It don't have to be the same picture painted on it, does it?"

"Oh, I'm not fussy about that. But, look here, what do you mean? Take your hands off me. You want me to give you my egg?"

"You said it," answered Donnelly. "That's fair enough. You busted mine. How about it, Kid?"

Seaman William Sprague had sworn to stand by. In honor bound he felt obliged to agree, "If you won't be happy without that same picture, Martin, I guess you win. But please don't start anything rough in this club. We are guests, and if you and this other big bimbo cut loose you may wreck the place."

Captain Parkinson had wrenched himself free with a powerful effort and stood with his ostrich egg carefully guarded under one arm. His demeanor was that of the affronted English gentleman who had entertained rowdies unawares. They were probably affected by liquor. He refused to engage in an unseemly altercation with them. Regaining his suavity, he declined to accept the machinist mate's ultimatum. He preferred to keep his own egg. It pleased his fancy. In spurning the offer of payment, the Yank was making a cheerful ass of himself. In trying to bully an Englishman, he had made a blunder. It wasn't done.

"For Heaven's sake, Martin, shove outside and maneuver," implored the Kid, tugging at his comrade's sleeve. "And be careful you don't bust *his* egg. Then where do you get off?"

Donnelly harkened to this sensible advice. Stepping aside, he permitted the annoyed Captain Parkinson to pass out of the club and down the staircase. Close behind him pounded the two bluejackets. Vainly the hunted Briton gazed up and down this little side street in search of a taxicab to waft him elsewhere. Confronting him on the pavement loomed the gaunt, menacing figure of the machinist's mate whose mind ran in one groove.

"Why won't you give me your ostrich egg and call it square?" he demanded. "I don't like the way you behave."

At this moment a stray ricksha, taking a short cut homeward, halted at the curb on the chance of picking up a fare. Captain Parkinson dodged aside and leaped for the providential vehicle. In he scrambled, yelling to the Zulu in the shafts to run like the devil. Before the ricksha could get under way, however, Martin Donnelly had lunged forward to pluck Captain Parkinson from the cushion as one pulls a cabbage in a garden.

The ostrich egg slid undamaged into the bottom of the ricksha. The indignant Parkinson was hurled to his knees on the cement sidewalk from which he rebounded with surprising agility. Donnelly was hurling at him these insulting words:

"Run away from me, would you, you big cheese? Looks like I'll have to poke you one."

Seaman Sprague was an interested bystander. This was Donnelly's party, the poor dumb-bell. Now let him finish it. He was surely egging this other bird on.

The inference that Captain Parkinson, late of the South African Rifles, had been a first-class man in his prime, was more or less correct. This he proceeded to demonstrate. His tactics were swift and unexpected. The blow that he aimed at Donnelly's chin went straight and true to the mark. It had plenty of speed and two hundred pounds of beef behind it. Almost a knock-out, it jarred the husky sailor to the heels and left him dazed.

With a grunt he staggered forward to clinch. As he did so, he planted a fist in the stomach of Captain Parkinson, just above the belt. It was a random jab, but effective. The recipient wheezily retreated, bumping into the ricksha. Such was his momentum that he fairly tumbled into it. This was the cue for the excited Zulu who had been looking on. As if the thing had been arranged, he snatched up the shafts and bounded away.

A slight down grade enabled him to pick up the pace like a sprinter. The ricksha spun around the nearest corner on one wheel and vanished from view. It was a sensational departure. Martin Donnelly was flabbergasted. Still dizzy from the impact with Captain Parkinson's bunch of knuckles, he stood rubbing his chin. William Sprague was laughing heartily. This was better than vaudeville. He heard the impassioned accents of Martin Donnelly exhorting him:

"Go chase the sundowner, Kid. Pick up

your feet. I can't make knots enough. He skidooed with the ostrich egg that belongs to me."

"You sure just are plain nutty, Martin, I'll tell the cock-eyed world. Go get him yourself. I haven't lost any eggs. Honest, you ought to be locked up."

"Huh, he didn't even give me a chance to beat him to a frazzle," grumbled the other. "Hooray, boy, look who's here!"

Waving his arms, Martin galloped toward the corner, shouting as he went. An empty ricksha was passing along the wider thoroughfare. It was drawn by a Herculean Zulu distinguished by a gorgeous headdress of buffalo horns, ostrich plumes, and leopard skin.

"Oh you Gus," roared Martin. "My grand old speed boy! Overhaul the son of a gun that just got away from me, and I'll give you enough coin to buy another wife."

The bronzed warrior flashed his white teeth in a grin to show he was not too leg weary to serve the needs of his friend, the Yankee sailor. The latter vaulted into the ricksha. Gus was away like a shot, his headdress nodding grandly to the cadence of his stride. Here were two strong, determined men to pursue the fugitive Captain Parkinson to a bitter finish. The bewildered Kid gazed after them while he muttered:

"Nobody with nervous symptoms ought to make a liberty with Martin Donnelly. He means well, but trouble is his buddy. Gee, I wish I could get a close-up view of this Zulu Marathon. The Parkinson guy didn't have more'n a couple of hundred yards' start. And Martin's big boy was certainly hitting it on all six."

William walked in the direction of the city-hall square on the chance of finding a taxi. The quest was futile. However, he was lucky enough to sight a handsome limousine waiting in front of an apartment house. The chauffeur drowsed behind the wheel. William woke him up and scraped acquaintance. The story stirred the chauffeur's sporting blood. He was a sociable young man who had been out to visit the *Toledo* earlier in the day. The crew had treated him royally. One good turn deserved another.

"This Donnelly is liable to crash into the police before he winds up," William was good enough to explain. "Sober but awful stubborn. Get me?"

The chauffeur was willing to take a chance. He would not be missed for an hour or so. His people were at a dance. He proceeded to step on the gas. The limousine hummed in pursuit of the two rickshas with a sublime indifference to traffic regulations. A few minutes and it became evident that the crafty Captain Parkinson must have doubled like a hare to shake off the vengeful machinist's mate. There was never a sign of the galloping rickshas.

"We can find them," said the chauffeur, slowing down to light a cigarette. "If they go out Berea way, the hills will throw those tired Zulus into low gear. And if they turn back to the harbor we can nip 'em at the docks. This Captain Parkinson may head for the Union Castle boat to dig himself in."

"That is his best bet," agreed the Kid, "but unless he gives up the ostrich egg, Donnelly'll storm the ship and pull him out of his stateroom."

They circled to pick up the trail. It seemed extraordinary that a large, angry machinist's mate, careering hell bent in a ricksha, could have disappeared without making some commotion. To the anxious William Sprague the whole performance seemed uncanny. The limousine swiftly traversed one shadowy street after another in the manner of a scout cruiser on patrol. The Kid advanced the theory that Donnelly might have murdered the Parkinson goof and was hiding the body in some lonely spot.

Not long after this, the headlights picked up the figure of a man in white uniform who came limping down the middle of the road. It was an area of lawns and hedges where the city began to be suburban. The weary pedestrian stepped aside to let the limousine pass. The Kid's jubilant outcry made him halt. Martin Donnelly climbed in and relaxed upon the luxuriously cushioned seat. In one hand he gripped a painted ostrich egg, still unbroken. Carefully he laid it down beside him while he wiped the sweat and dust from his glowing face.

A glimpse of this rugged wayfarer had shown that he was no longer spick and span. In fact, he bore the marks of a heavy engagement. A leg of his wide trousers was split to the knee. There were grass stains on his shoulder. His starboard

eye was discolored. To the eager questions he vouchsafed:

"For a rummy, that Parkinson puts up one damn good scrap, believe me."

"Did you trim him, Martin?" asked the Kid.

"I'm a modest man but, anyhow, I came away with the ostrich egg. Say, will this high-toned bus of yours drive us to the ship? I turned my ankle."

The chauffeur was more than willing. He desired to hear the tale unfold.

"It is too late for you to make your speech at the Elks' banquet," suggested the Kid. "So that's off your chest."

"I look like a guest and an orator," said Donnelly, but with no trace of bitterness. He had resumed his good-natured attitude toward life. The clouds had drifted from his horizon.

"Well, it was this way," he went on to narrate. "Parkinson's Zulu did a ninety-degree turn into somebody's big garden, understand? The idea was to run in behind the hedge and fool me before I made the corner. This Zulu race horse of his jammed his helm over too hard and the ricksha turned turtle. Parkinson was spilled out on the turf, likewise the ostrich egg. It hadn't been properly secured in the cardboard box so it rolled out under a bush.

"I come bowling along with fires under all boilers and Gus steamin' as steady as a clock. I sight the abandoned ricksha where a gate opens through the hedge. Gus makes the turn like a certified pilot and sets his engines astern. We stop and I bounce out to renew the same old argument about the ostrich egg. Captain Parkinson is on his hands and knees gropin' about to find his egg. He certainly does act stubborn about it. It is pretty dark inside the hedge, but he sees me in motion and comes up fast for a heavy man. Um-m, I hate to go aboard ship with a black eye, Kid. It never did happen to me before. I ran smack into his fist."

"I could have told you to lay off him, Martin. He packs a pretty wallop."

"So he does. Well, we sort of waltzed around on the lawn, and it was an informal scrap. After a while this Parkinson spits out a couple of teeth and says he is jolly well fed up with it or words to that effect. So I let him come up for air, and he rambles off somewhere. While he had been swappin' broadsides, Gus had found the ostrich egg under the bush. The other Zulu tried to beat him to it, and so they went to war. Take it from me, they are ferocious folks. I pried Gus loose after a struggle. He was pleasantly chokin' this other Zulu to death. Then I gathered up the ostrich egg and came away. Gus was too wore out to pull me another rod. And that's that."

Seaman Sprague desired more details. The recital was sketchy. The victor was in a contemplative mood, however, and perhaps fatigued by the vicissitudes of a night in Durban. He yawned and stretched his legs. Fate had ceased to thwart him. After a while he remarked:

"It was real romantic, Kid, Zulus and ostrich eggs and a mighty nice scrap in an African garden. I played the right hunch when I deserted that Elks' banquet."

"You can't call a party romantic unless it has a girl in it, Martin."

"Skirts would have made it too blamed complicated," replied the philosophical machinist's mate.

The obliging chauffeur dropped them at the quay and refused to accept Donnelly's pound note. He had received his money's worth. While waiting for a boat, William gazed at the towering funnels of the Union Castle liner and observed:

"I wonder if Captain Parkinson will be on deck to wave us good-by in the morning."

"No, he dislikes me. And it was all his own fault for actin' so ornery and unreasonable."

The gangway steps of U. S. S. *Toledo* were brightly illuminated by a string of electric bulbs. Martin Donnelly climbed them slowly. The twisted ankle bothered him. The officer of the deck scrutinized him as he ascended. Donnelly had never been rated as a hard case. On the contrary he had an excellent record. But, to judge from appearances, he must have skidded this time. He had all the marks of a drunk and disorderly liberty.

Conscious of this critical survey, the battered machinist's mate was absorbed in framing a convincing alibi. He was absent-minded and abashed. He had reached the gangway platform when he tripped and stumbled. The lame ankle had played him a trick and he was not sufficiently watchful. Losing his balance, he lurched against the rail. The ostrich egg was dislodged from

his grasp. It fell to the steel deck and was demolished.

Martin Donnelly uttered one deep curse. This was too much. Then a sense of grief calmed the outburst. To the unsympathetic lieutenant he explained:

"I went to a lot of trouble to get it, sir. It was a present for my poor old mother."

"You needn't try to pull any sob stuff on me," was the crisp retort. "What's the matter with you? Too drunk to stay on your feet?"

"No sir—cold sober and heartbroke," replied the culprit. "I met with a little accident, me and a ricksha and a man that didn't want to let me have the egg. Sprague was with me, sir. Ask him."

The lieutenant was perplexed but inclined to give the machinist's mate the benefit of the doubt. It seemed cruel to press the point in the presence of such unmitigated woe. There was no hint of liquor in such demeanor as this. The mourner stooped to pick up the fragments of his painted landscape. Something astonished him. He held up between his fingers what looked like a little wad of soft white paper. Others like it nestled in the cuplike segments of the broken egg or were scattered on the deck.

Donnelly smoothed out the bit of paper, curious to examine the lump inside it. He displayed a rough pebble resembling dull glass or quartz, about the size of a lima bean.

"An uncut diamond!" ejaculated the lieutenant whose eyes popped out. Forgetting the dignity of rank and station, he squatted to help recover the scattered treasure. As fast as the diamonds were picked up, they were dropped into the officer's cap. Some of them were found nestling in the scraps of soft paper with which the shell had been stuffed.

There was a good handful of these dull, irregularly shaped stones of various sizes. Several of them must have weighed as much as twenty or thirty carets. An ostrich egg is capacious. It will contain a large number of diamonds deftly inserted through a hole in one end and packed tight with wadded paper.

"I didn't notice the extra weight of it," said Donnelly. "A man wouldn't, unless he was used to 'em. He would lay it to the thickness of the shell."

"Or the heft of the landscape smeared on it," suggested the Kid. "Well, Captain Parkinson did his darnedest to keep a roughneck like you from running off with it. You'll have to hand it to him. You weren't the only guy that knew what he wanted. But, listen, why did he ask me to carry the loaded egg to the Union Castle boat and leave it for him?"

"Scared! He showed it when he came into the club," ventured Donnelly. "His game had been queered somehow. He didn't dare sneak the diamonds aboard the steamer himself. You were the easy mark, Kid. Nobody would be liable to suspect a simple-looking young gob from the *Toledo.*"

The lieutenant felt rather fuddled, and no wonder. The navy trains an officer to meet any emergency, but this was more like a page from the "Arabian Nights." He stared at the little heap of diamonds in his cap and blinked. It did not escape his sense of humor that Martin Donnelly had remained perfectly calm and collected. He had shown much more emotion over the destruction of the ostrich egg.

"The captain and the executive are ashore at the Elks' dinner," said the officer. "I can't report this until they come off. Leave the stones with me, Donnelly, and I will put them in the paymaster's safe at once. Count them, if you like. Hanged if I know who they belong to. We sail so early in the morning that I doubt if the captain gets in touch with the Durban authorities. But he can send a radio and get the matter straightened out at Capetown. You go get cleaned up, Donnelly, and come back and tell me the yarn before you turn in. It must be a humdinger."

"It is that, sir, if you like adventures, but I wish you could ha' seen the picture painted on that egg."

While the strenuous machinist's mate was enjoying a shower bath and a change of clothes, he pondered thoughts which made him chuckle in spite of his loss. In South Africa it was strictly forbidden, he knew, to trade in uncut diamonds without a government license. And every stone had to be registered and a description of it recorded. This was to prevent stealing from the mines. The penalties for this kind of smuggling were severe, in flagrant cases several years at hard labor on the Capetown breakwater. It was plausible to surmise that the genial Captain Parkinson had been a re-

ceiver of stolen goods which he was endeavoring to take out of the country with him.

A messenger came below and told Donnelly to shake a leg. A launch had just come off from shore with the Durban chief of police or something. And the captain's gig was reported alongside, fetching him back from the Elks' banquet. Too bad, said the messenger. It looked like a kettle of fish. What did they want to pinch poor old Donnelly for? The machinist's mate cuffed the ribald youngster and hastened on deck.

The visitor was a soldierly, keen-looking man who introduced himself as an inspector from the Durban headquarters. Presently the captain came up the gangway and eyed Martin Donnelly with marked disfavor. He had played truant from the Hotel Royal and now he was in the hands of a police inspector. A few words of enlightenment, however, and the commander invited the others to have their conference in his cabin. Donnelly turned red at finding himself in this sacred domain and sat on the edge of a chair. He hoped for the best and expected the worse. The night was not yet over, and the jinx might hang something on him yet.

It was consoling to find that the inspector considered him a good deal of a hero. This thawed the captain's austerity. It was an excellent omen when he passed the cigar box to the perspiring Donnelly to whom the proceedings had unpleasantly suggested a summary court.

"We received a tip by wire from Johannesburg, late this afternoon, to look out for this Parkinson chap," explained the inspector. "He was once an officer and a gentleman but he went very wrong. Good family and all that. He has been suspected of illicit diamond buying for some time, but he was a bit too clever for us. We couldn't get the goods on him, as you say. He must have got wind of the message that told us to pick him up and search his luggage and so on. In a funk, he stowed his diamonds in one of these silly-painted ostrich eggs that the tourists buy. He was afraid to go to his hotel, I fancy, so he dashed into the club you mention. And he was leery of boarding the steamer until the last moment."

"But how did you happen to connect him with Donnelly?" asked the captain.

"Oh, we followed him to the club and learned that he had gone away with two American sailors from the cruiser. One of our men picked him up on the way to the Union Castle boat. He was very much the worse for wear, and said he had been the victim of a brutal assault."

"So was I," declared the machinist's mate, clapping a hand to his black eye. "And what do I get out of it? I lost two elegant ostrich eggs to-night and——"

"I was coming to that," said the inspector. "You can count on a handsome reward. It is rather important to nail a rascal like this Parkinson."

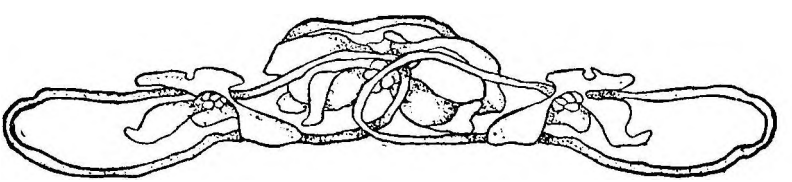
"How much of a reward?" persisted Donnelly whose methods were direct.

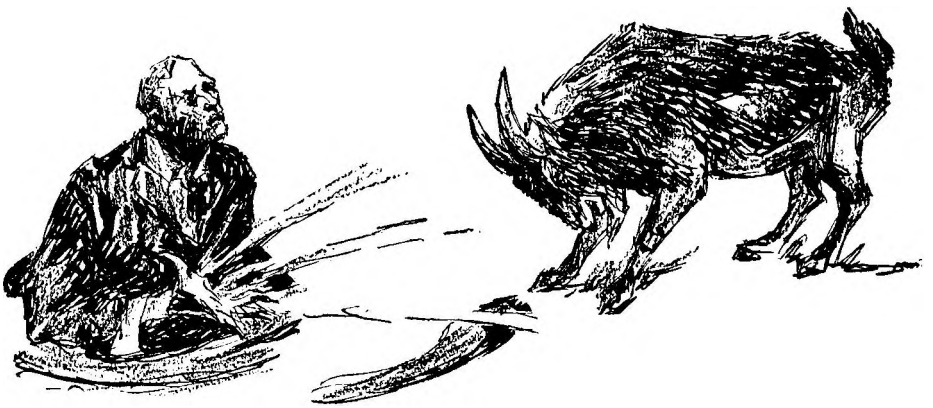
"The Diamond Syndicate will be very generous, in addition to the police fund set aside for this purpose. I should say you ought to clean up a thousand quid."

"A thousand pounds!" shouted Donnelly. "For the love of Mike, that's most five thousand dollars in real money. Say, Kid, you get a piece of it for standing by, and I'll send some to Gus. The inspector can find him for me. The rest of it goes to my poor old mother in Hackensack I knew I was absolutely right in taking that Parkinson guy's ostrich egg away from him. If he hadn't been as stubborn as a mule he might have got clear with his diamonds."

The captain of the *Toledo* wore a quizzical expression as he said: "I can't make head or tail of it yet, and perhaps I never will, but in some mysterious manner you seem to have won wealth and glory for yourself, Donnelly, and brought credit to the service."

Another story by Ralph D. Paine in the next issue.





The Ultimate Goat

By Holman Day

Author of "The Story Craigin Missed," "The Moon of Mischief," Etc.

A North Woods story, packed with fun and padded with thrills.

EUBLAS COPP furnished two sensations in one October afternoon.

It was quite a feat in the case of a man like Eublas Copp who had squatted till middle age in a rural eddy off the main current of affairs, a human bullfrog in a puddle of prosaic nonentity.

Sensation Number One resulted from too much money.

He rushed out of the Caribou Trust Company's bank, clutching a fat packet of bank notes in each hand. But he had not robbed the institution. He had cashed a five-thousand-dollar check. When Cashier King had earnestly suggested that it was dangerous for a back-country farmer to have so much money about him and urged Eublas to leave the check in the bank to his credit, Mr. Copp misunderstood the cashier's anxiety and conceived a prompt distrust of the stability of the bank; he insisted desperately on having the actual cash planted in his clutching fingers. The cashier counted out the money in tens and twenties, piling up plenty of bulk, shrewdly desiring to give a salutary object lesson to a man who up till then had been chiefly concerned with the change from a dollar bill.

The check was in payment for Copp's crop of potatoes. It was one of those freak boom seasons for potatoes in Aroostook County. Copp by some sort of instinct had been ready for it; he had mortgaged his own farm to buy fertilizer, had leased other acreage and now had cleaned up. Potato buyers were frantically bidding against each other in the streets of Caribou. Eublas had been pull-hauled by men waving check books. His slow mind and torpid tongue made him appear to be a cautious seller; because he was unable to say 'Yes!' sooner he was at last offered a peak price.

"There you have it, Eublas!" said Cashier King when he pushed the packets under the wicket. "Now you know what a pile of five thousand dollars looks like! Put it back in the bank! Don't be a reckless fool!"

But in the excitement of the first experience with what seemed to be prodigious wealth that's what Mr. Copp proceeded to be!

He tried to stuff the packets into his pockets; the bulky bundles would not fit. When the cashier again urged prudence, Eublas scowled and snarled; he seemed to run of an idea that the bank man intended to grab back the money. There was an element of the unreal about the thing, for Copp! He became pretty much of a lunatic, all at once. He clutched the bills, ran out into the middle of the street, shoved

his arms above his head, displaying the packets to a gathering crowd, and screeched, "My Gord, what'll I do with it?"

In the gallery of spectators whom he attracted were several sharp gentlemen who were ranging as financial picaroons in Aroostook on the chase for easy money in that period of flushness among the farmers.

A little later in the afternoon Mr. Copp bought a gold brick from one Hallet Dorsay. Mr. Dorsay had succeeded in showing Copp what to do with that troublesome money.

Unbelievable folly, was it, falling for such an ancient fraud in these days of enlightenment?

No, not in the case of Eublas Copp. He was not enlightened. He had never read newspapers. He had kept his nose as close to the soil of his farm as any one of his rooting pigs.

Mr. Dorsay wrapped the gold brick carefully, sealing the package with liberal splotches of wax from a wafer. He urgently counseled Mr. Copp to carry the gold home and bury it until such time as it could be taken to the city and sold for five thousand dollars' profit. In the lunacy of new wealth which seemed to drop from the skies, Mr. Copp believed even in that prospective profit! He was far gone!

But in order to gloat, even as he had received the kick of his life from handling the packets of bills, Eublas broke the seals before he reached home. The new kick was pretty much of a "haymaker." This was not the brick which he had handled and fondled in the presence of the hypnotic stranger in a room in the Caribou House. This brick at which he now goggled was merely a regular brick, none too carefully coated with tinfoil.

When he whirled his horse in the road, under the lash, one forewheel of his rickety farm wagon was crushed by too sharp a turn.

He leaped out, left the rig where it was and started back toward Caribou village on the dead run, carrying the brick. He was winded and staggering when a man overtook him in a flivver. The man could not understand Mr. Copp's incoherencies very well but he took him in and rattled him to the railroad station. The consensus of such opinion as the two were able to arrive at was that the sharper would skip out of town by the down train. The volunteer chauffeur said he'd try to make it, but it would be a close connection.

Sensation Number Two in Mr. Copp's hectic afternoon resulted from his money taking wings!

The train was starting away when Copp leaped from the flivver. He ran along the line of cars toward the rear of the train. He saw Dorsay sitting with the handsome young woman who had been a charming third in the hotel room.

Mr. Copp was good at a throw, after long practice on the invading hens of his neighbors. He hurled the brick through the glass of the window and noted, when he whirled and scuttled back to keep pace with the train, that the brick had landed according to aim, on the head of Mr. Dorsay; the victim had slumped forward into the trembling arms of his terror-stricken companion.

Copp turned and confronted the crowd of station loungers and found amazement—and a threat of trouble.

"I reckon I'll have to take you up, Eub, unless you can arrange with the station agent to settle for that damage to railro'd property," stated Deputy Sheriff Pinkham.

"I've been sold a gold brick!" shrilled Copp. "I handed it back to the gor-rippered, soft-soap son of a potatter bug! I ain't the one to be took up! Go git him! Arrest him!"

The officer surveyed Copp with frank amazement. "I'd never believe there was a single gold-brick sucker left in the whole United States! And there ain't another now! You're the last one."

"Go arrest him, I tell you!"

"Do you think I can hoof it fast enough to overtake that train? Copp, you've gone crazy! I ought to have arrested you when you come tearing and hollering out of the bank."

The station agent came forward and demanded pay for the smashed window.

"I'm dreened, dangslam it! Git that damn thief! Git that money! And I'll buy your railro'd!"

"See what you can do with the telegraph, Ben," suggested Pinkham.

"I'll wire the operator at Fairfax Junction," agreed the agent. "But that critter is probably foxy enough to drop off the train at the flag station between here and the junction."

Copp strode up and down the platform,

beating his fists together in anxiety, waiting for news.

The report from the junction was that the man and woman had left the train at the flag station.

Copp staggered away on foot; his misery was complete. The sheriff and station agent said nothing more about the damage claim.

"There's no use in starting a hue and cry after them sharpers," the officer confided to the agent. "There's no telling which way they've gone. The county treasurer won't stand for expenses in squaring things for such a cussed fool!"

On his way home Copp got a lift in another tin road beetle; it had been in his mind to buy one of those things for himself, even over what he knew would be vitriolic protest from his thrifty and domineering wife.

He did not come across his horse and cart on the road; he found them in his yard whither the horse had dragged the wrecked vehicle. Roxy Copp was doing anxious sentry go at the gate. "Lord a'mighty, man, you've had me scared nigh to death! I thought you'd been throwed out and killed!"

Mr. Copp was devoutly wishing that he had been!

When the flivver charioteer had gone on his way she set her hands on her broad hips and blistered him with an up-and-down sweep of her eyes. "Hes' Jepson held up here on his way home from the village and told me you was out in the street making a fool of yourself, waving money in your hands!"

That was only mild folly, reflected Copp, considering how he had later tossed that money out of his hands.

"We'd best step into the house, Roxy," he faltered. "I expect you're going to do considerable hollering, and what the neighbors don't hear won't hurt 'em!"

"Where's that money?" she demanded, following at his heels.

Her voice carried far, listeners heard her query and the presumption in the neighborhood was that Mr. Copp told her where the money had gone. He reappeared in precipitate fashion. When he came hurtling outdoors he caught his toe on the threshold, tumbled down over the steps and lay on his back long enough to be a target for such missiles as came to her hasty hands.

When he was on his feet again she chased him about the premises, through the barn, around the corn house and last of all through his tool shop, toward which he had headed for purposes of his own. In the shop he grabbed his rifle, a box of cartridges and an empty knapsack; he had them laid out ready at hand, having planned a hunting trip, now that the deer season was on. In this present exigency, having little time for thinking up other plans, he clung to the idea of the hunting expedition. He fled across the empty furrows of his potato field toward the belt of woodland and his wife, encumbered by her flesh, was obliged to let him get away.

Later he stopped at Wat Briggs' place, on a crossroad through the woods, and secured some salt pork, molasses, tea, flour and dry beans in a tin pail.

"I'm all done trying to live among people, the way the times is nowadays," he told Wat. "I'm going to get into the only safe place I know of, the woods! The deeper the better! Even if it comes to a biting match with a bear I'm savage enough to chaw him up!"

He headed south toward the big timber, the black growth, the real forest of the State's wild lands.

He was wiry and hardy after his strenuous work of the potato season and was not afraid of the outdoor life ahead of him.

He spent the first night in an abandoned lumber camp. It was a rather dismal lodging for one who had been unable to find room in his pockets for his wealth a few hours before; those pockets were now empty except for his jackknife and some small change. Before he turned in on the boughs, which he had laid in one of the bunks, he dug a hole in the ground, burned fagots in it, heated rocks in the red coals and then set well down in the pit the tin pail filled with soaked beans garnished by a hunk of pork and plenty of molasses; he scooped up dirt and heaped it over the improvised oven.

He feasted in the morning, when he had uncovered the hot and steaming beans. After all, a lot of money wasn't everything life could offer, he pondered, munching the beans and sipping the tea which he had brewed in an old tin can requisitioned from the débris behind the camp's cookhouse. "The old saying is right," he muttered. "'Easy come, easy go!'" In this new free-

dom he was forgetting the grinding toil in his potato patches.

He made up quite a respectable outfit of cooking utensils from the articles left in the camp kitchen. Then he trudged on his way in the hale crispness of the October morning.

He was handy with his rifle; he enjoyed fried partridge breasts for lunch. He ate very heartily and that forehandedness was lucky for him; he was obliged to go without supper.

In the early dusk, while he was traversing an old logging road, hoping to find another set of abandoned camps, and not caring especially whether he did find refuge or not, in his bland confidence in the safety of the forest, he heard and recognized the autumn mating call of a bull moose and remembered with some trepidation that the bull moose develops considerable unamiability at that season.

He heard trampling at one side of the road and the gruff "tr-rook, er-rook, oom blaw-w-w!" sounded again, close at hand; then something which resembled a very large Hubbard squash was shoved through the underbrush just ahead of the wayfarer. Huge antlers and glaring eyes were adjuncts of the nose and head.

Mr. Copp did not shoot. Closed time on all moose, male and female, had been declared; he had been seeing the placards on trees; the penalty attached was a fine of five hundred dollars—and Mr. Copp had lost money enough! However, his sense of thrift was not working just then—his frantic fright was the moving impulse which made him drop his rifle. He needed both hands for tree climbing. The great brute was charging. The sharp edges of the fore hoofs slashed bark from the tree right under the feet which Copp yanked out of reach as he shinned.

The moose circled the tree all night, going away a short distance at intervals, but returning with a rush and emitting threatening snorts whenever the captive made a move to descend from the crotch where he had taken refuge.

The disgusted animal departed finally at dawn, thrashing down into a swamp in quest of breakfast.

Mr. Copp did not stop to have his own breakfast until he was all of five miles along on his way and believed he was well out of the bailiwick of the moose; the latter seemed to be a determined creature with an extremely unstable temper.

Nevertheless, Mr. Copp's firm belief in the peace and safety of the big woods was not especially jarred; this affair had been only a freak happenstance, he assured himself.

After his breakfast-lunch with which he tried to make up for a lost supper, he couched himself on the moss in a glen and made up the sleep he had lost; he had not dared to nap in the tree crotch, fearing that he would tumble out.

When he awoke he found himself staring into the round, unblinking, glassy eyes of a Canada lynx—a bobcat. When Copp moved a bit, the cat, sitting on a tree trunk not fifteen feet distant, slowly wreathed its lips away from two rows of glistening teeth, opened its red-lined mouth and snarled. The bobcat, according to Mr. Copp's first startled thought, seemed to resent this reanimation of a prospective meal on which it had been gloating.

The rifle was far beyond its owner's reach, leaning against a tree.

Then Copp recollected what old hunters had told him about a lynx's nature—they called the animal a "lucivee." The critter, they said, took a grim but harmless interest in human beings who remained perfectly still and stared back at the animal with just as much intentness as the cat persisted in. It was declared that a loupcervier would not attack a man who could keep up his end of the staring contest.

Mr. Copp did his best, but the bobcat outclassed the human contestant. The latter found himself getting numb and dizzy; the eyes were exerting a hypnotic influence. Copp's short temper flared. "I don't owe you money, do I? You'll know me next time you see me, won't you?"

At sound of Copp's voice the cat snarled again.

"Look a' here, if it comes down to cussing I've got quite a lot of language saved up sence day before yistiddy, and I ain't had no chance to use it on nobody yet." His groping fingers found a small rock; he threw it to one side in order to attract those disconcerting, round eyes.

The cat did not shift its stare; it yelled and leaped on Copp, but merely made his head and shoulders a sort of springboard and jumped from there to the limb of a tree and disappeared.

The claws had sunk deeply and had torn flesh as well as fabric. Copp mopped off blood, picked up his belongings and ran away as fast as he could manage his footing.

In spite of his two adventures he was still maintaining in his inmost soul that he had merely met up with a couple of exceptions in the peaceful woods.

However, the next day, he was set upon by five angry bears in a mass attack.

It was in a blackberry patch which the frosts had spared. He had not noticed the bears when he leaned his rifle against an old camp at the edge of the clearing and plunged in among the tangle of bushes to satisfy his appetite for blackberries. The bears had preëmpted the tract and were on their bellies, crawling slowly and pulling down the bushes and sucking off the fruit with great zest and contentment. They arose and made for Mr. Copp with unanimity. Their numbers rendered them intrepid in attack. Bears were not to be eluded by tree climbing. He was compelled to race them and managed to keep ahead until they slacked up and went back to their berries. He did not return to secure his rifle; he was glad because he had not left his knapsack along with the weapon.

He was lucky enough to find another set of old camps and barred himself in for the night, after he had kicked out three grunting and complaining quill pigs who were only too glad to get away with their lives.

The next day was uneventful and he trod on toward the south with reviving courage. He was meditating on some plans for the future. Probably one of the paper-pulp companies in those southern reaches of the woods was paying good wages for choppers; somebody had said so, anyway. He would take a timber-jack job, write a letter to Roxy to give her something to think about in the way of softening her heart; he could go back to Caribou in the spring with money enough to make another clean-up in the potato business. And the next time let anybody try to get it!

He had no clear idea of where he was, but that made little difference to Copp in his spirit of adventure. The ends of the sun's arc defined east and west and he headed down toward the south.

On the fifth day of his wayfaring he trudged into a region where the black growth thinned; he crossed hardwood ridges; he came upon a road which was distinctly something of a thoroughfare, rude though it was.

He had been feeling some qualms in regard to the loss of his rifle but this new aspect of the country promised the protection of civilized life before long. All dangers were behind him in the dim depths of the forest through which he had passed. He saw nothing larger in the way of animal life than skittering squirrels, harvesting beechnuts.

He arrived at a bubbling spring of water; human hands had walled it in; he was still more at ease.

With his knife he cut a strip of bark from a birch tree and fashioned it into a drinking vessel, skewering the edges with a whittled twig. He kneeled beside the spring and leaned far over the brink to dip.

He heard no prefacing sound on the soft earth which had been watered by the overflow from the fount.

However, he felt the terrific impact of something which had come up from the rear. The next instant he was head down in the spring, his hands clawing wildly at the gravel on the bottom.

He had entered the water with a yelp of terror which was cut off short when a suffocating volume was sucked into his lungs through his open mouth.

There had been peril for him in his recent adventures, but this truly was the narrowest squeak of Mr. Copp's life. He was encumbered by his knapsack, and the spring had been walled into narrow confines. He was compelled to writhe and twist and wriggle like a contortionist before he could shift ends and stand up in the water; his head came just above the curb of the walling. He had been all of half drowned! He could barely hold himself upright by clutching at the rocks. He blinked the water from his smarting eyes and, still half delirious, believed that he was prolonging the visions which had flashed before the vivid consciousness of a drowning man.

A few feet away, facing Copp, was a buck goat, a billy goat, prancing, pawing the ground, wagging ferociously a patriarchal beard as he shook his head; he was restrained from another attack only because Mr. Copp was not easily to be come at while he remained in the spring.

Moose, bears and bobcats—they were accredited denizens of the woods! The ad-

venturer had been endangered by them, but such perils were to be looked for in the wild forest!

But a goat! A fractious, furious he-goat who glared with reddened eyes and brandished wicked horns and was merely waiting until his victim was out of the water in order that another below-the-belt slam could be administered!

Mr. Copp, reeling in the roiled spring and recovering his senses slowly, inquired of himself in wild wonderment what the blue Tophet the world was coming to when a man had his life put in peril by a goat in the North Woods?

Then he knuckled his eyes and looked beyond the attacker; a considerable herd of nanny goats was feeding at a little distance in a patch of moss and evergreens. They were complacently leaving to their lord and champion the matter of dealing with this invader.

Copp took in hand the drifting bark cup; he dashed water into the eyes of the menacing besieger. The goat boldly faced the dousing and came closer, either for more water or to seek revenge. Mr. Copp cleared his choked larynx after great effort and was able to talk huskily; he informed the whiskered persecutor what he was and had been, and went into some acrid details regarding the goat's progenitors. While he was conveying these opinions he was digging at a loose rock in the walling. Securing it, he bobbed as far out of the water as a kick against the bottom would take him and hurled the missile. It landed squarely between the goat's eyes and he went down and out.

Copp struggled over the curb of the spring and fled along the road.

But he was immediately knocked flat on his face by another he-goat which came tearing out of a covert. Rolling over and getting on his hands and knees in order to crawl to a tree, the victim was assailed twice more from the rear by the caprine catapult before the tree was reached. Only with the utmost difficulty, on account of his physical derangement, was Copp able to climb. He stood on a lower limb and steadied himself by clinging to a branch above his head, finding the erect attitude more comfortable.

From that elevation he beheld the roofs of buildings. The settlement seemed to be a hamlet of considerable size.

When the goat departed from the foot of the tree, after exchanging baleful glances with the man on the limb, Copp seized the opportunity and slid down to the ground.

He felt renewed confidence when he limped away toward the settlement. He had had enough of the creatures of the forest; he longed for human companionship.

Then he heard the rattle of hoofs, looked behind and saw several horned goats in full pursuit. To right and left of him were flocks of nannies who blatted encouragement of their protectors. Copp leaped out of his lagging limp, forgot his pains and fled hopefully to the sanctuary of the village at his best clip. He came in sight of store signs. He saw what was evidently a hotel. He headed up the single street toward that refuge. But ere he was able to reach the tavern the goats overhauled him and took turns in bowling him down. He was butted into the heart of the hamlet—he was fairly butted into the door of the hotel; the portal was open. He ran upstairs and banged and bolted a bedroom door against the invading persecutors.

Having leisure to do a little thinking, Mr. Copp's slow mind was beginning to take note of the fact that he had not seen a single human being in the settlement. On the wall beside the door was a push button and a card above it informed the guest of the number of rings required to call bell boy, ice water, hot water and chambermaid. Mr. Copp called for everything on the list and added a few more pushes on the button for good measure, hoping to stir up somebody who could scratch his itching curiosity.

He heard no sound except the hoofs of the goats clacking on the stairway and their nasal blasts of victory as they returned to their respective bevies of nannies.

He went to a window which commanded a general view of the street. The open doors of empty places of business sagged on their hinges. Windows gaped where the glass had been broken out of the sashes. The litter of abandonment was everywhere. Not a person was in sight. It was a village utterly deserted by mankind. He could see a structure of rather imposing size near a dam and a waterfall. But only the pounding waters broke the silence; there was no hum of industry in the mill.

When he was sure that the incensed goats

had gone about their business he inspected the rooms of the hotel's upper floor. There was no furniture of any sort. Nor was there any below stairs, so he learned when he ventured there. Behind the desk in the office he found a litter of papers of various sorts. Having plenty of time on his hands he perched himself on the desk and examined the papers, hoping to get some information about this goat domain. He hated all printed stuff, he did not understand big words, but he went at this adventure into literature with all diligence.

One of the papers was a prospectus of a concern which called itself "The Mohair Mills Corporation. Direct From the Goat to the Loom."

Mr. Copp did not know what mohair might be but it was evidently something connected with a goat, and that being the case it was no wonder this scheme had gone up the spout, as it had, he pondered in his new hatred of goats and all their works.

It was a prospectus of an ambitious enterprise and the promises to investors were glowing. The plans of the celebrated cat-and-rat ranch—the cats to eat the rats and the rats to eat the carcasses of the cats after the skins had been removed for market—had nothing on this mohair mill venture as a self-acting proposition. The goats would forage for their own food, the nannies would supply milk for the settlement, the kids would furnish fresh meat for the mill workers and skins for the tanners, the water power would cost nothing and would run the looms and operate dynamos to provide electric light and heat for all the stores and houses.

Never having read newspapers, Mr. Copp was not aware of what a swindling, stock-selling scheme this mohair mill thing had proved to be when it was shown up a year or so previous to his visit.

The shells of mill, stores and houses had been erected in order to provide photographic material for a stock-marketing campaign by mail. No machinery had ever been installed. The few goats planted in the place—also for the alluring photographs—were the only ones connected with the enterprise who had done at all well, excepting, of course, the promoters and the fiscal agents. The goats had multiplied into half-wild herds; they dwelt in the wintertime in the empty buildings; they stood on snowdrifts and browsed on the evergreens. During the other, and more clement, seasons life for them was an untrammeled paradise. The thousands of small investors had never combined to do anything about the matter; such investors never do in this land of the free and field of the fraud.

Mr. Copp put the prospectus in his pocket and fell to wondering whether anything sensible could be done with goats, anyway. Evidently nobody else thought so. There they were, in undisturbed possession of—what was the name of the place? he wondered! He went out on the hotel veranda, craned his neck and looked up at the sign. It heralded, "Mohair City House."

He marched up and down the street, investigated the interior of every building, gave the empty mill the once-over—and then returned hastily to the hotel. He had perceived danger at hand. It was approaching dusk and the goats were flocking in from their feeding. He barred the main door as best he was able, wrenching a rotting pillar from the supports of the veranda roof.

Safely intrenched, he surveyed the population taking possession of their various abodes, each billy marshaling his retinue. The thronged street furnished quite a lively spectacle for a time. It was a vociferous parade. The stranger in their midst was glad when darkness came and the bleating of kids and blatting of elders had ceased.

However, Mr. Copp was not in for the placid night he had looked forward to when he couched himself on the office counter, having made up a bed with some discarded horse blankets which he had found in a stable.

He heard a hullabaloo and looked forth. It was a moonlight night. He could observe fairly well what was going on. There were pitched battles in progress between ferocious buck goats and invading bears.

Evidently the goat population had been taught something by past experience, and sentinel billies were on guard. The kids were the bait that was attracting the assailants. While the bears—and the only really savage bear in the Maine woods is a cornered female with her cubs—were craftily making a deceitful demonstration and dodging the onslaughts of the heroic defenders, several bold bruins managed to duck through the line, lunged into the housed herds and went scuttling away, dragging wailing kids. It looked to Mr. Copp as if

most of the bears in that part of the State had become addicted to young goat flesh and had come to dwell in the vicinity of Mohair City.

Not having any intention of becoming a permanent resident, himself, he had been meditating on measures for departing. His experience with he-goats in the open day had not been satisfactory; he had decided to walk away in the nighttime. But a fine chance had he, was his sour reflection, venturing against that double cordon of billies and bears!

The conflict continued for most of the night. He could not distinguish the identities of the bears, of course, but it was plain enough what was going on. The personnel of the small bands of kidnapers was constantly changing.

The hungry bears, having had long practice in their tactics, were making forays in small squads while the attention of the defending bucks was taken up with the merely skirmishing attackers. It was a protracted period of foraging; the bruised and weary Copp wrapped himself in the blankets and went to sleep at last and let them fight it out. He was perfectly impartial in his sympathies; he had been chased by bears and butted by goats—and some of those kids would grow up into savage butters if they were allowed to live!

The next day he essayed a sortie, testing out his doubtful situation. He was promptly run back to the hotel by a revengeful billy.

Later, he found in one of the buildings a nannie disabled by a broken leg and prevented from going forth to forage; evidently she had been the victim of a bear's paw when she tried to shield her offspring. Mr. Copp went and got his tin pail and milked her. The milk helped out his slim bill of fare.

There was a rusty stove in the hotel kitchen; the workmen who built the structures had used the tavern for a boarding house and the stove was not worth hauling away.

Copp made biscuits and fried some salt pork and quaffed the goat's milk.

The bears did not come back on the second night, having stocked kid meat sufficient for several days in that mass attack. But the sentinel bucks were on the job, so Copp discovered when he made another attempt to slip out of Mohair City. One of them leaped from the shadows and knocked him through an open door into a flock of sleeping nannies. He fled up a ladder into a loft and pulled up the ladder. He passed a mean night on bare boards.

In the morning he was inflamed into a particularly incensed mood while he reconnoitered from the head of the ladder. The nannies had trooped forth at an early hour. But with slothful pertinacity several he-goats remained couched on the floor below, chewing their cuds and blinking their eyes contentedly. According to Mr. Copp's malevolent opinion, as he inspected them, they were old fellows. Their beards wagged slowly as the ruminating jaws worked. They resembled ancient sirs sitting around a country store's stove, working on chews of plug tobacco; Copp would not have been surprised if one of them had expectorated and started to talk about crops.

There was in them such a reassuring resemblance to humans that he decided to test out their combativeness; their everlasting munching reminded him tantalizingly of his gnawing hunger.

When he started to descend the ladder the goats merely turned up to him grave and peaceful regard from filmy eyes. They arose and backed into a corner and lay down again, giving him full gangway. Their status in the goat community was plain enough: they were old codgers who had been obliged to give way to the younger blood in control of affairs and were staying by themselves in senile retirement out of motives of prudence.

The sight of them, and the nature of their situation, helped Copp in furnishing a real nub for some of the vapory cogitations he had pursued on the bare boards in the loft. Before he left the place he convinced himself by a few experiments that he was able to boss those venerable goats according to his will.

On his departure he barred them in by propping a scantling against the door from the outside.

He gazed at a scaling hawk as he walked up the street toward his hotel and did not envy the bird its wings, as he had on the previous day.

Two days later Mr. Copp had accomplished what he set out to do and was on excellent terms with his elderly protégés; he selected for his especial attentions four which were not too decrepit; he had seven

to choose from. He seized opportunities when the swashbuckling young blades of the community were far afield with their respective coteries; he made himself solid with his charges by bringing in fodder from the bush, saving them the trouble of going after rations; in the stable which had harbored the work horses while Mohair City was being made ready for the photographers, he was able to scrape up a fair amount of grain which had been left in the bins. By doling this dessert he made a great hit with his venerable friends. He was obliged to duck hastily out of their abode every time he finished a visit; they displayed an embarrassing determination to be in his company all the time.

He found other items than grain in the stable, to wit: scraps of harness, ropes and a small but sturdy four-wheeled truck on which the ends of logs had been supported while the timber was dragged in from the woods.

Mr. Copp left Mohair City, driving a goat four-in-hand, riding on the truck. Having won the friendly confidence of the animals, he easily had made them amenable to discipline of harness and reins.

With goats as his convoy and furnishing a protecting ægis, he attracted no undesirable attention from the combating element. The younger billies in the community merely glanced up as the outfit passed; they went to feeding again, acting as if they were glad of this exodus of the superannuated.

Copp headed his team toward the south along a measurably good tote road. Over his shoulder he expressed profane hopes of what would happen to the denizens of Mohair City. He announced that he was well shut of that goat hell hole and would never come back.

II.

At Oakfield, on the southern border of the big woods, the annual fair and cattle show was in full swing when Copp drove into the village. He attracted much attention and drew many queries but he kept his mouth shut. It would be of a piece with the rest of his misfortunes, he told himself, to have some investor in Mohair City step forward and call for his arrest on the charge of stealing goats. He found an empty pen on the fairgrounds and lodged his tired chargers as exhibits, having learned that fodder was furnished free to exhibitors. He dug into the small change in his trousers pocket and feasted on hot dogs—with plenty of mustard.

Then he roved about the fairgrounds and found that unspeakable Hallet Dorsay and his woman companion busily engaged in reaping coin from suckers by some kind of a game. The crook had changed his appearance with a false mustache and sideboards but hate sharpened Copp's vision, and he knew all too well the tones of that suave voice.

The victim's first impulse was to rush on the sharper, knock him down and take back the gold-brick money.

But that act would surely put the attacker into the hands of the law. Moreover, complaint to an officer would get the thing into the court. Copp was afraid of lawyers. He wanted to drag back all his money for himself. Just how to manage the affair he did not know. While he was doing his slow thinking he hung on the wheel of Hallet Dorsay.

Copp had been obliged to let his whiskers grow in the woods. He was not recognized by Dorsay; that much was plain to Copp when he was invited to try the game, whatever it was. He shook his head and backed to the outskirts of the group.

After the crowds flocked upon the grand stand to view the horse trotting, Dorsay found his business too slow and he and his companion went to a hotel near the grounds.

Copp trailed them relentlessly. They paid no attention to this nondescript person.

The hotel was pretty well deserted. When the couple went into their room, Copp was able to enter an adjoining one; the door was open. He shut the door softly and bolted it.

The house was a makeshift hostelry, planned to accommodate the cattle-show patrons; the walls were merely sheathing. Copp put his ear to a crack and heard the two counting money and cackling over their success.

"Yes, it's a little risky, considering the haul in Caribou," confessed Dorsay, answering a remark from the girl. "But I'd be more of a fool not to stop and grab off some easy coin from these jaspers at this fair. And a man who is nitwit enough to buy a gold brick, as that fellow did, won't do any foxy trailing. Now that we're up

here in this patch of kale I wish I could get a tip on another good prospect."

Mr. Copp promptly proceeded to give Mr. Dorsay that tip. Copp had been pondering on all sorts of alternatives, from murder down the list. But his resources of revenge were limited after he had definitely decided to fight shy of uncertain law and greedy lawyers. His latest adventure was naturally uppermost in his mind. He had an asset in Mohair City. He used it desperately. He began to talk loudly enough to be heard in the adjoining room. He pitched his voice in as low a bass as he could manage. Then he squeaked replies in higher tones. It sounded like two men engaged in a vigorous discussion.

The deep voice argued for Mohair City as a wonderful field for operations by two sharp fellows, such as Mr. Copp maintained that he and his other self were! It was a lively place, penned in by the woods, and the folks who dwelt there hadn't had any chance in two years to do any sporting and spend the money saved up.

The shrill voice canvassed the possibilities of falling down on the thing.

These objections gave the deep voice an opportunity to extol Mohair City still more volubly as a nest of real suckers, hungry to take the bait.

Finally the shrill voice gave up the debate and agreed with the deep voice that Mohair City would be easy picking. The road by which Mohair City could be reached was explained by deep voice to shrill voice.

"I'm afraid we've been talking too loud, though," said deep voice.

"They're all out on the fairgrounds—nobody's in the hotel."

"But keep your clap closed from now on," urged deep voice. "If any other sharp cuss gets a tip on Mohair City he'll beat us to it! We can't get away from our other shenanigan for two days, anyway!"

Then Mr. Copp made the noise of husky whispering. The creaking of the sheathing indicated that a listener was leaning against it.

An hour later, posted advantageously, Mr. Copp saw Dorsay and the young woman ride out of Oakfield in a buckboard hauled by two horses; Dorsay was doing his own driving.

The four goats gazed contemplatively on their guardian when he addressed them over the edge of the pen. "Gents, I never expected to go back to Mohair City, and I may have dropped as much to you!" By this time the patriarchs really did seem to be more or less human, as Copp viewed them after association for many days! "But a business man ain't never sure of his plans ahead as things keep coming up. Get a good night's sleep, boys, for we're going to start mighty early in the morning and go back to your old home. If I'm reckoning right there'll be a couple more goats in the place when we git there!"

He cleaned his pocket of coins in order to buy a stock of hot dogs. He devoured all he could hold and put the rest away in his knapsack for future reference.

That night he slept in the pen with the goats. In spite of certain detracting qualities as close companions he found their society preferable to the human beings with whom he had been coming in contact.

III.

The next forenoon, tooling his four-in-hand toward Mohair City, Mr. Copp came across evidences of disaster in the affairs of the Dorsay expedition. The spectacle would have troubled a person less set on vengeance than Copp was.

Two horses had been anchored beside the road by the wreck of a buckboard which had wrapped itself around a tree.

When the four tractable goats hove in sight around a turn of the tote road, the terrified equine vision failed to note that the animals were harnessed. Plainly, other goats had had something to do with the previous stampede of the horses; now they tore themselves loose from the harness in a struggle more desperate than any which had preceded, and displayed their determination to have no additional truck or traffic with goats. The horses made this resolution plain by making a wide circuit around Mr. Copp's outfit; they galloped away down the road toward Oakfield.

He rode on, complacently munching a sausage and looking as if a number of his worries were to be set at rest.

When he returned into Mohair City, as blandly unmolested as he had been on his departure, he halted in front of the hotel with a bit of a flourish.

Dorsay had his head out of an upper window. He made a fine picture of distracted helplessness. "I take it you must own this

damn renegade mob of whiskered hair mattresses, whatever your name is! They horned into my horses last night. The horses ran away and tipped out a lady and me. Those devilish goats played billiards, with the two of us as cue balls! They butted us into this hotel—but it isn't a hotel. What do you mean by having a sign out to fool people?"

"I don't know, I'm sure!" vouchsafed Copp. "If it'll help your feelings any I'll take it in."

"I suppose you're mayor of Mohair City!" sneered Dorsay.

"I hadn't thought of being that—but if you're nominating and electing me, then I'm mayor."

"Where do we get something to eat? That's the first thing to be attended to. Then you get us out of here or I'll sue you!"

"One thing at a time—one thing at a time!" urged Copp, unhitching his team; the goats strolled off to their accustomed abode.

"Now about your eats, mister!" he called up to the couple; the girl had joined Dorsay in the window. "If you're in a hurry I can give each of you a cold hot dog." He opened his knapsack and displayed the food. "If you ain't in so much of a hurry I can——"

"Bring 'em up here—we're starving."

"That's good!" commented Copp dryly. "Prices have consid'able of a range here in Mohair City. Circumstances being as they are, these 'ere sangritches will cost you one hundred dollars apiece."

The girl gasped.

Dorsay spiced with malediction his amazed and absolute refusal to be nicked in any such atrocious fashion.

Mr. Copp began to eat one of the sausages and his manifest relish made the gnawing hunger of the two witnesses more agonizing.

"Look here, man, you can't be lost to all sense of humanity, whoever you are," pleaded Dorsay. "We've got to eat—we've got to get out of this God-forsaken place. What do you mean by holding us up like this?"

Copp finished the sausage and began on the other. "You ought to have grabbed in on grub when the prices was ranging fairly reasonable. Now you'll have to wait till I can bake beans and roast you some kid meat. That'll make your dinners cost you two hundred and fifty apiece. And another thing, mister!" He broke in sharply on Dorsay's raging profanity. "I'm just about as short tempered as these 'ere goats round the place. If you want to talk with me you'd better come down into the hotel office where we won't be straining our voices. And when you git there I don't want no more cussing. It ain't allowed by the rules of Mohair City."

When Dorsay entered the office, followed by the young woman, he evinced no recollection of the face behind Copp's whiskers. That insulting forgetfulness added to the slow fury which was developing in the victim of fraud. An affair which had tipped over the world for Copp was evidently only a minor incident in the life of this fly-by-night.

"Now, man, get down to earth!" commanded the newcomer. "I'll give you five dollars for some kind of a meal. Make it snappy and I'll add a dollar tip. That's Ritz-Carlton prices."

"Never heard of the gent named Carlton, but he ain't running my vittle business in Mohair City. I've got something else besides grub to talk with you about, mister! You'd better give me a good look and remember back to Caribou!"

"Hell!" barked Dorsay. The girl chirped a shrill cry.

"It might have been a small matter for you but it has been consid'able of a one for me," pursued Mr. Copp, narrowing his eyes malignantly.

"I guess you've got the goods on me," confessed Dorsay with a sickly grin. "But how did you ever guess you'd find me up here in the last place God ever made—and then didn't finish?"

"It makes too long a story, and I've got to tend to something else," stated Copp grimly. "Put up them cash hooks of yourn! They may do you some little good—but I'm announcing here and now that I'm going to give you the cussedest licking a man has ever got sence old Nebbycudneezer went out to eat grass."

"There's no need of a fight!" bleated Dorsay.

"There ain't going to be no fight! I told you it would be a licking. And I ain't worrying a mite about your handing over that money I've sweat for. Look out! I'm coming!"

In spite of the woman's screams and

pleadings he flew at Dorsay and began a vengeful rattytoo with his gnurly farmer's fists at the ends of vigorous arms. "I got up this muscle hoeing weeds out o' potatters!" yelled Copp. Over and over he knocked Dorsay down, yanked him again to his feet and hammered him some more.

He bent his adversary across the office counter, polished him off with a few, last, soul-satisfying punches and tossed him into a corner.

"Now, young woman," ordered Copp, dusting his palms together, "you trot up and bring down that bag he spoke of."

She obeyed timorously and counted out his money at his command. He carefully verified the count. "Take one thing with another, punching a cheap crook and pawing over good cash, and my hands is feeling almighty comfortable and speedicular today," he informed her, clapping his palms after he had fondled the bills. He cast a glance at Dorsay who was groaning back to consciousness. "He don't seem to be having his mind on business, marm. You seem to be setting pretty close with him in operations, judging from your talk in the Caribou House. Let me tell you! You and him can't never get out of this Mohair City without my help. When the billy goats ain't butting you, the bears will be biting you."

"The bears were awful last night," she whimpered. "We didn't dare to go to sleep."

"Exactly! And I shall have to be passing on my way most any minute now, and you'll be left to another night of it. I see there's plenty more money in that bag. You count me out five hundred more dollars and that'll buy for you two a ride on the Mohair City Goat Express, no stops this side of the safety belt."

"Hallet!" she quavered. "this man wants five hundred dollars for getting us away from this dreadful place."

"Pay him!" Dorsay gasped.

"There's nothing like getting a man into a soople state of mind, when it's a matter of giving up money," declared Mr. Copp. He crammed the packets of bills down into his knapsack and buckled the straps carefully before he hoisted the sack to his shoulders.

When the "Goat Express" halted in front of the veranda, Dorsay was able to stagger out and climb aboard in the company of the young woman.

Without adventure they rode two miles down the road.

Not stopping the plodding goats, Copp stepped off the truck and handed the reins to Dorsay. "Keep 'em going—I reckon they'll act all right. You can ride into Oakfield in style!" Copp walked along beside the truck. "There's some kind of a saying about getting a man's goat! Well, you've got four of 'em! Mebbe that'll keep you pleased. You're welcome to 'em—and to all the rest I've handed you. It's nice weather for this late in the season, ain't it? Good day!"

He turned off sharply into a wood road which, so his woodsman instinct informed him, would take him by a detour around the perils of Mohair City.

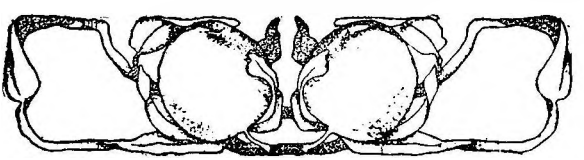
Mr. Copp had decided to foot it back to his home, through the forest. He had no hankering for the easier method—the railroad ride from Oakfield. There might be dangers in the woods, to be sure, but moose and bears and bobcats had no gold bricks for sale and would not pick a man's pockets.

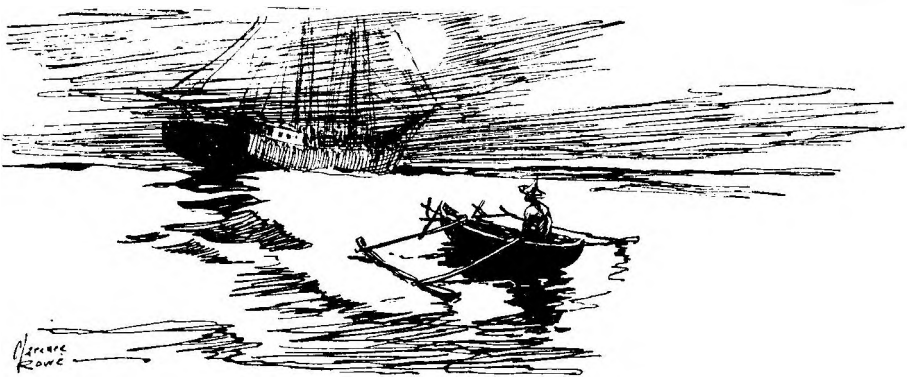
He felt entirely safe, farther along on his journey, when he recovered his rifle which he had left standing against the wall of the old camp. The bears were not foraging for blackberries that day.

When at last he emerged from the belt of woodland, and saw his house, he was carrying a fine buck deer draped around his shoulders.

That trophy pleased Mr. Copp, but in his knapsack he was carrying something which pleased him more—a sure and safe ticket of admission back to the bosom of his family.

Another story by Holman Day in the next POPULAR.





The Story of Kanoa and the Jinni

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Voice of the Torrent," "The Gates of Morning," Etc.

A South Sea Island paraphrase of an "Arabian Nights" legend.

WE were talking one night of Stevenson's story of the "Bottle Imp" and that pleasant piece of fiction, heard of for the first time, stirred the mind of A. L. Pel, a Dutch trader, to recount some experiences of his in the mystic East.

It was in the smoking room of a Dutch boat, a Stoomvaart Matschappij Nederland, bound from Singapore to Genoa, and the company included two Java planters, Grant, a Scotch gentleman well over seventy who was one of the original South Sea traders and a friend of Louis Becke, a Frenchman interested in rubber, and the aforesaid A. L. Pel.

Pel, on the Stevenson story being explained to him, said there was "nothing in it that there might not be." He told of a Chinese at Yang Yang—which is on the east coast of Korea—who undoubtedly kept a devil in a box. Pel had seen the box, moreover he had put his ear to it and had heard the devil whispering and muttering inside. It was a very potent devil and had power over lives and events.

"And why not?" said Grant. "You chaps needn't laugh. If you'd lived as long in the East and in the Islands as I have, you'd come to recognize there are matter-of-fact truths that beat all the spirit stories hollow—aye, and the 'Arabian Nights.' You remember that story in the 'Arabian Nights' where the fisherman lets the jinni out of the bottle. Well, forty-five years ago and more I came across the very same happening at Ratea down south of——"

"Happening?" said some one.

"Yes," said Grant, "you might call it that. The details are different, but the thing was practically the same as far as the bottling of a spirit goes."

This was the story he told us in substance and with some unimportant additions, and subtractions of my own.

Ratea was an island of the old Pacific days. South of Raratonga and west of Tuhuai, cut in two by Capricorn and waving its palm trees to the blue sky, Ratea lay like a gem on an ocean that steamers' smoke had never defaced nor ash lift defiled. In those days sandalwood was still king and pearling scarcely touched. Naura was holding its phosphates in reserve and the coconut trees knew nothing of soap companies. In those days the Pacific lay a treasure house, almost untouched, with Ratea for its least, yet perhaps most lovely jewel.

Two hundred and fifty souls, who as yet had never seen a missionary, who knew nothing of clothes and little of evil with the exception of occasional bouts of cannibalism, inhabited Ratea, fished in the lagoon, loved and lived and fought and died in a

world where time stood like a great blue arch between rains.

Born on Ratea, the first sound you heard was the sound of the sea, the ceaseless voice of the sea forever breaking on the reef; and all your life the waves talked to you, loud in storm and low in calm.

The voice of the sea was the first sound that Kanoa heard—the sea that one day brought on its waves a big canoe from Uari, away to the southwest; a canoe filled with men armed with clubs shaped like hockey sticks and obsidian-headed spears; men who landed on the beach and ran through the groves chasing the people of Ratea as though in a game.

Kanoa was so small that he could not understand what it all meant till, two men running past him—one pursuing the other pursued—the pursued man tripped and was brained by the pursuer. Kanoa saw this, and a deadly fear seized him, making him run away and hide in the woods.

Perhaps it was because of this that he grew up timid, or rather shy and self-effacing, unharmful, almost girlish, and yet at the same time straight as an arrow, tall, muscular and swift of limb, so that at twenty years of age he was the finest man on Ratea, and yet at the same time the least feared and respected.

The fighting men of Uari had never come back to finish the work of extermination owing to the fore part of a cyclone that missed Ratea and swept Uari from beach to beach, killing every soul, so Kanoa was never tested. Had he been, maybe war would have brought out hidden qualities that peace failed to develop, and he would have been chief of the people of Ratea instead of what he was.

But love, if you have noticed, doesn't bother much about the social status of his victims or their moral and mental defects. Kanoa was good looking and Love one evening caught him on the reef.

Toward sunset he had taken a net to fish the pools for squid. He was coming along on that part of the outer beach which the ebb had left uncovered when, in the distance, standing on a projection of coral and looking seaward, he saw a girl.

It was Malie, the daughter of Nadub, the fish-trap maker, and though he had seen her many times he had never seen her before as now, for she was alone, and her hair waved in the evening wind, and her little bent body as she leaned toward a pool was curved like the young moon.

Malie called to him and when he came to her he found she had caught a cuttlefish which was beyond her strength to pull out, for these small squid cling to the rocks so tightly that sometimes it takes the strength of a full-grown man to move one. Kanoa helped the girl, putting his arm round her body so that their strength might be united; then when the squid was out of the pool which it had turned to an inky black, he did not at once let her go.

Malie released herself and held him away from her and looked into his eyes. They were alone, quite alone, with no one to see them but the gulls flying against the evening light. Then, as though his gaze had drugged her, she half closed her eyes, and Kanoa swift as the squid when it seizes its prey, caught her again in his arms. Later on, married according to the customs of Ratea, they started for a fortnight's honeymoon in the woods.

After that, for the newly married couple it became a question as to whether Kanoa would make a home for Malie or go and live with her in the house of Nadub.

Nadub desired the latter course to be taken. Malie was very useful to him; helped him in the making of the great cane traps, went fishing, ran messages and did the cooking. Had Kanoa been a man of proper spirit he would have refused this suggestion; being what he was, he weakly fell in with it and as a result confirmed the people of Ratea in their opinion of him.

After the first month or so of marriage, Malie, who had been all sweetness, began to show the sour streak that is in the nature of every woman and every man born of woman, though it may be only a hair's breadth wide. She would order him to do this and that, and he, like a fool obeying, and, so to speak, putting his head through the collar, she rapidly fastened the rest of the harness upon him and took up the whip.

The very children in the groves cried after him: "Oh, Kanoa, look! Malie is after thee!"

On the reef, fish spearing by torchlight, Sipi, his wife's brother, would push him aside, and Nadub, pounding his kava, would call him to take the pestle as though he were calling a servant or a dog.

So things went for a year, and then one day Kanoa on the reef suddenly forgot Ma-

lie and Nadub, his married life and his unhappiness, for far to the east on the blue sky something showed that the eyes of Kanoa had never seen before. Something white, like the wing of a great gull—a ship in full sail.

Then Kanoa paddled back to the beach shouting his news, and the people ran, lining the shore. Remembering the long-distant raid of the men of Uari, some carried clubs and some spears, and so they stood as the schooner entered the break in the reef and swam across the still water toward the shore.

But Kanoa was not among the valiant company on the beach. To his shame, he was hiding in the woods. The sight of the schooner had been enough for him. He seemed to see again the far vision of the men of Uari, to hear again the cries of the stricken ones and to *feel* again the blow of the club that had scattered a man's brains. It was not cowardice so much as the crowding of these old ghosts and recollections that drove him through the palm groves, uphill through the sandalwood trees and so to the hilltop where perched in the upper branches of a tree he could see the ship—a topsail schooner—coming now on the wind and now passing through the opening of the reef. Then Kanoa, as he watched and listened, heard her voice as the anchor chain roared through the hawse pipe. Then she was dumb, and the white canvas thrashing the wind began to come off her as the leaves come off a withering tree.

Kanoa watched for a long time, yet nothing happened. No men landed from the schooner to run through the trees like the braves of Uari killing and slashing, no cries came on the wind—nothing but the complaints of the sea gulls as of old and the murmur of the reef and the voice of the trees.

The schooner had dropped no boats, the people on board not knowing the nature of the people of Ratea and dreading perhaps a bad reception.

Then as Kanoa watched, he saw canoes putting out across the water of the lagoon. Just as mice steal around a piece of cheese, and led by the hunger of curiosity, the canoes stole round the *Borgo*—for that was the schooner's name—and as Kanoa watched the canoes came right alongside of her as though suddenly taking courage, and then after a while he could see the people of the canoes on the schooner's deck.

On the deck of that wonderful thing that was a canoe yet not a canoe, on its deck unharmed and touching it and exploring it —and he, Kanoa, was out of it, up a tree, a coward whose cowardice had cost him the loss of this miraculous experience.

His eyes, keen as the eyes of a bird, could now make out the tiny figures on the deck of the *Borgo* and differentiate them. Nadub was there, and Sipi and Keola, they seemed conversing with the men of the schooner and coming to no harm.

Then Kanoa left his tree and came down running through the woods till he reached the village, which was empty. Then he came to the beach where all the women and children and old people were congregated. No sooner did they see him than they set up a shout: *"Kanoa, paraka o he Kanoa!"* Calling him a dogfish and a runaway, Malie, his wife, leading the chorus. But Kanoa scarcely heard. Shame itself was forgotten in the wonder of this new thing floating there before him on the emerald waters of the lagoon, the canoes nestling by her side as guillenot chicks by their mother. But even that sight did not hold him long, and shame returning, he ran off, followed by the jeers of the crowd, and hid himself in the woods.

The *Borgo,* one of the earliest Pacific blackbirders, was a Finnish ship owned and captained by a Russian Finn named Neils Nystad.

Russian Finns at sea generally are found in the fo'c's'le and are looked upon with disfavor by the ordinary merchant Jack. Disfavor tinged with fear, for it is well known that these men have power over the wind, can see the future, and have command over devils; also, they are strange-looking people, quite different from the Norwegians and Swedes—men of Klitland or Frisia or Sjaeeland or Laaland or Funen.

Captain Nystad was queer looking, very flat of face and with oily black hair plastered over a low brow. He was one of those curious men who if they come within touching distance of a nation or tribe can speak its tongue. He had been two years in the Pacific, now, making his headquarters at Geebvink Bay in the north of Papua, and making wide sweeps in pursuit of his business which put in the fewest words á la

Yankee, was "kidnaping natives." Otherwise known as blackbirding.

Blackbirding in its most disreputable stage was simply stealing men; slaves for plantation work who received a nominal wage paid in the depreciated currency of trade goods. In its more reputable form, the men weren't stolen, but inveigled into the net of the trader in flesh. Contracts were made with them, they would be paid so much for their work for a certain time and be returned to their island safe and sound when the contracts were expired.

Captain Nystad's method lay between these extremes. He wanted no fighting, no trouble with the natives. He would promise anything, get the Kanakas on board his ship and sail away with them. They would never return.

In Ratea he had found an ideal spot for the carrying on of the game. It was absolutely unsophisticated, knew nothing of the tricks of the white man, and the people, though fierce if injured, and keen to fight when roused, were gentle folk when in their right minds.

Nystad having dropped his anchor had, as Kanoa had observed from the hilltop, made no attempt to land. He guessed that curiosity would bring the canoes out pretty soon, and he was right.

Out they came, Nadub leading, the canoe men all armed, and the paddles scarcely striking the water.

Then, closer up, Nadub saw at the rail of the *Borgo* the Kanaka crew, men from the Pelews, and a Javanese or two, all nearly as naked as himself and all friendly in appearance. He saw Captain Nystad and Byrne, the mate, and Nystad waved his hand to him, and this pleased Nadub, for he guessed instinctively that Nystad was the chief of these strangers and Nystad had singled him, Nadub, out as chief of the Rateans—which he wasn't. Ratea had no chief man in particular, but this did not lessen the compliment nor the self-importance that suddenly swelled in the breast of the fish-trap maker.

He brought his canoe boldly alongside and came on deck. The others followed and stood for a moment mute and huddled together like penned sheep. The decks, the masts, the spars and the rigging held their minds like a trap. Then they broke out chattering like a nest of magpies and some of the Kanaka crew joined in, fraternizing with them. Nystad, taking soundings in this ocean of language, found he could navigate it. The Ratean tongue held a good many strange words, but it was close enough for his purpose to the dialects he knew.

Then Nystad, feeling sure of his ground and not knowing in the least the blunder of the business, began to make magic, talking all the time. He showed Nadub a ten-cent mirror and Nadub looking into it saw a face looking back at him from it, a face that frowned when he frowned and put out its tongue when he put out his tongue; yet there was no face behind the thing which was quite flat and only the tenth of an inch thick. "It is yours," said Nystad, motioning him to keep it. Then to Sipi he presented a box of tandstickor matches—wonderful little sticks that when struck in a certain way burst into flame—and to the others such things as a yard of calico painted with flowers, a musical box which played one tune, and a whistle that blown into made a noise like the singing of a bird.

"You've got those chaps, sure," said Byrne, as the guests went off hugging their treasures. But he was wrong.

Kanoa, jeered off the beach by the others, did not see the canoes coming back nor Nadub running to Malie with the mirror in his hand, nor did he see the girl take it, look into it, and drop it with a scream. The thing was all starred and broken and when Nadub looked into it again he saw nothing but bits of a face. This was bad. Worse still, a few minutes later the whole box of matches which Sipi was exhibiting went off in his hand and burned his fingers. Kanoa saw nothing of all this, lying beneath the shelter of the trees, his heart torn between shame of his own cowardice openly exhibited before Malie and the burning regret that he had not seen what the others had seen.

The schooner filled him with a wonder and desire beyond all words and the men who had boarded her and touched her seemed to him the happiest of mortals and the most enviable.

He did not know that Sipi of the burned fingers and Nadub of the broken mirror were at that moment counciling the others that the strangers had better be avoided and their magic gifts destroyed. He knew nothing of all this, but Nystad knew it.

Next day, when landing with a shore

party, the people of Ratea drew away from him and vanished, dissolving among the trees.

"We're taboo," said Byrne, "curse them. We'll never get to windward of them now."

"That is so," said Nystad. "There is only one thing to be done. Wait till to-night, take the boats and all our men round beyond that point and rush the village when all these beast men are asleep. You know I go softly as a rule, but this is not a case for softly."

"No," said Byrne. "We'd be kicking our heels here forever. Even if we get only a dozen of them, it's worth it."

They returned to the boat and rowed back to the schooner, and Kanoa, still hiding from his shame in the trees, saw them go. A great desire seized him to leave the trees, run to the waterside and call them to take him with them; he might have done so, but the fear of ridicule held him back—the ridicule of Malie who would say: "You are brave enough now that the others have shown you the way—you who ran and hid when you thought there was danger."

"No," said Kanoa to himself, "I will wait till night when no one will see. Then I will swim off and call to them and they will let me come and touch all those things they have to show and for which my heart yearns."

Having fixed this in his mind, he lay down on his stomach with his face in his arms and fell asleep dreaming that Malie was pursuing him along the beach, armed with a sting-ray's tail and calling him a dogfish.

It was dark when he awoke, the moon was rising over the eastern sea and lighting the sands where nothing showed but the canoe houses and a single beached fishing canoe.

Kanoa, leaving the shelter of the trees, stood for a moment watching and listening. The beach sands, curving, ran out into a long white spit like a finger pointing at the *Borgo* anchored fair and clear in the moonlight. On the spit a dark spot was moving. It was a turtle.

It had been his intention to swim out to the schooner, but the sight of the canoe changed his mind. He came toward it; there was nothing in it but a paddle and a spear. Kanoa pushed the little craft gently off, got in and seized the paddle. Even as he did so he saw stringing away toward the little cape to the eastward of the bay three dark forms, the boats of the *Borgo*, six men in each and every man armed and every man provided with signal-halyard line enough to bind a couple of prisoners. But Kanoa knew nothing of that. Still, he knew that these were the small canoes belonging to the great one and the sight for a moment gave him pause. Then he resumed his paddle, cowardice urging him back to the beach, curiosity and the passion to see and touch urging him forward.

The schooner, as he drew near, showed no sign of life, not even a riding light. The incoming tide ran past her, making a ripple at the anchor chain and bow with a trickling sound, the only voice in all that quiet moonlit night with the exception of the murmur of the reef.

Bringing the canoe alongside he fastened up and came on board.

No, the *Borgo* was not deserted. The anchor watch, a single Kanaka, was keeping guard Kanaka fashion, lying on the planking of the deck fast asleep.

Kanoa looked at the sleeping figure and then at the wonders around him; the high masts and spars, the wheel and binnacle, the empty davits, the standing and running rigging, all lit by the moon. He heard the trickle of the water on the planking and the click of rudder chain and creak of timber as the ship moved to the gentle swell, then his eyes fixed themselves on the glow of the saloon skylight. The lamp below was lit and the light showed amber against the cold white light of the moon.

Then he drew toward the saloon companionway and looked down.

The glow of the lamp showed vaguely from here and the moonlight touched the brasswork of the top steps. He had never seen a stairs before, he had never gone down anything except down a tree. The vague interior of this wonderful place half repelled him, yet curiosity had him now more than ever in her grasp. He came down the stairs by sitting on each step, lowering himself from one to the other, feeling with his feet for the next, his heart in his mouth till he reached the mat. Then he stood up with the open saloon door before him and all the wonders of the place lit by the swinging lamp.

There was a telltale compass on the beam above whose pointer moved subtly as the

schooner swung to the heave of the swell, and there was an old Britannia metal watch hanging on a rail whose little hand was moving. He touched them warily and then he touched a bottle that stood among them.

Now, in this bottle, Captain Nystad—Finn that he was and the owner of all this magic place—kept a very powerful spirit or devil, but Kanoa knew nothing of this.

Kanoa put the bottle to his nose and the smell ran up through his mind so pleasurably that he put the bottle to his mouth and it was then that the jinni leaped out—at least in part. The burning spirit filled the mouth and ran down the throat of Kanoa so that he coughed and choked, but he did not let go the bottle. Holding it clutched by the neck he sat down on the imitation plush couch, while the jinni who was now working in his stomach and warming his veins called out to him to put the bottle to his mouth again.

This he did, and then, wonder of wonders, Kanoa began to grow and swell. He felt a foot taller and half a foot thicker and great in himself beyond words, so that by the time that the whole of the jinni had escaped into him, he was twenty feet high—and growing. He was also laughing and snorting, his eyes aflame and his soul athirst to be doing he knew not what. He saw, in his mind's eye, Malie as he had seen her last—sneering at him—and this vision filled him with such fury that he dashed the empty bottle against a bulkhead and sprang to his feet to seize her.

It was at this juncture that far-off cries and screams coming through the open skylight made him turn, climb the companionway and spring on deck. Here he met the anchor watch, who ran at him threatening and not perceiving his great height and width. Kanoa seized him as a man seizes a chicken and bashed his head against the mainmast and threw the body overboard. Then he stood, his hands on the starboard rail and his eyes on the sand spit along which Nadub and his crew were being driven by Nystad and his men.

Kanoa turned to the port side, dropped into the canoe in which lay the glittering spear, and pushed off.

Now when Nystad attacked the village of sleepers, he and his men yelling like fiends, things happened as he expected. The Marys and the children—whom he did not want—dashed away into the bush with the boys and the cowards, and only some forty men, mostly unarmed, were left to be dealt with. These he attempted to head toward the boat, but they were braver than he expected and they took their own line of retreat toward the sand spit, where they could not be surrounded, determined to swim if worst came to the worst and make for the outer reef.

With two of their number dead and four of Nystad's men accounted for, driven almost to the point of the spit and with all the fight nearly out of them, they were preparing for this last resort when a canoe beached behind them and out of it shot the god of battles—Kanoa; fifty feet high now, spear in hand, yelling like a demon and charging through the parted ranks straight at Nystad.

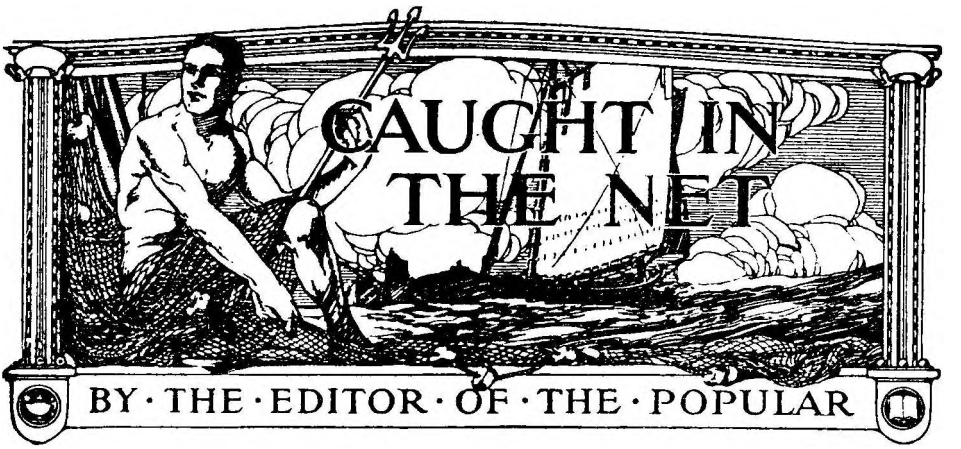
In a moment Nadub was after him, charging at Byrne; in a moment, Nystad spitted and Byrne clubbed, the men of the *Borgo* were broken and running, only to meet with the cowards and women who had left the shelter of the trees armed with stones and sticks and to fall, some here, some there, never to rise again, while among them fell Kanoa, the hero of the fray—dead drunk.

Grant said that he had this story from Kanoa himself years after, when Kanoa was very fat, chief of Ratea and a Bible Christian, and that Kanoa had said that he would nevermore have dealings with spirits contained in bottles, for that on the morning after, when the jinni was out of him, he felt only two feet high, shrunk, and so miserable that he could not take even an interest in such merry happenings as the burning of the schooner and the staking out of the still-living Nystad on the reefs for the sharks to devour him.

He said, also, that bad as his experience was, he had never regretted it, since the spirit had brought him back Malie, not as a wife always scolding and sneering at him, but as a woman who loves a man because she fears him.

"For no woman," said Kanoa, folding his hands on his paunch, "can know love, who knows not fear."

More Stacpoole stories in future issues.



TRAINING AND EDUCATION

OUR subject is suggested by the consideration that ten days from now, in schools and colleges and lecture halls, the opening of National Education Week will be celebrated. During that week the people of America will be invited to reflect intensively upon the significance and urgency of education.

There is certainly no nation in the world which places more emphasis on education than America. No country can point to a school system better organized, more costly, more far-reaching than ours. Yet ever and anon we are told by visitors from other shores that America is undereducated.

Foreign commentators seldom offer sound criticisms when America is their topic. Their pronouncements as a rule are tinged with a certain envious asperity of which they are probably quite unconscious but which, none the less, lays their judgment open to suspicion of prejudice. America is a puzzle to the rest of the world. Europe does not understand us and Europeans are piqued because they cannot find out how we produce our effects.

When they tell us we are undereducated, they are honest, but they are inaccurate. Education is a broad term. It embraces a great many things—culture, breeding, discipline, training. A man who was completely educated would be a god—able to do everything. Complete education is an ideal—and therefore unattainable. When the European tells us we are undereducated he means that we are not educated according to his standards. That is all.

Education is valueless unless it is adapted to the circumstances with which it must cope. European education emphasizes culture—the abstractions of thought. That is well enough for Europe. There is time for abstractions in Europe—perhaps. Here we are still too busy. We have work to do—a great deal of work. Latin and Greek will scarcely solve the enormous practical problems which the development of our new country imposes. The life we lead is active and practical—not leisurely and reflective. We prepare the future—we do not analyze the past. Training is our greatest need, and discipline. Culture and breeding will not fell trees, build dams, rear cities, and subdue the wilderness to our needs. The time for rhetoric and the classics will come with the leisure of a later age. To-day we must occupy our minds with the labor of our hands. We must be trained and disciplined to produce—not molded and polished to ornament. Our critics do not, or will not, understand this. They say we are ignorant and careless of beauty. That is only the half truth that makes a falsehood. We are ignorant of the things we cannot use and do not need. But we have the knowledge that will make a desert bloom. And as for beauty—it may be that nature has provided us with such a bounty of it that we do not feel the urge to improve upon and supplement her works.

A PROBLEM FOR NATURE

PROFESSOR J. W. GREGORY, who presides over the geographical section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, has so little to worry over in his own life, apparently, that he can afford to fret himself about the troubles the world will head into a thousand years from now. He is disturbed about the problem which will confront man's descendants in the year three thousand. He has calculated that if the population of the earth continues increasing at its present average rate there will be standing room only on land, exclusive of the polar regions, a thousand years from now. Even more alarming, because more immediate, is his prediction that in a little more than a century, at the present pace of population, there will remain in the world barely sufficient sources of food supply to fill the myriad stomachs which then will be clamoring for sustenance.

This is all very alarming, theoretically. And it may have its terrifying practical aspect, as well. In the past Nature took care of the population problem very neatly. She provided drouths and famines and plagues to wipe out the human surplus. But what will she do now with science arrayed against her? In progressive countries plagues, famines and drouths no sooner get a good start than science applies the brakes and they are brought to a halt. Nature has few known strongholds left that science has not entered and destroyed.

Nevertheless we are not alarmed. We do not think that our grandchildren six times removed will starve to death. Nor do we believe that their remote descendants will have to invade the igloos of the Eskimos in order to find room to lie down.

There is some mysterious cosmic force that coördinates and adjusts the movements of all life. It is the hand that lifts the safety valve when the pressure in any direction becomes too great. It has never failed the world in a crisis. Science is ever trying to usurp its place. But science will fail. Science goes just so far—then Nature, the cosmic force, takes charge.

No matter what the scientist calculates, Nature will give his figures the lie in her own good time. How she will do it we cannot predict. We may speculate, but that is all. The only thing that can be said, in the certainty of faith, is that provision will be made. Nature will solve the problem in her own inscrutable way. A century from now there will be food for the mouths of our children; a thousand years from to-day there will be room enough still for everybody.

THE CHAMPION NATION

THIS year will go down in sport history as a year of world-wide international competition and as a year of almost unbroken success for American sportsmen both at home and abroad.

Our first great victory came in the Olympic Games in France. American track-and-field athletes outclassed by a wide margin the men of speed and brawn that the rest of the world sent against them. American swimmers, both men and women, did as well as their brethren of the spiked shoe. The great Yale eight-oared crew, representing the nation, won as decisively on the Seine against the other rowing countries as, representing their university, they had won at New London against their Harvard foemen. American representatives in many other branches of Olympic competition won more than their share of first honors. Taking the games as a whole the American invading forces led the rest of the world with plenty to spare.

At home our success was just as impressive. Twenty-three nations challenged for the Davis Cup, emblem of the team tennis championship of the world. Australia was the survivor of the preliminary competition, but the Australians were helpless before the defending team of Tilden, Richards and Johnston. The cup stayed here. Other tennis successes came in the Olympic Games, where Americans won every event, and in our national championship, where the superstar Tilden held his title against a field that included most of the ranking players of all nations.

Perhaps the most colorful of all this year's international sport events were the polo matches for the International Challenge Cup. The Four Horsemen of Meadow-

brook, riding—as the polo people say—"with their necks for sale," kept the cup here for at least three years more by defeating the British challengers in two straight games.

Another successful cup defense was put on by our amateur golfers against the British challengers for the Walker Cup. Our one failure to repel a sport invasion of importance came in the races for six-meter yachts on Long Island Sound, in which, after a ding-dong seven-race series, the British sailors captured the trophy.

We also had our victories in professional sport. Walter Hagen came back from England with the British open golf championship in his pocket, and to prove that his win was no fluke won the American professional championship. Another American success came in the heavyweight fight between Harry Wills and Luis Angel Firpo of the Argentine, from which Wills emerged the winner after fifteen rounds of clinching and wrestling that did anything but please the huge crowd that paid high prices to see the bout, and which convinced fight followers that Jack Dempsey has nothing to fear in a match with Wills, his persistent challenger.

America led the world in sport in 1924, and judging by the young stars who are being developed and seasoned in every branch of competition, America is going to lead the world for a long stretch of years to come.

MAKING MUSIC DEMOCRATIC

PEOPLE always made tunes and sang, and we find even the most barbarous tribes indulging in vocal efforts and scraping and plucking wood and wires, banging drums and blowing pipes. But like literature, as an art music was originally aristocratic. Kings and queens, lords and ladies patronized and supported it. Less than a generation ago music was still aristocratic and only choice souls gathered together to hear a Beethoven symphony or a Wagner opera.

Now, all this has undergone a change which we recognize but hardly evaluate. The radio has brought within common earshot the musical masterworks, and the astonishing part of it is that in a recent census of radio owners' likes and dislikes the classic stuff received more votes than other types of music.

So at last, perhaps, we have the "musical atmosphere" which was supposed to be the peculiar possession of Europe through centuries of tradition and culture. Invention has brought it to us, and it will be a tremendously interesting process to watch and see what it does to us as a people. The change is now going on, and we doubt whether there is one radio fan in a thousand who has not in some way become affected by, or familiar with, a musical composition of a caliber formerly considered beyond comprehension.

A man of penetrating intellect once said that the insuperable barrier to understanding a symphony and other great tone works was, for the ordinary individual, that they could not be heard often enough to make them loved and familiar. He asserted that if heard sufficiently a composition like Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" would become as popular and well known as, say, "Home, Sweet Home." It all lies in repetition, which achieves the ultimate appreciation. A simple tune can be grasped and liked in a single hearing, but it takes more application and repetition to get a work of larger scope within the range of average taste.

Also, jazz, whether you approve of it or not, has helped introduce the classic composers to the great general public of this country. People have heard the music of Schubert, Chopin, Wagner and the rest distorted or stolen for a popular piece, and they have grown curious about the works of the masters, which has naturally led to knowledge of them.

Jazz itself is undergoing change. It is achieving dignity. Its proponents are seeking original expression in it, and serious composers are hailing it as "the music of democracy."

Altogether, it begins to look as if this country of ours were really in the way of genuine musical culture and, maybe, on the threshold of the long-sought-for "national school of music."

AUTHORITY

HOW frequently we hear or make the remark: "Oh, the law ought to do something about that!" It is in all our mouths. We think it is one of the chief warnings of our times, this insistent call from all sides that something or other be forbidden or regulated by law.

Is it not the cry of the incompetent? If we had halfway control of ourselves and our children should we feel it necessary to appeal to State and Federal powers to step in and help us out in every department of life?

Honestly, it is an exhibition of hysteria and weakness for which we should be thoroughly ashamed. Multiplication of laws in this land of liberty is appalling, and surely a disgraceful commentary upon our lack of self-reliance and discipline.

Censorship of our literature, our stage, our moving pictures and other forms of entertainment and culture should begin at home, like charity, and not be delegated to the government.

It is an axiom that the home is the foundation of the State, but how weak and wabbly is that foundation when its elements are not strong enough to cohere and solidify into moral, mental and spiritual support without seeking the authority of the law at every turn.

A country too much governed is headed for a smash-up, sooner or later, just as a home too little governed is doomed to disaster.

POPULAR TOPICS

IT is an unpleasant fact that if all the illiterate voters in the United States were organized in a political party they would have sufficient power to decide any national election. According to statistics of the National Education Association there are over four million voters who can neither read nor write.

Luckily these illiterate voters do not all belong to any one party. Like intelligent voters, stupid voters, careless voters, serious voters, honest voters, humorous voters, voters who believe everything they are told, voters who believe nothing they are told, and repeating voters, they are divided pretty evenly among the various clans.

It is rather astonishing to learn that in a country where the little red schoolhouse is the second-best applause provoker of ladies and gentlemen who are trying to talk their fellow citizens into electing them to public office—the first-best being the overmuch-amended Constitution—there are almost five million people to confess that they cannot write, and that over three million of them are native-born citizens.

AMERICAN illiterates are about evenly divided between the sexes. There are over a half million illiterate minors, and almost four million illiterates under fifty-five years of age. Three fifths of the people who can neither read nor write live in rural sections. There are a half million people who can read but who cannot write.

THERE are one hundred and ten educational dark spots in the United States—counties where more than twenty-five per cent of the people are illiterate. In some of these counties more than half the people cannot write. One county with a high percentage of illiteracy does not number a single college graduate among its native born.

Of course, some people might consider this county decidedly lucky, but we are glad that we don't live there. We like to have college graduates around us, so that we can get tickets for the big football games from them.

THE National Education Association seems to be perturbed about the fact that there are many people who cannot read the subtitles of moving pictures. This seems to us to be the highest attainable peak of nothing to worry about.

THE Japanese who operate the Chosen Railway in Korea have troubles of their own. The Koreans use the right of way to walk on and the authorities estimate that at least five hundred trains a year have to stop because the promenaders pay no attention to locomotive whistles.

The Koreans, being unused to railroads, often lose their heads—especially those who pick out the track as a place to sleep on hot nights, and use the rails as pillows.

A BIG New York bank is authority for the statement that the people of the United States earn two hundred million dollars a day, and save thirty million dollars of it.

WE are a little worried about our old friend John Bull.

A report from England says that John's taste in tobacco is changing and that he is growing fond of the milder varieties of the weed.

Still, there are hopeful aspects of the situation. There are fifteen million smokers in the British Isles and at least a third of them are pipe smokers. A country that can boast of five million pipe smokers must be sound at the core.

The average Englishman spends thirty-five dollars a year for tobacco. Great Britain imports eighty-seven million dollars' worth of tobacco a year—ninety-two per cent of it from the United States. The taxes on tobacco bring the government enough to support the British army, and are six per cent of the entire national revenue.

THE pen is mightier than the sword.

Or, at any rate, the business of making pens is a mightier one than the manufacture of swords.

We haven't seen any recent figures from the swordsmiths, but the census bureau says that last year almost two million gross of pens, worth over a million dollars, were manufactured in the United States. In spite of the ever-growing number of typewriters in use, the pen output was thirty-eight per cent greater in value than it was in 1921.

THOMAS JEFFERSON, writing to a young man and laying out a program of study that would break the mental back of any gasoline-burning college boy of to-day, had a few words to say regarding exercise. Written in 1785, they rate at least a chuckle to-day. Said Mr. Jefferson:

"Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body, and stamp no character on the mind."

Jefferson was a firm believer in shooting as the best form of recreation and exercise. In the same letter he said: "Let your gun, therefore, be the constant companion of your walks."

Even to-day, in some sections of this land of the free, this wouldn't be bad advice to give enthusiastic young Democrats.

FOR some time now people interested in the physical well-being of the race have been viewing with alarm the fact that more and more people prefer taking their exercise behind the wheel of a motor car. They bewail the fact that we no longer do our pleasure traveling on Shanks' mare or aback a horse. Jefferson was as much worried a hundred and forty years ago—but for a different reason. Speaking of the effeminate habit of riding instead of walking he said: "The Europeans value themselves on having subdued the horse to the uses of man; but I doubt whether we have not lost more than we have gained through the use of this animal. No one thing has occasioned so much the degeneracy of the human body."

Wonder what the shade of Jefferson thinks of a nation whose young men nearly all ride in motors—and still are able to perform feats on the running track that the people of his time would have considered impossible for the human machine?

The Pursuit of the Wooden Leg

By Ernest Douglas

Author of "The Wooden Leg of Destiny," and other stories.

As Joe Bonner pointed out, a man who will steal a leg from a fellow cripple is beneath contempt and beyond description. But one must expect to drink with strange fellows, below the Rio Grande. Still, even for Mexico, Perrett was an exceptional and versatile scoundrel.

WE met Perrett at Magdalena, in a certain cantina poetically styled La Paloma. In a short half hour he and Joe Bonner had become so chummy that they traded wooden legs.

How Joe and I happened to be in Magdalena is in itself quite a story. We had got out of Mexico with twenty-five thousand dollars gold, the reward paid us for recovering a parcel of stolen diamonds from Palemon Salazar, bandit chieftain and revolutionist, at the battle of Lagarto. I was for buying some good, safe business in the States; but in Nogales Joe heard that half the famous De la Rosa estate was for sale. He immediately began to build air castles; we should become big haciendados with cattle on a thousand hills, and all that sort of thing. In vain I pointed out to him how unsettled were conditions below the border, how unstable the government at that time; nothing would do but we must at least look over the De la Rosa rancho.

"With our little wad we can buy something really worth while in Mexico," he argued with an obstinate shake of his great red head. "We can be big fish in a puddle that isn't so small, while in this country we can never be anything more than minnows."

"Yes, but it's a muddy puddle that becomes bloody now and again," I objected gloomily.

But the argument wound up with us getting letters from the Nogales bankers of Señorita Francisca de la Rosa, last surviving member of that revolution-harried clan, and taking a train for Magdalena, a sleepy old town only a mile or two up the river from her ancestral casa. When we saw the hacienda, with its sagging fences and tumble-down buildings, we understood why she was trying to sell part of her holdings. She needed money to restore the remainder to productivity and perhaps to lift a load of debt accumulated since tranquillity and prosperity fled the land with Porfirio Diaz.

The casa had once been a large and pretentious residence but in the course of the last rebellion it had served as fortress for a party of Obregonistas led by Colonel Miguel de la Rosa, father of the estate's present owner. Carranza artillery was brought up, the adobe walls reduced to dust and the defenders massacred to a man. Now the mansion was a ghastly ruin surrounded by splintered stumps that had once been beautiful shade and fruit trees. Only three or four rooms had been rebuilt.

In one of those pitifully bare but neat and clean rooms we were graciously received by Señorita de la Rosa herself. Subconsciously I had expected the queen of such a broad domain to be a withered, mantillaed spinster. She was anything but that; she was a fresh, blooming, snappy-eyed young woman in a soft-gray dress of American style. Her features were unmistakably Latin, yet she could have passed anywhere in our country as merely an unusually pretty and intelligent-looking American girl.

Unlike Joe, I am anything but susceptible to feminine charms; his frequently kindled flames usually left me cold; but I just had to take a second look at our hostess. When I realized that I was staring at her almost rudely I glanced sidewise at my friend. His blue eyes were shining and his face beaming with frank admiration. No question about it, Joe Bonner was smitten again. Señorita de la Rosa, though, did not seem to mind a bit. Women never did mind having Joe admire them.

As we took homemade chairs with seats of interlaced rawhide thongs I noted the carefully careless ease with which he handled his right leg, the one of wood and steel and rubber that replaced the limb shot away by German shrapnel at St. Mihiel. Joe was very sensitive about that leg, especially with women; it hurt his pride to be pitied and treated as a cripple. Withal, he was as proud of his wooden leg as a kid of a new bicycle. After you knew his secret he would spend hours showing it to you, telling how he had had it made to order, and how features of his own invention made it almost as good as a real leg.

In halting Spanish, Joe began to explain our business. At his first pause the señorita broke in:

"Pardon me, señores, but I think we will get along better if we speak English."

"You speak English!" Joe exclaimed in relief.

"Of course. Almost half my life has been spent in American schools. I was in a convent at Tucson when my father was killed here."

The bank had written her about us so our arrival occasioned no surprise. Her major-domo, or superintendent, was away for the day, she said, but on the morrow he would show us over the property.

"And you'll come along too, we hope," Joe said boldly.

"Perhaps, if you wish," she murmured with a blush and a glance at the ancient dueña who for the sake of Mexican convention had remained in the room.

"I wish that I could offer you the hospitality of my rancho for the night, but you see what the war has done to my poor house," she apologized as we rose to go. "I'm sure that you will be much more comfortable in the hotel at Magdalena."

Before we had reached the gate, where a somnolent peon waited for us with a livery-stable buggy, Joe had started to rave.

"Did you ever see a girl like her?" he exploded. "What a peach! A regular peach, a pippin, a dream, way down here among the cactus! Smart as a steel trap, too."

"No, I never saw a girl like her," I admitted maliciously. "Not since that dancer, La Amapola, last month. And then there was——"

"Ah, shut up, Pete Wayland! You're hopeless. But say, honest, aren't you surprised? Just to see her is worth this whole Mexican trip. They don't make any like her in the States. By the Eternal, they never made another like her anywhere! And what a brave little thing, to stick here and try to restore the family fortune all by herself."

"Well, if you're going to marry this hacienda there's no use in talking about me buying part of it. I may as well drift on back to the border. I never did have much hankering for Mexico and I have none at all since we got slammed into that jail at Lagarto."

"Don't be an ass, Pete. Who said anything about marrying it? But say, a fellow could do a lot worse. You're a congenital pessimist, but I know that the revolutions are all over. With this property and a few good Yankee dollars to fix it up—— And with a wife like that to work for! But it's —well—sacrilege to talk about inflicting a wooden-legged husband on a girl like her. Dad blast those Germans, anyway!"

His depression was only momentary, however, and he was still raving when we reached Magdalena and went to our room at the Hotel Madero. There he restlessly removed his wooden leg, lay down on a bed and proceeded to envelop himself in dreams and pungent Mexican cigarette smoke. I tried to doze off and forget the heat, but every time I closed my eyes he kicked me with his good foot or dug me in the ribs to

demand confirmation of his opinion that her hair, her skin, her teeth or her ears were superlatively something or other; or to inquire earnestly whether I thought her supposed objections to his artificial limb would prove insuperable. Joe was the best pal a fellow ever had, but mighty hard to put up with when in love.

When evening came I had difficulty in persuading him even to go downstairs to eat. He wanted to keep still and think, he said. Some new and splendid idea had just struck him. While I splashed in the washbowl fragments of his rambling conversation reached my ears but made little impression. I believe that he was considering some plan under which I should take over the business management of the De la Rosa hacienda while he directed the cowboys and agricultural laborers. By this time he was making no bones about his intention to wed Señorita Francisca, provided she could be persuaded to overlook his wooden leg.

"It isn't as though I didn't have a leg practically as good as the one I lost," he reasoned.

When I finally succeeded in propelling him to Sun Lung's restaurant, however, Joe pitched in like a harvest hand. Whatever else it did to him, love never affected his appetite. After the meal he acceded with only slight demur to my proposal that we stroll around and see the sights of the town.

The process of seeing Magdalena naturally led us to La Paloma, which, next to the plaza, seemed to be the social center of the community. We sat at a table in the long, narrow, ornately decorated barroom and sipped at steins of Hermosillo beer. My eyes were upon the cosmopolitan, colorful throng of humanity that surged in and out of the cantina, but Joe's thoughts were still back at the Rancho de la Rosa.

"Hello!" I exclaimed suddenly. "There's another man with a wooden leg."

At the bar, ordering tequila mescal, was a stately old party with the iron-gray mustachios, goatee and solemn dignity of a Kentucky colonel. We were just near enough to the mirror behind the bar to see that his eyes were steely blue and piercingly keen, though a trifle shifty; that his nose was oddly flattened and angled off crazily toward the left corner of his mouth. Evidently that organ had been broken at some time and received only indifferent surgical attention. But for this disfigurement his features would have been handsome, though angular and bony.

His right leg was missing below the knee. The empty trousers leg was pinned up under the coat behind and the stranger sagged against a battered peg leg that must have been knocked together by a village carpenter. A piece of two-by-two lumber extended up from the knee, on the outer side of the thigh, and was attached to a belt at the waist. Halfway down from the knee was a big "P" carved with many flourishes.

"An American!" Joe ejaculated.

Impulsively my companion rose, approached the cripple and held out his hand.

"My name is Bonner," he said. "And this is Mr. Wayland. We are Americans and you are a countryman, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"You are mistaken; I am a Britisher. Nevertheless I am very happy to make your acquaintance. My name is Perrett."

After hooking a heavy, knobby cane over his left forearm he thrust out a sinewy hand to both of us in turn. Joe invited him to our table.

"Ah, drinking beer," he observed with an air that I fancied was slightly patronizing. "Very commendable temperance; but in honor of this felicitous occasion I insist on introducing you to my favorite beverage, a blend of my own invention that I call the 'cactus cocktail' because it includes only liquors distilled from different varieties of cactus. Antonio!"

The white-jacketed bartender responded and Perrett poured out a stream of Spanish so rapid that I caught only a part of it. Soon we were served with tall glasses filled with a light-green liquid.

We drank to our future acquaintance and Joe ordered another round. Of course I had to hold up my end but I managed surreptitiously to spill most of my third drink on the floor. Already my head was whirling and I knew that the seeming mildness of Perrett's pet tipple masked a fearsome potency.

Joe, however, had no such misgivings. The liquor quickly loosened his tongue, never too tightly hung. He became confidential and began to tell our new-found friend all about his wooden leg.

"Why, I never would have suspected that you were an unfortunate like myself," Perrett declared. "You seem to be just as active as any man with two good legs."

"Of course I am!" Joe pounded violently on the table by way of emphasis. "That's the very point. Modern science has achieved no greater triumph than this wooden leg of mine, which I designed myself and had made to order. Come on up to our hotel and I'll show you how it works."

"That isn't necessary. There's a room in the rear here that I often use for private business. Three more, Antonio, and to the back room."

Though I would gladly have escaped hearing Joe hold forth upon the marvels of his wooden leg, for that wonderful limb was now an old story to me, I went along to avoid seeming unsociable and because I suspected that one more cocktail would be about his limit.

In the seclusion of the back room Joe removed his leg and explained every detail of its mechanism. Perrett was enthusiastic in his approval, unstinting in his praise of both the leg and its designer.

"You must really give me the maker's name and address," the Englishman said as he scratched a long thumb nail speculatively down his crooked nose. "I have tried various artificial legs but never found one that gave me such comfort and satisfaction as this old peg."

"Here, you try mine," Joe offered generously. "Your leg is cut off just where mine is, we're about the same height, and it ought to be pretty near a fit."

Perrett unbuckled his peg and carefully fitted Joe's leg to his stump.

"It was made for me," he asserted delightedly as he rose and stamped about. "What a leg! What a leg! Why, I didn't believe it possible. There's a lot more spring in this rubber foot than in my real one. What will you take for your leg, Mr. Bonner?"

"It's not for sale at any price. I'd as soon think of selling my head as my leg."

"I'll give you a thousand dollars for it."

"No! Please don't talk about buying my leg."

"Twelve hundred."

"Nothing doing. I need that leg worse than I need money. But let's see how it feels to wear a peg again."

Joe fished Perrett's discarded peg from the floor and put it on. Laughing immoderately, he hobbled over and placed his hand on Perrett's shoulder for support.

"Let's take a walk on the plaza," the Britisher proposed.

"Not much! Not with this thing on. Think I want everybody in Mexico to know I'm shy a leg? Give me back my own leg and I'll go with you."

Perrett waved his hand grandly and ordered more cactus cocktails.

"Better cut out the booze," I whispered to Joe. "Ask for ginger ale."

"Don't know what they call the stuff in Spanish," he grumbled irritably. "Besides, I don't want ginger ale. I never drink it. It's bad for my stomach."

I made no pretense of swallowing my next cocktail but left it untouched on the table. Joe tossed off his and then said:

"Well, Mr. Perrett, I guess you'd better give me my leg back so Pete and I can be going."

"What's your hurry? I want to try it out a little more to make sure it's the right length for me. Maybe I'll have to have mine made a fraction of an inch shorter."

"Say, are you going to give me back my leg or will I have to take it 'way from you?"

Joe had started up angrily. I pulled him down, admonishing him not to start anything.

"All right, but I want my leg back," he growled.

Appearing not to notice Joe's ill temper, Perrett asked a few questions about the way the foot was jointed to the ankle. Joe was mollified, remorseful, and insisted on buying another round of cactus cocktails.

"Pardon me, but there's a man I've got to see," Perrett remarked when the drinks came. "I'll be right back."

By that time I was becoming vaguely suspicious of Perrett and his intentions toward Joe's wooden leg; so I followed and watched while he conversed briefly with a corpulent, pock-marked Mexican. The Mexican looked inquiringly in our direction, nodded his comprehension and went away.

"Can you sing?" Perrett asked jocularly upon his return. "What do you say we have a few jolly old Yankee and British songs?"

"You bet I can sing," Joe affirmed. "Can't I sing, Pete?"

"Sort of," I admitted.

"Like to hear me sing 'Annie Laurie?' Here goes."

By main strength and awkwardness Joe had got through the first stanza and half

the chorus when the door was opened unceremoniously and six or seven Magdalena policemen, all armed with revolvers and several with short, thick clubs, crowded in.

"You are under arrest, gentlemen," the leader informed us politely, nodding toward Joe and me.

"Under arrest?" Joe howled, jerking away from the officer who had laid a hand upon his arm. "What's the charge?"

"Disturbing the peace. You will please come quietly."

"Oh, all right. Didn't know it was against the law to sing in Mexico. Well, Perrett, you'll have to give me my leg now so I can walk to jail."

But the Englishman was calmly working his way through the knot of policemen and did not halt.

"Stop him!" yelled Joe. "He's got my leg."

The Mexicans laughed indulgently. Joe made a dive after Perrett, toppling over two or three of them. One brought a club down upon his head and my red-haired buddy sank to the floor. I sprang to his side. Another of those clubs—or perhaps it was the same one—crashed against my cranium and I passed out amid a shower of shooting stars.

When I regained consciousness I did not have to wonder where I was. I had been in a Mexican carcel before. Bright moonlight streamed in through a high steel-barred window. My head was aching miserably. That unmistakable jail odor annoyed my nostrils.

I threw out one hand and felt cold concrete. My other hand closed over a peg leg. Joe's snores rent the otherwise still air.

After striking a match and finding that he was unhurt except for a lump on the head, I decided to let him sleep. For hours I lay awake trying to think out a plan of action for the next day. First of all, of course, Joe's wooden leg must be recovered. But how? Doubtless Perrett had a strong pull with the local authorities and had arranged for us to be confined indefinitely. Or they might deport us as undesirable aliens. I smiled grimly at the notion of a person capable of jailing two men just to get possession of a wooden leg that he fancied. It couldn't have happened anywhere but in Mexico.

Joe stirred soon after daylight, sat up and inquired faintly where we were.

"We're in jail again," I replied tartly. "But it's a much nicer jail than the last. And your leg is gone, too."

"My leg?" He gazed blankly at Perrett's peg. Slowly the light of understanding spread across his countenance. He spouted wrath like a geyser spouting hot water.

There is no use in going over all that Joe said about Perrett and the Magdalena police; it was plenty. If they would turn him loose for five minutes he would fight the whole town. Joe Bonner was capable of doing just that, too.

"I've heard of mean men before," he wailed after the storm had partially subsided. "I've heard of men that would take candy from babies, or push little chickens into the water; but was there ever before a man mean enough to steal a fellow cripple's leg?"

The sun was an hour above the horizon when an Indian youth so dark that he may have been part negro brought us a meager breakfast of garlicky frijole beans, tortillas and green onions.

"Say, boy," Joe began, "I want to see the mayor of this town right away."

"Si, señor," the turnkey responded, sticking out a grimy paw.

Joe reached into his pocket for silver and slowly drew his hand out empty. I had already discovered that my watch and pocketbook were missing. Luckily we had left most of our money in the safe at the hotel.

"They got our coin," Joe mourned. "Anyway, boy, you toddle right over to the presidente municipal and tell him that two Americanos want to see him right quick. We'll give you ten pesos when we get out."

Slyly the turnkey grinned, then he went away without a word. We fretted and fumed but no one came. Noon arrived, and still no sign of the mayor. The hour of our engagement with Señorita Francisca de la Rosa was long since past.

"If we could only get word to her she might help us," I suggested.

"Get word to her!" Joe protested in horror. "I hope she's the last person in the world to hear about this pickle. She'd find out that I have only one leg."

"Well, she has to find it out sooner or later, hasn't she?"

"Pete, you don't understand women. My wooden leg is something that's got to be broken to her gently, after she knows me

and has begun to like me. If she finds it out now my goose is cooked."

"There must be an American consul in this town," I resumed after a time.

"Probably is, but how are we going to reach him?"

Along toward evening the turnkey returned with two more of those messes that pass for meals in Mexican jails. All at once I was seized with an inspiration. I stripped off one of my new tan shoes and slipped it through the bars.

"After you take word to the American consul that two gringos are in this jail and want to see him right now, the mate to this is yours," I promised.

"Si! Si!" the Indian agreed with a wide grin.

I had to give up my other shoe, for the consul was on hand within twenty minutes. He was an accommodating young chap who heard our story with indignation that he did not try to conceal, and amusement that he could not hide. It took him less than an hour to see the jefe or some one else in authority, make vigorous representations about what Uncle Sam would do if we beloved nephews of his were longer detained, and have us released. Incidentally, he lent me the money to buy back my shoes.

When it came to advising us what steps to take to recover Joe's leg, the consul was wholly at a loss. He had never heard of any one named Perrett and the officials whom he questioned professed themselves equally ignorant concerning the Englishman.

We left the consulate and hurried to La Paloma to begin investigating on our own hook. Antonio, the bartender, greeted us with a gleaming smile and made no reference to the disturbance that we were supposed to have started on the premises.

"Ah, yes," he returned brightly to Joe's feverish questioning. "Señor Perrett left at dawn in his automobile for Batamote, where he has a plantation of the rubber plant we call guayule. He was much pleased with that wooden leg he bought from Señor Bonner last evening. When he told me the price he paid I could scarcely believe him. I had no idea that legs of wood were so dear."

"Say, where is this Batamote, where Perrett's gone?"

"You know where Sonoita is, on the border west of Nogales? Batamote is only a short distance south of Sonoita. A hundred and fifty miles from Magdalena, I am told."

"Well, Batamote next," Joe announced savagely as he shuffled out of La Paloma on Perrett's peg.

But when we sought the only garage in Magdalena and tried to hire a car we were met with a firm refusal from the proprietor.

"There is no road, señores," he explained. "Only a burro trail. No one has ever driven an automobile over it except a loco Englishman who comes down here sometimes with a car twice as big and powerful as any I have here. Besides——"

He dropped his voice almost to a whisper.

"It is worth an Americano's life to travel in that part of Mexico."

"Why?"

"The people, who are mostly cattlemen and small farmers, are very bitter against your country. They want to take their stock and produce duty free across the border to the new mining camp of Ajo. There was a fight at Sonoita last month between Mexicans and American customs guards, and two Mexicans were killed. Since then they have organized a force under a man called General Moreno, who claims to be a great patriot and has made all the ignorant peons think that he is going to make himself president of the republic. I would not think of going to Batamote if I were you."

"We're going," Joe averred with a vicious click of his big white teeth. "Our quarrel is not with Mexicans but with that Englishman you mentioned. No Johnny Bull can steal my wooden leg and get away with it. How much for that car there?"

He pointed to a shiny new Ford.

"A thousand dollars gold, señor. The duty——"

"I'll take it. We'll go right over to the hotel and get the money. Better load on a full set of spare tires, if the road is anything like you say. And some oil and a couple of five-gallon cans of gasoline."

Of course I ought to have dissuaded Joe from such a foolhardy expedition; but I knew that it would be just as easy to drag the moon down with a string, and I didn't try. It never occurred to me to refuse to go along; he was my buddy. I had followed Joe Bonner on more than one crazy adventure and always seen him come out on top, so I had little doubt that this one would wind up with him in triumphant possession of his wooden leg. Besides, I will con-

fess to a certain curiosity regarding what would happen when he caught up with the thief.

We had already learned that road signs were nonexistent in Mexico, so we obtained from the garage man minute directions as to how to reach Batamote. He drew a rough sketch map for us, showing the principal mountains and other landmarks.

We drove the coughing Ford to the hotel, paid our bill and left with the clerk all our baggage except a field glass and a few shirts and socks that we piled into a suit case. Each of us, of course, carried a revolver.

"One thing more," Joe said when we were all set for the start. He sat down and wrote a brief note. Then we went back to the garage and he paid to have it delivered to Francisca de la Rosa that evening.

"What did you tell her?" I asked curiously as we rattled out on the tortuous road to Batamote.

"Called away on important business and will be back in a few days," he answered. "Hope I told her the truth—about coming back, I mean."

As Joe had only one foot I did most of the driving that night.

"If I only had my own leg instead of this horrible mistake I could drive just as well as you," he worried.

"Yes, and if you had your leg we'd be snoozing peacefully at the Hotel Madero," I returned. "Here's another irrigation ditch, so hold on."

The so-called road led us up the bed of the Magdalena River between fragrant orange groves and fields of grain and alfalfa. When we were not fording the stream we were wallowing through a ditch. Some time after midnight, though, we left the valley and climbed out upon a cactus-studded mesa.

We had breakfast at a cluster of adobe shacks that may nor may not have had a name. It was no banquet, but a great improvement over jail fare. As emergency rations we bought some tortillas and dry jerked beef.

Keeping the right road was not hard in daylight for there were the broad marks of Perrett's tires to follow. Joe was able to relieve me at the wheel on some of the less difficult stretches. It was all very rough and heavy going, though, and we averaged less than ten miles an hour. When we were not bucking through sand we were climbing up or sliding down steep boulder-strewn mountainsides. I ruined two front tires by skidding into a spiny organ-pipe cactus; the rubber was ground off the rear casings but by some miracle they did not blow out.

We passed only a few miserable ranches and they seemed deserted. Once or twice the figure of a lone horseman was visible on the distant horizon. Except for lizards, jack rabbits, burros and a few scrawny cattle, we saw no animal life.

The sun glared down pitilessly out of a brassy sky. Our faces and hands were burned red as overripe tomatoes. The radiator hissed and boiled; fortunately we had brought along plenty of water so that did not stop us.

Nothing stopped us until the speedometer told us that we must be within five or six miles of Batamote. The landscape had become less forbidding; cactus and greasewood had largely given way to mesquite and cat's-claw trees. Though still fearfully rough the road was not so rocky.

A shapeless lump under a spreading green mesquite suddenly became a swarthy giant pointing a long rifle down the road in our direction. Other figures materialized out of the shade and scattered into the brush. Menaced by a dozen black muzzles thrust through the undergrowth, I brought the car to a stop.

"Here's where we're in for it," I breathed. "Don't pull that gun now, whatever you do."

"*Amigos!*" Joe cried. "Friends! We are peaceful travelers, nothing more."

Cautiously the members of the detachment emerged from concealment, their rifles cocked and aimed straight at us. A quivery feeling chased itself up and down my spine. Excepting their leader, the tall one who had first sighted us, they were an undersized crew dressed in tattered shirts and overalls; their feet were bare but for rawhide sandals.

"Gringos!" they shouted wrathfully.

"That garage man said that Americanos were unpopular up here," I whispered. "Let's be Englishmen."

With his most winning smile, Joe offered his hand to the commander of the squad and addressed him as "General." That brought a pleased grin and the atmosphere seemed a trifle less threatening.

"We are not gringos, but Englishmen, and we seek our countryman, Señor Per-

rett," Joe went on. "We have important business with him."

"Ah, yes, the friend and adviser of our brave General Moreno. But you mistake: I am not the general, only Colonel Rios."

This sounded interesting. Perrett was friend and adviser of the insurrecto who was stirring up dissension against both the American and Mexican governments.

"See, I am wearing Señor Perrett's wooden leg," Joe continued persuasively, lifting the peg for their inspection. "He—I let him have mine."

Excited chattering broke out. It was true that Perrett had returned from Magdalena with a new wooden leg, and this one, with the big carved "P," was certainly his old one. Perhaps these strangers were what they claimed to be.

"We shall be compelled to relieve you of your arms," Rios said finally. "You shall stay at Batamote to-night and to-morrow we will conduct you to Señor Perrett at Sonoita. And if you have not told us the truth, if you are spies——"

"Oh, is Señor Perrett at Sonoita? We hoped to find him at Batamote."

"Ah, you have not heard the glorious news. The war has begun. General Moreno and his heroic army to-day captured Sonoita from the gringos and soon will march on to Tucson. All Mexico will rise to follow our banner of freedom and liberation and we shall take back from the great United States the territory that was stolen from our poor nation in 1848."

Here was news indeed. I could feel Joe trembling with excitement. We had landed in the thick of things with a vengeance.

They took our revolvers away from us. Rios and two of his men, bristling with importance, climbed into the tonneau and we jounced on to Batamote.

"Why not go to Sonoita to-night?" Joe suggested.

"That would be very unwise, señor. It is almost dark and we might be shot by some outpost. Early to-morrow I will provide you with an escort. Myself, I must stay here to guard the road from the south."

So we spent the night, virtually prisoners, at Batamote. Rios provided us with quarters in a brush-roofed jacal and posted a sentry across the dusty street. We were grateful to him for not putting us in jail.

Batamote, which turned out to be just another dog-infested clump of earthen huts festooned with strings of bright-red chili peppers, was almost deserted. Practically the entire population was either in Moreno's "army" or had gone to Sonoita to help celebrate the victory over the hated gringo. The few remaining inhabitants held a noisy open-air baile not a hundred yards from our shed, but Joe, who seldom missed a dance, did not propose that we attend. He could not, of course, trip the light fantastic on that peg leg he was compelled to wear, and we were both very tired. Also, though we were supposed to be Englishmen, we did not care to participate in a Mexican jubilee over a Yankee defeat. The discreet deception was sufficiently galling to a pair of ex-doughboys without that.

We had a shrewd idea what the battle of Sonoita really amounted to. We had never been there but knew it to be only a remote village, a base from which three or four line riders of the customs service patrolled a far-flung stretch of border. Moreno's guerrillas had rushed the town and either killed, captured or driven off the defenders. It was unlikely, though, that any of them had been allowed to escape and go for help.

"There isn't any telephone or telegraph within a hundred miles of Sonoita," I mused. "Likely the customs officers and the military at Nogales don't know yet that anything has happened. Joe, it looks as though we have other work cut out for us besides getting back that leg of yours."

"We have," he agreed. "But I hope to grab the leg while we're doing it, and take a poke at that pious old fraud who stole it from me. How much will you bet that he's not at the bottom of this 'war' we've bumped into?"

"What has he to gain by inciting these *cholos* to rise against Uncle Sam?" I countered.

"I don't know yet. That's one of the things we've got to find out. He's a compadre of this Moreno bird, isn't he? And he's with Moreno at Sonoita, probably egging those bushwhackers on to Tucson. That's the first city of any size north of the line and likely they think it is the capital of the United States. Mark my words, you'll find out he's back of all this."

True to his promise, early the next day Rios sent us on our way to the border with a pair of sergeants, Cota and Tisnado. The road lay in a dry wash through deep sand and was overhung with cat's-claw branches

that tore cruelly at our faces, our ungloved hands, and our clothing. It took us all of two hours to cover the eight or nine miles.

A troop of ragged cavalry with vaquero saddles and a motley collection of arms was maneuvering on a mesa just south of the sun-baked town. An officer detached himself from the mass and galloped toward us. Our escort explained our presence, our desire to find Perrett.

"Ah, that is unfortunate," the captain regretted. "Señor Perrett left in his car, with his chauffeur, not over an hour ago to scout around Tucson and Nogales and advise General Moreno which place to attack first. But he will be back to-morrow. You had better drive on to the general's headquarters and report."

"Gringos!" was the derisive cry that arose on every side as we clattered up the main street of Sonoita, past the iron post that marked the international boundary. We were in the United States, but a part of the United States that was in enemy hands. The atmosphere was even less friendly than in Mexico. Soldiers, together with women, girls and children dressed in bright colors as though for a fiesta streamed out of the adobes and pointed excitedly at us. The general impression seemed to be that we were prisoners of war.

But for the guards in the back seat we would certainly have been mobbed. They stood up and shouted at the throngs crowding about and the way for our machine was cleared reluctantly. So nervous was I that I scarcely knew the brake pedal from the steering wheel. I somehow brought the car to a halt before the largest building, above which floated the serpent and eagle of Mexico.

One of the half dozen officers who piled out to investigate the tumult was a grizzled, mustachioed, stoop-shouldered old man with a uniform of khaki that had been dyed green and then spangled with yards upon yards of gilt braid. Joe hopped out of the Ford as fast as the peg would let him, bowed ceremoniously and began:

"Have I the honor of addressing that brave and gallant patriot, General Moreno?"

"I am General Moreno. And what would you have, gringo?"

"Gringo! You do me an injustice, general. My companion and I are Englishmen, even as your friend, Señor Perrett, whose wooden leg I wear since he found that he had use for mine."

Moreno's eyes took in the peg speculatively and Joe went on:

"Señor Perrett has told us so much in praise of you that it has become our cherished ambition to make the acquaintance of the noble and unselfish leader who is Mexico's man of destiny, her next president."

The general visibly unbent at that. Stern looking though he was, he was not impervious to such extravagant flattery.

"I am sorry, but Señor Perrett has just left."

"So we hear. But we have urgent business with him and if we might be permitted to follow——"

The lines of grimness and suspicion snapped back into Moreno's leathery countenance.

"Señor Perrett will return to-morrow," he grated. "Until then you will do me the honor to be my guests. Your escort will find quarters for you and see that you lack for nothing."

Then, to the guards:

"Attend Señor Perrett's friends constantly. Understand?"

"Si! Si!"

"You will excuse me now, gentlemen. I am a very busy man, preparing for the invasion. I intend to succeed where Villa failed."

"He sure doesn't mean for us to go poking out of here and carry news to the gringos about what has happened in Sonoita," Joe muttered in English. "Wonder what happened to the line riders."

I put the question to a trooper, who said that one of them had been killed and the other three were held prisoners, unhurt.

We were almost at the upper edge of town and could see a white ribbon of road winding off to the northeast through rolling hills that were covered with cholla and ocotillo cactus, Spanish dagger and scoriae black malpais rock.

"That's the way my wooden leg went," Joe remarked moodily.

"Wooden leg be blowed!" I growled. "How are we going to get word to Nogales about this? One company of infantry, brought over here in trucks, is all that's needed to wind up this little 'war' and send Moreno's invading army back to the bean patches of Sonora."

With Cota and Tisnado still sitting in

the tonneau, we drove across to a big shed about which seethed a milling mass of humanity. Several Mexicans lurched toward us, hilariously waving bottles.

"Cantina," grinned Cota. "José Flores has moved his stock of liquors up here from Batamote."

We stopped where we could see over the heads of the crowd. Bottles, kegs and glasses were strewn in confusion over long tables formed of pine boards laid on boxes. Four bartenders were doing business with both hands.

"Might as well make ourselves solid," Joe said to me. "Maybe we can get these dry nurses of ours stewed."

"Hey! Tequila for all. Everybody have a drink on us."

He leaned far over to pass a twenty-dollar bill to the bartender. It was seized by Tisnado, who inspected it hurriedly and spat:

"If you are English, why are you carrying gringo money?"

With that he was out of the machine and streaking it for the general's headquarters. I could see the sweat break out on Joe's brow.

"Good Lord!" he stammered. "That was a boner right. Now they'll search us and find out that all our money, our clothes and everything else we have are American. Then it will be an adobe wall and a firing squad for us. Pete, you drive this hunk o' tin like you never drove yet."

Before I realized what he intended doing he had hurled himself over the back of the seat and smashed Cota squarely between the eyes.

Luckily I had not killed the motor. I pulled the throttle clear down and that Ford shot forward like a cork out of a popgun.

Behind us rose a hullabaloo that almost drowned out the reports of the rifles that sent bullets zipping past our ears. More than one plunged into the metal body and as I crouched low behind the wheel I prayed that none would strike the tires. The road was a mere series of chucks, bumps and deep-worn ruts and the wheels were on the ground only at intervals.

The next thing I knew Joe was shouting in my ear:

"Hey, slow up. They'll never catch us now, and there's no sense in killing ourselves."

"Maybe they've got a car to chase us with," I flung over my shoulder.

"Not a chance. Didn't you hear Rios say that there wasn't one in the country besides Perrett's?"

Rios had said that, so I slackened our pace to thirty miles an hour. After we had left a league or two behind us I obeyed Joe's repeated request to stop. He dropped the Mexican, unconscious, by the roadside and climbed to the seat beside me. Around his waist was Cota's well-filled cartridge belt and he grasped the rifle in his hands. He reached back for the peg leg.

"Had to take it off and club him with it to keep him quiet," he grunted. "Say, but I'd like to hand Perrett some of the same. Now, Pete, step on her all you please. Let's travel some!"

I let her out as much as I dared. Mile after mile of jumbled landscape and precipitous cañon walls flashed by. In soft spots we could perceive the tracks of Perrett's car among the hoofprints of burros and horses.

"Nogales by night, if we have any luck," I predicted.

"Yeah! But if we only catch up with that crooked-nosed old leg thief before we get there!"

Joe fingered the trigger of the rifle impatiently.

Noon came and we paused only to pour oil and water into the Ford. A little later we came to a fork in the road, which for some time had been bearing almost straight east. A weather-stained sign told us that the turn to the southeast was the way to Nogales; the left fork, leading north, was the Ajo road.

Perrett had gone north.

"Now why did he do that?" Joe wondered as he gazed at the record left by Perrett's tires. "Thought he was going to Tucson and Nogales to reconnoiter and tell Moreno where to take his war next."

"It beats me. Which way, Joe?"

"Pete, if it's all the same to you let's keep after my leg. That other car can't be far ahead and a delay of an hour or two in getting our news to Nogales won't make much difference. Besides, we know now that Perrett had a lot to do with starting this trouble and it may be important to run down that old scoundrel and see what more he's up to."

This was sound sense, so we also went

north. A few minutes later Joe hissed: "There he is!"

Perhaps two miles away, across a level mesa where heat waves danced fantastically and distorted one's vision like a trick mirror, a tiny black spot moved.

"Give her all she's got!" Joe yelled.

We roared on across the mesa for five minutes or so, and the black spot drew perceptibly nearer. Then Joe let out another yell:

"They've seen us. See 'em scoot. Probably don't know who we are but they're not going to stop to get acquainted. But I believe they're in range. Stop and let me smoke 'em up."

I stopped and Joe emptied the magazine of the rifle. His fire drew no reply. On sped the big gray car, untouched.

"Didn't think I could hit it," Joe commented philosophically. "Moving too fast. Now I wonder if this little bus can ever catch up."

"We can try, but I'm afraid there isn't much chance."

The mesa came to an end at some foothills of pinkish granite. We climbed a little, then dropped down toward a circular valley two or three miles in circumference. For a moment the other car was out of sight. We came to a sharp bend where the road curved to the left.

"There they are, away off to the west," said Joe. "Where's that field glass?"

He snaked the glass out of the suit case and surveyed the valley as we hummed along.

"Here's our chance," he bawled frantically. "The road keeps to the high ground at the edge of the valley on the south and west and breaks out just beyond that bald knob over there to the northwest. We can cut straight across and head them."

"Without a road? We'll get stuck sure."

"But it's perfectly level; I don't see any sand and there's no thick brush, only greasewood and cactus."

"We'll risk it," I consented. "Never will catch him in a stern chase, anyway. If the cactus punctures our tires we can patch 'em and turn back to Nogales."

So we left the road and charged straight across the valley. In spite of having to swerve constantly for clumps of chollas we made almost as good time as on the road. Low, hard spots of adobe soil that must have been small lakes in wet weather showed us why the road had been routed around.

Perrett's car was now in view, far off to the west. A bullet whined through the air above us.

"Let him waste his lead," Joe scorned. "He hasn't got as much chance now as a bean in a plate of soup. By the Eternal, Pete, we're gaining! Keep up this gait and we'll get to the bald knob a full half mile ahead of them. They——"

The rest was lost in a screech of brakes as I checked the Ford on the brink of a gully. It was a mere crack in the earth but we knew that if we ever got the car down into the bottom it would never pull itself out.

"Napoleon made the same mistake at Waterloo," Joe lamented. "Well, nothing to do but hunt for a place to cross this blasted trench. No wrinkle is going to stand between me and my wooden leg."

We found a crossing place at last but were thrown so far north that all hope of reaching the knob ahead of Perrett was gone. In fact it was now slightly southwest of us. We turned northwest again and snorted bravely up to the base of a low hill where we supposed the road to lie.

No road was there!

"It must be west of this hill," Joe surmised thoughtfully. "Maybe we can get over it ahead of him."

The slope was not steep, but it was very rough and one that no sane man would try to ascend with a car. I was not sane, though; the heat of the chase was in my blood. Having attempted the impossible, we were both stubbornly determined to accomplish it.

So up that hill, over jagged boulders and patches of prickly pear, snorted the little Ford. Joe was so busy hanging on that the rifle slid down between us. Only my deathlike grip on the wheel kept me from flying off into space.

"She's going to make it! She's going to make it! She's going to make it!" Joe chanted monotonously. "Go to it, little hunk o' tin, if you want to get my wooden leg back for me and scotch the bird that kidded the Mexicans into picking a scrap with Uncle Sam."

"If she doesn't make it I'll take the gun and run," I shouted above the roar.

But the hunk o' tin made it. With every one of its tires flat, a pincushion for a thou-

sand cactus spines, it coughed tiredly to the crest of the hill.

But we did not drive it down the other side. For that other side was one wall of a narrow defile just wide enough for the road at the bottom.

"This is all right," Joe decided. "We can stop him from here. Good Lord! I've been so busy watching and hanging on that I've forgotten to reload, and I'm sure going to be throwing lead in about a minute."

He tore a cartridge from the belt and tried to ram it into the magazine. It stuck. He threw open the breach and tried it in the chamber. It did not fit. Joe compared it with those still in the belt, peered at the marks on the stock of the gun; then he sat down on the running board with a hollow groan.

"Wrong ammunition," he blubbered. "Just like a Mexican to pack around a fancy rifle and a lot of cartridges too big for it! We're as helpless as a pair of lap dogs yipping at a couple of hounds. I'll never get my leg back now. By the left horn of the prophet, though! I won't stop trying."

Perrett's dust-covered car thundered into view around the bald knob, with a sag on the left side that told plainly of a broken spring. I had guessed that it must have suffered some accident or we never would have been able to intercept it with our smaller, slower machine.

Joe threw his rifle up threateningly and senselessly pulled the trigger. Perrett, sitting at his chauffeur's side, replied with a splatter of bullets. We concealed ourselves behind the Ford.

"Za-m-m-m!" A bullet tore through the radiator and boiling water gushed out upon a runty barrel cactus. We would travel no more in the Ford that day.

"Why didn't we think of rolling boulders down there and blocking the road?" Joe demanded breathlessly. "Say, a good big one would do the trick yet."

We looked about hurriedly but there was no movable rock near that was large enough to accomplish his suddenly conceived purpose.

"Well, here goes," Joe panted as he reached inside the Ford and released the brake. "Give her a shove, Pete." Only a slight push was necessary to send the battered little auto, so new and bright only two days before, hurtling down the declivity. As we threw ourselves flat on the ground it turned over two or three times and came to rest squarely across the road, all four wheels spinning in the air. There was not room for a burro to pass on either side.

Not ten yards away was the Perrett machine. Sight of this obstruction so suddenly cast across his path confused the driver. He headed first into one bank, then into the other, and wound up by smashing directly into the Ford.

Perrett was thrown through the wind shield and hung limply over a headlight. The chauffeur clung to the wheel and his head slowly sank as the big car quivered to a standstill. Its weight and the steep walls on either side kept it from overturning.

Leaving Joe to follow as best he could on the peg leg, I scrambled and slid down to the wreck. I was barely able to lift Perrett and lay him on the road behind, for he was an even heavier man than I had supposed. He was breathing jerkily and bleeding profusely from a dozen cuts about the head. His gory nose was crookeder than ever, for its bridge had been broken again.

From him I transferred my attention to the driver, who, to my surprise, was not a Mexican but a Chinese, nattily dressed in khaki. A moment's inspection convinced me that aside from a long gash caused by his forehead being rapped against the steering wheel, he was unhurt. Already he was recovering his senses, so I took care to remove his revolver and to pick up Perrett's rifle.

Again I turned to the Englishman. His heart was not beating very strongly or regularly so I called up to Joe:

"The old chap is dying, I'm afraid."

"That so? Pass me up my leg and we'll see if we can't save him for Uncle Sam to hang properly as a spy."

"Your leg? Why——"

"Don't you see I'm hung up on this ledge? I can't move another inch on this stick of stove wood."

So I rolled up Perrett's trousers, unlaced the corsetlike affair about the thigh, and carried to Joe his precious and inimitable wooden leg.

"Hooray!" His yell of triumph reverberated eerily among the granite cliffs as he tossed the peg away. "Righteousness prevails once more in the land. Now I can be of some use again."

Nimble as a goat, Joe hopped down from his ledge and joined me.

The Chinese was now looking about dazedly. Joe took Perrett's gun and after making certain that it was loaded ordered the Celestial to step out. This he did, slowly and unsteadily.

We did the best we could for Perrett. The driver brought us friction tape and rubber tube patches from the tool box and we bound up the cripple's wounds, stanching most of the blood. There was no sign of returning consciousness. Some of the tape we applied to the head of the Chinese.

Aside from a punctured tire and the smashed wind shield, the big car did not seem to have been damaged by the collision. There was that broken rear spring, of course, but it dated farther back. Joe himself started the motor and backed off the Ford. Then he made the driver replace the flat tire with a spare.

In the tonneau we improvised a bed upon which we placed Perrett. I sat beside him, Joe got into the front seat and motioned the Chinese to take the wheel.

"Nogales, James," he ordered with mock pomposity. "Back up to the first wide spot, turn around, and let 'er ramble."

The broken spring kept us from rambling very fast and it was late afternoon when we drew up before the hospital at Camp Stephen D. Little, on the outskirts of Nogales. Perrett had become delirious and was babbling a mixture of English and Spanish utterly without sense.

"Can't admit him here," declared a sprucely uniformed young doctor after one look at our patient. "This is exclusively a military hospital."

"We know that," Joe rejoined, "but you'd better take this bird. He's a Federal prisoner, charged, or going to be, with inciting the Mexicans below Sonoita to invade the United States. Get a stretcher, carry him in, and send for the commandant. We've got important business with him right quick."

"That's different. Carroll, ask Colonel Hocker to step over here at once."

We sat in our car until the colonel arrived. Joe tersely told him our story.

"Captured Sonoita!" the grizzled old campaigner exclaimed in disbelief. "We knew, of course, that there was trouble over there recently; but our information is that the agitation has all died out."

"It probably would have died out but for that fellow we led in just now. There's a two-bit war on and at least a company of soldiers is needed to end it."

"I'll take two companies. But who is this Chinese?"

"He's the Englishman's chauffeur. Better hold him for investigation. He may know a lot more about his precious master than we do."

The doctor came out again and stated in reply to our inquiries:

"No, I don't think he's going to die. But some things he said in his delirium cause me to suspect that the customs service may be interested in him. I have telephoned for Inspector Talbot."

The inspector drove up in a few minutes, shook hands and invited us to go with him for a look at Perrett. At the bedside he turned around after one glance, hurried outside and began to toss everything movable out of the car that had brought us.

"Look here!" he exulted as he lifted the rear seat cushion.

The compartment underneath was full of bright little square tin cans with queer Chinese markings.

"What's that?" I asked, mystified.

"Opium. A whale of a cargo and worth a pile of money. There's probably more hidden about the car somewhere. Parker was certainly out to make a killing this time, all right!"

"Parker?"

"Sure! 'Slaunch-nose' Parker. What did he tell you his name was?"

"Perrett."

"And likely he told you he was English, too."

"He did."

"I've heard that he was posing as a British guayule planter. But he's only a renegade Yankee. We've been after him for years. Most successful opium smuggler and chink runner that ever operated along this border."

"But why did he talk the Mexicans into attacking Sonoita?"

"Did he do that? Why, so he could run this stuff across without interference from our line riders, of course."

"Oh!" Joe gasped. "Pete, a great white light breaks in upon my subconscious mentality. That's the reason he went north instead of coming on toward Nogales. He was giving Moreno the slip and beating it

for California with his poppy juice. He was all through with the war that he had started."

"Just like him," Talbot chimed in. "Incidentally, there's a reward of five thousand dollars for his capture, and probably you boys will also get something for bringing in this opium."

Joe took my hand solemnly.

"It's yours, Pete," he choked. "Good old Pete! You sure earned it, the way you drove that hunk o' tin and ran your neck into all kinds of danger just to help me get back my wooden leg."

"Nonsense! If your leg hadn't been stolen we'd never have gone to Batamote and Sonoita at all. We split the winnings."

"We'll thrash all that over later. You stay here and collect the coin and come on down just as soon as you can."

"Down where?"

"To Magdalena, where I'm going on the next train. Now that I've got my leg back, I have important business there."

Another story by Mr. Douglas in an early issue.

DO YOU KNOW ONE OF THESE MEN?

UNCLE SAM is looking for ten men who are more bashful about coming forward to claim decorations that have been awarded them for gallant service in the war than they were about facing death to win the decorations.

Perhaps you know one of these men. If you do, make him read this notice and tell him to get in touch with the war department at Washington.

Here is a list of the ten heroes that all efforts have failed to locate, together with their last-known addresses:

Private Harry Carlin, No. 12830, Medical Detachment, Base Hospital 36. 2236 Fourth Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Awarded a French decoration.

Private Charles Cartona, No. 65624, Company I, 102d Infantry. 232 Orange Street, Waterbury, Connecticut. Awarded D. S. C.

Private Floyd Cline, No. 54112, Company C, 7th Infantry. Crown, West Virginia. Awarded D. S. C.

Captain Otka Peter Dobes, Ambulance Service. Variety Publishing Company, New York City. Awarded French decoration.

Corporal John K. Irons, No. 736749,Company K, 11th Infantry. 524 Franklin Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio. Awarded French decoration.

Private Emmet E. Lunsford, Company A, 31st Infantry. General Delivery, Claremoro, Oklahoma. Awarded D. S. C. for service in Siberia.

Captain Clayton R. Pollan, Section 537, Ambulance Service, 220 May Avenue, Fort Smith, Arkansas. Awarded French decoration.

Sergeant Luther Ruhl, No. 430357, Company F, 16th Infantry. Hugo, Oklahoma. Awarded D. S. C.

First Sergeant Chester H. West, Company D, 363d Infantry. Poso Farm, Firebaugh, Fresno County, California. Awarded Italian decoration.

Corporal James O'Connor, Company I, 165th Infantry. 320 Ninth Avenue, New York City. Later address, Hotel Asbestos, Manville, New Jersey. Father, Patrick O'Connor, lived in Parish of Arnogh, County Clare, Ireland. Awarded Italian decoration.

The war department also is holding three Distinguished Service Crosses for delivery to relatives of men who gave their lives in the war. Relatives of these men should communicate with the war department:

Private Frank Arkman, No. 1429432, Company L, 305th Infantry. Residence, Bellingham, Minnesota. No relatives discovered.

Sergeant Carl C. Carter, No. 540595, Company A, 7th Infantry. Residence, Fresno, California. No relatives discovered.

First Sergeant Edward G. Mason, Company D, 55th Infantry. Residence, Detroit, Michigan. Emergency address, John J. Mason, Toledo, Ohio. No relatives located.

The Law West of the Pecos

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "The Riders from Texas," "The Scalp Lock," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Sergeant Jess Roundtree of the Texas Rangers had a heavy score to pay. It was his infatuation that had paved the way for the escape of Raymondo Cantara, alias "Mysterious Dave," from the jail at Dragoon. Who, Roundtree wanted to know, could resist the blandishments of a girl like Alicia de Montana? She had made a fool of him. But she had paid, too. For Mysterious Dave had made a fool of her. And, in addition, the bullet that should have found the heart of her faithless lover had buried itself in Alicia's breast. Dave had fled on through the Texas night, leaving her bleeding; and Jess had abandoned the pursuit for a time, heartbroken at what he had done. For it was Roundtree's bullet that brought the girl to the threshold of death. And, seeing her as she lay there, scarcely breathing, the blood bubbling from her wound, he knew how fiercely he had come to love her. But it was no time for futile anguish. He left her in the military hospital at Dragoon, and with Private "Quick" Talley rode on the trail of Dave. Dave must be caught. The honor of the rangers depended on it. Dave knew the secret that the rangers wanted, the name of the bandit leader who, for years, had directed the operations of the desperadoes who robbed the caravans coming up from Mexico. Roundtree's chief, Captain Ross, made it clear that no excuses would be accepted. Dave must be caught. The Big Bend must be cleaned up, and Dave was the key to the situation. It was disheartening work for Roundtree and his companion. They combed the country. They lurked for days in the saloons at Presidio, on the Rio Grande. Once they caught sight of their prey, but Dave had seen them an instant sooner, and he vanished in the haze of smoking guns. They were in constant danger, for Presidio was a gangman's paradise and every saloon lived on the patronage of bandits and smugglers. Here the outlaws of the Big Bend and the men of Chico Cano's Mexican "Vinagrones" met and trafficked. A ranger needed eyes all round his head in Presidio, for he was a marked man. Roundtree and Talley picked up details of minor interest, but never anything conclusive. They found, for instance, La Lola, a woman who laid claim to the heart of Mysterious Dave. But she had a close mouth. They found Valentino, the brother of Alicia de Montana, who tried to put a knife in Roundtree's throat—but thought better of it when he heard the true story of his sister's misfortunes. They rounded up a gang of petty smugglers and took them to Dragoon, the ranger headquarters for that district, where "King" Wootan, the hotel keeper, presided over a "kangaroo court" that tried them with mock dignity. But Dave Mysterioso they could not find. He roamed the mesquite with Chico Cano's men and plotted, against the coming of the next rich caravan.

(A Four-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICIA HAS HER WAY.

IT was a big day for King Wootan when, outdoing old King Solomon and showing more acumen than the rangers, he picked from the eight Mexicans the man who had thrown his knife and turned him over to Ross. Like all his decisions it had called for the drinks, and when Roundtree returned from locking up the prisoners he found him holding forth to the crowd. Other decisions, equally apt, were recalled by this exploit; and the alcalde was in the midst of a story when Mrs. Wootan tapped Roundtree on the shoulder.

"Young man," she said, "you come over here. They's somebody wants to see you."

"All right," he nodded. "I'll be over directly."

"No, you come right now!" she commanded and Jess turned away reluctantly.

"Come in here," she ordered, leading the way across the street and throwing open a door; and Jess followed after her blindly, for in Dragoon her word was law. The door was one of a series that opened on the broad veranda, doors of rooms that were rented when any person of superrefinement desired a bed better than his blankets in the hay; and in this one, lying on a couch, was Alicia de Montana, with a smile of welcome in her eyes. Her face was still pale and the lips which had lured him had lost their cherry-red glow; but there was a new light in her eyes and the long month of suffering had softened the lines of her mouth.

"Ah, here is my tall ranger!" she cried, and Mrs. Wootan sniffed and went out.

"Sit down," invited Alicia with a wave of her slender hand, but Roundtree stood by the door. Captain Ross had warned him in no uncertain terms that his affair with Alicia must stop, and yet—he reached out awkwardly at the clutching white hand and avoided the question in her eye.

"You still think of me!" murmured Alicia, trying to brush away a tear as he knelt down by her bed, and then she was suddenly calm. "How long it is," she sighed, "since that last time you were here! I am sorry that I was so angry. But the low language of that woman—that terrible creature they call Lola—made me quite forget myself. I hope you will not think ill of me for talking as I did—and there was another thing, too. Will you not sit down by me here?"

She made a place for him on the bed and drew away her hand which he still held fast in his own.

"I was excited," she went on hurriedly. "I did not think how it would seem when I asked you to go and kill—Dave. And when I offered to marry you—you must remember my excitement, my unhappiness that Raymondo had proved false. I did not know what I said."

"Oh, that's all right," mumbled Jess. "I wouldn't hold you to your promise. And you didn't need to make any promises nohow, because I was going to kill Dave, anyway. You don't need to think about marrying me."

"Oh!" she cried, and her breath came quick while the smile died out of her eyes. "Of course," she went on, "if you do not love me—but no, I know you do not. How could you, after what I have done? Still, if you did love me, a little, and if the saints aided you to kill this Dave——"

"He's a hard man to find," explained Jess.

"Have you seen him?" she demanded sharply. "Ah, you bring up bad thoughts again; of that terrible night at the jail. But no, I will kill him myself."

"We can't find him," he defended doggedly.

"I will find him," she said. "In a few days now my wound will allow me to ride. But because I offered to marry you if you avenged me for this insult, do not think I am heartless—I am not. It is all a kind of madness that came over me, but now I am well again. So you must forget my hasty words and leave Dave to God—He will punish him for all he has done, and I would be sorry to have my tall ranger killed."

"Killed!" scoffed Jess. "Don't you worry about that, if I ever get close enough to shoot. But the last we heard for sure he was on a goat ranch over in Chihuahua—didn't Trinidad tell you about it?"

"No! He told me nothing!" she cried.

"Well, your brother has gone over there and——"

"My brother! Do you mean Valentino?"

"Why, sure," replied Jess. "Why not?"

"And did Valentino go over there to kill him? Then why has he not returned?"

"Quién sabe," shrugged Roundtree. "Haven't you heard from him?"

"I have heard nothing since Trinidad came back with the money and told me to remain in Dragoon. And every day I have hoped that Valentino would come. But no—I am cast off—I am forgotten! My family have disowned me utterly!"

She buried her face in the pillow and began to sob, and as Roundtree suddenly realized the position he was in he rose up softly to go. There were other men in town besides Captain Ross who would resent this intimate visit and though Mrs. Wootan had summoned him and stood guard outside, the tongue of scandal would wag. Men would talk, and Captain Ross would be the first

to hear the gossip about his sergeant and Alicia de Montana; but before he could retreat she reached out her hands and drew him back to her side.

"And would you leave me, too," she reproached, "when I am alone, and need your help? There are evil men here, and old Trinidad is afraid. It is that tall man I spoke of—Livernash. He is always watching, outside."

"What? Outside your door?" demanded Jess.

"Not now," she smiled. "My good Mrs. Wootan protects me. But I cannot go out but what I feel his eyes upon me, and so I remain a prisoner, inside. Ah, if Valentino would only come and take me away! I do not care where I go. But if he does not come soon, if perchance he has been killed, I will ride away at night and take shelter with my friends at Presidio."

"You stay right here," advised Roundtree sternly. "Mrs. Wootan can take care of you, and there's nobody else that can. We've seen Livernash in Presidio with some pretty tough Mexicans—and besides, there's Chico Cano. He might seize you and hold you for ransom."

"But here I am so unhappy!" she protested. "No one comes to see me at all. Oh, could you not take me, when you go back to Presidio, and leave me at the home of my friends?"

"No," he said. "The captain has forbidden me to have anything more to do with you."

"And why?" she demanded angrily. "Is it nothing to the rangers that a woman is in danger, as I am? Is it nothing that I need your help? Ah, that captain! I do not like him. His eyes look right through me—he hates me. Was it not enough, when I was sick in the hospital, that he had to bring in that other woman? He knew I loved Raymondo, but his heart is like a stone and he put her there to plague me. When I had no one else to love, he put her in my room to tell me that Raymondo was false. I am not a child, and I know. But why did he do it, I say? It was cruel. I cannot forgive it!"

"He did it," answered Roundtree, "because you had brought in wine and got his rangers drunk. Have you forgotten the saw blades that you hid in the champagne bottles? That was not the right thing to do. But he brought in La Lola because he knew it would make her angry, and she knew where Dave could be found."

"But you did not find him," she taunted.

"Does that make you any happier?" he asked.

"Ah, no, no!" she cried, reading the suspicion in his eyes, "do not think that I still love this Dave. It is my hate that keeps me ill. I lie here all day and the anger gnaws at my heart. All I live for is to see him killed, and then I do not care. But do not stand off and look at me that way—are you afraid to take my hand? Then come—I am lonely, for you."

She held out her hand and, while his heart warned against it, Jess gave her his own, and was lost.

"Ah, my lover," she murmured, twining one arm about his neck and drawing his head down low. "Can you never forgive me? I am sorry. Then kiss me, just once, and I will let you go—have you never known kisses before?"

She pressed her lips against his and his resolution weakened—it was a madness that swept him off his feet—but all the time he struggled feebly to escape, for he remembered his captain's words.

"I must go," he muttered, putting her clinging hands away and avoiding her smiling lips; but she laughed into his ear and held him close again, until at last he tore himself away. For a moment he stood staring, smoothing down his tumbled hair; and then as she beckoned him back he turned on his heel and stumbled out the door.

"*Hasta mañana*—until to-morrow!" she called after him, but he did not even look back.

CHAPTER XV.

LA LOLA.

TWO weeks of to-morrows passed slowly by and Roundtree did not return, for even before his visit to Alicia became known the rangers rode back to Presidio. The first caravan had passed by safely, but the robbers, whoever they were, had escaped the ranger net; and other and richer caravans, some laden with gold bullion, were on their way up the trail. Sooner or later, by a swift blow or a midnight raid, the robbers would reveal their presence and a king's ransom in treasure would be lost. Then the protests would come pouring in—from Mexico City and Washington, from

the governor and the adjutant general—and Captain Ross and his company of frontier rangers would know the humiliation of defeat. But—the raid had not been made, the treasure was still en route, and once more the rangers took the trail.

The Mexicans are by nature a garrulous people, swept like fields of waving wheat by windy rumors and baseless reports; and yet under stress of fear they can keep a secret and the rangers' search was in vain. After two weeks of riding the trails, and of watching at boggy crossings, Sergeant Roundtree returned wearily to Presidio; and as he sat in El Crepúsculo, the corner saloon, he saw a woman he knew. It was La Lola, the scar of a bullet wound on her neck; and when he met her eyes she beckoned. But knowing her evil nature he only shrugged his shoulders and at last she came over to him.

"Aha, Señor Reenger," she taunted, "so you are back to shoot some more women? Other men have given me flowers but they will be forgotten while you are still remembered, by this."

She touched the red spot where his pistol bullet had entered, but he gazed at her coldly and said nothing—and at last she came to the point.

"Have you found Raymondo?" she whispered and her eyes glowed as she spoke his name, either with love or hate or both.

"Neither have I," she responded and laughed ruefully. And then, sitting down and leaning across the table, she ran on fast and venomously.

"How much will you give to find him?"

"Twenty dollars in gold," he answered imperturbably, and she drew back with a disdainful laugh.

"Raymondo was more generous," she said.

"Sure," he retorted. "He steals his money, but the rangers work for theirs."

"Dave's sweetheart is in town," she announced.

"Who is she?" he asked and she burst into hard laughter.

"You know her well," she taunted. "The woman from Dragoon—the one I saw patting your cheek. She never loved him as I do, but now he has cast me off. That is why I ask what you pay?"

"You are lying," returned Roundtree. "That is what I say. Nothing. If I followed you I would be sure to get killed."

"And serve you right!" she flared back angrily. "But I would not let you follow me. So you can keep your twenty dollars, for who ever knew a reenger to give away a cent?"

She flaunted away from him, her pretty head on one side and her lips twisted scornfully; but all that day he felt her eyes upon him, until at evening she suddenly leaped up.

"Come over here!" she called, running to look out the doorway; and not knowing what she saw, he strode quickly after her, half expecting to see Dave himself.

"There she goes!" cried La Lola, slapping his cheek maliciously; and, riding past the door, he beheld Alicia de Montana, closely followed by Trinidad, her *mozo*. For a moment, as she saw him, Alicia's face lit up with a smile that was radiant with love; but at sight of Lola, standing laughing at his side, she flushed and struck her horse with the whip.

"My sweetheart!" mocked Lola, slipping her arm about his neck and dancing away as he cursed; but in a moment she was back again, ignoring his anger to spit out the door after Alicia.

"Shameless creature!" she railed, "see her riding up and down! She is looking for Raymondo—the big goat. He has not come near me nor sent me a dollar since I was shot in the Flor de Mayo cantina—and now he sends for *her!* She is of the aristocracy and he wishes to show her off and parade her as his sweetheart; but I am his loved one, myself. Since this wound in my neck the men call me *kalele,* because my head is twisted sidewise, like a hawk's; but if I cannot have my man he shall not live to laugh at me and flaunt this new love in my face. Hombre; have you got that twenty dollars?"

"Aqui tengo!" answered Jess, showing the money.

"Then buy me a drink," she said, "and I will tell you where he is to be found."

"You'll get no drink from me," returned Roundtree roughly. "Nor any twenty dollars, either. I can see by this that you have a black heart and a sting like a *vinagron.*"

"So I have!" she acknowledged, "but once my heart was kind—until that shameless one, Raymondo, cast me off for nothing and took up with an Española. The gringo is angry because I called him to the doorway while his sweetheart was riding by;

but she has thrown you over, man, to fly to the arms of Dave and I did it to pay her for her words. Did she not call me hard names when we quarreled in the hospital at Dragoon? Then this is her pay, and now I will pay Dave for casting me off as he has. I have ways that he does not know of keeping track of his flittings—and I know where he will be this night."

"Adónde?" inquired Roundtree eagerly.

"You ask me where?" she shrilled. "Then where is the twenty dollars? Very well, if you will not pay me I will go there myself and the reengers will loose the credit for his death. But for twenty dollars gold, I will tell you where to go and catch him."

"A man is a fool," he observed, "to go back where he has once been dog bit. I know your black heart, and if I went where you said I would wake up with a knife in my back."

"Are you afraid of the Vinagrones?" she taunted.

"Sure," he said, "and of their women, too; of which I take you for the worst."

"But why do I waste my time with a man who is a *tonto,* with no more sense than a goat?" she retorted with a toss of the head. "No wonder the fool reengers ride the country for months, seeking for that which every Mexican knows; but these gringos are so grasping they will let twenty dollars stand between them and the man they hunt. Oh, well, you can keep your dirty money."

"Many thanks," answered Roundtree mockingly, and she stopped in her tracks and turned back.

"I will show you if I am lying," she burst out savagely. "Go down the river to-night to the big stone house, just below the Smugglers' Crossing; and there you will find Dave, the gringo dog, at a dance where I am not asked. Shoot him first, my friend, and then shoot the woman—only not in the neck, like me. Will you do it?" she demanded as he watched her.

"I will consider it," he said at last and handed her over a dollar.

"Puf, you cheap American!" she cried contemptuously as she glanced at the Mexican dollar; but as he moved away she laughed at him derisively and hurried to the bar for a drink.

As for Roundtree, he wandered off as if, already, her words had passed out of his mind; as if the dollar Mex which he had paid for the information represented its total value to him; but once back in the ranger camp he summoned Talley and "Buck" Buchanan and laid the whole matter before them.

"She's treacherous," he ended, "and she hates rangers like horny toads; but there's just a chance that Dave has got well and is back for a little high life. What do you think about it, Buck?"

Buck Buchanan, the lone ranger who had been left in charge of camp was a big, aggressive man, a man who time and again had broken up Mexican dances and who knew the stone house well; but, like Talley, he was hot-headed and impulsive.

"Let's go down there!" he barked, "it ain't over twenty miles. But we don't want to start until way along toward midnight or some Mexican will tip our hand. Wait right here till their lookouts get tired of watching us and then ride down the river like hell. I can handle the whole bunch, myself."

But Mexican bailes, as Roundtree knew, were a gathering place for desperate characters, oftener than not from across the river; and while the chances were good of catching some outlaw, three men were hardly enough. The Mexicans at such times were always ready to fight; for the *sótol,* or native brandy, flowed like water; and already in their raids the rangers had had battles, though so far only the Mexicans had suffered. But if Mysterious Dave was there he would have dangerous men with him, for he was hand in glove with the Vinagrones; and the last thing that Captain Ross could desire, under the circumstances, was a losing fight for his rangers. They were outnumbered a hundred to one by the cutthroats and organized robbers who made the Big Bend their stamping ground; and if the Mexicans ever succeeded in breaking down their prestige the rangers would have a fight on their hands.

As it was, a man like Buchanan could walk boldly into a dance hall and disarm the most obstreperous Mexican—and it was for doing just that that he had been recalled from river patrol and sent to cool his heels in camp. For, against his captain's orders, he had needlessly exposed himself by arresting a drunken Mexican lone handed. A battle of bullets had followed, in which no one had been hurt on account of the brush and darkness; but in the turmoil and confusion Buchanan's prisoner had escaped,

though it was not for that he was punished. It was for violating the first rule in the ranger service, that in action men should fight in pairs; and now, still unrepentant, he was boasting his ability to round up the baile by himself.

"I'll tell you, boys," said Roundtree. "I'm game to take a chance, if you fellows will promise to behave. But if you're going to get bullheaded——"

"Aw, who's bullheaded?" demanded Talley truculently. "Ain't I always been careful with these Mexicans?"

"Well—yes," acknowledged Jess, "but you——"

"He's hitting over your shoulder," chuckled Buck good-naturedly, "but I never had no trouble, yet. You know the old saying: 'Every ranger is a general.' Don't that mean he's to use his own judgment?"

"Sure," agreed Roundtree, "but remember I'm in charge and accountable to Captain Ross. We don't want any fight, understand?"

"Yes, but we do want Dave. And if I see the dirty dog——"

"I'll take care of Dave," answered Jess, but Buchanan only laughed and said nothing.

It was an hour before midnight on a still hot night when they rode out on their scout after Dave, and as Roundtree looked back at the town and the lights of El Crepúsculo, he wondered if he was being betrayed. The venomous celerity with which La Lola had accomplished her purpose, by staging a little love scene before Alicia, showed a mind ably adapted to the low Mexican intrigue in which women's loves and hates play no small part. In one quick sally—a rush to the door, a familiar caress, a grin of impish hate—she had conveyed to Alicia an impression of easy friendship which no explaining would wholly efface.

Lola had shown that she was dangerous, and as ruthless as she was quick—but her hate for Dave was real. It was the conviction of that alone which had sent him off on this night ride; for it was revenge, after all, which had prompted Lola to come back and tell him of this dance, and Dave. True to his nature, Dave had cast her aside for some new love; but Jess knew, despite Lola's venom, that Alicia was not a rival for Dave's heart. There too he followed his instincts—though they had betrayed him before—but as sure as he knew anything he knew that Alicia had ridden to Presidio to see *him*. He had read it in her smile, in that first flash of radiant love which had come before Lola had embraced him, and an anger he could not master rose up and almost choked him as he dwelt on the baseness of this woman. It was the treachery of the low Mexican at its worst. But it was this same Mexican treachery which the rangers must count on to break down the wall of silence they had encountered, and La Lola's flash of hate might have given them the clew that would lead to the death of Dave. And then, how La Lola would wail!

They rode down the long trail, now pounding across the mesa, now toiling through the sand of the bottom land; and as they approached the Casa Piedra, the House of Stone, they heard the sounds of revelry. The deep notes of a bass viol, marking the time to a *canza*, proved the story of the baile to be true; and if the dance was no myth then the chances were good that Mysterious Dave would be there, too. Roundtree rode in the lead, leaving his men to follow close as they spied about for some sign of treachery; for if an ambush was intended there would be watchers by the trail, waiting to shoot the rangers down. But nothing stirred in the sparse cover of the brush.

In the mesquite trees below the house they found saddle horses tied in the bushes and came upon drunken sleepers, but the bulk of the Mexicans could be seen about the doorway that opened into the one big room. Violins and guitars added their notes to the viol's drone, there was shouting and women's laughter; and, emboldened by the quiet outside, the rangers tied their horses and approached the house from the rear.

At a signal from Roundtree, Buck Buchanan dropped behind, where he could guard the small back door; and then, each man thoroughly rehearsed in his part, Jess and Talley circled around to the front. When the proper time came they would advance through the darkness and make a swift entrance into the crowded room; but until Dave was sighted they were to remain out of sight, while Buchanan was to wait on them. It was their part to maneuver, if need be to attack; while he was to bar the back door against escape or shoot Dave down as he fled. So they parted, and the dance went on.

A drunken altercation sprang up inside the house and two men came running out with knives. With their serapes wrapped tight about the left arm in order to protect them from knife thrusts they closed, time and again, stabbing with one hand and warding with the other, while the Mexicans gathered about in a crowd. Roundtree and Talley crouched back behind the shelter of a tree, watching the mob for the tall form of Dave; but as they waited they heard five shots from the interior of the house and the fighters suddenly scattered and fled. The doors poured out men and women, struggling to escape from the flying bullets; and as the rangers charged inside they saw a short, squat Mexican standing over a man on the floor. His pistol was still smoking, but at sight of Jess and Talley he whipped out the back door and was gone. And there was no one outside to stop his flight, no pistol to shoot him down —the man on the floor was Buchanan.

"God A'mighty, Buck!" cried Roundtree as he knelt down beside him. "What's happened? How'd you come to be here?"

"I saw Dave!" gasped Buchanan, raising his head from a pool of blood and struggling to catch his breath, "or I reckon it was Dave," he muttered. "But that short Mexican was laying for me—broke my arm the first shot. The doll rags is shot out of me, Jess."

He fell back with a shudder and Roundtree saw the blood spout as it pumped from three holes in his shirt. A few minutes afterward, in spite of all they could do, Buck Buchanan was dead on the floor.

Roundtree stayed with him to the end, trying to stop the flow of blood and ease the last agonies of his death; while Talley, darting out, searched the brush for the squat Mexican and then rounded up the women as witnesses. A ranger had been killed and his slayer must be punished or the service would be held in contempt; but a great fear had come over the women, greater than the fear of the hated rangers, for the man who had done the shooting was Chico Cano. Not a woman would talk, until Talley guessed the truth and compelled their reluctant assent. But when he inquired for Dave the old silence came over them and at last he drove them angrily out the door. Buchanan was dead, Chico Cano had escaped; and out in the brush the Mexicans were jeering.

Taking advantage of the darkness they had gathered in the thick mesquite and as the door of the house was opened to let out the women they shouted exultant taunts.

"Otro toro!" they called, "bring on another bull!" It was a phrase of the bull ring, when the matador has done his work or a bull has refused to fight; and Talley responded with a stream of curses before he slammed shut the door. Buck had run into a trap, and they had lost.

The final blow came later in the night when, scouting around, Jess discovered a weeping woman who admitted that Dave had been there. He had been dancing with her when La Lola had ridden in and warned him the rangers were coming. And so Dave had fled—with Lola.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT SMUGGLERS' CROSSING.

IT was a sober group of rangers who stood over Buck's body as it was lowered into its lonely grave; and that evening, back at camp, Captain Ross called them together and preached a sermon—for them. Buchanan was dead—and he had died fighting, like a true ranger. But if he had obeyed his captain's orders, and the orders of Sergeant Roundtree, he would be there with them, that night. He was a brave and courageous man, but to uphold their prestige a Texas Ranger must be more than brave; he must abide by the rules which years of border warfare had shown to be absolutely essential.

There was a standing order among the rangers never to ride out alone—always to travel and fight in pairs—and this order had saved many lives. The breaking of it had cost many more, and these men had lost their lives needlessly. Buck Buchanan was gone, and as a general rule the captain passed no strictures on the dead; but in the emergency before them, with the Mexicans becoming bolder, it was necessary to say a few words. Buchanan had learned every duty but one, and that one was to obey orders. He had been recalled from patrol for doing this same thing which had finally resulted in his death. And now, with Chico Cano making his boast that he had killed a ranger, their company would find a new spirit among the Mexicans, a spirit that would have to be squelched. Chico Cano and Mysterious Dave would

have to be killed and the caravan robbers wiped out—otherwise the Texas Rangers would find their usefulness destroyed and the country taken over by outlaws.

"Hereafter," ended the captain, "travel in pairs and take no chances. And remember—I want Chico Cano."

That night by the dim starlight Jess Roundtree and Quick Talley rode back over the trail to Smugglers' Crossing; and for a week, without success, they watched the ford for rustlers, who used it for crossing their cattle. After the killing of Buchanan it was a dangerous post to occupy, for Chico Cano and his men were bold; but the sting of their captain's words had roused the rangers to a fury and they only waited for a chance to strike back.

It came at last when, just after daylight, three Mexicans appeared driving a herd of stolen cattle down the trail that led to the ford. Other Mexicans had come and gone, unsuspectingly passing the rangers as they lay hidden on the American side; but, since nothing could avail to break their sullen silence the rangers had let them go. Now they got out their glasses, and, reading the earmarks on the cattle, they knew them for Mexican stuff; nay, more than that, they recognized the brand—it was the iron of the De Montanas.

"But say!" burst out Talley as he lay behind a log and peered out through their screen of low willows, "who's that young feller riding behind? Ain't that Valentino, himself?"

"Sure is," agreed Jess after a careful scrutiny, "but he's traveling with two hard-looking hombres. Let's let 'em cross and take him prisoner."

"You're the boss," grumbled Talley, "but don't you never forgit he tried to stick a knife between your ribs. I'll take care of those other two, myse'f."

He settled down vengefully, with his rifle across the log, and they watched the herd cross in silence. Then Roundtree rose up, not a hundred feet away, and Valentino halted as he recognized him.

"Alto!" shouted Jess, raising his hand warningly to the two Mexicans; but they too knew the signs of a ranger. For a moment they crouched in the saddle, almost frozen with the fear of death; and then without a word they whirled their horses and made a dash for the Mexican side. Talley's rifle rang out and the leader plunged forward, falling dead on the edge of the stream; and as the other spurred in he lopped suddenly over and tumbled slowly into the rushing stream.

"Don't run!" warned Jess as Valentino reined about; and with a shrug he awaited his fate.

Quick Talley trotted out and with businesslike celerity brought the bodies of the Mexicans ashore, while Roundtree walked out to Valentino. Jess had laid down his rifle—and no Texas Ranger feels it necessary to cover his man with a pistol—so, though Roundtree could have killed him before he could fire, Valentino felt himself received as a friend.

"Que hay, amigo," hailed Jess; and after a moment of hesitation the young Spaniard rode forward to meet him.

"I am your prisoner," he said with a wan smile.

"Don't mention it," replied Roundtree with the easy politeness which he had learned from his intercourse with the Mexicans, "I am glad to see you again. Did you find any trace of Dave?"

"I have been very unfortunate," responded Valentino at last, and stepped down off his horse. "Here are my guns," he said with a bow, and handed over his belt.

"Many thanks," returned Jess. "I am sorry your friends were killed, but——"

"They are no friends of mine," answered Valentino indifferently. "You might search them—they are Vinagrones."

"That's just what my partner is preparing to do. But come over to our camp—you look tired."

He led the way through the willows to the hidden camp where the rangers kept their horses and supplies, and while Valentino sat silent Jess heated some coffee and set out a meager breakfast.

"So you did not find Dave?" began Roundtree at last, as his guest rolled a cigarette, and the Spaniard shook his head.

"I have been very unfortunate," he repeated.

"In what way?" inquired Jess; "you seem to be alive, and now you are in the hands of friends."

"Ah, amigo," faltered Valentino, "I know it looks bad, but with your permission I will try to explain. Yet I do not care too much what may happen, for I have failed at every turn. When I left you at Presidio

I had sworn an oath never to return without bringing back Dave's ears, but before I had entered the mountains the Vinagrones took me prisoner and I was led to Chico Cano's camp. There, to save myself from death, I told him that same story which had served my *mozo* so well; but they kept me bound with lariats until a messenger from Presidio brought word that I told the truth. Perhaps you do not know it, but you are a marked man with these outlaws; and when he found in very truth that I had struck at you with this knife that dog of a Cano grew fawning. My bonds were removed and I was made much of by all of them, for daring to attempt the life of a ranger; and to carry out my part I informed their chief that I wished to join his band.

"He is a ferocious man to look at, with long fangs above and below which give his mouth the appearance of a dog's; but, though he is so brutish, he has the cunning of an Indian, and an Indian's distrust of the Spaniard.

"Already I had been nicknamed the *Guachupin,* their peon term of reproach for a Spaniard, and though I assured him I had been driven from home by my father I think he suspected me yet. I was not like the other men he had about him, many of whom were of the lowest class, and yet he had need of me, too; for those four men that you killed in the Flor de Mayo were the most educated of his band. Yet it is an unbroken rule among the Vinagrones that no man may join the band until he has placed himself beyond the law; so I was informed by the chief that before I became a member it would be necessary to participate in a raid.

"Very well, I consented, though my soul was afire to seek out Raymondo Cantara and kill him; and so, against my will, I rode out with those two felons and robbed my own father's herd. Perhaps it was my fate, or a punishment for my sins, but I was recognized by one of our vaqueros; and now my poor father, who may have given me up for dead, will know that his son is a thief. That is why I say I am very unfortunate—and so you may kill me, if you wish."

"No—I believe you!" protested Roundtree, "and when we have finished I will give you back your guns and let you go. But tell me first where these Vinagrones are to be found, and what kind of a man is their chief?"

"Chico Cano? He is a man as broad as a door and no taller than a twelve-year-old boy; and he is found here, there and everywhere, until his followers believe he can transport himself through the air. Many times, when the rurales have caught him in their net, he has slipped through their lines and escaped; and these two men that I was with believe in all sincerity that he turned himself into a dog. But whether as a dog, or as a man with dog's teeth, the fact remains that he always escapes; and the bullet was never made that can penetrate his body—that has been demonstrated, time and again. Once a woman whom he loved took his pistol while he slept and placed it against his heart, but when it went off he leaped up like a bear and killed her with one blow of his hand. They say also he has the power to win any woman he wants by some medicine that he pours into wine, but since this one tried to kill him he sleeps always away from camp, where no one can find his bed. Such a man is Chico Cano, but enough of him—have you heard from Mysterious Dave?"

"He crossed the river right here, not a week ago—but we didn't get him," said Jess.

"Here!" cried Valentino, starting up with an oath. "And I was out stealing my father's cattle! What a fool I am! But which way did he go? Perhaps I can trail him yet."

"A woman warned him," explained Roundtree, "or the rangers would have got him. As it was, he crossed the river, and Chico Cano staged a knife fight to draw the rangers out into the open. One man disobeyed orders and ran into the trap and Cano shot him dead. Now the rangers are out for revenge."

"I understand," nodded Valentino, glancing back toward the ford where Talley had killed his companions, "but the Vinagrones are very, very numerous. All this country is in their power."

"They are afraid to fight," Jess answered scornfully. "One ranger can whip a hundred of them."

"Perhaps," shrugged the Spaniard. "But if they will not fight?"

"We'll make them," responded the ranger. "Say, I saw your sister in Presidio."

"My sister!" exclaimed Valentino. "And

why is she there? Ah, a curse on this infatuation which has dragged her so low that she will follow after Dave Misterioso! She it is who is the cause of all my misfortunes—she has disgraced our family, and herself. If I find her with Dave I will kill them both. She is my sister, but this is too much."

He leaped to his feet and began to pace to and fro, snapping his fingers and muttering angrily; and as Roundtree undertook to intercede for Alicia he brushed his explanations away.

"Do not talk to me!" he cried. "I know, as no one else, the power that this gringo has over her. But I swear by all the saints I will thwart her yet, and bring back his ears for a token. Tell my sister if you see her that Raymondo shall die or her brother will never come back. But I forgot —I am still your prisoner."

"No, compadre," replied Roundtree, "you are free to go when you will. But as you cross the river I will fire some shots near you, so the Mexicans will think you are escaping."

"Ah, my amigo!" exclaimed Valentino, embracing him extravagantly and patting him on the back. "Of all mankind you are my only friend. How I wish that it were you who had come to our hacienda and won the heart of my foolish sister. But no, when she was seeking for some one to love, it must be this cow thief, this Raymondo! And now I must return and kill him. So warn your friend not to kill me when he shoots and I will plunge through the river and escape."

He ran back to the crossing and, as Jess spoke to Talley, he swung gracefully up on his horse. Then with a yell of derision he spurred into the stream, while the bullets rained about him.

"Gr-ringos!" he shouted back with an insulting gesture as he strode out on the Mexican side, and jumped his horse into the brush.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHICO CANO'S DOG.

THE rangers returned with their herd of stolen steers to find Presidio in a hurly-burly of excitement. A second big caravan, consisting of twenty huge wagons, had crossed the river that day; and now in a cloud of dust and with bull whips popping like pistol shots it was parking on the mesa for the night. Half the population of Presidio del Norte, on the Mexican side, was swarming across in its wake; and at the ranger camp Captain Ross had assembled his men to prepare for the impending battle. For, besides great bales of blankets, Mexican hats and imported silks, the caravan was intrusted with three cargoes of gold bullion, valued at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

This was carried concealed beneath cartloads of hides, but Kelly, the half-Mexican wagon master, had confided its presence to the captain, as well as that of five cargoes of cognac. These wagons had special guards, picked from the nerviest of the Mexicans—men who had proved their courage in the years of constant warfare when the Apaches and Comanches watched the trail—and Kelly felt no fear of being robbed. But Captain Ross, though he appeared to agree with him, felt equally confident that the caravan robbers would strike. It had been noted the year before that wagon trains loaded only with merchandise, or with small stores of cognac and silks, had been allowed to pass unmolested; but when gold and silver bullion was transported in large quantities the caravan was invariably attacked.

The huge losses had been concealed, to keep as secret as possible the existence of this treasure of bullion; for if its presence became known every ruffian in the country would rush in to spoil the caravans. But from his experience of the year before, Captain Ross was fully satisfied that the caravan robbers had their agents in Chihuahua; which being the case, and the treasure being rich, he felt confident the wagons would be attacked. Whether the men who did the robbing belonged to Chico Cano's Vinagrones or to the invisible gang of Americans below the Rim, was a problem the rangers had not solved. It could only be solved now by a careful dogging of the caravan and an attack on the robbers themselves. In short, the captain planned, having failed to locate the gang, to watch the caravan until they made an attack, and follow their tracks from there. But most of all he was determined to protect the treasure, no matter at what cost.

"Sergeant Roundtree," he said, after Jess had reported, "I want you to work by yourself to-night. Circulate around outside the caravan and see what you can hear along

the trails, but don't expose yourself unnecessarily. I intend this time to keep the rangers out of sight and so encourage the gang to attack. We will break camp before dawn and ride ahead up the trail, leaving you and two other men, Privates Talley and Kilcrease, to follow up the rear of the train; and to-morrow evening, after dark, I will swing back with my full force and surround the caravan where it camps. Then we will lie in hiding and hope for the best. My belief is, the gang will attack."

After detailed instructions regarding his part in the caravan's defense Captain Ross sent Roundtree into town; but before he left Jess looked over the eighteen men whom Ross had summoned to his camp. Some he had known as rollicking cowboys, working on the ranches round about, and others as regular rangers; but never in his life had he seen men more fit to carry out the work before them. Almost without exception they were around six feet in height, big and strong and with quick, steady eyes; and as he strode off through the night he recalled his boast to Valentino—one ranger could whip a hundred Vinagrones! The Vinagrones were like the treacherous sand scorpions for whom the gang was named, quick to scuttle under cover whenever retreat was possible and dangerous only when caught. Then with pistols and stabbing knives, like scorpion stings, they would fight and lash out to the end; but with those eighteen men Captain Ross could ride the river and clear it of every Vinagron.

A half moon hung straight overhead in the sky, lighting up treacherous corners and making the night almost like day, except in the black shadows of the trees. Roundtree skirted the caravan camp, where the revelry was at its height; and then, seeking a chance to catch sight of Alicia, he walked past the house where she was staying. This was the home of a German merchant who, marrying a woman of the country, had settled down to make a fortune in trade; but with its barred windows and doors it looked more like a fort than the residence of one of Presidio's first families. Blank walls faced the street and the entrance to the patio was protected by a grille of spiked steel, yet as he passed a second time Jess was conscious of a dark form that hovered just inside the gate. Under the shadow of his broad hat the man's face was invisible, but as Roundtree drew closer he recognized the white beard that hung, goatlike, from the chin of old Trinidad.

"*Hola,* Trinidad!" he hailed, and after peering out through the bars, the *mozo* took off his hat.

"*Buenas noches,* Señor Reenger," he replied.

"Where is your mistress?" demanded Jess. "I have news of her brother, whom I met down the river, to-day."

"Quién sabe—who knows?" he answered. "She went out riding, and has not come back."

"Not back!" cried Roundtree. "Where did she go? When did you see her last?"

"At four, this afternoon. We rode up the trail that follows the bank of the river bottom; but where it turns up the hill she sent me back and rode on by herself."

"What, with all these ladrones about—and the caravan coming in? My God, she must be crazy!"

"Quién sabe," shrugged Trinidad, "she has not come back." And with a curse for his dumbness Jess left him. Asked a hundred questions, not involving a direct fact, the old peon would shrug his shoulders to all of them. Quién sabe—who knows?—was his universal answer, as it is the answer of all Mexican peons. Too many people have been shot for knowing things in Mexico and knowledge has gone out of fashion, but Roundtree was sure of one thing—the old *mozo* was worried or he would not be waiting at the gate. Yet Alicia might have gone to watch the parking of the caravan or fallen in with some of her friends. She might be visiting at some other house besides that of the merchant, Meier, whose wife was a distant relative; but on a night like that it was doubly dangerous for a woman to be out after dark.

Chico Cano and his Vinagrones almost made a business of stealing women and holding them for ransom in the mountains, and since Alicia was known to be the daughter of wealthy parents she would naturally be marked for their prey. And there were other men of every degree of brutality abroad that night. The scum of the cantinas of Presidio del Norte had crossed the river in a body and no woman was safe away from home. It was a night when any crime could happen, and Jess' heart sank as he hurried up the road.

The main street of Presidio followed the bank of the river—or where the bank had

once been, for it changed with every flood; and the trail which Alicia had followed was an extension of the wide thoroughfare, now suddenly pinched down to a wagon track. It dipped down into the willows, where the sand was heavy and deep and the shadows made a lurking place for marauders; and then up over the bank of the rocky mesa until it dropped back into the bottom; but hunt as he would Roundtree could find no signs of violence—nor could he find Alicia. What madness had moved her to ride on alone was more than Jess could surmise, but since the road led on he followed it afoot until he saw a house ahead.

It stood on the farther side of a clearing in the mesquite trees and almost on the bank of the river, which had swung close to it during the last big flood; and as Roundtree stood in the shadows, looking and listening for some sign of life, he heard deep voices on the trail behind him. Stepping farther into the black shadows and crouching close to the ground, so he could see their silhouette against the sky, he lay quiet and listened intently. Two men were talking, one in the deep guttural of a low-class Mexican and the other in the faulty Spanish of an American—a voice which Jess seemed to know.

He was giving orders, though about what was not plain, and the Mexican was talking back to him—a rough, vibrant voice, echoing the depths of an enormous chest—and as Roundtree watched he walked into the open. First a high-peaked sombrero, then a short, squat form, unbelievably broad across the shoulders—it was no other than Chico Cano. But the tall man who walked behind him—and who, by his presence, had saved Cano from the ranger's gun—that man was not Mysterious Dave. It was Livernash, the tall cattleman with the cruel eyes, the man the rangers had discovered to be a rustler; yes, more, he was the man that Alicia had feared when she had rebuffed his bold advances at Dragoon. But he was not Dave, and with a muttered oath Roundtree lowered his gun and followed.

They walked across the open and approached the adobe house, which was surrounded by a wattled fence of arrow weed; and hardly had they entered and struck a light when the ranger crept up to the gate. He had circled the small clearing in order to keep under cover, and now, all ears, he crouched outside the fence and listened to the talk inside. Here at last was the chance in a million of finding out who Livernash was, and of discovering his relationship with Cano. In their prepossession over the caravans the rangers had made no efforts to run down the stories of his cattle rustling. That was an affair that could wait until the caravan robbers were located and their menace to travel definitely ended; but Chico Cano was the most wanted man in Mexico, for he had trapped a ranger and killed him. Jess loosened his pistols and waited; yet, strain as he would, he could not hear what the voices said. One spoke and the other answered, but the thick walls of the adobe house muffled their words to a man outside the fence.

Roundtree reached up carefully and unhooked the rawhide band which held the gate tightly shut. He pushed it open and went in and was halfway to the house before he noticed a crouching form by the door.

Then in a dead silence more terrifying than the loudest outcry a huge mastiff rose up and launched himself straight at him, only to be jerked over backward by his chain. So suddenly had he appeared that for the moment the ranger was paralyzed; he stood gaping without even the power to run, without the courage to draw and shoot. But as the dog was snatched back by his rattling chain and fell against the door with a thud Jess turned like a flash and made for the gate, almost feeling the polished fangs lay hold of him. The chain clanked and snapped taut, there was a bloodcurdling snarl that seemed to lift him over the gate and Roundtree found himself running down the road.

Being a ranger, Jess had considered himself as brave as the next man but the ferocity and unexpectedness of this sudden attack had broken down his nerve completely. One moment he stood staring, his heart in his mouth, while the huge beast came lunging at his throat; and the next, seeing the dog jerked back by a chain, he had swallowed his heart and run. Whether he had jumped over the gate or taken it with him was something he never would know, but at the edge of the clearing he stopped and looked back, his pistol held ready to shoot. The door had been flung open, hoarse voices urged on the dog, who came bounding down the trail to lay hold of him; but if Jess fired his last chance of killing Cano was

gone, and he stooped and picked up some rocks.

The first stone, hurled with all his strength, rebounded from the mastiff's broad back as if he were made of cast iron, and Jess smashed him in the face with the other; but the furious creature rose up and, after fighting him off with his pistol, Roundtree was compelled at last to shoot. Then with a curse for the brindled brute which had balked all his plans he ran back toward the ranger camp. It had been said that Chico Cano, through some magic power, could turn himself into a dog—and if so, then Chico was dead; but something told Jess that the bandit was still living, and the mastiff had saved his life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CARAVAN ROBBERS.

THERE was quiet, at last, in tumultuous Presidio—the quiet of early morning after a night of revelry, still punctuated by the shrill whoops of Mexicans—and at his camp by the Rio Grande Captain Ross of the rangers had assembled his men by the fire.

"Boys," he said, "we'll be starting in a few minutes, and you know what I'm going to say. I expect every ranger to do his full duty—take no chances, and shoot to kill. Unless all signs fail this caravan will be attacked, most likely to-morrow night. We will ride on ahead and hide under the Rim, leaving a few men to follow behind; and to-morrow evening after dark we'll come back afoot and surround the caravan camp. If it is attacked, let the bandits come out into the open—let 'em take the camp, if they want to—and then we'll close in and kill every man, unless they decide to surrender. That's all, now—you can saddle your horses."

The half moon had set at midnight, leaving the landscape dark except for the faint glow of stars; and while the Mexicans were still dancing around the fires at the caravan the rangers rode off through the hills. Rather than leave any tracks for the keen eyes of the outlaws they quit the trail from the start, and that morning at daylight they hobbled their horses in a secluded cañon and spread their blankets for a long day of sleep. There would be no sleep that night.

At the camp by the river Sergeant Roundtree and his two men slept late and kept out of sight. It was their duty to follow the caravan as it wound up Rocky Cañon to its first camp at Willow Springs, but the wagon master and his men were slow. The horse herd, under the charge of the *caporal,* had lost a big cut of mules and most of the herders were drunk. This also was the case with the teamsters and camp rustlers and even with Kelly himself. After their long pull across the desert from Chihuahua to the river, the strict discipline so necessary to the safety of the train had temporarily been allowed to relax. One night of music and dancing, and rounds of drinks in the cantinas, and then with lighter spirits the happy-go-lucky teamsters would be ready for the second leg of their journey.

It was nine hundred miles from Chihuahua City to San Antonio, the greater part through a trackless desert, and knowing his men Miguel Kelly let them drink, then drove them with curses to their work. It was their way and they liked it best, though they nodded in the saddle and the mules picked the trail themselves. After the orgie of the night before the town was dead, except for a brisk trade in eye openers, and when at last the huge wagon train pulled out, there was no one to see them off. They went grinding up the cañon, called Cañon de Las Piedras on account of the washed boulders in its bed, and behind them three rollicking cowboys, returning from a night in town, alternately raced their horses and lolled in the shade. Not even Miguel Kelly knew that the three cowboys were rangers, sent out to protect them on the trail.

Banging and grinding from rock to rock the cumbersome wagons lurched forward while the little Spanish mules tugged and strained in front of them, scrabbling madly at each crack of the whip. Drivers fell asleep, to be awakened by volleys of curses which they passed on with interest to their teams; and the heavy-eyed passengers, perched mournfully on the loads, gave up all thought of rest. It was a continual jar and bang, like the blows of a huge hammer; and when at last they reached camp and unharnessed along the stream every man who was permitted to went to sleep. There was no thought of making a corral for their protection against attack, even if the broken ground had permitted it; but as dusk came

on the wagon master roused his men and posted the guards for the night.

A sharp curve in the creek had broken the long train in two, the wagons loaded with cognac being on the upper side of the point and the three wagons of gold below, and all on the east side of the stream. By the gold Kelly stationed three men armed with rifles, who immediately gathered a big pile of firewood to keep up their watch fire during the night. Another guard was set over the cargoes of liquor, and the horse herd was sent out for the night; then, after much drinking of strong coffee and singing by the fire, the exhausted roisterers dropped off to sleep. The horse herd was driven up onto the rough, rocky mesa which bounded the stream on the west; and just as darkness fell Sergeant Roundtree and his men rode in and made camp below the caravan. Then the night came on, with its deceptive moonlight and the inky blackness of moon shadows, and the rangers lay quiet and waited.

The half moon, which had shown brilliantly, swung down toward the western hills, and the shadows along the creek grew deeper; a velvety darkness half obscured the jagged mountains to the east, where a coyote set up a yell. A dog, set on by the guard at the gold wagons, gave answer again and again and the coyote howled back defiantly. But there was a something vaguely human about the last note of that wolfish call—it was a signal from the robbers to their confederates, the men on guard, and the rangers prepared for action.

Silence followed the savage outcry from the mountain slopes above and the baying of the gold guard's dog; and the rangers, leaving their camp, crept closer to the wagons, taking shelter in the brush along the stream. Sergeant Roundtree was in the lead with Talley and Kilcrease at his back, and by that time they knew that Ross and his men were concealed in the stream bed above. Nor had they long to wait for, just as the moon began to set, they heard men creeping past them. A man at the gold wagons struck a match for his cigarette, raising it up and down as a signal, and three men rose up and walked toward him. Other forms rose up on the hillside to the east and with a yell the robbers charged. Attacking from three sides at once, they drove the Mexicans from their wagons and up into the rough ground to the west; but as the first firing ceased Miguel Kelly, the wagon master, came running to defend his gold. Roundtree saw his crouching form as he halted on the point, looking down at the men by the fire, and then at a volley the brave half-breed went down and the last of the Mexicans fled.

Swiftly and silently the men who had attacked the train spread out to guard the long line of wagons and Roundtree rose up to a crouch. Talley and Kilcrease rose beside him, a pistol in each hand, their bodies bent almost to the ground, and at a signal they advanced up the road. Three men had been assigned to guard the wagon loads of gold and the rangers approached them unnoticed.

"Surrender!" challenged Roundtree, "in the name of Texas!" Then three guns spoke at once. Each ranger had picked his man and their aim had been true, for all three of the robbers went down. But no sooner had Jess' challenge announced his presence to Captain Ross than a fusillade of shooting broke out above them. No need of challenge there, for Ross' men were in line and they drove the robbers before them as they advanced. Roundtree and his rangers crouched down behind the wagons to escape the enfilading fire of their comrades and the outlaws came fleeing toward them. First they saw skulking forms on top of the rise over which Kelly had charged to his death, and as they drew near Jess summoned them to halt.

"We surrender!" cried the tall man who seemed to be their leader; but as he answered he shot his right hand into the air as a signal and his men broke and ran for the hills. The rangers opened fire, not at the leader but at his men, and when they looked back he was gone. In the fraction of a second which he had gained by his false surrender, and the precipitate flight of his men, he had crouched out of sight and fled, though the rangers had taken toll among his followers. The battle moved swiftly into the short, brushy gulches which led up the side of the hill; but a shout from Captain Ross summoned his men back to the wagons where they would be safe from ambush and surprise.

Seven outlaws lay dead within the radius of the firelight, including the three who had been guarding the gold, and not a ranger was hurt. The ranger attack had been too quick, and too well-timed, and the

surprise had been complete. Before they knew it the caravan robbers had been overwhelmed and a third of their number killed; but the tall leader had escaped and though he tried to praise his men, the captain was plainly displeased.

"Light that fire," he ordered, "and bring those teamsters back. Sergeant Roundtree, tell 'em we're rangers. And the minute it comes daylight I want you to find that man's trail. We've got to get their leader —that's all."

CHAPTER XIX.

"QUIEN SABE?"

BY the light of a huge fire the rangers gathered up the dead and summoned back the terrified teamsters; but when they examined the bodies, which were dressed like Mexicans, they found all but two to be Americans. Just as Mysterious Dave, when robbing the stage, had disguised his men as Apaches, so this bandit chief, whoever he was, had disguised his band as Mexicans. For over a year Chico Cano and his gang had received the credit for robbing the caravans; but in the light of this discovery it was apparent to Captain Ross that he had gone too far afield. For some of the Americans killed were men he had rubbed shoulders with as he passed through King Wootan's bar; and the rest, though unknown, were of the desperate type that had made the Big Bend so dangerous.

The captain retired to a rock and, rubbing his long nose reflectively, considered the various aspects of his case. It was what his men called one of Ross' councils of war, in which he consulted no one but himself. Somewhere in his own domain these men who had been robbing caravans had a hiding place still undiscovered; for though they were Americans they had come disguised as Mexicans, hence their hiding place must be near at hand. A few hours' quick work before they escaped might lead him to the headquarters of the gang; and then in one battle he could annihilate the remnant and clean up the Big Bend overnight. But even if they escaped he had already solved one big problem—the work was being done by Americans.

While the rangers had been scourging the Mexicans and patrolling the Rio Grande the enemy that they sought had been at their back, looking down and laughing at their failure. But, though they had thwarted him, Ross had trapped them at last and dealt them a decisive blow; and while they fled he still hoped to follow their tracks and stamp them out like a nest of scorpions. Then he would attend to Chico Cano.

At daylight the rangers, after breakfast with the caravan, brought down their horses and took up the trail; and with two Yaqui trailers to follow the faint markings they traced the fugitives to where their horses had been tied. Here, at the entrance to a side cañon where a great mass of washed boulders had been left by a succession of floods, the boot tracks came to an end and the real work of trailing began. Out across the field of rocks the Yaqui trackers moved slowly, placing a finger here and there to show the watchful rangers where a shod horse had left his footprint among the boulders. But as the outlaws fled they seemed to have scattered in every direction, a favorite device with the Apaches; and at last even the Yaquis, the best trailers in all Mexico, held up their hands and called a halt. The trail had been lost in the rocks.

Circling slowly to and fro the Indians pointed here and there as they detected some faint trace of hoof marks, but the robbers were gaining distance and time was too precious to waste in a futile hunt for tracks. Scattering his men both ways Ross directed them to search the hillsides which surrounded this immense field of rocks, while the Yaquis tried to pick up the lost trail; but noon found them still balked and Ross was too good a trailer to tramp out the tracks and ride on. If he rode forth at random the tracks of his own shod horses would only add to the complexities of the search, and it had already become evident that the outlaws had led them purposely into this waste of polished rock.

At its upper end a big cañon led up into the mountains, but the robbers, if they wished, could double on their tracks and ride back down the Cañon de Las Piedras. Ross sent trailers north and south and into the hills to the west to cut sign for the elusive horsemen, but three days of desperate riding and the most painstaking tracking brought nothing but defeat for the rangers. The outlaws had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them up and Ross sent the Yaquis back to their caravan. Then he assembled his men and called on any one of them to give him a working clew.

"Captain," spoke up Talley, when the others had finished, "I can tell you something about that tall man."

"What? The one that was their leader —the one that held up his hand?"

"That's the one," responded Talley. "You know, captain, I'm kinder proud of my snap shooting, and specially shooting at night, and when I seen that tall jasper flash his hand up against the sky I took a shot at it, jest for fun. He jerked it down right quick and, knowing my shooting like I do, I believe I made a dead center."

"Well, why the devil didn't you tell me this three days ago?" Captain Ross demanded angrily. "Didn't you know that it was important?"

"Well—yes," admitted Talley. "But you've been kind of ringy on account of our losing this man; and I knowed if you heerd it you'd shore give me hell for not shooting him through the haid. But he's surrendered, you see, and knowing how you feel about killing prisoners——"

"You shot him through the hand!" snapped Ross.

"That's the size of it," confessed Talley. "Jest f'r instance."

For a minute Ross glared at him, then his grim face relaxed and he showed his teeth in lieu of a smile.

"How the governor ever expects me to get results," he grumbled, "is more than I can figure, with this outfit. Nothing but a gang of gun-toting kids! Very well, Private Talley, your report is accepted and I only hope you've marked our man. Because a wound like that is going to call for treatment and——"

"Oh, hell!" burst out Talley, "I never thought of that!"

"He'll go to Doc Moore," ended Ross.

"Say, cap!" begged Talley, "lemme ride in and ask, will ye?"

"I'll attend to that myself, while I'm reporting to the adjutant general," replied Ross, suddenly rising to his feet. "You and Roundtree and Kilcrease can go back to Presidio, and the rest of you boys take these hills. Those men are here somewhere, not forty miles away, and I want you to find them—that's all!"

He gave hasty directions for the carrying on of the search and, swinging up on his gaunt horse, started for Dragoon at a lope while Talley gazed ruefully after him. But regrets sat light on the little ranger and as they rode into Presidio he was as laughing and care-free as ever. If he had marked his man, well and good, they would find him; and if not, no great harm was done. But if the man who stuck up his hand turned out to be Mysterious Dave, then another good chance had been lost. And as he thought the matter over Private Talley suspected that Dave had outwitted him again.

Back in their camp by the Rio Grande the rangers unpacked their mule and prepared for a good night's rest, but fate had something else in store. Out of the dusk rode old Trinidad, his white beard all a-tremble, as he beckoned Roundtree aside

"Have you seen my mistress?" he asked.

"No, indeed!" replied Roundtree, astonished. "Didn't she come back home, that night?"

"No, señor," answered the *mozo*, abjectly.

"Then where is she?" demanded the ranger.

"Quién sabe?" shrugged Trinidad, "who knows?"

"Ah, that's all you know—quién sabe!" scolded Roundtree. "Do you want me to find Doña Alicia? Then come over here and tell me all you know—and forget that quién sabe talk!"

He led the trembling peon to the edge of the river where the others would not overhear what was said and questioned him again and again.

"Now where do *you* think she is?" he ended.

"Quién sabe!" responded Trinidad, automatically.

"Now, here!" burst out Roundtree, grabbing him roughly by the shoulder and shaking him till he squealed. "Talk up! Has Chico Cano got her?"

"Quién sabe," replied the *mozo*, "he is always stealing women, but no one seems to know."

"Mira!" began Jess, tapping his arm confidentially, "you know a great deal, my friend. If I knew what you know I might get your mistress back; but how can I do it, otherwise? All I want to know is where to find Chico Cano. Tell me that and I will do the rest."

"Chico Cano?" repeated the old man dumbly, and he glanced about swiftly before he spoke.

"Go up the river, this evening," he mut-

tered from beneath his beard. "You might see a boatload of grape brandy crossing." And then he relapsed into the grave dignity of the peon, the cloak which hides his ignorance, and also all he knows.

"Quién sabe?" he shrugged. "Why not?"

CHAPTER XX.

A RECKONING WITH CHICO CANO.

IN the excitement of the battle and the pursuit of the robbers, Roundtree had almost forgotten Alicia. On the night she was reported lost he had set out in search of her but the encounter with Chico Cano and his dog had banished all thoughts but one. The anxiety of the lover had been swallowed up in the ranger's rage at losing his chance at Chico Cano; and no sooner had he returned to camp than he was caught up in the swift events which had ended in the fight at Willow Springs. But instead of being an end the battle had been the beginning of three days and nights of trailing—and now on his return, worn out by the hardships, he found old Trinidad with his news.

His mistress was still lost—no one knew where she was, unless it was Chico Cano—and if she was held for ransom the time was overdue for the demand for money to be made. Yet it had been known in Presidio that Alicia de Montana was the daughter of a wealthy haciendado and her movements had undoubtedly been watched; but even if, in her blindness, she had fallen into Cano's hands no great harm was likely to befall her. Her father, if he relented, could pay the bandits their ransom and Alicia would be returned. It was the memory of Livernash, the companion of Chico Cano, which gave Roundtree the greatest uneasiness.

Livernash was a man of a different stamp, more cold-blooded than Chico Cano but less swayed by considerations of money; and if, as now seemed probable, he was responsible for her abduction, then Alicia was worse than lost. She was in the hands of a man as cruel and heartless as he was unprincipled, and his bold love-making at Dragoon almost forced the conclusion that Livernash himself was behind it. Like a voice long forgotten Jess remembered his cynical comments as he had related the story of King Wootan.

It was not the King's temerity in stealing the emigrant's wife which had excited Livernash's biting scorn; but the fact that, after stealing her, he had been weak enough to marry her and so placed himself in her power. And on the very same night that Alicia had failed to return, Roundtree had seen this man with Chico Cano. What was more probable, then, than that a bargain had been struck, with Alicia the pawn of their trade?—Chico Cano to abduct her and turn her over to Livernash at his ranch below the Rim. They were rustlers together, stealing cattle across the river—why should they not steal women, too? And to make it more terrifying, there were the days and months at Dragoon when Alicia had lived in fear of Livernash.

Roundtree went off by himself and thought the matter over, but he could not search for Alicia, even now. His hands were tied, for Captain Ross in no uncertain words had warned him against Alicia and this love affair. He had even refused to allow him to resign until the results of his love madness had been rectified; until Mysterious Dave had been retaken and all the devilment he had perpetrated had been paid for by the death of his gang. From that one night of infatuation, long months of effort had been brought to naught—Dave had made his escape and even now his dexterous hand might be guiding the fortunes of the outlaws. But for Mysterious Dave, Buck Buchanan would be alive and riding with the rangers; and Chico Cano, half man and half dog, would be dead and in his grave. And, but for his escape, Sergeant Roundtree could resign, but now he was honor bound to go on.

Old Trinidad had intimated in his roundabout Mexican way that Chico Cano would cross the river that night, for the smuggling of grape brandy which the old man had mentioned was now Cano's principal occupation. With every caravan from the south large consignments came in which were never declared at the customhouse, and the next two or three weeks were given over to running the guards and smuggling the liquor across. And, since the money was paid down when the goods were delivered, there was a chance that Cano would be present.

It was only a chance, for the thick-headed old *mozo* had a genius for getting things wrong; but Roundtree was afire to follow up any clew which might lead to the abductors of Alicia.

The moon was at its full, almost obscuring the stars, as the rangers set out on their quest. Since he had come to the Big Bend country Roundtree had always been paired with Talley and to-night the obliging Kilcrease had agreed to keep camp while they scouted up the river for Cano. Following their usual custom, Sergeant Roundtree went ahead, his broad shoulders and tall form almost obscuring the diminutive Quick, who kept watch to the rear and on both sides; but instead of following the road they skirted the edge of the willows, keeping always within sight of the river.

Above the reef of rocks which made the crossing at Presidio, the Rio Grande was broad and deep, a river twice the size of the present shrunken stream, depleted by countless canals. A hundred yards across, it was so deep and muddy that few cared to risk swimming it with a horse; and besides the myriad fishes that leaped and plopped on its swirling surface there were alligators, five hundred miles up from the Gulf. Its waters, if they could speak, could tell of a thousand deeds of violence, and of corpses floating down to the sea; and on such nights as this, when smugglers were abroad, even the rangers took their lives in their hands.

At a curve of the river, where the flood of the year before had cleared a long strip of bottom land, the winding cow trail turned out into the foot-high willows that were sprouting anew in the sand bars; and, lying, flat on his stomach, Roundtree inched his way along it, pausing every few minutes to listen. The call of night birds came softly, and a pair of coons by the slough chattered and splashed as they quarreled over their fishing; but of a sudden all was still and the nightwise rangers knew that some one besides themselves was near. That was the surest sign of all, when the night noises were hushed, yet they could not hear a footstep fall.

There was a long, breathless silence and finally, foot by foot, the rangers moved on up the trail. To the left they could hear the lapping of the water as it eddied along the shore and at last there came an audible splash. Roundtree raised his head cautiously and looked toward the river, but nothing was visible except a swaying among the willows. Some huge body was moving through them, crushing the sprouts down as it passed yet gliding almost without a noise; and to his startled eyes something about its writhing approach suggested the passage of an alligator. Jess crouched down and waited until it should cross the trail in front of them, lying low to avoid attracting attention; and then suddenly the willows parted, a ferocious countenance confronted him, and he was face to face with a man.

But a spasm of fear had contorted the savage features until they lost all human semblance; the huge jaws dropped open and the coarse, snarling lips revealed long canine teeth, above and below. Yet the creature was a man and as his first surprise passed away Jess saw him reach back for his knife. The stare of fear turned to a snarl of rage as he reared up like a tiger cat to strike, yet so terrible was the spell which their meeting had cast upon him that Roundtree lay frozen in his place. Creeping along through the willows, he had left his pistols in his belt to keep from jabbing their muzzles into the mud, and it was now too late to draw. For the first time in years he was caught without defense but as he ducked back from the knife thrust Talley's pistol exploded by his ear and the huge Mexican leaped high in the air.

He came down with a snarl, clawing the ground and wallowing the willows down as he bucked about in the agonies of death; but a second shot from Talley brought his struggles to an end before he reached the bank of the stream. Roundtree sprang up and drew his gun and started for the river, where a boat was tied to the shore; and in the water beyond he saw two V-shaped lines, like the wake where a muskrat swims. But these were no muskrats but men swimming for their lives, ducking their heads under to escape the expected shots; they were Chico Cano's men, and a few minutes later their bodies were floating with the stream.

"Pretty shooting," observed Talley as he put up his smoking pistols and turned to examine the boat; but Roundtree ran back to the path. That ferocious, doglike face with the canine teeth above and below could belong to but one man—Chico Cano.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *out on November 20th.*

The Chester Emeralds

By Llewellyn Hughes

A bloodstained pocketbook looks like murder—and leads to the detection of an intricate piece of villainy.

ABOUT nine o'clock on Wednesday morning Goring's patience was rewarded. Rising, he put his *Times* down on the table beside his half-consumed poached egg and went into his bedroom. From the bureau drawer containing his socks he took out a hidden pocketbook. It was of good Russia leather, slightly worn, monogrammed and cornered in plain silver, and had a dark irregular stain on the back. Inside it was ninety-four dollars; three twenties, six fives and four ones. The latter were brand-new, and two of them —no more—showed a faint stain corresponding with that on the leather. There were three letters with their addresses torn off in each instance, minus their envelopes, all written by the same feminine hand; two of them began with "Dear Mr. Caton;" the third one began with "Dear Frank." There were a number of visiting cards bearing the name Frank Innescourt Caton, Esquire, and containing in their lower corners the names of the Roxburgh Club, Westminster, London, and the St. James Club, Montreal; some American postage stamps; and a plain card on which had been written in pencil the address of an Italian restaurant on the East Side. It was peculiar and almost illegible, but with the aid of a magnifying glass he had made out the name "Durlenbach" and the words "real italian spaghetti—chianti—46 dnarg street—city." Alan Goring knew his New York. It contained no Dnarg Street, but spelling the word backward he had gone down, yesterday afternoon, to No. 46 Grand Street, then on to No. 64 Grand Street, and at the latter place discovered a small restaurant called the Adelphi. The spaghetti and Chianti were indeed excellent, but the proprietor said he'd never heard of Mr. Durlenbach.

There was one other thing in the pocketbook. A piece of paper, torn from a writing pad, and decorated by a series of figures. Goring now gave this his closest attention. "91421 less 865 equal 90556. Add 265 make 90821. Subtract 37 equal 90794." Proving them as he went along, he found an error here, a numerical surplus of ten. "Add 24 equal 90818. Add 603 equal 91-4-21." That, he saw, was the original number. It was followed by a sentence. "There is nothing in it."

Goring returned to his breakfast, sat down, and picked up the morning newspaper. In the Lost and Found column he reread the following:

$250 REWARD.

Pocketbook. Brown Russia leather. Monogram F. C. and corners in silver. Lost Monday night in Yellow taxi. Finder keep money and claim above reward by communicating with X 2187, *Times*.

Hurriedly finishing his coffee, he put the pocketbook and the newspaper in his coat pocket, went to the telephone, and called up his office. "Sending a telegraph boy down with my copy," he said briefly. "I'll be down later. May have a story." Then he put on his hat and overcoat, went out into the rain, hailed a passing taxi, and drove north.

II.

You will find, if you walk down Ninety-eighth Street from Central Park West toward Broadway, a shoemaker's shop set in the basement of one of the houses. It is a very little shoemaker's shop, not much bigger than the shop of a leprechaun, and with its paraphernalia of hammer and last, china nail and peg top, thin knives worn into all sorts of shapes, countless strips and crescents of leather, just about as confusing to the eye. Outside the window is a little signboard and on it a little name: "T. Story. Shoemaker."

You won't find evidences of a twentieth-century mechanical evolution here, no installation of labor-saving, shoemaking devices—as a matter of fact there isn't room enough—no foppish rubber heels and fancy work. Just the plain, common materials of an honest shoemaker of the old school who makes boots—not shoes, mind you—boots out of real well-tanned ox hides, and, furthermore, makes them, every stitch and cut of them, with his bare hands. He has as many customers as he can handle, enough to supply him with a steady source of revenue, not much, but sufficient for his needs and enabling him to add to his library of secondhand books.

At the back of his shop is his little apartment. The walls of two rooms are lined with bookshelves packed with books of all sizes and descriptions. It looks for all the world like a secondhand bookstore except for the fact that his books are in meticulous order and arrangement. The majority of them are scientific books, but there are rows of volumes dealing with the study of medicine, political economy, the arts, music, law, history and psychology. There is a whole wall, for instance, devoted to books dealing with the study of crime and criminology. All bear the print marks of his fingers; practically all contain his notes, written in small neat handwriting down the margin. The light in his rooms is rarely extinguished before two and sometimes three o'clock in the morning, and if you looked in through the window you would see him sitting in his well-worn armchair, a corncob between his teeth, his sharp nose adorned by steel-rimmed eyeglasses, reading and studying with a profound disregard of the hour.

To describe Tench Story and give even a brief history of his many experiences would fill a tome. Built like his shoemaker's shop, his hammers, his harmonium—which, by the way, he made himself—on a small scale; thin, nervous face, intensely bright eyes that can soften before children and yet penetrate the exterior, the mask, of an Eumenides, this little man is in all probability the greatest criminologist in America. His marvelous work in unraveling the mystery involved in the death of Judge Opp, the astonishing way he saved the reputation of the beautiful Mrs. Tennant during her divorce trial, put the stamp of approval upon his extraordinary talent and genius for the detection of crime. His detective powers are unrivaled. Letters testifying his uncanny ability have been signed by men in all walks of life and if he cared to make some of them public it is said that many a chief of police might lose his popularity. Two or three inspectors—it isn't wise to mention names in this connection—have been advanced to responsible positions commanding a fine salary as the direct result of Tench Story's simple dislike of the least form of publicity.

The truth is he interests himself in these apparently incomprehensible mysteries for the pure fun of solving them, the mental satisfaction of it—and then passes the information on. In this he plays no favorites, although it should be said he prefers to help the more serious and brighter members of the police force and newspaper organizations rather than the stolid and indifferent persons lazy in some sinecure. He is a man whose thoroughness expresses itself

in all he does. The boots he makes, for example. Not a stitch, not a nail put in carelessly, not one blow of his hammer fails to do its work. A man requires the stimulation of honest labor, he says; human beings all need the exercise of coördination of eye, brain and muscle, some physical work in return for the blessing of being one of Mother Earth's inhabitants, part of her bosom, part of her dust.

III.

Goring dismissed his taxi at the corner of Ninety-eighth Street and walked the rest of the way on foot. Before this queer little man, plying a waxed thread and pulling each stitch tight with exceptionally strong fingers, the young reporter was usually subdued in manner and speech, and, one might say, slightly obsequious. He had met Tench Story three years ago in a most singular and—for him, Goring—lucky way when the *Courier* had sent him to cover the murder of that Chinese girl, Loey Fong, in which affair the little shoemaker came within an inch of losing his life. Lucky, because in rendering assistance at a timely moment he had won the friendship of the famous little detective, a friendship he valued above that of any other man. On his part, Story liked the young reporter immensely, but he never let him know it. Indeed, if he was conscious of the different forms of emotion his inscrutable face rarely demonstrated it. Women, as a rule, irritated him, and the prettier they were the less notice he seemed to take of them; certainly, the softest pair of eyes couldn't influence him nor shake, for one minute, his inexorable stride in the van of justice. He had married, but was now a widower and revered his late wife with a cold, dispassionate veneration. Strange little man in every way!

Alan Goring pulled at his pipe and, as a preliminary, spoke of the weather; it was, he commenced, a rotten day and it would probably turn to snow.

The shoemaker went on with his sewing. "Meaning," he criticized dryly. "New York's about to witness a miracle! Wonderful thing, that. A day turn to snow. Yes, sir, that's wonderful. Sure like to see it."

Goring felt foolish. "I mean the rain," he said. "The rain might turn to snow."

"Ah." He looked out at the gray sky. "'Pears so from the look of it." In taking up a paring knife he accidently knocked down a pair of lady's shoes. The reporter picked them up and glanced at them as though studying their character. "Got to finish that young girl's shoes by this evening," said the shoemaker. "She needs 'em. Maybe she'd get a dancing engagement if she didn't go partying so often and spoilin' her looks with synthetic gin."

"A lot of them do that," said Goring, itching to take out the pocketbook and broach the object of his visit. "But they don't talk about it as a rule."

"Don't s'pose this one does, if it comes to that."

"You mean you judged that from her appearance?"

"Haven't seen the girl," said the shoemaker, waxing a bristler.

"Then how—how in thunder——" asked Goring, looking at the pale-blue satin shoes, somewhat down at heel, one sole worn to a hole.

"Some little boy brought 'em here. There's the name of Stewart and Sons in 'em—wonder you haven't seen it—large as life. Most actresses get their shoes there. Size of foot, high heel, sole worn out in the center where a dancer balances her weight—older women more to the side; all depends. Stain on satin; synthetic gin. Mark outlined across instep; man's shoe. Both of 'em must have been intoxicated before that could remain there like that."

"Good Lord," said Goring.

The shoemaker looked up. "Nothing to be surprised over," he said. "All down there same as if it was written with pen and ink."

The reporter shook his head. "Perhaps it's easy to you, but to me——"

"Pspt!" Tench Story invariably made that little sound with his lips when he was annoyed. Goring took the hint and shut up. "Now then, what's botherin' you? Don't s'pose you've come here to get your shoes fixed."

Hopefully, Goring produced the pocketbook and laid it, monogram downward, on the littered counter. "Talking about stains," he began, "what stain is that?"

The little man bent forward, looked at it for the space of a second, sniffed at it with his sharp nose, then resumed his stitching. "Say it was human blood," he ventured indifferently.

"Just what I think. Now, just read this thing in the Lost and Found column. It's this morning's *Times*." He held out the newspaper, his index finger pointing to the particular place. The shoemaker shot a glance at it.

"Well," he decided, "better write 'em. Better write 'em and say you've found it. What else? You'll be two-fifty to the good —and I'll be able to mend that poor girl's shoes all the quicker. Eh?" He looked up inquisitively, his nostrils beginning to quiver a little.

"The only thing of any value in it," pressed Goring eagerly, "is a sum of money. Ninety-four dollars. There's a scrap of paper with some numbers on it, but I think it's merely one of these trick things or something. The notice in the *Times* says the finder may keep the money. Ninety-four berries. That's a fair sum. I could buy about ninety-four such pocketbooks with that and then have enough over to take in a theater for a week. Besides that, they are offering two hundred and fifty dollars as well."

The shoemaker continued to show little response. The pocketbook still lay on the counter before him.

"There are three letters in it, written by a lady to a Mr. Caton—that's his monogram in silver on the outside."

"Well, get in touch with her instead. Romance!"

"But the addresses have been carefully torn off."

The shoemaker's nose again twitched a little, like that of a pointer dog. "What's she to say in 'em?" he asked slowly.

"Just personal letters. Very well composed. A young girl, I should judge, of refined tastes and a great deal of charm. If she's not in love with him she's pretty darned near it."

"Nothing, then," put in Story, "of any interest?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. She seems to have had a little tiff with her dad—it looks as if he didn't care for this Caton chap paying her any further attention, which she considered 'outrageously unfair and stupid.' He, Caton, she wrote, must forgive her father if he called on him and questioned him about his social standing and——"

What happened next delighted the young reporter beyond all measure. The little shoemaker suddenly downed boot and tools, seized the pocketbook and, beckoning him to follow, left the room.

IV.

In the apartment, surrounded on all sides by shelf after shelf of well-worn books, Goring once more marveled on the transformation from simple shoemaker to serious detective. Here was a man, a little man, whose very fingering of a pocketbook, for instance, was fascinating to behold. The reporter's heart beat a shade quicker as he watched him. The quick, incisive method of his investigation, the nervous white hands, the dilated eye, the grave face with its slightly tremulous nostril, all portrayed a master mind ferreting round the outskirts of mystery.

"I'd say," remarked the criminologist quietly, "that bloodstain was about two days old. When and where did you find it?"

"Yellow taxi. Monday night. Times Square. I'd just come from a poker party and——"

"Get the taxi number?"

"No. 041-261. Mental photograph of the driver, too. I'm sure I'd remember him if I saw him again."

"How came it you didn't notice the blood on the pocketbook?"

"The fact is," said Goring, "I'd been celebrating a little and—well, I'm afraid I was a little under the weather. It wasn't until the next morning that I looked at the damn thing."

Tench Story said nothing and gave his attention to the blank card on which was faintly penciled the address of the restaurant. "I went down there, yesterday," said Goring, a trifle excitedly. "But they——"

"Down where?"

"No. 64 Grand Street."

A suggestion of pleasurable surprise dwelt for an instant in the shoemaker's eyes, and he gave Goring a congratulatory nod. "What was it?" he inquired.

"A restaurant called the Adelphi. The proprietor said he didn't know any one by the name of Durlenbach."

"S'pose you guessed he was lying, didn't you?" Goring didn't reply. The shoemaker now returned to the piece of torn paper with its meaningless numbers and Goring, unable to restrain himself, exclaimed: "There's an error in those figures. A mistake of ten——"

"One moment, please." Not for one but for several moments did Goring remain silent while Tench Story scrutinized each article in turn and finally brought a powerful magnifying glass to bear upon the pocketbook itself. Goring withheld further comment until, instinctively, he knew the little shoemaker would be willing to hear from him. It was flattering, anyway, to be able to sense the criminologist's increasing interest. There were, on the other hand, no physical manifestations of it. At one moment he whistled quietly over a letter—a hopeful sign—and Goring expected him to make some observation, but the next moment he discarded it indifferently. He looked up at length, his eyes singularly contracted, mesmeric. "Kind of interesting," he drawled in a calm voice that had in it nothing of the fever registered in his eyes. "Yes, kind of interesting, and the man who wrote this address"—he held up the card with the name of Durlenbach on it—"also wrote out these numbers and this sentence; 'There is nothing in it.'

"See that *c* that looks like an *i?*" Goring leaned forward. "Now look at the same *c* on the card here. And that funny twist to his *a* is repeated. It's the same handwriting."

"I believe it is."

"I *know* it is," emphasized the little shoemaker. "All right. Now what do you deduce from that?"

"Not a thing," said Goring candidly.

Story laughed. "Um! Can't hope to get much help from you, can I? Anyway, like to congratulate you on your foresight, young fellow, in not answering that reward notice right away. Seems like there's a nice little mystery hanging round this pocketbook. Guess it may amuse us a while, even though we may be too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes, sir. Too late! There's a heap of things can happen in two days, and to-day's Wednesday, isn't it? Theseus put the Cretans to the sword in less time than that."

"I can track down that taxi driver, if you like," said the reporter.

"I've been thinking. 'Pears to me he's got nothing to do with it. Chances are he don't even remember his fare. No, we're going to claim that two hundred and fifty dollars first of all—but we're going to claim it in a roundabout way so's we can observe this Caton fellow without his knowing it."

He walked thoughtfully over to the telephone and called up a fruit vender named Timothy Fogerty on Columbus Avenue. "Tim, this is Tench Story," he explained. "Got a little job for you. Write at once—special delivery—to X 2187, *Times*. Yes, get a lead pencil and put it down. X 2187. All you've got to say is that you have the missing pocketbook. That's right. I'll be down right away and put you wise." To Goring he said, "Old Fogerty's helped me out many a time before. He's the greatest little finder of suspiciously lost articles in New York City—and I'm right by him with an armful of cabbages getting a line on the claimant. Cost you a ten-dollar bill out of that two hundred and fifty."

Goring colored. He was, he protested, more interested in the working out of the mystery than in a mere——

"Pspt!" sniffed the little shoemaker. "Well maybe if the *Courier* can spare you for a couple of hours there'll be a kind of an exciting story to write up." He began to whistle. "Who knows?"

Goring's eagerness to be of service was obvious. "I don't see why I couldn't have written to say I'd found the pocketbook," he said. "You could be up in my apartment, reading a book or something when this man Caton called."

"Understood you to say you'd been nosing round that Italian restaurant on Grand Street, yesterday?"

"Well, what of that?"

"If there are any *Iagos* in this business the sight of you would scare 'em a mile off. Get me?"

"I get you."

The shoemaker then went to the telephone again and called up police headquarters. In his terse manner of speech he asked Inspector Wright to make him a quick report of all admittances to the city hospitals since Monday night, and also if Sergeant Fera could be stationed, at about twelve o'clock, opposite a small fruit store at No. 215 Columbus Avenue. He had unique privileges at headquarters. Owing to his unselfish coöperation with them, the police granted almost any request he cared to make. Inspector Wright apparently raised no obstacle, for Story went on to advise that Sergeant Fera was to wait for the signal of an upturned box of oranges, then shadow the man who immediately came out of the fruit store and report where he

went. "Plain clothes," he said; "and tell him I'll try and get in a word with him beforehand."

He took up the piece of paper with the strange numbers on it, whistled a little tune, went and looked up something in the New York directory, closed the book with a loud bang, then wandered over to his harmonium and sat down before it. He began to play very softly, an old-fashioned melody that was adagio and hymnal in character. Goring had often known him to play like this for hours at a time when some problem continued to baffle him. He realized the folly of interrupting the little man, so he settled back in his chair and concentrated on the several possibilities this strange reward for the pocketbook presented. Racking his brains to be able to advance some clew, some theory, that would justify the little shoemaker's kindly opinion of his powers, he could discover nothing that was backed by plausible theorization and argument.

The music soon lulled him into a melodious world in which crime and wrongdoing had no footing. A pleasant half hour went by and Goring was in the midst of a reverie when, without the least warning, Story ceased playing and in a few strides was across the room examining the city directory once more. A shadow of disappointment flitted over his face as he closed the book. He then took up the telephone directory. Goring observed that he sought a definite page and that he counted up and down a particular column. The maneuver conveyed little to him, however. The shoemaker wrote down several addresses, returned to his armchair and stretched his legs so contentedly that it was palpable he had discovered some clew or other. "Guess you're rearing to go, aren't you?" he inquired mildly.

The reporter almost jumped from his chair. "Try me."

"Got three addresses here. Take a taxi and drive past 'em in turn. Get a line on the sort of houses they are then report here to me." He looked at his watch. "About four, this afternoon."

Goring grabbed his hat. "Anything else?" he asked greedily.

"Yes. Call up the St. James Club, Montreal. Find out if Caton is a member."

"And the Roxburgh Club, of London?"

"Waste of time. No club of that name there," concluded Tench Story.

V.

It was two minutes to the hour in the afternoon when Alan Goring returned to Ninety-eighth Street and he was informed by Chuncin Wing, the shoemaker's Chinese servant, that Mr. Story had just come in and was waiting for him. "Had no idea," was Story's greeting, "there were so many blamed oranges in a crate. If I picked up one of 'em I guess I picked up a hundred. Never had such a time. They rolled all over the block and got all covered with mud. Old Fogerty said it was as good as a picnic." He lit his corncob and pulled away in thoughtful introspection. "Well," he asked, "what's new with you?"

"Caton's not a member of the St. James Club in Montreal. Never has been a member."

"Kind of thought so." A pause. "And those three addresses I gave you?"

"Not much luck. The first was an apartment house, the second was a laundry, and the third was an empty residence."

Tench Story was alert on the instant. "That so! Which one was that?"

Goring reënforced his memory by a surreptitious peek at the slip of paper in his hand. "No. 117 East Fifty-fourth Street," he said. "It looked as if it had been empty for years. There was a time-worn sign outside with the name of the agents, Lafferty & Dudler, and a——"

The little shoemaker was at the telephone book. "Plus ten; plus ten," he said to himself. He hummed a little tune, but his eyes were dancing. "Want to see that house right away!" he said. "Probably have to break in. Maybe that's the better way." Goring could see that his hidden anxiety was getting the better of him. "Got a gun with you?" he asked, snapping off his words.

"No."

"Take this. And that flash light. Dark in an hour. Let's go. Got Sergeant Fera at the corner—waiting in a taxi. Hop to it!"

Goring was ready. "But—but what's the use of——"

"Needn't stop to advance theories," flashed the shoemaker. "Do all the talking you want in the taxi. Got an idea this affair is kind of serious—and if that's so every moment is precious."

The reporter had met Sergeant Fera before and he set himself for his muscular handshake. Once they were racing across the park the impatience that had tempo-

rarily pervaded the little man's soul flew away. "Now, Goring," he said brightly, "go right ahead; let's see what you've got. Read the girl's letters, didn't you? Examined the pocketbook? Guess you've come to some sort of conclusion about this fellow Caton. Any idea what he looks like?"

Goring was flustered. "Not the slightest idea."

"Pspt!" scorned Story. "That's bad! Now come, you can do better than that surely! Think he'll be a short chap like me? Or with a snub nose on him like the one adorning the face of our estimable sergeant here?"

"No," said Goring, thinking of the charm of the girl's letters.

"Why not?"

"Because this young lady who signs herself Olive would hardly be in love with a short little man whose nose was——"

The little shoemaker, pointing at Sergeant Fera's undisguised expression of pique and resentment, burst into one of his rare fits of laughter. "Fera," he sympathized, " 'pears to me Friend Goring's a little hard on us. Willing to bet you've no cause for complaint in the matter of attention from the ladies. Eh?"

The sergeant shrugged. "I once knew a kid down on Washington Square," he stated. his nationality proclaiming itself in a slight accent, "that for looks had every chicken in New York City beat a mile. Say! the minute I seen that kid—well, you wouldn't believe me if I was to tell you."

"Don't tell us," said Tench Story, turning his attention again to Goring. "Then you wouldn't say," he went on, "that Caton was a short, thickset, heavy-lipped man, unmistakably Teutonic in complexion and manner, and with an ugly scar of a badly healed incision—of a carbuncle and the subcutaneous tissue—on the back of his neck?"

"I would not," agreed Goring.

"Neither would I," returned the shoemaker. He looked at Fera. "So our friend of this afternoon couldn't have been Frank Innescourt Caton, even though he insisted and produced documentary evidence to prove he was."

"You didn't fall for that bull, did you?" suggested the sergeant, taking his cue and hoping he had said the right thing.

"Not from the moment I saw him enter the fruit store. By the way, Goring, it may interest you to know that Sergeant Fera traced Mr. Durlenbach down to No. 64 Grand Street!"

"Durlenbach?" Goring appeared dumfounded. "How did you find out he was Durlenbach?"

"Spoke with a German accent; went down to the address preceding his name on that card in the pocketbook you found; and while he was paying out two hundred and fifty dollars to Tim Fogerty I accidently brushed against him and knocked off his hat. I apologized, of course, and as I handed it back to him I noticed the initials R. D. inside the hatband." He smiled. "But we can leave that gentleman for the time being. The fellow I want to see is Frank Innescourt Caton, Esquire. Don't forget the 'Esquire.' He'll be a pretty gentleman. Sergeant! You seem deep in thought. What's your theory?"

"It's my belief that Caton's been bumped off by this Durlenbach. He looked like a blond gorilla. I'm pretty strong myself but believe me I'd need a little help before I tackled that bird single-handed."

The taxi swung round a corner and continued along Fifty-fourth Street. Story cautioned the driver to stop at the southwest corner of Lexington Avenue. "Don't let's be seen together," he told the others. "I'll go into the tobacco store. Goring, you wait on the other side of the street till I give you the high sign—and you, sergeant, get in touch with the policemen round these parts and make sure that Goring and I won't be interfered with or observed as we force an entrance by the back way. After that, don't go too far from the house. And remember, the least sign you get from either of us, start right in smashing down the front door. It'll be a revolver shot or the breaking of a pane of glass."

"I get you."

They got out and separated. The rain was coming down heavily and a penetrating, cold mist, lifting from the slippery street, caused the passers-by to look like phantoms. "Elements are with us, thank the Lord," murmured the little shoemaker. "Fifteen minutes and it'll be dark as the Black Stone of Caaba."

A little later Goring and Story had forced an entrance into the untenanted residence and were moving softly through the deserted dining room to the hall. Goring led the way, carrying a flash light and a cocked revolver. The front room was empty and

so were the upstairs rooms. One look in through respective doors sufficed. Goring's flash light showed plainly that the layer of dust had not been disturbed and that the single footprints up the stairs had been made just latterly—the little shoemaker said about two days ago. Tench Story wasn't interested there. Downstairs again, in the hall, he got on his hands and knees by the front door and, as though he were following some unperceivable insect he began to crawl back through the hall and toward the stairs leading down to the kitchen and the servants' quarters. Goring, on tiptoe of excitement, kept right behind him. The grip on his revolver tightened as Story quietly opened the door at the foot of the stairs and entered the kitchen. It was windowless and situated in the center of the basement. There was a large table in front of the cooking range covered with sheets of newspaper and by the light from the torch Goring saw several roaches scurrying to safety with a rustle and clatter. After the eerie emptiness of the upstairs rooms, the kitchen with its table, two or three chairs, stepladder against the wall, gas range and roaches seemed occupied and he expected, any moment, a face to appear in one of the dark corners. But what kept him at a tense pitch was not the silence of the house; it was because of what he could see and feel in the attitude of Tench Story: The little shoemaker's eyes were shining like stars. Goring knew they were on the verge of some important discovery, some incongruous revelation.

For an instant or so he could hear the ticking of his own watch, and then he was galvanized by Story's complete absence of fear; the little man commenced to whistle one of his old-fashioned airs just as though he were out in the park. "They were here less than forty-eight hours ago," he said.

"Who were?" returned the reporter, recovering from the shock and giving utterance to the first words that came to his dry lips. "You mean, Durlenbach?"

Instead of answering, the shoemaker bent down and picked up a cigarette stub, examined it under his microscope, and said, as he threw it away again: "The fellow who smoked that Fatima, for one. There are finger prints and footprints everywhere. Looks like there were a half dozen of 'em."

He looked in the cupboards, the servants' rooms, the coal cellar, the furnace room, washed his hands under the tap, then went to the foot of the stairs. "Bring the light, Goring. Want to examine those bloodstains upstairs again."

The young reporter, impressed by the expression on Story's face, continued to speak in a subdued tone. "What bloodstains?"

Upstairs, in the hall, the little shoemaker took the light and pointed to a dark stain on the door rug. "See that!" He got on his knees, his sharp nose to the floor. "There it is again. See? Look at that—look at this! Made a kind of little splash, didn't it! Fallen from a height. Face or hand. Maybe a badly cut hand. Ah!" He pointed excitedly to a long scratch in the dust along the corridor. "That's proof enough."

"What?"

"Four men came in here and one of 'em was carried in. See that scraping mark where his foot dragged. There it is again. See it? Maybe he's as dead as home-brew—but he's still in this house somewhere, and I'm going to find him." The reporter suppressed a shiver. "Let's try the stairs again, Goring. Um, another bloodstain."

At that moment an unmistakable groan from somewhere below came up to them. Goring held his breath. The groan was repeated, but more weakly. "Thought so," said Tench Story. Regardless of all the noise he made, the little man hurried down the stairs and stood listening at the bottom. Then he called. "Hey, there! Hey!"

A low moan—it seemed, now, from somewhere upstairs—answered him.

"Where is it?" whispered Goring.

Story was tapping the panels of the kitchen stairway as though he expected to discover a secret room. Suddenly he stopped, bounded back into the kitchen, and threw the light above the door leading to the stairs. "Should have thought of that before," he said to himself. "Couple of chairs—and that stepladder—quick! In many of these old houses that closet up there is used to store anything from kindling wood to pots and pans, but at the present moment it contains a dying man, unless we can rush him to the hospital in time."

Goring, taller and stronger, mounted the ladder and opened the small, square door. A gagged and trussed-up man was lying there, his feet toward the entrance. He was

wearing tweed trousers, the sort of material usually preferred by Englishmen, brown shoes and spats. "Caton!" ejaculated the reporter.

"Can you get him down?" ordered Story. "Or d'you want Fera to help you?" He had found part of a candle, lit it, and waxed it to the table.

"I think I can manage." Between them they lifted the almost lifeless man to the floor, cut the cords which bound his arms and legs, removed the gag from his mouth, and tried to infuse some spark of life, animation, into the numbed body. He was, saw Goring, a man about forty-seven, with slight traces of silver in his dark hair. No marks of physical violence were perceptible, but his face was deathly, the growth of his beard accentuating his utter ghastliness. Even after they had released him, his arms and legs remained in the same position the cruel bonds had held them despite Goring's endeavor to massage them back to their normal position and freedom. Neither robbery nor outright murder appeared the object. Story was exploring the closet from which the man had been removed; there he found a quantity of blood and the cause for it, a broken china cup, its blue pattern crimsoned, and on which one of the gang had sustained a badly cut hand or wrist. "Caton, isn't he?" asked Goring.

"He is not," snapped the little shoemaker, stepping down. "Soak your handkerchief, anything, under that cold-water tap and bathe his face, his mouth." Even as he spoke he was running his nervous, prehensile fingers into the man's pockets. Not finding what he hoped to find, he went on to scrutinize his watch and cigar case. Then he opened the waistcoat, undid the shirt, collar and tie, noting the name of the maker of each, and the laundry marks; transferred his attentions back to the waistcoat, and, in a final effort, he pounced on the inside pocket. It was empty, but attached to the lining was the man's name and address. Tench Story rose with a muffled exclamation.

"Who is he?"

"Hammond Chester. The father of the young lady who wrote those letters you found in the pocketbook."

"What! Hammond Chester!" Goring was well acquainted with that name and had often seen photographs of him, although he had never actually met the well-known millionaire. He looked at the haggard, drawn features beneath him. "By Heaven! I believe it is Mr. Chester."

"Course it's Mr. Chester," retorted Story angrily. "Hammond Chester, of Tarrytown, whose daughter is one of the most attractive and popular débutantes of the season, whose collection of emeralds is the most famous in America." He eyed Goring coldly. "D'you get anything from that?" he inquired, almost sarcastically.

"You mean they——"

"That's just what I do mean. Nice, pleasant gentlemen, aren't they? They trapped him somewhere, drugged him, brought him here and—Goring, we'll need to move fast—mighty fast. Frank Innescourt Caton, Esquire, is after the Chester emeralds. Unless——" The little shoemaker closed his eyes thoughtfully and fell to humming one of his odd little tunes.

"Unless what?"

"Unless it's the girl. She's an heiress in her own right."

"But how do you know those letters were written by Miss Chester?"

Story opened his eyes and glared at the reporter with a good deal of scorn. "Because two and two make four. In each letter was some reference to Tarrytown. 'Glad you think the air of Tarrytown is delightful.' 'Dear Frank, Tarrytown seems deserted without you.' And in her last letter: 'Please try and forgive father if he calls on you and questions you about your social standing.' The shoemaker looked at the moaning figure below him. "Well, he did call—last Monday. And he got—this." His cursory eye noted the hour. "Jump to it! Out you go—front door. Call Fera—telephone hospital. Mr. Chester'll pull through with careful nursing." He was literally electric with inward excitement, his sympathies for the victim on the floor amounting to nil, his anxiety to pit all his mental powers against those of clever thieves so dominating him that he moved and spoke with the precision of a machine. To Alan Goring, hurrying up the stairs to obey, Tench Story at such moments was the epitome of scientific analysis and subtlety of reasoning combined with decisive instantaneous action. Glancing over his shoulder he saw him darting about here and there, his eyes luminous, his face masklike, examining through his miscroscope objects that seemed relatively unimportant.

When Sergeant Fera entered the kitchen the little shoemaker was standing on the ladder, his head and shoulders thrust into the closet which, had he not rescued him, would undoubtedly have been Hammond Chester's tomb. "Fera, he began," after he had descended, "this gentleman is Hammond Chester, the Tarrytown millionaire. Now get this straight! You were passing, you understand, and heard groans. You broke into the house and found the body trussed up and gagged in that closet. Report the matter to Inspector Wright, and get after that fellow Durlenbach whom you tracked down to that restaurant on Grand Street."

With a characteristic motion of his hand and arm the little shoemaker signified he conceded the whole affair from now on to no less an authority than Sergeant Fera. Then he sprang up the stairs and hurried away.

VI.

The rain hadn't abated and the thickening night had settled down like a heavy shroud over the city. Down Fifty-fourth Street the lamps were but circles of pale light of a limited radius trying to pierce the gloom. Faces, white and strained, sad and seemingly devoid of interest in anything, flitted by. Tench Story walked rapidly with quick, elastic little steps to the corner and was about to enter the tobacco store when he saw Goring coming out. "Nearest garage," he whispered, "fastest car; here—grab this!" Into the reporter's cold wet hand he thrust some money. "Wait here for me. I'll be telephoning."

He made two phone calls. One was to the Chester residence at Tarrytown, whence the butler informed him that Miss Chester had not yet returned from the city. A hurried conversation resulted with Mrs. Ingleton, the missing girl's aunt, much to that lady's distress. Story's second call was to the Municipal Building. Using the name of Inspector Wright and rapidly explaining the situation he got the clerk there to check off to him the late-afternoon marriage returns; the latter was still reading them out long after the little shoemaker had hung up and left the booth. Goring, a business-like-looking chauffeur and a low racing car were waiting outside the cigar store.

"Tarrytown! As fast as you can," Story said to the driver. "Take chances with anything. We'll stand by you. But"—and the muscles on his lean jaw were prominent—"no accidents. Haven't time for 'em. Twenty-five dollars if you make it in forty minutes."

The car shot forward, precipitating the shoemaker sidewise into the cushioned seat. "Guess he means to earn it," he said to Goring, settling back and pulling the rug well over his knees and legs. Goring knew enough not to arouse a finely tempered irritability by indulging his curiosity in a series of queries at a time like this; he remained silent. They were, he realized, hot on the scent of some dénouement, and he was content to wait until they arrived at Tarrytown. He concentrated his thoughts on Olive Chester and her lovable, girlish letters. It was a strange coincidence that her portrait had appeared in the afternoon *Courier* yesterday and that, all unwittingly, he had looked long upon that lovely face, suppressing a twinge of regret that her social position and wealth prohibited his meeting her. And there was, he recalled suddenly, to be a ball at the Ritz this evening in connection with the activities of the Junior League and Olive Chester was to be one of the performers in a special dance or tableau. She certainly was exceptionally beautiful to look upon.

It was a terrible night. The rain beat against the wind shield, whirled in through every aperture and chilled them to the bone; the spinning wheels splashed through puddles, sending up great geysers of muddy water; they skidded, rocked, and were thrown from side to side. No one spoke until they reached the outskirts of Tarrytown, then Tench Story curved his hands about his mouth and shouted to the driver. "Next crossing! Turn to left—take third road to right. Go uphill and stop at the large house near the top."

Mud-splashed and steaming, the car came to a stop opposite a dark, huge mansion set back fifty yards or so from the road. "Wait here!" was the little detective's command to the driver as he jumped out and hurried up the drive. The door was opened by the butler. "Mrs. Ingleton, please. I'm Mr. Story."

"Step this way, sir. Madame is expecting you."

They were ushered into a magnificent room and were met there by one of the most stately ladies Goring had ever seen;

he could, he decided, imagine no woman of forty-five or thereabouts more charming and delightful to the eye and for the first time the matchless beauty of pure white hair, fashionably coiffured and devoid of any form of ornamentation, struck him as an esoteric symbol of the attractiveness of advanced womanhood, appealing in every way. She looked from one to the other, an enchanting anxiety manifested on her face. "Mr. Story?"

The little man bowed.

"Be seated." Suddenly, her reserve, her command of poise, left her and she turned to Story with an impulsive gesture of entreaty. "Oh, I do hope nothing serious has happened. My brother is the kindest man in the world. He hasn't an enemy that I know——"

"Calm yourself, madam," assured Tench Story. "Your brother is safe, I think. It's your niece, Miss Chester, who is in danger."

She crushed the wisp of cambric between her fingers. "Olive?" she gasped. "What has happened to her?"

"We've come up here to find that out. Depends on what you have to tell us. Time is slipping by. Please remain calm and collected and answer as carefully as possible all my questions." As he spoke he was glancing—in that peculiar, furtive way of his—about the room and at various objects; but now he looked directly at her. "You informed me over the telephone a while ago that you had had a telegram from your brother last Monday."

"It is here," she said, handing him a telegram which she took from the inside of a book on a near-by table. Goring noted that her hand trembled, causing the telegram to rustle. Story read it through quickly and placed it in his breast pocket. "Brother expected to go to Savannah?" he asked.

"Yes. In connection with some business. He left last Monday afternoon. He really expected to go last week, but for some reason postponed it. We were not surprised however to get his wire saying he had changed his mind."

"We?"

"Olive and I."

"Didn't think of calling him at his office to make sure?"

"To make sure?" Her tone conveyed that she considered the question a little impertinent. "We have had no occasion to doubt Hammond," she answered. "He is too happy here to leave us, except when business duties force him."

"Yes, of course," agreed Story. "Quite understand that. Fact is, Mrs. Ingleton, your brother didn't go to Savannah at all. He was waylaid by a gang of crooks, drugged, and locked up in an empty house in New York." Her exclamation of horror made Goring clench his fists. "This telegram wasn't sent by Mr. Chester. It was sent either by Mr. Caton or Mr. Durlenbach, both of them, I understand, acquaintances of yours."

The color had left her cheeks. "But Mr. Caton and Mr. Durlenbach were here only this afternoon, seeing Olive," she said.

Story nodded and, looking at his watch, frowned at the hour. "Mr. Caton and Miss Chester," he told her abruptly, "were married at the Municipal Building late this afternoon!"

Goring's heart gave a leap, but his attention was captivated by Mrs. Ingleton. There was something admirable in the way she preserved her charm of dignity before them, two strangers to her; the intake of her breath was audible and her fingers tightened on her handkerchief. "Now, Mrs. Ingleton," continued the little criminologist without giving her time to respond to the startling announcement he had just made, "you must condone my indelicate procedure and do your best—at least for the time being—to focus all your faculties in the matter of helping us. Every minute is extremely critical!" He rose to his feet. "Mr. Caton, of course, had his hand in bandages, didn't he?"

Her affirmative nod brought a smile to his eyes.

"And Mr. Durlenbach? Short, thickset, heavy lower lip, scar on back of neck——"

"No," she contradicted. "He is very tall, well over six feet in height, and military looking."

Story gave a little shout. "Ah!" He exchanged a rapid glance with Goring. "Guess I jumped to the wrong conclusion this afternoon in the fruit store. That husky brute was one of the gang all right—but he wasn't Durlenbach."

"But the initials inside his hat," reminded Goring.

"Coincidence. We all make mistakes—and I guess that's one on me." All at once the annoyance caused by the discovery of

his error left his face and he spun round on his heel and faced Mrs. Ingleton again. "Did Caton," he pressed almost fiercely, "walk with a bit of a limp?"

"Yes."

"Slight build? Reddish hair? Little finger of left hand kind of doubled up—like this?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Ingleton. "He said it had been hit by a bullet during the war."

"Sure was hit by a bullet all right," said the little shoemaker, "but long before the war."

"He served in the war," she defended.

"If he did," said Story, "he wore a German uniform. Last time I heard of him was in 1914 and he went by the name of Von Schroder then. Very popular with the ladies and an expert jewel thief."

"I always thought he spoke with a slight German accent, but Olive said he was English."

"English nothing." Tench Story was exultant. "By Heaven!" he said to Goring, "we'll turn a pretty trick over to the police if we're in luck to-night. Now, Mrs. Ingleton, tell us all about this afternoon and how your niece came to go away with this Continental jewel snatcher."

"We were having tea," she said, with great difficulty, "in the library when——"

"Explicit, please. Who were having tea?"

"Mr. Caton, Mr. Durlenbach, Olive and I."

"Proceed."

"Mr. Caton was smoking a cigarette and teasing Olive about something—when all at once the rug burst into flames. Somebody shouted 'Fire!' and in an instant we were all rushing about, bumping into each other and getting in the way of the servants. Luckily we got it put out—and I must say that Mr. Caton was indefatigable and courageous, despite his injured hand."

Story was not solicitous for the health of the hero. "Well, I'll be busted! So that's how they worked it. The old game all over again." To Mrs. Ingleton, he said. "Notice anything peculiar about Durlenbach during the fire?"

"I don't remember. We were all so upset."

"You'll admit that Durlenbach wasn't as conspicuous as Caton in putting out the fire?"

"I really don't remember having seen him at all—now you mention it," said Mrs. Ingleton.

"For the simple reason he was elsewhere," said Story. "Where did your brother keep his emeralds?"

"They are usually kept in his safety-deposit vault downtown," said the poor lady, near the point of collapse. "On my instructions they were brought up here this morning for Olive to wear to-night at the Junior League ball. I locked them up in Hammond's private safe."

"Get your keys. We'll have a look at that safe even though the emeralds are gone. Hurry, please."

Goring followed them into Mr. Chester's study and watched Mrs. Ingleton set the combination and open the safe. From under a heavy bronze flower vase she took a small bunch of four keys and was about to unlock one of the safe drawers when Tench Story stopped her. "See those keys for a moment?" he requested. She handed them to him without a word, and he studied them minutely under his ever-ready microscope. "Are these keys always to be found under that flower vase?"

"No," she said. "I usually carry them on a chain fastened to my waist belt."

"So that Mr. Durlenbach," said the little man, "had no difficulty in taking an impression of them while his fascinating friend was amusing you with stories of his bravery during the late war! Now, Mrs. Ingleton, the emeralds." She bowed her head, her attractive, aristocratic bearing giving way to a meek obedience. Inserting a key she opened a drawer and, manifestly happy to prove her fears unwarranted, took out a large oblong velvet case and laid it on the table. Releasing the catch, she lifted the lid.

The detective's prognostications were only too true. The case was empty.

"They were all there this morning when I put them away," she said piteously.

Tench Story snatched up the keys and handed them and his microscope to Goring. His face was severe. "Look at that key. See tiny traces of putty on it?"

"Yes," said the reporter.

"Mrs. Ingleton, the fire in the library was deliberately started by Caton and while every one was trying to put it out Friend Durlenbach was up here opening the safe and using a facsimile key made from a prior impression of this one. When Caton ran

away with your niece this afternoon he had the emeralds in his pocket. And he'll get clean away with the blamed things if we don't stop him in time." He called Goring's attention to Mrs. Ingleton, who was beginning to waver unsteadily on her feet. "Watch she doesn't fall," he cried, pressing a bell.

"Oh, what can we do?" she sobbed, allowing Goring to help her to a chair. "This is simply terrible."

The butler entered. Story requested that he be shown Miss Chester's room at once, and on a sign from Mrs. Ingleton the butler led the way. There, in the sanctum of the young heiress, the little shoemaker found a clew that set him humming with delight. In one of Miss Chester's bureau drawers was a time-table. Nothing unusual about that, perhaps, except that it was folded back on a certain page. What captured Story's attention however was that a train leaving the Grand Central Station was underlined in pencil. The destination of that train was Chicago and the West.

When Tench Story reëntered the study his gray eyes, surrounded by a network of fine lines, were smiling. "Matters might have been much more serious," he told Mrs. Ingleton. "As it is, with a fair proportion of luck, I s'pose we may promise you the safe return of brother, niece, and emeralds before—as the witches say—the old clock strikes twelve. Anyway, you will mitigate the anxiety of a young lady and the embarrassment of your humble servant if you can arrange, my dear madam, to be at the Belmont Hotel not later than half past eight this evening. Think you can manage it?"

She nodded her head, weakly.

"All right. Jump to it, Goring. Guess we've got to hustle—with some heavy work at the end of our journey."

In the car, speeding back through the rain, the little shoemaker chuckled and dug his sharp elbow into Goring's ribs. "Got to hand it to 'em," he said. "They pulled off the job beautifully. The damned rascals!"

VII.

Tench Story marshaled his forces without the least confusion. One of Inspector Wright's best men had already boarded the train long before the gates were opened. The little man himself, with Goring and Inspector Wright, was waiting a little to one side of platform twenty-four. There was a bare chance, as he told the inspector, that they had changed their plans at the last moment and had decided to make their get-away by car. But being married to the heiress Caton would figure he had little to fear. He, anyway, was the man they wanted most.

At a quarter after eight the passengers for Chicago and points farther west began to make their way down the inclined platform to the train. From the distance Story's alert eye permitted no one to pass without close scrutiny, and Goring could see that he was keyed up to the highest pitch of nervous expectancy. Once he started and drew the inspector's attention to a tall figure of a man in a long ulster coat, carrying a suit case and hurrying down the platform. They allowed him to pass, but the little shoemaker was delighted. "We're on the right track," he punned, chuckling away.

The train was scheduled to leave at eight forty and it wanted but one minute to that time. The stream of passengers had subsided. A man, his wife and two children came hurrying through the gates and ran down the platform. Story glanced at his watch, his eyes narrowing. He was about to make a dive for the train and climb aboard when a little flurry of excitement before the gate preceded the entrance of a man and woman followed by a porter with two suit cases. The man's right hand was conspicuously bandaged. "That's him," whispered Story, and Inspector Wright sprang forward.

"Frank Caton!"

"Who the devil are you?" His hand went toward his hip pocket, but something hard pressing into his stomach stopped him.

"How dare you!" With a stamp of her pretty foot, Mrs. Caton flashed a pair of ravishingly angry eyes on the inspector. "We've got to catch that train."

"I think not," said the inspector. "It's not you're fault, ma'am."

Caton's hands were up. "You cursed fool!" he spluttered in a blaze of desperation. "You can't touch me. We're legally married."

"Then, Mr. Frank Caton, alias Wilhelm von Schroder, you'll answer to the charge of bigamy," put in Tench Story.

"That's a lie, damn you!"

"Also a felonious assault upon with intention to kill this young lady's father; rob-

bery of the Chester emeralds with your accomplice Durlenbach, and—look out!" Mrs. Caton screamed and was caught just in time by Goring to prevent her from falling. Inspector Wright, quick as a flash, put out his foot, tripped the flying Von Schroder while two policemen, disguised as porters, fell on him, pinioning his arms. Down the platform came the cry of "All aboard!" and the train slowly pulled out of the station as Von Schroder resigned himself to the inevitable arrest.

Tench Story, with that alacrity and precision for which, in part, he was famous, had already opened one suit case and was now rummaging about amidst the expensive lingerie that filled the other. "Anything on him?" he panted, looking at the inspector.

"Nothing but a gat and a flask."

The little shoemaker glanced in the direction of the departed train. "I knew that was Durlenbach," he meditated, half to himself. "Giving him the jewels was—clumsy. Place to hide 'em was in the girl's suit case. Still—effective all right." One of the porters had returned with a glass of water for the fainting and unfortunate Mrs. Caton. Story approached her. "Consider yourself a lucky young lady," he informed her, in that singularly dispassionate tone of his. "As the wife of a bigamist and international crook your position would be unenviable. Mrs. Ingleton is waiting at the Belmont to take care of you."

"My father?" she sobbed tremulously, her eyes glistening with tears.

Tench Story didn't spare her feelings. "In the hospital," he said.

"But is he—is he——"

"He will be all right again in a few days, Miss Chester," said Goring with infinite compassion and adoring eyes. He was on his knees beside her, offering her a glass of water. The little shoemaker took delight in giving him a sharp kick on the ankle.

"Take Miss Chester—confound it! Mrs. Caton, I mean—over to the Belmont. See you there in ten minutes." He walked over to Inspector Wright. "Got all the dope you need?" he inquired.

"All except the emeralds," suggested the inspector, a trifle maliciously.

Story motioned with his hand and arm to him, exactly as he had done earlier in the evening to Sergeant Fera. "Apply to Lieutenant Overton for the emeralds first thing in the morning. Unless you'd like to go up to Albany for 'em to-night. Good night, inspector—and don't forget. My name out of it."

"Pleasure," returned the hard-faced inspector, imitating, with a show of disapproval, the manner of his little master.

The little shoemaker went at once to the telegraph office and sent two telegrams. One was to Carl Durlenbach, and ran:

> Missed train. Wait for me. Albany.
> SCHRODER.

The other he sent to Lieutenant Overton:

> A tall, clean-shaven, fair-haired German named Durlenbach will be reading my telegram the same time you are reading this. He plans to jump off at Albany if you don't jump him off before he gets there. We have Caton. You get the emeralds.

He hesitated before signing the telegram, then wrote down the name: "Wright."

VIII.

It was almost midnight when Tench Story heard the ring of his doorbell. He put down the book he was reading—it was Pasteur's "Theory of Fermentation"—then rose and admitted Alan Goring. The young reporter was flushed and perspiring with his own exertions. For a second, that latent power suggesting itself through the calm exterior, the smoldering pupils, the puissant hands and fingers of the brilliant little criminologist seated before him, checked the reporter's enthusiasm. He was always conscious of a deference due this queer, whimsical, terrifying little man. But now his earnestness swept through and proclaimed itself in the waving of a newspaper and a voice that was somewhat boisterous. "Seen the *Courier?*"

The shoemaker signified he had not seen the *Courier.*

"Well, they've got the whole blessed gang!" shouted Goring. "Thanks to you we've made another scoop. Read it."

"Prefer to hear it from you," was the murmur.

Goring lurched into a chair and began:

> CLEVER CAPTURE OF INTERNATIONAL JEWEL THIEVES.
>
> Smart Work by Inspector Wright and Detectives Fera and Overton. Chester Emeralds Quickly Recovered.
>
> Last night, while Lieutenant-Detective James Overton of the Fifty-third Street police station

was making a spectacular arrest of Carl Durlenbach at Albany, Sergeant Angelo Fera of the Italian squad captured two men who answered to the names of Roland Drogher and——

Story interrupted: "Ah! the fellow whose initials I saw in his hat at Fogerty's fruit store. An ugly brute. Go ahead."

Goring continued:

—and Emil Stanzer, on the Jersey ferryboat. Earlier in the evening, Inspector Charles Wright, after a desperate struggle, succeeded in capturing the ringleader, a man called Frank Caton, alias Wilhelm von Schroder, known in Paris, London, and Vienna as one of the most daring of all jewel thieves. All were wanted in connection with the cleverly conceived robbery at the house of Hammond Chester of Tarrytown. Following certain information he received early yesterday morning, Inspector Wright lost no time in rounding up the——

"That'll do," Story broke in, rather wearily. "So they made a clean-up, did they?" His countenance brightened a little. "Guess we'll give Inspector Wright credit, and he's got two smart detectives in Overton and Fera."

"But, see here," defended Goring, "the man whom Hammond Chester ought to thank is——"

"Pspt! Forget it. Get all the mental exhilaration I need out of it and a percentage of physical satisfaction in proving my deductions are more or less correct. I want nothing more." He stretched his arms. "Hungry? I am. If that servant of mine hasn't gone to bed maybe he'll serve us a little something to eat." He called, "Supper ready, Chuncin Wing?"

A voice replied from the kitchen.

"Just a minute," insisted Goring. "How are the chances of getting a line on some of this stuff you pulled off to-day?"

"What d'you want to know?"

"To start with, how did that stain get on that pocketbook I found—and how did it come to be left in the taxi?"

Story laughed. "About that," he said, "I don't know any more than you do. Let's go over it. According to Mr. Chester, Caton—let's call him that—offered to prove his credentials if the millionaire would go with him to the National Bank. All Hammond Chester can remember after he got into a closed car with Caton and Durlenbach is smoking a cigar which the former gave him, then feeling dizzy, and—all right. Drugged. What they did with him then is immaterial. What we know is that about ten that same Monday night when the way was clear they took him to that house on Fifty-fourth Street. In shoving him in the closet—a fiendish piece of business—Caton cut his wrist on a broken cup. It bled pretty freely; you saw the blood all along the hall.

"My impression is that he fainted dead away in the taxi, when they left, that he fell forward before Durlenbach or Drogher could catch him, and as he did so his pocketbook dropped out on the floor. In their anxiety not to arouse the driver's attention they thought of nothing but how to get Caton out and into their apartment, failing to notice the pocketbook. Fifteen minutes later you found it."

"Trod on the thing," said Goring, "as I was getting out."

"All right. Now then—when you reported that empty house," went on Story, "my suspicions were aroused. At first I thought that Caton was the victim, but the moment I saw the type of man trussed up in that closet I knew I had the cart before the horse. When I discovered he was Hammond Chester—the rest was easy. Caton was the ringleader of a gang and their object was the Chester emeralds. Phoned up the Chester residence at Tarrytown, found out what I wanted to know, that Mr. Chester hadn't been seen since Monday, and that his daughter had gone into New York with Caton and Durlenbach. Phoned up the Municipal Building and discovered they had been married late that afternoon. You know the rest. All except a lucky clew I found in Miss Chester's room. In all innocence the poor girl had marked the time of a train she and Caton were to take for the coast."

"But how on earth did you find the address of that empty house on Fifty-fourth Street?" asked Goring.

"Oh, that!" The little shoemaker smiled. "Figured there was something in that pocketbook that Caton was kind of anxious to get hold of and willing to pay money for. Couldn't have been the letters, I thought, 'cause there was nothing of any value in 'em and the addresses had all been carefully torn off. That left the card on which had been written the address of that restaurant down on Grand Street, and the piece of paper with its series of numbers. The first was easy, but when you went down there they threw you off by saying they'd never heard of Durlenbach.

"The other message bothered me. Sort of clung to the notion that it meant an address as well. Anyway, I was sure that that piece of paper was what Friend Caton was after. All right. Why did he want to get hold of it? Several reasons, maybe. Might be a code—a message—which, on being deciphered would get him in a mess of trouble. So I concentrated on that.

"If you recall the numbers"—he paused a moment, knitting his brow—"91421 was the most prominent. Also the same hand that wrote that Grand Street address wrote those numbers. I couldn't get the meaning of that expression, 'There is nothing in it.' But the number 91421 was repeated twice, and the second time it was 91 dash 4 dash 21. The numerical error of 10 couldn't be ignored, either. In a code like that it was obvious and was put in there for a definite reason.

"All right. Believing it meant an address of some sort I thought first of No. 914 West, or East, Twenty-first Street. That was no good. Then I went to the New York directory. Led me no place. Finally I grabbed the telephone book, looked up page ninety-one, the fourth column, the twenty-first line, and wrote down the name and address. Seemed kind of promising. But the error of ten still remained unaccounted for. So I just counted ten lines up and ten lines down, gave you the three addresses and sent you off on the chance it might prove something."

The reporter's face was a study.

"Moment you mentioned an empty house, I knew the meaning of that expression, 'There is nothing in it,' and I realized I had hit the nail on the head." He stopped. "Which reminds me I've got to finish that little actress' shoes by morning."

He settled back in his chair and closed his eyes. "This is about what happened," he continued. "Monday morning, Mr. Chester phoned Caton he was coming to see him. Caton knew well what it was all about, for Miss Chester had already warned him in her letter. It began to look as if his game was up. So he arranged a plan to do away with Hammond Chester, grab the emeralds, marry the girl—a fortune in itself—and make a clean get-away. It's my belief he wanted to avoid murder and that as soon as he and Durlenbach got clear, this fellow Drogher was to release Mr. Chester. Anyway, a place had to be found in which to hide him, and the empty house on Fifty-fourth Street solved the problem. The idea of having it communicated to him in that way—by telephone page, column, and line, plus ten lines—was undoubtedly the genius of Caton; but the handwriting was Drogher's, as we have since proved. Drogher possibly slipped him that note while Mr. Chester was up there in their apartment.

"Well, they got him down into their specially hired car, drugged him, and drove round until it was dark. Guess that's about how they worked it, eh? The name of Durlenbach struck me as kind of familiar, and when Mrs. Ingleton described him and told me that Caton had a doubled-up little finger on his left hand I woke up. There's an account of 'em in that little volume up there on the shelf."

He opened his eyes, and reaching into his breast pocket threw across an envelope. "Here's your two hundred and fifty dollars reward," he said; "less the ten I gave old Tim Fogerty. S'pose you've spent a load of it already. In fact you have, let us say, imaginatively invested it in a new suit of clothes, a new hat, tie, and maybe a walking cane—the English touch—to go calling on the lovely Mrs. Frank Caton next Sunday."

Goring burst out laughing.

Chuncin Wing called to say that supper was ready. "And we are ready for it," declared the little shoemaker, jumping to his feet. "This servant of mine is some cook. Ever tasted that most delightful of bouillis, shark's-fin soup? Nothing like it. Ever eaten a salmi of wild duck, spiced with samshu? Ought to try that some time. Chinese cuisine? Nothing like it."

AT LAST DISCOVERED

JUDGE KENESAW MOUNTAIN LANDIS, pooh-bah and lord high commissioner of organized baseball, knows now where to find the genuine "meanest man in the world." He is the Chicago citizen who, when his little boy asked him for a birthday present, affectionately replied: "Well, I'll tell you, Morris; we'll get your mother to wash a place on the window so you can see the street cars go by."

Compassion

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "Mute Tongues," "The Avails of the Fraction," Etc.

The prison guard consults his own heart.

THE strident note of the penitentiary siren, warning the sparsely settled countryside that a convict had escaped, smote the ear of old Mart Dalby as he sat at the door of his cabin on the densely wooded mountainside watching the dusk change to the dark of night.

Except when illness chained him to his bunk, every night for over five years he had thus watched, thus waited for the sound of the siren. He was prepared, rehearsed, even to the words he now muttered as he thrust the pipe in his pocket:

"Might get this far. I'll be ready!"

Every night, when his vigil was done, he had carried the chair into the house and lit the tin bracket lamp. Except on the first day of every month. On that day he brought the chair in, but he did not light the lamp. He lit, instead, a small bull's-eye lantern. It was the first act in his rehearsal for the night that was to-night. Methodically—like seamen in a fire drill—he went through the routine. First he slipped the secret catches which made two small doors at the bottom of a series of wall cupboards act as one, so that when he pulled open the upper the lower came with it, admitting his body after he had slid back the compartments inside. Disappearing down a short ladder within, he emerged with a large enamel bucket and a basket. The former he filled with cool water from the near-by spring, the latter with food. With these he disappeared again into the nether recesses of the cupboard, taking great care, as he drew in the bucket, lest any water should spill and leave a telltale wet mark on the clean pine woodwork. Once more he descended, this time with a thick, clean quilt.

He closed the cupboard, went into his small bedroom, took from a secret place some bills and small change and placed them in the pocket of a suit of clothes, neither old nor new, which hung in the closet, suspenders already attached to the trousers. On a hook beside the suit hung a shirt and underwear. Shoes, with socks stuffed into them, were in a covered box at the bottom of the closet. There were other clothes and shoes in the closet, making these special garments inconspicuous.

For an hour he lay on his bed in the dark, staring at the ceiling. There was no use stirring for an hour because the little cabin, almost completely concealed in the dense growth of oak, laurel, madrona, was far up the long slope of the mountain that shadowed the penitentiary upon the north.

Twice, drawing the slide of his dark lantern, he looked at his old, worn, faithful open-faced nickel watch that had ticked for him in the frozen north, in the shimmering heat of desert spaces, in pits and shafts of mines. The hour was up. He arose, thrust an old six-shooter in his pocket, seized the lantern and left the cabin, its door ajar.

Old Dalby had not been young when, accompanied to its grim portal by two friends, now long dead, he had entered that penitentiary to begin a sentence of twenty-five

years. Though good behavior had shortened this term, he was an old man when next he saw the earth's horizon.

But there had been this mountainside, visible to him from several points in the prison grounds—mountains, timber, the blue sky he knew and loved. And it was to the mountainside he bent his trembling steps in the new suit, the new shoes, carrying the little bundle of precious relics. And from that mountainside, far up, he looked out upon the world and knew himself afraid!

In a bank in a distant town he had had a small nest egg; and this was now grown to a modest competence. With his own hands he built him the little cabin, and cunningly contrived the wall cupboards leading to a small, square, blind cellar. Then, needing something to do, he led a burro home, bought a pick, shovel and pan and fared forth in good weather into rocky gulches and scratched about, making himself believe he was still a prospector.

Once a week he returned as a visitor to the penitentiary, always with tobacco, candy, odd bits of comforts for prison friends. And to these—the trusted ones—he told of the harborage on the mountainside.

Nightly, for five years, all that the prison had left of Martin Dalby watched the sun gleams go out on the roofs and walls of the penitentiary and the darkness come. Once there had been a jail break, swiftly suppressed. Once a prisoner had been smuggled off in an automobile. Once a convict got over the wall and ran gallantly, in broad daylight, over the moor—until he was shot down. Now, to-night, at a right hour, the siren had blared its warning. Perhaps—*perhaps*——

The old man followed his zigzag path down through the woods, slowly, stopping every few moments to listen, cupping his hand to his own good ear. It was a hard track to follow—at night. One fleeing, desperately intent on finding the haven of the cabin, might easily go astray——

No! There was a sound on the trail, not far. There was cautious approach. Old Dalby stepped aside into the brush and crouched—and waited.

A figure appeared, burly, catlike. Dalby strained his old eyes, thinking the figure striped. As it passed him he turned a tiny ray of light upon its back—and was sure. He whistled softly, and the figure stopped—petrified.

"It's all right, pard," he whispered reassuringly, and stepped out into the trail.

The burly figure turned. The two met and peered into each other's faces.

"I'm Mart Dalby," said the old man; "lookin' for the cabin up here, be yer?"

"Yes," whispered the striped man. "Seen any one?"

"Nobuddy. You're all right," answered Dalby. "Foller me. Don't step on no dry sticks."

He groped his way uphill to the little cabin, hearing, close behind him, the cautious tread of the escaped convict. They entered the cabin and shut the door. Then old Dalby shot a small ray of his lantern into the face of the man.

"Don't know yer, but you're welcome. Who give yer the tip?"

"A man named—named Ransome," replied the convict nervously. He was peering about in the dark.

"Ransome? Don't know him. He got it from some one else, hey?"

"Yes, I believe he did."

"Didn't say, hey? Wasn't from an old lifer, he didn't say—old 'Hi' Weston?"

"Yeah, guess it was," replied the fugitive readily. "How's your windehs? Can you risk a little light in here?"

"Better not," replied Dalby. "They're blinded, but there's chinks. The guards must be out scourin' the hills. I'll get yer safe, yo' poor devil."

"What you goin' to do with me, partner?"

"I got a blind cellar—no door, just them lockers, there." He flashed a beam at the wall. "Good air, water, grub—till the search is over and eve'ything safe. Then—a suit o' clothes, wig, hat, shoes, money—and I'll slip you 'long through the hills to a station far off."

"Fine!" Greedily the man had glanced about during the brief moment of play of the lantern's light. "Get me out of the way quick. There's another man on this mountainside. I heard him a ways back. But I gave him the slip."

He listened intently. "Something stirring! Hear it?"

"Mebbe," said the old man uncertainly. "Quick—in here! Backwards, down a ladder." This as he slipped the catches and opened wide the locker doors. "Dry and clean—and safe. If he comes in and sets

a while you stay still—dead still. When he goes, I'll scrape my chair, and mebbe stomp. Then you kin move. When it's safe I'll open up and talk to yer."

The convict had backed down the ladder. Old Dalby closed the doors and reslipped the secret catches, after drawing forward the compartments. One searching the cabin would find nothing but small lockers filled with odds and ends.

Again he walked forth with his lantern, for it must be made to seem to the guard —if guard it was—that the old discharged convict, the hermit of the mountain, was wary of intruders, having heard the siren.

He caught sounds—slight cracklings. He flashed on the bull's-eye—fully; and shot its ray hither and thither. A figure stepped forth from the dense wood and hurried to the old man.

"*Dowse it!*" said the newcomer in a low, intense voice, seeking to get hold of the lantern.

The old man complied, but in the moment's interval before he shot the shutter, he flicked the beam upon the newcomer and saw the familiar uniform of a penitentiary sentinel.

"Come on!" whispered the guard, making for the cabin. Old Dalby followed him in slowly, and closed the door.

"Thought I heard some one in the bresh," he said as he turned on the light again and surveyed the newcomer furtively. "I was skeered it was the escaped convict. Heared the blasts, o' course. You thought he come this way, did ye?"

Craftily he was probing the knowledge of the guard—whether he knew this was a place that would be friendly to the chance fugitive. "Well, I ain't seen nor heared anybody—till you come." He felt anxious to be rid of the guard who, he knew, would not rely upon his word. "Want to take a look round?" The old man struck a match and approached the wall lamp.

"No, *don't* light it, friend," said the guard in a low voice of alarm. "He's up here—not far."

"Well, then, a little light'll lure him to the cabin—if that's what he's lookin' for." In the dark the craftiness on old Dalby's face could not be seen by the guard. "If he creeps up to the door you kin nab him." He turned on the lantern.

The guard snatched it from his hand, and closed the shutter. "*No,* I say! He's close, I tell you. He must be. Don't talk so damn——"

"*Who's* close—damn it!" cried old Dalby, bewildered, his nerves breaking.

"The guard—the *guard!*" whispered the man hoarsely. "*I* ain't a guard—just got his clothes on, to get across the flat and past the settlement."

"*You* a prisoner?" "Old Man" Dalby's hands shook. Excitement—horror—nerved him. He snatched back the lantern and turned its light upon the seeming guard, who—to satisfy him and get that cursed light off again—looked into the lantern, raised his hands, bared his ankles, ripped open his coat and showed prison underwear. Old Dalby knew these marks, these signs. This was indeed a prisoner—and one who had known the horrors of solitary confinement, and worse.

"God!" muttered the old man, turning off the light, shrinking down into a chair. He covered his face pitifully with his hands and wept.

The convict crept up to him. "They said you had a place—'Old Man' Weston did. I wouldn't have made the break except for that. I thought if I got across into the woods—at dark—— I framed it careful. There was McPherson. I guess he come to the pen since you left. Mebbe not. He had the right place on the wall. I got kind of friendly with him—quite a while. Tonight I brought him up a message when he was just steppin' out of his sentry box to make the pace to the next. He lemme come up. Just gettin' dark. Nobody could see me shove him back in. I made him strip off his suit, holdin' his own gun on him. Hell of a time gettin' my stripes off and puttin' his clothes on, with only one free hand. He pretty near snatched the gun once. I had him gagged so he couldn't holler. I figured mebbe there was somethin' to tie him with in the sentry box—but nothin' worth a damn; and I got over the wall and lit safe, knowin' he'd get loose quick and give the alarm.

"Damn him! He didn't go down inside. He give the alarm, all right—must of pulled the gag out pretty quick. But he follered me—yeah, right over the wall. Must of, for I heard him doggin' me when I got into the woods. Got more wind than what I've got, friend. I had to leave the trail and take to the brush before I got halfway up."

"How'd you know how to come—without

no trail?" asked Dalby, peering down into the man's face.

"Stars!" promptly replied the convict. "Studied the stars over the place in the wall where I seen your cabin smoke once—when I got a look. Mountain man myself—Cassidy's my name. Felt around, hopin' McPherson would get lost—for a while—till I could beat him here. I've beat him all right—for a while. Want to know, mebbe, do yer, whether I'm in wrong or right—guilty or not?"

There was a harsh catch in the whispering voice of Cassidy. For old Weston, hearing this man contemplated taking the life-and-death chance, had managed only to convey to him a few words: "Mountainside cabin—place to hide you." And he did not know if he would be welcome.

Old Mart Dalby put out his hands in the dark and felt over the body of the broken man. "No," he said in a tremulous voice "Don't tell me. Don't make no difference. You a lifer?"

"Yes," whispered Cassidy.

"And plumb grievin' for the air?"

"An' the woods!" the man added hoarsely. "I'll go clear to the other side of the earth—for free woods!"

"You *would* 'a' ben welcome," said the old man sadly. Whereat the other clutched him.

"*Would* have been!" he exclaimed in dismay. "Ain't *now?* What do you mean?"

"Too late! He's here!"

"Not McPherson—not——" Mechanically, Cassidy wiped starting sweat from his forehead.

"He come up the trail. I seen him from cover in the brush—seen the stripes—thought it was you—the escaped man. Brought him in. He never give himself away. No light—couldn't look him over or I'd of seen he was no prisoner. God!"

"Where is he, friend?"

"In where you would have been, down through the lockers there—down in the secret cellar. Now! Right now!"

"He hasn't got no gun," whispered Cassidy. "I got his gun." Fumbling in the unfamiliar pocket, he drew out an automatic.

"You wouldn't kill him, would you?" asked old Dalby curiously.

"No!" was the reply. "I killed a man once. Ten years ago. He ought to have died—actin' the way he done to my wife." He covered his face with his hands. "God help me for it. It ain't right. But—yes, I'd do it again, damn him! But I won't kill no *man.* McPherson, he's a guard and a stool pigeon, mebbe. But he's a *man.* Look how he come after me—plumb down that wall, takin' a big risk of his neck. I don't want to kill no *man.*"

"You can get off quiet. I got clothes—clothes just like a ordinary man—business man, like. Shoes, hat, everything. Give you a gun, too, as if you was huntin' in the hills. Whiskers, if you want. Anyhow a wig. Nobuddy is goin' to know you. Poor devil!"

The lifer! Woods—air—it was all he wanted, this wreck of a man, in for something—something concerning his womenfolks, he had said. Old Man Dalby knew that longing to crawl away—away into the sunlit spaces. He thought only of Cassidy.

Not so Cassidy. Cassidy thought of other things—other things beside the goodly light and air. He thought of the dank smell of stone—of old Dalby, pent again.

"He's here," said Cassidy. "You showed him all you got. You got to turn him loose even if they don't find him. It's the pen for you again—and die in it!"

"How old be you?" asked Dalby.

"Thirty-five," replied Cassidy.

"Seventy-three, I am," whispered the old man. "I've had five years out—me and the li'le old burrer—old, pretty nigh, as I be, I reckon. We done seen a heap of hills hereabouts in that time. And glimpses of the sea, too, from some of them high p'ints. I reckon we're pretty near ready to die anyhow. I ain't as well as I oncet was. I get turrible aches, and can't eat nothin'. Better let me fix you up, son, and you hop along."

Cassidy thought of a woman—one still alive, pale, silent—distant she was to the man's mind's eye. A repentant, grieving woman. A hopeless woman—and her child. He had braved death twice for this chance. It was a good chance; for the wit of a lifetime, used deliberately, night after night, in this cabin, had enabled old man Dalby to plan well for the safety of some poor soul—some lifer taking the hazard of the gun-mounted wall. Cassidy thought long, fighting with tooth and nail the yearning passions that gripped him. He knew the dank smell of stone—and what it would do to Dalby.

His heart beat, sick, with the struggle.

"I'd like to," he panted out. "Maybe I oughter. But I can't, old man. I can't! I can't pull you down out of this. I kin smell the bay trees through the door, out there in the night. God, ain't it sweet! No, I can't. I can't. Bring him out. I'm ready to go back with him!"

The "him" referred to, seen in the minds of the whispering men at the bottom of the blind cellar, was really standing on the ladder, his ear thrust against the thin pine locker door.

He had a gun in his hand, and no thought but to have to use it. For he knew that Mervyn Cassidy, lifer, desperate—who indeed so desperate as such a one, with the tang of the sweet air of freedom in his flared nostrils?—Cassidy would take no chances when it came to opening the locker.

There was a Mrs. McPherson and a young McPherson, too, whom the guard saw every two weeks—and hoped to see again. And the sweat had poured from his face as he stood there on the ladder while he listened to the colloquy of Cassidy and Old Man Dalby.

And when Cassidy made his decision he drew a long, slow breath—like the breath of life come back. And something told him, with the voice of a new conviction, that if prison walls harden they soften, too. For sorrow is sorrow, wherever it finds a man. And it does its work well.

McPherson's big fist thrust out the locker cover, bursting the catch. But he was afraid of the effect of surprise, of sudden fright. So he said—perforce, "You're lookin' into a gun, men. Don't move!"

Holding to the upper edge of the locker above, he put his knee to the lid below and forced it, clambering out and standing near them, the gun still in his hand.

"Old man," he said, "you get up and raise your hands—I can see 'em. And go light that lamp."

There was no word from the two he confronted—just their breathing. Dalby rose and obeyed him.

In the light, blinding to them all after the long dark, they peered squintingly at each other.

Then Cassidy said: "Your gun's in my pocket, Mac." Curiously, he asked, "Where'd you get that other one?"

"I run plumb into an outside sentry, told him who I was and I was on your trail. And he flipped me one of his automatics in a jiffy. So you see you didn't have me. Not quite so soft, huh?"

"You think so?" said Cassidy, slyly. "Mebbe I didn't know you had a gun. How could I? But don't you never think I'd have let you out of there till I *knew!* Just one thing saved you, Mac—the old man. I'm lettin' you go. Now you let him!"

"And I'm tellin' you, Cassidy," returned the guard—for pride still burned in him, "that you'd never have captured me—not alive, anyhow—if you'd talked any different than you did. I heard every word you said—from the start!"

"All right," said the escaped lifer quietly. "Take me back. And don't blow on the old man, now will you? Be a sport!"

"I won't blow on him, Cassidy," promised the guard. He threw his gun on the table and turned to Dalby, white, crouched down on a wooden stool. "Get out the duds!"

Mervyn Cassidy, a keen man in the prime of his days of freedom, gave the guard one piercing glance. "You dassen't!"

"The suit, the shoes, the hat, the wig—the whole shootin' match," persisted McPherson. And like a man in a dream old Dalby limped slowly to his closet.

Cassidy flung himself at the feet of the guard, weeping brokenly. "You don't dare, Mac! You can't trust the word of a convict, can you?"

"*Some,* I guess," replied McPherson. His eye roved the table—for tobacco. "If you'd ruther go back to your cell than send the old man there—though he was safe from me, not that you knew it, of course—well then, I guess I'm safe from you. We all got good reason to keep our mouths shut, ain't we? Me, I'll be on my way in these stripes of yours; and when I get back—about tomorrow night—they'll still be scourin' the country for a man in a prison sentry's uniform, with a shaved head. Maybe I'm throwin' the government down, but"—he spoke confidentially, almost apologetically—"I was just bluffin' you, Cassidy, a minute ago when I claimed you couldn't have got me. You could have croaked me—or penned me in like a rat till I starved. Government sure ought to let a man say thank you for his life!"

More stories by Mr. Solomons in early issues.

The Cap Comes Back

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "A Word for John Lawton," "According to the Dope," Etc.

Some men are brilliant in flashes—others excel in stubborn perseverance; horses are like that, too.

"CAP" WHITLEY'S exact age was a secret between him and his Maker. The hundreds who exchanged greetings of one kind or another with him at the race tracks day by day might hazard a guess regarding it, but it is safe to say that not one of them—even the old-timers who ought to know—would have taken the short end of an eight-to-one bet that his guess was right within twenty years.

There was no doubt but that the Cap was very, very old. Unimpeachable records of turf happenings proved that he had been a prominent owner of thoroughbreds in the heyday of Jerome Park. His horse Whistling Boy won the Centennial Handicap at Saratoga in 1876, and veteran horsemen would have told you that the Cap was no chicken even then. But accurate data on the Cap's age decidedly were not to be had. One had to be satisfied with estimates, and these ranged between sixty, which was absurd, even though the Cap looked no older than that, and ninety, which of course couldn't be so with the Cap as spry as he was.

Maybe you know Cap Whitley yourself by sight, having had him pointed out to you at one of the tracks, or perhaps you can recognize him from this description: A long, big-boned, meagerly fleshed figure, almost military in its erectness. An eagle beak, a chin like a snow plow, a drooping white mustache, black eyes sparkling beneath shaggy brows, lean, seamed cheeks tanned to the hue of mahogany, longish but evenly trimmed silver hair. Always a black sack suit, freshly pressed, spotless and fitting like a drug clerk's bottle wrapping. Always a high standing collar, thin black bow and stiff-bosomed shirt. Always a wide-brimmed hat of black felt. Always broad-toed, heavy-soled shoes, shining like mirrors. Always carrying himself with courtly, old-fashioned dignity. A striking figure, to put it in a word or two; a grand old Roman; a venerable survivor of the older, more picturesque days of the turf.

The Cap had been retired from active participation in racing for years. That is to say, he no longer campaigned a stable of horses. His retirement had not been accomplished suddenly, for the Cap was no man to do anything hurriedly. Rather it was a gradual process which synchronized with the disintegration of his stable as one

by one his horses grew too old to race. He bought no new horses as the members of his string disappeared from the turf, and, when the last one was gone, the Cap was through, and the familiar carmine blouse and white cap of his jockeys were seen no more.

This method of quitting the game naturally led to much conjecture on the part of the regulars at the tracks as to the state of the Cap's finances. The logical assumption was that he must be broke. From the viewpoint of the dyed-in-the-wool racegoer no man who had ever raced horses would stop doing it—while he lived—for any other reason than because he could no longer afford to keep a stable. The Cap, they decided, who had always bet 'em far, wide and handsome, must have gone for his bundle in the betting ring. A sad case, truly; but why hadn't the old fool shown sense enough to quit while he was ahead of the game?

To this impression the Cap himself lent color. There's a saying on the turf to the effect that medicine can be found for every other disease but playing the horses, and in a way the Cap proved the truth of it. Though his colors appeared no longer on the tracks the Cap continued to visit the race courses every day, and he continued to bet.

His betting, however, was a far different thing from what it had formerly been. In fact, suave Jerry Walker, then making one of the biggest books in the East, all but fell off his high stool when, a few days after Spanish Lass, the last of the Cap's string, had broken down hopelessly during the running of a race at Sheepshead Bay, the Cap sauntered up and gravely handed him a two-dollar bill with a murmured request that it be accepted as a wager on a two-to-one favorite.

"Hey?" ejaculated Jerry, who more than a few times had taken five-thousand-dollar bets from the Cap. He held out the bill, examining it as though it were a curio. Then he recollected himself. "All right, Cap," he sang out cheerfully. "Whatever you say. King Henry—four against two," he called to his sheet writer, and the career of Cap Whitley as a two-dollar better had begun.

Thereafter two dollars remained the Cap's standard bet. He never increased the amount, and turf custom prevented his lowering it. As with Jerry Walker, other big bookmakers were mildly stunned when the Cap first sprang the two-dollar racket on them. But like Jerry Walker they ended by taking the bet—and the other similar ones that followed. They usually discouraged piker players, but somehow their regular standards didn't seem to apply to the Cap. He wasn't a piker; he was an institution, and, if two-dollar play had suddenly become his speed, who were they to deny him the privilege of maintaining a gait that suited him?

So, broke or not and retired though he may have been, the Cap continued to be on hand every afternoon that the bugle called them to the post—North, South, East or West, wherever they were running and whatever the weather—as well dressed, as complacent and as genial as ever, making his two-dollar bets with as much astuteness and caution as he displayed in placing his four-figure wagers of other years, exchanging nods with his army of acquaintances, but following generally the solitary course that had been his portion since those of his generation had passed under the wire in the stake race of life.

Murray Lewis—who had once been Moritz Levy, Jr.—was a wise guy, a smart young feller. All the Lewises—and the Levys—were immensely proud of him; more so than they were of any other member of the tribe who was consistently bringing home the bacon. For Murray had not succeeded in getting his out of the relatively easy marts of commerce. On the contrary, he had tackled one of the toughest games in the world and had emerged from the struggle on top of the heap.

Starting as a youth of twenty with a meager bank roll of about two hundred dollars, Murray had in seven years knocked horse racing for a row of furlong posts. Through a fortunate admixture of good luck and good judgment he had succeeded in running his original capital up into four figures in his first season on the turf, and the next year he quit guessing them to become a bookmaker.

Of course, there's no such thing as a bookmaker any more. The law distinctly prohibits bookmaking or pool selling in most of the States where racing still flourishes. It recognizes in New York State, however, the right of citizens to make

friendly wagers, and any citizen who is careless enough to go to the track unaccompanied by a friend with whom to bet can usually find some accommodating soul like Murray Lewis who is willing to overlook the conventions and enter into friendly relations with a stranger—as long as the stranger is willing to put up his money.

So by meeting all comers according to the approved custom Murray Lewis had prospered until in the gossip of the Lewis-Levy family his holdings were estimated at "a hundert t'ousand cash at *least*." Murray himself said nothing, but the fact remained that he rode back and forth to the tracks in a ten-thousand-dollar limousine, employed a cashier, a couple of clockers and three or four runners at generous salaries, possessed jewelry, clothing and similar appurtenances of wealth in abundance, and took any bets that the heaviest plungers handed him without turning a hair.

In person Murray was small, thin, slightly stoop shouldered, and ferret faced. If his relatives were proud of him, it was as nothing compared with the pride he had in himself. That in Murray Lewis' opinion Murray Lewis was just about the cleverest young gent that had ever stepped down the pike was plainly disclosed by the self-satisfied smirk he habitually wore, the supercilious, overbearing air he adopted toward even the most consequential of his customers, and the flood of wise talk and biting sarcasm that flowed almost constantly from the corner of his thin-lipped mouth.

To Murray Lewis the traditions of the turf meant nothing. So far as he was concerned all events preceding the day that he had first stepped through a track gate and cashed his first bet were to be disregarded. The great horses, the heavy betters, the famous races and all other actors and incidents of the past were nothing in his young life. He was living in the present and getting his living out of it, and, if the past possessed any value, it was only that its events had combined to rig up a game that offered Murray Lewis a wonderful opportunity of gathering money in huge gobs.

And so the past glory of Cap Whitley impressed Murray Lewis no whit. Of course he knew the Cap by sight. It was impossible for any one to be a daily attendant at the race meetings for seven years without learning something about the Cap. But to Murray Lewis the veteran turfman was only an old guy who'd gone broke playing 'em, and who'd become a two-buck piker, taking up valuable room on the lawn which might better be occupied by some live wire who had real money with which to back his selections.

Murray didn't waste much thought on the Cap, but, seeing the old fellow sifting leisurely through the mob in front of the grand stand, he couldn't help but wonder why it was that several of the most substantial bookmakers in the game—veterans of the old days of open betting—let themselves be bothered by the Cap with his two-dollar play. He, Murray Lewis, shooed the pikers away from his stand; let them know just where they got off at. Why didn't these other birds give that old pest the air; send him back to the two-bit lawn brokers where he belonged? The old dope could be thankful it had never occurred to him to come round bothering Murray Lewis!

And then one day it did occur to the Cap to bother Murray Lewis. It was a blisteringly hot July day at Aqueduct. One of the big turf classics was down for decision, and a record-breaking crowd thronged the course. Wandering about the lawn in search of one of his favorite bookmakers, the Cap suddenly found himself caught in a swirl of betters which was rushing from the paddock to play a last-minute tip. Irresistibly it carried him along, and when he came to a stop he was directly in front of Murray Lewis.

The Cap hesitated a second. He had never, of course, done business with Murray. The prospect, though, of fighting his way through that crowd again in quest of a bookmaker to whom he was known appalled him. The heat and the buffeting he had just received had left him wilted and weak. Besides, the horses were already at the post. They might be off before he could weave his way through the crowd again.

He plunged his hand into his pocket, drew out a little pad of paper and on it scribbled the wager he had intended making. He had just heard Murray announce the odds against the favorite, Mainmast, as three to two, so the slip which he tendered to the young bookmaker contained the legend, "Mainmast—3-2—CAP."

Murray Lewis took the ticket automat-

ically. Then as he glanced at it he looked up scowling, apparently realizing for the first time that the Cap stood before him.

"What the hell is *this?*" he snarled, shaking the ticket in the Cap's face.

The Cap gave a little start. His shaggy brows knitted in a puzzled frown. Then he smiled as if in understanding.

"Really, I beg your pardon, sir," he said apologetically, "but my handwriting is not so good as it used to be. The ticket's for Mainmast——"

"Oh, to hell with your handwriting!" snapped Murray impatiently. "I can read that all right. But don't you know no better than to hand *me* a two-dollar bet? Here," he directed, thrusting the ticket into the Cap's hand, "take your chicken feed down to the fruit counter and buy yourself a coupla bananas! Come on—move! You're holding up the parade."

The Cap's long frame suddenly stiffened. His eyes blazed angrily as Murray's meaning became clear to him.

"Sir," he thundered, "do you mean that you won't take my bet?"

"You tell 'em I won't!" declared Murray, who was using both hands to collect tickets from post-time betters. "Go on, move, won't you?" he growled. "Them gents behind you want to get to me."

"But, my dear sir——" persisted the Cap, his voice shaking with suppressed wrath.

"Oh, roll your hoop!" bade Murray. "I got no time to be bothered with you two-buck guys!"

"But I'll have you understand, young man——" began the Cap.

"Oh, shut up and get out of the way!" barked Murray. "How many times are you got to be told? Here," he said, sticking his hand into his pocket and withdrawing a roll of bills, "if you need three bucks so bad, take 'em from me! It's worth that to me to be rid of you!"

Murray himself led the laugh which greeted this jest.

The Cap roughly pushed back the proffered bills.

"Sir," he blazed, "you have insulted me cruelly! I demand that you apologize!"

"Oh, go chase yourself, you poor old piker!" responded Murray.

"That I offered you a small wager," continued the Cap, "gives you no license to decline it. The excuse you offer is merely a subterfuge. Apparently you doubt my good faith, my personal and financial responsibility. I do not know your name, sir, but I can refer you to——"

A guffaw from Murray cut him short. Murray had never before heard any one talk exactly like the Cap, and he found the old gentleman's line of lingo exceedingly diverting. The stilted, old-fashioned phrases, the show of dignity, the suggestion that Murray had declined the wager because he questioned the maker's ability to pay—these things coming from a poor old has-been and inspired by so trivial a matter as a two-dollar bet made a combination inexpressibly funny, and, despite the trouble, annoyance and financial loss which the Cap was causing him by interfering with the activities of his post-time players, Murray just had to howl.

"Oh, cut it out!" he laughed. "You don't fool nobody but yourself. Everybody knows you're busted—clean. Why, you old boob, you been *dead* for twenty years—and you're the only one don't know it! Why don't you take a tumble to yourself and clear out? You're in the way—a pest! This ain't no game for old dumb-bells like you, and I'm one guy that ain't going to stand for you no longer! Go on—beat it—take it on the run! And don't come back!"

"You whelp!" roared the Cap savagely. "You wretched young upstart! You deserve to be horsewhipped! Well do I remember the time when your kind would have been refused admittance to the race courses! Do you think that the few paltry dollars involved in the wager you refused to take are important to me? Do you think I have no other interest in this glorious sport than——"

"Oh, hire a hall if you want to make a speech!" interrupted Murray nastily. "You remember when they'd have given me the gate, do you? Huh! You ought to have quit the game when they was running it to suit you! You're behind the times, papa. If guys like me were around in your day, you'd never have got as far as you did!" And Murray gave his head a toss and looked about him for applause from the crowd which was eagerly listening to the argument.

"You'll apologize to me instantly, sir," cried the Cap, "or——"

"Apologize—hell!" laughed Murray.

"I'll teach you a lesson——"

"Oh, pull in your head!" advised Murray wearily. "You're just an old pest! Go on; get out of the way. You're taking up too much space."

Saying which, Murray impatiently shoved out his hand, catching the Cap on the chest and pushing him backward.

The Cap was old, but he had been a powerful man in his day. Age may have shriveled his muscles, but it had taken nothing from his warlike spirit. Murray's words had angered him, but this push was an indignity which filled him with fury. Catching his balance, he uttered a roar, and rushed at the other with bony fists outstretched. His attack, though, was halted before it was fairly launched, for a Pinkerton, worming his way through the crowd, was suddenly between him and Murray.

"Now, Cap," protested the detective, "you mustn't do that."

"That young thug——" panted the Cap, striving to brush through.

"You've got to cut it out, Cap," asserted the Pinkerton severely, hastily using his bulk to block another rush on the part of the pugnacious old turfman. "You know you mustn't start any fights at the track," he reminded the Cap soothingly. "Come on, Cap; let's get along," he suggested, taking the old fellow's arm and attempting to guide him through the crowd.

The Cap paused thoughtfully.

"I did forget myself," he admitted after a moment. "You're right; the track's no place to fight—with your fists. But as for you, young man——" he growled, glaring at Murray over the Pinkerton's shoulders.

"Ahr, you old windbag!" snorted Murray disgustedly. "That's all there is to you—talk!"

"Yes?" snapped the Cap. He hesitated momentarily, then he plunged his hand into his pocket and again drew out his little betting pad. He held it up for a second or two; then a queer, crooked smile appeared on his face. He replaced the pad in his pocket, and turned away.

"Yah!" taunted Murray gleefully. "You know better than to try to bluff me! You ain't got nothing to bet—and you know I know it! You're busted—and I wouldn't take a bet from you anyway," he called as the Cap and the Pinkerton were swallowed up in the crowd, "not if you was the last man left in the game!"

At the grand-stand steps the Cap halted and wiped the perspiration from his brow. Then he turned to the Pinkerton.

"You heard him call me a windbag?" he asked.

"Oh, you mustn't mind that, Cap," said the other easily.

The Cap included the whole lawn in a broad gesture.

"Riffraff! Scum!" he growled. "Times certainly have changed! I remember when ——" He broke off suddenly. "*He* said I was behind the times," he murmured thoughtfully after a moment, "that I'd been *dead* for twenty years. Can it be that every one——"

He left the question unfinished, and an odd expression of hurt resentment overspread his face.

"Pshaw, no, Cap!" the Pinkerton diplomatically assured him. "Everybody knows that you're as good as you ever were! You don't want to pay attention to—to everything you hear," he finished lamely.

The Cap eyed the other narrowly. Evidently he had caught the ring of insincerity in the detective's well-intended words. The latter grinned shamefacedly under the older man's intent stare.

"Well, I guess I'd better be getting along," he said at last. "I—I got work to do. So long, Cap; behave yourself—and good luck."

The Cap made no response, but shaking his head in a thoughtful, puzzled sort of way, lumbered heavily up the steps.

Various versions of the Cap's set-to with Murray Lewis were circulated within the next few days, and the turf goers' reactions to the story were correspondingly varying. There was no gainsaying the fact that Murray had acted quite within his constitutional rights in refusing the Cap's wager, but opinion was divided regarding the form which his refusal had taken. Some held that a gentler method would have proved equally efficacious, while others expressed their belief that Murray had acted properly; that rough, plain talk was the right weapon to use in giving the gate to an old pest like the Cap—if you wanted to make it stick. All, though, were agreed that in offering physical violence to a man of the Cap's years Murray had behaved in a manner inexcusably shameful.

"Too bad that Pink come along," one

man told Murray. "I'd like to have seen the old geezer hand you one!"

"Yeah?" scoffed Murray. "And what do you think I'd have been doing all that time?"

"Gosh, you *are* a mean little rat!" announced the other after surveying Murray contemptuously for a moment. "Why, say, kid, if you'd raised your hand to that old feller again, *I'd* have pasted you right in the nose!"

"Oh, you would, huh?" grunted Murray, sneeringly but not belligerently, for the other man was large and stout.

"And I'm telling you something else," Murray was informed further. "From what I hear of Cap Whitley, you'd never have got away with that rough stuff a few years ago, Pink or no Pink! He'd have cleaned you up!"

"Huh! His days of cleaning anybody up is over!"

"Too bad that they are!" responded the other.

Which attitude was typical of even the Cap's deepest sympathizers. The old fellow had been roughly treated. He owed one to Murray Lewis. Time was when he would have squared the debt with interest. But, poor, old, busted has-been, what could he do about it now?

And, of course, under press of more important things, everybody forgot all about the incident in a few days. The Cap, though, didn't forget. Murray's coarse words had been a bitter revelation to him. That the new generation of turf goers regarded him with contempt, thought him a nuisance, the Cap had not suspected. It was a terrific blow to the pride that ever had been one of his outstanding traits. He brooded over the situation, discussed it with a few elderly men who had known him in the days of his glory. They denied, of course, that Murray Lewis' expressed opinion furnished an index to the sentiments which others held regarding the Cap, but, as in the case of the Pinkerton who had interfered in his quarrel with Murray, their denials somehow failed to ring true. They were trying merely to be kind to the Cap, and they fooled him not at all.

"Don't! Stop!" the Cap directed one man who was laying it on especially thick. "You think I'm a back number just as the rest do. Well, perhaps you're right," he said thoughtfully. "It's hard, though, to feel after all my years that I've lost the respect——"

"Oh, come, Cap!" protested the other. "It isn't so bad as all that!"

"Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes!" bade the Cap sharply. "I realize now that people have been sneering at me behind my back for years. They've been pleasant to me, but they've been laughing at me. But," cried the Cap in sudden heat, "I'll show them!"

"That's the spirit, Cap!" applauded the other.

"You're laughing at me now!" snapped the Cap, and the other's eyes dropped. "I'll show them all," he promised savagely. "You—and that unspeakable young whelp —every one!"

The other shrugged his shoulders and shook his head sadly as the Cap turned away. Though the Cap had charged him with laughing at him, he found nothing entertaining in the older man's bombast. On the contrary, he was sorry for the Cap, with his grand talk, his absurd dignity, his almost childish pretentiousness. Boasts and threats sound bad enough coming from one who can make them good; falling from the lips of a man whose last noteworthy accomplishment dated back almost a quarter of a century they became merely ridiculous.

And ridiculous indeed was the Cap's method of demonstrating to the world that he considered himself still worthy of being reckoned with in the racing game. A short month after his encounter with Murray Lewis his colors appeared once again on the Saratoga track.

It was just about the sort of a comeback that a poor, old, impoverished back number might have been expected to stage. The steed which carried the Cap's colors was a two year old, bearing, according to the program, the apt enough name of Bygone Days. The program contained the further information that the colt had formerly been called Doctor Rogers, which caused the wise ones to laugh, for Doctor Rogers was an ugly duckling which had been tried and found wanting by one of the big stables in the spring meetings—a well-bred animal, but apparently a no-account throwback, possessing so little speed and such a vicious, dangerous temper that its wealthy owner had banished it to the barn. As Doctor Rogers, though ridden by Joe McVay, the acknowledged king-pin

of jockeys, the Cap's colt had finished a perfect last in six consecutive maiden races. As Bygone Days, piloted by an unknown apprentice, the probable performance of the colt for its new owner was easy to forecast.

And in its first outing under the carmine and white the colt ran true to form. The race was a five-and-a-half-furlong affair for maiden two year olds, and the rise of the barrier found Bygone Days caught flat-flooted in a sulk. Little Jerry Doolan, the ninety-nine-pound exercise boy who had the mount, applied his whip desperately, and at last got the Cap's colt off when the rest of the field was a sixteenth of a mile away. Bygone Days, though receiving the most energetic ride of any juvenile in the race, made no attempt to catch up. He merely cantered after the others in a leisurely, untroubled sort of way, finishing amid a burst of satirical applause a full ten seconds after the trailers of the field had passed the judges.

Which uninspiring display—duly chronicled of course by the humorously inclined turf reporters and duly commented on by the wise-cracking regulars—was merely a prelude or introduction to Bygone Days' true capabilities, or lack of them.

Outside of springing another Man o' War on them, the Cap couldn't have done anything which would have informed the patrons of racing more quickly or more surely that he was again a horse owner than permitting Bygone Days to run in his colors. A horse which always runs last and against which the price makers automatically chalk up one hundred to one whenever its name appears on the entry list will attract quite as much attention as an abnormally consistent winner—especially if owned and saddled by such a picturesque old character as the Cap.

Through the Saratoga meeting, through the autumn racing around New York which followed and through the Maryland season which brought the turf year to its close, the Cap and his colt furnished the followers of the game with almost constant entertainment. Bygone Days received the care of a champion. He had his morning workouts and his rubbings, little Jerry Doolan serving as exercise boy and hostler as well as jockey. Better fodder than he ate no horse ever received—though it remained a deep mystery how the Cap, being broke, stood the gaff for feed and stable room. Lengthy whispered instructions were given to Jerry Doolan every time Bygone Days went to the post. But the performances of the colt became more disgraceful the oftener he raced. Neither in exercise gallops nor in races did he show any inclination to run.

There was something pathetic in the Cap's steadfast devotion to this most hopeless of horses, for it was readily apparent that the old fellow took Bygone Days seriously. Every time the colt raced he played him to win—a single two-dollar bet. He followed every inch of those races—if such they may be called—through a pair of powerful binoculars. He was on hand every morning that the colt worked, and he timed the gallops with a split-second watch.

One of the New York sporting writers dug up the interesting fact that the ancestry of the Cap's travesty on a race horse might be traced back to the great Whistling Boy, the Cap's first champion, and used this as the basis for a "human-interest" Sunday feature that ran a full page in the colored magazine section. A quotation therefrom:

> Whistling Boy is gone; so is the glory that was Cap Whitley's in the days when that great racer's hoofbeats thundered on the hard surface of the American tracks. A tired old man, penniless, struggling pitifully to turn back the inexorable hand of Time, a gangling, ugly, speedless colt—insult to the name of thoroughbred—these are the present-day ghosts of the dapper sportsman and fleet race horse of yesteryear. A grim, cruel joke Fate has played in choosing the descendant of the horse that won him fame to bear Cap Whitley—beaten—down the home stretch of his career. Yet it is the sort of joke that Fate loves to play on those who pursue the Sport of Kings.

And so on. If Cap Whitley read and thereby learned that his insistence on running Bygone Days made him an object of pity to the followers of racing, he gave no sign. He continued to send the colt to the races, continued to accord him the tender care of a stake horse. And Bygone Days, meeting cheaper and cheaper horses as the two year olds of the year broke one by one out of the maiden class, repaid his owner's efforts by continuing to run last—always last.

The "Millionaire Kid" made his appearance at the Jamaica track a few days after the Metropolitan season opened in May of the following year. How he got by the wise boys who watch the entrances in hope of meeting just such as he must forever remain

a mystery, for if ever there was one who seemed designed by nature and circumstances to furnish a meal ticket for some hard-working tout, he was it! He was young, apple cheeked, blue eyed, innocent looking; obviously an absolute stranger to the track and its ways. And the paying-teller's cage of a national bank at pay-roll time on a Saturday morning proclaimed the presence of ready money no more eloquently than he! The younger set among track habitués go in for fancy duds on a generous scale, but their flashiest garments made but a dull glow beside the brilliant attire of this newcomer. Not that his clothing was merely gay. It was, on the contrary, subdued if anything when compared with the habiliments of such snappy young dressers as Murray Lewis, say; but it spoke of London tailoring and was worn with a debonair air which suggested that its wearer was not merely making a splurge with the results of sudden good fortune, but was accustomed to sporting just that kind of scenery all the time. In short, the kid was class.

But, however he eluded the sharp eyes at the gate, there he was, sauntering along before the grand stand just when the betting was coming in heaviest for the second race, looking about him with the eager, lively eyes of one viewing a striking scene for the first time, wearing on his boyish face a slightly diffident look as though rather troubled by the strangeness of his surroundings.

Murray Lewis was not getting rich because he was in the habit of giving the go-by to opportunity. Busy collecting tickets, he caught sight of the young stranger out of the corner of his eye and shrewdly sized him up. The next instant Murray had leaned over to Milton Schwartz, his cashier.

"Milton," he whispered, indicating him whom he had already tabbed the Millionaire Kid with a meaning forefinger, "get that guy!"

Milton looked, saw—and understood. He was away in a flash, and a few seconds later had the newcomer anchored safely by the arm.

"All fixed up with a bookmaker, sir?" he inquired respectfully, smiling his most ingratiating smile.

The other hesitated.

"Why," he said slowly, speaking with an accent which the observant Milton classified immediately as English, "why, I was given to understand that betting was not permitted."

Milton grinned slyly. This boob seemed almost too good to be true! Quickly he tightened his grip on the other's arm and explained to him the system whereby certain favored ones were permitted to make wagers with the generous, whole-hearted Mr. Lewis, whom he referred to in his little sales talk as "my boss." Milton had handed out the same spiel time and time again, and almost invariably made it take. This time proved no exception. The other heard him through, then walked with him to a remote spot under the grand stand and deposited with him a thousand dollars, in return for which he received a little packet of betting tickets, instructions in the use of the same, one of Murray Lewis' business cards and the privilege of making bets with Murray until the thousand was exhausted.

The end of the afternoon found Murray Lewis possessed of two five-hundred-dollar bills which he had certainly not expected to own when he came to the track that day, for the Millionaire Kid, who signed his tickets "J. Irving," disregarding odds, wise play and everything else which might have aided him in stumbling onto a winner or two, ate up his deposit in four bets, all of them absurd and the last of them the softest money Murray could recall ever collecting —three hundred dollars on Cap Whitley's Bygone Days at one hundred to one.

Murray was still laughing about that one when he and Milton Schwartz climbed into his car.

"Biggest bet I ever handled," he grinned. "Thirty thousand bucks! But I coulda let him make it thirty million for all the chance that skate has of ever winning anything! Wonder why that old squirt keeps running that dog?"

"Search me," responded Milton. "The skate's like himself—a dead one. Gee, I gotta laugh every time I think of the way you handed him the razzberry that day last summer. Ain't bothered you since, has he?"

"He knows better," growled Murray. "But the nerve of him that day! Not a buck in his clothes, I'll bet you, and talking to me like he owned the track! Telling me to apologize to him, and that he'd teach me a lesson, and all that! For him —blah! But say!" he chuckled, "that Millionaire Kid we dug up to-day's a live one,

I'll say! Lose a grand without turning a hair. He's *heeled,* that boy! Hope he calls in again!"

"He must be one of them big Irvings," guessed Milton.

"What big Irvings is that?" asked Murray.

"Oh," replied Milton vaguely, "you know—the folks Irving Place is named after, and the Washington Irving High School and all that."

"Yeah," nodded Murray dryly, "I know the family—related to the Riversides that the Drive is named after."

Then he hastily changed the subject. In his own line Milton was a clever kid, but out of it hopelessly dumb.

But whatever the family connections of J. Irving, in his dealings with Murray Lewis he certainly lived up to the title of Millionaire Kid which the other had tacked on him. Three or four more players like him, and Murray could have retired in a season, for the depth of his ignorance regarding horses which had even a remote chance of winning was exceeded only by the size of his bank roll. His success at plastering large-sized bets—two, three, five hundred dollars or more—on absolute dead ones amounted almost to wizardry. In his first five visits to the track he enriched Murray by five thousand dollars clean, without cashing a bet. And he did it with an easy-going nonchalance that implied the presence of plenty more money where that had come from.

Of course a wealthy innocent like that was bound to attract attention, and enticing inducements were held out to the Millionaire Kid to divert some of his play to other books. Also, the touts descended upon him like vultures. But J. Irving merely smiled his innocent smile and sent them all traveling. One bookmaker, he said, gave him all the action he craved, while to the touts he made it known that, win or lose, he saw no sport in playing another man's selections.

All of which was most gratifying to Murray Lewis.

Murray Lewis was a little worried. Four of the six races on the afternoon's card had been run, betting had opened for the fifth event, and the Millionaire Kid had mysteriously disappeared; hadn't been seen since the early part of the afternoon when he had made his customary thousand-dollar deposit with Milton Schwartz. It was the Millionaire Kid's tenth afternoon as a racegoer. His nine previous visits had meant just nine thousand dollars to Murray Lewis, and what was worrying Murray was that his most profitable patron mightn't get around in time to bet—and lose—his tenth thousand. That would be almost a calamity, for Murray would have to give him his money back.

And then—almost at post time—Murray's worriment disappeared as the Millionaire Kid suddenly stood before him.

"Hello," bade Murray cheerfully, "where you been?"

"Up there," replied the Millionaire Kid, gesturing toward the grand stand. "I'm glad, too," he added naïvely. "None of the horses I've picked so far have won."

"Well, they can't *all* win for you," grinned Murray, nudging Milton Schwartz who stood beside him.

"It doesn't seem so, does it?" observed the champion boob better dolefully. "Well," he said, brightening, "I'll try again. What's that one?" and he held out his program, indicating the bottom horse with his thumb.

"Ho!" chortled Murray. "Me old pal Bygone Days, huh? Well, Mr. Irving, seeing it's you, a hundred to one."

"A thousand dollars," said the Millionaire Kid.

"Sure!" agreed Murray heartily. "Make it big. That's the way I like 'em. And I hope you win," he grinned as he shoved the other's ticket into his pocket.

"Thank you," nodded the Millionaire Kid. "You can pay me in large bills."

"Sure thing!" grinned Murray. "Anything you say, Mr. Irving. Be around early to-morrow—and slip me another thousand," he added under his breath as the other moved away.

Milton Schwartz heard the finish of the speech, and laughed.

"He *is* soft, ain't he?" he observed. "But say, Murray, supposing one of these dead ones he's playing ever comes to life!"

"Oh, behave!" ordered Murray.

"But it'd bust you," persisted Milton. "This Bygone Days horse, now—you stand to lose a hundred grand——"

"Holy cat!" yelped Murray. "Can you picture Bygone Days winning anything?"

"No," admitted Milton, "but——"

"Why, the dog ain't never went beyond

six furlongs in his life," declared Murray, "and this race is a mile and a quarter. Besides, Solly Jacobs clocked him for five eighths yesterday morning, and it took him a minute, ten, to do it—in a drive. He's slower than the old guy that owns him—and that's something! *I* know what I'm doing."

"Sure you do," admitted Milton, "but just——"

A sudden roar from grand stand and lawn drowned his words. The horses had been lining up behind the barrier as they talked and had at last got away.

"There! Look there!" ordered Murray, pointing toward the track after he had observed for a moment. "They're just off—and look where he is already!"

Milton looked. Eight horses were running almost in a line, while the ninth, bearing the now rather familiar carmine and white of Cap Whitley, was three or four lengths in the rear and losing ground at every stride the others progressed.

"Huh!" grunted Murray. "Beaten off five lengths in the first fifty yards! Can you figger where he'll be after a mile and a quarter? Who's that in front?" he asked, raising his binoculars to his eyes and studying the horses in an effort to answer his own question as they dashed toward the turn.

Rounding the turn, the leading horses were no longer bunched, but Bygone Days had slipped farther to the rear. Eight lengths, more or less, now separated the Cap's perennial loser from the nearest front horse. Little Jerry Doolan was holding his mount to the rail, apparently making no effort to overtake the others. Probably he had learned by experience how useless it was to urge Bygone Days to any effort beyond what the horse would make on his own.

"It's between Autumn Leaves and Merrymaker," murmured Murray Lewis, naming the two leading horses. He dropped his glasses and pointed to a furlong pole halfway down the back stretch. "Right there," he declared, tapping Milton on the shoulder, "you'll see old Bygone Days curl up and die. That's his six-furlong limit."

But, reaching the post Murray had indicated, Bygone Days gave no sign of quitting. He was still a lonesome last, far out of contention, but he continued to plug along in the rear, half obscured by the cloud of dust that rose from the hoofs of the leading horses.

At the end of the back stretch, Autumn Leaves and Merrymaker, respectively first and second choice in the betting, seemed to have established definitely that the race lay between them. They were running neck and neck, while the former contenders—a cheap lot at best—began one by one to evidence a desire to chuck it.

"Look there!" bade Milton Schwartz, seizing Murray's arm suddenly in a tense grip. "Bygone Days—he's coming up!"

"Dumb-bell!" Murray barked at him. "Can't you see what's happening? Them other skates is going back to *him!*"

"Maybe," admitted Milton grudgingly, "but it looked like——"

"Ah, shut up!" snapped Murray disgustedly, glaring at the race through his glasses.

There had been a heavy play on the two leading horses. To Murray a victory by Merrymaker, the second choice, meant a profit of close to three thousand dollars on the race, including the Millionaire Kid's thousand, which he was counting already in the can no matter what. A win by the favorite, on the other hand, would cause him just about to break even. So the gaze that he bent through his glasses was intent and anxious.

The crowd, its sympathy pretty evenly divided between the two leaders, set up a deafening roar as the field skirted the turn. Though few probably remarked it, in one particular that stage of the race saw a world's record broken—for the first time since Cap Whitley owned him Bygone Days was better than last. For on the turn the despised carrier of the carmine and white passed two horses!

Maybe Murray Lewis was right, maybe it was not the Cap's colt which was creeping up, but the other horses dropping back; yet there he was in seventh place and—for him—going strong!

Into the stretch dashed Autumn Leaves and Merrymaker. An instant later out swung the four who were fighting it out for the small end of the purse. Then, behind them, seconds, so it seemed, after their riders had straightened them for the run to the wire—Bygone Days.

And as he made the turn, hugging the rail as though glued to it, little Jerry Doolan drew his whip and brought it down smartly on his mount's black flank. The

colt's response was magic. As though some tremendous force suddenly swept on him from behind, he bounded forward in a series of space-consuming leaps that carried him over the ground like a black phantom. There was no grace, no beauty in his motion. Rather he seemed to hurl himself along in mad frenzy, his hoofs biting viciously into the track surface yet moving so swiftly that they seemed scarcely to touch it. Ten—a dozen perhaps—of those wild bounds and he was on even terms with the four horses which were racing for third money. Another stride or two and he had passed them, dashing through an unbelievably narrow opening on the rail.

Three lengths in front of him, in the center of the track, were the two leaders, still running as if yoked. As he shot through the opening he had so miraculously found, Little Jerry Doolan saw the sixteenth pole flash by him. Only a half furlong to go—a three-length lead to overcome! Once again Jerry went to the whip. A single cut sufficed. Bygone Days had found his legs; it was his day! Inch by inch his monstrous bounds carried him closer to the choices. Ten yards from the wire he was even with them—even, though, only for a flash, for there was no withstanding the dizzy speed of the black colt.

And, as he passed the judges, Bygone Days was a length in front with Jerry Doolan looking back and grinning.

The deep hush that always follows the victory of an outsider fell on the crowd. Murray Lewis' glasses dropped from his nerveless fingers. His narrow face was ashen. His eyes were suddenly glassy and staring. His chin had dropped, and he was gulping with queer movements of the cords of his skinny neck.

Beside him Milton Schwartz was swaying drunkenly. Beads of perspiration were standing on his forehead. He was drawing his fingers across his eyes as if to wipe away an unwelcome film that obscured his vision.

For them it was the end. Murray's car, his jewelry, everything he owned would have to go if he were to pay the single bet he had taken on Bygone Days. And to a boob! All he had—to a boob!

A touch on his shoulder caused Murray to start in nervous alarm. He turned to find the Millionaire Kid grinning at him with bland innocence.

"Large bills I said, Mr. Lewis!" chuckled the winner.

Gambling etiquette decrees that the professional accept even the most outrageous blows of fortune with good grace. It was a sorry attempt that Murray made, though, to act the dead-game sport. The sickly smile that he turned on the Millionaire Kid would not have fooled even one of that youth's innocence and inexperience.

And then of a sudden all pretense fell from Murray. His mouth popped open with stunned amazement. The breath hissed in his dry throat as he involuntarily filled his lungs with a single gasp.

No combination of letters could reproduce that sound; yet, combined with the look on Murray's gray face, it was strangely eloquent, containing surprise, understanding, helpless, bitter rage, and an admixture of other emotions that defy classification.

For beside the Millionaire Kid, his hand lying affectionately on the other's shoulder, his eyes gleaming, and an odd, amused smile on his seamed countenance, stood Cap Whitley.

He and Murray stood regarding each other in silence for the better part of a minute. Then the Cap's grin widened and the gleam in his eyes became brighter.

"A 'has-been,' am I?" he inquired softly, yet with a ring of triumph in his voice.

"You—you——" stuttered Murray almost tearfully. Then he gave it up. He shoved a trembling finger almost in the face of the Millionaire Kid. "Who's that guy?" he demanded thickly.

"My grandson," said the Cap, "Mr. John Irving Whitley, second, the other holder of that name being myself. Rather a clever betting commissioner I should say too, considering that he never witnessed a horse race until a fortnight ago."

"You'll never get away with it!" whined Murray desperately. "They'll have you up on the carpet! Your horse was doped! He never coulda run that way if he wasn't!"

"Oh, dear me!" protested the Cap in mock chagrin. "For one who expressed himself so confidently when we met last you display an amazing ignorance of affairs of the turf! You *should* know, my dear young sir, that it sometimes requires a long period to train a horse to his best form."

"You can't tell me you didn't pull some crooked work!" growled Murray.

"And sometimes," continued the Cap in

the same gentle, chaffing way, "a trainer will persist in running a horse in sprint races when the horse's real capabilities are for the longer distances. Having owned an ancestor of Bygone Days many, many years ago, perhaps I should have known that a colt of his blood was not likely to prove successful as a sprinter. But—possibly because I am older than I used to be and consequently not so alert of mind—I failed to try Bygone Days over a distance of ground until recently. And it was quite surprising how his form improved in consequence. We sent him out for his long trials at night," he added with the suspicion of a wink.

"At night!" ejaculated Murray. "Why, you old crook——"

"And the matter of plates—shoes," smiled the Cap. "An important item! Whistling Boy, the ancestor of Bygone Days which I once owned, never was much account until he was fitted with plates of a peculiar pattern which I myself designed. Bygone Days wore similar plates to-day—for the first time in a race. If I had thought to make the change a year ago, who can say that the colt's past record might not have been better?"

"Aw, shut up!" ordered Murray. He was gazing at the Cap with a look that was almost admiring. Trickery—putting something over—to Murray represented the summit of human achievement. Even though he must acknowledge himself the goat in this particular coup, Murray was forced to recognized that both in originality of conception and skill of execution said coup was a master effort.

The Cap caught that look, and his face suddenly hardened.

"About a year ago," he said, "you insulted me grossly, and I demanded that you apologize. You declined to do so. Could it be that since that time you have altered your opinion of me?"

"Aw, say!" growled Murray miserably. "You put it over on me—what you want to rub it in for?"

The Cap's eyes brightened. Impulsively he thrust out his hand and grasped Murray's arm.

"Am I to accept that as the apology I asked from you a year ago?" he inquired sweetly.

"Aw, take it as it lays—any way you want!"

"You accepted rather a large bet from my grandson," said the Cap. "A foolishly large bet, I might say, considering the price you laid. But, of course, you know your own business better than I," at which dig Murray winced perceptibly. "You are prepared to pay my grandson?"

"Hell!" barked Murray. "What else can I do?"

"You can give me my grandson's ticket," the Cap informed him.

"Give you his ticket?" stuttered Murray.

"I'll destroy it," said the Cap. "Time has healed somewhat the feeling of resentment your words of a year ago caused me. Now that I can do so, I find that I do not wish to hurt you. Besides, the thrill of profiting from the victory of a horse departed from me years ago. I need no more money than I have. Despite the impression which seems to prevail, I am moderately wealthy. So, if you'll give me the ticket——"

"You mean," stammered Murray, "that I don't have to pay?"

"Not my grandson's bet," the Cap informed him. "Under the circumstances, though, I do not believe I am asking too much if I request you to refund what he has paid you in the last fortnight."

"Give him back what he lost?" yelped Milton Schwartz, speaking for the first time. "Why? Didn't he lose it?"

"*You* shut up!" barked Murray at the cashier. "Ain't you got no sporting blood?" Murray seemed dizzy, giddy at the proposal the Cap had made. In all his experience he had encountered nothing like it. And it simply was not in him to understand. A hundred thousand bucks—and the Cap was passing it up! Still, if the Cap wanted it that way——

"Go under the stand with the Cap," he ordered Milton severely, "and give him ten thousand bucks. And let him have one of my cards, too," he added as an afterthought. "*He's* the kind of a guy I like to have bet with me!"

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

HERE are two letters, both concerned with practically the same problem and both illustrating the same principle in human affairs.

S. P. writes:

"I am married and have two children and a small salary. Recently my wife has been ill and I have been under rather unusual expenses. It is necessary for me to borrow four or five hundred dollars. I can borrow the money all right but the question is, from whom? I might offer security and borrow it in the ordinary business way, I might borrow it from friends of mine who have little more than I but are still willing to do what they can to help—or I might borrow it from a very rich man whom I have known for years, though not intimately, and who has so much money that five hundred dollars one way or the other means nothing to him. He would never miss it. I have visited this man at his home, I have associated with him on terms of absolute social equality—and yet the very fact that he has so much money and I so little makes me hesitate about going to him. It seems unreasonable. Perhaps it is a foolish pride on my part. Should I ask him for the loan which he can so well afford to make, or shouldn't I?"

THE answer is, "You shouldn't." The instinct that makes you hesitate is a perfectly sound one and illustrates the fact that something deep and inarticulate in a man may often guide him better than a line of reasoning that is easily put into words.

At first blush it would be the obvious and simple thing to go to the rich man and strike him for five hundred. This is the thing the worldly-wise man in a cheap and obvious sense would do. He has plenty, you have little; it won't hurt him to loan you the money; he'll never miss it—everybody has heard that line of reasoning.

You will find reasoners of that sort sitting about the lobbies of Mills Hotels

and in cheap rooming houses all over the land. That's where that sort of reasoning gets a man in nine cases out of ten.

If you value your rich friend at all—and I take it that you do—let him alone on the money question. The richer a man is the more he is bothered by people importuning him for financial assistance. Probably one of the great drawbacks about great riches is the fact that their possessor too often feels that he is surrounded by selfish people, that no one values him for anything but his money and that mankind are uniformly predatory. Years ago I stood in an art gallery beside a very successful man, the possessor of a considerable fortune. We were looking at a picture of an Indian trapper who stood surrounded by a circle of wolves. Their eyes were gleaming in the darkness.

"Martin," said my friend, "I often feel like that fellow in the picture. Caught in the circle—the circle of people who are trying to get money away from me."

Friends are valuable—but not for the money you can borrow from them. Also every strain you put on a friendship, every time you lean on your friend rather than standing on your own feet, weakens that friendship in some degree.

As for people of wealth never missing five hundred dollars or so—never believe it! Those who are most careful about money, who kick the most about a trifling loss, who hate most to see extravagance and waste, who deplore the indiscriminate and promiscuous borrowing and lending of money are generally people of great wealth. Perhaps that is the reason they have the money. They are free and generous enough but never careless, and the idea that any wealthy man of sense would "never miss" five hundred dollars is a big mistake.

ANOTHER letter in similar vein:

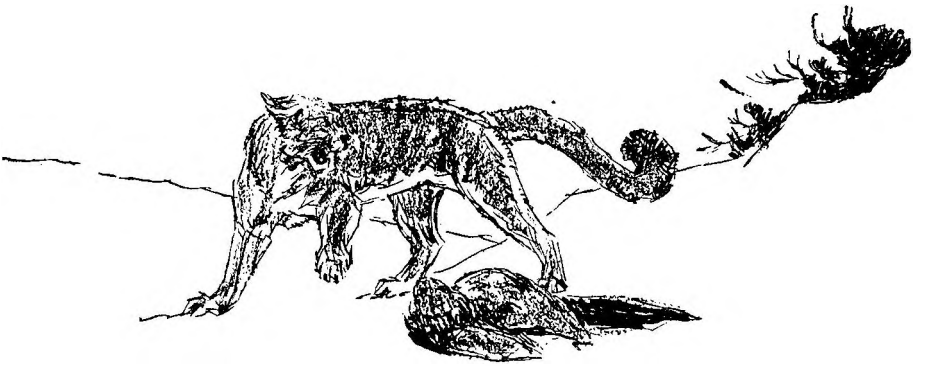
"I am married, have four children, am buying a house from the municipality. I am going to lose the house if a substantial payment is not made in the near future. Months of sickness in my family, running credit accounts with the grocers, et cetera, eight weeks off the pay roll, have put me in the position that between five or six hundred dollars are needed if I am not to go down and out. I am slated for a better position accompanied by an increase in salary within the next month. I have never met any of the higher officials of the firm I work for. I have nothing in my favor as security for a loan except a fifteen-hundred-dollar life-insurance policy and a reputation for honesty. I was thinking of writing the president of the company and asking him for either a personal loan or a loan through the company. He is rated over twenty millions. Tell me what you would do."

IF I valued my position I would try hard to get the money outside. Borrowing money from an employer is not the way to strengthen your position with him. There are times when it may do no harm and it may be all right in this case, but if I were you I would try elsewhere first. The municipality that you bought the house from, on a frank statement from you of your position, your character and assets, will advise you in regard to borrowing on a second mortgage. The fact that you are in a steady job, that you are honest, and that you are going to get a raise ought to make it possible for you to get the five hundred at six per cent without going to the head of your firm.

The fact that he happens to have twenty millions makes no difference when it comes to borrowing or lending money. Lending money to any one—except as a business—is a nuisance.

Lending money as a business is another story entirely. As a general rule there are two sorts of people doing business—the sort that lends, the sort that borrows. And the lenders are getting richer all the time.

It is better not to have to borrow at all—but when you do borrow, it is better to make it a straight business proposition.



The Triumph of Ahmeek

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Cougar Code," "Blue, of the Arctic," Etc.

The beaver colony wins through.

THE Rattlesnake, boisterous mountain stream, came tumbling out of Little Bear Cañon, and spread rather thinly over the flats of High Meadows, narrowing again to thunderous rapids where it poured out of the lower end of the valley. Once it had taken an almost straight course across the depression, its channel cut sharply in the soft loam which was now rank with buffalo grass; turning aside but slightly to avoid thick stands of aspen and willow. But that was before Ahmeek, the king beaver, with his followers, swam the lower white water, and came to the deep valley. For five years they had stayed, and now the flats were stump land and meadow, yet no man had ever put ax to tree there. The chiseled-off butts stood as bleached headstones marking the site of once tall, living things of sweeping limbs and rustling leaves, now vanished. Only the coniferous trees, spruce and fir, which no beaver will touch unless under stress of great hunger, remained.

Stripped of their sappy bark, the thick-trunked aspens and wide-armed willows had gone into the crib work of the mighty beaver dam which stretched almost across the valley, so that the stream above had been backed into a shallow lake. Breaks in the dam here and there allowed the impounded waters to escape in rivulets, which finally joined in a single stream, and the Rattlesnake was itself once more.

Now, while the valley had an immaculate lining of new snow; while the air was motionless, and the hills echoed hollowly to the booming of thickening ice in the great pond, Ahmeek and his thirty-seven followers debated as to how they would meet a crisis that confronted them.

Spring was still months away, yet the specter of starvation loomed menacingly, an enemy more to be feared than the silent-footed preyers—cougars, wolves and wild cats—whose hunger pangs became keener when they thought of the fat-tailed artisans safely within the thick-walled lodges of frozen mud. Time after time some famished animal sniffed longingly at these big piles of sticks and muck, and then set about half-heartedly to dig into the stonelike structure, only to give up at last and move away toward the hills to continue the ceaseless hunt, hunt for food, when, it seemed, there was no food. Deep within the citadels, Ahmeek's tribesmen slept or ate in snug comfort, oblivious to storms raging without, or the tribulations of their furred foes. But chance has a cruel way of upsetting the nicest of calculations, and proving that content is dangerous.

That autumn the beavers had worked steadily laying in a winter supply of food. Juicy-barked trees were felled, canals were dug, and the logs and limbs floated downstream to the storage pond, where they were sunk in mud. It was Ahmeek who led in

this task, whose uncanny engineering skill laid out the ditches, helped dig them to the right depth, and then supervised the felling of trees. Nor were there too many aspens and willows to be cut within the valley. During the summer a forest fire had crept down the mountainside, killing green things and destroying much of the beavers' food supply. Yet if the winter were not unusually long the colony would have enough food to live through it.

The pond coated with ice in November, and each night saw the covering thicker. Then had come a warm, moist wind from the coast; a gentle chinook which thawed snow nearly as fast as a strong sun. The upper Rattlesnake, roused from its twilight sleep of approaching winter, went wild as flood water poured into it from every gully. Rising bankful, it swept a mass of débris through Little Bear Cañon and into the beaver pond, smashing the ice, carrying away a portion of the dam, and covering the sunken food supply with a tangled mass of driftwood.

A freeze followed, as the chinook wind spent itself. By the time the beavers had repaired their dam, ice had added another barrier between them and their reserve. By dint of main strength and sharpness of teeth, they would eventually cut their way through the mass of drift, but that would take time. Meanwhile, they would go on shortened rations.

As if this were not enough, Fate, resenting the good fortune that had attended the beavers under the guidance of Ahmeek, sent against them a powerful and crafty enemy.

In the clear December night the valley was like a giant's cup brimming with liquid moonlight. The place was empty and silent, yet activity was going on there, beneath the ice. Ahmeek and his strongest woodcutters were attacking the flotsam which barred them from their larder.

The king beaver was a giant of his kind, almost as large as a dog. The thickest and finest fur swathed him, kept him warm in the chill water. His wide, flat tail was at once a rudder and a propeller, aiding the sweep of his webbed feet. From within the lodge, lungs filled to capacity with air, he would dive down the tortuous passage that led beneath the ice, and would chop steadily with his teeth at a log locked in place by the flood. Other beavers were doing likewise. From time to time, as their lungs needed oxygen, they returned to the lodges, swimming through the passageway to a shelf which stood above water; and there drew gasping breaths while they regained strength. Thence back to work.

Then Ahmeek discovered an air hole through the ice.

The ice had always been thin at this point, due to a whirlpool of the river, before it sucked away through the dam. Perhaps the activities of the beavers had dislodged fragments of sunken wood in the bottom of the pool, which had been drawn to this spot, aiding in the churning, cutting motion. In any event, Ahmeek, rising against the thin ice, broke through.

Thereafter the work was much easier, for the air hole was nearer to the barrier where the beavers were busy than were the lodges. They could rise here, take a fresh breath, and return to their task. It chanced, however, that the beavers were not the only ones who marked the opening.

Down the moonlight-washed side of the valley came a wraithlike shape, grayish-brown in winter fur. The big male cougar who had his range through these hills was lank with hunger, for the deer, by reason of some unaccountable whim of their own, had vanished, gone to some sanctuary which only they knew, and the cat had bethought himself of the beaver colony. It seemed a forlorn hope, almost a waste of time, for the beavers had always been secure in their lodges, or beneath the ice. Yet desperation turned his steps down the steep incline, on the chance that a miracle would give him the food he sought.

Halfway down the slope he paused. Before him the wide pond, covered by snow, lay like a spotless plain. But at the edge of the dam he saw a single dark spot. Being ripe in wisdom he understood perfectly that this was an air hole. And an air hole meant a weak point in the defense that nature had thrown around the beavers. With growing interest he trotted swiftly down the cliff side and across the ice.

Then, stealthily—so stealthily that the brittle, powdery snow beneath his feet made not the slightest sound—he crept toward the edge of the hole. Suddenly he sank down flat; moveless, tense.

A black nose had appeared on the surface of the pool, as one of Ahmeek's henchmen came up for fresh air. There was a

little whistling sound, as the beaver drew the life-giving oxygen deeply into his lungs, and for a moment he rested there, tail flat on the water, back and head just visible; while his round, bright eyes, like shining beads, surveyed the white world for sign of danger. So low did the cougar crouch, and so well did his fur blend with the snow in the half light, that he escaped observation. With a sigh the beaver sank.

Instantly the cougar was up and had gained the edge of the pool, where he flattened again, expectantly.

He had not long to wait. The mate of Ahmeek, an unusually large female nearly the size of her lord, rose to the surface almost under the cougar's nose. In the beaver colony there was no argument over who did the work; there were no sluggards. Male and female, both worked with equal persistence when the welfare of all depended upon it.

So Ahmeek's mate, leaving off cutting at an obstructing log, came up—and saw the cougar!

Like lightning his left forepaw flashed at her; great, curved cutting claws unsheathed, a blow that would have broken her back had it landed full. But the big cat, in his ravening eagerness, had neglected to take a firm hold on the slush ice; so when he struck he felt himself slip toward the black water. Nevertheless, his paw fell as he intended, but lacked force. Instead of killing the female outright it but partially stunned her, while a claw hooked into her pelt.

At that moment, as if his mate had sent him a telepathic appeal for help, Ahmeek himself was at the air hole. One glimpse of the cougar dragging the weakly struggling body of the female to the edge of the ice, and Ahmeek sank, to reappear instantly. Like a torpedo he shot half out of the water, and his chisellike incisors, strong enough to tear a long chip from a log in a single bite, clamped on the cougar's foreleg, cutting through tendons and muscle. With a blood-chilling squall of agony the great cat involuntarily loosed his hold of the female, and sprang back. Freed, the she-beaver intuitively dived, swimming like mad for the refuge of the passage leading to her lodge.

Thereafter the air hole was used no more by the beavers. Lamed, and hungrier than ever, the cougar finally went his way, leaving the underwater woodsmen to work in peace.

Dawn was an hour old when a wrinkled Indian drawing a toboggan laden with his outfit, and several neat rolls of wolf and wild-cat pelts, worked his way gingerly down into the valley. Few men had seen the place; it had been years since the Indian himself had been there, and he was minded to pass up the spot for better trapping grounds among lakes lower down the Rattlesnake, when from the edge of the cliff he caught sight of the beaver dam. He smiled, for he remembered that there had been no dam there when he had visited the place before. More than that, he knew that it was not a dam that had been abandoned; the head of water backed behind it indicated as much. Here was an opportunity to add to his catch of fur. In the north a gray pall was creeping toward the zenith, forecasting a blizzard. The Indian told himself he would not tarry long here.

At the edge of the pond he left the toboggan, and with a small ax cut a number of twelve-foot poles, which were hard to find after the thoroughness with which the beavers had logged the place that autumn. Then he fell to studying the construction of the nearest beaver lodge.

At last he nodded as though satisfied, and began chopping a hole in the ice.

At the first ax stroke the sleeping beavers awoke, and dived for safety. The Indian heard the splash of their going, but did not pause. At last he had a hole about three feet long and a foot wide, directly over the underwater entrance. Then, driving the poles into the soft mud of the bottom, he closed the opening, except for a narrow passage just wide enough to admit the body of a beaver. Here he set and sunk a trap, the chain of which was secured to a pole, in such a fashion that no beaver could enter the lodge without being caught. This finished, he went on to the next lodge, drove more poles, and set another trap; and so on. Then he returned to the first lodge.

He found the trap sprung, but no beaver.

When the owners of the lodge had stayed underwater as long as they could, they swam back for the passageway. It chanced that this lodge belonged to Ahmeek himself, and the king beaver had led the return, when it seemed that the Indian had gone.

Luck favored the big leader. A swirl of his body had touched the pan of the trap, and had sprung it. Ahmeek fled in alarm, at that vicious, muffled snap close beside him, nipping his fur. He knew something about traps. Thereafter the entrance was safe, but none of the beavers would enter it. Ahmeek had another resource to fall back upon.

The Indian made the round of the traps. None of the others were sprung, and yet there were no beavers inside the lodges to flee upon his approach.

The thing mystified him. While the beavers could swim about under the ice for a considerable time, eventually they must come up to the lodges for air. Yet apparently they had not done so.

While he meditated upon it a snowflake struck him in the face; then another. He glanced upward. The blizzard was coming. He must be on his way.

Suddenly he saw the air hole, and something like a grin cracked his face.

"Big beaver here. Heap smart!" He nodded as if in corroboration. So long as the air hole remained, the big leader would not permit his followers to enter the lodges, and risk being caught; they merely came to the hole for air, and again dived, waiting for the Indian to go. He could have shot them as they did this, but that would require waiting, and he had no time to waste. Besides, the current probably would have sucked their bodies away, and he, mindful of the failing fur supply in these hills, was not one to throw away a good pelt. Besides, he believed that he could come back and get the whole colony.

Gathering up his traps he climbed out of the valley, and went his way. That night, in his storm-swept camp miles away, he suffered a strange illness. He was old, anyway. When the blizzard ended only a great mound of snow marked the place where the red man had made his last camp. With him perished the secret of the valley —the beaver colony which was Ahmeek's.

So the craft of the big beaver had triumphed again. The colonists were still safe.

The famine crisis had passed. February's sun warmed the valley at midday, until the snow thinned, and the brown rocks showed through here and there. A passage had been cut through the driftwood to the sunken saplings, and Ahmeek knew that there would be food enough for his followers until spring came.

But Ahmeek had not lived to ripe maturity without the wisdom that comes from experience. The cougar troubled them no more; the man had gone, but there were other dangers to harass the busy workers, and the king beaver sensed the menace that sometimes comes in earliest spring, when famine, combined with natural promptings that have maintained life on this globe from the beginning, makes maniacs out of certain of the furred kindred.

It was, therefore, just before the thaw that heralded March, that Lutra, the giant otter who had wintered on the lower Rattlesnake, near where it joins with the majestic Columbia and moves toward the sea, missed his mate.

Nothing quite like it had happened before. So far as is known, otters mate for life; and it was so in the case of Lutra. He did not know that she had wandered afield, and had fallen victim to a trapper's craft. The dog otter could only surmise that, earlier than usual, she had set out for headwater, and the lofty lake where she was wont to sojourn each spring and summer while rearing her young.

To think was to act, with Lutra. And now he was on his way—his mad, reckless, lovelorn way—to overtake her.

He covered distance with astonishing quickness, following the Rattlesnake upstream; taking short cuts when he came to a loop of the river. More swiftly than a fish he slipped through the water, his webbed hind feet churning like paddles, while his spadelike tail guided him, now up, now down, now directly ahead. Occasionally his catlike whiskers and beady eyes showed at the surface, but only for a moment, when he was gone again.

It was dawn of the fourth day that he came up the rapids at the lower end of the valley, and saw before him the beaver dam, with the black, twisted ribbon of the river above.

After a quick survey, he climbed up on the structure. Above was the frozen pond. Lutra ran along the edge, saw the lodges, brown heaps of bottom muck, for the sun had melted the covering of snow. He came to an air hole in the ice, and hesitated.

The dog otter was frantic with anxiety and loneliness. Time after time, as he crawled out on the bank, on his way up-

stream, he had sent forth his chirruping cry—the call to his mate—but there had been no answer. Moreover, he was now hungry. He was always ravenous, for that matter, even though it was easy enough to gratify the craving, for no bull trout or rainbow could escape him in the water. He knew all about beavers, but he was not thinking of them at this moment so much as he was the fact that beneath the ice on this wide pool there should be good fishing. With a little duck of his head, he slipped soundlessly into the black water.

Here he saw a world of greenish-yellow, for he swam with his eyes wide open. Back and forth he quartered the pool, but the fish that it undoubtedly contained apparently were more adroit in evading him than he was in searching them out. Suddenly a black opening yawned before him.

Without hesitation, or knowing what it contained or where it led, he surged into it, his webbed feet driving the water behind him. Straight ahead the tunnel went for a few feet; then slanted upward. He knew it then for the underwater entrance to one of the beaver lodges, but he did not pause.

A number of beavers were asleep in the lodge of Ahmeek. One of the smallest awoke with a great hunger gnawing him. Abruptly he sat up, preened himself with a few dabs of his long-toed hind feet; then dived into the tunnel which led toward the food-storage pond. As he went down he was suddenly confronted by an apparition of bared fangs and gleaming eyes.

Like lightning he whirled and sprang for the shelf where Ahmeek and the others lay. As his head shot from the water he squealed shrilly, for the teeth of the dog otter had met through his thigh. Thereafter pandemonium reigned.

Just what happened no eye could follow. The dog otter, big as he was, and savage—powerful enough to kill a wild cat or intimidate a wolf—might have entered any other lodge in the colony and slain the occupants and escaped, but not the castle of Ahmeek. Here was strength and size added to craft and courage. Yet there was no cowardice in the heart of Lutra, who belonged to the fearless, ravaging clan of the *mustelidæ*, which includes the weasel, mink, marten, fisher and wolverene. Cursed with a blood lust that passes all understanding, the weasel family kills not so much for hunger as for killing's sake; and Lutra, mad over the loss of his mate, wanted to slay. He would destroy every beaver in the pond ere he went on. Ordinarily he was content to live on fish, rabbits and birds, but now he was hot with the craving for bigger prey.

At the cry of the young beaver, the dog-like head of the otter, with its cattish whiskers, showed; and with a chirring sound that was his battle cry, Ahmeek flung himself on the foe. Instantly locked in a terrible embrace, they surged down the passageway, and into clear water.

Here was a battle to Lutra's liking. Quicker than a fish he flung his long, lithe body about, avoiding the holds that Ahmeek sought, and always driving in with his own vicious snap and shake. Yet the big beaver himself was by no means a novice in the water. His hind feet churned, he shot ahead; he swerved with a twist of his broad, rudderlike tail, and more than once his great yellow chisels chopped through the thick fur and skin of his adversary.

Gradually the water took on a pinkish hue, for both battlers were torn and slashed; mud was stirred from the bottom, until beaver and otter fought in an underwater fog. Time and again it seemed that each had lost the other in the maze; then the blazing eyes and wide-opened jaws of the missing fighter would reappear, to resume the struggle.

Now it was apparent that the end was near. Both animals needed air. Their strokes were weaker, yet neither, it seemed, was willing to quit. Other beavers would have dashed in to help their king, but Lutra gave them no opportunity, nor did Ahmeek himself. Here was a foe which the ruler of the colony must deal with alone.

By no means the born fighter that the otter was, the big beaver seemed first to falter, although his stout heart beat as courageously as ever. His rushes became slower, while Lutra, quick to sense victory, redoubled his efforts, in smashing drives. He lunged in and out, quick as light, and each time red showed where he struck.

But seconds were precious now, for his lungs seemed bursting. And, too, it was time for the death stroke. Like an eel he whipped double; then shot at the king's unguarded throat.

Just as it seemed that his cruel fighting teeth would lock, he felt those terrible cutting chisels set in his own neck. Too late he sought to swerve; the incisors of the

great rodent champed together. With his dying gasp, as his tortured lungs expelled the last of their air, the otter gripped the beaver's right foreleg. Down sank both battlers. A string of bubbles trickled upward from the big beaver's nose, where it was buried in the otter's neck.

Then the king came to life. With a powerful surge of his tail and hind feet he lurched toward the air hole, dragging that dead weight, still fast to him. Never had he known the life-giving opening could be so far away. Another kick, another few inches gained; another kick and surge, a few inches more. A futile effort, and he would never make it. Slower and slower he moved, and it seemed that he sank deeper than he forged ahead.

But the fighting, indomitable spirit that is the heritage of all beavers, the patience and will to win that keeps them on earth when more favored of the furred kindred are vanishing—more highly developed in Ahmeek, the king—came to his rescue. In a sudden rush of strength, when it seemed that he was already dead, he surged ahead; his black nose thrust itself into the air, and he drank deeply of the winey atmosphere. The last convulsive effort tore loose the hold of Lutra, and the long, glistening body of the dog otter, the beautiful sheen of its fur like dark silver in the ghastly, gray-green depth, sank slowly toward the bottom, while young beavers, who had witnessed the struggle of their king, wheeled away from it in alarm.

Spring was near. The first sun rays were searching the summits, the east was salmon fleshed with dawn, while down the valley breathed a wind spiced with the tang of some rare elixir. A hardy water ousel, a curious little gray bird who had wintered there, teetered along the edge of the beaver dam, and called to his mate; utterly unafraid of the giant beaver who rested by the air hole, and who found the world good in his hour of triumph.

Another animal story by Mr. Gilbert in an early issue.

ENFORCING ORDERS

WHEN former Senator Joseph W. Bailey of Texas, one of the most brilliant debaters who ever went to Congress, was practicing law as a young man in his native State, he was employed by a farmer, Hiram Nelson, whose hay wagon and two horses had been destroyed by a swiftly rushing railroad train at a grade crossing. The railroad company finally offered to compromise the damage suit by giving Hiram a lifelong job as flagman at the crossing that had been the scene of his tragedy.

The first day Hiram went to work, a man on a hand car stopped at the crossing and said:

"My name's Bryan. I'm your boss. And there's one thing you've got to remember. The Special Express on this road must never be late. Put your gates down two minutes before she's due and keep them down until she's passed you. Don't forget! No matter what happens, the Special Express must never be late at this crossing. I won't stand for it!"

At five o'clock that afternoon the Special Express was due at Hiram's crossing. At two minutes to five he put his gates down, got out his white flag to wave the train on and waited. The two minutes passed, and two more, and five more. Then Hiram darted into his shed, came out with a red flag and waited, chewing tobacco so fiercely that his jaws cracked at every mastication. Finally the Special Express whistled in the distance, eighteen minutes late, and came roaring on, whereupon Hiram sprang to the middle of the track and, by wildly brandishing the red flag, brought the train to a stop.

"What's the trouble here?" roared the engineer amid the screeching of the brakes.

"Air you the engineer?" inquired Hiram hotly.

"I am! What's the trouble, stopping the Special Express this way here?"

"I want to know what's made you so all-fired late!" Hiram shot back. "Bryan says he won't stand for it!"

I'M not out to knock any other firm's stock
That helps you about when you travel;
There's bureaus and such—English, Yankee, and Dutch—
At which you can't rightfully cavil;
They'll route you with skill any place that you will
Whose name you have read of in books,
But when you are whirled to the end of the world
The agent you'll find there is Cook's.

Cook's!
In all of the out-of-way nooks,
No matter how far or how strangely you fare,
The agent of Thomas B. Cook's will be there.
The outfit you'll find any time, anywhere,
Is—Cook's!

And whether you get to Siam or Tibet,
Iquique, Colombo, Lahore,
Alaska, Peru, Athabasca, Chefoo,
Hongkong, Yucatan, Singapore,
New Zealand, Sahara, New Guinea, Bokhara,
However outlandish it looks,
There's no need to dread it, your letter of credit
Is cashed by an agent of Cook's.

Cook's!
They've mapped all the rivers and brooks,
Their schedule covers the utmost frontier
From Here out to There and from There back to Here;
The agent who's certainly bound to appear
Is—Cook's!

They'll sell you a ticket through jungle and thicket
  And send you a guide if you like.
And when you go far past where other men are
  An agent of Cook's you will strike.
Ubiquitous guys are these agents, and wise
  To all of the hooks and the crooks.
And if when you die up to heaven you'd hie—
  Arrange for your passage with Cook's.

Cook's!
They've got the whole world in their hooks.
The source of the Nile or the Amazon's mouth,
In countries of wet and in countries of drouth.
Ice, snow, desert, jungle, north, east, west and south,
There's always an agent of Cook's,
Cook's
An affable agent of Cook's.

Manlius, His Mark

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Short Man," "White Emeralds," Etc.

The Great Macumber violates the ethics of his profession.

IN all the world of vaudeville there is not to be found a performer who keeps the faith more scrupulously with his public than does the Great Macumber.

Nine-and-ninety headliners will patch a new song here and a new gag there into the threadbare routine of yesteryear and carry hardily along seasons without end, calling their ancient acts new. Macumber, as any one who has followed his stage career can testify, is that rare hundredth shogun of variety whose announcement of a change of bill is a pledge and a pact.

No illusion of the Great One's, no matter how popular or how costly, is ever carried over the circuit a second time; and it is similarly a point of honor that even those marvelous minor feats of prestidigitation which are the fillers of our program must not be presented twice before the same audience.

One feature only of Macumber's performance stands unrevised and unvarying. His solemn little speech introducing his miracles remains essentially as it was when first I heard it years ago, on a day before I dreamed I was destined to be his pupil and partner in the magic art.

This opening speech is at once a challenge, a confession and a warning—a half whimsical, half earnest disclaimer of extra-terrestrial alliances.

"I am a trickster, a fraud if you will," says the Great Macumber. "It is really a game of wits we are to play. My business is to mystify. Your pleasure, I hope, will lie in seeking to solve the mysteries of my magic.

"There may be some present who will think my tricks black miracles. They will perhaps be sniffing for the brimstone before I am through. For the benefit of these good people I'd explain that I'm leagued with no supernatural agencies. My magic is man-made, as all mortal magic must be. I have no powers except those lent by the swiftness of my hands and by the perhaps deceptively simple-appearing apparatus which I shall use. And no man, regardless of what his pretensions may be, has larger powers than I. Remember that, for charlatans swarm the earth as thickly as ever they did in the Dark Ages, preying on the gullible and fattening off grief."

Fair and open is Macumber. Yet for all his frankness and despite all that has been printed concerning the warfare he is eternally waging against quacks of the transcendental, there seem to be a superstitious few in every crowd who carry away the conviction that the Great One is more of a sorcerer than he admits.

Every so often, as a result, some astonishing sort of proposition is certain to be

brought to us at the Rawley. A dozen times Macumber has been implored to fathom dubious futures. His assistance has confidently been invoked in the curing of the incurable. He has been called upon to exorcise evil spirits from a small boy with a penchant for window breaking; and has been invited to provide, on a strictly contingent fifty-fifty basis, some charm or incantation which would have the effect of causing a rich and crotchety old gentleman to change his will.

It was when we were featuring the illusion called "The Love Philtre" that little Mrs. Felix Byrne submitted her unique and naïvely hopeful scheme. She came clothed in anonymity and tragic black, and heavily veiled.

"I am a desperate woman," said she, and I was a little surprised that the voice through the veil was so youthful. In her somber garb she had seemed at the least of middle age.

"I can't believe it," murmured Macumber. "Indeed, I cannot."

"And why?" she demanded quickly.

The Great One smiled.

"Because," said he, "you are too young —and if you'll pardon the personality, too well endowed with good looks—to know the full meaning of the word you've used. You are perhaps in a bit of trouble. Isn't that what you mean?"

She was silent for a moment.

"You—you're guessing!" she accused.

"On the contrary, I speak of what I see."

Her hand went swiftly to the black veil, and the Great One chuckled.

"It's still there, serving nobly," said he. "But eyes can be trained to penetrate thicker veils than yours, my lady. Mine have been—and you were good enough to let me seat you by the window. You still have doubts? Then let me tell you that your hair and your eyes are brown, that your nose is of the quite delectable type known as retroussé, that your chin is of the sort toward which I personally lean, and that the color in your cheeks is a trifle higher than it was a minute since. When I avow in addition to this that your face is as strange to me as it is charming, what further reason to—— Ah! you are quick to grasp a suggestion, I perceive! That's much better. I thank you."

The girl in black, with a little cry, had thrown up the defeated veil; and I saw not only that her eyes were startled but that they were brown.

"I can't believe it was your *eyes* that saw," she said. "You are more than human. I suspected that before. I know it now."

"You'd please me," the Great One told her, "by not being so positive."

"I've seen you on the stage."

"Yes?"

"I could hardly believe what I saw. Your mind reading——"

"Did I not say at the outset that my play at thought transmission would be a trick?"

"You did. But it was genuine. I happened to have an old Roman coin in my purse. I handed it to your assistant—to this gentleman here, I think. And almost before he could ask the question you had told me what it was, and even had given the date. You were on the stage, more than a hundred feet from me. There was absolutely no chance of——"

"Tush!" interrupted Macumber. "I tell you again that the mind-reading business is no more than a mystification. Robert Houdin invented it a century ago, and although I'll confess I've added a wrinkle or two of my own, I am but a copyist. It's the lad's lookout and mine to be as familiar with old coins as your archæologists are, for not a week passes but what some wiseacre tries to trip us with one. Magic I leave behind me at the stage door. But if in my private capacity I can be of service to you—if with advice or otherwise I can aid you—a command will be a favor."

Obviously the girl had been impressed, but she appeared not altogether convinced. She hesitated, and her regard was both shrewd and sad.

"I don't know what to believe," she admitted. "Or—or whether to be disappointed. I've been days making up my mind to appeal to you. Even when I decided to come, I could not bear that you should see my face. But since I am here, veiled or unveiled, I'll ask you the question that brought me."

"Pray do."

A flame rose in her cheeks.

"It's about one of your mysteries. The one described in the program as 'The Love Philtre.' It was a sort of allegory, I thought. You showed a couple on the stage. In pantomime they quarreled. The hus-

band went away—vanished into thin air before our eyes. Then with some yellowish powder you wove a spell. You brought the powder out onto a platform leading from the stage. There was a little explosion, and from the smoke stepped the man who had disappeared."

The Great One nodded enthusiastically.

"Aye," said he. "You missed no point of the byplay. It has been our aim in the last few years to dramatize the magic. We've the motion pictures to compete with, you see. What was it about this particular illusion that interested you, may I ask?"

"I wondered if in reality there could be such a thing as—a love philtre."

"Oh, but there is," protested Macumber with instant gallantry. "And I'm thinking the Lord has given one to you in that bonny face of yours, little lady." He laughed softly. "You're not doubting that, are you?"

The brown eyes were suddenly dewy.

"I'm not a l-little lady," she choked. "I've been m-married five years, and I'm getting old and u-ugly."

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Macumber, but the weeping girl pressed on:

"You don't know! You don't know! My h-husband sees it. I love him—and I'm l-losing him!"

Her tears flowed faster.

"You're deceiving yourself!" exclaimed the Great One.

"No; I am deceived," wailed the girl.

"A victim of a too great imagination."

"Not that. A victim of a too great trust. A too great love!"

"Imagination," reiterated Macumber uncomfortably. "I'll confess to owning a sixth sense—and it tells me I am right. What about this husband of yours? How do you think you're losing him?"

"To another w-woman."

"Folderol! I'd like to see her!"

"S-so would I. Oh, if I could have my hands on her for just a minute!"

"You're not acquainted with the rival, eh? Then how can you be sure she exists?"

"I intercepted a note. And I knew about her before that. I have a sixth sense, too. She must be b-beautiful—and she's rich. We have little. That is one of her holds on Felix. Felix has had money from her, and——"

The Great One frowned.

"Eh?" he queried. "Money, you say? And what else?"

She dabbed at her eyes with a frilly and futile handkerchief.

"N-neckties," said she. "That was the beginning. He wore them for her. I should have left him then, instead of waiting to have my heart t-torn."

The shadow had passed quickly from Macumber's brow with her reply. A smile plucked at the corners of his mouth.

"Dear child," he congratulated, "you progress famously. You've a proper regard for suspense, a flair for the unexpected. My morning is yours, and a month of my days if they'll benefit you. Neckties, by the Lord! A colorful wooing!"

His eyes came to mine, and they were jubilant.

"I can read the alliteration on your lips, lad—the Triangle of the Ties! But you're overhasty, I'm thinking. 'Twill more likely develop as the Strange Case of the Cravats, for upon my soul I—— Oh, pardon! Most certainly and most humbly I yield to the Lady Scheherezade!"

II.

There is an intangible, indefinable something about Macumber which our journalistic friend Billy Race declares to be the essential quality of the great reporter. People do not have to be long in his presence to be convinced of his sympathy and his understanding. In women, particularly, he inspires confidence at once. Although seals have laid on their lips, secrets that are buried in their hearts will find a way out when the Great One listens.

Our visitor of the brown and tearful eyes had succumbed completely.

"Whether you can help me or not I don't know," she said. "But somehow I am sure I can trust you."

"At any rate," said Macumber gently, "you can trust your intuition."

"You wonder who I am?"

Macumber shook his head.

"Would that make a difference?"

"Perhaps not. We aren't persons of importance. But I feel I should attempt no concealment. My husband's name is Felix Byrne. He is a clerk in the office of Parsons & Whitely. Perhaps you've heard of the firm?"

"I believe so. A Stock Exchange house."

"Yes; not one of the largest, but one of

the oldest. I was Mr. Whitely's personal stenographer until I was married. Felix wouldn't let me keep on. He's that sort. On his forty dollars a week—it's fifty now—we managed to be very comfortable, and to save money.

"And we were happy. There haven't been any children, but I've never missed them. Felix filled my life. No husband could have been kinder or more considerate. We've never had a real quarrel. And now—n-now——"

She broke off to dry her eyes again.

"That's what I want to hear," said the Great One. "*Now* what's happened?"

"Now my happiness is ended. Unless I can win him back. Oh, you mustn't think I'm the kind of woman who goes hunting trouble for herself, Mr. Macumber. I'm not the jealous, suspicious type. The thought of there being anybody else in the world that Felix would l-look at never entered my mind until this last month.

"How long it had been going on I can't tell you. Nothing that Felix ever did or said gave me reason to guess there was anything wrong. They must have been meeting downtown, in the afternoons, for Felix was careful not to seem to be neglecting me. In his homecomings he was as punctual as ever.

"Then one day the cat popped out of the bag. Felix brought home a box containing a half dozen new neckties—and my eyes were suddenly wide open."

The Great One betrayed a passing bewilderment.

"Just a moment, please! You travel too fast for me. What was the matter with the neckties?"

"They were g-gorgeous."

"But why——"

"Just a few minutes ago you said I might depend on intuition—and it was intuition whispered to me then. You may not realize it, Mr. Macumber, but the deductive powers in women are far more fully developed than in men. I knew, in the first place, that in all our married life Felix had not selected a single cravat for himself. He left it to me to pick and to purchase them always. But such neckties as these I'd never bought. They weren't such ties as men on small salaries can afford. At a glance I knew they must have cost at least five dollars each.

"Felix had been brazen enough to open the package before my very eyes. I can't begin to describe the feeling that came over me. I asked one question. No, Felix hadn't gone mad. He hadn't bought the neckties himself, didn't even pretend that he had. The horrible thought came unbidden into my mind. What is the first gift a woman thinks of for the man she loves? A fine cravat—a symbol to be worn by the one who has captured her heart. Hadn't my own first Christmas present to Felix, before we were married, been a beautiful tie—and a tie which he laid aside after the first day at the office as being too precious with sentiment to wear?

There was a world of sympathy in Macumber's shadowy smile.

"I can understand," he murmured. "'Twas a rare delicacy he exhibited. But tell me, Mrs. Byrne, did you immediately disclose your suspicion to your husband?"

"I couldn't help it. The words were out before I could consider them. I was beside myself. 'You've had these from some woman, Felix,' I said. 'Oh, how could you?'"

"And your husband?"

"He laughed. He *could* laugh. I found myself weeping. Then he thought better, and began some lame explanation."

"Which was?"

"I wouldn't hear it."

"Did you not say you'd never quarreled?"

"We didn't quarrel. I simply went to my room and closed the door. And then for two days we didn't speak. Finally when I could contain myself no longer I demanded to be told the full truth. For a time Felix maintained a sullen silence. When he spoke he was pleased to be sarcastic. He was defiant and showed not a bit of shame.

"'How could I hide anything from as foxy a person as Mrs. Felix Byrne?' he sneered. 'If any one wants to give me a few neckties, I'll take 'em and wear 'em and still be within my rights. Just ask your old family divorce lawyer if that isn't so, Mrs. Sherlock!'

"So there he was, as much as begging me to divorce him. And right out of a clear sky, Mr. Macumber, after all the happy years!"

Little Mrs. Byrne discovered a dry corner on her handkerchief. She needed it, and used it.

"That was a little over three weeks ago,"

she resumed dismally. "Every day since, Felix has worn a different necktie—but never one that I have bought for him. That woman has continued to supply him. She has fairly lavished ties upon him. There have been three gift packages of a half dozen cravats each thus far, and the end isn't——"

"You mentioned money, and a note."

"I'm coming to that. The money was inclosed in the note, and the note came in the box of ties. They were delivered at the house last Saturday afternoon. From Chubbsley's on Fifth Avenue, no less.

"I opened the package, for Felix wasn't home from the office. It wasn't as if it were mail, you see; and the envelope that held the note wasn't sealed. Folded in the envelope was a hundred-dollar bill—as much as Felix makes in two weeks."

"The note? What did it say?"

"I have it here in my purse. I snatched it from Felix later, after he had read it, and I've had it hidden behind a mirror ever since. This is it."

Macumber unfolded the square of paper which she offered him. After he had read the few typewritten lines it contained he questioned the girl with a glance, and when she had signified her indifference with a shrug passed the note along to me. It was on the stationery of one of the swagger new hotels—the Luxor, as I recall—and was signed simply with a typewritten initial:

> My Dear Boy: I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am that circumstances prevented me from seeing you downtown to-day. Herewith, at any rate, a few more ties. You'll wear them for me, won't you?
>
> The other little gift inclosed I beg you to accept without question. It is my intention to share with you in much larger proportion, and I'm going to insist on having my way. But that I'll explain when we meet again. Then you shall know what you've come to mean to me in these last weeks.
>
> In the meantime, more power to your good left hand and your bright auburn head. D.

As I finished reading I was aware that the Great One was humming under his breath. It was an old tune that I had all but forgotten. The words came flooding into my memory. Macumber was paraphrasing the last lines of the ballad:

> "More than all the sweetest words,
> Tell me with your ties!"

Mrs. Felix Byrne didn't appear to have heard.

"Now you see!" said she. "And there was a very distinct odor of perfume hovering about the envelope and paper. I guess it's gone now."

Macumber nodded.

"I didn't notice it, but I'm not doubting your word. Of course it could be accounted for in more ways than one. What did your husband have to say, Mrs. Byrne?"

"What could he have said? Of course I had my little surprise ready for him when he got home. I had put the money and the note back into the envelope, and had rewrapped the neckties. Felix didn't conceal his interest when I told him that a package had come for him. Before he opened the note he had managed to smuggle the ties into his bureau drawer. To do him justice, I will say that the money seemed to be unexpected. I gave him only a moment to read what the woman had had to say. Then I asked innocently: 'Who's your letter from, Felix?'

"He didn't answer at once, and I had to repeat the question.

"'Oh,' said Felix, 'from a man who's in the office a great deal. A customer.'

"I was as sweet as I could be. You know it's honey that catches flies, Mr. Macumber.

"'Maybe the same man you've been getting the pretty neckties from,' I said.

"Felix grasped at the straw.

"'How did you guess it?' he wanted to know. 'Queer bird. He's sent more ties, too.'

"'Isn't that nice of him?' I said. 'And what's that? Money? Goodness! A hundred-dollar bill! What's that for, Felix?'

"I had him stumped, I could see. Felix isn't fertile enough to make a first-class deceiver of women. He scratched his head, and then gave up.

"'You'll have to guess that for yourself, Fannie,' he told me. 'All I know is that he seems to want me to have it—and I guess he's a man who can afford hundred-dollar tips, all right, if he's a mind to give 'em. I'll just put this money by, and see what he has to say. But I tell you now that he won't have to work overtime to convince me I ought to keep it, whatever it's for.'

"And then, Mr. Macumber, Felix seemed to gather courage and inspiration at the same time and decided he'd go right on pulling the wool over my eyes. He started by

trying to fuss over me, and calling me his own dear little girlie and saying what a shame it was he hadn't been man enough to insist on telling me where he got the ties before. His smug assurance infuriated me. I couldn't stay to listen, but snatched the letter from his hand and ran away to my room.

" 'What's the matter?' he shouted after me. 'What're you going to do with that letter?'

" 'I haven't decided,' I told him. 'But maybe that old family divorce lawyer of mine will find it useful as evidence one of these days!' "

The Great Macumber was regarding her smilingly as she came to a pause.

"And I suppose," he said, "that further silence has averted another quarrel since? Yes? But I do think you may be doing your husband an injustice, Mrs. Byrne. I do have a thought that this letter *was* written by a man."

"You forget the perfume."

"I do not. But perhaps I might better have said dictated by a man. A letter typewritten on hotel stationery will nine times out of ten have been written by a public stenographer. And have you ever seen a hotel stenographer—or smelled one—who wasn't gloriously scented?"

Under the girl's solemn and suspicious scrutiny Macumber's smile thinned and vanished.

"I offer the suggestion for what it's worth," he continued seriously. "And I warn you, Mrs. Byrne, not to be too quick to condemn. Before long you may be regretting it. If my own intuition is good for anything there's trouble brewing for this husband of yours. For all I can say now the mischief may have been done already. But probably not.

"You've asked me for advice, and indeed I have a bit for you. Will you follow it? Good, then. You must change your tactics with Mr. Felix Byrne. Let him talk to you. Listen to any explanation he may have concerning the customer and the cravats, no matter how preposterous it may sound in your ears. Then come and repeat the story to me in every detail. More than you know—perhaps more than I now realize myself—may depend on your acquiescence, and on your promptness and accuracy. You promise? I thank you, my lady. And I'll be relying on you!"

III.

While little Mrs. Byrne had been with us Macumber, though his eyes often had gone yearningly to the jar which held his store of sable and sinister tobacco, had shown her a fine consideration by denying himself his pipe. Hardly had the door closed behind her when he was enveloped in smoke. I cast a question into the haze.

"What nonsense, lad!" he exclaimed. "Do you, too, suspect I'm a sorcerer? How else could I know what Felix is into? 'Tis but a hunch I have that he's been marked for the victim of some deviltry or other. What it may be we must wait to learn."

"The money sent——"

"A bait, likely. To me the whole business seems to bear the guild mark of the skilled confidence worker. Yet it's no more than a guess, mind."

"I see nothing about Byrne to tempt even third-rate crooks. On fifty dollars a week he can scarcely have amassed a fortune."

"Aye. But I dare say Parsons & Whitely have. Felix may have more of wealth at his hand than many a millionaire. Have you thought of that, youngster?"

I hadn't. But thinking about it got me nowhere, and the Great One obliged with no further suggestions.

A day or two afterward we had a phone call from Mrs. Felix. Macumber was out, and it was I who answered. But when our brief conversation had been concluded I was no nearer to a solution of the mystery of the cravats. Young Mr. Byrne was on his dignity, his wife reported. The explanation he had lately been so eager to have heard could not now be cajoled out of him. Silence still sat upon the house of Byrne.

"A mess," pronounced the Great One when I told him of the call. "I should be sounding the man myself."

It was nearly a week after her visit to the Rawley when we heard again from little Mrs. Byrne. Rather it was Macumber who heard, for he was alone when she rang up. On my return I found him pacing the floor and grumbling savagely to himself. In his soliloquy one word was constantly recurring.

"Idiot! Idiot!"

"Meaning whom?" I queried.

"Myself," groaned the Great One. "I should never have let the thing drift so far. That Byrne business, I mean. I've had a call from the unhappy young lady. Her

husband has made a clean breast of it at last—and a deal more he had to confess than there'd have been a week ago. Already he's so far involved that I fear it will be beyond us to extricate him."

"How involved?"

Macumber shook his head.

"That I can't tell you, lad. Mrs. Byrne exacted a pledge from me that I'd say not a word to any one. She's fair frantic wi' grief and fear."

"It wasn't another woman, then?"

"Of course it wasn't. She knows it now. It's no love philtre she's wishing for, but rather a magic carpet. This evening I'll be seeing Felix myself. But too late, I'm afraid."

For the next half hour the Great One strode the rug and smoked in silence. Then he jammed on his hat and was gone without a word. When he came back, toward midnight, I was glad to see he seemed a shade more cheerful.

"There's still a chance to pull the man out," he announced. "Time favors us. We'll have a few days, at least. Thanks to the Lord that we're not playing this week. And thanks again that it was his wife to whom Byrne went with his confession. The two circumstances together may be the saving of him, wi' rare good luck."

In Macumber's activities of the next few days I had no share. At dinner the following evening I gathered he had spent some part of the afternoon in the bureau of identification at police headquarters, and that Felix Byrne had been there with him. But what the object of the visit was or whether it had been successfully achieved the Great One did not disclose.

After that he deserted the Rawley altogether.

"I'll not be far away, but it's better I stay a while under another roof," was the only explanation I could get from him; and after it had been made he rode away in state with a hastily packed trunk piled onto the roof of his taxi.

Whither the Great One had gone he didn't see fit to let me know, and indeed a matter of seventy-two hours had gone by before I had a word from him. And then the first thing that came over the telephone wire to me was a surprising question.

"Lad," he demanded excitedly, "d'ye ken the principles of the great American game of poker?"

"The principles, and that's about all," I told him; and therein, as he must have known well before he asked me, I spoke the truth. Cards are tools of the magician's trade, and ethically he may not gamble with them. In all the years during which I had been associated with Macumber I had not once suffered myself to be drawn into a game of chance; and the Great One for all his uncanny skill, I knew, would be as little at home at a poker table as myself. What speculating he does, and at times it is considerable, is always done in the Street.

So when I had replied to Macumber's question, I asked one of my own. What the devil, I wanted to know, did this sudden and startling interest of his in poker mean?

"A gambler's fever is upon me," he replied. "I'm burning with it."

"What of that oath of yours never to turn a card for stakes?"

"'Twas made to be broken. It has fallen a victim to circumstance. I had the good fortune to be accepted into a pleasant little card party last night, and we play again this evening. Lad, but it's a bonny game! Fortunately my fellow players had not met me as Macumber, and so they're spared dark thoughts about the bit siller I've picked up from them."

"Maestro!"

His familiar chuckle floated to me.

"For shame, youngster! I came by my winnings honestly, I'd have you know. The cards I played were those dealt to me."

"How about Felix Byrne?"

"Oh, Byrne? I fancy he's paying the penalty of his foolishness. I'll give you the details later. Just now I've an invitation to extend. I'd like to have you sit in with us to-night."

"Do you really mean that?" I asked incredulously.

"Surely I do. And no more questions, if you please. Taking your acceptance for granted, I've already phoned the Rawley cashier. He'll have two thousand dollars in cash for you. That should see you through."

"Two thousand!" I gasped.

"That was the amount I mentioned, and he seemed to understand. My check is on the way to cover it. When you've collected the money, climb into a taxi and drive over to the Hotel Whitestone. Get here at eight or thereabouts."

"Very well. And I'm to go to your room?"

Again the Great One chuckled.

"You'd have a time finding my room, lad. I am quite certain there's no Mr. Macumber stopping at the Whitestone."

"Oh, then you're not living there?"

"I am, but my name isn't Macumber. It suits my convenience for the moment to be Mr. Bill MacIntosh of Shreveport, Louisiana. For your information, I not only have very valuable holdings in the Caddo oil fields but made several quick millions a while since in the Homer boom."

"Interesting," said I. "My congratulations, maestro! And may I ask who I——"

"You, my dear Archie, have already been vouched for as the high-flying son of one of Oklahoma's leading citizens. Your name is James Loomis, and please do not embarrass me by forgetting it."

"James Loomis I am, sir. But what the deuce is the idea of the masquerade? Am I to understand that this game is——"

"No, no, lad! You're off there. The game's been absolutely straight. My word on it. As for our use of assumed names, doesn't it occur to you that the Great Macumber & Co. might be regarded as a rather baneful combination in a contest at cards?"

And then, brusquely informing me that if I wished a chalk talk on the subject of the evening's operations I'd have to wait for it, Macumber rang off.

IV.

For any but the biggest of hostelries to rake together two thousand dollars in cash after banking hours is no inconsiderable feat. The Rawley's management had accomplished it—and the size of the roll I carried into the Whitestone that evening was in direct proportion to the effect its accumulation had represented.

One single thousand-dollar bill—the first and last which my pockets have held—had been yielded by the office safe. Then there were three or four hundred-dollar notes, and as many fifties. Beyond that the denominations tapered down to twenties, tens and even fives. My two thousand dollars, if one were to calculate on the impression made by the mighty bill on the outside, could have been forty thousand.

In the lobby of the Whitestone I looked about in vain for the Great One. I was on the point of asking to be connected with the apartment of Mr. Bill MacIntosh of Louisiana when a heavy and hearty hand pummeled my back and I heard, boisterously raised, the voice of Macumber.

"James Loomis! Little old Jimmy himself, or I'm a liar!"

Wheeling, I perceived that for the second time in his life Macumber had stooped to the scorned art of disguise. He had equipped himself, that is to say, with a hat as broad as his r's; and the effect was not short of astonishing. In consequence I stammered a little over my greeting.

"Hullo, Mac—MacIntosh. What's on?"

"Friends of mine. Ones I told you about. Want you to meet 'em. Mr. Manlius and Mr. Doremus—shake hands with Mr. James Loomis of Oklahoma, New York and Paris!"

A flavor of Scotch was in the atmosphere, and I saw with a sudden misgiving that the Great One's eyes were owlish. Temperate I knew him to be, and yet the suspicion that flitted into my mind went out when I'd had a sharp look at the Messrs. Manlius and Doremus.

These two weren't at all of the type I'd been prepared, somehow, to meet. Quite obviously they were men of substance. Mr. Doremus was rather tall and cheerfully rotund of build—a man of business, I thought, rather than a profession. Macumber almost immediately confirmed my guess.

"Heard of the Doremus Milling Company of Minneapolis? *This* is the Doremus!"

Mr. Manlius, who was taller than Mr. Doremus and spare, took my hand in a firm and friendly clasp.

"And Mr. Manlius," explained the Great One, "has the distinction of being the youngest national-bank president in the Northwest. Something like that, isn't it, Manlius? Oh, in Minnesota? My mistake! At any rate, in our group the Northwest and the Southwest meet."

Mr. Doremus laughed gustily.

"But I suppose Mr. Loomis understands the party doesn't divide on lines of sectionalism? It's every man for himself, Loomis—and may the worst man suffer little."

During the next few minutes of our chat, I felt myself under a more or less frank scrutiny by both the Messrs. Doremus and Manlius. Behind all their urbanity I sensed a determination to be certain of their company before taking chances however easily to be afforded.

The two, it developed, were also guests of the Whitestone; and when Manlius at length suggested that we adjourn to his suite for a Scotch and soda I felt I had passed inspection with flying colors. Yet, as I went, I wondered what could be Macumber's design against these citizens of affairs—or if it were possible, indeed, that it was the poker game in which he'd become interested for its own fascinating sake alone.

It was the Great One who brought the talk abruptly from aimless generalities to cards.

"Let's to our mutton, gentlemen!" he urged. "You'll pardon my impatience, for with the feeling of good fortune upon me I count minutes lost as good dollars lost. I'm needing the dollars, I can tell you. Only this morning I had a telegram containing the sad news that MacIntosh No. 7 had dropped in production to three thousand barrels a day, and I'm like to be a broken man in heart and purse as a result of it."

"I pity you," grinned Mr. Doremus. "If I could draw three thousand barrels of flour a day out of a hole I'd turn over the mills to charity to-morrow. But as it is—— Hold on there, Manlius. I'm in the game for sociability, not for blood. Not so many yellows, if you please. A two-hundred-dollar stack should last me the evening."

"It's been a lean year for the Sixth National," Manlius remarked, "but I'm investing five hundred myself. You, MacIntosh? A thousand? You're bent on turning my chaste apartment into a gambling den, eh? Well, I suppose it's one more case of easy come, easy go. If you had to build up your dollars out of fractions of per cents you'd probably think more of them."

Manlius' quiet and humorous gray eyes were on me.

"I think," said I, swallowing hard, "I think four or five hundred will——"

"Tush!" cried Macumber. "Would that be an Oklahoma figure? Give Tom Loomis' son a stack the size of mine, Manlius. And don't let young James deceive you wi' his spurious meekness. He's a wolf in a poker game. When the untamed spirit moves he'll be lifting you out of your boots."

But for all the Great One's heraldings it was with a chastened spirit that I entered into the game. I didn't understand the quirks of it well enough, I realized, to be competing for considerable stakes; and still less did I understand the enterprise in hand. As a poker wolf I had no difficulty whatsoever in playing the sheep. What pots I went into—and I played no more frequently than I felt obliged to, be assured—I entered diffidently. Yet though my hands were played with a uniform lack of spirit which I found it impossible to conceal, I contrived to hold through the first couple of hours a slight advantage I had gained in earlier pots.

Always, guardedly, I was watching cards and fingers, plays and players, from beneath the green eye shade tossed to me by Manlius. And after long watching I knew that Macumber had been right. Despite the repeated warnings of an inner voice, I knew it. The game was absolutely straight. Manlius and Doremus were what they seemed to be, affable and full-pursed visitors in New York. Their brand of poker was gentlemen's poker. Their shuffling of the cards was honest shuffling, their dealing from the top of the deck.

My abstraction passed unnoticed. Not even Macumber took cognizance of the caution that guided my play. He and Manlius were providing, and sharing, all the action in the game. What had begun as a four-cornered contest was resolving itself gradually and surely into a duel. Doremus, having lost a couple of two-hundred-dollar stacks, had become as passive a participant as myself. It seemed his aim merely to check his losses. Only strong hands brought him in; he was not pinning too high hopes on the draw.

Evenly, but with ever-widening strokes, the pendulum swung between Manlius and the Great One. Once Manlius was forced to replenish his stack with a second five hundred dollars; again Macumber's thousand was all but gone. And from behind their stacks, high or low, the two never ceased to smile at each other and to exchange polite persiflage.

They came together again in a smashing big pot. Macumber, confident, continued to raise until his chips were all in the center of the table. Three yellows, worth a hundred dollars each, were his final contribution.

"Not playing anything back, are you?" asked Manlius. "Very well, then. I suppose all I can do is to call."

The Great One showed a small straight.

Manlius had a small straight, too—but a higher one than Macumber's.

"Tough luck!" said he. "That's the kind a man hates to be beaten on."

The Great One's grin didn't impress me as altogether spontaneous.

"I never really hate to be beaten," he protested. "But the devil of it is, Manlius, that I hate—and hate mightily—to have to say au revoir to such an enjoyable little pastime. As a matter of fact, I didn't anticipate we'd proceed so merrily. For the nonce I'm cleaned out. And I'm grieved by the knowledge that the hotel's safe is about empty. I had them cash a draft for me just after dinner."

Manlius laughed easily.

"Happened to me a dozen times. So don't let that worry you. I'd sooner have your check than bullion, upon my word, MacIntosh. Easier to carry. Glad to have you keep on."

Macumber appeared dubious.

"After all, Manlius," said he, "you don't know me any too well. I might be a sharper."

"Take my chances on that," grunted the other. "I know a he-man when I see one."

"Nevertheless, I'd have you take no chances. Money or its equivalent on the table is my own rule, Mr. Manlius. I never go behind it. So I'm afraid I'll have to—— But hold on! I'm not so poor as I thought! Would bonds of the Ætna Oil Corporation pass muster with you as a banker?"

"I rather think they would. But——"

"Then, by heavens!" cried Macumber, "I'm solvent! Nay, more—vulgarly rich. The vault below holds my treasure, and I can have it up here in five minutes. A day or two ago I sold a lease to the Ætna people and took their bonds in trade. Good money after bad it may be, Manlius, but I'll invest sixty thousand more or any part of it to make a dent in that tottering stack of yours. Don't stir from your chair, sir. I'll produce the bonds before you can say John Henry Robinson!"

And not many minutes had passed, in truth, before the Great One was covering the surface of the table with gold-bordered certificates and proclaiming:

"Come one, come all, and have a try for the wealth of MacIntosh! But in particular, Manlius, come you! The brilliant blue sky is the limit!"

Manlius looked at him steadily.

"I count sixty of 'em," he said. "Do you mean you want to put the whole business into the game?"

"I do that. And you? How far back do you go, friend Manlius?"

The banker eyed his stack.

"I'm pretty well equipped for action as it is, MacIntosh. But the Northwest must hold up its corner. Being far, far away from the Sixth National of St. Paul I can't match you; still I think I could manage to play on a basis of thirty thousand if the game should get out of hand."

The Great One stroked his chin.

"Let's see. You've a bit less than a tenth of that in front of you, Manlius. Did I happen to mention my——"

The banker stiffened.

"I wasn't thinking of asking you to accept paper—personal paper. I happen to have a few bonds myself, and I shan't have to leave the room to get them. Beyond the picture yonder's a wall safe. And if the Universal Harvester Company's as solid as Ætna Oil, I promise you I'll make up the amount I mentioned. No, I won't ask you even to accept the promise. You shall see with your own eyes, old man!"

From his wall safe Manlius brought an envelope, and once more a fortune flooded onto the table.

"I," smiled Macumber, "count twenty-eight. How about you, Doremus? And Jimmy, what do you say? What? You both retire? Ah, well, I'll not argue against your decision. Neither of you has been playing in decent luck, so 'tis better a battle left to the giants. Come, Manlius, the deal's yours!"

Waved out of the game though I'd been, I didn't put off my eye shade. Beneath its brim I continued to follow the flight of the cards. Never a false move did I catch, although I concentrated so intently on their backs as they came deal after deal off the deck that I lost all track of the play.

Still the voice deep down in me continued its croaking. Something was wrong, something was wrong. The sanguine Macumber was riding for a fall from which all his matchless skill in card manipulation would not save him, even were he disposed to avail himself of it.

Though the dealing of Manlius was straight, this game was crooked. And then, suddenly, I had the answer. It was the

cards that were crooked; Macumber's bonds were moving one by one to the other side of the table not because Manlius was dealing himself better hands, but because he was plunging only on winning hands. He knew when he topped Macumber. The backs of Macumber's cards must tell him.

The Great One, a little unsteadily, had called for a fresh deck. More closely than ever I watched Manlius after he had put it into play. And now I saw him mark it. His method had the simplicity of genius. His finger nails were long. A tiny scratch on the back of a card—a scratch which no one could say had not come there by accident—did the trick. To a finely trained eye the position of the scratch told the story.

I was sorely tempted to denounce Manlius at once. The small voice bade me wait. I tried a dozen times to get Macumber's eye, but he was absorbed in the play. He was puzzled, exasperated, losing again and again. Three out of four pots were taken from him.

My study turned from the method of Manlius to his system. What did the marks mean? Little by little my eyes sharpened for the test. I could distinguish his scheme of differentiating between the suits. Then I could tell aces from kings, kings from jacks. I had it!

I was brought back to the play with a start.

What they call a "whale of a pot" was in the cooking. The Great One had cast caution to the winds. The best hand of an hour had come his way, and he was backing it to that brilliant blue sky which he had declared to be his only limit. I had tabulated the cards in my mind as they went to him. He had three queens and a pair of nines, if those little nicks I had been studying meant what I thought they meant.

I saw three of Macumber's bonds go into the pot together and then my glance, hidden by the green shade, swept to Manlius. He was earnestly inspecting the faces of his cards. As earnestly I scrutinized their backs. Two sevens, two kings—my heart gave a leap and then plummeted to my feet. A third king! Three kings and two sevens! A bad moment for a man with three queens and two nines!

Manlius studied the Great One's face; and now and again, I saw, his gaze dropped to the backs of his cards.

"You're bluffing!" he said. "I won't be intimidated by the power of wealth. Call you? I wasn't thinking about that. No, I'm obliged by my own abnormal strength to raise you, MacIntosh!"

"Of course I'm terrified," remarked Macumber. "Having dealt the cards myself, I'll back my skill though. What did you put into the pot, please? The eight bonds of mine you'd take? A five-thousand-dollar raise, is it? There's a doubt in my mind I'll confess, Manlius. How much to raise? That is the question. Would an increase of ten thousand make you pause and ponder? Well, one can only learn by trying!"

I subjected the backs of the Great One's cards to another and anguished inspection. Could I have been mistaken in my first reading? Was the hand stronger, possibly, than I thought?

No; there were the marks of Manlius to speak for themselves. They assured me again that Macumber held three queens and two nines and nothing more. A pretty problem of conduct presented itself. Before I had solved it the time for action had passed.

Manlius had raised again. All the bonds he had won from Macumber, all the bonds he had taken from the wall safe, were in the center of the table. And Macumber had called!

Now Manlius didn't laugh.

"Tough luck!" said he again, and he spoke sincerely enough. "I'm really sorry for you. This was a time when I was loaded for rhinos. You shouldn't have been so optimistic. But so long as No. 7 flows along——"

Faces upward, he spread his five cards on the table. One glance confirmed my reading of the scratched backs. Three kings and two sevens were what he had—as I very well knew.

I could only admire Macumber's control. His face lengthened the least bit as he looked at the other's hand, but he managed a wry grin.

"You did not overplay, Manlius," he said quietly.

The holder of the king full had begun to stack the bonds in the pot.

"You must have been strong yourself, MacIntosh," said he.

"I was. Have you no curiosity, Manlius?"

The banker continued his calm and meticulous stacking of bonds.

"I've schooled myself," he said rather shortly, "against indulging in post-mortems. Otherwise, as you must be aware, I could have asked you to show the cards on which you called. They were in play, you know."

"For that matter," sighed the Great One, "they're still in play. Since they're not in the deck, and I've no thought of putting them there, the pot will not have passed into history until you've seen them."

Manlius looked up sharply from his accounting.

"Have your way, old man," said he. "It's not a winner's province to protest against delays in the game."

"In the first place, I've three queens," said Macumber, and laid the cards on the table.

"I see them," assented Manlius. "I don't mind saying I'd be tearing up the deck if I were you."

"And a seven," continued the Great One. "You see that, too, Manlius?"

The banker stared at him and at the card.

"Certainly I do. But——"

"But wait!" murmured Macumber. "Don't you care to see my fifth card? It's another—why, by the Eternal it's another queen, Manlius! I can't tell how I thank you for tidying up my pot! Nor how sorry I am, my dear fellow, to recall that I've an important appointment at midnight and to perceive that that time is less than ten minutes away!"

V.

Outside the marble portals on the Hotel Whitestone a pale and agitated young man flung himself upon the Great Macumber.

"Did you—did you——" he stammered.

"I have them here," said Macumber. "Twenty-eight thousand-dollar bonds of the Universal Harvester Company. That's the proper number, isn't it?"

"He—he didn't make a fight to retain them?"

"Ah, there was something in the nature of a controversy. But when I displayed the strength of my hand he gave up, and quite tamely. Didn't he so, lad? Oh, by the by, you've not made the acquaintance of Mr. Felix Byrne, have you?"

I stared at the pale one.

"I trust, Felix," resumed Macumber cheerfully, "that you'll have learned a lesson. The bonds are much safer in the place provided by the Messrs. Parsons & Whitely for their protection. I'd not borrow them again, if I were you."

"Oh, I'll not. I'll not!" vowed young Mr. Byrne. "I've been in torment since they——"

"And never forget," said Macumber, "that you might have been somewhere else. It's a cruel thought, but a beneficial one. Good night, Felix. And I'd take a taxi home if I were you. One never knows where and when he'll encounter rascals in this city of New York!"

Felix Byrne went in his taxi, but the Great One and I walked back to the Rawley under the stars. Behind us, in the Whitestone vault, we left the bonds of Ætna Oil Corporation which had been hazarded on the marked cards of Manlius.

"As per agreement," remarked Macumber, "with the rich and trusting MacIntosh from whom I borrowed them, along with his identity. I was fortunate in meeting him again immediately on my departure from the Rawley. When I'd explained the circumstances, he was glad to help me out.

"The circumstances? My dear lad, you shall have them as we walk. Know you then that these gentlemen whom we encountered at cards to-night were lately engaged in fleecing gilded transatlantic passengers. Their methods having become a bit crude, the detective forces of the great lines, in friendly collaboration with Scotland Yard and the New York police department, persuaded them to voyage no more. Like poor *Ben Gunn*, they were marooned on an island.

"The island happened to be Manhattan, and as good a place to ply their trade as any. It was Mr. Doremus who concocted the really meritorious little comedy which brought Felix Byrne into their toils.

"Mr. Doremus has a weakness for speculation in stocks. Off and on for years he has traded in the customers' room of Parsons & Whitely, for whom Felix is customers' clerk.

"It came to pass that after he had been left to pick a living ashore, Mr. Doremus began to figure on Felix as a possibility. For pickings, you see, had not been so good as among holidaying folk in smoking rooms.

"Felix, Mr. Doremus observed, was left-handed and had red hair. Out of those facts grew his scheme. Left-handed, red-

haired persons are proverbially lucky. Felix didn't know that until after it had been called to his attention.

"But Mr. Doremus didn't mention the fact, you may be sure, until he had captured Byrne's imagination with his eccentricity and his liberality. First he presented Felix with a half dozen neckties, begging him to wear a different one each day. Felix, mystified but very well pleased to have the cravats, obliged.

"As a reward he got another half dozen ties, then another half dozen with a hundred-dollar bill and finally an explanation.

"Mr. Doremus said he was playing Felix's luck. Each of the ties, he told him, represented a certain stock. As Felix selected his cravats, so Mr. Doremus played the market. Or so he said. And it was quite easy for him at the end of each week to pick stocks that had risen and let Felix believe what he wished."

"But the bonds," said I. "How——"

"It was of course a few of Parsons & Whitely's bonds that Doremus was after. He'd always been the steer of the combination, and this was his supreme coup. He knew that as customers' clerk, Felix would have access to many thousands in securities.

"And so, when the time was ripe, he told Felix of another plan of his for testing his left-handed, red-headed luck. Mr. Manlius was introduced into the plot as a crony of Mr. Doremus. He was very wealthy, very fond of cards, and very fortunate with them. So fortunate, indeed, that Mr. Doremus wouldn't be above playing Felix's own luck against him. A few little sessions were arranged. Felix did gloriously, as you can imagine. But, since he was being backed by Mr. Doremus in secret, his winnings didn't belong to him.

"At noon one day, in an office rented temporarily by Mr. Manlius, there was a brave game. Mr. Manlius was piqued. Pots rose into the thousands. Felix was encouraged to play with I O Us. Mr. Doremus, you see, was still back of him. At the close of the game the accounting was staggering. Mr. Manlius owed Felix twenty-eight thousand dollars.

"The trap was ready to be sprung. Mr. Manlius was so severely annoyed by his losses that he questioned Mr. Byrne's responsibility. Could he have paid if *he'd* lost twenty-eight thousand?

"Felix was in a quandary. Mr. Doremus, his backer and protector, called him into private consultation. He, Mr. Doremus, couldn't lay his hands immediately on so much money to save his soul. If Felix could see a way out, then Felix could have all that Mr. Manlius had lost. A fine nest egg for a young married man.

"The suggestion of borrowing a few bonds from Parsons & Whitely came from Mr. Doremus. They could be taken away in the afternoon and replaced the following morning with no one the wiser.

"Simple and safe, eh? Felix could see that. He followed the advice of Mr. Doremus. Triumphantly he proved to Mr. Manlius that he could show twenty-eight thousand dollars. Mr. Manlius was contrite. He made a sporting proposition. A few more hands, what? Felix couldn't refuse. The few hands that Mr. Manlius insisted genially on playing were mighty ones. What more need I say, lad?

"Strangely the luck of the left hand and the red hair was no longer with Felix. He rose sans winnings and sans bonds, with disgrace and prison staring him in the face.

"Together, Felix and I found likenesses of the Messrs. Manlius and Doremus in the rogues' gallery. They have had their downs, you see. Inspector Clancy of the detective bureau informed me they'd been last reported as living in hopes at the Whitestone. There I found them. I placed myself in the way of Mr. Doremus, and caused it to reach his ears that I was rich and easy. The rest you've seen—all but that pleasant party last night when they insisted on letting me win seven hundred of their money. Which precise amount, by the by, I dropped in cash to-night. So never can they say I cheated them."

He chuckled, and relapsed into silence. Another block and I intruded my great question on his reflections.

He had had three queens and two sevens. How the deuce had he changed one seven into a fourth queen?

A pitying glance was mine.

"Oh, lad, oh, lad!" sighed the Great Macumber. "The fourth queen I'd held from the beginning. 'Twas but the mark of Manlius that I changed!"

Another Macumber story in the next issue.

A Chat With You

THANKS to E. F. Jessen, formerly city editor of the Anchorage *Daily Alaskan,* we have learned a little about the career and personality of one of the original POPULAR readers. The reader is George Pilz, of Jack Wade, Alaska. Not long ago he sent us a little envelope full of gold dust to pay for his next year's reading of THE POPULAR. He spoke well about the magazine but his modesty prevented him from saying anything about himself. Now a writer for the *Daily Alaskan* tells us something about him.

* * * *

"MY trip to Jack Wade Creek," runs the clipping, "was of absorbing interest. Here I met and stayed for a while with George Pilz, who is reputed to be the first gold miner in Alaska. Mr. Pilz, who is now in his eighties, came to Alaska forty-seven years ago. He has been to practically all the camps in the territory as well as having a large acquaintance from one end of Alaska to the other. For many years he has been operating a sluice box on Jake Wade Creek and is still going strong. Mr. Pilz informed me that he was the original owner of the famous Treadwell mines. At his cabin on the creek he has a unique cache. It consists of a good-sized box which is raised or lowered at will on a high pole. This was a new and practical form of cache to me.

"Jack Wade Creek, ninety-five miles west of Dawson, is recalled by all of the old-timers as the enormously wealthy field from which millions were taken years ago. Nuggets of large size spotted this area and kept miners busy in their frantic and successful attempts to procure them. When I left the creek a few months ago there were seventeen men working there and from all indications they were reaping a fair living."

A WHILE ago we dropped Mr. Pilz a friendly line. And when the original Alaskan gold miner gets this number of the magazine and reads these lines—if he can spare the time from the stories—we want him to know that a friendly hail is being sent him across a great many miles of land and water.

We have a fellow feeling for gold hunters, being in the business ourselves. And we have had pretty good luck in finding pay dirt and plenty of good nuggets. Jack Wade Creek is not the only field that keeps on yielding the real stuff year after year.

* * * *

FOR instance, it is seventeen years since we published the first big Western novel by William MacLeod Raine. At that time the gold-bearing possibilities of Western romance, and of Mr. Raine's genius, were as unknown as the Alaskan gold fields were when Mr. Pilz was a tenderfoot. "Wyoming" was Raine's first big success, and the nuggets have been getting bigger and bigger ever since. The latest, the biggest, the brightest, the best comes to you in the next issue of the magazine, out two weeks from to-day. It is called "The Return of the Range Rider." It is a tale of that romantic frontier that must be sought far from the beaten trails. It is a full-book-length novel, well worth the two dollars that tens of thousands will pay for it when it comes out in cloth covers. It is perhaps the best book that Raine ever has written and you get it all complete in a single issue of the magazine.

* * * *

WE wish we, personally, had Raine's gift —or indeed the gift of a dozen other men who work on THE POPULAR. We have known the outdoors but it is quite beyond us to tell other people what it is like. We

remember well the blazing glories of the Painted Desert and those Arizona nights when the stars seemed so many and so near that no one need ask for more than their companionship. There was the homely, human companionship—two or three fellows on the trail, an Indian or so—no East, no West, but all of us following the setting sun. We could never put that across to others. And yet, with every issue of this magazine, we see others who can perform the miracle.

* * * *

WE have never been fishing off the great Campeche bank or in the Caribbean. Yet we know what it is like there. We know the flash of the sun on the waves, the crisp whiteness of the foam, the blue-and-white symphony of sea and sky, the lift and roll of the rhythmic seas. H. de Vere Stacpoole gave us the whole thing in a novelette which we print complete in the next issue. It is called "Hiram's Way." Not a good title at all and we are ashamed of ourselves for not choosing a better one. But the tale is so good that without any title at all it would win its place.

* * * *

SHOULD you incline to a stuffy, dull, poky, indoor life we would rather advise against the next issue. There is so much of the wholesome fresh air in it, so much romance, action and adventure that it is scarcely to be recommended to valetudinarians with weak hearts. The swift hoofbeats and crackling gun play in Raine's novel, the rough-and-ready give and take of Ralph Paine's tale of the navy, the humor and character of Holman Day's North Woods huskies—none of these things are suitable for one who likes to be bored and half asleep.

But if you want to hit the trail westward —Caroline Lockhart and Dane Coolidge as well as Raine are there to guide you. Then there is a big installment of a new Western serial by Frank Spearman. And if you are interested in baseball, look up Mr. Ralph Mooney. If you like mystery, atmosphere and generally speaking a good detective story there is always the Great Macumber. His latest exploit is detailed in a narrative called "Monsieur Picard's Parrot." The narrator is Robert Rohde. The story is a good one.

Altogether this Thanksgiving number of THE POPULAR is going to be quite as good as the best turkey ever cooked. Cranberry sauce, cider, pumpkin pie—everything that the U. S. A. and surrounding countries have to offer—are there in it, in the spirit. Crisp fall weather, a crackling log, a good pipe and a good magazine—we are wishing all of these—but absolutely delivering the last!

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1924.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Charles A. MacLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

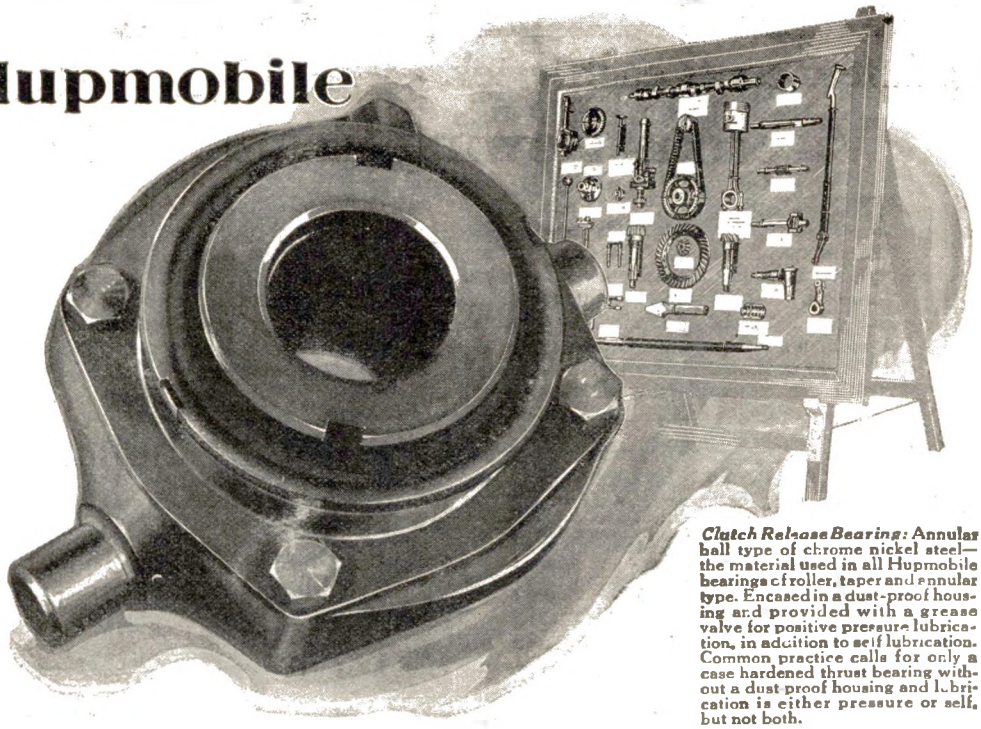
3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1924. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public No. 183, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1925.)

Hupmobile



Clutch Release Bearing: Annular ball type of chrome nickel steel—the material used in all Hupmobile bearings of roller, taper and annular type. Encased in a dust-proof housing and provided with a grease valve for positive pressure lubrication, in addition to self lubrication. Common practice calls for only a case hardened thrust bearing without a dust proof housing and lubrication is either pressure or self, but not both.

15 Minutes Save Hundreds of Dollars

When buying a motor car, remember the good old maxim "Knowledge is power" that we used to write in our copy books.

Now you can quickly obtain positive knowledge of what makes some motor cars stand up and save money for their owners. Also, the plain facts about why some other cars cost so much to maintain.

Learn These Vital Fundamentals

Hupmobile has condensed these invaluable facts—has made them part and parcel of large parts display boards.

Fifteen or twenty minutes spent in studying these object lessons in motor car building will arm you with a real knowledge of what to insist upon, and what to avoid, in any motor car you inspect.

It is as simple as A B C—this business of buying a motor car that will actually save you money.

All that you really must understand are the comparatively few fundamentals of good construction.

For instance, how are the cylinders finished? Are they merely reamed, or are they reamed and honed, as in the case of Hupmobile? Does a car use double heat-treated steel drop-forgings generally, as does Hupmobile, or does it add weight and decrease strength and economy by using malleable iron castings? How large is the bearing surface which supports the crankshaft? How is the camshaft mounted? What is the best type of bearing for each purpose? And is that best type used? What kind of a lubricating system in the motor?

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These questions, and others, Hupmobile answers for you. It shows you quality construction as employed in the finer cars such as Hupmobile—construction that makes for lower costs and longer life.

With this it contrasts the inferior practice that is almost certain to mean far higher cost per mile in the long run. Hupmobile is well fitted to give you the facts that count. It is the one car that, in tests in the hands of fleet owners, has established records of economy for low cost per mile, that have never been equalled.

Better to Know Than to Hope

There are so many ways in which a motor car can be cheapened at later cost to you, that you can hardly afford to buy in the mere ***hope*** that all will be well.

It is far more comfortable, and so much better in the long run, to ***know*** just what you are buying—and that knowledge awaits you at your nearest Hupmobile dealer's.

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A few cents each week - -

Vigorous, glowing Health again!

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast. There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. Health is yours once more.

"For years I suffered from habitual constipation. Cathartics gave but temporary relief. I could not enjoy my favorite dishes without fear of flatulence, disturbed sleep, etc. I read of the merits of Fleischmann's Yeast. In despair I took the Yeast haphazardly—later—three times daily. Today I hardly know myself—face all aglow with the pink of health—no constipation annoyances. Again I eat my favorite New England boiled dinner without after-discomfort!"

(Mr. G. Henderson Coyle of Detroit, Mich.)

"Fleischmann's Yeast gave me everything that four years' chronic constipation, with its then continual purgative taking, took from me. As a 'rifleman' I saw active service on four fronts, and constipation undermined my constitution until I became a nervous wreck, invalided from the service; classified neurasthenic, I was awarded a pension with disability 40%. Life was hell. After persuasion I tried Fleischmann's Yeast and now eat well, sleep well and what's better, work well and cheerfully. A month ago I wrote the pension authorities asking for a final award. I don't need my pension any longer."

(Mr. Charles H. Ward, Halifax, N.S.)

"I did not *eat six cakes* of Yeast and feel myself improving immediately. In fact for one month I used 3 cakes a day without any visible improvement. But by the middle of August, 1921, *my chronic constipation commenced to give way*—I again consulted our family physician, who told me to use no other remedies but Fleischmann's Yeast. . . . Today my stomach troubles have become ancient history, and my skin eruption a thing of the past—thanks to the remarkable effects of Fleischmann's Yeast."

(Miss Ruth Rollband, Utica, N.Y.)

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast for Health comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days.

Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-10, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

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If You Were Dying To-night

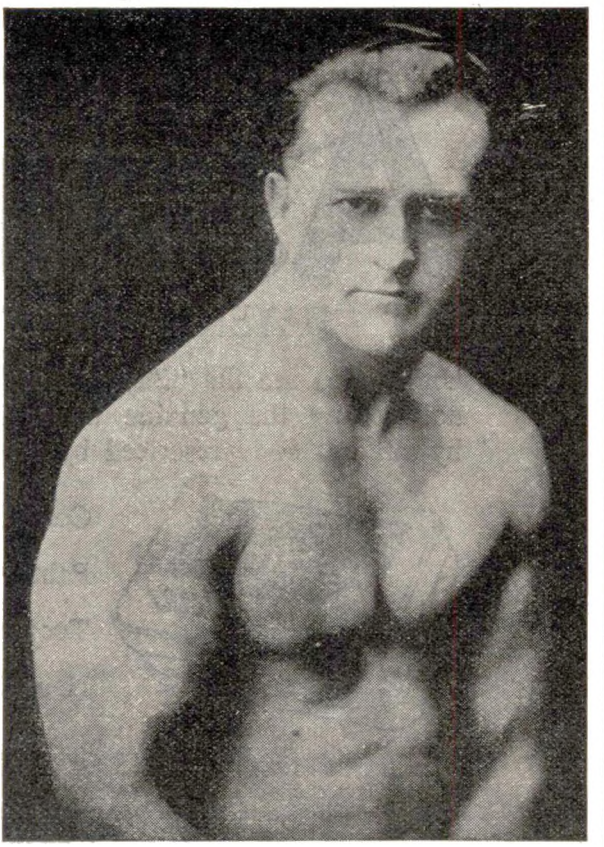
and I offered you something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well, fellows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. To-morrow or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquito trying to bite a brick wall? A fine chance.

A Re-built Man

I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

All I Ask Is Ninety Days

Who says it takes years to get in shape? Show me the man who makes any such claims and I'll make him eat his words. I'll put one full inch on your arm in just 30 days. Yes, and two full inches on your chest in the same length of time. Meanwhile, I'm putting life and pep into your old back-bone. And from then on, just watch 'em grow. At the end of thirty days you won't know yourself. Your whole body will take on an entirely different appearance. But you've only started. Now comes the real works. I've only built my foundation. I want just 60 days more (90 in all) and you'll make those friends of yours who think they're strong look like something the cat dragged in.



Earle E. Liederman, The Muscle Builder

A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things that you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep full chest breathes in rich pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge square shoulders and your massive muscular arms have that craving for the exercise of a regular he man. You have the flash to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after in both the business and social world.

This is no idle prattle, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them, I will do for you. Come then, for time flies and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

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It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you from cover to cover. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

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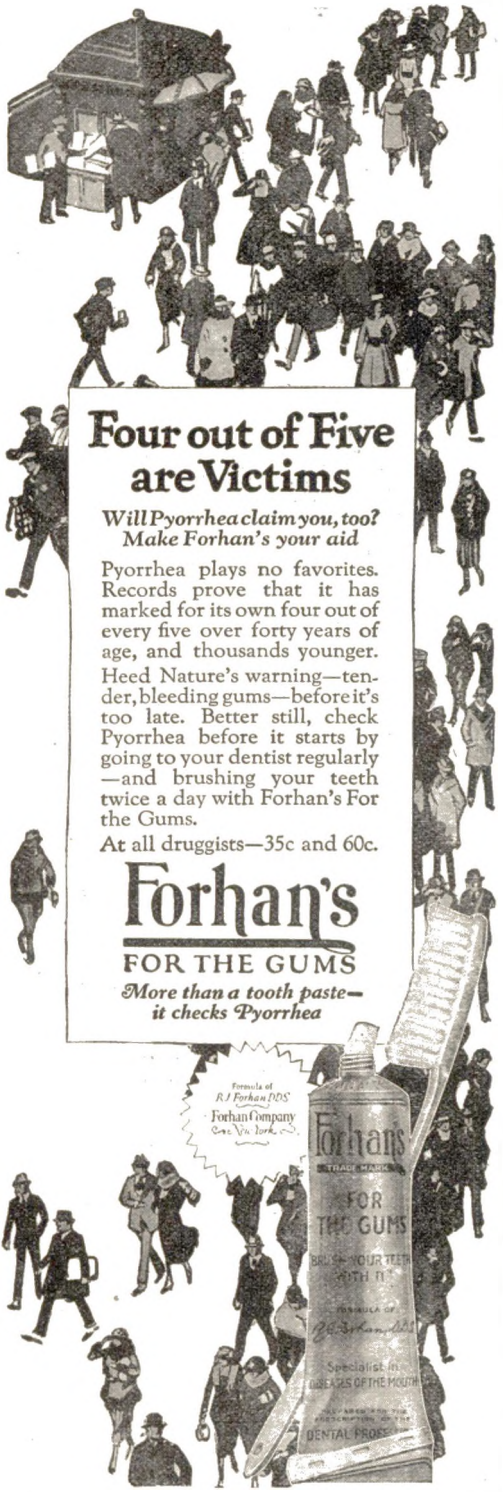
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To those who rush their order for any of these diamond rings or this wrist watch, we will give absolutely free this twenty-four inch indestructible iridescent pearl necklace with a 14 karat solid white gold clasp set with a GENUINE DIAMOND. This offer is made to a limited number of new customers only. Don't pass up this rare opportunity.
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Just send $2 and ring or watch you select together with the FREE pearls will be sent to you. Keep both for ten day's free trial. If you do not feel you have received more than your money's worth, send both articles back and your $2 will be cheerfully refunded. If you feel, as we do, that this is the biggest bargain ever offered, simply pay $1.50 a week until balance is paid. Be sure to order rings by numbers,
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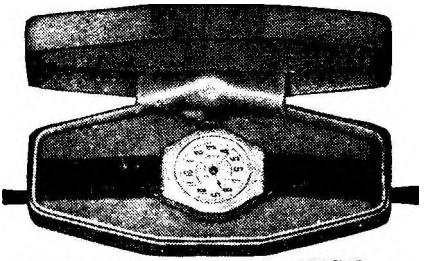

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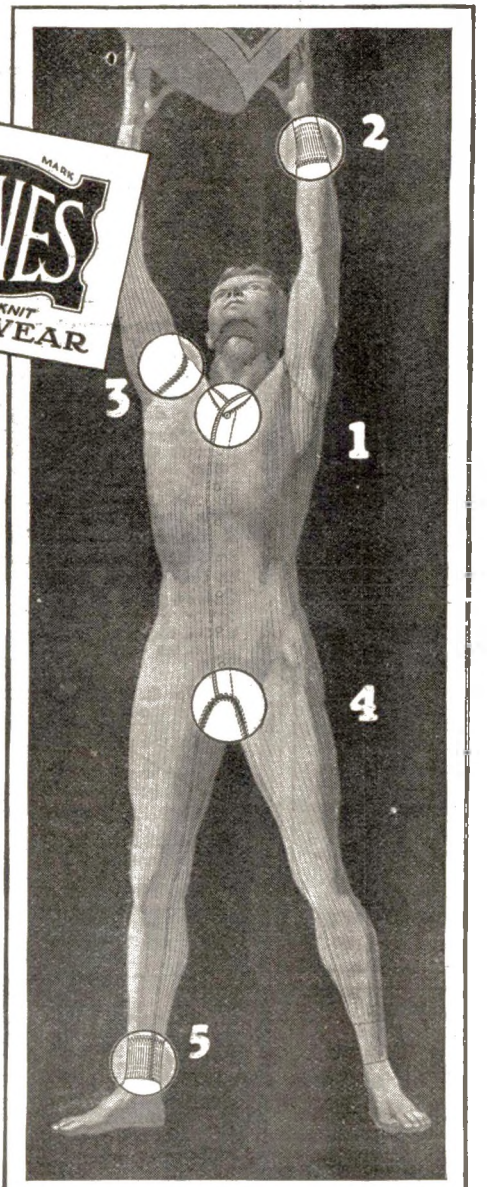

1

HANES *Collarettes are cut to size. A 40 suit has a 40 collarette. Won't roll or pucker. Protect the chest from cold draughts, and let the top-shirt lie smooth.*

2

HANES *Cuffs won't pull off. They snug the wrist. Reinforced on the end to prevent raveling and gaping. Sleeves are exact length—not uneven.*

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HANES *Elastic Shoulders give with every movement, because they're made with a service-doubling lap seam. Comfortable. Strong.*

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HANES *Closed Crotch really* STAYS *closed. Double gusset in thigh another comfort feature. Crotch can't bind, for* HANES *is fitted by* TRUNK *measurement, as well as chest.*

5

HANES *Elastic Ankles never bunch over the shoe-tops. No ugly pucker showing under the socks. One leg is exactly the same length as the other. They're mates!*

Write your own ticket—

HANES *measures up*

MAKE your own specifications. Put in all the things good winter underwear should have to suit *you*. Put a price on it that is below what you would expect to pay for such underwear. Then go to the HANES dealer and see the very suit of underwear you have in mind!

No two ways about it, Men, HANES is the best winter underwear in the world for the money. Just read those 5 Famous Points again, go see the actual garments, compare them point by point and *know* that your underwear money can't buy bigger value.

HANES comfort is real. And HANES wear matches HANES comfort. The red label is a definite guarantee that every thread, stitch and button will give the kind of service you have a right to demand, or your money back. Buy HANES this winter! Union suits, also shirts-and-drawers. Three weights. We especially recommend the HANES Heavy Weight for all practical purposes.

Boys can also write their own ticket. HANES Boys' Underwear is made of the same materials and with the same care. Union suits only. Two weights—heavy and extra heavy. Sizes 2 to 16 years. 2 to 4 year sizes with drop seats. Also knee length and short sleeves.

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New ideas, new methods, systemization, and simplification, sound business practices, all the direct development of more than a half century of making and marketing rubber goods, have achieved a matchless quality at an unparalleled low cost.

When you get Goodrich Tires, you secure the results of fifty-four years spent in mastering the problems of rubber manufacturing; for the Goodrich policy passes the savings and other benefits on to you.

This is why today you can motor better on less money. Consult a Goodrich Dealer on how you can best share the new Goodrich Value.

A Tire for every Transportation need . . GOODRICH BALLOON CORDS • SILVERTOWN CORDS • COMMANDER CORDS • "55" FABRIC • TAXICORDS • HEAVY DUTY CORDS • SEMI-PNEUMATICS • DE LUXE CUSHION —TRACTOR TYPE • DE LUXE CUSHIONS • INDUSTRIAL TRUCK TIRES

THE B. F. GOODRICH RUBBER COMPANY, *Akron, Ohio*

In Canada: The B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company, Limited, Toronto

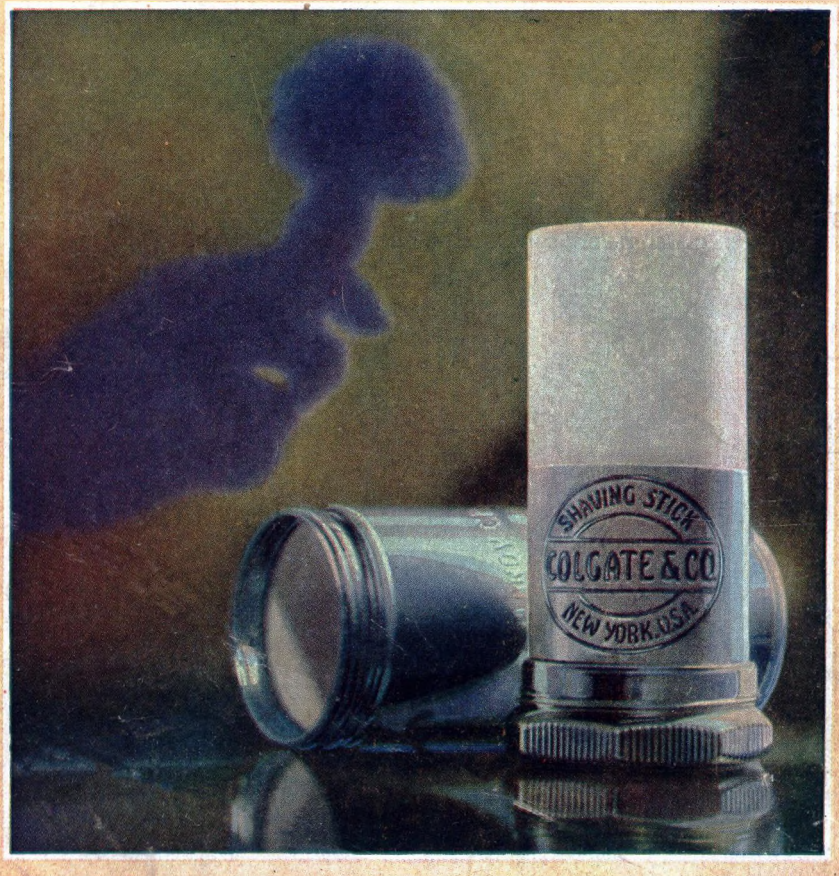
GoodrichTires

"Best in the Long Run"

COLGATE'S

Shaving Stick

"HANDY GRIP" AND REFILL



For Comfort, Convenience, and Economy

When we say to you that the Shaving Stick has important advantages over shaving preparations in any other form, we can do so without bias, for we manufacture shaving sticks, powder and cream.

In its attractive nickel box, our "Handy Grip" Shaving Stick is most convenient for traveling. It will not crush when packed, and it makes a wonderful lather for *easy shaving*. It is not uncommon for a Colgate Shaving Stick to last more than a year in daily use.

The famous "Handy Grip", with a trial-size shaving stick in nickel box, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is gone, buy Colgate "Refills" for the price of the soap alone, 25c.

COLGATE & CO., Dept. C, 199 Fulton St. • NEW YORK

Truth in advertising implies honesty in manufacture