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OCTOBER 7TH 1919

"ON STRIKE"

BY

ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

AND

"THE GIRL, A HORSE AND A DOG"

BY

FRANCIS LYNDE

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Vol. LIV. No. 2

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October 7, 1919

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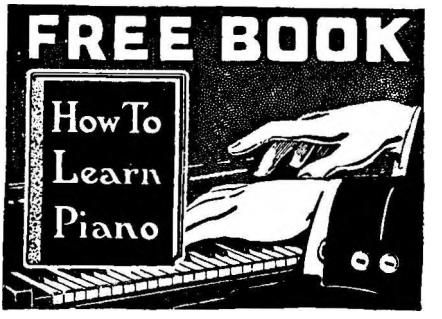

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The Girl, a Horse, and a Dog

By Francis Lynde

Author of "Bighorn Northern—Maverick," Etc.

Here is a story to stimulate your imagination and pique your curiosity. The hero finds himself in an aggravating predicament. He had thought himself an heir to wealth, and acted accordingly. When the will was read a surprise was sprung. There was nothing for him. However, the real inheritor softens the blow in a letter as follows: "Your portion of Grandfather Jasper's property was worth, at its latest valuation, something like four hundred and forty thousand dollars. It lies in a perfectly safe repository, situated between the 105th and 110th degrees of longitude west from Greenwich, and the 35th and 40th degrees north latitude. When you find it, you will be able to identify it by the presence of a girl with brown hair and blue eyes and a small mole on her shoulder, a piebald horse which the girl rides, and a dog with a split face—half black and half white."

CHAPTER I.

PERCY'S JOKE.

DID you ever wake up in the middle of the night to find everything perfectly still and quiet and normal, and yet with the feeling that there had been a tremendous crash just before you had gotten wide awake enough to realize it? If you have, you'll know how I felt that morning when I was called in, with the other members of the family, to listen to the reading of my grandfather's will.

First, to give you some idea of the conditions precedent, as the lawyers say; my father—dear old dad!—never had what Grandfather Dudley called "the money sense." As an architect with fine artistic feeling, he earned a liberal income—and spent it; or so much of it that there was barely enough left to take care of my mother and sisters, and to keep me going, as you might say, in a dashedly modest way. Without work, that is. I had never acquired the work habit. I was always "going to," but it was so fatally easy to keep on postponing the chilling plunge. You see, I had made a lot of jolly good friends in college, and there was always something or other going on; yacht cruising in summer, duck shooting in the fall, motor tours anywhere and any old time—you know how it goes.

Besides, there was Grandfather Jasper in the background. He had money; scads of it, so we believed; and it had been a sort of family understanding for years that he was intending to split it, fifty-fifty, between my cousin Percy and me. Before I go any further, let me say that cousin Percy was—and is—all the different kinds of things that I am not, and never wanted to be; smooth, "dear" with the girls, ambitious as the devil, and measuring his friends by the amount of "pull" they could exert in his behalf—there you have him. When we met—which was not any oftener than I could help—he never missed a chance to knock me for my "disgraceful idleness."

"You're a fright, Stammie," he would say, in his neatly polished, diplomatic way: he had a billet in the state department at Washington, and was in training for the legation service—"You are a perfect fright. Three years out of the university, and you haven't done a single useful thing yet. How long are you going to keep Lisette waiting?"

Right there was another knot in the tangle —Lisette. We had agreed to agree—Lisette and I—some six months in advance of Grandfather Jasper's death, and we were both perfectly well assured that my income wasn't more than half big enough to get married on. Lisette was one of a family of four girls in a mighty expensive household, and there was nothing to hope from that side of the fence. Though we didn't discuss it brutally in so many words, we were waiting for that fifty-fifty look-in at the will which family tradition declared had already been drawn up, signed, sealed, witnessed, and put away in cold storage.

All of which brings us back to the nightmare effect. When the Dudley will was taken out of the ice box and read to the assembled members of the family, there were at least two shocking surprises. For one thing, we discovered that Grandfather Jasper hadn't been anywhere near as rich as we all thought he was; that his modest manner of living had been as much a matter of necessity as of choice. Bad investments—of which the family had never heard a whisper—had cut his fortune down to something less than half a million. That was shock number one; and shock number two was strictly personal to me: Grandfather Jasper had willed the money—all of it—to cousin Percy, giving as his reason that he thought Percy would make better use of it.

Of course, I had everybody's sympathy and condolences—even Percy's. My mother wept; and, as I recall it, Lisette managed to compass a tear or so when I told her what had happened; or, rather, what had so ignominiously failed to happen.

"Whatever will you do?" she faltered; and when I told her that I was never good at conundrums, she wiped the tear or so away and became her calm and collected self again —she could do the calm-and-collected in a way to make a stage heroine blush with envy.

"I suppose you will really have to go to work, won't you, Stammie?" she went on, after I had side-stepped the conundrum.

"Perish the thought!" I told her; then I gave the good reasons. "Fat chance I'd have. I can navigate a yacht—a little—drive a motor, ride a polo pony, and play a fair hand at bridge and the other great American game. I think that is about the size of it. Besides, you wouldn't want to marry a workingman."

"No," she said reflectively; "I don't think I should, Stammie."

"You needn't return the ring," I grinned, seeing that she was looking at it rather regretfully. "You can wear it on some other finger, you know."

"Yes; I suppose I can," she said; and I'm blessed if she didn't shift it to a finger of the other hand, right there and then!

It was less than a week after this that Percy's letter came. I found it in my mail at the club; and since it was a state department envelope, and thus unquestionably from Percy, I stuck it in my pocket, meaning to read it when I had more time—did this because John Lockerby had just challenged me to a game of pool. Later, when I had dropped in at "The Rockerie" to see Lisette, I ran across the letter and opened and read it. This is what it said:

DEAR STAMMIE: I know just about how you felt last week when you heard Grandfather Jasper's will read, and it isn't going to make you feel any better now when I tell you that I knew of its provisions more than a year ago. When the will was drawn, grandfather showed it to me, and gave me a sealed envelope which I was to open after his death. That envelope, as I knew at the time, contained, among other things, a codicil to the will. By its provisions you are to receive a legacy under certain conditions which were to be revealed to you at such time as I might think best.

At first I determined to make you wait a while, hoping that the realization that you were left out would shock you into doing something for yourself. But as it happens, I can't stay to try the experiment. I start for San Francisco to-night, on my way to join our legation in Peking. So here are the conditions.

Your portion of Grandfather Jasper's property was worth, at its latest valuation, something like four hundred and forty thousand dollars. It lies in a perfectly safe repository, situated between the 105th and 110th degrees of longitude west from Greenwich, and the 35th and 40th degrees north latitude. When you find it, you will be able to identify it by the presence of a girl with brown hair and blue eyes and a small mole on her left shoulder, a piebald horse which the girl rides, and a dog with a split face —half black and half white. You'll be more than apt to find the three together; and if you make the acquaintance of the girl, you'll be on the trail of your legacy.

So there you are, Stammie, old boy; there's your fortune. All you've got to do is to *go to work* and find it. Perhaps by that time you will have acquired the working habit—which is what Grandfather Jasper hoped might prove to be the case.

Wishing you great joy in your search, I am, your affectionate cousin, PERCY.

Naturally, I laughed at this screed of Percy's, taking it for a joke; a poor joke

and in rather bad taste, coming from the man who had walked off with the table stakes. In that mood I handed the letter to Lisette for her to read. She didn't laugh, but she did look a bit scornful.

"I don't suppose the blue-eyed girl would appeal to you," she said, "though the horse and dog might. When do you start?"

I chuckled. "What will you bet that longitude 105 to 110 isn't in the middle of one of the oceans?"

"We can easily see whether it is or not," she offered, and she went somewhere and found an atlas. I should have lost my bet, all right, but the area described might just as well have been ocean-bounded. We discovered that meridian 105 split the State of Colorado just west of Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, and the playground plotted out for me took in three-fourths of the remainder of the State, a slice of Utah, a good bit bigger slice of New Mexico, and a bite out of the northeastern corner of Arizona, just for good measure.

"Me for the wild and woolly!" I brayed. "But what do you think of Percy, the immaculate, pulling a bone like this! Getting the Chinese job must have made him dotty."

"You are taking it for a joke?"

"Sure—and a rather rotten one, at that."

"Then you won't go to look for the blue-eyed girl? Think of what you may be missing."

For just one crazy minute I had a hunch or a premonition, or whatever you call it, that it might *not* be a joke. Grandfather Jasper was always a bit eccentric—a rich man's privilege. On the spur of that moment I said:

"If I should go, would you wait for me, Lisette?"

She took her time about answering—plenty of it. When she was perfectly good and ready, she had the calm-and-collected attitude nicely adjusted and focused.

"I think I'd better not change the ring back, Stammie," she said, sort of wintrily. "If there *is* any money, and you should find it, you would probably fling it all away before you could get back to Boston. And then, there is the blue-eyed girl: if she should bring you a fortune, you'd have to marry her. It would be the least you could do, don't you think?"

This made me laugh again. "Don't tell me that you care enough about me to be jealous, Lisette!" I said in honest derision.

"I don't," she averred soberly. "You are big and strong and—well—er—nice in a good many ways, Stammie, and much too handsome for your own good; but when you marry you'd better be sure that the girl has money enough to buy her own hats. *I* haven't enough, as you know."

"So the love-in-a-cottage idea doesn't appeal to you?"

"Not in the least, Stammie, dear."

This seemed to be the end of our rather lukewarm love dream, and I'll have to confess that it didn't hurt me as much as I suppose it should have. Anyway, a half hour or so after I left "The Rockerie" I met Jack Downing, and when he asked me if I didn't want to go with him in his motor cruiser for a little spin down the coast of Maine, I fell for it at once. And a few hours beyond that, I was hanging to the wheel of one of the nattiest little crafts on the North Shore, with a fresh nor'easter blowing and giving me the time of my young life to hold the *Guinevere's* head up to the seas as we lifted the Isles of Shoals on the port bow.

Full three days elapsed before I thought again of Percy and his joke; and I shouldn't have thought of him, or it, then if we hadn't happened to be tied up at Rockland for motor repairs. It was a dog that made me remember; a mangy cur that followed the Rockland motor repairman down to the wharf; a most disreputable-looking dog—but he had the magic markings. Half of his face was black, and the other half a dingy white.

After I'd stared at the dog for a second or two it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't got back at Percy; that I had let him get away with the idea that possibly he had soaked me one. Then I did a little figuring on train schedules. By all the probabilities, Percy ought to have been just about due in San Francisco. That being the case, or the likelihood, I toddled up to the telegraph office and sent a message, addressing it in care of the captain of whatever might be the next steamer due to leave for ports in China. All I said was:

"Your joke was as funny as an hour in a dentist's chair. Bon voyage to you."

When I shoved the message at him the operator wanted to know where he could find me with the answer, and I told him there wouldn't be any. He sprung his rules on me and said he'd have to know, so I told him I was a member of the motor cruiser

Guinevere's party at such and such a wharf; that we were laid up for a few hours, tinkering on our motor; and that our next stop would probably be at Portland.

That evening, just as we were getting up from dinner in the *Guinevere's* saloon, there came a boy with a telegram. It was from Percy; and he said:

Don't be a complete fool. It was no joke at all. Ask my lawyer.

Even then I didn't go off at half cock. It was too ridiculous to bite very hard. But later, when I got to thinking it over; and especially when I thought that I really did owe it to Lisette not to turn down even the tenth part of a chance to provide her with the means of buying her future hats; the die was cast, as the playwriters say. I made some sort of an inadequate excuse to Jack Downing, caught a night train, stopped off at the home station long enough to pack a couple of grips, and the thing was—no, not done; just begun.

CHAPTER II.

A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK.

Since my hunting ground began in the middle of Colorado, I took a ticket to Denver by way of Chicago and Omaha. A box of cigars and a bunch of magazines got me as far as Chicago, and a three-hour lay-over between trains in Chicago enabled me to stock up on maps and gazetteers—anything the bookstores had in the shape of canned information on the region I was heading for.

This information stuff kept me busy all the way across Illinois and Iowa and well out into Nebraska. As I remember, it was after the train had passed North Platte that I woke up to a realization of the fact that the man in the opposite section also had a little Pullman table in front of him, and was likewise studying maps—and blue prints. He was a rather efficient-looking fellow of maybe thirty-two or three, with dark hair and eyes, what Lisette would have called a determined nose, and a close-cropped brown beard and mustaches.

Farther along, we met in the smoking room. Mr. Brown-beard's only cigar turned out to have a broken wrapper, and I tendered my pocket case. That broke the ice, and we talked. In the course of time Brown-beard said:

"You don't happen to be a mining engineer, do you?"

"Far be it from me," I laughed. "I'm not much of anything, more's the pity."

"I didn't know," he said; "I saw you studying maps as we came along."

Now, ordinarily, I'm apt to talk a lot too much about my own affairs, but this was one time when I had a hunch not to. So I said: "I saw you doing the same thing."

"Sure you did," he admitted. Then he told me his name——and I got it as Bullton, or Bulletin, or something like that—and said he was mining engineer, which was the reason why he had asked me if I wasn't one.

Past that, the talk ran mostly upon his profession, and since the mysterious hunch was still nudging me, I let him carry the banner, figuring chiefly myself as a good listener.

"Yes; we run across some mighty funny propositions in my trade," he said, after he'd given me some sort of an idea of what a mining engineer's job is like. "A good many people seem to think that an expert has a chance to get in on any number of 'ground floors' in the mining game, but that isn't so. In my own case the only sure shot I ever had got away from me."

"How was that?" I asked.

"The man died," he replied laconically.

That sounded rather interesting, so I said: "Tell me about it, if it won't bore you."

He grinned. "You'll be the one to be bored. It was this way. A little over a year ago I was on my way to Chicago with a report I had been making on some properties in the Cripple Creek district. In the Pullman I fell in with a nice old gentleman who had bought a gold brick in the shape of a flooded mine. The mine had at one time been a 'producer' though not by any means what you'd call a 'bonanza.' Then its luck changed, as sometimes happens. In sinking and drifting they had uncovered another vein which was very rich. Don't let me talk your arm off."

"Go ahead," said I. "My arms are well insured."

"Well, about the time that they struck this new vein they also struck water—an underground lake. Sometimes a mine flood comes suddenly, but oftener it gives warning; cracks leaking a little more freely, or the sump filling a little faster than the pumps can take it out. In my old gentleman's case there had evidently been some

little interval; long enough to allow the operating company to find out what they were up against, and to unload. The old gentleman wasn't exactly a woolly sheep. He had owned some stock in the mine for a long time; and after the new strike was made he naturally wanted to own more. They haggled with him as long as they dared; offered to buy his interest or sell him theirs: and he finally bought. I don't know the exact price, but it was something like half a million, I believe. In less than a month after the deal was closed, the mine was drowned and went out of business."

"Still I don't see your lost opportunity," I threw in.

"I'm coming to that. My specialty as an engineer happens to be the unwatering of wet mines. The old gentleman had maps and profiles with him; the records of an excellent topographical survey. We were together all the way to Omaha, and I had all the chance I needed to study the situation. I'm reasonably certain that I discovered a way in which that mine can be drained at comparatively little expense."

"You told the owner?"

"I told him I could do it, but I didn't give my plan away. Then I made him a proposition; offered to undertake the drainage at my own expense. If I should succeed, he was to give me a fourth interest in the property. If I didn't succeed, it was to cost him nothing."

I laughed. It does me good to find out now and then that there are other people in this world who are as reckless as I am.

"You made an offer like that to a stranger, and on a mine that you had never seen?" I said.

He grinned good-naturedly and got back at me.

"All business is a taking of chances, and as the matter stood at that stage of the game I had everything to gain and nothing to lose. The old man had plenty of evidences as to the former value of the property; dozens of assays and mill runs signed by men whom I knew well. But he was a queer old codger, secretive and cautious as an old fox. For instance, he had carefully clipped the name of the mine from the blue-print sheets and other papers, and in all our talk he never once let that name slip. In spite of all this, he drew up a sort of option agreement with me. He said he wanted to go home and think it over, but money talked. If I meant business, we'd stop off in Omaha and fix things up so they'd stay put until he was ready to give the word to go ahead."

"You stopped off with him?"

"I sure did. We found a lawyer and had the agreement drawn up in legal form. The time limit was to be a year, and the option was to be a thousand dollars. If either of us should withdraw within that time he was at liberty to do so by forfeiting his ante of a thousand dollars. If neither of us withdrew by or before the end of the year, I was to be at liberty to go ahead with my drainage proposition, and the agreement bound the owner to turn over a one-fourth interest in the property to me upon the completion of the job."

"But why so long a wait?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that, too. At that time I was under engagement to go to Peru for a Chicago syndicate, and I expected to be out of the United States for about a year. Why the old gentleman wasn't in any bigger hurry, I don't know, but it seems he wasn't. Anyhow, we signed the agreement, put up our checks for a thousand each, and put the whole thing in escrow in one of the Omaha banks. The time limit expired a week ago, on the day that I landed in New York. Yesterday I called on the Omaha banker, and he told me my old man was dead—had died just a few days earlier."

"Still, I don't see how you've lost out," I insisted.

"Wait. Here comes the funny part of it. Mr. Banker tells me that I am remembered in my old man's disposition of some cash legacies made just before his death, and I'm to have the thousand dollars which he put up as a forfeit. I took the money and spent some of it within an hour wiring the old man's lawyer, whose name the banker had given me. I briefed the situation for the lawyer, said I was ready to fulfill my part of the contract, and asked him to wire me the name and location of the mine. You wouldn't guess in a thousand years the kind of an answer I got."

"No, probably not. What was it?"

"It was a facer, all right. Mr. Lawyer said that his client had never owned a share of mining stock in his life, that there was nothing among his papers bearing upon the subject of my telegram, and that I must be either drunk or crazy. Of course, he didn't put it just that way, but that is what he meant."

I was still a bit fogged as to the present status of the thing, and I said so.

"Well, it stacks up about this way," was Brown-beard's reply. "There is a perfectly good mine somewhere west of us that is worth anywhere from a quarter to half a million, and is kicking around without an owner. So far as I can see, I'm the only man on top of earth who has a claim on any part of it. And I have no more idea than the man in the moon where it is 'at.'"

"Hard luck," I admitted. "But you saw the maps, you say."

"I know; but they were merely survey maps. There wasn't a name of any kind on them to identify the location. Possibly—quite possibly—that was a part of the old man's queer secretiveness. No; I'm afraid my little fortune is a lost dog, so far as I'm concerned."

His mention of a lost dog hit me right in the center of my solar plexus and I laughed like a fool.

"What struck your funny bone?" he asked, sort of dubiously.

"Nothing," I gurgled; "only I'm hunting a lost dog, too." But I didn't tell him any more. That hunch was still with me, and, anyway, my chase seemed too foolish to be rehashed for a stranger.

CHAPTER III.

WAIFS AND STRAYS.

When I turned out of my berth the next morning, my sleeper was standing in the Denver yard and my smoking-room companion of the night before was up and gone. Since we hadn't exchanged cards, and I wasn't even sure that I had his name straight, I couldn't have found him again if I had wanted to. But at the moment, finding him again was the least of my troubles.

After breakfast I began to inquire around about that meridian; the 105th that the maps showed passing just west of the city. Curiously enough, nobody seemed to know anything about it, and I was finally forced to take a long taxi ride out to the Denver University where I got hold of the professor of astronomy and was told that the maps were right.

I was a bit disappointed at finding that no part of Denver was included in my hunting ground, though the girl-horse-dog clew pointed to the country rather than to the city. Family tradition had it that Grandfather Jasper had once gotten as far west as Denver, and I had been cherishing a secret hope that I might perhaps find myself inheriting a business block, or an office building, or something of that nature in that noble city.

Resorting again to the maps, I found that the 105th meridian, followed north, stops short against the 40th parallel of latitude just south of the little town of Erie. Followed south, it tracks the D. & R. G. Railroad for about twenty miles and then takes to the mountains, barely shutting out Manitou, and passing well to the westward of Pueblo and Trinidad. This simplified matters—a little. The railroad system of western Colorado is not so tremendously extensive, and those of eastern Utah and northern New Mexico still less so. It wouldn't be a lifetime job to visit every hamlet in the prescribed area, I thought.

Yet this idea of wandering from place to place, combing the face of nature for blue-eyed maidens and piebald horses and harlequin-faced dogs was already beginning to strike me as about the most fantastic thing a body could ever conceive of doing. So, for about the first time in a pretty rattle-brained life, I sat down to do some ground and lofty thinking, with Cousin Percy's letter for a sort of nexus.

Phrase by phrase I pondered the sphinxian document, weighing each word and sentence, and turning the confounded thing inside out in search of a better clew. The third paragraph contained the meat of the matter. "Your portion of Grandfather Jasper's property was worth, at its latest valuation, something like four hundred and forty thousand dollars." What single piece of property outside of a large city could be worth any such sum as that? I could think of nothing but a mine of some kind. But the letter said "was worth;" was that an implication that it was no longer worth that sum? Would a mine decrease in value as time passed? It might; and then again it mightn't.

Then there was that other phrase: "It lies in a perfectly safe repository. . . ." "Repository" implied a container of some sort; a brick wall, or a barbed-wire fence, or anything you like to imagine. Could a mine be said to be in a "repository?" I guess some investors in mines have concluded that their money was in a "repository" that couldn't be pried open. Some-

how, I kept coming back to the mine idea, in spite of all I could do; and at last, right out of a clear sky, *smack!* the real thing hit me between the shoulder blades. At the price of one good cigar given to a fellow traveler in distress I had purchased my clew. The "secretive" old gentleman of the mining engineer's story was Grandfather Jasper!

For a time I had to grind pretty hard on the capstan to winch my feet down to the solid earth again, and to attain a frame of mind in which I could coldly measure the probabilities. Oddly enough, the miraculous part of it—the one chance in a million that I had of running across the one man in a hundred million who could tell me that story—didn't impress me at the moment. I was too busily engaged in fitting the puzzle pieces together.

At this point I began to get action. One word from the man Bullton, or Bulletin, or whatever his name was, would settle the question, and that word was his "old gentleman's" name. He hadn't mentioned it in telling his story—which might have been by design or just a happen-so. But, by heavens, I'd make him mention it!

That is a good old saw which says you must first catch your hare before you cook it. Denver is a goodish-sized city in which to hunt for a man whose name you don't know, and I saw at once, of course, that I'd have to have the name before I could turn a wheel. How to get that name was a problem. Since the man had told me that he was just back from a year spent in South America, the city directory was no good. Hotel registers seemed to be the only hope and I made a round of all the places where a man of his class might put up. Nothing doing; no name anything like Bullton or Bulletin.

Finally, by the merest chance, I stumbled upon the Mining Exchange, and the secretary showed me a list of engineers and mining experts. In its proper place I found the name of Charles Bullerton. A question shot at the man behind the desk elicited the information that Mr. Bullerton was in South America. I could have yelled for joy, because this proved that Charles Bullerton was my man, and that the story to which I had listened wasn't altogether a Pullman smoking-room romance, such as so many men tell.

"He isn't in South America," I told the secretary. "He's here in Colorado. I came over from Omaha with him day before yesterday."

"All right," said the secretary. "If you know more about him than I do, why do you ask me?"

Here was a chance for some of the cousin-Percy dope—diplomacy and that sort of stuff—and I palliated that gentleman good and proper; gave him a fifty-cent cigar, and talked all around the bush before I got back to Mr. Charlie Bullerton. The bit of honeying brought home the bacon. Bullerton's usual address, when he was in Colorado and not in Denver, was in care of a certain bank in Cripple Creek; or, at least, that was the way it had been before he went to South America.

A telegraph office was the next thing needed, and there seemed to be about a hundred-to-one shot that I wouldn't touch bottom. My message, prepaid and answer prepaid, contained only the single question:

What was the name of the old gentleman who bought the watered mine and then died?

For two whole days, which I put in chasing piebald ponies and harlequin-faced dogs about the streets of Denver—and found no blue-eyed girls attached, I thought I'd shot up in the air and missed the whole side of the earth. Then one morning the answer came in just two words, like this:

To Stamford Broughton, Hotel, Savoy, Denver.
John Smith. Charles Bullerton.

That settled it with a vengeance, you'd say. And yet it didn't. It merely proved that Mr. Charles Bullerton had acquired a sudden access of caution, and was probably cussing himself now for having been too loose-tongued with a perfect stranger in a Pullman smoker. He had answered my wire with a name that didn't mean anything at all, and he hadn't meant it to mean anything. So the result was exactly opposite to the one he wanted to produce: it convinced me that he was hiding the real name; and the corollary to that was that the real name would be "Jasper Dudley."

Whether or not his memorandum agreement with my grandfather would be binding upon me as the heir, was a question for the courts to decide. But one thing was certain. If he should succeed in finding the mine and go to work on his unwatering scheme, he would have a grip on things that might be handsomely troublesome to break.

Having argued it out thus far, the next step suggested itself immediately. I must

have a heart-to-heart talk with Bullerton, telling him who I was, and giving him a chance to join forces with me in the search, if it was my grandfather's mine that he was looking for. Grabbing the impulse by the neck, I took the first train for Cripple Creek. Too late. Bullerton was gone, and the bank folks didn't know where.

Looking back at the thing now, I am glad to be able to say that I was already beginning to acquire a bit of sense—the sense of proportion. I had gone into the chase more than half for the sheer fun of it; pretty much as a dog runs after the stick you've thrown into the bushes, and which he hasn't much hope of finding. But now it was appealing to me as more of a man's job. There *was* a legacy, and, however valueless it might be in its present condition, it had once been worth nearly a half million—and might be again. And a half million is a whole lot of money.

For a moment I felt like wiring Lisette, "You may possibly get your future hats, after all," but I didn't. From what little the bank folks had said, it appeared that Bullerton was fairly well known in Cripple Creek. Therefore, somebody must know more than I had as yet been able to find out about the manner of his disappearance. My job was to find the somebody.

I went about it in a systematic sort of way. There are probably a thousand mines in and around Cripple Creek, and I hunted up something like nine hundred and ninety-nine of them, asking the same question at each and all: "Do you know a mining engineer named Bullerton?" Plenty of people knew him. "Know Charlie Bullerton?—why, sure!" But that was about all they did know. Still I wouldn't quit, and about the time I thought I had exhausted all of the possibilities, I found the particular Bullerton friend I was looking for. His name was Hilton, and he was the superintendent of a big drainage-tunnel enterprise designed to unwater a lot of flooded mines on the hills above the tunnel site.

"I can give you a little information, but not much," was his answer to my stereotyped inquiry. "Bullerton is bughouse on the subject of a lost mine, and he has gone to hunt for it. He has a sketch map of the location, but nothing to tie it to. Just before he left he told me that he had been showing this map to some old prospector he had happened to run across. And the prospector had claimed to be able to recognize the topographies. That was as far as I got. I didn't ask him where the location was, or where he thought it was."

"You've no idea where the hunt was to begin?" I asked.

"Only a guess. In the talk he asked me if I knew anything about Placerville, in the Red Desert; what sort of a town it was, and if a man could outfit there for a prospecting trip. I took it from this that he might be heading for Placerville, though he didn't say that he was."

As you'd imagine, that was enough for me. The next morning I was back in Denver, figuring out the quickest way to get to Placerville in the Red Desert. I hoped Bullerton was on a true scent, but was mightily afraid he wasn't. If he should happen to be, then I must beat him to it. True, he had his map to guide him; but I had the girl, the horse, and the dog.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE BACK OF BEYOND.

To my chagrin, the railroad ticket offices in Denver didn't know any such place as Placerville in the Red Desert. The only one they had listed was a station not far from Telluride, in the San Miguel. Nor could the mining-exchange gentleman help me. He said, what was true enough, that mining camps blaze up and burn a while and then go out blink, and in a short time even their names were forgotten; this being particularly the case with placer diggings. He suggested that if I could find some older resident whose memory reached back a few years, there might be something doing.

"Steer me," I begged; "I'm a total stranger in Denver."

He thought for a minute and then said: "The Du Pont people have been doing business here for a good many years, and they know the powder buyers all over the country. Suppose you ask at their office."

I went forthwith, and the gentleman to whom I gave my card was mighty kind and obliging—looked as if he might be that way to everybody. Moreover, he had the dope. The Red Desert Placerville was strictly a "has been." The placers had long been exhausted, and the place had afterward figured as a shipping point for some mine or mines on the desert slope of the eastern Timanyonis. He was not quite certain, but

he thought the name "Placerville" had been changed to something else. Questioned about the mines for which the place had formerly served as the shipping point, he could tell me little, save that he supposed they had all played out. At all events, the powder shipments to them had stopped long ago.

As to the means of reaching the "has been," these were simple enough. There were through sleepers by way of the P. S-W. and Copah. My informant thought, however, that I might be obliged to go to a copper-mining town called Angels, some twenty miles farther along, and return on a local, since it was altogether probable that the through trains did not stop at Placerville.

Armed with this information, I hit the trail, taking a ticket through to Angels, and the following morning when I ran my window shade up in the Pullman berth, the train was rocketing along over endless reaches of the toughest-looking country that the sun ever shone upon; red sand, it appeared to be, with scattering bunches of greasewood. Off in the distance there were mountains, and then more mountains; and after I was up and dressed I saw that the scenery on one side of the train was an exact duplicate of that on the other. If you'd shut your eyes and turn around, you wouldn't know which side of the train you were looking from.

The dining-car breakfast was all right; the farther you get into the region of no supplies, the better the car eats are likely to be—I've always noticed that. From breakfast to luncheon I had the sleeper smoking room all to myself, and I dozed and smoked straight through to one o'clock, waking up now and then to observe that the scenery wasn't changing a particle. But when I went forward at the last call for luncheon and took a seat in the dining-car, I found that the scenery had been changing a bit on that side of the train. We were gradually approaching the northern mountain barrier; part of the time we were skirting the barren foothills.

It was while I was eating that the train stopped to water the engine at the dreariest place that ever lay out of doors. The town itself was a collection of shacks in all stages of dilapidation, most of them empty and with gaping holes where the windows and doors had been. All around and about them the ground was heaped up in hillocks and windrows, exactly as if a drove of antediluvian hog monsters had rooted it up.

In the train stoppage my window in the dining car looked out upon the end of the station platform. The place was deserted; there wasn t a human being in sight, not even the usual bunch of country-town loafers hanging around to see the train come and go. I was staring out of the window and wondering how anybody, even a telegraph operator, could stand it to live in such a lonesome place when I got my shock. It was a dog that connected up the battery wires for me; a shaggy mongrel with his ears cocked and a red ribbon of a tongue hanging out as he jumped up on the station platform as if to say "Hello" to me. For right down the center of that dog's face and dividing it as accurately as if it had been drawn with a ruler, was a line marking off a black half from a white half.

I was just taking a swallow of hot chocolate and it nearly choked me. Luckily I got it down before I saw the horse—a rangy cow pony, saddled and bridled and standing hitched at a gnawed wooden rail in front of the nearest of the tumble-down shacks. "Piebald" is sort of an elastic word as the dictionary defines it, and might apply to almost any beast markings out of the ordinary. The horse I was gaping at was a true "calico," white and sorrel in dingy patches; "piebald," if a purist in the use of English —like cousin Percy, for example—wished to call it so.

You know how tightly the chairs and tables are jammed in together in the modern dining car. Before I could drop things and break loose and rush back to the steward's sentry box in the end of the car the train was rocketing along again.

"Hey!" I shouted; "what's the name of that station we've just left?" and the well-fed, bay-windowed dining-car boss looked at me strangely.

"Easy, my friend," he cooed, gentling me soothingly. "I don't know the name of the city, but I'll find out for you right away if you'll go back quietly and finish your luncheon. I hope there was nothing wrong with the service to—to—er—excite you."

"G-r-r-r!" I said, and went back to my place. Whatever might have been done, it was too late to do it now. Presently the railroad-train conductor, a man big enough to have kicked a prize elephant into the

gutter, came along and propped himself by two hamlike hands on my table.

"Somethin' I can tell you?" he inquired in a sort of be-careful-of-yourself tiger growl.

"A few," I returned. "What is the name of that place where we stopped a few minutes ago?"

"Atropia."

"'Death sleep,'" I translated with a grin. "It fits, right down to the ground. What are the industries of Atropia?"

"I don't get you." The tiger growl was deepening.

"Excuse me; I'll try to put it in simpler form. Why is Atropia?"

By this time he appeared to have reached the conclusion that I was a lunatic, safely enough, though most probably a harmless one. He looked first at the little colored slip sticking in my hat band and then consulted a notebook drawn from an inside pocket.

"H'm; ticketed to Angels," he muttered, half to himself. And then to me: "Are you expectin' to have friends meet you at Angels?"

This was too much, but anxious as I was to find out something more about Atropia, I felt it an imperative duty to do my part toward enlivening a rather sad world. So I said solemnly: "I shall be met by a parade of the Angels fire department in uniform, and with the apparatus, headed by a brass band. But this is irrelevant to the present burning question. What I am thirsting to know is why there should be a dog with a face half white and half black on the Atropia station platform, and a piebald pony hitched to the horse rack on the Atropia public square."

That finished him.

"Say, young feller, you've sure got 'em bad," he commented. "But that'll be all right. Just wait till we get to Angels, and then you can find out all these funny things that you're so anxious to know."

"Hold on," I interposed, as he was trying to escape. "Atropia hasn't always been dead, has it? What was its name when it was alive?"

"Huh?" he queried; and then: "Oh, I get you now; it used to be Placerville."

"Thank you; that helps. Now how much farther is it to Angels?"

"'Bout twenty miles."

"All right; and when will there be a train coming back to this Atropia place?"

"Way-freight—to-morrow mornin'—eight-thirty."

"Good! Now, if those fire people and the brass band don't miss me——" I couldn't resist the temptation to give him a final shot, and it hit center. As he edged away I could see by his expression that he still thought me crazy.

When I went back to the Pullman after luncheon I perceived that the train conductor had promptly passed the word about the episode in the dining car. The Pullman conductor evidently had his eye on me, and the negro porter shied every time he passed my section. This was amusing, but if I could have known the tenth part of what was going to be taken out of this Pandora's box that I had foolishly dug up in the dining car the amusement feature would have been forgotten in a pretty strenuous effort to straighten things out while there was yet time.

Most naturally, I didn't have—or take—very much time to reflect upon the poor joke that had set people to wondering which asylum I had escaped from. I was too busy planning some way by which I might anticipate the eight-thirty way freight of the next morning. Granting the assumption that there need be no fixed limit to the law of coincidences, the happenings were coming too thick and fast to be classed as mere chance cuttings of the cards. Bullerton, guided by the old prospector's story, was headed for Placerville; and at Placerville I had seen the horse and the dog. Nothing was lacking but the blue-eyed maiden. Clearly, I must arrive at this Placerville-Atropia place at the earliest possible moment.

It was with this enthusiastic determination dominant that I descended from the train at my ticket-named destination of Angels, and found a typical mining camp of a single street and a dusty dreariness scarcely exceeded by that of Atropia. The first thing I saw on the station platform was my train conductor talking earnestly to a large, desperado-ish-looking man whose greatest need was for a clean shave. By the manner of the two I saw that their talk was aiming itself at me: the railroad man was only too plainly warning the Angelic person that Angels had an escaped madman in its midst.

Still I saw only the humorous side of it and refused to be disturbed. Fired by the ambition to find some way of returning at

once to Atropia before the magic horse and dog should disappear, I tramped off in search of a place where I could leave my two grips. The place that offered, and the only one, was the "Celestial Hotel," and I wondered what sly wag had suggested the name, which was a double pun on the name of the town and the fact that the hostelry, half restaurant and half tavern, was kept by a Chinaman.

Wing Poo, when I found him, looked much like the average Chinese laundryman, and his English was a shaving from the same stick. Though I hadn't lost very much time looking for the "Celestial," it was quite apparent that my reputation as an escaped lunatic had preceded me in some mysterious fashion, for when I asked for accommodations and a place in which to leave my luggage, the Chinaman's face took on the characteristics of a stone Buddha, and he said: "Solly. No got loom."

"Money," I retorted, showing him a handful of gold coins which I had taken the precaution to buy before leaving Denver.

That got him. The commercially minded Chinaman will take a chance on an untamed Bengal tiger if you can show him a possible profit; at least, that is the impression I had gathered on a former winter tour in California.

"Mebbe so can find loom," said Wing Poo, and he took my grips. This removed one obstacle in the way of sudden flight, but as I was turning to leave the restaurant-tavern another one loomed up in the shape of the large, desperadoish-looking person whom I had seen talking with the train conductor. He blocked the exit for me, pulling the lapel of his coat aside to show me a silver star the size of a small saucer.

"I'm onto you with both feet," he said, boring me with an eye that I could easily fancy might strike terror into the heart of the most hardened criminal. "I'm givin' you warnin' right now that no funny business don't go in this man's town."

"Guess again," I suggested. "I'm not a theatrical company."

"Huh!" he grunted. "What bughouse did you break loose from, anyhow?"

I laughed. "I'm quite harmless," I assured him; "the train conductor ought to have told you that while the telling was good. Give me a little information, and I'll forthwith remove myself from your charming city. How far is it by wagon road to Placerville-Atropia, and how can I get there?"

"My gosh!" he said gloomily; "two of you in the same week!"

"Even so. When did the other one arrive?"

"Day before yistidday. He didn't look so dog-gone bughouse, but I reckon he must 'a' been, or he wouldn't 'a' gone to 'Tropia."

"Let him rest in peace. Do I get my information?"

"Shore: we speeds the partin' guest. You've come a-past your place. Twenty-one miles back; and the way-freight'll take you there to-morruh mornin'."

"How about this afternoon and a horse?"

"There ain't no road."

"What's the matter with following the railroad track?"

"I reckon you mought; and then ag'in, you moughtn't. Have to head some o' the draws, and they re'ch back into the hills in a heap o' places."

"Couldn't make it in a motor car?"

"There ain't but three cars in this whole town, and I reckon *you* ain't goin' to git to borra one of 'em."

"All right. Just the same, I'm going to Atropia—this afternoon."

He let me pass, and I tramped up the street until I found the one livery stable. Here again, my fool reputation had quite evidently preceded me. The man had idle horses, plenty of them, but I couldn't hire one for love or money. When it came right down to the pinch, he wouldn't even sell me one.

"Naw," he grunted. "They'll be along yere after ye by to-morrer 'r nex' day, an' I ain't a-goin' to crope up an' say I he'ped ye git away."

It was just as I was about to inquire of the telegraph operator what the chances were that the great temptation rose up and slapped me in the face. Up the grade from the westward a tiny car, carrying two men, came spinning along. I recognized it at once as a track-inspection car, driven by a gasoline engine, and used by road masters and other railroad men for making quick trips over short distances.

In half a minute the little car rattled up to the station and was stopped, and the two men got off and went into the telegraph office, leaving the engine running. In a flash I saw my chance. Of course, if I stole

the car I'd be caught and arrested and hauled off somewhere and tried and fined; but before any of these things could happen to me I should have settled that biting question of the ownership of the piebald pony and the harlequin-faced dog.

Swiftly I crossed the platform to the waiting car. Since I had driven everything on wheels from a motor cycle to a racing auto, I saw at once that the control mechanism was simple enough. So, with a single glance over my shoulder to see that the coast was still clear, I sprang aboard, jerked the throttle open, and released the clutch, praying that the switches might be right for me in the upper end of the small Angels yard. With a roar like that of a rapid-fire gun the little car shot away. Two, three, five rail joints clicked under the wheels, and then, as the machine began to gather speed, I looked back. Three men were running down the station platform, one of them waving something that glistened in the sunlight. I heard the distance-diminished crack of a pistol, and a bullet sung a whining little song to me as it went by. I flung up an arm to show the gun-firer that he had missed, and the next instant the small car tore around the shoulder of a hill and Angels became only a backward-flitting memory.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAGIC TRIAD.

For the first few minutes the exhilarating experience of driving what was to me an entirely new motor vehicle kept me from dwelling too much upon the enormity of the offense I was committing. Sober second thought came in due time, however, and I began to plan a bit for the near-by future. Without doubt, news of the car theft had already gone over the wires to Atropia, and while I was quite willing to be arrested and tried and made to pay the penalty, I was fully determined that that unusual and interesting experience should be postponed at least long enough to enable me to reap the benefit of the theft.

Accordingly, I opened things up and gave the inspection car all the gas it could use, keeping a sharp lookout ahead, and meaning to stop a little way short of the city of dead things, abandon the car, and make the actual approach on foot. That is, if I should live long enough to get that far—an accomplishment which began to appear just a trifle uncertain before I had measured the first mile of the flight. You see, I knew absolutely nothing of the train schedules on this out-of-the-world railroad, and for any assurance I had to the contrary, I might very well be rushing to a collision with something coming full tilt in the opposite direction.

This thought was something less than comforting, and it kept me keyed up to an anticipatory pitch that soon became positively thrilling. On the pieces of straight track it was not so bad; here I should have some little warning. But at the approach to each new curve I could feel a cold breeze chasing up the back of my neck, and the reaction, when I could see around the curve and get a glimpse of another reach of clear track ahead, left me sweating like a victim in a Turkish bath.

Fortunately there were mile numbers strung along on the telegraph poles, so I could get a notion from time to time of how much longer the agony was going to last. Judging from the way the scenery was tearing past, I estimated that the car must be doing at least thirty miles to the hour; which meant forty minutes, or such a matter, to cover the twenty-one miles. If the opposing trains, whatever they might be, would only keep out of my way for those precious forty minutes——

As good luck would have it—I've always been the luckiest dog that ever lived—the warning, when it came, took a different form. Far away I heard, or seemed to hear, the shrill scream of a locomotive whistle. Of course, I couldn't tell from which direction the approaching train was coming, but that didn't make much difference. Head-end or rear-end, there was bound to be either a collision or a holdup, and in either case I didn't intend to be among those present if I could help it.

Jamming frantically on the brakes to bring my machine to a skidding stop, I piled off and tried to derail the car. The little beast proved to be a lot heavier than it looked, and it was no one-man job to get it off the rails and out of the way with anything like decent celerity. Nevertheless, I was doing fairly well when my interruption hove in sight less than five hundred yards away. It was a freight train bound in the general direction of Angels, and the locomotive at the head of it looked as big as an office building as it came surging down upon

me. I had only time to give one more heave at the gasoline car, a mighty boost that got all but one wheel of it in the clear, and then I took to my heels and broke for the tall timber—only there wasn't any timber on those blamed hills.

One glance over my shoulder showed me what I was in for; that the story was to be continued in our next. The engineer tried to stop; did stop, but not until after he had caught the little car to send it toppling end over end to smash at the bottom of the embankment. Then the foot race began—three or four men jumping from the train to put out after me. Being in pretty good training, I thought I could give them their money's worth at that game, and that was what happened.

Through one gap and into another, making figure eights around the hills and back again we went, until finally I lost them and sat down on a flat rock to gasp and laugh. It had all been so supremely ridiculous and so beautifully in keeping with the reputation I had left behind me at Angels, that I felt sure that now nothing less than a verdict of expert alienists would ever convince these Red Desert people that I was anything but an escaped madman.

After the breathing spell I began to look around a bit to get my bearings. The sun had gone behind the western mountains, though it was yet only a little after four o'clock. The breathing halt had been made in a narrow, cañonlike valley which seemed to extend northeast and southwest. Since it wasn't exactly prudent to go back in the direction of the railroad, I kept on up the valley, heading away from the setting sun, and feeling certain that, sooner or later, I must come out somewhere in the vicinity of Atropia.

That was a bad guess. Two hours later I was galumphing about among those barren hills, with all sense of direction totally lost, and with no change in the stage settings perceptible save that the hills were growing bigger and the intervening valleys were shrinking more and more into precipitous ravines. In all these ramblings, which must have covered miles, I had seen no slightest trace of human beings; no trails, no cattle, nothing to indicate that I hadn't been dropped down hard in the middle of a blankly uninhabited wilderness a thousand miles wide.

All these things taken into consideration, I could have shouted with relief when, at the last of the scramblings up a bowlder-strewn slope in which the pocket ravine ended, I came into an excuse for a road; a mere notch cut in the steep mountainside, and looking, as nearly as I could determine in the darkness, as if it hadn't felt a wheel for a month of Sundays; but, nevertheless, a wagon road, made by the hand of man.

Being pretty well winded by the stiff climb out of the cañon ravine, I sat down at the roadside to breathe a bit, and to decide which way I should go, to the right or the left. The choice, so far as I could see, lay only between going uphill or down. The road had a slight grade, and the inference was that the downhill pitch would come out, in the course of time, somewhere upon the desert level. Just as I was making up my mind that, in the dark, a downhill stumble would be preferable to the other kind, I heard a patter of feet and a dog barked.

A moment later I could see the beast, indistinctly. He had been coming up the road and had stopped at the sight—or scent—of me. Since a dog argued the proximity of a dog-owning human being, I called coaxingly: "Here, Towser—here—come on, old fellow—that's a boy!" and the curious thing about it is that he did it, running up a little way and stopping, and finally coming to squat in front of me and to lift a paw for me to shake.

I jollied him a bit and let him nose me to his heart's content. Suddenly, as if he had discovered a long-lost master, he broke away and began to leap around me, barking a hilarious welcome. In the midst of this hubbub I heard hoofbeats and the squeak of saddle leather, and the dog's owner came up. At first I thought the dimly outlined, Stetson-hatted figure in the saddle was that of a boy; but it was a woman's voice, and a mighty pleasant one, that called to the dog: "Down, Barney, and behave yourself—what's the matter with you, sir!"

I stood up and pulled off my cap. "I'm the matter, chiefly," I said. "Your dog seems to think he knows me, and I'm awfully sorry that his memory is so much better than mine."

"Barney is such a foolish dog, sometimes," she said sweetly. "He has a double brain, you know: half of it is good-natured and silly, and the other half is—well, it's much——"

The dog had come around again, wagging

his tail, and at that magic word "half" I stooped to let him stick his cold nose into my palm. The act brought me near enough so that I could see him better, and I had to clap a hand over my mouth to keep from shouting out and scaring the entire combination into a wild stampede. The dog was *my* dog. One-half of his face was white, and the other was so black that it merged harmoniously into the night.

"I know," I said, straightening up; "my brain acts that way, too, sometimes." Then: "Excuse me, but would you mind telling me the color of the horse you're riding?"

The young woman laughed. "Can't you see for yourself?" she asked.

"No; I'm—er—rather color blind, after dark."

"Winkie is what the cowmen call a 'pinto'—a calico horse," she answered promptly.

"Sure!" I bellowed; and the horse shied and the dog barked in sympathy. I apologized at once. "Pardon the explosion. As I said a minute ago, my brain sometimes acts like Barney's; half of it being good-natured and silly, and the other half—well, we'll let that go for the present if you'll permit me. Just now I lack only one degree, so to speak, of being entirely happy. May I—er—will you have the goodness to tell me where I am?"

"I—why—dear me! don't you *know* where you are?"

"Not any more than a harmless, necessary goat, I assure you."

"But I can't understand——" she began.

"Of course, you can't," I broke in, laughing joyously. "But if you had been through what I have this afternoon, you wouldn't wonder."

"Did you—did you come from Angels?"

"How did you guess it? It's as true as Gospel; and I feel as if I had walked most of the way. I—I—my car broke down, you know."

"Yes," she said, "I know"—just as if she did. Then: "This is the southern slope of Cinnabar Mountain. This road goes on down to Atropia, about three miles below here."

"Y-yes; Atropia was the place I was trying to reach."

"So they——" she broke off short and tried again: "Yes, Atropia—of course. But you are not going there now, are you?"

"I suppose it's Atropia or no supper; neither supper nor lodging."

She stopped and thought a moment.

"I—really, I don't think you'd better go to Atropia. It's quite a long walk, you know."

"But what else can I do?"

She thought again, and then said what I was hoping she might say.

"I—we—that is, daddy and I might give you some supper and put you up for the night, if—if you wouldn't mind sleeping in the—in the loft."

If she had only known that I would cheerfully have risked sleeping in the cellar rather than to lose sight of her, but she was going on a bit breathlessly: "It is only about a mile, and—and if you're very tried I might let you ride Winkie."

"I shall be delighted—to walk," I hastened to say.

"Straight on up the road, then," she directed; so I struck out, with the dog at my heels and the pony at his heels.

We had covered perhaps half of the promised mile in plodding silence when we came to a place where the grade was so steep that the climb cut my sea-level wind to the little end of nothing, and even the tough little mountain pony was puffing.

"Wait a bit and get your breath," said the pony's rider; and when I halted: "You are not used to these high altitudes, are you?"

"Not so that any one would remark it," I gasped. "How high up are we?"

"About five thousand feet. The mine is exactly five thousand three hundred, I believe."

There it was—*the mine!*

"Pardon me," I blurted out, "but would you mind telling me if your eyes are blue?"

Her laugh was like a drink of cool spring water in the middle of a hot summer day.

"I—I hope you are not dangerous," she stammered, mixing the words in with the end of the laugh.

"Bless you, no!" I protested. "Without doubt, I'm a third-degree lunatic; there have been times—like to-day, for example—when there wasn't even method in my madness. But I am perfectly harmless, I assure you; at least, I'm never tempted to be violent unless people refuse to answer my questions."

"That seems quite reasonable," she admitted. And then: "I sup-pup-pose my eyes are blue: people tell me they are."

"Thank you," I burbled. "There is only one other little matter, and that can wait

until we are—er—a bit better acquainted, you know. Shall we go on now?"

She spoke to her pony and we went on.

Accordingly, after perhaps half a mile of the level going, we came to the steepnesses again, with the great mountain towering before us to shut the stars off well up toward the zenith. Ahead of us, and up another steep slope, I could see the dim shapes of a number of buildings, all dark. Then we came to a great gray dump, looking as if the mountain had one time opened its mouth to relieve itself of a poorly digested meal.

Beyond the dump there was another building with a light in it, and as the dog ran ahead of us, barking, the figure of a man silhouetted itself in the open doorway.

"We are here, and you are welcome to the old Cinnabar," said my companion to me; and then she "hoo-hooed" cheerily to the man and slipped out of her saddle, letting her pony stand while she led me to the door of the lighted, log-built cabin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD CINNABAR.

I was wondering how the little lady—when she was afoot the top of her head came about level with my shoulder—was going to explain things to her father. But I needn't have bothered my brains about that. We had apparently left all of the conventions at the bottom of the hill.

"Daddy, here is a man I found down at Antelope Gulch: he had lost his way, so I brought him home," was the simple manner in which she launched me; and I found myself shaking hands with an elderly man who looked as if he might be a farmer, or a miner, or something of that sort—flannel shirt, trousers tucked into his boots, iron-gray whiskers all over his face, and an eye as mild as a collie dog's.

"You did plum' right, Jeanie," he remarked; and then to me: "Come right on in and be at home, stranger. If you don't see what you want, ask for it." After which he went to take care of the piebald pony.

The log cabin was primitive only on the outside. Inwardly it was a dream of homeliness; rag carpet on the floor; chintz curtains at the windows, heavy, home-built furnishings, a glorious stone fireplace with a wood fire snapping and crackling in it against the chill of the high-mountain night. A hanging lamp lighted this haven of rest, and under its mild glow I got my first good look at the girl.

She wasn't beautiful in the common acceptance of the term; she was just piquant and charming, and—well—lovable; that's the only word that fits. A round little face, wind-tanned as delicately as the blush on the biscuits your mother used to bake, a rather jolly nose, a rosebud of a mouth upheld by a firm, round chin, and the chin upheld by an extra firm little jaw. As she had admitted, her eyes were blue—the sort of blue that shades into violet—and they were well-set; wide apart and perfectly fearless; the kind of eyes fit to match the straight-lined brows that usually go with them.

Her make-up was about what one would expect to find in the circumstances; a jaunty campaign hat, a riding habit that looked like washed khaki—and probably was washed khaki—divided skirts, and neat, brown riding boots. The jacket of the habit, which she stripped off as we stood before the fire, had pockets like a man's, and the coat-stripping revealed the trimmest of brown canvas cartridge-belts sagging around her waist, with a six-gun carried grip forward on the right-hand side, cowboy fashion.

"I see now why you weren't frightened when I rose up in front of you in the road," I said, nodding at the gun.

"Yes; daddy always makes me carry it when I'm going anywhere out of his sight," she explained as if in half apology.

"Could you use it, if you had to?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so. Goodness knows, daddy has taken pains enough teaching me that the hand can be quicker than the eye." Then: "Please make yourself comfortable; I've got to go and get supper."

So I lost her for the time being, and sat alone before the cheerful blaze, chuckling quietly over the mad adventures of the day and their highly romantic outcome. Beyond all manner of doubt, I had discovered the three talismans of Cousin Percy's cryptic letter. By what seemed little short of a miracle, I had found the girl, the horse, and the dog; and if the remainder of Percy's letter were to be taken at its face value, I should now be in touch with my legacy.

As to the character of the legacy, there was now no question. Grandfather Jasper had left me a mine; and I was fully prepared to find it the drowned mine of Bullerton's story. What I might be able to make of it was a matter which could well be

postponed to another day. Just as I reached this conclusion the old man came in, pulled up a chair on the other side of the hearth, and began to make me welcome in a mild-mannered way, saying that they didn't have much company and were always glad to see a new face. He didn't ask any troublesome questions, and beyond telling me his name, which was Hiram Twombly, didn't volunteer any information about himself and his daughter, or explain how they came to be living in so much comparative comfort in such an out-of-the-way place.

Later on, the girl returned to set the table, and shortly afterward we had supper. It was an amazingly good meal; crisp bacon, fried potatoes, hot biscuits and honey, and coffee that was delicious in spite of the condensed milk that took the place of cream. "Homey" is the word that fitted the supper, which marched in perfect harmony with the rag carpet and chintz curtains and cozy fireside.

The table talk was purely desultory, as if all three of us were trying to dodge an issue of some sort; the weather, the difference between the climate of the eastern and western slopes of the range, the bracing nights even in June at altitude five thousand feet —all sorts of innocuous things like that. And not one word of mention as to the why of the dark and deserted buildings on the other side of the great mine dump, and a just as careful avoidance of any reference to my reasons for making aimless foot tours in a region where I was measurably certain to get lost.

When we left the table the blue-eyed maiden got house-wifely busy again, and the old man and I sat before the fire and smoked. I don't remember just how the talk happened to drift around to automobiles and motor boats and such things, but it did, and I guess I may have bragged a bit about having driven and tinkered pretty nearly every sort of go-cart on land and water—as I had.

"Reckon you're sort of a God-send," said Twombly. "To-morruh I'll get you to show me a few things 'at I don't know 'long of them lines, maybe."

By and by the girl came in and sat down to knit, just as her grandmother might have done, and then her father lighted a lantern and went out. I was fairly perishing to know a number of things, but hardly knew how to begin asking about them. So, as the old man put his hat on and left the cabin, I blew out the first foolish remark that came into my mind.

"All dressed up and nowhere to go: isn't that about the way of it up here on this mountain?"

"Meaning daddy?" she said, smiling. "He has gone to make his regular round of the mine buildings and cabins. Not that there is any particular use in it; only he likes to feel that he is at least pretending to earn his pay."

"The mine?" I queried.

"Yes; this is the old Cinnabar, you know, d daddy is the—well, I suppose you might call us the caretakers. The mine has been shut down for a year or more."

"Is it a gold mine?"

"It was."

"Why the past tense?"

"Water," she said succinctly. "It's a drowned mine."

Of course, this was just what I expected to hear, and yet this plain confirmation of things gave me a damp and soggy feeling of despondency. Percy had wired that his letter was no joke; but it seemed that it really was one, and that the joke was on me.

"Can't the water be pumped out?" I asked.

"No. I understand the company spent thousands of dollars trying. There is a big building just filled with pumping machinery; and boilers and engines and everything. Daddy will show you to-morrow, if you care to see them. It's—it's rather pitiful."

"You mean the company's loss?"

"No; the company didn't lose anything. It was just one old man."

Now we were coming to the meat of the thing, and I looked my hand of cards over carefully to the end that I should not overplay it.

"I like stories," I said; "especially mining stories," and thereupon she told me the story of the Cinnabar. It was a fair repetition of Bullerton's tale, with a few more of the particulars thrown in.

It seemed that the original company had more than made good; had paid dividends until the capital stock was worth four or five to one. Then the water had begun to come in; real water, not the financial kind. After which my grandfather—she named him by name—generously came to the rescue —without meaning to—and they had soaked

him for a final clean-up. That is about all there was to it.

"Who were these original owners?" I asked, after she had finished the sorry tale of drowning.

"Some Cripple Creek company; I don't know any of the names."

"Did my—did the old man you speak of ever come here himself?"

She nodded. "Once; after it was all over and the place was deserted. Daddy was here, and we were living in this cabin; squatters, I guess you'd call us. This used to be the mine superintendent's house, and it was empty, like all of the others. Daddy said we might as well be getting the use of it; anyway, until somebody came along who had a better right; so we camped down."

"That was proper. And this Mr. Jasper Dudley didn't turn you out, I suppose."

"No; he was very kind. When he found that daddy's gulch claim wasn't going to amount to anything, he said he needed a caretaker here, and since that time he—or, rather, his lawyer—has sent us money every month. But now I suppose it will all be different."

"Why should it be different?"

"Mr. Dudley is dead," she said, looking steadily into the heart of the fire.

"But the heirs?" I suggested.

"We don't even know who they are. When Mr. Dudley went away, he left a sealed envelope with daddy. He said he might come back again, some time, but if he didn't, or couldn't, daddy was to keep the envelope and give it to his—Mr. Dudley's—representative; whoever that might be."

Talk about plots thickening! This one was already as thick as molasses in the middle of a cold winter.

"How were you to know this representative?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied simply. "I should suppose he would be able to identify himself in some way, wouldn't you?—that is, if he ever comes."

"Yes, of course," I agreed; and then, since we seemed to have scraped the bottom of the Cinnabar pan clean, I switched off to something else. "When we were coming up the road together, you garnered the impression that I was a crazy man, didn't you?"

She forced a queer little laugh and bent lower over her knitting.

"Didn't you try to give me that impression?"

"I fancy I didn't have to try very hard—since you had been spending the day in Atropia."

At this, she looked so painfully self-conscious that in common charity I had to help her out. So I dodged again, saying: "When you were in Atropia did you see anything of the other crazy man?"

"Is there another one?" she asked, rather breathlessly.

"I was told so in Angels this afternoon: by a man who carried a gun, and wore a silver star, and needed a shave very badly indeed. His words, as I recall them, were, 'Huh! two of you in one week.' And he added that the other one had gone to Atropia."

"Is this other man a friend of yours?" she inquired.

"You could hardly call him that: I've met him only once. He is a mining engineer, and his name is Bullerton—Charles Bullerton."

If I had reached up and got her pistol from its holster over the mantel and banged it off into the fireplace, she could scarcely have been more startled.

"Bub-Bullerton?" she stammered. "Is Mr. Bullerton here?"

"Not here, exactly; but according to the man with the silver star he was in Atropia two days ago. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes; qui-quite well."

"Then, naturally, you will know best whether or not he is crazy."

Once more she let the blue eyes drop to her knitting, and if I wasn't mistaken the rosebud lips were twisting themselves in a wry little smile.

"The last time I saw him he told me he was crazy!" she admitted.

"Isn't this delightful!" I murmured. "Bullerton is crazy, and I'm crazy; perhaps we are all a bit crazy. You remember what the old Quaker lady said to her husband: 'All the world is queer, John, save thee and me; and sometimes thee's a little queer.' Do you know, Miss Jeanie, that I've come thousands of miles to find you?"

"To find *me?*" The blue eyes were as round as the full moon.

"Even so; you, your horse, and your dog. Would you—er—would you permit a very personal question—remembering always that it is put by a man who has lost his wits?"

"I—I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you don't; nobody would. But

I am virtually obliged to ask the question. Have you a small brown mole on your left shoulder?"

She blushed very prettily; even the handsome mountain wind tan wasn't brown enough to hide it.

"I think you *are* crazy—completely crazy."

"Certainly, I am; there hasn't been the slightest doubt of it since—since about two weeks ago, when I started out to hunt for a pie-faced dog and a piebald horse."

There was silence before the fire for a long minute, and I began to be afraid Daddy Hiram would come back before anything else happened. Then she said: "How did you know about the mole?"

"Then there is one?" I questioned eagerly.

"Y-yes."

"Glory be!" I chanted. "You don't know what a load you have lifted from whatever poor fragment of a mind I have left."

Again she said: "I don't know what you mean."

"No; you wouldn't know in a thousand years."

Silence again, and then: "Aren't you leaving it rather awfully for me, don't you think —not telling me anything?"

"Just you wait," I begged. "I have lucid intervals at times; all crazy people do, you know. When my next one comes along I'll tell you all I know—which isn't nearly as much as you might think."

I had an idea she was going to insist upon knowing, then and there, but at that moment her father returned, and she went on with her sock-knitting while we two men talked a bit and had a bedtime smoke. Pretty soon I began to get sleepy—a natural consequence of the strenuous day—and at the third yawn, which I was trying vainly to hide, Daddy Twombly lighted a candle and offered to show me my bunk. This proved to be in the cabin loft, as the blue-eyed maiden had threatened, and the stair was just a common ladder. Father Hiram left me the candle, and I had rolled myself in the blankets and had blown the light out before I realized that the loft must be directly over the room with the fireplace in it.

I was so workmanly tired that I fell asleep almost at once. and why I should have awakened before morning I don't know. Neither could I tell what time it was, though it seemed as if I hadn't been asleep more than a few minutes. There were voices in the room below; Twombly and his daughter had not yet gone to bed, it seemed. I had no manner of right to listen in, and I didn't mean to. But short of stuffing cotton in my ears there didn't seem to be any way of dodging—and I didn't have any cotton.

"I found him"—this in the girl's voice—"sitting beside the road at the head of Antelope Gulch; I think he must have climbed out of the gulch itself. No, I wasn't exactly scared; but, of course, after what I'd heard at Atropia, it startled me a little. Barney made friends with him at once."

There was a pause, and then the old man: "S'pose you go over the thing again, Jeanie. I'm sort o' mixed up on it."

"It was this way: I'd been over to Mrs. Haggerty's for a while, and afterward I walked down to the railroad office with Buddy. He had some new magazines and I sat down to look through them. Pretty soon a freight train passed, going west, and right away the telegraph instruments seemed to go crazy and Buddy said: 'Gosh-all-Friday!' and fairly jumped to answer. It was Angels talking, telling Buddy that a man had stolen a gasoline inspection car at the Angels depot and was running away with it up the line: Buddy was to throw a switch in front of it and stop it at Atropia.

"Buddy wired back that Number Eighteen had already passed, and that the thief would probably never get as far as Atropia alive. That was all we heard until just before I started back up the mountain. Then I guess the Angels operator had a little time on his hands, and he told Buddy all about it: how this man had come to Angels on Number Six, and Six's conductor had warned Ike Beasley, the marshal, telling him that the man who had just got off the Pullman was not quite right in his head. It seems that the man went right uptown and left his suit cases at Wing Poo's. Then he tried to hire a horse to ride to Atropia. Buck Bradley had heard about him and wouldn't let him have one."

"Sure! I reckon he wouldn't," said the man's voice.

"It was after that that he went back to the depot, and when the inspection car came along, stole it and ran away with it. He met Number Eighteen somewhere on the way and stopped and tried to get his car off the track. When he found he hadn't time, he took to the hills. The freight crew chased him, but they couldn't catch him."

Another little spell of silence, and then the man's voice again.

"You reckon this is him, up in the loft, don't you, Jeanie?"

"There can't be any doubt about it. The Angels operator described him for Buddy; a big, handsome young man in gray tweeds, and wearing a golf cap to match."

"That's him," said Daddy Hiram, still reckless with his grammar. Then: "I'm sure sorry. Of course, he's bughouse, but what he did wasn't noways vi'lent, as you might say. He just set his fool head on gettin' to 'Tropia, some way. What do you think, Jeanie?"

"I'm not sure he is crazy, daddy. There's a—there's a mystery of some sort about him; and part of the time he is just as sensible as anybody."

"Well, it seems a pity if he should have to go to jail, 'r to a 'sylum, and that's what'll happen if the railroad folks get hold of him. What say if we try to keep him sort o' quiet here till this thing blows over—that is, s'posin' he'll stay?"

"Why, y-yes; if you think best," was the half-hesitant reply; and then, as if to change the subject before it should grow to such a size that she couldn't handle it: "I heard something else to-day—something that you won't like to hear. Bullerton is somewhere in this neighborhood. He was in Atropia yesterday, or the day before."

"Huh!" said the man's voice. "I wonder what crooked deal he's tryin' to pull off now? I s'pose Buddy saw him and told him?"

I noticed very pointedly that she refused to say whether this Buddy person had or had not told her; just skipped over it entirely. All she said was: "You may depend upon it that Buddy won't tell him how to find us."

"No," was the growling response; "but somebody else will, and I don't want to see him come foolin' 'round you any more whatsoever, Jeanie, girl. I kep' still before, but that was before I found out how crooked he is."

"You needn't be afraid for me, daddy," said the girl, and I could hear her low laugh. "You know you've always said I'd have to marry money, and Charles Bullerton hasn't enough to tempt even me."

I heard something that sounded like a deep-throated "Gosh!" and then: "If Charley Bullerton's been in 'Tropia, he'll be here, next, tryin' to get his claws into this here Cinnabar carcass. And I ain't got no boss to stand behind me. That'll be a nice kettle o' fish!"

I stuck my head out of the blankets and listened greedily. It seemed to be very highly necessary that I should know the exact ingredients of that kettle of fish. But my luck had exhausted itself. In a few minutes there was a stir in the sitting room below, and I could hear Daddy Twombly shoveling up ashes to cover the fire. That meant good night; and though I continued to listen there were no more sounds, and I was finally obliged to go to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

PARTNERS.

If I had been what I professed to be; an ordinary drifting tourist set afoot by a broken-down auto; my cue to be on my way the following morning couldn't have been delayed much beyond the appetizing breakfast to which I sat down a little after seven o'clock. Since I had reached the end of the rainbow, and had no intention of leaving before I could have my chance to dig for the pot of gold which is said to be the reward of rainbow chasers, I was casting about for an excuse to prolong my stay when my mild-eyed host took the matter out of my hands.

"Talkin' about autermobiles and such, las' night, gave me the idee that maybe you knowed somethin' about machinery," was the way he began. "If you ain't in no tearin' hurry to be goin' somewheres, p'r'aps you'd be willin' to show me how to take a steam engine to pieces so 't I could clean it."

"With all the pleasure imaginable," I agreed, before he could have time to change his mind. "Machinery is my long suit, if I have any. And as for the hurry part of it: I shouldn't recognize the word if I should meet it face to face in the big road. If you and Miss Jeanie could manage to take me on as a boarder for a while, I'd be more than delighted. I may not have mentioned it before, but my—er—doctor has recommended a stay in the dry altitudes, you know."

On any face less guileless the old prospector's smile would have figured as an impish grin.

"You don't say! You don't look much like a 'lunger,' " he ventured.

"That's a fact: I look disgustedly healthy, I'm sure. But you can't always tell by the looks, you see. I was worried stiff last night for fear my coughing might keep you awake."

"Curious," he remarked with the slow drooping of an eyelid, "I never heard it a-tall." Which, in view of the fact that I hadn't any cough, and had slept like a log the whole night through, wasn't so singular as it might have been.

This little breakfast-table talk was the prelude to a day's work. While the cerulean-eyed maiden was carrying the dishes out to the kitchen, the old man donned overalls and jumper, and a few minutes later I was introduced to the mine—*my* mine—or to as much of it as was open to any visitor other than a submarine diver. That wasn't very much. A well-built shaft house equipped with a hoist and a huge double pumping installation, an ore shed with a tipple for loading wagons, a blacksmith shop with a few machine tools for making repairs, a scattering of cabins along the mountain side—these last for the use of the miners who had been, and were no more: that was all.

While he was getting out his wrenches and hammers the old man told me the story of the Cinnabar—most of which I had already heard twice—first from Bullerton, and no longer ago than the previous evening from Jeanie Twombly—though Daddy Hiram didn't know this. It had once been a "producer," in ore sufficiently rich to bear wagon transportation to Atropia and the rail haul from there to the Copah smelters. Then the water had come in and the mine was flooded, as I could see for myself by looking down the shaft.

"And you say the water can't be pumped out?" I asked.

Twombly shook his head. "Looks like they gave it a mighty good try afore they gave up," he suggested. "You see them pumps: you can run 'em all day, and come night you wouldn't know you'd had steam on."

"Have you ever tried it?"

He looked a bit abashed. "It ain't *my* mine, and I reckon I didn't have no business to be a-monkeyin'. But there was wood for firin', and I didn't have a dog-blasted thing to do. I've run them suction pumps two days at a stretch—and never did gain a half inch on the water in the shaft."

That seemed to settle the drowning question pretty definitely, and I asked him what he wished to do with the machinery. He said he was afraid it might be rusting inside, and he wanted to take it apart; especially the steam engine. I told him how to begin, and he fell to work; but in just a few minutes his awkwardness with the tools gave me the willies.

"See here," I said; "if you've got another pair of overalls and a jumper——"

"Sure, I have," he admitted; and that was how I found my first real job.

We stuck at it until noon, disassembling and scraping and polishing and oiling, and incidentally finding the machinery in much better shape than it had any right to be after standing unused for so long a time. When Daddy Hiram called the noon halt and we went over to the cabin to wash up for dinner, the little girl met us round-eyed.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed; "has your—malady taken a new form?"

I laughed at her. "It has. My most lucid moments come oftenest when I'm tinkering with machinery of some sort. We're going to put things in top-hole order over yonder and pump the Cinnabar dry. After which, we'll all live happily ever after."

She shook her pretty head in mock sorrow.

"That shows the tinkering isn't a real cure," she asserted. "But come on in; you must be awfully hungry."

I was hungry. I think that forenoon measured the first useful half-day's work I'd ever done; and the afternoon made it a full day. It was great! For the first time in an idle, happy-go-lucky life I had a job with an object and a keen ambition to back it up. I was thirstily eager to get that machinery in shape, and to start the pumps, in spite of Daddy Hiram's assurances that it "wouldn't do no good a-tall."

Any old gold miner or prospector will tell you that there is a peculiar fascination in the precious-metal mining game that soon develops into something like a mania. In two days I had acquired all the symptoms; in two weeks the symptoms had acquired me. I could scarcely wait until we got the boilers cleaned and the engines put together, I was so impatient to make the trial.

During that hardworking interval I dropped into the little household like a member of the family, discovering new charms in Jeanie Twombly—and in the old

man, as well—at every turn. They were such wholesome, whole-souled folk, so vastly unlike the money-spending, have-a-good-time crowd I had always run with at home. Bright, too. The girl, especially, had a keen little mentality that could cut like a knife to the very heart of things. If she still thought me a bit off in my head, she said nothing to evince it, and I felt sure she was giving me the benefit of the doubt.

One evening when Daddy Hiram was making his usual useless round of the company property, I told her about Lisette, chiefly because it didn't seem quite fair not to.

"Of course, I knew there was a girl," she put in quietly.

"Well, as you see, there is, and there isn't," I countered.

"But you are engaged to her," she averred.

"Am I? That is just the point that I can't demonstrate, to my own satisfaction. Put yourself in her place. If you were engaged to a man and you took his ring off, right in front of him, and put it on the finger of the other hand, wouldn't you consider that you'd called the thing off, definitely?"

"Oh, well; if it hadn't gone any deeper than the ring," she began.

"It hadn't," I interrupted; "not in any human sense. You don't know the world of to-day, Jeanie. Sentiment, in the sense that our fathers and mothers understood the word, has been pretty well rubbed out of it. 'All for love, and the world well lost' has become merely a pretty bit of poetry."

"Oh, I should hope not," she objected gravely.

"Quite so, on my side of the world. Lisette and I, now, for example: we merely agreed to agree; or, perhaps, even that is putting it too strongly. Perhaps we merely agreed not to disagree. Then there was the money—or the lack of enough of it. She was always telling me that I couldn't afford to buy her hats."

"Well, you couldn't, could you?"

"No; but one day I may be able to: and then what?"

"Why, you'll have to buy them, won't you?"

"I wish I knew!" I groaned.

Her laugh was an immense easing of strains. "You and your Miss Randle haven't a monopoly on all the sordidness in existence," she remarked. "I'm always telling daddy that I've got to marry money."

"I can't imagine you marrying for money!"

"Can't you? Perhaps if you had lived the way daddy and I have, ever since I can remember——"

That didn't ring the least little bit true, and I told her so. But she clung to her assertion.

"No; you see me here, cooking for you and daddy, and keeping house in a log cabin, and wearing clothes that would make a dining-room girl turn up her nose, and maybe you think I like it. I don't. I want to be like other girls, and travel and see things, and have nice, soft, shimmery gowns to wear, and—and never, *never* have to open another can of beans again as long as I live, if I didn't want to: there!"

I laughed. "That is just because the right man hasn't come along down the big road. When he does come, you won't think about the frills and the garnishings—or the beans."

There were quite a few little evening talks like this, and her efforts to make me believe that she was hard and loveless and mercenary never got very far. It was simply absurd. Every glance of the blue eyes, every twist and turn in her cheerfully busy life, proved that she was built to make some man deliriously happy, wholly without regard for the figure of his bank account. I wasn't in love with her then. It was enough to live in the same house with her, and to eat her cooking, and to be with her every day. If I had had to get out; or if there had been another man—but I won't anticipate.

In due time after we began overhauling the gummed-up machinery, Daddy Hiram and I were ready to put fire under the boilers, and we did it. If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget the tense, suppressed excitement of that July morning. The excitement was all mine, you understand; daddy didn't have a sliver of it. And since he didn't yet know who I was, or the immense stake I had in the game, I couldn't inoculate him the least little bit.

"I reckon I know about how you feel," he would say. "I had them same fits o' the jumps, myself, before I'd ever steamed her up and tried her. But there ain't nothin' goin' to happen. You'll see."

Just the same, I had all the joys of the preliminary and anticipatory thrills, anyway. By eight o'clock we had ninety pounds

of steam on the boilers, and I held myself down until it climbed to one hundred and twenty. Then I started the pumps; big Worthingtons that threw a stream six inches in diameter. Long before this, I had gotten the mine layout from Daddy Hiram, though he had no maps and could tell me only what he had pieced together from hearsay. As he described the workings for me, I understood that the main shaft ran straight down some two hundred feet, from which level there were drifts and stopings following the vein back into the mountain.

That all of these underground workings were filled with water could well be argued from the fact that the shaft itself was full to within a dozen feet of the floor of the shaft house. Of course, the Worthingtons, having a suction lift of only twenty-eight feet or so, couldn't lower the water below the twenty-eight-foot level; but if they could make a beginning, there were two immense deep-well pumps to do the follow-up stunt.

After the pumps were started, and the gauges showed, or seemed to show, that they were working to full capacity, I rigged a measuring gauge; a bit of wood for a float with a string tied to it, and the string passing over a pulley in the shaft-house ceiling with a weight on the end of it. If the water should go down the float would go with it, pulling the weight up. A board with pencil marks on it, stood up beside the weight, answered for an indicator scale.

For an hour we drove those big water lifters at top speed, and made ourselves fairly pop-eyed watching that suspended weight. And at the end of the hour it hadn't moved a hair's-breadth; not a fraction of an inch.

"I told you so," said Daddy Hiram mildly. "If them pumps was to run from now till kingdom come, it wouldn't make a smitchin's difference with that water."

"I don't believe the pumps are working," I protested. "Those gauges must be out of whack. Where does the discharge water empty itself?"

"Over in the gulch into the creek."

"Show me," I directed; and together we went to investigate. There was a beaten path along the little bench leading straight across to a near-torrent of mountain water, a clear stream of melted snow, foaming and tumbling on its way to a junction with the headwaters of the Little Timanyoni.

We found the discharge a little way below the end of the path; a six-inch iron pipe which had been laid underground from the shaft house, doubtless, as I thought, to keep it from freezing in winter. The end of the pipe stuck out over the stream, into which it was projecting a six-inch solid jet. The discharge was coming, all right; there could be no doubt about that. So back we went to the mine buildings, to pile wood into the furnaces and to resume our watch upon the indicator weight.

Noon overtook us after a while—with nothing doing save that we were rapidly diminishing our wood pile. Jeanie brought our dinner over to us, with hot coffee to wash it down, and she had her merry-merry laugh at my demonstration which wasn't demonstrating.

"If daddy hadn't tried it so many times," she said. "But we *know*."

"You don't know me!" I retorted, helping myself to more of the warmed-over beans. "To-morrow we take turns chopping down some more trees. After we've burned all the wood within reach, maybe I'll be ready to quit."

My heavens, but it was a fight for fair! For a solid week we chopped wood, daddy and I, and kept the fires roaring under the boilers, and kept those monster pumps thumping and pounding away—night and day, mind you; watch on and watch off. And right straight through it all, that little indicator weight that I had rigged up stood stock-still; never moved the width of one of the pencil marks I had drawn on its gauge board.

At the end of the week I gave it up, and it was like pulling teeth to do it. By that time I was as hard as a keg of nails, and as stubborn as a mule, and the fierce toil of the wood-chopping had given me an appetite for work that fairly made me ache when I thought of stopping. We threshed it out that evening, the three of us before the cabin fire, after daddy and I had reluctantly stopped the pumps and let the steam run down.

"I reckon you hadn't ought to take it so hard, Stammie," daddy was saying. "After all, you must ricollect that it ain't no skin off 'm you if the old Cinnabar stays right where she is and soaks till kingdom come."

"No skin off of me?" I chortled with a sort of wild eerie, eldritch laugh. "Listen—both of you," and then I told them the entire heartbreaking story of cousin Percy's

letter and my grandfather's joke; of my footless search for the girl, the horse and the dog—or what would doubtless have been a footless search if I hadn't happened to run across Bullerton.

I remembered afterward that I had just got that far—to the naming of Bullerton—when Barney, the collie, got up from his corner of the hearth and began to growl. The next minute we heard a horse's *sh-u-r-r-r,* and Daddy Hiram went to the door. Jeanie and I, still sitting before the fire with our backs turned, heard him say, "Why, hello, Charlie Bullerton! What in Sam Hill are you doin' up in this neck o' woods?"

I turned to look at Jeanie—and missed. In the moment I had glanced aside she had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE TOO MANY.

Now in view of the fact that I had overheard Daddy Hiram's expressed opinion of Bullerton, and the other fact that the Twomblys, both of them, were just about the sincerest people I had ever met, I was a bit disconcerted to hear the old man greet my acquaintance of the Pullman like a long-lost friend. But it only meant that the ordinary civilities and conventions die hard, even in the wilderness.

When Bullerton came in he didn't seem half as much surprised to find me sitting before the Twombly house fire as I thought he might have been.

"Well, well, Broughton! the world isn't so big, after all, is it?" he bubbled. "Who would have thought that the next time we met it would be in such an out-of-the-way corner of the universe as this? I hope you've been well and happy all these weeks."

I said what I had to, and wasn't any too cordial about it, I guess; and for no better reason than the sort of unwelcoming feeling that any untimely butt-in provokes. We'd been doing very nicely without company, daddy and Jeanie and I; and, besides, there was a recollection of that "kettle of fish" daddy had mentioned, the ingredients of which I was now, as I supposed, about to learn.

Bullerton drew up a chair and made himself handsomely at home, pulling a silver-mounted cigar case and passing it around—without result, since daddy and I both said we preferred our pipes. That didn't faze the brown-whiskered jeet—not in the least. He lighted a cigar for himself, and began to talk much as if we'd invited him to; about his year in South America; about the oddness of his meeting me on the train, combined with the oddness of his meeting me here again in the Eastern Timanyonis; and things like that.

He was just comfortably in the swing of it when a door opened behind us and he jumped up with another, "Well, well; look who's here!" and when I looked I saw him holding Jeanie's two hands in his and braying over her like an ass. And, if you'll believe me, that girl had gone and changed her dress! That is what she went to do when she slipped out and left me to stare at her empty chair, *after* she'd heard her father say, "Why, hello, Charlie Bullerton!"

It was all off with me from that time on. For what was left of the evening, Bullerton played a solo. The talk fairly gushed out of him, like water from a wet sponge when you step on it. Jeanie didn't knit and listen, as she used to for me; she just listened. Daddy didn't say much; he never did, for that matter; and as for me—well, I was too full for utterance, and if the stem of my old corn-cob pipe had been made out of compressed aloes, it couldn't have tasted any bitterer. I had thought Bullerton a pretty decent sort of fellow on the train, but that opinion was changing now like the weather on an April day. He was a ganulph—that's about what he was; a pure-bred, narrow-eyed ganulph, lacking nothing but a close shave and a few feathers in his hair.

I got enough of it about nine o'clock, and climbed my ladder and went to bed, covering my ears with the blankets so I wouldn't have to listen to the bagpipe drone of Bullerton's voice in the room below. When I left he was chattering about the Indian women of Peru, telling how inexpressibly hideous they were, and my last thought as I fell asleep was a sour wish that he might wake up some morning and find himself married to half a dozen of 'em.

I hoped—without the least shadow of reason for the hope—that the next morning would show me a hole in the atmosphere in the place that Bullerton had occupied. But there was no such luck. He was present at the breakfast table, as large as life and Jeanie made her batter cakes just as light and fluffy for him as she had been making them for me.

Feeding my overnight grouch until the spines stuck out all over its back, I made my escape as soon as I could, hiking over to the mine and the scene of my late discomfiture. I hadn't been there very long before Bullerton came sauntering over. I edged into the blacksmith shop and sat down on the anvil, hoping he might miss me and go back. But he didn't.

"I saw your lead," he said, dusting off a dynamite box and seating himself comfortably. "You were quite right in coming over here. There is no manner of need of taking the old skeezicks in on what we're going to talk about."

"Meaning Mr. Twombly?" I rasped.

"Meaning 'Mister' Twombly, if that's what you've been calling him." Then: "Don't you think you've played it rather low down on me, Broughton? Taking in my story of this mine without letting me know that you are the person most deeply interested."

"It didn't strike me that way: it doesn't yet. I notice you were mighty careful not to tell me the name of your old gentleman."

"Ordinary business precaution," he chuckled. "But we needn't waste time jawing over what might have been—and wasn't. I have a contract with your grandfather which is legally binding upon you as his heir—always provided you can prove that you are his heir. Want to see it?"

"No; I'll take your word for that much of it."

"All right. If you don't deny the validity of the agreement, we're just that much further along. I'm ready to carry out my part of the contract—to unwater this mine. What do you say?"

"How are you going to do it?"

"That is my business. If I should tell you, you'd know as much as I do."

I felt pretty scrappy that morning; there is no use in denying it. "You're not the only pebble on the beach, Bullerton," I said, looking him in the eye. "What you can do, another mining engineer can do—and probably will do without asking the fenced-in earth for a reward.'

"Humph!" he grunted; "that's your play, is it? You're fighting without ammunition, Broughton. You haven't any money; and you'll look a long time before you'll find an engineer who will be able to finance his own experiment on your drowned proposition."

"That may be. But if you told me the story straight, you can't turn a wheel until I tell you to go ahead. So your contract doesn't amount to a hill of beans."

"That may make a nice little question for the courts to decide," he snapped. "But I don't want to go to law about it, and neither do you. You haven't any money to throw away in a legal scrap."

The tone he was taking didn't make me feel any less quarrelsome; but to bring matters to a head, I said: "What's your proposition?"

"Now you're talking," he granted. "Here it is in a nutshell: You make me a deed to fifty-one per cent of the Cinnabar property, just as it stands, and then you may go back East and enjoy yourself. I'll do the rest."

The sublime nerve of the proposal nearly took my breath.

"Fifty-one per cent! You told me that your offer to my grandfather was for a fourth interest!"

"So I did, and so it was. But the times change and we change with them. I'm doing business with you, now, Broughton—not with your grandfather. Fifty-one per cent, and you to give me a clear field—not stick around, I mean."

"But you can't make anything like *that* stand in the courts!" I told him.

"Maybe not; but I can make it stand with you—which is much more to the purpose. You said a minute ago that I couldn't turn a wheel without your consent. *You* can't turn a wheel at all—without money."

I thought it was time to tell him where he got off. "Then, by Jove, the wheels needn't turn!" I declared.

"Oh, hold on; you're hot now and ready to kick the fat into the fire without considering the inevitable conflagration that will ensue." Then he showed me plainly what he'd been doing in the interval between his first and second appearances in the Red Desert. "I've had time to look you up a bit. You're engaged to a girl back East, and you can't marry her because you haven't money enough. Half a loaf is better than no bread. Take a day or so to think it over. I'm in no hurry." And with that he went back to the Twombly cabin and left me warming the anvil.

It will say itself pretty easily that the next few days stacked up about as wretched an interval as I had ever put over. I con-

trived to wear out the daylight time tinkering with the machinery at the mine, prying over all the ways I could think of for trying new experiments. But I couldn't shut my eyes to the way things were going.

Bullerton had a masterful sort of grip that seemed to give him a strangle-hold upon everything he tackled. Daddy Hiram knuckled down to him, or kept out of his way; and as for Jeanie, she appeared to be hypnotized. I couldn't get three consecutive words with her in anything like privacy, and Bullerton was with her practically all the time.

Another way in which the butt-in made himself hateful was by the constant parade of money. He had wads of it with him and carried a pocket roll thick enough to disgust a professional gambler. Before he had been on the ground twenty-four hours it was plainly evident that he was making love to Jeanie; evident, likewise, that in doing so he was resuming a pleasant occupation begun somewhere back in the past. I hadn't known that I was in love with the dear girl before this boob came along, but I knew it now, with a vengeance. And it seemed as though I hadn't any more chance than a tree-climbing monkey in the middle of the Great Saraha.

It didn't help things out much when Daddy Hiram gave me the sealed envelope which my grandfathr had left with him. The contents were a deed in fee simple to the Cinnabar, and a little letter to me, written in Grandfather Jasper's cramped, old-fashioned handwriting. In it he merely said that he was leaving me a property which had cost him pretty well up to half a million, and he hoped I'd brace up and go to work and make something out of it; adding that if I hadn't been such a hopeless idler all my life he might have considered the propriety of adding an operating fund to the gift. As it was, I must work out my own salvation —if I were anxious to possess any of that commodity.

I think it was on the fourth day after his arrival that Bullerton cornered me again, and it was again in the deserted blacksmith shop.

"Well, Broughton," he began abruptly, "I've given you plenty of time to think it over. Where do you stand now?"

"Right where I did in the beginning," I retorted. "I don't want any forty-nine-fifty-one per cent partnership with you."

"All right; we'll call that a back number and go on to something else. I'll buy your mine, just as it stands."

"For how much?"

"For fifty thousand dollars—cash."

"Not on your life!"

"Well, why not? It isn't a particle of good to you in its present condition, and you haven't any money to try experiments. As I figure it, you'd be just fifty thousand to the good on the deal."

"I don't need a little money that badly."

"It isn't a little. At a good, safe interest, it will give you an income of three thousand a year. And that's more than you can swing now."

"You seem to know a good bit about my private affairs," I grated.

"I do; I've made it my business to find out."

"That's neither here nor there; there's nothing doing."

"But there ought to be," he urged. "You owe something to the girl back East, don't you?"

His persistent harping upon the intimacies —my intimacies—was beginning to rub me on the raw and make me itch to get my hands on him, but I was telling myself that, for the sake of the Twomblys, I mustn't lose my temper.

"The less you dig in my private garden patch, the better we shall get along," I told him. "What I owe, or what may be owing to me, is no concern of yours."

He was silent for a moment. He had picked up a bit of iron rod and was tracing hieroglyphic figures with it in the dust of the shop floor. Presently he looked up with a sort of impish leer.

"Been trying to carry sentimental water on both shoulders, haven't you? It's no good, Broughton. I filed on the little Blue-eyes claim over yonder in Twombly's cabin a long time before you ever saw or heard of it."

I didn't mince words with him.

"See here, Bullerton," I said; "there are limits, and I'll pay you the compliment of assuming that you're no fool. We'll leave Miss Twombly out of it—completely and absolutely out of it."

"You may; but I shan't," he smiled back. "In point of fact, my dear Broughton, you'll have to leave her out of it."

"Not for anything you may say, or leave unsaid."

"Yes; for something I may say. Have you forgotten that you have advertised yourself rather successfully in this corner of the world as one of two things: a pretty dangerous sort of lunatic, or—a criminal? As a matter of fact, the railroad detectives have been looking for you ever since you stole that inspection motor and got it smashed."

"Twombly knows about that, and so does Miss Twombly," I offered.

"They wouldn't give you away, of course: in a certain sense you are Twombly's guest, and in another you're his employer. But neither of these restrictions apply to me."

"In other words, if it should suit your purpose, you'd hand me over to the railroad sleuths: is that what you mean?"

"As a guesser, Broughton, you are hard to beat. Now you understand why you are obliged to leave the girl out of it—and I am not."

"Miss Twombly, herself, has the casting vote on that," I threw at him.

He got up from the dynamite box seat and dusted himself with his handkerchief. "She's already voted," he said coolly. Then: "You don't hold any cards, Broughton, and you are bucking a straight flush: I'd just as soon show you my hand," and he pulled his fat pocket roll of banknotes and let it lie in his palm. "Money is what talks, old man, and when it does, it makes so much noise that you can't hear anything else. Do you take the fifty thousand and vanish?"

"No."

"I'll give you another day to think it over; but I'm warning you that the price will shrink. It's fifty thousand to-day; and to-morrow it'll be forty."

I slid from the anvil and half unconsciously picked up the blacksmith's handhammer. "You go to hell," I said; and he went away from there.

This happened in the morning, and after Bullerton had removed himself I took to the woods on the mountain and didn't show up again until supper time. As had come to be the usual thing since Bullerton's advent, I played the dummy hand at table, and as soon as the meal was over I left the cabin and went across to the shaft house, with the day-long grouch growing like a juggler's rose.

In the engine room there was a chair made out of a barrel cut half in two and rigged with a seat—a luxury contrived by some past-and-gone hoist man—and I sat down in the dark to try to think things out. Should I take the fifty thousand and quit? Common sense said Yes, spelling it with a capital letter and underscoring it for emphasis. What was the use in hanging on? Hadn't I proved that the mine was undrainable, save, perhaps, at the enormous cost of driving an underrunning tunnel from a lower slope of the mountain? Daddy Hiram and I had figured on that: he'd had experience, and could furnish the rough-and-ready mathematics of rock boring. Two hundred thousand dollars, at least, was his estimate; and it might as well have been two hundred million dollars, so far as my resources went.

Then there was Jeanie. Hadn't she told me plainly that she was going to marry money? And wasn't the money flaunted in her face every day of the world? Then, again, there was Lisette. Fifty thousand dollars at six per cent would buy her hats—but it wouldn't buy much else. I could picture the calm-and-collected way in which she would say, "Yes, Stammie; you've succeeded nicely in financing the hats. But we couldn't buy hats and keep a car on three thousand a year."

I had just climbed down to this bottom round of this ladder of dejection when I heard a bit of noise and looked up to see a small figure darkening the engine-room door. Then a voice that I would have recognized in a thousand all speaking at once, said: "Mr. Broughton—Stammie: are you here?"

CHAPTER IX.

TO FISH OR CUT BAIT.

It's something wonderful how the sourest grouch can be banished by a single word. That word "Stammie," you know: she had never called me that before; though Daddy Hiram had been using the familiar handle right along.

"Yes?" I said, and jumped up and went to her. There was a bench just outside of the door where that same hoist man of other days had been wont to sun himself, I suppose, and we sat down. There was no moon, but the starlight was top hole. Her first question had the tone of a reproach.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing as a bear with a sore head?" she asked.

"Often," I admitted.

"Well, isn't that the way you are?"

"Haven't I some little cause?"

"Maybe. It does seem provoking that

your grandfather should have left things in such a dreadful muddle."

"Grandfather Jasper was laboring for the good of my soul. He knew his 'medium,' as the artists say. He wanted to make me work—something that nobody else has ever been able to do."

"Don't you like to work?"

"Why-e-e, I guess I'm like other folks in that. I don't mind working if I can pick my job—and my company. I've been having a bully good time hammering around this old bunch of junk with your father. Or I was until Satan came also."

"Meaning Mr. Bullerton?"

"Yes; meaning Mr. Bullerton."

"Ought I to listen if you're going to say things about him?"

"Not if you're going to marry him."

"Why shouldn't I marry him? Hasn't he plenty of money? And haven't I always told you that I'd have to marry money?"

"When you talk that way you are saying out loud just what Lisette says to herself—only you don't mean it, and she does."

"If you could have your mine, she could have her wish. It would be enough to buy her hats, wouldn't it?"

"Lord!" I said, "I hope she won't be obliged to go bareheaded until the Cinnabar begins to pay her millinery bills. The Boston winters are rather cold. But tell me; how did you get permission to come over here and talk with me?"

"Whose permission?"

"Bullterton's, of course."

"I don't have to ask it—yet."

"Not yet, but soon," I grinned. "You shouldn't have come."

"Why not?—if I wanted to."

"Because it's cruelty to animals. After a man has traveled thousands of miles to find the one girl in the universe, only to get himself elbowed aside by a brown-whiskered jeet——"

"Hush!" she said. "Can't you ever be serious? What are you going to do about the mine?"

"I can grab hold of the hot end of it in either one of two ways. Bullerton offered to unwater the Cinnabar if I'd deed him a bit more than a half interest—which would mean that he'd make a stock company of it and freeze me out entirely, most likely."

"And what is the other way?"

"He offers to buy the mine outright, just as it stands, for fifty thousand dollars."

"But your grandfather paid nearly half a million for it, didn't he?"

"Even so. But I'm the under dog. The man you are going to marry has none of the nice little scruples in a business transaction—if you'll permit me to say so. He even threatens to turn me over to the authorities for stealing that inspection car and getting it smashed."

"Oh, I don't think he'd do that!" she deprecated.

"It is right and proper that you shouldn't think so—in the circumstances. Just the same, I'm swearing continuously at the circumstances."

"You don't want me to marry money and have good clothes and all the other things?"

"No, by Jove! I want you to marry me!"

Her laugh was just a funny little gurgle. "Bluebeard!" she said. "And you haven't even killed Miss Randle yet! Thank you, ever so much; but I don't want to be one of several. Besides, you haven't any money."

Talk of *impasses* and impossible situations! What could a man say to such a girl as that!

"Did you come over here just to torment me?" I rasped.

"Woof!" she shivered; and then, right smash out of a clear sky: "Kiss me—just once, Stammie."

Did I? She was gasping a bit when she got up rather unsteadily to go back to the cabin across the dump head, and would not stay though I begged and pleaded with her. "No, indeed, Bluebeard Man," she said, with that queer little gurgle of a laugh. "I—I think I've found out what I wanted to. Good-by." And then, after I thought she was clean gone, she turned back to say, airily: "Oh, yes; I had almost forgotten what I came over here to tell you. You mustn't sell the mine, Stammie; not under any consideration. Good-by, again."

Can you beat it? When the good Lord made women, He doubtless had many patterns; but I do believe the one particular mold was broken after this Jeanie girl had been fashioned. For an hour or more I sat on that slab bench at the engine-room door in a sort of half daze, wondering if I had been asleep and dreaming, or if the thing really had happened. And when I finally went across to crawl up the ladder to my bunk in the loft, the cabin was all dark and I appeared to be the last one to turn in.

At breakfast the next morning everything

went on as usual, and for anything that Jeanie said or looked, the dream theory that I had been playing with might have been the sober fact. A bit later, after I had gone across to the mine, Bullerton came over to dig me out, as before.

"Forty thousand this morning," he announced, as chipper as an English sparrow over an unexpected breakfast. "Can you afford to let your capital shrink at the rate of ten thousand a day?"

"You never miss what you haven't had," I retorted. "No bidders, this morning."

"All right; it'll be thirty thousand tomorrow. At that rate you'll be owing me something pretty soon. That's about all I have to say—except one more little thing: No more tête-à-têtes in the starlight, old man, or I shall have to put the gad to you—the railroad gad, you know."

It made me so prickly hot to have him admit, baldly, that he had been spying upon Jeanie and me the previous evening that I could scarcely see straight.

"See here, Bullerton!" I barked; "I told you the other day that there were limits. You may think you have as many lives as the cat, but I doubt it."

He laughed and threw back the lapel of his coat to show me a gun slung by a shoulder strap under his left arm.

"You pulled a hammer on me yesterday, Broughton, and you probably didn't know that you would have been a dead man before you could swing it. A word to the wise. But I've got a better life-insurance policy than the six-gun: you're in love with Jeanie Twombly—in spite of that girl back East; and because you are, you're not going to make her a widow before the fact."

"Don't be too sure about the widowing part of it," I growled.

"It's a pretty safe bet," he said; and then, as if to rub it in: "I'm crazy about that girl, Broughton."

When he said that it popped into my mind what she had meant when she had said that he had once told her he was crazy.

"It strikes me that you are crazy about a good many things," I told him.

"Maybe," he admitted. "We'll let that go. You're not selling your mine for forty thousand—cold cash—this morning?"

"Never in this world."

"Good! I can afford to stick around here a few days longer, I guess—at the rate of ten thousand dollars a day. So long." And he picked his way out of the shop and went back to the cabin—and Jeanie.

Later on in this same day, while I was standing at the shaft mouth and looking down at the water that was keeping me out of my heritage, Daddy Hiram came up behind me.

"Still a-puzzlin' over it, Stammie?" he asked in his mild-mannered way.

"There's nothing to it, daddy," I replied. "Bullerton's got me by the neck, and he knows it. So do I, for that matter."

Instead of making any reply he tiptoed to the door and peeped out. "The cat's comin'—makes me sort o' hot under the collar," he muttered, half to himself; and then to me: "Skip out o' that other door, Stammie, and hit for the timber. I'll ketch up with you in a little spell."

I didn't know exactly what he was driving at until after I got clear of the mine buildings and into the woods. Then I looked back and saw Bullerton sauntering across the dump head. He was evidently bent on another little job of spying. In a short time daddy joined me, and made an excuse that didn't mean anything at all.

"I got a claim over yonder in the gulch—the one I was workin' on when your gran'paw came along," he said. "Thought maybe you'd like to mog over and take a look at her."

Of course, I said I should be delighted; and we made a detour around the Cinnabar and pushed along in silence for maybe half a mile until we came to the abandoned claim. In times past he had discovered a small quartz lead and had driven a one-man tunnel on it straight into the mountain for a hundred feet or so, in the hope that the vein would widen. He led me into the tunnel, waved me to a seat on a pile of broken rock, and took one himself. "Got your pipe?" he asked; and when I nodded he produced his own and filled it.

"I'm gettin' so I sort o' hate a gosh-dummed crowd," he volunteered, after the pipes were going. "Feel sometimes as if I'd like to swap with a gopher and duck into a hole."

"Well," said I, grinning, "you've ducked; and so have I."

"Charlie Bullerton," he began, without further preface: "What-all's he tryin' to do to you, Stammie?"

I told him—all of it.

"Great Moses!" he ejaculated at the end of the sorry story. "Why, gosh-to-Methusaleh!—it's a holdup!"

"It is what they call 'business,' out in the big world, daddy," I explained. "Bullerton has the underhold on me and he is using it; that's all."

"Do you reckon he *kin* unwater the Cinnabar?"

"Sure. So could you or I, if we had the money to drive a long drainage tunnel."

"What's a-puzzlin' me, Stammie, is to know where he got the money; that is, that's one o' the things."

"He has it, all right; carries it with him," I grumbled.

"Yes, but I'd bet a fice dog worth a hundred dollars it ain't *his* money."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because I know Charlie Bullerton—been knowin' him since the year one. He can't keep any money of his own; ain't built thataway."

"Gambling?" I queried.

"Big gambles; stocks, and that sort o' truck. No, sir-ee; this money that he's flashin' 'round ain't his'n, not by a long chalk. Somebody else is puttin' it up, and if that's so, Stammie, there's a reason for it."

"Naturally," I conceded. Then: "Could you make a long, high jump and guess at the reason, daddy?"

"Not so's it'd hold together, I reckon. But there's a few little chips I've picked up from folks that's older in this neck o' woods than I am—been here longer. This here Cinnabar never was what you could call a bonanza. Plenty of ore, but most of it low grade. Once in a while they'd strike a rich pocket, and then things'd jump up; but mostly it was plain wood-sawin', with the wagon haul and the railroad freight a-cuttin' pretty deep into the profits."

"Rich pockets now and then: that would be the time to sell, wouldn't it?"

He nodded. "I reckon that's how they caught your gran'paw. But Buddy Fuller—he's the telegrapht operator at Atropia, and a sort o' halfway nephew o' mine—says there's more to it than that. 'Long back a couple o' years 'r so there was a big copper strike made in Little Cinnabar Gulch, about four mile west o' here, and there was a heap o' talk about the railroad runnin' a branch up to it. That there branch, if it was run—'r when it's run, for it's goin' to be, some day, to open them copper mines—'ll go within a hundred yards of the old Cinnabar: you could mighty near dump from the ore sheds into the cars."

"In which case even the low-grade Cinnabar ore would come a little nearer being a bonanza?" I put in.

"Eggs-zactly. The wagon haul was what was puttin' the cuss in the cost o' handlin'."

"And with the railroad right at the door, it might even pay to drive that long unwatering tunnel we were figuring on?"

"Now you're talkin', Stammie. Can you see any furder into the millstone? I reckon I've got to the end o' my squintin'."

I refilled my pipe and did a bit of thinking. Daddy Hiram's facts opened up a rather long lane of inference and conjecture. Sometimes the best way to get at the inside of a mystery which has the human factor in it is to put yourself in the other fellow's place. Supposing *I* had been the owner of the Cinnabar under the conditions daddy had described? The answer came as pat as you please. With a railroad in prospect which would turn a small profit into a big one, I should quite probably have shut the mine down to wait until I could hear the whistle of the locomotive.

That conclusion led promptly to another. Supposing, at the moment of decision, some doddering old gentleman had come along and offered to buy the mine? Add the supposition that the water problem was daily growing more insistent, with the ultimate threat of a flood. As an ordinary, garden-variety mining shark, what would I have done? That answer came pat, also. I should have taken the old gentleman's money, trusting to the rising flood to make him sick of his bargain in due course of time, and thus willing to sell out.

"I believe I have doped it out," I told daddy, at the end of the reflective pause; and then I passed the inferences along to him. The immediate result was a couple of his quaint substitutes for profanity.

"Jehoiachim-to-breakfast!" he exclaimed; "I'll be Absalom-treed if I don't believe you've struck the true lead, Stammie, my son! If you have, Charlie Bullerton's here to do the dickerin' for the old Cinnabar outfit. They sold for half a million 'r so, and now they're willin' to buy back for thirty or forty or fifty thousand. By Jezebel! I knew that rooster was tryin' to work some skin game!"

"Yet he is going to marry your daughter," I put in grimly.

At this, the old man turned gloomy serious in the twinkling of an eye.

"That's been a-pinchin' me like a tight boot, Stammie. If you'd ast me before he come, I'd 'a' told you she hadn't a livin' morsel o' use for that blow-hard. But just look at the way things are stackin' up now!"

I had been looking until my eyes ached. The indications were all one way, tons of them, with only one little impulsive kiss to put in the other side of the scale. I didn't tell daddy about the kiss, but I did tell him that Jeanie had told me not to sell the mine.

"H'm," he commented. "That brings on more talk." Then, after a bit: "There's yit another nigger in this woodpile o' your'n, Stammie; besides, the one you've just dug out. Reckon you can hang on to the cow's tail for a spell longer?"

"I've been wondering if it were worth while, daddy. Bullerton is stuck, unless I sell out to him. He can't turn a wheel while I hold the deed you gave me; so, if I should take my foot in my hand and walk out, he'll be left up in the air. But, on the other hand, there's Jeanie. If she's going to marry Bullerton, I'm not enough of a dog-in-the-manger to bite her nose off to spite Bullerton's face."

"Um," was the grunted response. Then: "Charlie Bullerton's been hintin' 'round that you're tied up with a girl back East. Is that only another o' his frilly lies?"

I laughed. "I wish I knew, daddy," I said. "I was engaged, but the way I look at it the girl broke it off short when we found—or thought we had found—that my grandfather hadn't left me anything. She's like Jeanie, you know; she's got to marry money."

"Jes'so," he said with a rather grim glint in the mild eyes. "If you had the old Cinnabar in slap-up workin' order, I reckon you'd have to go back yonder and marry her?"

"I'd be in honor bound to offer to, anyway."

"That don't sound much like you was carin' a whole lot for her," he objected a bit sourly.

I despaired in advance of making him understand the lack of sentiment in the case. He was much too simple-hearted. So I got rid of the Lisette obstacle, or got around it, as best I could.

"She has been free for several weeks, now; in all probability she is wearing some other man's ring by this time. But about the Cinnabar: assuming that my string of guesses is hitched up to the true state of affairs, what would you advise me to do? Shall I hang on—with no prospect, that I can see, of getting anywhere on my own hook? Or shall I sell out to Bullerton and thus let your daughter in for a wife's share in a possible fortune?"

"Gosh-all-hemlock! when you put it that way I reckon *I* ain't the man to advise you!" he spluttered. Then, as upon a second and belated thought: "Jeanie says for you not to sell. If she said that to me, I'd hang on till the cows come home."

"And that, daddy, is precisely what I shall do," I said, and the saying of it ended the conference in the abandoned tunnel.

CHAPTER X.

A COLD BATH.

The next morning I made up my mind that I'd ignore Mr. Charles Bullerton completely and get back on the job of trying to invent some way of salvaging the wet mine. But while I was shucking myself into overalls and jumper, here he came, sauntering over to make the customary morning bid.

"This is the thirty-thousand-dollar day, Broughton," he shot at me; and I noticed that he wasn't quite so chipper as he had been the day before.

"See here," said I; "what's the use? You can't buy this never-failing water well of mine at any price; it isn't in the market."

"Say, Broughton, you don't look like a damn' fool!" he snapped back.

"Thanks. I don't mean to act like one, either."

"But you're stuck, world without end, and you know it. This wet hole in the ground is of no more use to you than a pair of spectacles to a blind man!"

"Perhaps not; 'a poor thing, but mine own.' I can keep it as a souvenir, can't I?"

"Oh, damn!" he gritted, and turning on his heel, went away.

I put in a long day, all alone, taking the pumps apart and trying to find out why they could pour tons of water into the creek below without appearing to take any out of the drowned mine shaft. When I didn't

show up at the cabin for the noon meal, Daddy Hiram brought me a snack, and offered to stay and help; but I said No; that I wasn't fit to associate with him or anybody, and that I could invent better alone.

The same sort of thing happened in the evening. In digging around among the left-over supplies we had found an acetylene torch and a can of carbide, and I rigged up a flare so that I could go on working after dark. Daddy brought my supper over from the cabin, and asked me if I wasn't ever going to quit. I told him I didn't want to go up against Bullerton any more than I had to; that things had come to a pass at which the next word between us was likely to be a blow. He didn't urge me, and when, at a pretty late hour, I went over to the cabin and crawled up the ladder to my blankets, I didn't see any of them.

The following morning when I turned out I found a mighty sober-faced old man putting breakfast on the table.

"It's jest you and me for it, this mornin', Stammie," he muttered, and his mild old eyes looked as if they were about to take a bath.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Has Bullerton gone?"

"Uh-huh; bright and early—'fore day, I reckon. I didn't hear him."

"But where's Jeanie? She isn't sick, is she?"

He shook his head dolefully.

"No; she—she's gone, too."

"Not with Bullerton?" I gasped.

"I reckon so. She left a little note on the table for me, tellin' me not to worry and sayin' I needn't look for her till I saw her ag'in."

At first I could scarcely believe my own ears. It was so incredibly out of keeping with Jeanie as I had been idealizing her. That she could bring herself to marry Bullerton under any conditions was a ruthless smashing of all the fitnesses; that she should run away with him clandestinely, when there wasn't the slightest need of it, was a shrieking absurdity. Yet she had evidently done just that. The fact that her holstered pistol, without which she never rode alone, was still hanging in its place over the mantel was sufficient proof that she had ridden with Bullerton.

"Are you going after them?" I demanded.

"What for?" was the despondent reply. " 'Tain't a morsel o' use, any way you look at it. Jeanie's a woman growed, and she don't have to have the old daddy say she can, 'r she can't. Besides, they was prob'ly hikin' for one o' the early trains—there's one each way, east and west—and them trains've been gone a couple o' hours."

Daddy had done his best with the breakfast, but I don't recall any meal of my life that ever came so near to choking me. We talked a little: I guess daddy saw how hard I was hit and tried to comfort me a bit; and I did the same for him. By and by we got around to the business side of it, where there was another bunch of perplexities. What had made Bullerton turn loose all holds on the Cinnabar proposition, flying the coop, as you might say, between two days? From his point of view he had me going, and he might safely assume that it was only a question of time when I must surrender. Why had he quit? There was only one answer to that query: he was postponing the business part of it to go and marry Jeanie Twombly, thus showing me that there was nothing coming to me on either count.

It was in the midst of these reflective and bad-tasting questionings that I happened to feel in the coat pocket where I had been carrying the deed turned over to me by Daddy Hiram; and, by George!—that pocket was empty!

"What hit you, son?" daddy asked, seeing my jaw tumble down, I suppose.

"Nun-nothing," I gurgled; "only Bullerton has swiped my deed to the mine."

"The dickens he has! Plum' sure you ain't lost it out o' your pocket?"

We made sure, at once, looking in my loft sleeping place and in the mine buildings. The deed was gone, safely enough, and we both agreed that Bullerton had had chances a-plenty in which to steal it. Wearing overclothes on the pump job the day before, I had left my coat hanging in the cabin, and he had had all day in which to find and rifle it.

"Well, daddy," said I, after the search had proved futile, "where does this leave me?"

Threshing the thing out a bit, we soon found where it left me. Grandfather Jasper had made no mention of the mine, or of any legacy to me, in the will as it had been probated; and his lawyers had told Bullerton—according to his own story to me, recounted in the Pullman smoke-room talk—that there was no record of any mining

transactions in his papers. Therefore, in the absence of the memorandum which my grandfather had given Cousin Percy—and which Percy had doubtless carried with him to China—there was nothing but the deed to show for my ownership—absolutely nothing!

At that, the loss of the deed wouldn't have been fatal if the document had been recorded. It hadn't been. Daddy had promptly called my attention to this fact when I had first shown him the contents of the sealed envelope, saying, as I distinctly remembered: "You want to be gettin' that thing copied into the county books down at Copah, Stammie," and pointing out that the document lacked the recorder's certificate of the time of filing. And now, with the unrecorded deed gone, there was nothing to prove that I had ever owned the Cinnabar. The loss was total—with no insurance.

Daddy Hiram was shaking his head sorrowfully after we had run the last bunch of straw through the threshing machine.

"Looks like your gran'paw and Charlie Bullerton and the Old Harry had bunched their hands and run in a cold deck on you, Stammie, son."

That was what it came to, so far as I could see. Of course, there was the prior transaction—the transfer of the property from the original owners to my grandfather, which must have involved the passing of papers. But of this transaction there might, or might not, be a legal record. Even Daddy Hiram didn't know who the original owners were, by name. He merely understood that they were Cripple Creek mining men, styling themselves the Cinnabar Mining Company.

With things looking as blue as the bluest whetstone that was ever clicked upon a scythe, we tried to settle upon some line of action. Copah was the county seat, and the natural first step would have been for me to go there for a search in the county records for evidence of the sale of the mine to my grandfather. But the minute I should show myself on the railroad, I'd be nabbed for the theft of the inspection car. Daddy offered to go in my place, but that was no good. I knew perfectly well how helpless he'd be in any such lawyerlike search as would have to be made in the county recorder's office.

Being stopped off short in every other direction, we both gravitated finally over to the shaft house and went to work in an aimless sort of fashion putting the dismembered pumps together. Along in the middle of the forenoon, Barney, the harlequin-faced dog, came home with his tail between his legs and acting as if he had lost his last friend. We took it that he had followed his mistress in her early morning flight, and his return alone was proof positive that she had gone on one of the trains. I had been cherishing a sort of vagrant hope that she might have changed her mind at the last minute, refusing to go with Bullerton. But now that hope was gone glimmering.

Though we had begun the reassembling job in a listless sort of way, we soon got more or less mechanically interested; and after we had eaten our noon snack we fired up the boilers, just to be doing something to stave off the wretchednesses for a few hours longer.

With steam up we turned the machinery over a few times, to see that everything was in working order again, and when the big pumps began to clack, I went to look down the shaft. As before, when we had run the pumps for days and nights on end, there was a little disturbance of the water, but nothing more.

"Daddy, I'm going to find out something!" I declared, and began to strip my clothes off.

"Sho, now!" he protested; "you ain't goin' down into that plagued hole, Stammie! You'll ketch your death o' cold!"

"I'll chance the cold. We've seen the water coming out at the other end of things, and now I mean to make sure that it is going in at this end."

He didn't try very hard to dissuade me, and a minute or so later I was crawling down the shaft ladder in the habiliments that old Mother Nature gave me. It was my first exploration of the shaft, and I was surprised to find it so well and tightly timbered; "boxed" is the better word, since it was really a substantial wooden box built within the square pit. Common sense told me that this must have been done to prevent the caving in of the sides; and afterward I remembered wondering at the time that the shaft should have been sunk in caving material when the remainder of the bench upon which the buildings stood appeared to be little else than solid rock.

The first dip into the water was a good bit shocking. Mountain water of any sort

is apt to be pretty cold, and when you strike it twelve feet down in a pit it doesn't feel any warmer. But this plunge bath was fairly paralyzing; I could have sworn that the water was fresh from the bottom of a snow bank. No matter; I was in for it, and I stayed in, following the side ladder down, down, until I was up to my chin and shivering like a man with an old-fashioned ague chill.

By feeling with a free foot I could determine that the pump suction pipe went on still farther, and then the real adventure began. The ladder suddenly gave out, quit, stopped. There were no more rounds below the one upon which I was teetering. That being the case, there was nothing for it but a dive, feet foremost, and letting go of the ladder I took a long breath and began to swim downward. It was pretty much like trying to cleave a path through liquid ice, and I was finally obliged to clutch the big suction pipe, pulling myself down awkwardly by that.

If anybody cares to ask, I'd say it was a hundred feet down to the place where a great swirl of water began to twist at my feet and legs—and, incidentally, to freeze them solid—this though I knew it couldn't possibly be more than twelve or fourteen feet, since that depth would measure the extreme lift of the suction pumps. What happened after that was merely a series of vivid impressions—vivid, but somewhat mixed. Almost before I knew it I was fighting desperately for dear life. The big, six-inch suction had taken hold of a foot and a leg, and I was unable to get loose.

By George! I wouldn't want my worst enemy to go through what I did for the next hour or so—it seemed like hours to me, though, of course, it could have been only a few seconds. Wriggling and twisting to make the monster let go of me, I finally got head downward in the pit, and then it appeared to be all over but the shouting.

Clawing and struggling, I seemed to feel the wooden sides of my prison all around. The water in this lower level was in a swirling turmoil. Once it seemed as if I reached out an arm and had it shoved back as by a mighty inrushing torrent. Again, I had the impression that I was completely inclosed in a box with a bottom, and with the lid shut down, and nothing but the savage pain in the suction-clamped foot and leg made me go on fighting.

It was Daddy Hiram who saved my life. Suddenly the jarring clang of the pumps, magnified a thousand-fold for me in that icy pit of death, stopped and the mechanical squid let go of my leg. With lungs bursting I shot to the surface and weakly clutched the ladder. Framed in the square of light a dozen feet overhead I could see daddy hanging over the mouth of the pit; saw him and heard his shouted, "Freeze to her, boy —I'm a-comin' down after ye!"

I was freezing, all right, but I found breath to warn him back, and presently managed to crawl up the ladder and roll out upon the shaft-house floor. Instantly the old man pounced upon me, pounding and rubbing rougher than any Turkish bath prize fighter that had ever mauled me before. It was torture, but it turned the trick, and in a little bit I began to glow pink where I had been blue—all but the great bruise, ring-shaped, where the suction pipe had bit me.

Of course, daddy was chock-full of sympathy and pity; he was a good bit like a kindly old woman in many respects.

"What in the name o' Jazariah ever got hold o' ye down yonder, Stammie?" he demanded. "I knowed you was a-fightin' something; the water was all r'iled up and b'ilin'."

"The suction pipe," I explained, beginning to climb back into my clothes. "I was fool enough to get under it and it grabbed me like an octopus. If you hadn't stopped the machinery I'd have been a gone goose in another ten seconds."

"Then she's suckin' all right, is she?"

"You'd think so, if you'd been where I was," I averred. Then I began to "register" some of those impressions. "What kind of soil is there under this floor, daddy?"

"Huck!" he chuckled; "what soil there is on this bench you could mighty nigh put into your eye, I reckon. It's mostly rock, and blame' hard rock, at that."

"That is what I thought. But if the shaft is in rock, why did they box it with timber?"

"Well, now, I'm dinged," he said musingly; "I'd never 've thought of askin' that!"

Speaking of the wooden bulkheading renewed that other impression—of having been shut in a tight box in the moment of the fiercest struggling—of fancying that there was a swirling inrush of the liquid ice, as well as an outrush. But the recollec-

tion was so confused that I dismissed it. When a man is fighting for dear life ten or twelve feet under water, pipe dreams are nothing to the things he can imagine.

It was while we were sitting around, hammering away at the old puzzle of why the water level never varied so much as by a fraction of an inch in the shaft, in wet seasons or dry—as daddy testified it never did—and why the subtraction of a six-inch stream with velocity enough to stir up a whirlpool at the bottom of the suction pipe should make no impression upon it, that I began to notice the queer actions of the pie-faced collie, Barney.

Never a restless dog, unless he was going somewhere, he seemed now to have acquired an incurable case of the dog fidgets. First he would come and stick his cold nose into my hand; then he would go to sit beside Daddy Hiram, yawning and panting as if he were waiting for us to stop talking and pay some attention to him.

"Barney's homesick, and I don't blame him," I said. "Come here, old boy!" He came to lick my hand, and while I was petting him I found a pretty bad gash just behind one of his ears. "See here, daddy," I broke out; "the dog's hurt!"

We examined the wound and decided at once that it was not a bite. It was a bruise cut, looking as if it had been made by some dull instrument or weapon. I had a hot-flash vision of Bullerton kicking the dog to make him go back home, and it was so real that I couldn't get rid of it. But if that was what had happened, Jeanie truly must have changed her entire nature. I could easily fancy the girl I knew, or thought I had known, flying like a blue-eyed little fury at the man, lover or promised husband, or anything else, that would dare to kick her dog.

When it began to grow dusk in the shaft house we shut up shop and went over to the cabin to cook our supper. The dog went along with us, but evidently with reluctance. Once he started off down the road leading to the lower bench, but came back when he found that we were not following him. Still, neither of us had dog sense enough to guess what was the matter with him.

Later, after we had eaten supper, I took some of the leavings to the door to feed him, and he refused to eat. If he had acted sick or moped I shouldn't have wondered; but now his restlessness of the afternoon was breaking out in little frenzy fits of impatience. Daddy and I, being merely stupid humans, were commenting on his queer actions, when he once more started off down the road, looking back over his shoulder and barking when we made no move. Even solid ivory can be penetrated after a while, and at last we caught on.

"Say! he's a-tryin' to tell us to come on!" said daddy. "Methuselah-to-gracious!—did it have to take us a hull afternoon to figger out that much dog-talk?"

Having "figgered" it out at last, we made no further delay. Daddy got his rifle and cartridge belt, and told me to take Jeanie's pistol for myself—which I did. Two minutes later we were Indian-filing down the mountain road in the darkness, Daddy Hiram, with his gun in the crook of an arm, setting the pace, with the collie running ahead to point the way.

CHAPTER XI.

AROUND ROBIN HOOD'S BARN.

Most naturally, we expected the trail would lead us to Atropia, or that the first lap of it would, anyway. But it didn't. After we had gone, perhaps, halfway to the railroad station, the dog branched off to the left on a road that was little better than a bridle path through the forest, and which kept its level on the slope, neither ascending nor descending.

"How now, daddy?" I asked.

"I dunno," was his answer. "This trail goes round to the old Haversack claims on Greaser Mountain." Then he added: "But the dog knows."

Barney did seem to know where he was going. He was trotting along with his head up and was not following by scent. The new trail was as crooked as a ram's horn, running back into the gulches, and at times climbing a little. In one of the gulch headings there was a little patch of wash sand, and daddy called a halt. Gathering a handful of dry pine cones, he struck a match and lighted a fire, making me stand aside while he did it.

When the fire blazed up to light the little glen the old man went down on his hands and knees and began to examine the sand patch. Then I saw that he was looking for hoof tracks.

"Sort o' queer," he said, straightening up.

"Jeanie's been here, but Charlie Bullerton ain't. There's only one set o' tracks."

"The pinto's? Are you sure?"

"Reckon I ort to be; I shod him."

At that we made a wider search, but there were no other tracks. Apparently only one horse had headed the gulch, and that one was the piebald. This was the first dip into a mystery which rapidly thickened as we went on, still following the dog's lead. A mile or so past the sand patch we came to the mining claims spoken of by Daddy Hiram; a few tumble-down shacks and a boarded-up tunnel, all long since abandoned. Here the dog made a detour, coming presently into another path beyond the deserted claims, and never seeming for a moment at fault. Once more I asked "How now?" and daddy's answer was that the new path probably led down to the desert level, somewhere and somehow.

It did, at a point which daddy said was a number of miles east of Atropia, though he admitted he couldn't guess the exact number. Though the exact figure was of no special importance to us, daddy was able to fix it when we reached the railroad track. Our point of approach was at the switch of a "blind" siding, and daddy named it at once.

"Greaser Siding," he said. "It's the place where them two early morning trains meet, when they're on time."

"And you think Jeanie came here?" I asked.

"The dog thinks so."

The collie was running about, up and down the parallel tracks, with his nose to the ground. Pretty soon we heard him barking at a little distance, and when we went to see what he had found, the mystery suddenly took on added opacity. In a little swale a short distance from the track we came upon the dog, and the piebald pony, riderless. The reins had fallen over the horse's head, and Barney had them between his teeth and was tugging and pulling and trying to lead the pinto.

"I'll be dummed!" said daddy, and thereupon we sat down on the warm sand and started another line of guesses. It was the old man who figured out the line of the least resistance, finally. For some reason best known to herself, Jeanie had not wished to be seen taking the train at Atropia in company with Bullerton. So she had taken the short cut across the mountain slope to this uninhabited sidetrack, where she knew the train would stop, and had boarded it here.

"But which train?" I queried; "the eastbound or the westbound?"

"It'd be the eastbound; it's the one that takes the siding. T' other one comes through on the main track and don't stop."

I'll have to admit it looked pretty incredible to me. I couldn't make myself believe that Jeanie Twombly was the kind of young woman to consent to go away with a man and then be ashamed to be seen with him. But the evidences that she had come to this out-of-the-way place and had taken the train here were all but conclusive. Upon examining the pony's bridle we found that it had been chewed and bitten into shapelessness. Apparently she had told the dog to take the horse home, and Barney had tried to obey. Failing to make the pinto understand what was wanted of him, the collie had come after us.

Daddy struck a match and hauled out a brassy-looking watch.

"Apast ten o'clock, and we're a good ten mile from home," he said. "Ain't nothin' to be gained by rushin' right back, Stammie, I reckon. What say if we go back in the timber a little piece and camp down?"

I had no objections to offer, and after we had found our shelter, and had picketed the pony and made a fire, we stretched ourselves to sleep the sleep of the weary; and, heartsore and disappointed as I was, I didn't stay awake to think about it.

The next thing I knew—and it seemed to be just about a minute after I had closed my eyes—daddy was shaking me.

"Time to be hittin' the trail, if we're goin' to get back to breakfast," he announced; and when I asked him what time it was, he said it was three o'clock and better. With no preparations to make we were soon taking the cross-mountain trail in reverse, each of us earnestly trying to persuade the other to ride the pony, with the result that neither of us did it.

Daylight was just beginning to blot out the stars when we traversed the broad plateau bench below the Cinnabar and headed for the little slope that led up to the dump head. When we topped this last small hill there was a sharp surprise awaiting us. On the level spot which served as a door yard for the Twombly cabin stood a horse, saddled and bridled, its drooped ears and hanging head showing all the signs of hard rid-

ing; and on the doorstep of the cabin, seated and calmly smoking his short pipe, was—Bullerton!

CHAPTER XII.

A SCRAP AND A SIEGE.

It was daddy who made the first break.

"Charlie Bullerton, where's my daughter?" he rapped out, in a sort of deadly rage that you wouldn't have thought possible in so mild-mannered a man.

"You needn't worry about her," was the cool response. "Didn't you get the note she left, saying that you needn't?" Then, as if he had just recognized me: "Hello, Broughton; we've missed a day, but I'll give you the benefit of it and not dock you. Are you selling the Cinnabar for twenty thousand dollars this fine morning?"

He didn't get the kind of answer he wanted; or any kind relating to the mine. I walked up to him, keeping an eye on the hand which would have to be the one to go after the gun hanging under his coat.

"Twombly has just asked you where his daughter is, and you haven't told him," I said. "You've got about ten seconds in which to come clean, Bullerton."

He had risen to his feet, and, just as I expected, that watched right hand flicked suddenly under the coat. We mixed it promptly. I got hold of the gun hand before it got to the pistol butt, and at the clinch we were all over the place. As it happened, I had dabbled in a good many sorts of athletic stunts, and knew a few of the Japanese wrestlers' tricks. He had ten pounds or so the advantage in weight, I judged, but when I got the thumb of my free hand on a certain spot in his neck, it was all over but the funeral.

Jehu! how he swore when I crumpled him up and took his gun away from him and flung him down and stuck a knee into his solar plexus! But the thumb touch had fixed him. His head was skewed over to one side and he couldn't straighten it. I felt around until I found that other paralyzing nerve—the one at the joint of the third vertebra.

"Now then," I gritted, "if you don't want to be crippled for life—where's that girl?"

He yelled like a hurt baby, protesting over and over again that he didn't know.

"Listen to him, daddy," I said; and then to Bullerton: "Now, tell all you do know, and tell it quick and straight!" and I gave him one more little prod on the agony nerve.

With a preliminary shriek he blurted it out by littles. "We were going to Angels—to get married," he gasped. "Ah—ah—I was to meet her at Atropia—she—she was afraid to ride with me—afraid the old man—would come gunning. Oh, for God's sake, take your thumb out of my back!—you're killing me!"

"You need a little killing," I told him. "Go on. You were to overtake her at Atropia: what then?"

"I didn't meet her!" he howled. "I don't know where she went."

I didn't believe a word of what he was saying, and I think Daddy Hiram didn't. But the look on the old man's face made me let up. It was plain that he couldn't stand it to see the third-degree business carried to a finish, and I got up and pulled Bullerton to his feet. He was pretty badly wrecked; still couldn't straighten his neck, and stood as if one leg were about half paralyzed.

"This outfit is my property, and you've outstayed your welcome," I barked at him. "Climb your horse and get out of here."

He limped over to the horse and gathered the reins and tried to put a foot into a stirrup. When I saw that he couldn't do even that much I grabbed him and heaved him into the saddle; did this and gave the horse a slap that set him in motion. I guess I shall always be able to recall the picture of that brown-bearded jeet riding across the dump head in the early morning light screwing his body in the saddle—because he couldn't turn the stiff-necked head—to yell back at me with sizzling curses, "I'll get you!—I'll get you, yet! Damn you—do you think you can make a hobbling cripple of me and get away with it? I'll——" and then breaking it off short and kicking the ribs of his nag frantically for more speed when I made as if I were going to run after him.

Through this bit of belligerent by-play, which hadn't wasted more than a few minutes, Daddy Hiram had stood aside as an interested spectator. But he was frowning soberly when Bullerton's wry-necked figure went out of sight among the trees on the bench below.

"I'm a-mistrustin' he lied, more 'r less, at that, Stammie," he commented dubiously. "His sayin' that Jeanie was afraid I'd foller 'em up with a gun. She knows the old

daddy better'n that. Never mind: I reckon we'd better rustle 'round and hunt us something to eat, so's to have it over with. We ain't seen the last o' Charlie Bullerton."

"Eat?" said I; "when we don't know what has become of Jeanie?"

He made a gesture like that of a dog passing its paw over its eyes.

"That's grindin' me some, too," he admitted. "But so long as Bullerton ain't with her—and I reckon we got to hustle. If you'll cut the bacon, I'll make up a fire, and we'll get a quick move."

He didn't offer any further explanations, and when he set about getting breakfast I helped as I could. We ate, standing, in the little lean-to kitchen, and made a short horse of it—of the kind that is soon curried. Immediately afterward daddy blossomed out in a new rôle—that of commander-in-chief.

"Moving day, Stammie," he said briefly. "Dig up all the chuck and canned stuff you can find and tote it over to the shaft house. I'll fetch the blankets and the cookin' tins."

I obeyed blindly, but entirely without prejudice to a lively curiosity as to what might be going to happen. While I was transferring the victuals, the old man unearthed another Winchester from a closet under the loft ladder, and with it a box of ammunition; and I remarked that this second rifle, like his own, looked as if it had been freshly oiled and rubbed up every day since it left the factory.

"You'll have a lot of talking to do presently," I warned him. "You seem to forget that you haven't yet told me what's biting you."

"Maybe there ain't nothin' bitin' me; maybe I'm jest gettin' sort o' old and skeery. But it's this-away, Stammie: ever since your gran'paw give me this watchin' job, and since I heard tell how them Cripple Creek tinhorns socked it to him on this Cinnabar deal, I been lookin' for trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Oh, most any kind. This here Red Desert neck o' woods is the sort of country that Shakespeare, 'r some other one o' them old poet fellers, must 'a' been talkin' about when he writ,

> "They kin take, what has the power,
> And they kin keep what can."

I ain't been easy about them Cripple Creek four-flushes any time since your gran'paw went away."

"You're afraid Bullerton is going to try force?"

"I dunno, Stammie; but if you've ever noticed, it's most apt to rain on the day you left your umbrell' at home. Comin' up the road in the gray o' the twilight this mornin' I saw somethin' that sort o' made me perk up my ears."

"What was it?"

"Down in that gulch that they call Antelope—mostly because nothing much but a antelope 'r a bighorn could climb out o' it—I saw a fire and a bunch o' huskies hunkerin' around it. Didn't like it much at the time; and I liked it a whole lot less after we come home and found Charlie Bullerton campin' down on the cabin doorstep."

Just here I began to see a little method in the old man's madness. With my deed in his hands—in the scrap, what with my anxiety about Jeanie, and the savage desire to square up with him for past-due accounts, I had totally lost sight of the theft of the deed—with this unrecorded deed in his hands, Bullerton had only to come and take possession of the mine. I had nothing on earth to prove my right and title to it.

"But, see here, daddy," I said; "if he's got my deed, or has destroyed it, why——"

"Why, he has as good a right to the Cinnabar as the next feller, is what you're goin' to say. Sure enough; but he's got to *take* it afore he kin *have* it, ain't he? And we've got two mighty good guns that says he's goin' to have one joyous old time a-takin' it; that is, if you're of the same mind that I am."

"I get you now: sure I am," I answered promptly. And then I began to sing little joy songs in my heart because Jeanie was well out of the way and we could fight with a free hand if it came to a show-down.

By this time we had transferred all the necessaries of life to the shaft house and were ready to look over our defenses. They were not to be sneezed at. The hoist house itself was strongly timbered and sheathed with two-inch planking. The doors were heavy affairs, and could be fastened with a bar. The windows—there were only two of them and these on the down-mountainside—were merely square holes left for light and ventilation, and they were high up in the wall.

Skirmishing around in the outbuildings we found a number of curved sheets of boiler iron which, so daddy said, had been used

in the mine drifts as shields to protect the miners in blasting: these we carried into the shaft house and stood up around the exposed parts of the walls, and thus provided ourselves with a bullet-proof barricade behind which we could shelter ourselves from rifle fire.

For weapons of offense we had only the two Winchesters and Jeanie's pistol; but we were fixed beautifully in another way, for there were two boxes of dynamite, with fuse and caps—with good possibilities wrapped up in the greasy brown paper cartridges, as daddy pointed out. Even as he talked he was cutting short pieces of the fuse and bedding the capped ends in some of the paper cartridges to make them look like giant firecrackers.

"I believe you had this all doped out ahead, daddy," I said, when he had a neat little row of the crackers laid out. "But surely you didn't expect to hold the fort alone, did you?—against a crowd of 'jumpers.'"

"Me and Jeanie," he said simply. "We'd 'a' done our best, and the angels couldn't do no more'n that."

Here, unless the old man was sadly mistaken, was another and wholly unsuspected side of the blue-eyed maiden displayed for me. I tried to imagine Lisette helping her father, or me, or any man to defend a beleaguered mine against a mob attack. It was so funny that I shouted.

"What struck you?" daddy asked, looking up from his job.

"Oh, nothing much. Only I've been living in such an Arabian-Nights sort of a world for the past few weeks that I have to pull up short and laugh at it once in a while, just to prove that I'm still on earth. Do you mean to say that Jeanie would shut herself up in here and load the guns for you against a mob of mine jumpers?"

He looked up with a bit of prideful moisture in his mild blue eyes.

"You don't *half* know that little girl o' mine, yit, Stammie," he said earnestly. And then: "She's the only boy I ever had, you know; and she ain't had any mother since she can remember. Maybe I hadn't ort to taught her to shoot, and them things; but it seemed like I *had* to."

"You haven't made her a particle less womanly—or lovable," I hastened to say. Then I blurted out the thing that had been weighing on me ever since we had found Bullerton on the doorstep: "Do you suppose they could—is there any way they could have been married yesterday, daddy?"

"Yes, I reckon there was. They might 'a' gone on down to Angels. There's a justice o' the peace down there."

"But she took the train at Greaser Siding, and you said the westbound train doesn't stop there."

"It might've stopped yisterday; Charlie Bullerton might've telegraphted to have it stop."

There it was again, at the same old cul-de-sac. What more natural than that they should have gone to the nearest marriage mill, and that Bullerton had left Jeanie there while he came back to give me the material finishing stroke? I guess I'm not much of a scrapper; lazy men aren't, usually. But when I saw what Bullerton had done to me, and what he thought he was going to do, I was ready to reach out and shake hands with red murder or any other thing that would give me a toe-hold in the fight. One question, and one only, I had to ask.

"How much of this mountainside have we a legal—or, rather, an ethical, right to defend, daddy?"

"All of it that you can see, in any direction."

"Then if Bullerton comes in sight anywhere he'll be trespassing on my property?"

"That's the size of it."

"All right; that is all I wanted to know."

I don't know to this day what made Bullerton so slow in bringing up his army, but it was high noon, and daddy and I were eating a cold luncheon with the shaft-house doorsill for a seat, when we saw the army coming. It was a straggling gang of seven or eight men; we couldn't count them accurately because the trees on the lower bench kept getting in the way. The bunch came up within easy rifle shot and stopped in the edge of a little clearing, and then we saw that the army was armed.

At the halt one of the bunch—Bullerton, we guessed—broke a branch from a pine, stripped the twigs from it, and made it the flagstaff for his white handkerchief. Under this flag of truce he and two of his men came on, leaving their guns with the others. There was a climb of about thirty feet, maybe, coming up from the level plateau to the shelf upon which the mine buildings stood, and we got a fairly good look at the peace party before it came within speaking

—or talking—distance. Bullerton still had a slight touch of the wry-neck, and the devil-may-care jauntiness which had been his chief characteristic had been wiped from his face and manner like a picture from a blackboard.

As the three of them topped the rise in the ore road I reached back and got one of the guns.

"That's near enough," I called out. "Do your talking from there."

The delegation halted and Bullerton took a paper from his pocket.

"I'm serving legal notice upon you, Broughton," he said; "and I have two witnesses here, as the law requires. I represent the Cinnabar Mining Company, of Cripple Creek. You are trespassing on our property, and I demand possession."

"So that's the new wrinkle, is it?" I laughed. "I was hoping you might spring something a little more original. How are you going to prove ownership?"

"The burden of proof isn't on us; it's on you!" he ripped out, waving the folded paper at us like a flag. "You haven't a shadow of claim to this mine! I've got your so-called deed right here. I can prove by a credible witness that I took it out of the pocket of your coat. It's a forgery; a clumsy, childish forgery that wouldn't impose upon a blind man! We can send you to the rock pile on the strength of it, if we want to."

Of course, I thought he was bluffing. It sounded like another toot out of the same horn he had been blowing all along. But daddy was whispering in my ear as he sat behind me.

"Gosh-to-Friday!" he exclaimed; "he's got you goin', Stammie! He's made a copy and throwed the deed away—burned it up, 'r something!"

"You've got it all your own way, Bullerton—or you think you have," I grated. "I might say that you've got everything but the mine, itself. If you want that, you may come and take it; but I can tell you right now that when you break into this shaft house there will be fewer people alive on Cinnabar Mountain than there are at this moment. I shall probably be one of the dead ones, but I shall do my best to make you another."

"All right," he snapped back; "you're speaking for yourself." Then to daddy: "How about you, Twombly? This is no quarrel of yours. Suppose you go over yonder to your cabin and stay out of it. Nobody wants to hurt you."

That put it pretty squarely up to me, too, and I turned to the old man.

"It's good advice, daddy," I said; "and this *isn't* your quarrel. You'd better duck while you can."

Daddy Hiram made no reply to me at all. Instead, he stood up and shook his fist at Bullerton.

"I been lookin' for you and your kind of a crowd for a year back, Charlie Bullerton, and gettin' paid for doin' it!" he shrilled. "Stammie says if you want this here mine you kin come and take it, and by gummies, I say the same!"

"All right," said Bullerton again. "But it's only fair to say that we outnumber you five to one. You two haven't as much show as a cat in hell without claws." Then, as he was turning to go, he flipped the deed into the air so that it fell at our feet. "You may have that," he sneered. "We'd like nothing better than to have you produce it in court."

It didn't seem just fitting to let him have the last word, so I pitched a small ultimatum of my own after him as he herded his two scoundrelly looking "witnesses" into the downward road.

"One thing more, Bullerton," I called. "Your flag of truce holds only until you get back to your army. If you or any of your pirates are in sight on Cinnabar property ten minutes after you hit the bench, we open fire."

Since the truce was thus definitely ended we retired and put up the bars at once, and as we were closing the doors and making everything snug I asked daddy what kind of human timber Bullerton was likely to have in his army.

"There's no tellin'. But most likely he's picked up a handful o' toughs and out-o'-works in Angels. There's always drift o' that sort hangin' round a minin' camp."

"Fighters?" I asked.

"Oh, yes; if fightin' comes easier than workin'."

With the doors secured I climbed upon one of the pumps to bring myself on a level with the high windows. The ten-minute interval had expired but the raiders were making no move to vacate the premises. On the contrary, they had built a cooking fire and appeared to be preparing to camp.

It's funny how a little thing will sometimes touch off a whole battery fire of red-hot rage. It fairly made me schoolboy mad to see those fellows calmly ignoring my warning.

"Hand me one of those cartridges," I snapped at daddy, and when he complied, I stuck a lighted match to the fuse. There was a fizz, a cloud of acrid smoke to make me turn my head and cough, and then a frenzied yell from the old man: "Throw it!—gosh-to-Friday!—*throw it!*"

I contrived to get it out through the window, some way, and lost my balance on the pump top doing it, tumbling into daddy's arms. Coincident with the tumble, the stout old hoist house rocked in the crash of an explosion that was still echoing from the cliffs of the mountain above when the sour fumes of the dynamite rose to float in at the window openings.

"Good gizzards!" stuttered the old man, "did you reckon I cut them fuses long enough so 't you could hold 'em in your hands and watch 'em burn?"

"What do I know about fuses?" I asked, grinning at him. Then I mounted on one of the pieces of boiler plate and looked out, prepared to see the entire landscape blown to shreds.

Aside from a few sheets of iron torn from the roof of the adjacent ore shed, the landscape appeared to be still with us. But down on the bench below, the small cooking fire was burning in solitary confinement. The raiders had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

HYDRAULICS.

Speaking of solitary confinement, that is exactly what we endured for the remainder of the afternoon. In due time the fire in the little clearing burned out, and no one came to rekindle it. About and about, the solemn silence of the mountain wilderness ringed us in, and it was hard to realize that the siege had not been abandoned—though we knew well enough that it hadn't.

All our speculations as to the cause of the enemy's inaction blew up as soon as they were made. True, Bullerton might safely count upon having all the time there was; since we were five miles from Atropia, on an unused road that led only to the Cinnabar, it was highly improbable that anybody would happen along to meddle or interrupt. But why he should delay, when he had a force big enough to rush us, was more than we could guess.

Immediately after my adventure with the dynamite cartridge, daddy found an auger and used it to bore loopholes by means of which we could command the approaches to the shaft house on its two exposed sides. Eastwardly, the blacksmith shop intervened between us and the boiler shed, and on that side we were necessarily blind. The remaining side faced the abrupt cliff of the mountain rising to maybe twice the height of the shaft house and almost overhanging it. At its summit the cliff tapered off into a steep slope, bare of timber; hence, we were comparatively safe in that direction.

During the all-too-quiet afternoon we had ample opportunity to figure on our chances. Though I did not mention this to Daddy Hiram, I argued that Bullerton, either as the de facto, or at any rate prospective, husband of Jeanie Twombly, would be slow to precipitate hostilities which might easily end up in the death of Jeanie's father. As an alternative he might conclude to starve us out. Living in the Twombly cabin, he had had a good chance to learn the state of our commissary, and he probably knew, to a single can of beans, how well or poorly we were provisioned for a siege.

As to the provisioning, we were not so badly off. Daddy, well used, in his long experience as a prospector, to figuring upon the longevity of grubstakes, estimated that, what with the canned stuff, part of a sack of flour and another of meal, we could live a week, though the cooking was going to be a bit inconvenient. For a fire we should have to resort to the blacksmith's forge, and the shop was nothing but an open-cracked shed, entirely indefensible against assault.

One of the things we did in that interminably long afternoon was to examine the deed which Bullerton had so contemptuously flung at us on his departure. Neither daddy nor I could discover, at first, any reason why Bullerton should have called it a forgery, nor could we convince ourselves that the document was not really the identical paper which had been given me in my grandfather's sealed envelope.

If, as daddy had suggested, Bullerton had made a copy, destroying the original so that I should have only a palpable forgery to produce in court, the copying had been very skillfully done. I knew Grandfather

Jasper's signature—I had seen it on a sufficient number of checks drawn to pay spendthrift debts of mine in the past, goodness knows—and there seemed to be no possibility of mistaking his queer, old-fashioned, shaky handwriting.

After all, it was Daddy Hiram who found the proof that the paper we held was not the original.

"I reckon we ain't much lawyer-folks—neither one of us, Sammie," he offered, after he had gone carefully over the legal forms for the third or fourth time. "This ain't your deed."

"Show me," I demanded; and he pointed with a stubby finger at the notary's attestation to the signature.

"See anything wrong about that?" he asked.

I didn't, and said so.

"Try ag'in," he suggested; and then the thing hit me slam between the eyes. The notarial seal was lacking.

"Are you sure there was a seal?" I inquired.

He nodded. "Dunno why I didn't notice the miss at first. You're euchered, Stammie; this here's a copy, all right, and the copier didn't put a seal on it 'cause he didn't have any seal."

It was another jab in the ribs for me, but it only made me the uglier. Bullerton apparently held all the cards but the one little two-spot of possession. But I made up my mind there and then that the two-spot was going to cost him something in the draw.

As all days must, our wearisome first day came to an end at last. Not to take a needless risk, we cooked our supper over the forge fire while it was still daylight, and were not molested. For anything we could see or hear, we were alone on the mountainside, and the solitude and silence were more baffling—and more disconcerting—than any battle we could have been asked to fight.

After darkness settled down we were made to realize more acutely how helpless we were. With the utmost vigilance—if we were to get any sleep at all a night watch could be maintained by only one of us at a time—a surprise attack would be the easiest thing in the world for Bullerton to pull off. The attackers could carry the blacksmith shop and be at the door of the shaft house before we should know anything about it. With the pipe-smoking I made daddy turn in and took the first period myself.

For a long time nothing happened; less than nothing; and the creepiness of that lonesome, gruesome sentry go was about the fiercest thing I had yet experienced. There are no night noises in the high altitudes; no frogs, no insects; and the silence was fairly deafening—and maddening. Daddy Hiram was one of the few men I've ever known who slept in absolute and utter quietude; even his breathing was inaudible unless I crept over to the corner where he had rolled himself in his blankets. Twice, in sheer desperation, I woke the dog, but aside from giving my hand a lick or two before stretching himself out again, that was all there was to that.

Not wishing to strike a match to determine the exact end of my period, I determined to give daddy good measure. So I think it must have been somewhere around ten o'clock when the collie awoke with a start, got up and took the kinks out of his back with a little whining yawn, and trotted to the door—the one opening toward the dump head. Applying an eye to one of daddy's freshly bored loopholes, I could see nothing at first but the shadowy bulk of the cabin, which was possibly two hundred feet distant and on the same level with the shaft house.

But though I could see nothing, the dog could evidently hear something. He had his nose to the crack of the door and was growling. I quieted him and listened. Something was going on, either in the cabin or near it; in the dead silence I could hear human voices. Presently there was a report, a flash of flame spurting from the opened window of the cabin, and simultaneously the sharp smack of a bullet on the iron roof of the shaft house. The jumpers had captured the outworks and were in the cabin.

The report and the bullet clatter awakened Daddy Hiram, and when I turned he was at my elbow.

"Done crope up on us, have they?" he queried in his usual unruffled manner. Then: "Maybe this is jest a false motion, Stammie. S'pose you go look out on the blacksmith shop side o' things."

I crossed quickly to the other door, taking the collie with me. I could see nothing on that side, and quite evidently the dog heard nothing. Returning to the threatened side

of the building I found daddy straightening a piece of heavy iron wire and fitting it to the barrel of his Winchester like a ramrod. Before I could make out what he was doing, he had impaled one of the dynamite cartridges on the protruding end of the ramrod.

"Stand by with a match, son, and let's see what's a-goin' to happen," he directed, with quaint humor. "When I say the word, you stick your match to the fuse."

Well, say! you can write it down that I enjoyed a delightful little spasm as I got a flash-light mental picture of that old man fumbling around with a lighted cartridge at the muzzle of his gun and trying to poke it through a loophole that couldn't possibly have been over two and a half inches in diameter—and in the dark, at that! Or if he should succeed in finding the hole and the rifle bullet should jam on the wire. Or any one of a dozen "ifs" that might fail to rid us of the deadly thing before it went off. .

But there was no time to protest, and the whang of another bullet on the iron roof speeded things up. "Shoot!" muttered daddy, and I struck a match, sheltered it in my hollowed hands until it got going good, and then, with a fervent little prayer that daddy might not miss the hole, stuck the blaze to the frayed end of the powder string.

Coming all three together, as it seemed to me, there were spittings like those of an angry cat, a puff of choking powder smoke, and the crack of the rifle. For just about three seconds nothing further happened; but at the fourth second or thereabouts—oh, boy! The cabin was stoutly and solidly built of logs, but in the flash of the ripping explosion we had a glimpse of the door and windows caving in and a section of the split-shingle roof sailing skyward. "Now, durn ye," was daddy's morose comment, made with an eye to a peephole, "now, durn ye, maybe you'll let folks sleep peaceable for a little spell!"

Of course, in the dark, and with the cloud of dust the explosion kicked up, we couldn't tell what became of the raiders, or whether or no we'd killed any or all of them. But the immediate result was perfectly satisfactory. There were no more roof bombardments, and after we had remained on watch together for perhaps half an hour, daddy sent me to the blankets for my forty winks; did that, and afterward played a low-down trick on me. For, what with the previous night's broken rest, and the more or less exciting day, I slept like a tired baby, and when I awoke the sun was shining broadly in at the two high window holes at something less than an actute angle, and Daddy Hiram was making coffee and frying bacon over a chip fire built on one of the pieces of boiler iron which he had turned down on the floor for the purpose hearth-wise.

The old man took my reproachful abuse for his unselfishness good-naturedly, as he did most things, and made his report of the night's doings. Up to midnight there had been nothing stirring, but after that there had been sounds on the blacksmith-shop side, and indications that the pirates were swarming in the boiler shed. Since this lay beyond the blacksmith shop, we couldn't see what was going on, or work the dynamite racket on them.

"What do they seem to be doing over there?" I asked.

"I dunno; heap o' poundin' and hammerin' and cussin'. Jest let up a little spell ago."

"Sabotage, do you suppose?"

"No, I reckon not. If that was their game they could tear things up 'r burn us out mighty easy. But if they do that, they'll lose the plant and machinery and be that much out o' pocket."

Shortly after breakfast the hammering began again. With that infernal blacksmith shop in the way, we couldn't see a thing, and could only make wild guesses at what Bullerton was doing. Along about the middle of the forenoon they fired up one or more of the boilers; a whiff of wind coming along the mountain blew the smoke over so that we could see and smell it. Still we were hopelessly lost in the guessing wilderness.

It was just at noon, while we were squatting on the floor to eat another meal warmed up over the chip fire, that we found out what the mechanical noises of the night and forenoon portended. One of the left-overs from the working period of the mine was a good-sized steam force pump which had been installed on one of the lower mine levels; had, as we concluded, been taken out of the shaft ahead of the advancing flood and put under shelter in a corner of the boiler shed. As I was passing my cup for more of daddy's excellent coffee, the familiar clank of a pump was heard, with the coughing *chug-chug* of the steam exhaust therefrom.

"That low-level pump!" I ejaculated.

"There must have connected it with the boil——" Whoosh! that was just as far as I got. In the midst of the utterance a three-inch torrent of muddy water came curving up through one of the high window openings to arch over and fall splash upon us as we sat munching our dinners. Everlastingly ruined the dinners, put out the fire, upset the coffeepot, and soaked us to the skin.

Well! Of course we ran and ducked and dodged, like the drowning rats who were hunting for a hole. But now Bullerton's devilish engineering ingenuity came into play. By some means as yet unknown to us, he had contrived a movable nozzle to his squirt gun, and in another minute there wasn't a single dry spot in that shaft house. I venture to say that daddy and I and the dog ran a full mile trying to get out of range of that demoniacal nozzle machine, but there wasn't a corner of the place that it couldn't, and didn't, reach.

Naturally, we didn't spend the remainder of the day playing puss in the corner, and running around in circles, and trying to find a dry spot that didn't exist. Boosted by daddy, I climbed up beside the window of vomitings, and between drenchings that made me gasp and choke and swear madly I found out what had been done to us. During the night the scoundrels had laid a pipe line from the pump in the boiler shed alongside of our prison; this with an upright extension on the business end of it. At the top of the stand-pipe stem there was an elbow with a short joint of pipe screwed into it to point our way, and on the end of the nozzle there was a piece of rubber hose. Under the uneven impulses of the pump strokes this flexible extension of the nozzle flopped up and down and sidewise like the nose of a patent lawn sprinkler; and there you are—or there we were.

Risking a shot from something more deadly than this ditch-water slinger, I leaned out and took a look around. There was nobody in sight, and I reached for the hose. It dodged. I reached again and discovered that the end of it was a nicely graduated six inches beyond my longest stretch. Moreover, every time I grabbed for it, it seemed to be endowed with a sort of malignant mechanical intelligence, whisking itself aside and filling me choke-full with an extra dose as it flirted away.

I was gasping for breath and chilled to the bone when I dropped back to the floor of the shaft-house shower bath and explained with chattering teeth what was going on outside. We took hurried counsel together, huddling in the one corner which the deluging stream missed oftenest, and with the dog trying to burrow his way under us to get out of the pitiless downpour. We still had the dynamite; daddy's first care had been to snatch up the cartridges and turn a bucket over them. But the "giant" was useless in this emergency. True, if we could have dropped a stick of the stuff outside it would have blown Bullerton's contrivance to kingdom come; but it would most probably at the same time have caved in the side wall of our fortress. I say, "if." A burning fuse is pretty tenacious of its fire; it's made to burn under difficulties. But you can hardly throw it into a spouting water jet and expect it to go on singing its little fizz song to a finish.

"Gosh-to-Solomon!" daddy spluttered, "we ain't *on* the water wagon—we're plum' inside of it! Are you rememberin', Stammie, that they can keep this gosh-dum thing up f'rever? All in the world they got to do is to put a stick o' wood on the fire, now and then! Say, son—they got us goin' and comin'; we can't eat, and we can't sleep no more whatever!"

"By heavens, I own those boilers, and if I could get a stick of dynamite under 'em I'd show the fellow that's firing 'em!" I shivered; and then the bright idea was born. "Say, daddy; we can stop it!" I yelled, and just then the water devil outside took another fiendish flop and got me squarely in the face.

But it didn't drown the bright idea.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MORNING WATCH.

The idea was one that ought to have suggested itself sooner. The steam supply pipe for driving the big pumps in the shaft house came through over our heads, and it was the sight of this pipe, steaming even on the outside of its thick coating of asbestos under the deluging water jet, that woke me up. A few twists of the throttle-valve wheel set the big pumps in motion, and crouching again in the least-wet corner we watched the index of the telltale steam gauge connected into the supply pipe.

We knew that the shaft-house pumps were voracious steam eaters; we had proved

that while we were running them. I had a notion that maybe Bullerton had fired only one of the battery of three boilers to run his bathhouse machine, and the result speedily confirmed the assumption. In a few minutes the steam pressure had dropped to a point at which it would no longer drive the pumps, any of them, and our window cataract stopped.

"This will be only a breathing space," I prophesied, getting up to squeeze the superfluous water out of my clothes. "Bullerton will do one of two things; fire the other two boilers, or disconnect this steam pipe of ours."

In a very few minutes he showed us what he was going to do, and sundry hammerings and twistings that shook the pipe overhead proved that he was going to stop the leak by cutting us off from the boilers.

"Take your whirl at the inventions this time, daddy!" I urged. "When he gets this supply pipe cut out, we'll be in for another ducking—one that we can't stop."

Daddy was shaking his head and wringing the moisture—and mud—out of his beard.

"By gummies, Stammie, we've got to take a chance," he muttered. "Anyways, I'd about as lief die as be drownded to death. We got to get that blacksmith shop out o' the way. Gimme a match out o' that tin box o' your'n—if they ain't all soaked to a sop."

I found the matches, which were still dry, and gave him one. Before I fairly realized what he was doing, he had snatched one of the dynamite cartridges out of its bucketed hiding place and was splitting the fuse end with his pocket knife.

"Open the door into the shop," he commanded; and when I obeyed mechanically, out went the bomb, fizzing and sputtering, to fall in a heap of scrap iron piled up on the farther side of the lean-to shop.

We barely got the door shut and barred before the crash came. The blacksmith shop was a flimsy shedlike affair with an iron roof, and it seemed as if broken timbers and pieces of sheet metal were raining down for a full minute after that blast went off.

The shock was tremendous, and our stout old fortress, itself, rocked and swayed like a tree in a gale. But the walls stood, and through a crack in the door we could see what we had done. The blacksmith shop had disappeared, vanished; leaving in its place nothing but a tumbled mass of débris. On the farther side of the mass a pile of cordwood had been toppled over, and under it a man was struggling to free himself. That mild-mannered old soldier that I was shut up with would have opened the door and shot the struggler if I hadn't stopped him.

The bomb-throwing settled the shower-bath question for us definitely, and once for all. With the shop out of the way we had a clear view into the open front of the boiler shed, and in a jiffy daddy had a couple of auger holes bored through the door so that we could command the furnaces with the Winchesters. When we looked again the imprisoned man had escaped and there was nobody in sight. Shortly afterward a bullet, fired from somewhere in the backgrounding forest, whanged upon the roof of the shaft house, and there were several more to follow; but they did no harm.

"Looks like 'giant' was the thing they're most skeered of," said daddy, with his queer little stuttering chuckle. "Now maybe they'll leave us have time to get dried out a mite."

The drying out process was a frightfully tedious affair, as it was bound to be. The only fuel we had was some ax-backings from the shaft-house timbering, and this was all so wet that it made more smoke than heat. But we succeeded, after a fashion, and were a bit less miserable—not dry, you understand; only a bit less wet. Meantime those pirates in the woods kept up their bombardment on the iron roof, not steadily, but just often enough to make us jump at the unexpectedness of it when it did come.

So far as we could determine, a bread famine was the next calamity that threatened us. The few cans of beans and tomatoes and peaches—the camper's standbys—were all right; and the bacon could be washed in water drawn from the flooded shaft. But the flour in its sack was merely a blob of paste and was beyond redemption; and the corn meal was the same. In view of the results, I wondered if Bullerton hadn't shrewdly calculated upon washing our commissary out of existence when he planned his overgrown lawn sprinkler.

All through what remained of the afternoon the would-be mine jumpers took pot shots at the shaft house, sometimes from one angle and sometimes from another, but

always cannily from a safe distance and under cover of the surrounding forest. Daddy Hiram, still grimly optimistic, drew a swallow or so of comfort out of the desultory rifle firing.

"Dunno as you've noticed it, Stammie," he said, "but if you'll only let a hog alone long enough he'll shove hisself under the bob-wire fence fur enough to get caught. Charlie Bullerton, now: he's plum' forgot that 'Tropia's only five mile away."

"What difference does that make?"

"It may make a heap. Looks like somebody, Buddy Fuller, 'r Jim Haggerty, the section boss, 'r some of 'em 'd begin a-wonderin', after a spell, what in tarnation all this here rifle poppin' up on old Cinnabar's p'intin' at and come see."

"Think the sound will carry that far?" I asked.

"It shore will. One night, afore 'Tropia'd gone as dead as she is now, a bunch o' cowpunches got into a argyment at Blue-Nose Bill's place, and we heard the crackin' and poppin' up here—Jeanie and me—like it was jest over yonder in Greaser Gulch."

"But if your nephew, or any of the others, do hear it?—what then?"

Bullerton's riflemen had lowered their sights so that now the bullets were coming through the plank walls of the shaft house, and as I asked the question one of them struck the iron air chamber of one of the pumps, flattened itself, and dropped into the old man's lap. Picking up the hot bit of lead to dandle it in his hands, Daddy Hiram answered without a break.

"Curiosity killed the cat, Stammie, son," he grinned. "You let some feller down yonder in town say, 'By gol—I wonder what all that shootin's for?' and the nex' thing that happens, somebody'll be moggin' up here to find out. See?"

Along about dusk, Bullerton, or some member of his gang, made a reconnaissance. I happened to be keeping the lookout on the cabin side of our fort and saw the figure of a man working its way through the pines back of the house. When I called to daddy he took a snapshot at the place I pointed out to him, and there was a wild yell and a stir in the pines as if a hog were galloping through them.

"Jest to let 'em know that we're still alive and kickin'," said the old man, with another of his hiccuppy chuckles. "I reckon that's what they was aimin' to find out."

And now—I looked around at the shadowy walls of the grim old shaft house, looming darkly and still dripping, *tick, tack,* from their early afternoon mud bath; felt my soggy clothes; stared across at Daddy Hiram, sitting backed up against one of the big pumps with his legs jackknifed and his hands locked over his knees: it was a grotesque pipe dream; there was no other name for it. Had I ever worn a silk shirt?—to say nothing of dress clothes? Had I ever sent my toast back at Marvani's because it happened to be browned a bit too much on one side? Had I ever worn white flannel on a yacht, or sport clothes at a football game? I broke out in a laugh that was a bellow.

"Split it up, Stammie," urged the old man dryly. "I allow you ain't goin' to be close-fisted enough to keep a joke all to yourself in no such a hoe-down as this."

"I'll try," said I, and did it the best I knew how.

"So you was one o' them gilt-edged, lade-dah young fellers, was you?" he commented reflectively, after I had spread my past out flat for him. "Silk socks on toast!" and he chuckled with that quaint clucking noise that meant more than the heartiest laugh. "S'posin' that girl back East could see you now?"

"She couldn't, daddy," I averred; "she is totally color blind to anything as far out of her class as I am just now."

"'Class!'" he echoed, a bit contemptuously, I thought; "has it got so 'at we have 'classes' in America, Stammie?"

"In the minds of a few; yes. I'm not sure that I didn't think so—once."

"Got over it now?"

"If I haven't, I ought to be shot."

Silence for a time, and then: "Book-learnin' and good clothes and eatin' with a flat fork 'r' all right, Stammie, but they don't make the man, n'r yet the woman; there's got to be somethin' inside—a heap bigger'n any o' them things."

Another silence, and at the end of it the old philosopher again. "You been sort o' sore about my Jeanie, since yisterday. She's been eatin' your gran'paw's bread, too, and you thought, and *I* thought, 'at she might at least 've waited a spell afore she run off with Charlie Bullerton. Maybe you're still thinkin' so."

"No," I denied. "A woman's first loyalty is to the man she loves."

"I been a-wonderin'," he mused. "Maybe we jumped at things too sudden, Stammie, son. What made her ride 'way up yonder to Greaser Sidin' to catch that train? And how come Charlie Bullerton to marry her one day, and be up here with his bunch o' thugs by daybreak the nex' mornin'?"

"Has she friends in Angels?"

"Not a soul. He'd 'a' had to leave her at the chink's ho-tel."

"But if they didn't go to Angels?"

"There ain't no other place they could go, and let him get back, as you might say, in the same day."

"Say it all, daddy," I invited.

"There ain't much to say, Stammie, boy; on'y what I said afore: maybe we been a-jumpin' at things sort o' blind like. Jeanie's got a heap o' sense—if I do say it—and the whole durn thing, as we been a-puttin' it up, ain't no more like her than winter's like July."

"You can't quarrel with me about Jeanie, daddy. She is all you think she is, and then some. I only wish I'd seen her first."

"Afore Charlie Bullerton did, you mean?—or afore you saw the girl back East?"

"Both. But I meant Bullerton."

Having thus run the subject into a corner we were both speechless for a time; and a little later we established our night watch, daddy taking the first trick under solemn promise to awaken me at the end of a couple of hours. This time he behaved better, calling me a while before midnight. He reported everything quiet, and pointed to the sleeping dog as evidence that the pirates were not within smelling distance.

"Been that way ever since you turned in," he said. "You can watch Barney; if anything goes to stirrin', he'll know it afore you will."

Nothing did stir; and after daddy left me to go and wrap himself in his damp blankets, I had a frightful time keeping awake. None the less, I managed to stick it out until about two o'clock; but after I had called daddy, and had passed the "all quiet" report on to him, I was gone in a minute.

I had just dropped asleep, as it seemed—though in reality I had slept a couple of hours—when daddy aroused me.

"Somethin' doin'," he muttered; and I saw that the collie was moving uneasily from one door to the other, and occasionally coming to crowd between us to stand with his ears cocked and his head on one side.

"Barney's hearing something," I said; and a moment later: "I can hear it now, myself; it's a wagon, coming up over our road."

Now the presence of a wagon on our bench might mean one of two diametrically opposite things; our deliverance, or the upcoming of reënforcements for the enemy. We were not long left in doubt. Shortly after the noise of the wagon wheels stopped we heard footsteps, and the hair stiffened on the collie's back. Next we heard Bullerton's voice just outside and apparently under our window openings.

"Broughton!" the voice called; "can you hear me?"

"So well that you'd better keep out of range," I spoke up.

"All right—listen: if you strike a match to touch off one of your infernal machines, I'll see you and pot you through one of your own portholes. Get that?"

"We hear you," I answered.

"All right again. Now listen some more. You've got to get out, Broughton; that's flat. I haven't wanted to go to extremes. For perfectly obvious and commonplace reasons, I don't want to kill you to get rid of you. But we're not going to be gentle with you any more. You've already hurt two of my men, and that's enough. The next time we begin, we'll throw stones."

"Yes; brought 'em up in a wagon, didn't you?"

He ignored this.

"We could starve you out if we cared to take the time. I know pretty well what you have to eat—or, rather, what you haven't. You may take your life in your own hands, Broughton; that's up to you. But how about the old man?"

"The old man's able to speak for hisself!" yapped daddy. "You do your durnedest, Charlie Bullerton!"

"All right, once more. You'll hear from us directly, now, and as I've said before, we've quit gentling you. That's my last word."

For a time after this the silence was thick enough to be cut with an ax, but the dog was more restless than ever, and we knew that something we couldn't see or hear must be going on. After a while I said: "What did they bring up in that wagon, daddy?—a Gatling?"

"The Lord on'y knows, Stammie—and He won't tell," was the old man's reply, made

with no touch of irreverence; and the words were scarcely out of his mouth before a thunderbolt struck the old shaft house.

CHAPTER XV.

TIT FOR TAT.

I said "thunderbolt" advisedly. The thing that hit us was comparable to nothing milder. There was a blinding flash, a rending crash as if the solid earth were splitting apart, and the air was filled with flying fragments and splinters. Air, I say, but the acrid, choking stuff we had to breathe could hardly be called that.

"Dynamite!—that's what they fetched in that wagon!" gurgled the old man at my side, and I could have shouted for joy at the mere sound of his voice telling me that he wasn't killed outright. Then, with that grim chuckle that nothing seemed able to extinguish: "What is it they say in the picture-paper advertisements about imitation bein' sort o' flatterin'? Charlie Bullerton's took to throwin' sticks o' 'giant.' Didn't get you, did it?"

I told him I was a whole human being, as yet, and he admitted that he was. "But we'd better do like the gophers and hunt us a hole," he went on. "That stick lit on the roof, and like as not the next one'll come thoo."

Accordingly, we made haste to turn some of the boiler-plate shields over on the floor, crawling under them for protection as the miners do in blasting; and the dog came also. I had laid my gun down somewhere, and in the hurry and scramble I couldn't find it; but daddy was a better soldier and kept hold of his weapon, dragging it into the crowded covert with him.

After an interval which seemed like hours, and was probably only a few minutes, we heard a stir outside and then voices, and one of the voices which was not Bullerton's said: "I'll bet that ca'tridge smoked 'em out f'r keeps, cap'n. Gimme the ax, Tom, till we bu'st open the door an' have a squint at 'em."

I think if Bullerton had called out just then and demanded our surrender I should have told him that I was not so much of a hog as not to know when I had enough. But the old man squeezed in beside me under our makeshift bomb-proof was made of better fibre; he was game to the last hair of his beard. With a wild-Indian yell, he hunched his gun into position and fired once, twice, thrice at the door, as fast as he could pump the reloading lever. A spattering volley was the reply to this, but it was aimed too high, and the only result was to set the air of the interior to buzzing as if a swarm of bees had suddenly been turned loose. After that, the enemy withdrew, so we guessed; at any rate, the silence of the dark hour before dawn shut down again for the moment and we were able to "gather our minds," as daddy put it.

It may be a dastardly confession of weakness, but I'm free to say that I was fast approaching the surrender point. Bullerton's resort to the dynamite as a weapon proved that he was ready to sacrifice the entire plant, if need be, to get rid of us; and if he had made up his mind to take this loss it could be only a question of a little time until we should be buried fathoms deep in the ruins of the shaft house and machinery —and without the privilege of dying in a good, old-fashioned, stand-up fight.

All of this I hastily pointed out to daddy, adding that, for Jeanie's sake, if for no better reason, he ought to stay on earth. Also, I said that there was a chance for us if we took it instantly. All we had to do was to crawl out, unbar the door, and make a bolt for it before the dynamiting was resumed.

I might just as well have appealed to a stone post. As long as I shall live I'll always beware of the wrath of a mild-mannered man. The old prospector was fairly berserk, and short of dragging him out by main strength there was no way to make him let go.

"I done promise' your gran'paw to stand by for him, and he paid me money for doin' it," was all I could get out of him. "When them hellions get this mine, they're goin' to have to dig a hole and bury me atterward."

There was mighty little time for discussion, or for anything else. Just as we were craning our necks to try to get a glimpse of the damage done by the thunderbolt—like a double-headed turtle peering out of its shell—and could see, in the first faint grayings of the dawn, a great hole torn in the roof directly over the hoist and shaft mouth, *bang!* came another of the dynamite bombs, followed quickly by a second and a third; all three of them falling outside of the shaft house, however.

This uncertainty of aim told us where the

attack was coming from. The bomb throwers were posted somewhere on the steep slope of the mountain above us. They did not dare to come down the slope to the cliff too near for their own safety. Hence, they were flinging the bombs at random without being able to see where they fell. So it was only by chance that the first one had exploded upon our roof.

"All the same, it's a chance that's a-goin' to come ag'in, if their dummed ammynition holds out," daddy grunted. "And I'm tellin' you, Stammie—the shot that comes down thoo that hole fixes us, for shore. Sufferin' Jerusalem! what-all is them fellers down yonder at 'Tropia a-dreamin' about to let all this fuss go on up here without comin' to find out what's a-makin' it?"

The Atropia that I remembered was so nearly moribund that I didn't wonder it wasn't making any stir in our behalf; so, when a few pattering rifle shots which seemed to originate on the bench below began to sift in among the bomb echoes, I took it that Bullerton had divided his force and was trying to rattle us two ways at once. As for that, however, the bigger bombardment kept us from speculating very curiously upon anything else. Two more of the giant crackers fell outside of the shaft house, one of them into the wreck of the blacksmith shop to send up a spouting volcano of scrap which fell a second or so later in a thunderous rain; and then——

We both saw it coming; a sputtering meteor leaving a trailing line of sparks behind it like the tail of a comet. Straight as a shot out of a gun it came for the great gap in the shaft-house roof, and we could hear the hiss of the burning fuse and smell the reek of it as it hurtled through the opening.

For a flitting instant it seemed as if it must drop squarely in front of the iron shields under which we were jammed—in which case even the undertaker wouldn't have been needed—not any whatsoever, as daddy would have said. But at the critical instant the hurtling thing "ticked" the top of the hoist frame and its downward course was deflected the needed hair's-breadth so that it fell beyond the machinery and the pumps and not on our side of things. None the less, we were cowering in anticipation of a blast which would most likely heave the whole machinery aggregation over upon us when the explosion came.

It wasn't like any of the other crashes; it more nearly resembled an upheaval of buried thunder, if you can imagine such a thing. We saw the belching column of flame and gas going skyward beyond the machinery barrier, taking a full half of the roof with it as if the blast had come from the mouth of a mighty cannon. We were dazed, deafened and half choked by the fumes; but neither of us was so far gone as not to hear distinctly a prolonged and rumbling crash like the thunder of a small Niagara, *coming after the smash!*

"The shaft!" shrilled Daddy Hiram, in a thin, choked voice; "it went off down in the shaft! And what-all's that we're a-listenin' to now?"

I think if there had been a rain of the dynamite bombs coming down we would still have crept out of our dodge hole to go and find out what had happened. But before we could determine anything more than that the shaft mouth was completely buried under a mass of wreckage, and that the mysterious thunder roar, dwindled somewhat, but yet hollowly audible, was still going on under the concealing débris, there was a masterful interruption. Shots, yells, shoutings, and mad curses told us that a fierce scrap of some sort was staging itself in the graying dawn just outside of our wrecked fortress, and Daddy Hiram yelled in sympathy.

"That's Ike Beasley!" he chittered; "there ain't nary 'nother man in the Red Desert 'at can cuss like that! He's come with a posse, and they're gettin' Charlie Bullerton's crowd!"

There was a fine little tableau spreading itself out for us when we clambered over the wreckage, lifted the wooden bar and flung the door wide. Daddy had called the turn and named the trump. The large, desperadoish-looking man who had once interviewed me at Angels, with a goodish crowd at his back, was snapping handcuffs upon first one and then another of the jumpers: the desperado himself was shoving Bullerton up against the shaft-house planking and counseling him, with choice epithets intermingled, to save his troubles up and tell them to the judge.

As we emerged from our prison, other members of the posse were scattering to round up the outlying bomb throwers who had apparently taken to the tall timber in an effort to escape. Down on the bench below there were horses and horse holders,

and among the horses one whose boyish-looking rider was just slipping from the saddle. While I was wondering why the Angels town marshal had let a mere boy come along on such a battle errand as this, the boyish figure ran lightly up the road and darted in among us to fling itself into Daddy Hiram's arms, gurgling and half crying and begging to be told if he was hurt.

I don't know how much or how little the big marshal knew of what was toward; but I do know that he quickly turned his captures over to some of his men and had them promptly hustled down stage and off scene. I was merely waiting for my cue, and I got it when the boy who wasn't a boy slipped from daddy's arms and faced me.

"I'm not hurt, either," I ventured to say, hoping that the brain storm had subsided sufficiently to make me visible. "Welcome home, Miss Twombly—or should I say, Mrs. Bullerton?"

The look she gave me was just plain deadly—you wouldn't think that violet-blue eyes could do it, but they can. Then she drew a folded paper from somewhere inside of her clothes and held it out to me.

"There is the deed to your mine, Mr. Broughton," she said nippingly, with a heavy emphasis on the courtesy title. "You wouldn't take the trouble to go and get it recorded, so I thought I'd better do it. I hope you'll excuse me for being so meddlesome."

It was the climax of the entire Arabian-Nights business, and I sat down on the shaft-house doorstep and laughed like a fool. But it was Beasley, the desperadoish-looking town marshal of Angels, who put the weather vane, so to speak, on the fantastic structure.

"I been lookin' 'round for you a right smart while," he told me gruffly. "When you get plum' over your laugh, you can come along with me and go to jail for stealin' that railroad car!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLD-BRICKING OF GRANDFATHER JASPER.

Beasley left me laughing while he started his posse back to Atropia with the captured raiders and their leader. Then we had a chance to look around a bit in the early morning light; to size up the damages and to dig into the mystery of the continuous roar which was still ascending from the wreck-covered mine shaft.

The damages, if they could have been collected, would have cracked a reasonably fat bank account. The blacksmith shop was a ruin, even to the stone forge, and the few machine tools it had contained were reduced to scrap iron. The roof of the shaft house was a total loss, and the hoisting machinery was crippled. Across the dump head daddy's blast shot had caved in the windows and door of the home cabin, and damaged the roof, but the interior wasn't hurt much.

We took all this in hurriedly, being much more interested in finding out what was going on under the pile of wreckage hiding the shaft mouth. Beasley was still with us, waiting, as I took it, to get his breakfast before he ran me off to jail, and the three of us fell to work clearing away the fallen timbers and roofing iron. It was a rather slow job, and Jeanie who, shrinking back into her normal, unobtrusive self; had set the cabin interior to rights, came to call us to breakfast while we were still digging away at the obstructions. Naturally, we didn't care to stop at that stage of the game, and it so chanced that Daddy Hiram was the first to stick his head through what remained of the tangle and hang it over the shaft edge.

"Hooray!" he yelled, his voice sounding as if it came from the inside of a barrel; and then again: "Hooray, Stammie, son! By the ghosts of old Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Charlie Bullerton's gone and done *eggs*-zac'ly what he said he could do—dreened your mine for ye! Climb in here and take a look at her. She's empty as a gourd—but at that, she ain't goin' to be, very long!"

A few minutes more of the strenuous toil cleared the pit mouth so that we could all see. The bomb which had exploded in the shaft had wrought a complete transformation. The water flood was gone; the pump suction pipe had been broken off short and dropped into the depths; the wooden boxing was crushed and splintered, disappearing entirely at a little distance down.

Also, the hollow roar which still went on was visibly accounted for. Some twenty feet below our floor level, on the eastern side of the shaft, a solid jet of water six inches in diameter was pouring into the perpendicular cavern, and it was its plunging descent into the bowels of the mine that was making the mimic thunder.

Again we let breakfast wait while a rope sling was hastily rigged and daddy and Beasley lowered me into the pit. At the nearer view some of the mysteries were instantly explained. The reason why the wooden boxing disappeared below a certain point was that it had never extended any farther. And the six-inch, never-failing cataract was coming in through a perfectly good nozzle of six-inch iron pipe!

In a flash the whole criminal mystery involving the old Cinnabar was illuminated for me. "Haul away!" I shouted to the two above; and when they had pulled me up over the wreckage and I could get upon my feet, I called to daddy and the marshal to come on, and led them in an out-door race along the mine bench of the mountain to the banks of the tumbling little torrent in the right-hand gulch.

A search of a precious few minutes revealed precisely what I was expecting to find —what you would have expected to find. In the middle of a small pool slightly upstream from the path level, a pocketed bit of water neatly screened and half hidden by a growth of low-branching pines, there appeared a cone-shaped whirlpool swirl into which a good third of the stream flow was vanishing. Daddy and the Angels marshal jumped recklessly into the stream and with their bare hands tore away the loose-rock dam that confined the pool. With the removal of the slight barrier and the clearing of the stream's course, the rock pocket immediately sucked dry, the other end of the cataracting pipe was exposed, and the secret of the flooded mine was a secret no longer.

We threshed it all out over a breakfast of bacon and hot beans and stewed tomatoes, eked out by delicious corn cakes which Jeanie was making out of some store of meal which daddy and I must have overlooked in our hasty provisioning of the shaft-house fortress. In that talk we, or daddy and I, recalled our blind guesses made on the day we had dodged Bullerton by taking refuge in daddy's abandoned tunnel; and Beasley, who was an old resident of the district and had been a mining man before he was elected marshal of Angels, was able to confirm them—or some of them.

The trick which had been employed to "soak" Grandfather Jasper was a pure bit of highway robbery. The Cinnabar—unflooded—so Beasley asserted, was worth all that my grandfather had paid for it, and more. But with the branch railroad built to its very door, as you might say, its value would be doubled. Two alternatives had presented themselves to the original owners, the speculators who had bought in the stock: to go on mining the ore and storing it against the time when the railroad, with its cost-reducing advantages, should come; or to suspend operations entirely for the same length of time.

While they were debating it—the debate was common talk in Angels—Grandfather Jasper had happened along. And the next thing Angels knew, the report was handed about that the Cinnabar had been sold, lock, stock, and barrel, to an Eastern millionaire; and that shortly after the sale an immense undergroud body of water had been tapped and the mine ruined.

With our discoveries of the morning the plan of the robbery became perfectly plain. Some giant of finance in the original company had evolved a scheme by means of which the mine could both be shut down during the interval of waiting for the railroad, and at the same time be made to yield a bumper crop of dividends. After the sale to my grandfather, the original people had continued to operate the mine under a contract by which they were to be allowed a certain percentage of the output—Beasley told us this, and the arrangement gave them ample opportunity to prepare for the coup de main.

A tight wooden box with a bottom in it had been built in the shaft. The remains of the bottom, against which I had bumped in my struggle with the octopus suction pipe, were still hanging in the shaft as damnatory evidence. Into this box the creek had been diverted through the underground conduit, the water had been admitted to rise to its natural level, the level of the intake—the big pumps had been installed, and everything was ready for the coup.

Then, as daddy was able to tell us, my grandfather had been hastily summoned, to be shown the water-filled shaft, and to be given a demonstration of the hopelessness of the thing by a long run of the pumps which drew the water from the box only to have it replaced instantly by the flow through the creek conduit. Doubtless the robbers had figured carefully on Grandfather Jasper's advanced age, and also upon the fact that in the actual purchase of the property he had been encouraged to take

expert advice and had been craftily primed by understatements of facts to trust the word of the robbers.

Be that as it may, Daddy Twombly testified that he came alone, and, after the pumping demonstration had been made, seemed disposed to pocket his loss and call it a bad day's work. There had been some little talk of running a drainage tunnel from a lower level on the mountainside, but this would have meant another half million or more, and nothing was done about it. According to daddy, my grandfather had merely frowned when the cost of the tunnel was named; had discharged the force; and, after putting him—daddy—in charge as caretaker, had gone his way home.

The later developments were not hard to figure out. Beasley was able to tell us that the proposed railroad was now a certainty for the very near future. Hence the time was ripe for the recovery of the Cinnabar by its original owners. No doubt they had confidently assumed that a repurchase of a property, upon which another half million must—ostensibly—be spent before it could again become productive, would be easy.

But death—the death of my grandfather—had stepped in to complicate matters. Somebody—possibly cousin Percy—had told them that they would now have to reckon with an heir. How Bullerton came to be employed we did not know, though here, again, Beasley was able to tell us that the jeet had figured before in crooked deals in the mining country. One thing, however, was fairly certain. It was I who had pulled the trigger of all the recent activities by the single query I had telegraphed Bullerton from Denver. He—and his employers—had doubtless immediately reasoned that no one but Jasper Dudley's heir would have asked the question.

"I reckon you can't get at them fellers higher up, Stammie; but if you don't shove Charlie Bullerton jest about as fur as the law'll allow, I'm goin' to call ye a quitter," was Daddy Hiram's ultimatum when the tale was told. But Jeanie had just brought in another plate of cakes, and I was looking at her when I replied:

"We'll see about that a bit later, daddy. The first thing to do is to get the old Cinnabar to shelling out money. I'm broke, you know."

At this Beasley, the last man in the world from whom help could come, I would have said, put in his word.

"Stammie Broughton—if that's your name—you ain't so dad-blamed crazy as you look and act," he remarked. "Money's what talks. Are you aimin' to swing onto this thing with your own hands?"

"Sure!—after I get out of the jail where you're going to land me for pinching that inspection car," I laughed. "Why else did I start out blindfolded to hunt for a girl, a horse, and a dog?"

He let the latter half of my reply go without comment—charging it up to some last lingering remains of the craziness, perhaps.

"Well, let's see about where you'd crack your whip first," he invited.

"That's easy. What I don't know about the practical end of the mining job would load a wagon. I'll dig out and hunt me up a real miner, of course."

"Nothin' so very crazy about that," he granted. "What's the matter with Hi Twombly, here, for your boss miner?"

"Not a thing in the wide world—except that he's going to be my partner in the deal."

"Now you're talkin' a whole heap like a white man," said the desperadoish one. "Dog-goned if I don't b'lieve you *are* white! What do you say to givin' me a whack at the bossin' job?"

I took just one quick little look at daddy across the breakfast table, and the mild blue eyes said "yes."

"But you've got me under arrest, Mr. Beasley," I objected, just to see what he'd say. "You can't close a business deal with your prisoner, can you?"

"Kill two 'r three birds with the one rock," he returned, cramming the siruped half of his wind-up corn cake into his capacious mouth. "I'll chase you down to Angels and turn you over to the maj-esty o' the law—yotherwise named old Squire Dubbin. Then I'll resign and go get your bail. Time old Bill Dubbin's chewin' over the law in sich cases made an' pervided—like he's bound to do—I'll rustle a bunch of men an' start 'em up hereaways to begin on the repairs. How does that strike you?"

I laughed. "It strikes me fair in the empty pocket, my good friend. Just at the present moment I couldn't finance one carpenter—to say nothing of a gang of them."

"Huh! workin' capital, you mean? That's

the easiest thing this side o' Hades—with an unwatered Cinnabar behind you. I'll take care of all that."

"You're certainly a man to tie to, Mr. Beasley," I said; and thus our bargain was struck.

Fifteen minutes later I was bidding a temporary good-by to the wreck on the Cinnabar bench, and was about to take the road with Beasley to Atropia; both of us intent upon catching the morning train to Angels. Daddy had lent me the piebald pony for the ride to the railroad, and the pie-faced dog was ready to trot at its heels. But the blue-eyed maiden had shut herself in her room, and I thought she wasn't going to come out to see me off.

At the final moment, however, after Beasley had already steered his nag across the dump head, and I was about to climb into the saddle, she came to the cabin door, a bit breathlessly.

"Please!—one minute!" she begged. "Do you know what they've done with—with Mr.——"

"With Bullerton?" I helped out. "No; I don't know."

"I—I—you owe me something, don't you, Sta—I mean, Mr. Broughton?"

I nodded. "I owe you anything you like to ask me to pay."

"Then—then—please let him go! If you refuse to prosecute——"

"Make yourself entirely easy," I returned, a bit sourly, maybe. "I'll agree not to play the part of the dog in the manger."

"Thank you—so much!" she murmured, and went in and on through to the kitchen; leaving me to follow Beasley with the sour humor telling me that of all the puzzling, utterly unaccountable things in a world of enigmas, a woman's vagaries were the least understandable. For after all was said and done, and after all that had happened, it seemed to be palpably apparent that Jeanie was in love with the jeet.

CHAPTER XVII.

COUSIN PERCY WIRES.

We spent four full days, and then some, in Angels, Beasley and I, after the court business was settled; and about the court matter I may as well say here that the railroad people refused to prosecute me for the theft of the inspection car after they found out who I was; and I, on my part, promised to pay for the wrecked car. But what I started to say is that Beasley, during those few days, proved himself a jewel without flaw, amply justifying Daddy Hiram's recommendation which had been passed to me across the breakfast table by the road of the eye.

Though I had neither money nor credit, the ex-marshal seemed to have only to rub some magic lamp, Aladdin-wise, to capitalize the Cinnabar for everything that was needed. Through his efforts a bank credit was established in distant Copah, and men, machinery, and supplies were forwarded to Atropia to be wagoned to the mine. Even in Angels, which, as a copper town, had no particular affiliation with gold mines and gold mining, I found that the owner of the Cinnabar—an unflooded Cinnabar—was not without honor.

It was in the evening of the fifth day that we left the train at Atropia and took the mountain trail in reverse for a return to the Cinnabar; Beasley riding a borrowed horse, and I the piebald pony which daddy had sent down by one of the workmen. Just as we were leaving the railroad station, Buddy Fuller, the operator, who had been the means of summoning Beasley to our help in the Bullerton battle, ran out to hand me a telegram. Since it was too dark to see to read it, and I supposed, of course, it was nothing but a bid from some machinery firm anxious to supply our needs, I thought it might wait, stuck it in my pocket—and promptly forgot it.

Our talk, as we rode together up the trail, was naturally of business; the business of reopening the mine; and it was not until we were nearing the upper bench of the mountain that the ex-marshal said:

"Still stickin' in your craw that you ain't goin' to gran'-jury Bullerton?"

"It is," I answered.

"It looks like you ort to. He ain't no better than a sawed-off-shot-gun holdup, any way you look at it."

"That may be; but I shan't prosecute."

"Why not?"

"Chiefly because I've promised somebody that I wouldn't."

"Not Hi Twombly?"

"No: not Twombly."

He didn't press the matter any further, and we rode on in silence. As we approached the neighborhood of the mine, evidences of Beasley's forth-putting activities began to

manifest themselves. Hammers and saws made cheerful racket, and carbide flares were lighting up the scene for the night shift of rebuilders. Twinkling lights in the long-deserted miners' cabins gave an inhabited aspect to the place, and the alternating clank and gush of deep-well pumps told that the work of freeing the lower levels of the mine from seepage water was already in progress.

Daddy Hiram met us at the door of his freshly repaired cabin across the dump head and insisted upon taking care of the horses. Beasley and I washed up at the out-door, bench-and-basin lavatory, and when we went in, Jeanie had supper ready for us. She didn't sit at table with us, and I thought she purposely avoided me—avoided meeting my eye, at least. I didn't wonder at it. Her position, as I figured it out, was awkwardly anomalous. I took it that she was in love with Bullerton and probably engaged to be married to him, but that her native honesty had driven her to take sides against him, and to do the one thing that had knocked his highbinder scheme securely on the head; namely, to get my deed recorded and establish my ownership.

Crazy as he had confessed himself to be about her, I doubted if Bullerton would forgive her for the deed business. Or, if he should overlook it and marry her, I fancied it would be partly in the way of revenge. It was a sorry mix-up, all around, and my heart ached for her. If there were any comfort to be got out of the fact that Bullerton wasn't going to be held for trial—that she had saved him from this—I meant to give it to her at the first opportunity.

It was rather late in the evening before the opportunity offered. Knowing nothing but hard work, Daddy Hiram was running the deep-well pumps himself, or, rather, taking the night shift on them; and about ten o'clock, just as I'd made up my mind to go to bed and let the repairing activities take care of themselves, I saw Jeanie going over to the boiler shed with a pot of freshly made coffee for her father. Here was my chance, I thought; and I waited and cornered her as she came back.

"Let's have it out, Jeanie," I said; which was a sort of brutal way to begin on the woman I loved, but was the only way if I was to go on remembering that she belonged to another man. "We can at least be good friends, can't we?"

"No," she returned with a queer little twist of the pretty lips and a flash of the blue eyes, "I'm afraid we can't even be that any more, Mr. Broughton."

It was awkward, standing there before the cabin door, and I pointed to the bench where daddy was wont to smoke his evening pipe in good weather. "Won't you sit down until we can sort of flail it out?" I suggested.

"It's no use whatever," she objected; nevertheless, she sat down and let me sit beside her. The place was public enough, goodness knows: the entire mine shelf was lighted as bright as day by the gasoline flares, and the carpenters were at work all over the near-by shaft house.

"I know just how distressed you must be," I began, "and perhaps I can lift a bit of the load from your shoulders. There will be no legal steps taken against your—against Charles Bullerton."

"Thank you," she said; just as short as that.

"And that isn't all," I went on. "After we get into the ore, and have some real money to show for it, I'm going to make over a share in the Cinnabar to your father and put him in a position to do the right thing when you marry. And he'll do it—you know he'll do it."

"How kind!" she murmured, looking straight out in front of her.

"It isn't kindness; it's bare justice. Between you, you've saved my legacy for me."

"I wish, now, it *hadn't* been saved!" she exclaimed as vindictively as you please.

Truly, I thought, the ways of women are past finding out; or at least the way of a maid with a man is.

"Can't I say anything at all without putting my foot into it?" I asked in despair. "You break a man's back with a load of obligations one day, and toss him lightly out of your young life the next. I haven't done anything to earn your—to earn the back of your hand, Jeanie; or if I have, I don't know what it is."

"You have committed the unpardonable sin," she accused coolly. And then: "I don't wonder that Miss Randle took your ring off."

I wasn't going to let the talk shift to Lisette, not if I knew it and could help it.

"What is the unpardonable sin?" I asked.

"To misunderstand: to think a person capable of a thing when a person is not; to —to just take it for granted that a person

is guilty—oh!"—with a little stamp of her foot—"I can't bear to talk about it!"

I guess it is part of a man's equipment to be dense and sort of stupid—in his dealings with women, I mean. Slowly, so slowly that I thought the catch would never snap, my fool mind crept back along the line, searching blindly for the point at which all this fiery indignation toward me had begun; back and still back to that moment of our deliverance—daddy's and mine—at the shaft-house door, with this dear girl untwisting her arms from her father's neck, and with me saying: "I'm not hurt, either. Welcome home, Miss Twombly—or should I say, Mrs. Bullerton?"

"Jeanie!" I gasped; "do you mean that you're not going to marry Charles Bullerton?—that you never meant to?"

"Of course I'm not!" she retorted. "But you thought so small of me that you simply took it for granted!"

I wagged my head in deepest humility. "I'm dust under your pretty feet, Jeanie; don't trample me too hard. Bullerton—we had a scrap that next morning, after you went away, you know, and I—well, he got rather the worst of it. And when I was trying to make him tell us where you were—even your father thought you'd gone off with him—he said you had planned to go with him to get married, but that you had failed to show up at Atropia for the train."

"He told a lie, because that is the way he is made, and he couldn't help it," she said simply, still as cool as a cucumber. "*He* said we were going to Angels to be married, and I—I didn't say we weren't; just let him talk and didn't say anything at all."

"Won't you tell me a bit more?" I begged.

"You don't deserve it, but I will. It began with the deed; your deed to the mine. One day, when you were over at the shaft house, and had left your coat here in the cabin, I saw him take the deed from your pocket when he didn't know I was looking. He read it and put it back. I knew it hadn't been recorded; you and daddy had both spoken of that. I was afraid he'd take it again, and perhaps destroy it. At first, I thought I'd tell you, or daddy, or both of you. But I knew that would mean trouble."

"We were never very far from the fighting edge in those days," I admitted. "Bullerton had shown me the gun he always carried, and had told me what to expect in case I were foolish enough to lose my temper."

"I know," she nodded. "He killed a man once; it was when I was a little girl and we were living in Cripple Creek. He was acquitted on the plea of self-defense. So I didn't dare say anything to you or to daddy. What I did was to steal your deed, myself, when I had a chance. Daddy has some blank forms just like it, and I sat up one night in my room and made a copy. It wasn't a very good copy, and I had no notary seal, but I thought it might serve the purpose. Then I hid the real deed and put the copy back in the envelope in your pocket."

"And Bullerton stole it, just as you thought he would," I put in.

"Yes; you are awfully careless with your things, and you are always leaving your coat around, just where you happen to take it off. I knew then that the next thing for me to do was to get your deed recorded quickly. He was urging me every day to run away with him, and I—I was afraid to tell him how much I despised him; afraid he'd take it out on you and daddy. So I just let him go on and talk and believe what he pleased. Of course, he wanted to ride with me the morning we went away, but I made an excuse to go on ahead."

"That much of what he told your father and me—when we had the scrap—was true. He said you went on ahead."

"I didn't go to Atropia, as he expected me to," she continued calmly. "I took a trail across the mountain to Greaser Siding. I knew the Copah train would stop there on the sidetrack. I tried to make Barney lead the pony home, and Barney tried his best to do it. But Winkie wanted to graze, and I had to go off and leave them when the train came. That's all, I think; except that I had to wait two days at my cousin's in Copah before I could get the deed back from the recorder's office."

"Not quite all," I amended. "You haven't told me how you happened to come back with Beasley and his posse."

"That was just a coincidence. I reached Atropia on the early morning train and met Mr. Beasley and his men just starting up the mountain. Cousin Buddy Fuller had told me how everybody in Atropia had heard the firing and explosions up here, and how he had telegraphed to Angels for Mr. Beasley. I was scared to death, of course, be-

cause I knew what it meant, so I borrowed the Haggerty pony and came along."

There was silence for a little while; such silence as the clattering and hammering of the carpenters permitted. At the end of it I said: "And when you got here, the first thing I did was to call you 'Mrs. Bullerton.' I don't blame you for not being able to forgive me, Jeanie, girl."

She looked up into my face with the quaint lip twist turning itself into a mocking smile.

"It was worse than a crime," she averred; "it was a blunder. What made you do it?"

"Partly because I was a fool; but mostly because I was sore and sorry and disappointed. I thought Bullerton had beat me to it."

"No," she said quite gravely; "it was Miss Randle who beat you to it."

I gasped. There were tremendous possibilities in that cool answer of hers; prodigious possibilities.

"But, say!" I burst out; "didn't I tell you that Lisette had pushed me overboard long ago?"

"I know. She was sensible enough to see that you and she couldn't live on nothing a year. But now that you are rich, or going to be—I'm sure you're not going to be less generous than she was. What if she *did* take your ring off in a moment of discouragement, knowing that you couldn't buy her hats? I'll warrant she put it on again as soon as your back was turned."

There we were; no sooner over one hurdle before another and higher one must jump up. I groaned and thrust my hands into my pockets. A paper rustled and I drew it out. It was the telegram Buddy Fuller had handed me—still unread. I opened it, half absently, holding it down so that the glow of the nearest flare fell upon the writing. After which I said, as calmly as I could: "But in spite of all that I had told you about Lisette, you asked me once to kiss you."

"Is it quite nice of you to remind me of it?" she inquired reproachfully.

"It wouldn't be—in ordinary circumstances; but—listen, Jeanie; haven't you been mad clear through sometimes in reading a story to have a coincidence rung in on you when you knew perfectly well the thing couldn't possibly have happened so pat in the nick of time?"

"I suppose I have; yes."

"Well, don't ever let it disturb you again. Because the real thing is a lot more wonderful and unbelievable, you know. Listen to this: it's a telegram from my cousin, Percy; the one who told me to go out into the world and look for a girl, a horse, and a dog, and who is the only human being on earth who knows where I am likely to be reached by wire. He is in Boston, and this is what he says:

"Recalled home when we reached Honolulu, outbound. Lisette and I were married to-day. Congratulate us."

For a minute there was a breathless sort of pause, and I broke it.

"Jeanie, dear—was it just common honesty and good faith that made you take all those chances, with the deed, and Bullerton?"

"Yes; I'm commonly honest," said the small voice at my shoulder.

"Bullerton is a shrewd, sharp, smart fellow," I went on. "I venture to say he never made such a bonehead break as I did the morning you came back. You must think something of him or you wouldn't have asked me not to prosecute him."

She hung her head.

"I think—a little something—of myself," she said with little hitches between the words. "I owed myself that much, don't you think? If I didn't deceive him outright, I certainly let him deceive himself. So that made me responsible, and I couldn't let you send him to jail, could I?"

"But what about me? Are you going to send me to a worse place than a jail?—for that is what the whole wide world is going to be to me without you, Jeanie, dear."

Her answer was just like her: she turned and put up her face to me, and said: "Kiss me again, Stammie." And though all the carpenters on the job were looking on, as I suppose they were, by this time, I took her in my arms.

It was a short spasm; it sort of had to be, in the circumstances; and when it was over, I folded Percy's telegram, took out a pencil, and, with the dear girl looking over my shoulder, scribbled my reply on what was left of the message blank. This is what I wrote:

The same to you. I have found the G., the H., and the D., and Miss Jeanie Twombly and I are to be married as soon as we can find a minister. Incidentally, I have learned how to work. Hope it will be a comfort to you, to Grandfather Jasper—if he's where he can hear of it—and to all concerned. STAMMIE.

On Strike

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "I'll Say So," Etc.

Najib, the funny little Syrian with the Coney Island education, tries his hand at a popular form of discontent, and brings to pass a most remarkable state of affairs in the Land of Moab. With equal ease he is strike-maker and strike-breaker.

FURTHERMORE, howadji," ventured Najib, who had not spoken for fully half an hour, but had been poring over a sheaf of shipment items scribbled in Arabic, "furthermore, I am yearnful to know who was the unhappy person the wicked general threatened. Or, of a perhaps, it was that poor general himself who was bethreatened by his padishah or by the——"

"What on earth are you babbling about, Najib?" absent-mindedly asked Logan Kirby, as he looked up from a month-old New York paper which had arrived by muleteer that day and which the expatriated American had been reading with pathetic interest.

Now, roused from his perusal by Najib's query, Logan saw that the little Syrian had ceased wrestling with the shipment items and was peering over his employer's shoulder, his beady eyes fixed in keen curiosity on the printed page.

"I enseeched you to tell me, howadji," said Najib, "who has been threatening that poor general. Or, perchancely, who has been made to cower himself undertheneath of that fierce general's threatenings. See, it is there, howadji. There, in the black line at the left top end of the news. See?"

Following the guidance of Najib's stubby, unwashed finger, Kirby read the indicated headline:

"GENERAL STRIKE THREATENED."

"Oh!" he answered, choking back a grin. "I see. There isn't any 'general,' Najib. And he isn't threatened. It means——"

"May the faces of all liars be blackened!" cried Najib, in virtuous indignation. "And may the maker of the becurst newspage lie be doubly afflictioned! May his camels die and his wives cast dust upon his bared head! For he has befooled me, by what he has here enprinted. My heart went out with a sweet sorrowfulness for that poor general or for the folk he bethreatened. Whichever it might chance itself to be. And now the news person has made a jest of the truth. Be he——"

Kirby's attempt at self-control went to pieces. He guffawed. Najib eyed him sourly; then said in icy reproof:

"It is known to all, howadji, that Sidi-ben-Hassan, the sheikh, was the wisest of men. And did not Sidi-ben-Hassan make known, in his book, that *'Laughter is for women and for hyenas?'* Furthermore——"

"I'm sorry I laughed at you, Najib," returned Kirby, with due penitence, "I don't wonder you got such an idea, from the headline. You see, I have read the story that goes under it. That's how I happen to know what it means. It means that several thousand workmen of several allied trades threaten to go on strike. That will tie up a lot of business, you see; along a lot of lines. It will mean a general tie-up —a——"

From Najib's blank face, the American saw his more or less technical explanation was going wide. Still remorseful at having hurt his factotum's feelings, Kirby laid the paper aside and undertook to simplify the matter.

"It's like this," said he. "We'll say a gang of men aren't satisfied with the pay or the hours they are getting. They ask for more money or for shorter hours; or for both. If the demand is refused, they stop working. They won't go back to their jobs till they get the cash and the hours they want. That is known as 'going on strike.' When a number of concerns are involved in it, it's sometimes called 'a general strike.' This paper says a general strike is threatened. That means——"

"I apperceive it, howadji!" exclaimed

Najib. "I am onward to it, now. I might have known the printed page cannot lie. But, oh, my heart berends itself when I think of the sad fate of those poor folk who do the stroking! Of an assuredly, Allah hath deprived them of wisdom!"

"Not necessarily," argued Kirby, wondering at his henchman's outburst of sympathy for union laborers so many thousand miles away. "They may win, you know; or, at least, get a compromise. And their unions will support them while they are out of work. Of course, they may lose. And then——"

"But when they make refusal to do their work," urged Najib, "will not the soldiers of the pasha cut them to ribbons with the kourbash and drive them back to their toil? Or if the pasha of that pashalik is a brutesome man, will not he cast those poor fellaheen into the prison and beseize their goods? And I answer, howadji, he will. Wherefore my eyes are tearing, for the men who have so unlucklessly——"

"Hold on!" exhorted Kirby; albeit despairing of opening the mind of a man whose forebears for thousands of years had lived in a land where the *corvée*—forced labor—was a hallowed institution; and where the money of employers could always enlist the aid of government soldiery to keep the fellaheen at their tasks. "Hold on! That sort of thing is dead and done with. Even in the East. Chinese Gordon stamped out the last of it, in Egypt, years ago. If a man doesn't want to work, he can't be forced to. All his boss can do is to fire him and try to get some one in his place. When a whole factory of men strike—especially if there are any big contract orders to fill in a rush—the employers sometimes find it cheaper to give them what they want than to call in untrained strikebreakers. On the other hand, sometimes, the boss can bring the men to terms. It all depends."

Yielding to the human joy of imparting instruction to so interested a listener, Kirby launched forth into an elaboration of his theme; trying to expound something of the capital-and-labor situation to his follower; and secretly wondering at the keen zest wherewith his words were listened to.

Seldom was Kirby so successful in making Najib follow so long an oration. And he was pleased with his own new-found powers of explaining Occidental customs to an Oriental mind.

Now, Logan Kirby knew the tangled Syrian character and its myriad queer slants, as well as it can be given to a white man to know it. Kirby's father had been a missionary, at Nablous. He himself had been born there, and had spent his boyhood at the mission. That was why—after he had completed his engineering course at Columbia's school of mines and had served an apprenticeship in Colorado and Arizona—the Cabell Smelting Company of New York had sent him out to the Land of Moab, as manager of its new-acquired little antimony mine.

The mine—a mere prospect shaft—was worked by about thirty fellaheen—native laborers—supervised by a native guard of twelve Turkish soldiers. Small as was the plant, it was a rich property and it was piling up dividends for the Cabells. Antimony, in the East, is used in a score of ways—from its employment in the form of kohl, for the darkening of women's eyes, to the chemical by-products, always in demand by Syrian apothecaries.

This was the only antimony mine between Aden and Germany. Its shipments were in constant demand. Its revenues were a big item on the credit side of the Cabell ledger.

Kirby's personal factotum, as well as superintendent of the mine, was this squat little Syrian, Najib, who had once spent two blissfully useless years with an All Nations Show, at Coney Island; and who there had picked up a language which he proudly believed to be English; and which he spoke exclusively when talking with the manager.

Kirby's rare knowledge of the East had enabled the mine to escape ruin, a score of times, where a manager less conversant with Oriental ways must have blundered into some fatal error in the handling of his men or in dealing with the local authorities.

Remember, please, that, in the East, it is the seemingly insignificant things which bring disaster to the feringhee, or foreigner. For example, many an American or European has met unavenged death, because he did not realize that he was heaping vile affront upon his Bedouin host by eating with his left hand. Many a foreign manager of labor has lost instant and complete control over his fellaheen by deigning to wash his own shirt in the near-by river or for brushing the dirt from his own clothes. Thereby he has proved himself a laborer, instead of a master of men. Many a foreigner has been

shot or stabbed for speaking to a native whom he thought afflicted with a fit and who was really engaged in prayer. Many more have lost life or authority by laughing at the wrong time or by glancing—with entire absence of interest, perhaps—at some passing woman.

Yes, Kirby had been invaluable to his employers by virtue of his inborn knowledge of Syrian ways. Yet, now, he was not enough of an Oriental to understand why his lecture on the strike system should thrill his listener.

He did not pause to realize that the idea of strikes was one which carries a true appeal to the Eastern imagination. It has all the elements of revenge, of coercion, of trapping, of wily give-and-take, and of simple and logical gambling uncertainty; which characterize the most popular of the Arabian Nights yarns and which have made those tales remain as Syrian classics for more than ten centuries.

"It is of an assuredly a pleasing and noble plan," applauded Najib when Kirby finished the divers ramifications of his discourse. "And I do not misdoubt but what that cruel general betrembled himself inside of his boots when they threatened to strike. If the stroking ones may not be lawfully attackled by the pashalik troops, indeed must the general——"

"I told you there wasn't any general!" interrupted Kirby, jarred that his luminous explanation had still left Najib more or less where it found him, so far as any lucid idea was concerned. "And I've wasted enough time trying to ding the notion of the thing into your thick head. If you've got those shipment items catalogued, go back to the shaft and check off the inventory. The first load ought to be on the way to the coast before sunrise to-morrow. Chase!"

As he picked up the duplicate sets of the list and ran over their items once more, Kirby tried to forget his own silly annoyance at his failure to make the dull little Syrian comprehend a custom that had never reached the Land of Moab.

Presently, in his absorption in his work, the American forgot the whole incident. It was the beginning of a rush period at the mine—the busiest month in its history was just setting in. The Alexandretta-bound shipment of the morrow was but the first of twelve big shipments scheduled for the next twenty-nine days.

The restoration of peace and the shutting out of several Central European rivals had thrown an unprecedented sheaf of rush orders on the Cabell mine. It was such a chance as Kirby had longed for; a chance to show his rivals' customers the quality of the Cabell product and the speed and efficiency wherewith orders could and would be filled by him. If he could but fill these new customers' orders in quicker and more satisfactory fashion than the firms were accustomed to receiving, it might well mean that the new buyers would stick to the Cabells, after the other mines should again be in operation.

It was a big chance, as Kirby had explained at some length to Najib, during the past few weeks. At his behest, the little superintendent had used every known method, to get extra work and extra speed out of the fellaheen; and, by judicious baksheesh, had even impressed to the toil several members of the haughty Turkish guard and certain folk from the nearest hill village.

As a result, the first shipment was ready for the muleteers to carry coastward, a full week ahead of schedule time. And the contract chanced to be one for which the eager wholesalers at Alexandretta had agreed to pay a bonus for early arrival. The men were even now busy getting a second shipment in shape for transportation by mule train to Tiberias and thence by railway to Damascus.

The work was progressing finely. Kirby thrilled at the thought. And he was just a little ashamed of his own recent impatience at Najib, when he remembered how the superintendent was pushing the relays of consignments along. After all, he mused, it was no reflection on Najib's intelligence that the poor little chap could not grasp the whole involved Occidental strike system in one hasty lecture; and that his simple mind clung to the delusion that there was some fierce general involved in it. In the Arabian Nights, was there not always a scheming sultan or a baffled wazir, in every clash with the folk of the land? Was it unnatural that Najib should have substituted for these the mythical general of whom he thought he had seen mention in the news headline?

But, soon after dusk, Kirby had reason to know that his words had not all fallen on barren soil. At close of the working day,

Najib had brought the manager the usual diurnal report from the mine. Now, after supper, Kirby, glancing over the report again, found a gap or two in the details. This was no novelty, the Syrian mind not lending itself readily to the compilation of terse yet complete reports. And, occasionally, Kirby was obliged to summon his henchman to correct or amend the day's tally sheet.

Wherefore, the list in his hand, the American strolled down from his own knoll-top tent toward Najib's quarters. As Najib was superintendent, and thus technically an official, Kirby could make such domiciliary visits without loss of prestige, instead of summoning the Syrian to his presence by handclap or by messenger, as would have been necessary in dealing with any of the other employees.

Najib's hut lay a hundred yards beyond the hollow where the fellaheen and soldiers were encamped. For Najib, too, had a dignity to uphold. He might no more lodge or break bread with his underlings than might Kirby with him. Yet, at times, preparatory to pattering up the knoll for his wonted evening chat with the American at the latter's camp fire, Najib would so far unbend as to pause at the fellaheen's camp for a native discussion of many gestures and much loud talking.

So it was to-night. Just outside the radius of the fellaheen's firelight, Kirby paused. For he heard Najib's shrill voice uplifted in speech. And, amusedly, he halted and prepared to turn back. He had no wish to break in upon a harangue so interesting as the speaker seemed to find this one.

Najib's voice was pitched far above the tones of normal Eastern conversation;—louder and more excited even than that of a professional story-teller. In Syria it is hard to believe that these professionals are merely telling an oft-heard Arabian Nights narrative; and not indulging in delirium or apoplexy.

Yet at a stray word of Najib's, Kirby checked involuntarily his own retreat; and paused again to look back. There stood Najib, in the center of the firelit circle; hands and head in wild motion. Around him, spellbound, squatted the ring of his dark-faced and unwashed hearers. The superintendent, being with his own people, was orating in pure Arabic—or, rather, in the colloquial vernacular which is as close to pure Arabic as one can expect to hear, except among the remoter Bedouins.

"Thus it is!" he was declaiming. "Even as I have sought to show you, oh, addle-witted offspring of mangy camels and one-eyed mules! In that far country, when men are dissatisfied with their wage, they take counsel together and they say, one unto the other: 'Lo, we shall labor no more, unless our hire be greater and our toil hours less!' Then go they to their sheikh or whomever he be who hath hired them, and they say to him: 'Oh, favored of Allah, behold we must have such and such wage and such and such hours of labor!' Then doth their sheikh cast ashes upon his beard and rend his garments. For doth he not know his fate is upon him and that his breath is in his nostrils? Yet will they not listen to his prayers; but at once they make 'strike.'

"Then doth their sheikh betake himself to the pasha with his grievance; beseeching the pasha, with many rich gifts, that he will throw those strike-making laborers into prison and scourge their kinsmen with the kourbash. But the pasha maketh answer, with tears: 'Lo, I am helpless! What saith the law? It saith that a man may make strike, at will; and that his employer must pay what is demanded!' Now, this pasha is named 'General.' And his heart is as gall, within him, that he may not accept the rich gifts offered by the sheikh; and punish the laborers. Yet the law restraineth him. Then the sheikh, perchance, still refuseth the demands of his toilers. And they say to him, then: 'If you will not employ us and on the terms we ordain, then shall ye hire none others, for we shall overthrow those whom you set in our places. And perchance we shall destroy your warehouses or barns or shops!' This say they, when they know he hath greatest need of them. Then boweth their master his head upon his breast and saith: 'Be it even as ye will, my hirelings! For I must obey!' And he giveth them, of his substance, whatsoever they may require. And all are glad. And under the new law, even in this land of ours, none may imprison or beat those who will not work. And all may demand and receive what wage they will. And——"

And Kirby waited to hear no more. With a groan of disgust at the orator's imbecility, he went back, up the hill, to his own tent.

There, he drew forth his rickety sea chair and placed it in front of a patch of camp

fire that twinkled in the open space in front of the tent door. For, up there in the hills, the nights had an edge of chill to them; be the days ever so hot.

Stretching himself out lazily in his long chair, Kirby exhumed from a shirt pocket his disreputable brier pipe; and filled and lighted it. The big white Syrian stars glinted down on him from a black velvet sky. Along the nearer peaks and hollows of the Moab Mountains, the knots of prowling jackals kept up a running chorus of yapping—a discordant chant punctuated now and then by the far-away howl of a hunting wolf; or, by the choking "laugh" of a hyena, in the valley below, who thus gave forth the news of some especially delicious bit of carrion discovered among the rocks.

And Kirby was reminded of Najib's quoted dictum that "laughter is for women and for hyenas." The memory brought back to him his squat henchman's weird jumbling of the strike system. And he smiled in reminiscent mirth.

He rather missed Najib's presence to-Syrian, his comrade in many a vicissitude. And he knew that Najib's fondness for him was as sincere as can be that of any Oriental for a foreigner, an affection based not wholly on self-interest. Kirby enjoyed his evening powwows with the superintendent beside the camp fire; and the little man's amazing faculty for mangling the English tongue.

He rather missed Najib's presence to-night. But he was not to miss it for long. Just as he was about to knock out his pipe and go to bed, the native came pattering up the slope, on excitedly rapid feet; and squatted as usual on the ground beside the American's lounging chair. In Najib's manner there was a scarce-repressed jubilant thrill. His beady eyes shone wildly. Hardly had he seated himself when he broke the custom of momentary grave silence by blurting forth:

"Furthermore, howadji, I am the bearer of gladly tidings which will make you to beshout yourself aloud for joyfulness and leap about and besclaim: 'Pretty fair!' and other words of a grand rapture. For the bird will sing gleesome dirges in your heart!"

"Well?" queried Kirby in no especial excitement. "I'm listening. But if the news is really so wonderful, you surely took your time in bringing it. I've been here all evening, while you've stayed below there, trying to increase those fellaheens' stock of ignorance. What's the idea?"

"Oh, I prythee you, do not let my awayness beget your goat, howadji!" pleaded Najib, ever sensitive to any hint of reproof from his master. "It was that which made the grand tidings. If I had not of been where I have been this evening—and doing what I have done—there would not be any tidings at all. I made the tidings myself. Both of them. And I made them for *you*. Is it that I may now tell them to you, howadji?"

"Go ahead," adjured Kirby, humoring the wistful eagerness of the man. "What's the news you have for me?"

"It is more than just a 'news,' howadji," corrected Najib with jealous regard for shades of meaning. "It is a tidings. And it is this: You and my poor self and all the fellaheen and even those hell-selected pashalik soldiers—we are all to be rich. Most especially *you*, howadji. Wealthiness bewaits us all. No longer shall any of us be downward and outward from povertude. No more shall any of us toil early and belatedly. We shall all live in easiness of hours and with much payment. *Inshallah! Alhandulillah!*" he concluded; his rising excitement for once bursting the carefully nourished bounds of English, and overflowing into Arabic expletive.

Noting his own lapse into his native language, he looked sheepishly at Kirby, as though hoping the American had not heard the break. Then, with mounting eagerness, Najib struck the climax of his narrative.

"To speak with a briefness, howadji," he proclaimed grandiloquently. "We have all stroked ourselfs!"

"You've all done—what?" asked the puzzled Kirby.

"Not we alone, howadji," amended Najib, "but you also! We would not berich ourselves and leave you outward in the plan. It is you also who are to stroke yourself. And——"

"For the love of Heaven!" exclaimed Kirby in sudden loss of patience. "What are you driving at? What do you mean about 'stroking yourselves?' Say it in Arabic. Then perhaps I can find what you mean."

"It is not to be said in the Arabic, howadji," returned Najib, wincing at this slur on his English. "For there is not such a thing in the Arabic as to make strike. We

make strike. Thus I say it we 'stroke ourselves.' If it is the wrong way for saying it——"

"Strike?" repeated Kirby, perplexed. "What do you mean? Are you still thinking about what I told you to-day? If you are going——"

"I have bethought of it, howadji, ever since," was the reply. "And it is because of my much bethoughting that I found my splenderous plan. That is my tidings. I bethought it all out with a tremense clearness and wiseness. Then I told those others, down yonder. At first, they were of a stupidity. For it was so new. But at last I made them understand. And they rejoiced of it. So it is all settled most sweetly. You may not fear that they will not stand by it. As soon as that was made sure, I came to you to tell——"

"Najib!" groaned Kirby, his head awhirl. "*Will* you stop chewing chunks of indigestible language; and tell me what you are jabbering about? What was it you thought over? And what is 'all settled?' What will——"

"The strike, of an assuredly," explained Najib as if in pity of his chief's denseness. "To-night, we make strike. All of us. That is one tiding. And you, too, make strike, with us. That is the other tiding. Making two tidings. We make strike. To-morrow, we all sleep late. No work is to be made. And so it shall be, on each dear and nice and happy day, until Cabell Effendi—be his sons an hundred and his wives true!—shall pay us the money we ask and make short our hours of toil. Then——"

Kirby sought to speak. But his breath was gone. He only gobbled. Taking the wordless sound for a token of high approval, Najib hastened on, more glibly, with his program.

"On the to-morrow's morning, howadji," he said, "we enseech that you will write a sorrowsome letter to Cabell Effendi, in the Broad Street of New York; and say to him that all of us have made strike and that we shall work no more until we have from his hands a writing that our payment shall be two mejidie for every mejidie we have been capturing from his company. Also and likewise that we shall work but half time. And that you, howadji, are to receive even as we; save only that *your* wage is to be enswollen to three times over than what it is now. And say to him, howadji, that unless he does our wish, in this striking, we shall slay all others whom he may behire in our place and that we shall dynamitely destroy that nice mine. Remind him, howadji—if perchancely he does not know of such things—that the law is with us. Say, moreoverly, that there be many importanceful shipments and contracts, just now. And say he will lose all, if he be so bony of head as to refuse us. Furthermore, howadji, tell him, I prythee you, that we——"

A veritable yell from Kirby broke in on the smug instructions. The American had recovered enough of his breath to expend a lungful of it in one profane bellow. In a flash he visualized the whole scene at the fellaheens' quarters—Najib's crazy explanation of the strike system and of the supposed immunity from punishment that would follow sabotage and other violence; the fellaheens' duller brains gradually seizing on the idea, until it had become as much a part of their mucilaginous mentality as the Koran itself; and Najib's friendly desire that Kirby might share in the golden benefits of the new scheme.

Yes, the American grasped the whole thing, at once; his knowledge of the East foretelling to him its boundless possibilities for mischief and for the ruin of the mine's new prosperity. He fairly strangled with the gust of wrath and impotent amaze which gripped him.

Najib smiled up at him, as might a dog that had just performed some pretty new trick; or a child who has brought to its father a gift. But the aspect of Kirby's distorted face there in the dying firelight shocked the Syrian into a grunt of terror. Scrambling to his feet, he sputtered quaveringly.

"Tame yourself, howadji, I enseech you! Why are you not rejoiceful? Will it not mean much money for you; and——"

"You mangy brown rat!" shouted Kirby in fury. "What in blazes have you done? You know, as well as I do, that such an idea will never get out of those fellaheens' skulls, once it's really planted there. They'll believe every word of that wall-eyed rot you've been telling them! And they'll go on a *genuine* strike, on the strength of it. They'll——"

"Of an assuredly, howadji, they will," assented the bewildered Najib. "I made me very assured of that. Four times, I told it all over to them; until even poor Imbarak

—whose witfulness hath been beblown out from his brain by the breath of the Most High—until even Imbarak understood. But why it should enrouse you to a lionsome raging, I cannot think. I bethought you would be pleasured——"

"Listen to me!" ordered Kirby, fighting hard for self-control, and forcing himself to speak with unnatural slowness. "You've done more damage than if you had dynamited the whole mine and then turned a river into the shaft. This kind of news spreads. In a week there won't be a worker east of the Jordan who won't be a strike fan. And these people here will work the idea a step farther. I know them. They'll decide that if one strike is good, two strikes are better. And they will strike, every week —loafing between times."

This prospect brought a grin of pure bliss to Najib's swarthy face. He looked in new admiration upon his farsighted chief. Kirby went on:

"Not that that will concern us. For this present strike will settle the Cabell mine. It means ruin to our business here, and the loss of all your jobs, as well as my own. Why, you idiot, can't you see what you've done? If you don't take that asinine grin off your ugly face, I'll knock it off!" he burst out, his hard-held patience momentarily fraying.

Then, taking new hold on his self-control, Kirby began again to talk. As if addressing a defective child, which, as a matter of fact, he was doing, he expounded the hideous situation.

He explained the disloyalty to the Cabells of such a move as Najib had planned. He pointed out the pride he and Najib had taken in the new business they had secured for the home office; and the fact that this new business had brought an increase of pay to them both as well as to the fellaheen. He showed how great a triumph for the mine was this vast increase of business; and the stark necessity of impressing the new customers by the promptitude and uniform excellence of all shipments. He pointed out the utter collapse to this and to all the rest of the mine's connections which a strike would entail. Najib listened unmoved.

Hopeless of hammering American ethics into the brain of an Oriental, Kirby set off at a new angle. He explained the loss of prestige and position which he himself would suffer. He would be discharged—probably by cable—for allowing the mine's bourgeoning prosperity to go to pieces in such fashion. Another and less lenient and understanding manager would be sent out to take his place. A manager whose first official act would probably be the discharging of Najib as the cause of the whole trouble.

Najib listened to this with a new interest, but with no great conviction.

Even Kirby's declaration that the ridiculous strike would be a failure, and that the government would assuredly punish any damage done to the Cabell property, did not serve to impress him. Najib was a Syrian. An idea, once firm-rooted in his mind, was loathe to let itself be torn thence by mere words. Kirby waxed desperate.

"You have wrecked this whole thing!" he stormed. "You got an idiotically wrong slant on what I told you about strikes, today; and you have ruined us all. Even if you should go down there to the quarters, this minute, and tell the men that you were mistaken and that the strike is off—you know they wouldn't believe you. And you know they would go straight ahead with the thing. That's the Oriental of it. They'd refuse to go on working. And our shipments wouldn't be delivered. None of the ore for the next shipments would be mined. The men would just hang about, peacefully waiting for the double pay and the half time that you've promised them."

"Of an assuredly, that is true, howadji," conceded Najib. "They would——"

"They *will!*" corrected Kirby with grim hopelessness.

"But soon Cabell Effendi will reply to your letter," went on Najib. "And then the double paying——"

"To my letter!" mocked the raging Kirby. Then he paused, a sudden inspiration smiting him.

"Najib," he continued after a minute of concentrated thought, "you have sense enough to know one thing: You have sense enough to know you people can't get that extra pay till I write to Mr. Cabell and demand it for you. There's not another one of you who can write English. There's no one here but yourself who can speak or understand it or make shift to spell out a few English words in print. And Mr. Cabell doesn't know a word of Arabic—let alone the Arabic script. And your own two years at Coney Island must have shown you that no New Yorkers would know how to read an

Arabic letter to him. Now, I swear to you, by every Christian and Moslem oath, that *I* shan't write such a letter! So how are you going to get word to him that you people are on strike and that you won't do another lick of work till you get double pay and half time? How are you going to do that?"

Najib's solid face went blank. Here at last was an argument that struck home. He had known Kirby for years, long enough to know that the American was most emphatically a man of his word. If Kirby swore he would not act as the men's intermediary with the company, then, decisively, Kirby would keep his oath. And Najib realized the futility of getting any one else to write such a letter in any language which the Cabell Smelting Company's home office would decipher.

He peered up at Kirby with disconsolate astonishment. Quick to take advantage of the change, the manager hurried on:

"Now, the men are on strike. That's understood. Well, what are you and they going to do about it? When the draft for the monthly pay roll comes to the bank, at Jerusalem, as usual, I shall refuse to indorse it. I give you my oath on that, too. I am not going to distribute the company's cash among a bunch of strikers. Without my signature, the bank won't cash the draft. You know that. Well, how are you going to live, all of you, on nothing a month? When the present stock of provisions gives out, I'm not going to order them renewed. And the provision people in Jerusalem won't honor any one's order for them but mine. This is the only concern in Syria, to-day, that pays within forty per cent of the wages you chaps are getting. With no pay and no food, you're due to find your strike rather costly. For when the mine shuts down, I'm going back to America. There'll be nothing to keep me here. I'll be ruined, in any case. You people will find yourself without money or provisions. And if you go elsewhere for work, it will be at pay that is only a little more than half what you are getting now. Your lookout isn't cheery, my striking friend!"

He made as though to go into his tent. After a brief pause of horror, Najib pattered hurriedly and beseechingly in his wake.

"Howadji!" pleaded the Syrian shakily. "*Howadji!* You would not, in the untamefulness of your mad, desertion us like that? Not *me,* at anyhow? Not me, who have loved you as Daoud the Emir loved Jonathan of old! You would not forsook me, to starve myself! *Aie! Oh!*"

"Shut up that ungodly racket!" snapped Kirby, entering his tent and lighting his lamp; as the first piercing notes of the traditional mourner chant exploded through the unhappy Najib's wide-flung jaws. "Shut up! You'll start every hyena and jackal in the mountains to howling! It's bad enough, as it is; without adding a native concert to the rest of the mess."

"But, howadji!" pleaded Najib.

"*Tamâm!*" growled Kirby, summarily speaking the age-hallowed Arabic word for the ending of all interviews.

"But I shall be beruinated, howadji!" tearfully insisted Najib.

Covertly, the American watched his henchman, while pretending to make ready for bed. If he had fully and permanently scared Najib into a conviction that the strike would spell ruin for the Syrian himself, then the little man's brain might possibly be jarred into one of its rare intervals of uncanny craftiness; and Najib might hit upon some way of persuading the fellaheen that the strike was off.

This was Kirby's sole hope. And he knew it. Unless the fellaheen could be so convinced, it meant the strike would continue until it should break the mine as well as the mine's manager. Kirby knew of no way to persuade the men. The same arguments which had crushed Najib would mean nothing to them. All their brains could master at one time, without the aid of some uprooting shock, was that henceforth they were to get double pay and half labor.

A calm fatalism of hopelessness, bred perhaps of his long residence in the homeland of fatalism, began to creep over Kirby. In one hour his golden ambitions for the mine and for himself had been smashed. At best, he saw no hope of getting the obsessed mine crew to work soon enough to save his present contracts. He would be lucky if, on nonreceipt of their demanded increase, they did not follow Najib's muddled preachments to the point of sabotage.

The more he thought of it, the less possible did it seem to Kirby that Najib could undo the damage he had so blithely done. Ordering the blubbering little fellow out of the tent and refusing to speak or listen further, Kirby went to bed.

Oddly enough, he slept. There was nothing to worry about. When a man's job or fortune are imperiled, sleep vanishes. But after the catastrophe, what sense is there in lying awake? Depression and nervous fatigue threw Kirby into a troubled slumber. Only once in the night was he roused.

Perhaps two hours before dawn, he started up at sound of a humble scratching at the open door flap of his tent. On the threshold cowered Najib.

"Furthermore, howadji," came the Syrian's woebegone voice through the gloom, "could I borrow me a book, if I shall use it with much carefulness?"

Too drowsy to heed the absurdity of such a plea at such an hour, Kirby grumbled a surly assent; and dozed again as he heard Najib rumbling, in the dark, among the shelves of the packing-box bookcase in a far corner of the tent. Here were stored nearly a hundred old volumes which had once been a part of the missionary library belonging to Kirby's father, at Nablous. A few years earlier, at the moving of the mission, the dead missionary's scanty library had been shipped across country to his son.

Kirby awoke, at grayest daylight. Through force of habit he woke at this hour; in spite of the workless day which he knew confronted him. It was his custom to get up and take his bath in the rain cistern, at this time; and to finish dressing, just as the men piled out for the morning's work.

Yet, now, the first sounds that smote his ears, as he opened his eyes, were the rhythmic creak of the mine windlass; and the equally rhythmic, if less tuneful, chant of the men who were working it:

"All-ah sa-eed!—Ne-bi sa-eed! Ohé! Sa-eed! Sa-eed! Sa-EED!"

In the distance, dying away, he heard the plodding hoofs of a string of pack mules. From the direction of the mine came the hoodlum racket which betokens, in Syria, the efforts of a number of honest laborers to perform their daily tasks in an efficient and orderly way.

Kirby, in sleepy amaze, looked at his watch, in the dim dawn light. He saw it was still a full half hour before the men were due to begin work. And, by the sounds, he judged that the day's labor was evidently well under way. Yes, and to-day there was to have been no work done!

Kirby jumped out of bed: and strode dazedly to his tent door. At the mine, below him, his fellaheen were as busy as so many dirty and gaudy bees. Even the lordly lazy Turkish soldiers were lending a hand at windlass and crane. Over the nick of the pass, leading toward Jerusalem, the last animal of a mule train was vanishing. Najib, who had as usual escorted the departing shipment of ore to the opening in the pass, was trotting back toward camp.

At sight of Kirby in the tent door, the little superintendent veered from his course toward the mine, and increased his pace to a run, as he bore down upon the American. Najib's swart face was aglow. But his eyes were those of a man who has neglected to sleep. His cheeks still bore flecks of the dust he had thrown on his head when Kirby had explained the wreck of his scheme and of his future. There, in all likelihood, the dust smears would remain until the next rain should wash them off. But, beyond these tokens of recent mental strife, Najib's visage shone like a full moon that is streaked by dun dust clouds.

"Furthermore, howadji!" he hailed his chief, as soon as he was within earshot, "the shipment for Alexandretta is on its wayward—over than an hour earlier than it was due to bestart itself. And those poor hell-selected fellaheen are betoiling themselfs, grand. Have I done well, oh, howadji?"

"Najib!" stammered Kirby, still dazed.

"And here is that most sweet book of great worthiness and wit, which I borrowed me of you, in the night, howadji," pursued Najib, taking from the soiled folds of his abieh a large old volume, bound in stout leather after the manner of religious or scientific books of a half-century ago. On the brown back a scratched gold lettering proclaimed the gruesome title:

"Martyrs of Ancient and Modern Error."

Well did Kirby know the tome. Hundreds of times, as a child, had he sat on the stone floor of his father's cell-like mission study, at Nablous, and had pored in shuddering fascination over its highly colored illustrations. The book was a compilation—chiefly in the form of multichrome pictures with accompanying borders of text—of all the grisly scenes of martyrdom which the publishers had been able to scrape together from such classics as "Fox's Book of Martyrs" and the like. Twice, this past year, he had surprised Najib scanning the gruesome pages in frank delight.

"I betook the book to their camp fire, howadji, and I smote upon my breast and I bewept me and I wailed aloud and I would not make comfort. Till at last they all awoken and they came out of their huts and they reviled at me for disturbing them as they slept themselfs so happily. Then I spake much to them. And all the time I teared with my eyes and moaned aloudly.

"But," put in Kirby, "I don't see what this——"

"In a presently you shall, howadji. Yesterday I begot your goat. To-day I shall make you to frisk with peacefulness of heart. Those fellaheen cannot read. They are not of an education; as I am. And they know my wiseness in reading. For over than a trillion times I have told them. And they believe. Pictures, also, they believe. Just as men of an education believe the printed word; knowing full well it could not be printed if it were not Allah's own truth. Well, these folk believe a picture, if it be in a book. So I showed them pictures. And I read the law which was beneath the pictures. They heard me read. And they saw the pictures, with their own eyesight. So what could they do but believe? And they did. Behold, howadji!"

Opening the volume with respectful care, Najib thumbed the yellowing pages. Presently he paused at a picture which represented in glaring detail a stricken battlefield, strewn with dead and dying Orientals of vivid costume. In the middle distance a regiment of prisoners was being slaughtered in singularly bloodthirsty fashion. The caption, above the cut, read:

"Destruction of Sennacherib's Assyrian Hosts, by the People of Israel."

"While yet they gazed joyingly on this noble picture," remarked Najib, "I read to them the words of the law about it. I read aloudly, thus: 'This shall be the way of punishing all folk who make strike, hereafter this date.' Then," continued Najib, "I showed to them another pretty and splendid picture. See!"

"Martyrdom of John Rogers, His Wife and Their Nine Children."

"And," proclaimed Najib, "of this sweet portrait I read thus the law: 'So shall the wifes and the offsprungs of all strike-makers be put to death; and those wicked strike-makers themselfs along with them.' By the time I had shown them six or fifteen of such pictures, and read them the law for each of them, those miserable fellaheen and guards were beweeping themselfs harder and louder and sadder than I had seemed to. Why, howadji, it was with a difficultness that I kept them from running away and enhiding themselfs in the mountains, lest the soldiers of the pasha come upon them at once and punish them for trying to make strike! But I said I would intercede with you, to make you merciful of heart toward them, to spare them and not to tell the law what they had so sinsomely planned to do. I said I would do this, for mine own sake as well as for theirs; and that I knew I could wake you to pity. But, I said it would perchancely soften your heart toward them; if all should work harder, to atone themselfs for the sin they had beplotted. Wherefore, howadji, they would consent to sleep no more; but they ran henceforthly and at once to the mine. They have been onto the job, ever since. And, howadji, they are jobbing harder than ever I have seen men bejob themselfs. Am I forgiven, howadji?" he finished timidly.

"Forgiven!" yelled Kirby, when he could speak, "why you eternal little liar, you're a genius! My hat is off to you! This ought to be worth a fifty-mejidie bonus. And——"

"Instead of the bonus, howadji," ventured Najib, scared at his own audacity, yet seeking to take full advantage of this moment of expansiveness, "could I have this pleasing book, as a baksheesh gift?"

"Take it!" vouchsafed Kirby. "The thing gives me bad dreams. Take it!"

"May the houris make soft your bed in the Paradise of the Prophet!" jabbered Najib, in a frenzy of gratitude, as he hugged the treasured gift to his breast. "And—and howadji, there be more pictures I did not show. They will be of a nice convenience, if ever again it be needsome to make a new law for the mine."

"But——"

"Oh, happy and pretty decent hour!" chortled the little man, petting his beloved volume, as if it were a loved child; and executing a shuffling and improvised step-dance of unalloyed rapture. "This book has been donationed to me; because I was brave enough to request for it, while yet your heart was warm at me, howadji. It is even as your sainted feringhee proverb says: 'Never put off till to-morrow the—the—man who may be done, to-day!"

The Flat-Footed Road

By Frederick J. Jackson

Author of "Classic Salvage," Etc.

This is the third of Mr. Jackson's sea stories which we have given our readers, and we feel sure that their quality has been noted. In the present yarn the ingenuity and daring methods of Captain Martin reach their highest point so far

AT the Page breakfast table the subject under discussion was Captain Hugo Martin, a self-sufficient young man who had endeared himself to Elwood Page by bringing the wrecked steamer *Donegal* into San Francisco under her own steam. Also by taking in tow a stanch tug called the *White Bear* and winding up by using the same tug to tow his own steamer into port.

Miss Dorothy Page, alluring and sweet in a breakfast cap which had cost her father not a cent less than twenty dollars, removed a nicely browned slice of bread from the electric toaster, spread it with butter, and passed it across the table to the owner of the Page Shipping Company.

"Dad," she said, "I think that your Captin Martin is not a bit nice. He has turned down three dinner invitations in a row. Where on earth does he spend his evenings?"

"Most of them in his cabin, as far as I know," he replied, smiling inwardly. "He prefers to study Spanish and applied mechanics and a lot of other things that wouldn't interest you in the slightest. And he has confessed a craving for moving-picture shows."

"Oh, he has. Well, just for the fun of it I want you to invite him to attend a picture show with us to-night."

"I'll certainly invite him—but that's not saying he will agree to go." Page grinned mischievously. "My dear, why not invite Lucile Crocker to join us. From the sentiments she expressed I believe she finds Hugo Martin much to her liking."

"Oh, she does!" If Dorothy did not sniff, her father's eyesight deceived him. "Well, Lucile Crocker is *not* going with us. I think she's altogether too conceited."

"Why, my dear," expostulated her delighted parent, "I thought you were very chummy with Lucile."

"There's a place for everything, daddy, dear," she explained in a superior way. "And you'll have some tall explaining to do if you don't produce Captain Martin this evening." She arose, walked around the table, and laid her smooth cool cheek against her father's. "You'll make him come, won't you, daddy? But don't you dare to tell him that I'm putting you up to it!"

"G-r-r!" he pleaded. "Don't choke me with that hug! There, that's better. I think Hercules had a snap compared to the tasks you give to me. Martin seems to be the immovable body and you're the irresistible force. I'm the luckless atom who stands in between. But Martin is a likable, clean-cut, handsome young devil, and I don't blame you."

"Blame me for what?" she demanded innocently.

"Ahem! Reviewing your actions since you took that trip on the *Donegal,* I'm beginning to have a shrewd suspicion that you're doing nothing less than setting your cap for——"

"Daddy!" She abruptly placed her hand across his mouth, and Page shook with merriment, for an upward glance from the corner of his eye had assured him that his usually self-possessed young daughter was blushing furiously.

"All right, honey, I'll make him come with us to-night."

"Daddy, you're a perfect old dear. I knew you'd do it."

In his office, later that morning, Elwood Page pried open the lid of a box of imported cigars and pushed it across the flat-top desk to Captain Hugo Martin, whereupon that young man grinned quizzically.

"Mr. Page," he said, "I notice that whenever you give me a cigar you've got another special job on hand for me. Some nut hard to crack. Am I right?"

"In a way." The shipowner's eyes twinkled as he tossed a box of matches across the desk. Waiting until Martin's cigar was drawing well, he broached the subject in mind.

"Martin," he began, "you're a lop-sided puzzle to me. Here on my hands is a determined young daughter who seems unable to understand why I can't *order* you to give us some of your time whenever you're in port. Do you dislike her?"

"Hardly!" Martin grimaced dryly. "I can't quite get a picture of any man disliking her. She's the most attractive girl I've ever seen."

"Then I never guessed wrong, after all," commented Page, the suspicion of a grin on his face as he drew an easier breath. "It must be *my* company that you wish to avoid."

"Hell, no!" was Martin's emphatic denial.

"What's the trouble, then? That's the part which puzzles me."

"You say I'm ungodly frank when it comes to discussing business. I'll loosen up the same way now. You're my employer. I regard you sometimes"—Martin grinned in spite of himself—"in much the same light as I expect my crew to regard me as their superior officer. The tradition of the sea is strong in me; there is no common ground of social footing between cabin and fo'c's'le. In regard to you and your family I feel much the same as an A. B. who has been invited into the cabin—I don't know what's coming next. I don't belong in the limousine set."

"Stuff, sir! Poppycock!" snorted Page. "Why try to stand me off with that line of talk? You know you don't mean it. You're the equal of anybody—and I have an idea you know it!"

"Let it go at that," agreed Martin amiably. "You may be right; perhaps I have a swelled head, but I have never been accused of it. Here's the straight-out truth. The society of Dorothy is too darned dangerous for me. I'm afraid of getting into shoal water, for, as I've told you, she's the most attractive girl I've known. She's distractingly beautiful, and her wilfulness—the way she gets away with it—is but an added charm. For my own peace of mind I prefer to keep away. What's in such a friendship? For me, I mean. I fancy I'm merely a bit of a curiosity to her because I refuse to lay down and be a good dog when she wants me to."

"Nonsense! Rot!" exploded the other. "I know my daughter, and she is too true a girl to play with any man that way. If she wants your company it is because she really likes you. There's not a single reason in the world why you should act as stiff as a wooden cigar sign. If you have any absurd notion that I wouldn't welcome you as a son-in-law get it out of your head immediately. I——"

"There you are! That's the sticking point!" interrupted Martin. "Why, if she were any one else's daughter, and gave me the least encouragement, I'd shoot at the record for fast love-making. It would be to the devil with parental opposition and everything else. I'd elope with her so fast it would make her head swim—if she was at all willing. By heavens! I wish you didn't have a red cent to your name. Then I'd set off the fireworks. As it is—— Well, it's out of the question. I'm loaded to the hatches with a pride which keeps me away."

"Hum!" Page cleared his throat. "Let me have a look at the sum and substance of this imaginary complaint."

"I suppose I'm too damned thin-skinned." Martin's tone was petulant. "Supposing Dorothy loved me, and I married her—both of which are unlikely. I'd walk down the Embarcadero, and every broken-down, boozy skipper on the beach would look at me and sneer: 'There goes Martin, the lucky stiff! He fell in soft—married Elwood Page's daughter, he did.'

"Not for a minute would any one credit me with marrying her because I loved her, because she is the sweetest, dearest girl in the world. Oh, yes! Every bilgy-smelling mariner on the coast would bandy my name and envy me as a successful fortune hunter. Not for me!"

"You—you brainless fish!" snorted the old shipping man. "I'd like to use your line of reasoning for ballast in a mud scow—which doesn't need any. Martin, of all the asinine, bull-headed young fools, you're at the head of the class!" Page puffed viciously at his cigar for a few moments. "Bah! You've got as much rich, young red blood in you as a—as a dried prune! That's my up-and-down opinion of you, sir! To let the possible mouthings of a bunch of envious bums stand in the road of your happiness—— Dammit! I'm disgusted with

you, sir. Disappointed! You've fallen so low in my regard that for two cents I'd like to fire you!"

"Keep the change!" snapped Martin, fire in his eyes. "I'm quitting you right now. So long!" And he made a speedy exit from the office before the other could utter a word of protest or apology.

"Dammit!" soliloquized Page. "Now I *am* in a heck of a fix. I've lost the only skipper I ever had who knows how to get results. I wouldn't lose him for a million. And I'm in for it when Dorothy discovers that he's gone. Wow! She'll act like a bear that's lost her cub. And it was only because I wanted to see her happy that I deliberately stirred up the young hot head. Now I suppose I'll have to crawl in order to square things, so I'll be a sport and do it.

"Sport, nothing!" he choked a moment later. "It's a howling necessity—or I'll lose both ways."

After a minute or so of regretful and wrathful cogitation, he started for the street.

"Down to the lumber yard! Quick!" was his order to his chauffeur. Fuming with impatience he settled back on the tonneau cushions.

He knew that Martin ordinarily would avail himself of a chance to stretch his sea legs by walking back to the steamer. But he also knew Martin well enough to be afraid that this time the impetuous young man would hire a taxi, speed to the steamer, pack his personal effects in a hurry, and leave a blank trail. It would be like him to do just that.

Arriving at the dock, Page hurried up the gangplank. On deck the first person he saw was a steward, who informed him that Captain Martin had not yet returned aboard.

The outer doors of Martin's cabin were open, swung back and hooked against the housing. The inner ventilated doors were locked, however. Page induced the steward to use a pass-key, then stepped into the cabin and sat down to wait.

On Martin's desk lay several sheets of paper, which he eyed curiously. They were covered with crude diagrams and figures representing numerous sums in arithmetic.

"What in Davy Jones has he been figuring on?" The shipping man propounded the question to the carpet on the floor. "Estimates on something," he continued. "I wonder——"

A key had rattled in the lock. Captain Martin stepped into the cabin, obvious surprise registered on his countenance at seeing his employer.

"Hello, young man!" was Elwood's peppy greeting. "Dammit, sir, I refuse to accept your resignation."

"I accept your humble apology," grinned Martin. "But I've got a vacation of a month or two coming, and if I don't get it I'll just up and quit on you in earnest."

"You poor neurasthenic," mourned his employer with mock sympathy as he gazed at the younger man's healthy, sun-tanned countenance. "You'd better see a doctor. Ten to one he'll advise a sea trip for your health, that is, if you go to the same one who told a mailman he should walk more."

"This is a matter of business with me," said Martin. "I want to make some money."

"A laudable ambition. I'll sell you a partnership in the Page Shipping Company. Then you can't squeal, nor can any one else, about you marrying for money. Why don't you stick on the job and buy in? I'll let you in easy. You can pay for it with the profits, and it will be strictly between ourselves. I won't discount your notes."

"I don't want a gift with flimsy wrappings like that. And I know the approximate value of the company. If I work for you and save *all* my wages for the next twenty-five years I may be able to buy almost one per cent. I can't wait twenty-five years. I want quicker action—and I'm going to get it."

"Glad to hear it. In twenty-five years I won't be able to let you into the firm; I'll be dead by that time. What's on your chest? What's this quick action you're going after?"

"I've got a little money in the bank, Mr. Page—what I've saved and the bonus you paid me for salvaging the *White Bear*—and I'm going to see the underwriters of the schooner *Athenian*."

For a moment Page was silent, his mind working rapidly to discover in what way Martin expected to make money. The *Athenian*, a four-topmast schooner of five hundred tons, while on the way from Puget Sound to San Pedro, lumber laden, had piled on the beach north of the entrance to Humboldt Bay. From the salvage standpoint she was hopelessly wrecked; it not being on record that the Humboldt sands had ever given up a victim.

"Great guns, Martin!" he exclaimed, "you

don't dream of getting the schooner off the beach. It's impossible. The surf is always high, and the sand. Do you know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars have been wasted in futile salvage operations up there?"

"Yes, I know," said Martin. "I'm not loony enough to think of touching the hull. I know I can do nothing with it. The storm drove the schooner so high on the shingle that you can walk around her at low tide. It's the cargo I'm after."

"The cargo! A little over six hundred thousand feet of lumber. It's worth only about twelve thousand dollars. Even with luck it will cost you about that much to get it over the two miles of sand dunes to Humboldt Bay."

"It can't cost me twelve thousand; I haven't got that much. I'll take care of the sand; a road of 'refuse' planks won't cost me over twelve hundred. Then I'll snake the cargo over to the bay in motor trucks. I figure I can clear a few thousand."

"The devil you can!" snorted Page. "Do you suppose you'd be able to get within hailing distance of real money if it were lying around for any one to pick up? The insurance company isn't in business for its health; it's out to recover all it can. It hasn't even sent up a gang to strip the hull. They're waiting for some sucker like you to come along. There are contracting companies up in Eureka which never overlook a dollar. Why haven't they touched the *Athenian?* She's been there for over three months. They know the sand. It's damnable stuff. Twenty-five years ago it drove the Klamath Lumber Mill out of business. They had a plant on the peninsula, but the sand overwhelmed them. They tried everything, but failed. The least wind would start the dunes moving. A gale would make ground glass out of their windows. They built wooden troughs, pumped water to flow through them and tried to wash the surplus sand out of the way. What happened? As fast as the sand was shoveled into the troughs it would sink to the bottom. In a few minutes the troughs would be full of sand and the water overflowing. No amount of stirring would budge the damn stuff. It's the deadest, inert clogger when you want to move it and the deadliest, shifting heart-breaker when you want it to stay put. It'll drift over your plank road despite all you can do. That's why the men who know let it severely alone. I'm not saying it is impossible to transport the lumber to the bay. It can be done, *but*—— As a business proposition this *Athenian* deal might appeal to a crazy man."

"Fair enough!" agreed Martin, smiling. "I'm plain crazy. Let it go at that. I'm not arguing at all. But I've got a joker in the hole. Everybody's been overlooking a bet."

"Maybe," grunted Page, really sorry for Martin. "You'll get your feet wet and your fingers burned, but the experience will teach you to take my word for some things. Frankly, Martin, what's the use of gambling like that? At the most you can make but a thousand or two—piker's profit."

"Mr. Page, I'm a bum if I don't pull fifteen thousand clear profit out of that cargo."

"Now I know you're crazy!" retorted the shipping man.

II.

"Twenty cents on the dollar," said the insurance agent.

"The hell you say," returned Martin in disgust. "I thought you were a business man. No wonder you can't get anybody to gamble on the *Athenian.* She'll bust up on you one of these rotten days. You have men who know their business. They gave their report. The hull is written off as clear loss. Come down to earth on the cargo."

"What's your proposition?"

"Five cents on the dollar—on the insured value of the cargo. I might want to build me a summer resort on the beach."

"*Yes,* you do!" grinned the agent. "Not on that beach. But I'll come down to bed rock. The lumber is yours for ten cents."

"Pirate! I want a fighting chance of getting my money back."

"Ten cents on the dollar!" repeated the agent. "I'd lose my job if I *gave* it away. It's insured for fifteen thousand."

"How's that?"

"The spruce aboard is listed higher than the fir."

Unnoticed by the agent, Martin wriggled uncomfortably.

"Tell you what I'll do. I'll pay the fifteen hundred if you'll throw in the whole darned shebang, anchors, standing rigging, and fittings. Sell wreck and cargo outright." Martin arose to his feet.

"It's a sale. But what are you going to do with the anchors?"

"Maybe I'll use them to hold down my hotel—if I build it," grinned Martin. "A summer resort out there might blow away in winter."

"Summer resort, your foot!" scoffed the agent, reaching for a bill of sale. "Cash down to-day and you'll own lock, stock, and barrel. Later you'll own a crop of gray hair."

When the transaction had been completed the agent inquired Martin's real object in making the rash purchase.

"Take another squint at the manifest," replied Martin. "You said the spruce was high, but it was ordered a year before it was shipped—and it's been on the beach almost four months. Look up the latest quotation. There's two hundred thousand feet. You'll kick your shins."

"Wait till you get up on the beach," chuckled the agent. "Even if spruce is over sixty dollars, you won't come out even."

"This happens to be airplane stock, and it's worth almost one hundred and sixty!" said Martin. "So long!"

"You're still welcome!" shouted the agent. "If you get anything out of the *Athenian* it will be with an airplane."

Two days later found Hugo Martin surveying his newly acquired property and calling on the high heavens to witness his grief. Several hundred thousand feet of lumber—the schooner's deckload—lay thrown along a mile of beach. The scattered timbers lay in a fairly straight line, about two hundred and fifty feet from the surf, the line representing the limit reached on the shingle by the sweep of storm-driven breakers. The Humboldt surf is ever boisterous; even now when Martin viewed it and considered it comparatively calm the breakers roared lustily in across a two-hundred-foot strip of creamy water and swashed in intermittent rushes high on the shelving gray sand.

At the sight of half of his treasured cargo mixed in with the driftwood Martin plunged both hands into trouser pockets, braced his feet far apart, and swore with fearful abandon.

"By the pig-iron hinges of Halifax! Here I went and bought a sack labeled 'Nice Fat Hens,' and it turned out to be skinny crow." He beckoned to Olaf Ericksen, a master stevedore, whose services he had engaged.

"When did the deckload go? No wonder I got the cargo cheap."

"The chain lashings snapped when she struck in the outer surf," explained the stevedore. "Snapped like threads when she broached-to and took the smash of a king sea, and the lumber went out of her like it was greased. The port rail, the main and mizzen masts went with it. So did the spanker topmast."

Martin dismally gazed at the hulk, which lay broadside on the sand midway high and low water marks. Keel to seaward she lay, with her bows at an angle more toward the surf than her stern. The port side, from the weight of the cargo in the hold, which was still intact, was quite imbedded in the sand, the keel being clear about a foot. Examination showed that the stern post and rudder were gone. Higher on the strand lay the broken spars, connected to the wreck by a tangle of stays and rigging. Her foremast and the stump of the spanker projected forlornly shoreward, the fore gaff with a remnant of reefed sail hanging from the mast with the other end embedded in the sand. Such was the angle at which the hull lay. From the hawse holes both anchor chains hung supinely. The anchors lay somewhere out in the surf, not having been dropped until the vessel was in the maw of the breakers, and then, seeing disaster inevitable, the windlass brakes had been released in order to allow the schooner to drift in as far as possible, thus rendering easier the task of getting the crew ashore through the smothering surf.

Martin studied the position of the schooner, pleasantly wondering whether her master had been drunk, insane, or panic-stricken. No, he evidently had hung on to his anchors as long as he could. The battered after end indicated that the schooner had struck stern on. Had the anchors dragged? If so, why had they not been allowed to drag still more?

"She's sure wrecked," affirmed Ericksen.

"Mighty poor seamanship somewhere. I'd have hung onto at least one mud hook till something happened. And even then I wouldn't have unstoppered the chain. If she lay in a different position it might be possible to get her off."

"Not a chance!" scoffed the stevedore. "They never get 'em off up here. Look at the *Corona* up at the entrance. They poured over a hundred thousand into her. She's still there."

"Yes, but she's a heavy steel steamship, weighted down by machinery, with her bot-

tom punched out by striking when she was carried over the jetty. And she lays squarely out in the breakers. This is different."

"Sure it is," agreed Ericksen soberly, and proceeded to tabulate every wreck for the past three decades. "They were all *different,*" he finished, "but they never got one of them off the beach. Take a walk from here up to the *Corona* and you'll see half a dozen rotted skeletons of good ships."

"I guess you're right," sighed Martin. "Anyhow, all I figured on was the clear spruce in the hold. I can hang on to the long end of the stick if I can get the spruce hauled across to the bay. I've got to!"

"I'm for you and with you," said Ericksen, "but I'm glad it's not my money going into the job."

"Aw, you're all a bunch of pessimists up here."

"Sure we are, and from bitter experience," was the rejoinder.

They turned and laboriously plodded through ankle-deep sand, up hill and down, over the dunes to the bay.

Three days later, Hugo Martin was an even more disillusioned young man. "Refuse" lumber was higher in price than he had expected, and he had much difficulty in obtaining a quantity of the size he wanted. He was forced to gather it up from various mills around the bay, and this entailed additional expense for stevedores, lighters, and gasoline towboats. Labor was scarce, therefore the laborers were independent. When Martin perforce hired them at their own valuation they termed him an easy mark. The owners of lighters and gasoline boats grossly held him up and called him a sucker. At the end of a week he had two things, the lumber for his plank road piled on the shore of the bay and a dent in his bank account which made him feel uneasy.

So far there had proved to be only one bit of cheering news, namely, that the airplane stock in the schooner's hold was all he had expected it to be. A gang of men, under the direction of Olaf Ericksen, was engaged in breaking the lumber out of the hold and piling it up on the beach beyond the reach of the surf.

Then arrived a portly, benevolent-appearing gentleman, who introduced himself as Jefferson Holt, president of the South San Francisco Aviation Company.

"The insurance company informs me," said Mr. Holt, "that you copped out a couple of hundred thousand feet of clear spruce —airplane stock."

"I have," replied Martin, "and can ship it in less than thirty days."

"Good! Got a market yet?"

"Not yet."

"Thirty days, eh? I'll pay one hundred and seventy dollars a thousand, delivered in San Francisco in that time."

"Time-limit proposition? What penalty for delay?"

"Stiff as a poker. I'm paying extra money for quick delivery."

"Can't guarantee less than forty days. Something might go wrong."

"Very well. Same price—forty days."

"You're the buyer! Let's get this into contract form. And how much will you advance? I need money, or will need it before long."

"You must deliver on time. This is essential, for after that time the price may drop. The government has a few thousand limited-service men working overtime in the Puget Sound forests. They're humping themselves on the spruce."

"Sure. Forty will be safe. I expect to deliver in less than thirty days. But I want some money advanced."

"How much?"

"I think I can wriggle through on five thousand."

"How much did the cargo cost you?"

"Fifteen hundred," admitted Martin. "But I've——"

"All right! I'll advance fifteen hundred. Not a cent more! And I'm going to tie you into a strait-jacket on that forty-day clause."

"Hop to it. Fifteen hundred isn't enough, but I can borrow more."

The contract when drawn up specified that in consideration of extra price paid by buyer if seller should fail to deliver within forty days all title and possession in said spruce timber should pass to buyer without further payments.

Martin grimaced when he read it.

"Pretty stiff, I know," conceded Mr. Holt, watching Martin's face. "But it will keep you jacked up on the job. Read the next paragraph. One dollar a thousand bonus for each day under forty in which you deliver. That takes out the sting, eh?"

"Fair enough," said Martin. "I'll sign. I've got the plank road built halfway to the beach and it'll be finished in less than

two days. Then the trucks will snake the lumber over to the bay."

A little later, Martin went back to watch the progress of the road building. Three motor trucks were busy keeping the laborers supplied with planks. In a way it resembled the construction of a railroad, for each truck would carry its load as far as the road had been completed, and the men would place the timbers in position ahead. It was simple work, for very little excavation was necessary. The sand was smooth; the planks were laid directly on it. Two stiff hills were the greatest obstacles. Around these the road detoured, which further shot to pieces Martin's estimate on the cost. These two hills required almost fifty thousand extra board feet of planking, and this combined with the overhead for the trucks at twenty-five dollars a day each and labor at sixty cents an hour caused Martin to worry some more.

This first half of the road lay for the greater part through a growth of scattered scrub pines and huckleberry bushes. These, together with patches of wild strawberries and sand reeds, served to anchor the erstwhile shifting dunes. Then came the last mile—across comparative desert land, denuded of all vegetation, with the exception of an occasional scanty colony of a hardy ivylike creeper. Gray and bleak when clouds were overhead, silvering and dazzling in the sunlight, lay the dunes. Stifling heat reflected back from them at noon; toward evening they seemed to radiate an eerie chill. Flat as a billiard table in spots, in others the surface was wind-rippled like miniature ocean swells. Here and there were ballooning hills, with valleys in between. Dead, inert, the sands seemed, incapable of motion, and Martin laughed.

In the afternoon the gentle northwest trade wind hauled more to the northward and freshened, a hint of what was to come. Occasionally, unnoticed by Martin, small areas of loose dry sand began to lift and roll gently south across the surface of the dunes. This process was almost indiscernible; the sifting grains traveled but a few yards before settling into another position. But the parade was all set to start in earnest should the wind blow harder.

By nightfall, when Martin embarked on the launch he had chartered to carry himself and his laborers to their homes and lodgings in Eureka, which lay on the eastern shore of the bay, he was at peace with the world. Twenty-four hours more would see the road completed over the naked dunes almost to the ocean beach.

By the time the launch reached the boat slip at the foot of "F" Street the bay had grown exceedingly choppy. White caps were beginning to sprinkle its surface. It was obvious that the wind was rising, but to Martin this signified nothing at all.

It was the following morning when he reached the open sand hills after a jolting ride atop a truckload of planks that the cold perspiration broke out on his brow. Where, the night before, had been a perfectly good stretch of plank road there was now a neatly rounded low ridge of sand. The timbers were buried over a foot deep for two-thirds of their length. It was a freak of the dune that the southern edge of the planks were comparatively free of sand. The other edge of the planks had stopped the drifting sand, causing a new dune to form.

"Too bad, Captain Martin," said Ericksen. "I was afraid of this."

"Too bad!" repeated Martin testily. "Why in Sam Hill didn't you tell me your fears? I could have prevented this." He immediately hustled back in the launch to the nearest mill for a load of one-inch boards, a foot in width, and a bunch of surveyor's stakes. A trip to a hardware store netted twenty shovels.

To Ericksen's suggestion that it might be advisable likewise to guard the southern side of the road, Martin replied that he couldn't afford it, opining that the southerly weather was over for the season.

By the next day the road had been cleared, and protected from further burial by a low barricade composed of the boards stood on edge and held upright by stakes driven into the sand. The wind continued to blow, and another dune soon formed against the barrier, building up several inches over the boards. The more the sand drifted the higher grew the dune—better protection for the road. Ericksen assured him that nothing but a shift in the wind would cause further trouble. Martin laughed, for at that season the trade wind usually blew steadily for weeks. And he reckoned on having the lumber transferred within ten days. To be sure, a little sand blew from the top of the dune onto the road, but the truck wheels ground it down. Then the wind died to a mere zephyr.

The afternoon of the day that saw the completion of the road to the beach likewise saw twelve thousand feet of the airplane stock hauled across to the bay. The next day, thirty thousand feet were moved, and thirty-five thousand on the day following.

Then the famous Humbolt jinx again got on the job. That night it unexpectedly blew up from the *south,* a blustery half gale. At daybreak it began to rain, but the mischief had already been done; in places which aggregated half a mile in length the road was entirely obliterated, buried several feet deep.

Martin looked at the ruins, computed the labor necessary to clear the road, figured up his remaining bank balance, and almost wept.

"Dammit!" he swore in conscious imitation of Elwood Page. "If I'd only brought my barometer along I might have figured what was in the wind. And just as everything had fancy fringes on it! Oh, well, it will cost about one-third as much to build another road as to recover this one from the dead." He still had eleven hundred dollars in the bank, but it was not enough to see the job through.

Therefore he paid off his men, instructed Erickson to finish taking the cargo from the schooner's hold, and then boarded the gasoline launch. The steamship *City of Topeka,* San Francisco bound, was coming down the bay. Martin ordered the launch to run alongside the moving steamer. A hail to the bridge caused a line to be thrown down to him, and he scrambled aboard the larger vessel.

Early the following morning he was walking up Market Street in San Francisco.

III.

At dinner on the evening of the day Martin arrived in the metropolis, Elwood Page smiled across the table at his daughter.

"Captain Martin is in town," he announced.

"He is! Oh, daddy, what did he say?"

"I haven't seen him. The rascal is deliberately staying out of my reach. This afternoon he called on Henry Taylor with a modest request for a five-thousand-dollar loan. He had the nerve to give my name as a reference, and Henry called me up about it. I told him to stand him off until tomorrow."

"Why? Of course you'll see that he gets the money."

"Certainly! Wouldn't think of turning him down. But if he loses out on the *Athenian* proposition I want to fix it so I'll have a mortgage on him for life. He can repay me on the installment plan. Henry will tell him that I recommended the loan only on the provision that he works for me until the principal is paid."

"Oh, daddy, I think that's a shame. You treat him like a slave."

"Confound his ornery young hide!" exploded her parent. "He's too independent, and it will gladden my heart to get him under my thumb."

"So you are going to lend him the money through Mr. Taylor." Dorothy knit her fair brow in concentration, began to giggle, and finally told *her* plan.

"Dorothy, you're a hardened villainess!" he scolded severely. "But the scheme appeals to me so much that I'm going to put it through. Martin will raise a howl, call it a low-down trick, and probably never speak to you again. But you'll have his goat tied up in a neat bundle."

"That's what I want," smiled Dorothy calmly.

"You'll get it, all right," agreed her indulgent parent. "You manage to get mine right along."

During the evening, Dorothy's idea of business humor was put up to Mr. Henry Taylor, and that honorable and amiable gentleman agreed to carry it through.

The following day, when Hugo Martin carefully read the typewritten contract drawn up by Mr. Taylor, he raised scarcely any objection to the option on his services by Elwood Page.

"It's your own money?" he inquired, dropping the paper on the desk.

"Certainly. I'm letting you have it on the recommendation of Elwood Page. And in view of the certain element of risk involved in this salvage deal I feel justified in charging an interest rate of one per cent a month. You noticed that, I presume? And the provision giving an option on your services until the money is repaid is merely for my protection. Your character is the deciding factor in my giving you this money."

"Risky! Risky!" grinned Martin. "But I can stand it if you can. I'll sign."

"Here, count this first." Mr. Taylor enticingly pushed a packet of one-hundred-dollar bills across the desk. "I thought

you'd like it in cash. Kindly verify the amount."

When Martin began to shuffle the currency, the benevolent Mr. Taylor picked up the contract, which was typed on both sides of a sheet of legal paper. It slipped from his fingers. Stooping to pick it up, he adroitly exchanged it for another he had thoughtfully placed on the floor behind his desk. Then he called in two clerks to witness Martin's signature. Martin signed without troubling to turn over the document and look at the other side. He had read it once, and was totally unsuspicious.

"Do I get a duplicate copy?" he inquired.

"No, indeed," returned Mr. Taylor suavely. "This is practically a note, you understand."

"Oh, I see," said Martin vaguely, then picked up the money, thanked Mr. Taylor, and departed.

When he reached the street he found Elwood Page, seated in his automobile at the curb, waiting for him.

"Hello, Captain Martin!" was his frowning greeting, but the frown was assumed. "I've got a bone to pick with you."

Martin genially invited him to go ahead and pick.

"Think you're smart, don't you, young man? Dammit, sir!' When you want money why don't you come to me?"

"There are personal reasons," replied Martin a bit stiffly.

"Huh! I'm warning you against doing business with Henry Taylor. He's an old skinflint! A crook! If you don't believe me go and ask him if I'm not right. He'll admit it. Be careful, or he'll put up a job on you quicker than shipping rates can raise."

"You ought to know; he's a friend of yours," grinned Martin. "Well, this is my busy day. So long!" He ran out into the street and flipped a passing trolley car.

Arriving back in Eureka, he went around to the McGraw Lumber Company and put in an order for enough planks to rebuild the road. He was informed that the company could fill no local orders for at least two weeks. Visiting two other mills and getting practically the same answer, he began to smell a large-sized rodent. Some one with pull was camping on his trail. With a troubled mind, he crossed the bay.

He found the dunes were still wet from the rain-laden southerly gale. Ericksen was pottering around the schooner's cargo, but had laid off the other workmen, for all the spruce had been removed from the hold and piled neatly on the beach ready for the trucks.

He told his troubles to the stevedore and asked his opinion.

"Funny thing, that," said Ericksen. "It sure enough looks like some one is trying to leave you flat-footed. Was it the Pacific Underwriters that you bought the cargo from?"

"It was. I know they're a fine bunch of scavengers and hate to overlook a bet, but I put it over on them."

"I'd like to see it done—once. If it will help any, I'm telling you that the Pacific Underwriters have insured about every mill and lumber yard around the bay. They cleaned up by bidding under the other companies."

"Um-m! Maybe I see daylight; maybe I don't. Anyhow, as you said, it does look like some one is trying to leave me flat-footed."

Flat-footed! The expression caused Martin to think of the three caterpillar tractors which he had seen on the deck of the steamer that had brought him back from San Francisco. He hurried back to Eureka and had the launch put him ashore at the steamship dock.

The tractors were in the warehouse. The Oakland factory branch was establishing an agency in Eureka, and the local representative was engaged, when Martin entered, in explaining the merits of the ungainly machines to half a dozen farmers—men he had lined up as possible customers. The latter were dubious.

Martin called the agent aside and asked him what the tractors could do in heavy sand. They ate it alive, according to the agent. Then Martin spoke in honeyed tones, pointing out how a lot of publicity could be obtained. Would one of the machines pull a loaded trailer through the sand? *Would it!* The agent was enthusiastic. Thereupon Martin offered to pay for the drivers, for oil, gas, and a small sum for depreciation to enable the machines to be sold at a discount if he could use them in getting the lumber across the sand dunes. The agent jumped at the chance. It was the opportunity he had been looking for—a grandstand play for free advertising. In his words, "It's a chance to show the people up

here that these machines are the real Peruvian gooseberries!"

IV.

Martin sent a wire to Elwood Page, inquiring into the status of one Jefferson Holt, self-styled president of the South San Francisco Aviation Company.

Back came this reply:

Jefferson Holt is vice president of the Pacific Underwriters.

"Oh, boy!" grinned Martin, and no wonder he grinned, for it had taken the tractors less than two days to transfer the remainder of the spruce across the sand dunes. They were now at work gathering up the scattered lumber along the ocean beach. The agent was more than satisfied, and was glad to keep the machines at work. The local press had featured Martin's coup, referring to it as "the flat-footed road," Ranchers came to see the tractors in action, and the agent had wired to Oakland for a dozen machines to fill his orders.

Then Martin awoke to the fact that he was a poor business man. He had forgotten to charter a vessel to transport the lumber to San Francisco. Perhaps the fact that he worked so many years on lumber steamers and had come to take them for granted had something to do with this omission. But as yet he regarded the matter of transportation as an unimportant detail. This was strange, for he was familiar with war-caused coastwise conditions. It was Elwood Page's reply to his wire requesting a vessel that caused him to worry all of a sudden. Page's telegram read thusly:

You ought to know how I'm tied up and can't spare a bottom for thirty days at the least possibly a longer time. If I can steal or buy or borrow another vessel I'll gladly do it for you and am going out to scout around.

Martin's uneasiness increased when he had sounded local shipping men. A bridge had been washed out on the recently completed railroad to San Francisco, and an abnormal congestion of freight was being passed on to the shoulders of the steamship companies. They were unable to handle it; all space had been chartered sixty days in advance.

"Why not charter a sailing vessel?" suggested Ericksen.

"Yeh! Why not!" wailed Martin. "Anything on the coast that will float is tied up from now to the day of judgment. If Page can't get a bottom for me then I'm certainly hung up to dry. Sailing vessel!" he repeated, a grin chasing the gloom. "Dog my cats, if I don't own one and hadn't forgotten about it—never considered it."

"You own one?" questioned Ericksen in surprise. "Where is it?"

"Out on the ocean beach—the *Athenian,* and I'm going to take a royal try at getting her off."

An hour and a half later he was on the strand, surveying the schooner from a new angle—that of salvage. She looked rather hopeless. It was half tide and the water surged around her. He waded out and clambered up the sloping deck to the main hatch. He possessed a hazy notion that the vessel's hull was sound. Wooden craft built by Bendixsen had a reputation for being stanch, and the *Athenian* was one of Bendixsen's best. So far she had defied the smash of the surf against her bottom, for, while stormy weather prevailed, the lumber in her hold had weighed her down. The harder the breakers thundered, the further the side of the vessel burrowed in the sand. What Martin feared most of all was that the grip of the sand could not be broken.

In the hold was three feet of water, which would have to be pumped out. He looked along the heavy list of the deck to the hand pumps, then again into the hold, and shook his head. Owing to the extreme angle of the vessel, but little water could be pumped out through the bilge. But the very fact that the water in the hold did not run out at low tide was cheering. It indicated that the bottom was sound, except perhaps for strained seams.

Beneath the forecastle head he discovered a portable hand pump, ordinarily used for washing down the decks. But its cast-iron cylinder was broken, evidently by a smash against the windlass. This failed to worry Martin. In fact, it saved him work, for it made him use his wits. Attached to the pump was a seventy-two-foot length of two-inch hose. This he cut into two pieces, and in a short time had two streams of water syphoning out of the hold.

When Ericksen arrived with a crew of men, Martin rustled up two axes, a hatchet, and a cleaver. The tangled mass of rigging from the fallen spars was cleared away. Purchases were then rigged and the three broken topmasts dragged back aboard and suspended over the seaward rail, forward of amidships. Planks were lashed and spiked

onto these to form a stout platform. Main and mizzen gaffs were chopped loose and set up as shears over the main hatch. From this a tackle served to lower and raise a wicker ballast basket. Beneath the lumber in the hold had been sixty-five or seventy tons of cobblestones—permanent ballast. These were hoisted up in the basket and carried forward to the outboard platform. With an empty hold, Martin hoped that this counterbalance, when the tide was high, would bring the schooner to an even keel. More important than this, however, was the necessity of squaring the vessel around with her bow to the sea, the exact position best suited for getting her off the strand. To further the latter operation he set up the main boom as a shore against the foremast. Three days it took to rig this purchase and to transfer the ballast forward to the starboard rail.

Martin minutely examined the dry hold, and calked a few open seams with oakum and thin wooden wedges. He also prayed for results from the brace on the foremast and the counterbalance. None came. The sands were like a leech, and the schooner refused to budge. But each day the high-water level on the beach was a little above that of the day before; a spring tide was coming. Each night, when he returned to Eureka, Martin eagerly looked for news from Elwood Page. Finally when a wire arrived it was a disappointing one. By straining a point, Page hoped to be able to spare a steamer in three weeks. Begging, bribery and polite blackmail had failed to release a vessel any sooner.

"Three weeks! Suffering catfish!" howled Martin in despair. "In three weeks I'll have nothing but a hopeless future! I've just *got* to get that schooner off the beach. If I could get the *Athenian* on an even keel—or anywhere near it—I'd get steam up in her donkey and——"

"And," finished Ericksen, "you wouldn't be any better off."

"Huh!" grunted Martin. "The hell I wouldn't!" He turned abruptly away and hastened to find the tractor agent.

"Say," he inquired of that worthy, "will one of your flat-foots snake a steam shovel across the dunes?"

"If one won't, I'll use two. If I hook on *three* of them with separate steel cables the shovel will have to come along or something will disintegrate. Go and get your shovel."

Martin did and was held up again. Five hundred dollars for three days was the price.

The steam shovel, snorting and puffing under its own power, after being towed by the tractors, clanked its way down the beach to the stern of the *Athenian,* stopping just short of the low tide wash of the surf. The engineer, nonchalant and blasé, leaned out and desecrated the sand with a gill of tobacco juice.

"Hey, you guy with the worried look," he yelled to Martin. "What do I do now? Climb this busted mast?"

"Dig a ditch along the vessel from where you are to where I tell you to stop. Shake a leg and do as much as you can before the tide comes in."

"I get you, but I don't," returned the blasé one, reaching toward an assortment of levers. A few seconds later a cubic yard of wet sand was dropped farther up the shingle. "I got you," he yelled above the rush of steam, "you want to *bury* her."

"No," laughed Martin. "I want to break the grip of the sand on her bottom. When the tide comes in the sand will wash back into the ditch, but some of the sand will ooze out from under the schooner."

"By gorry, it ought to—if I know anything about sand," agreed the engineer, and turned back to his task with a new interest.

In less than two hours the returning tide was swirling around the shovel. The engineer stuck to his task, finally losing his nonchalant attitude.

"I'm not a damned fool, even if you are," he shouted at last. "I'm quitting now!" He backed his ungainly machine up the beach.

Martin waded out forward, to avoid the ditch, clambered onto the forecastle by way of the cat-head and made his way aft to the poop deck. From the lazarette he brought one end of a coil of new manila rope, then stood beside the hatch and overhauled the line onto the poop. Making fast the rope to a starboard bitt, he passed it out through a chock on that side and brought it around under the stern. In all he put out four lines, then dropped from the stern into waist-deep water and pulled one line high up on the beach. He started back after the others; Ericksen proffered his assistance.

"What's the use?" said Martin. "I can't get any wetter."

About four hours later the tide was at its

height, with the surf smashing harder than usual at the schooner. The three caterpillars and the tractor, each attached to a line, were tugging frantically at the vessel's stern.

"She moved!" Martin jumped up and down on the sand in his excitement. "We've got her! We've got her!"

"He means he's got 'em," remarked the steam-shovel engineer to Erickson.

The schooner *had* moved, a few inches. The seas were striking with great force, and while the fore part of the vessel remained fixed and immovable by reason of the brace against the foremast and the weight of the ballast forward, every swell, aided by the pull of tractors, began to move the after end more or less, driving it up little by little, until at length she began to come to an even keel.

Wading and swimming, Martin made his way through the six or seven-foot depth of surf-topped water and went up hand over hand by way of the dangling stern falls which had held the ship's dinghy. To the donkey engine room he went and started a fire beneath the boiler. In an hour when steam was up, he hove in the slack of the anchor chains.

That night he slept aboard on the workbench in the donkey room. But it was only fitful snatches of slumber that he obtained. As he expressed it to himself with his favorite simile, he was as anxious as a cat in a bucket of tar. At midnight, when again it was high tide, he had the safety valve popping off and put the full head of steam into tautening the starboard cable. In all he managed to heave in a couple of fathoms, for the surf, while it could be termed moderate, smashed viciously at the schooner and loosened the grip of the sand on her keel. Martin went back to sleep. He needed it, for he was physically exhausted.

The light of day revealed the anchor chains again hanging with considerable slack from the bows; the schooner had shifted at least ten feet seaward. When high tide came again at noon he could feel the vessel occasionally grate on the sand. He hove her a score of feet seaward and was satisfied, for the fat spring tide of the season was due the following day. He went below, opened a seacock and allowed the hold to fill almost to the top of the keelson.

Ericksen, who had come aboard early in the morning, observed this and made a remark reflecting upon Martin's sanity.

"Why," said Martin, "I'm anchoring her. The vessel is afloat and she'll bump up and down on the sand to-night at high tide if she has an empty hold. I'll pump her out again with the donkey when I get ready to take her off."

In Eureka that afternoon Martin sought out a towboat captain and struck a bargain to have the *Athenian* hauled through the surf early the following afternoon. The price was only two hundred dollars—twice the rate for a regular tow, but dirt cheap, taking into consideration the extra trouble and danger of running a hawser in through the surf.

The towboat's task was even easier than Martin had dared to hope. He pumped out the hold in the morning, got rid of the port anchor by knocking out a shackle in the chain, and prepared to pick up the starboard mudhook. Deliberately sacrificing one anchor was not economy by any means, but it was safety first. Martin thought it was better thus.

Just before the tide had reached its high level Martin began heaving in on his remaining anchor. The powerful tug put a strain on its cable, and the *Athenian* slid seaward through the surf. It was almost as simple as it sounds, thanks to the thorough preparation Martin had made in advance.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the tug had brought the schooner alongside the decayed pier Martin had leased.

"Shake a leg, boys!" ordered Martin to the stevedores Ericksen had in readiness, and the lumber began to be passed over the side and into the hold.

Martin was painfully aware that his schooner lacked a rudder; he had remained aboard while it was being taken over the bar into the bay, and had cursed his lack of foresight in not rigging jury steering apparatus while the vessel was on the beach. Now, with less than fifteen days remaining in which to deliver the lumber in San Francisco—and in a badly crippled schooner, at that—he felt he could afford neither the time nor the money for necessary repairs, other than those he could make shift to improvise himself. The *Athenian* had but one good mast and the stump of another. Very well, he would sail her to San Francisco just as she stood. Elwood Page had once or twice accused Martin of loving the spectacular. Perhaps the old gentleman was right.

So while the longshoremen were pouring

lumber into the schooner's hold, Martin got busy improvising a rudder. Outboard from each quarter, in a line with the barrel of the steering wheel, he lashed and bolted horizontally the two gaffs he had used for shears in removing the ballast. At the ends of these outriggers he placed a heavy block. Then, weighting it with chains hanging in short bights, he brought the main boom astern in the water and prepared to tow it by a chain from each quarter shackled onto one end of the spar. He carefully allowed it sufficient scope for the counter to clear when the vessel pitched or ascended. At the after end of the spar, steel hawsers were made fast and led through the blocks at the ends of the outriggers to the barrel of the wheel. It was rigged so that when the wheel was turned, one part of the hawser was hove in and the other ran out. Thus the after end of the spar could be hove toward either quarter.

Five days later, Martin's battered craft was towed over Humboldt Bar. The towboat captain, after the hawser had been drooped, hung on the *Athenian's* path for several hours just to see what might happen.

From Humboldt Bar to San Francisco is two hundred and sixteen miles by sea. Martin had ten days in which to make the trip. He did it in forty-eight hours—with the northwest trade and against the prayers of Mr. Jefferson Holt, vice president of the Pacific Underwriters, who had hoped to pick a nice fat plum at the cost of exactly nothing. Mr. Holt was a good loser—sometimes. On this occasion he went out and found the best market he could for the spruce, namely, one hundred and sixty-seven dollars a thousand. This let him out with a loss of but six hundred dollars on that part of it, but the bait he had cut for Martin in the shape of a dollar a thousand bonus for each day of earlier delivery cost him sixteen hundred. That is, it would have cost him that, but Martin compromised on a thousand.

Depositing Mr. Holt's check in the bank, Martin then called upon Mr. Henry Taylor, with the intention of lifting his note.

"Your note?" repeated Mr. Taylor with well-simulated surprise. "Why, my dear young man, I have no note of yours. You must be referring to the one you gave Miss Page."

"What!" yelped Martin in much the same tone he would have used had he sat on a tack. "Say that again!"

"Certainly you gave her a note. I and my two clerks witnessed your signature. It was worded as a contract, I believe." Mr. Taylor grinned far from innocently.

Too angry for words, Martin raced out of the office. Down on Sutter Street he leaped into the first automobile he saw bearing a "For Hire" sign, and gave a Stewart Street address. Still boiling with wrath he stalked into the sanctum of Elwood Page.

"Say, how in hope did Dorothy get my note? There's something in the shape of a herring there."

"Didn't I warn you against Henry Taylor?" Elwood was enjoying himself.

"Hell! I read the contract. And I thought I was dealing with a gentleman."

"You weren't," Page smiled dryly; "you were dealing with an unscrupulous young woman. Here she comes now."

Dorothy Page breezed into the office.

"Oh, hello, Captain Martin," she cried gayly. "To-night's the night!"

"What night?"

"The night this week that you're committed to eat a real meal. Some of it is my own cooking."

"I'd like to," replied Martin, "but I——"

"You haven't a word to say about it," she interrupted. "Look at this. It's your signature—witnessed and everything." She took a sheet of legal paper from her hand bag and pointed out a paragraph.

. . . In lieu of interest on the aforementioned sum until it is repaid, the said Hugo Martin binds himself to place, when in San Francisco, one evening each week at the disposal of Miss Dorothy Page. The said Miss Page to chose the time, and the said Hugo Martin to accept her decision.

Martin's countenance turned crimson as he read the words. Deliberately, despite her gasp of protest, he tore the contract into shreds and dropped the fragments into his pocket. Then he reached over onto Elwood's desk for a pen and filled in a check.

"That lets me out," he said, "for the money is now repaid—with the interest I agreed to pay." He smiled at her. "Just to show you I'm a good sport I'll be glad to accept your invitation, anyhow."

"I withdraw it! Don't you dare to come!" she flared angrily with a stamp of her foot. Then with what looked dangerously like tears she fled from the office.

"You should worry," grinned Page. "Come anyway. *I'm* inviting you!"

The Red Hair

By Charles Somerville

Author of "The Khalifa of Tangier," Etc.

A murder mystery of the deepest dye. John Stuyvesant van Alstyne is killed in his library at midnight. There seems to be no reason on the surface for the deed, but in the immediate probing of the case a number of startling motives are disclosed. It brings out several of those carefully guarded "inner lives" which all of us carry around

IT was an hour past midnight of May 23, 19—, when John Stuyvesant van Alstyne, famous lawyer and diplomat, noted litterateur and thoroughbred New Yorker, a descendant of its Dutch Colonials, was murdered in the library of his fine, old-fashioned home in Washington Square, North.

A few seconds before the moment of the actual commission of the crime his wife in their bedchamber directly over the library, awakened. No sound caused it. But, somehow, even in sleep her mind had been stirred by a realization of the unusual, of an abruptly broken bond of habitual companionship, and she found herself sitting up in bed, perplexed, her eyes blinking in the darkness.

On the same instant she heard the shot that killed her husband. It was a balmy night, the bedchamber windows were open wide and the pistol's report echoing across the square, sounded like the shooting was outside in the park itself. But this first flashing impression which came to Mrs. van Alstyne was immediately, alarmingly corrected by the tinkling of breaking falling glass in the library of her home. The sound came faintly through the thick walls and ceiling of the sturdy old house. But none the less definitely. There followed the thud of a heavy body's fall. From Fifth Avenue was interpolated the blatant honking of a motor horn.

Mrs. van Alstyne seized the chain of the night light above her pillow and illuminated the room. She saw the expected—her husband's bed adjoining vacant. She arose, fearsome speculation in her eyes, quickly found and adjusted a house robe and slippers and left the room swiftly. At the stairway landing she touched a button and lights flared in the broad hallway below.

She saw Felton, the butler, in shirt sleeves, slippers, and his white and black livery waistcoat, already there. At her elbow, arriving silently also in slippered feet, Ormsby, the second man, appeared.

"Did you hear—the shot?" she asked, descending.

"Yes, madam. I 'adn't gone to bed. I was downstairs 'avin' a bit of a smoke when the——"

Mrs. van Alstyne passed the butler and went resolutely to the library door.

"John!" she called. "John, what has happened?"

She threw the door open boldly. She peered into the room. Dark-gray silken curtains draped the full length of the tall French windows blocking out the lights of the square. The room was completely in concealment.

"It is I, mother."

The responding voice was that of her eighteen-year-old son, John van Alstyne, fifth. But its lately acquired timbre of manhood had gone back to boyish treble and was tremulous.

"I've stumbled over something in the dark. Ugh!"

The tapering fingers of Mrs. van Alstyne, shaking now, felt along the wall for the light switch, found and operated it. She turned to see. Her stately figure straightened against the wall. Her large gray eyes enveloped the spectacle in a wide stare of horror.

Felton, the butler, in the doorway tensely whispered:

"Good God!"

One of the maids among the servants crowding and peering over his shoulder suddenly screamed, turned and fled upstairs, repeating her cries weirdly as she went.

Van Alstyne, the elder, lay face down-

ward at full length on the floor. A checkered black and brown dressing gown enveloped his long, stalwart body.

His slippered feet were almost touching a small, squat safe of obsolete make that stood against the wall, its door flung wide, its drawers and compartments pulled out but neatly stacked on the floor. But there was a mound of papers in confusion near them.

The famous lawyer's head with its heavy thatch of white hair lay infolded in the crook of his left arm. The wide sleeves of dressing gown and pajama coat were drawn back, his wrist bared and over it splayed the heavy forelocks of his white hair vividly stained crimson. The hand was tightly clenched. His right arm was thrown straight out from his side. A pistol was firmly in his hand. It pointed in the direction of the library table. The green shade of a bronze-based reading lamp had been shattered. Beyond in a far corner of the room the pane in a bookcase door had likewise been demolished and a bullet had ripped through the back of a red morocco-leather-bound book.

Young Van Alstyne, his tall, slender figure quaking, his good-looking, delicately featured, very boyish countenance a white mask of fear and revulsion, stood looking fixedly down at his father. A soft black hat was awry on the back of his head. A disorder of black curly hair showed on his pallid forehead. There was an ugly red dab on the soft, pleated silk shirt front that his dinner coat exposed. He began groping with his right hand for the support of the table, and they saw that the fingers of this hand were reddened. A mouse-colored motor coat was on the floor several feet away, flung into a heap.

Between him and his father there lay on the floor an old, cavalry saber, the blade encrimsoned halfway to the hilt. Near by was its scabbard.

The boy moved confusedly away from the table. In doing so he disclosed to the others that his body had hidden a leather-bound, steel-lined box. Its cover had been opened.

Felton took a hesitant step forward, but his eyes were sharp and glaringly upon the young man.

"God Almighty, Master Jack, what have you done?" he demanded.

The boy paid him no attention. Instead, he moved impulsively forward, knelt by the body, raised the wounded head and bent his own closely to it.

"Dad," he began softly, then loudly: "Dad! Speak to me, dad!"

In the pause, Mrs. van Alstyne stepped quickly toward her husband and son. But the youth looked up and said:

"Mother—he isn't breathing. He's dead!"

"However did it come to happen, Master Jack—such a terrible thing?" the butler persisted.

Young Van Alstyne arose and allowed a bewildered glance to rest on Felton.

"However did it come to happen?"

The boy shuddered. "Do you suppose I know? I fell over his body in the dark. I'd just stolen in through the window——"

"Through the window?" his mother asked wonderingly.

He nodded and offered no further explanation for there sounded a prolonged, peremptory ringing of the doorbell. The butler, waving the other servants impatiently aside, answered it. He returned with Policeman John O'Mara. The white mustached, veteran official was red-faced and panting.

"I heard the shot when I was pretty near at the other end of my beat," he said. "What's the——"

Then he saw the body. He stepped forward, bent and peered.

He stepped back, bared his head, and whispered:

"Heaven help us, it's Mr. van Alstyne himself!"

O'Mara stood appalled that the murder of so prominent a personage should have occurred on his beat and, moreover, genuinely aggrieved. He had known the lawyer for many years. There came a sudden remembrance of the "dude kid" from Washington Square who used to escape from his tutors to fraternize with the "tough kids" of the Greenwich Village tenements, and who had succeeded with the easy democracy of the thoroughbred in being accepted to full and regular membership with the gang. Many a night, as the distinguished lawyer and diplomat of international renown, he had still time to stop for a laughing chat with O'Mara over the good old times the "gang" used to have, its most memorable pranks and deviltries.

But, then, the policeman bethought himself of his present duty and looked around the room for a telephone. He saw one on top of a bookcase and moved toward it, but

halted and in common with all the others, stared at one of the long French windows. Its panels had been thrust open and there stepped into the room from the balcony, a well-dressed, red-haired, sharp-featured, compactly built man in the late thirties one would adjudge.

O'Mara stiffened and saluted.

"Good evenin', Captain Belcher."

Belcher nodded. His gray-green, swift, intelligent eyes worked rapidly over all the details in the handsome room eloquent in its furnishings of books and statuary, its curios and paintings of the affluent and cultured character of its owner, the dead man on the floor.

Belcher bowed shortly, courteously toward Mrs. van Alstyne.

"I hope I did not startle you, madam, coming through the window. But I didn't want to be delayed waiting at the door. It is important always to get to a scene like this as quickly as possible."

He looked sharply at O'Mara and the butler.

"I hope nothing has been touched or disturbed?"

They started to give him assurances that nothing had, but in the very moment, Ormsby, the second man, apparently obeying his servant's instinct had moved into the room, picked up young Van Alstyne's motor coat from the floor, held it up and was patting out its wrinkled condition preparatory to folding. He stopped confused as Belcher snatched the garment from him.

"Get back to that doorway. Leave things alone—absolutely alone," he snapped. He held the coat for a moment and then dropped it to the floor and knelt to readjust it in a disorder similar to that in which it had lain. Ormsby soft-treaded hastily back to the servants still grouped, keenly curious, in the doorway.

Then carefully skirting the bloody saber and its scabbard and walking around the far end of the library table, the captain made his way to the telephone. He called headquarters.

"Detective bureau. Captain Belcher. That you, chief? Murder—John Stuyvesant van Alstyne—yes, Van Alstyne. Looks as though he came on a yegg robbing his safe. He shot at his man but didn't get him. The murderer grabbed down an old army saber from the wall over the safe and fractured his skull. That's all I know. Was directing a card-room raid on the other side of the square—Woptown. Just started home across the square and heard the shot. Saw the lights go up in the Van Alstyne house and came right over. Want me to take charge? All right. Found Policeman O'Mara on the job when I got here. Notify who? Oh, yes, Redburn. That's so. He lives right near here, at that."

Belcher put up the receiver.

The lips of Mrs. van Alstyne as she sat rigidly erect in the armchair, moved with effort.

"I would like to have Mr. Redburn sent for," she said. "He and Mr. van Alstyne are"—her eyes suddenly wavered painfully—"were intimate friends."

"Certainly, Mrs. van Alstyne," said Belcher. "In any event he would be sent for. He directs investigations in—in cases like this for the district attorney's office. O'Mara, get Mr. Redburn's home telephone number and tell him what's happened."

But it proved unnecessary for the doorbell rang at this time and, when the butler returned, it was with Assistant District Attorney James Redburn following. The hall boy in his apartment house on the west side of the square had apprized him of an unusual occurrence in the Van Alstyne house.

Redburn, a Southerner, thirty-five years of age, had, nevertheless, already won a reputation as one of the most brilliant prosecutors New York had ever known. Tall, gaunt, black-haired, the rugged outlines of forehead, nose, mouth, and jaw were the more individually marked by black eyebrows describing a surprising height in their arch, coming down sharply to the bridge of his nose. These framed black eyes of a manifest great intelligence. His habitual manner was a suavity of eye, smile, and gesture. But on occasion, as many a defendant in important criminal trials had come to know, this suavity could completely disappear and under the intense ferocity of his skilled questioning many a dishonest witness or criminal who had essayed an insouciant or nonchalant attitude toward what he mistook to be an "easy lawyer," found himself beaten down, cringing, hopelessly entrapped before he slunk off the stand.

Redburn stopped, startled and shocked, at the sight of his friend's body. Then he saw Mrs. van Alstyne and her son. He went quickly over to them.

"There's nothing one can say of possible

comfort in a situation like this, Mrs. van Alstyne," he said. "But I will take charge of matters here, and you may be sure I will do my utmost to bring the assassin of my good friend to justice."

He put out his hand toward young Van Alstyne. Both stared simultaneously at the lad's red-stained fingers.

"Jack, my boy, not—but, perhaps, you had better not say——"

"Why, I loved my father dearly, Mr. Redburn," protested the boy.

Redburn flashed a quick, searching glance at the youth, then walked to the swivel chair at the library table, seated himself and scanned the faces of all in the room, slowly, deliberately.

"Nobody will leave without my permission," he said. "Now who first came upon the body of Mr. van Alstyne—who discovered the murder?"

Felton spoke up promptly: "Master Jack did, sir."

"Is that correct?" Redburn asked the boy.

"Yes, sir. I fell over his body in the dark."

"What caused you to enter the room? Did you hear a shot?"

"No, sir. That is I heard the shot, but I thought at the time it was just the bursting of an auto tire. I had just left some friends in a car at the corner of Fifth Avenue and came into the house through that window——"

"Through the window?" demanded Redburn.

"Yes, sir."

"But wasn't the window locked at that hour, one o'clock in the morning?"

"No."

"If I may speak, sir," interposed Felton.

"If it has anything to do with the window."

"Yes, sir. I don't like to put myself forward. I don't like to interrupt, but in a terrible thing like this I suppose it is only right to tell everything. I'm most fond of Master Jack and——"

"Never mind about Master Jack. What is it?"

Young Van Alstyne glanced quickly, angrily at Felton. But the butler's own little, black eyes wore their professional, expressionless aspect. Patches of color, however, had come into the cheeks of his otherwise pasty fat face. He ran the tip of his tongue along his thin lips under the sharply pointed, uptilted nose above a long upper lip. Redburn looked Felton over thoughtfully. The man was evidently holding himself hard under great excitement. Was it merely that of a servant, carried away by the sensationalism of the tragic event, indulging this opportunity which brought him forward importantly where his usual function was studiously to move in the background? Had he animosity toward the boy? Or was he honestly outraged in feeling by the terrible end of his master and simply sincerely, earnestly trying to help?

"Master Jack——" began the butler.

But the youth cut in sharply.

"I think I know what Felton wants to say, Mr. Redburn," said Van Alstyne. "It's about my coming in that way through the window late at night."

"Master Jack asked me to leave the window open for him to-night," said the butler incisively.

"Tipped you a dollar to get you to do it," added the youth. "Father has been angry with me for a long time, Mr. Redburn, about keeping late hours. He took away my latchkey this morning and warned me that I must be home at eleven. I had a date with some other boys and knew I'd be home late. I knew it would be later than eleven. I didn't want to ring the doorbell and arouse father because I knew there'd be a scene. So I asked Felton to leave the latch off that window," he pointed toward the one through which Captain Belcher had made his entrance. "I hoped to get in and up to my room without father hearing me."

"Is that what you were going to say, Felton?"

"Yes, sir. Not, of course, as how I think that——"

"Never mind what you think just now. Jack," continued Redburn kindly but crisply, "I'll have to ask you to give a strict account of your movements to-night."

The boy signified the presence of his mother with a movement of his head.

"I'd rather—rather——"

"It is necessary for you to speak. I must, however, warn you that anything you say may be used against you and you have the right to refuse to answer any questions I may put. But my own advice is that you answer frankly, my boy."

"Yes, sir. I took dinner at home and went to a theater with some frat friends—I

can give you all their names. Then we had a late supper at the Regal."

"Did you come directly home from the Regal?"

"No."

"Where were you meanwhile?"

Young Van Alstyne brushed the tangle of black curly hair back from his white forehead, frowned, then squared his shoulders and said:

"At Breen's."

"Gambling resort?"

"Yes."

"Did you play?"

"Roulette."

"Lose or win?"

"Lost."

"Much?"

"I didn't have much cash, sir. But—but I gave my I O U."

"For how much?"

"Three hundred."

"Have you been going to Breen's before this?"

"Er—yes, Mr. Redburn. A good many times."

"Been losing right along?"

"Yes."

"Has Breen any other of your I O U's?"

"Yes, sir."

"How deeply are you in?"

"Close to a thousand dollars, Mr. Redburn."

"Did your father know of this?"

"He knew I'd been going to Breen's—some club friend saw me there losing heavily and told him. But he didn't know I'd signed anything."

Here Felton took a step forward, lifted his heavy face as if about to speak, appeared to reconsider, and stepped back again.

"Well?" demanded Redburn. "Were you going to say something?"

"Er—well, I really rather not, sir."

"It isn't a matter of choice in a case like this. If you know anything further to throw light on this crime, it is your duty to speak."

"Yes, sir; that's what my conscience has been telling me, Mr. Redburn. But to say anything that would be against Master Jack is——"

"That has nothing to do with it. We are losing time. What had you in mind to say?"

Felton cleared his throat. He kept his eyes away from young Van Alstyne and the boy's mother. They fixed themselves glassily on the rugged countenance of the assistant district attorney.

"Well, sir, I'm afraid it's true that Master Jack and his father had a quarrel—a very bitter quarrel this morning, sir. It was at the breakfast table. Mr. van Alstyne said he meant to cut off Master Jack's allowance entirely if he didn't change his ways, said he simply wouldn't tolerate the boy's profligacy any further, sir. But—er—perhaps——"

"Go on."

"He told Master Jack that if he found he had been bandying his name around in gambling houses, he'd disinherit him flat, sir. He said he meant to find out. Then Master Jack—I'm afraid ill-advisedly, sir—finally pleaded with his father to let him have a few hundred, promising to do better and his father fairly shouted, Mr. Redburn, that he had ten thousand dollars in cash right out in the private safe, but he would not give him a penny of it, nor would he ever give him another dollar until he had shown he could conduct himself with self-control and like a gentleman, sir. But I'd rather have Master Jack tell it himself, sir. He will not deny it, I am sure. Mrs. van Alstyne was also there. And I think Ormsby overheard the conversation from the butler's pantry. Mr. van Alstyne was excited and raised his voice considerably, Mr. Redburn."

Jack van Alstyne backed hurriedly to Mrs. van Alstyne's chair and put an arm around her shoulder.

"You needn't ask mother about it, Mr. Redburn," he said quickly. "It's quite true—quite as Felton says. I wouldn't have concealed it. Nor would mother. Yes, we quarreled bitterly. I'll admit, too, that I was feeling desperate to-night when I left Breen's—not knowing how I was to make good those I O U's, knowing that Breen would certainly dun father for them. I'd have told you quite frankly," the youth concluded. A wavering of nervousness was plainly in his voice.

"Was that safe locked to-night when Mr. van Alstyne retired—does anybody here know?"

"Yes," said Felton. "I brought Mr. van Alstyne a brandy-and-soda at eleven——"

"Two hours before the murder?"

"Precisely, sir. He was in the act of locking the safe at that time, sir."

"Do you know the combination of the safe?"

"Me? Oh, no, sir!"

"Do you know who beside Mr. van Alstyne did?"

"Mrs. van Alstyne, I'm quite sure, sir, and I think Master——"

"Jack?" Redburn turned toward the boy.

"Yes, sir. Father told me the combination some time back. I had some valuable medals—athletic trophies, and kept them in the safe."

"Only your father, mother, and yourself knew this combination."

"Why, yes, Mr. Redburn," said the youth with anxious eyes.

"Jack," said the assistant district attorney not unkindly, "is there anything else you want to say? Have you told everything—everything you know of your father's death and about the strained relations between you and him? Everything?"

"Yes."

"Did you know where in the safe your father was in the habit of keeping sums of cash?"

"In that steel, leather-bound box," said the boy, pointing to the object on the table.

"Just hand me that box, young man," interjected Captain Belcher suddenly.

Harry put out his right, blood-stained hand, but shuddered and drew it back.

"Never mind," said Belcher, and reached for the box himself. He fell to examining it closely, then scanned the table and picked up a sturdy, copper paper knife. He brought out a magnifying glass such as jewelers use, screwed it into the socket of an eye, and examined the box and paper knife minutely.

"Jack," said Redburn. "I'll have to ask you to submit to being searched."

The boy gulped.

"Very well, Mr. Redburn."

"Belcher, will you kindly attend to that."

"Certainly," said the police captain. He put down the box and paper knife, slipped the magnifying glass back into his pocket, and telling young Van Alstyne to raise his arms, felt carefully into all his pockets and generally around his person. He brought out a cardcase, a few letters which he signified with a nod to Redburn were valueless, and then held up the youth's platinum watchchain with only a key dangling on the end of it.

"Where's your watch, Jack?" asked Redburn.

"I pawned it this morning."

"To get money to gamble with?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right," observed Belcher. "Here's the ticket."

Belcher walked behind the table and laid all the small articles he had removed from Van Alstyne's pocket in front of the other official.

"That your overcoat on the floor?" Redburn asked the young man.

"Yes, sir."

"Please examine that, Belcher."

The captain caught the coat up by the collar with his right hand and put the left into a side pocket. It came out empty. He switched the coat about and put his hand into the other pocket. He turned a significant glance toward Redburn and then produced to view a flat packet of yellow bills, bound across the middle with a strip of paper.

"Marked 'Ten thousand dollars'—one-hundred-dollar bills," he reported concisely.

"Why—why——" Young Van Alstyne's eyes were glaring, his lips distorted. When he spoke it was almost in a scream. "I never put that money there!" he protested. "I never had my hands on that money. I never saw that money. I tell you, Mr. Redburn, all these circumstances against me lie! They lie! Somebody put that money in there." He looked wildly at Felton. Then at the others in the room. "What are you all trying to do? Prove that I am my father's murderer?" He made great effort to speak calmly, but his voice rose to an hysterical cry. "Oh, I can see it all—all plainly enough! I've gambled, gone into debt, given my I O U's, been foolish, wild, reckless; my father refuses me money, threatens to disinherit me—if he discovers my gambling debts he will disinherit me; I know he has ten thousand dollars in cash in his safe, only my father, my mother, and myself know the combination; I'm discovered at midnight in the act of robbing the safe, I kill my father; steal the money, and the money is found in my pocket!"

He paused, caught his breath, and looked dully at the floor.

"Yes," the boy said; "I've heard of men who—who were put to death for crimes they never committed, men punished for things they did not do. Why, they'll believe it—they'll believe it. Everybody will believe I killed my father!" He wheeled on Redburn and shouted fiercely: "I tell you all

these circumstances lie! I did not kill my father! Mr. Redburn—you say you were my father's friend—what are you trying to do? Make a boy pay for a few boy's sins by putting him into the electric chair?"

Mrs. van Alstyne had arisen and her son turned toward her.

"Mother," he cried, "why do you stare at me like that? Do you—*you* believe it? I'm innocent, mother. If my father could speak he would tell you I am innocent."

He went on his knees beside the arm-chair and sobbed.

Mrs. van Alstyne resumed her seat and placed a calming hand upon his head.

"Mr. Redburn," she asked steadily, stoically, "do you believe my son killed his father?"

"Mrs. van Alstyne, I have formed no conviction. But the facts so far brought forth are ugly. You will understand I am only doing my sworn duty as a public officer in searching all the facts out. I beg you no longer remain through such an ordeal."

She looked at her son, however, and said:

"If you do not object, Mr. Redburn, I will remain."

The assistant district attorney bowed.

"Felton," he said, "how long have you been employed here?"

"Five years?"

"Your relations with your employer were good?"

"Of the best, sir. Never a cross word from him, sir."

"How is it that at one o'clock in the morning you had not yet retired?"

"On account of leaving the library window open, sir. I was worried about that and decided to sit up until Master Jack came home. But I dozed off. The pistol shot woke me up."

"I see."

"Belcher," said Redburn, drawing a writing pad toward himself as he sat at the table and taking up a pen, "I think it just as well to put the butler's statements in affidavit form immediately. Have you any further questions to suggest?"

"Not at present, Mr. Redburn. While you are drawing up the affidavit I'll just look things over."

"Certainly. Of course, I need not caution you not to disturb anything pending the arrival of the medical examiner."

"Of course not."

Belcher had been careful to replace the box and copper paper knife in precisely the position among the tumbled papers where it stood when he first entered the room. He again examined these articles under his glass, again replaced them with scrupulous exactitude, and then moved over toward the sheet-covered body. He was remarkable in that as he went about scrutinizing the room, he bore neither resemblance to the lean, pantherlike, beak-nosed detective of fiction, nor yet the thick-necked, burly, broad-footed police detective of real life.

There was no mark of the "cop" on him whatsoever. He had the shoulders and well-set figure of a military man. He was very well dressed, if anything, perhaps somewhat foppishly in a snug black-and-white striped suit, tan shoes, glove-fitting and displaying a rather small, well-turned foot. He carried a dark-gray Fedora hat and gray suede gloves in a hand wearing a heavy ring in which flickered three diamonds. A pearl of price in a simple platinum setting showed on his dark-blue costly silken scarf. His wavy, vivid red hair was abundant. He ran his fingers through it frequently without seriously disarranging it. He was smooth shaven, his features sharply defined, a wide but thin-lipped, tightly set mouth, an aggressive, acquiline nose, and rather large gray-green eyes whose lids had a tendency to draw half closed, frequently a habit in a man of speculative mind. Were he to be put forward for your deduction as to his probable occupation, you might have guessed him to be a successful broker or hotel manager or a theatrical manager of the better class. You would never have suspected his real occupation. An explanation lay in his appearance for his really many successes as a detective and for his present prominent position in the department. Newspaper talk had already slated him for an inspectorship.

Only once after examining the box and paper knife, did he touch another object in the room of tragedy. This was when he knelt, drew back the sheet which Redburn had ordered as a cover for the body from the head of the dead man and glanced a few seconds at the wound. He lowered the head, drew the sheet over it once more and arose. He was calm, even apparently indifferent. It was to be reasoned, however, that the sight of victims of death by violence was a commonplace in Captain Belcher's experience. Finally, his attention

was wholly absorbed in the bloody sword and its scabbard. He did not touch these things, but simply stood contemplating them with his trick of drawing his eyelids half shut.

Meanwhile, Assistant District Attorney Redburn finished the writing of the butler's affidavit, a sequential arrangement of the statements he had made regarding his knowledge of the estrangement of young Van Alstyne and his parent, the request the boy had made to have the window casement left open, the fact of his knowledge that his father had ten thousand dollars in cash in the safe, that young Van Alstyne knew the combination and that under the eyes of Felton there had been found by Captain Belcher a packet of ten thousand dollars in one-hundred-dollar notes in the youth's overcoat pocket. The statement was read to Felton who promptly, somewhat excitedly made oath to it, Redburn acting in the capacity of notary public, and signed it.

"I think you said that Ormsby overheard the breakfast conversation from the butler's pantry?"

"He must 'ave," said Felton.

"Ormsby!" called the assistant district attorney, "come here, if you please."

Ormsby obeyed but hesitantly. He was a slight, small man with grizzled hair cut close above a gaunt forehead. Heavy black eyebrows completely overshadowed deep-set, restless blue eyes. His nose was short, thin, and sharp, his mouth rather large and thin-lipped, but there was a surprising squareness of jaw and strength denoted by a thick, muscular neck on so slight a frame.

"You heard Felton's statement as to the conversation at the breakfast table between Mr. van Alstyne and his son? Did you overhear such a conversation from the butler's pantry yourself?"

"Hardly all that Mr. Felton spoke about."

"Well, give me your full name. I desire to set down in affidavit form whatever you may say."

"James Alfred Ormsby."

"How long have you been in Mr. van Alstyne's employ?"

"Two months."

"What part of the breakfast conversation did you hear?"

"I heard Mr. van Alstyne threatening to disinherit the boy if he found he'd been bandying his name on paper around gambling houses."

"Is that all?"

"Er—all that I can remember, sir."

"Didn't you hear Mr. van Alstyne make mention that he had ten thousand dollars in the safe in the library, but wouldn't give Master Jack a penny of it?"

"No, sir. I must have gone below to the kitchen before that was said."

"You were not curious to remain and hear the entire quarrel?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"In my room on the fourth floor."

"The shot down in the library was sufficiently loud to arouse you up there?"

"It awakened everybody, sir. On account of the open library window I suppose, sir. It sounded very loudly as if it was outside. We thought there had been a shooting in the square. I slipped into my trousers and slippers, and came downstairs because I heard Mrs. van Alstyne come out of her room and switch on the lights, and thought she might be alarmed. I did not hear the breaking of the lamp shade or library panel; no, sir."

Captain Belcher sauntered over to the table as this examination was going on and remained there while Redburn drew up the statement and Ormsby swore to it. Then Redburn arose and handed the pen to Ormsby, nodding to him to take a seat in the chair and sign the paper.

As Ormsby finished slowly writing his name at the bottom of the sheet, Captain Belcher suddenly leaned over the man's back, caught him by the wrist, and clasped a handcuff around it, drew the other wrist into position with a swift, forcible jerk, and snapped the other steel link upon it.

"That's your man," he said in matter-of-fact tones to Redburn. "He did the killing."

"How do you know?"

"He's left-handed. You noticed he took the pen in his left hand, wrote with his left hand?"

"Well?"

"A left-handed man committed the murder."

Ormsby had said nothing. His eyes under their heavy black eyebrows were flaming. But his face had gone sickeningly white, his lips were parted, drooping in an expression of despair.

"Where do you get your proof for the accusation?" asked Redburn eagerly.

"It's sticking out all over the room," said Belcher quietly, waving his hand toward the safe, the box, the sword and scabbard and the corpse. "This fellow's a new one on me, though. Can't have been in this country very long. English inside worker who slipped past Ellis Island, I figure. But they may know him. Just a minute."

He seized Ormsby's left wrist ruthlessly, drew up the hand, then slipped his grip to the man's thumb. With his other hand he drew a slender, plain silver cigarette case from his pocket, laid it on the table, and then with a handkerchief polished off the surface. He bent over Ormsby's thumb and breathed on it hard. With a sudden motion he jammed the thumb down upon the smooth silver of the cigarette case.

"O'Mara," he said, "get out your torch and light me up here."

O'Mara put a steady glare on the cigarette case from his pocket lamp while Belcher bent over it, his magnifying glass screwed to his eye.

"All right," he said a few seconds later, dropped Ormsby's hand, and went to the telephone.

The huddled, miserable, handcuffed man was forgotten. Young Van Alstyne on his feet again and standing back of his mother's chair, Mrs. van Alstyne, Redburn, Felton, and the other servants had eyes only for the police captain.

He called up headquarters and asked for connection with the identification bureau.

"Belcher calling from 90862 Chelsea. Take that number please. Look up thumb print—I should say classification B. Straight line running within a loop in center, third ridge forked, seventh ridge double-forked. Give me a come-back soon as you can. Thanks."

"Now, captain, if you wouldn't mind ——" began the assistant district attorney.

"Certainly," said Belcher. "We'll just go over the ground together. Suppose you take a look at that money box and copper paper cutter first. Here, Mr. Redburn, use my glass. You'll see from the scratches on the knife it was undoubtedly used in prying open the box. And now look at the scratches at the lid of the box. From left to right—in other words, opened by a left-handed man."

Redburn nodded that the marks existed and were convincing.

"What happened as I figure it," continued Belcher, "was this fellow had just got the box open, working in the dark, of course, when Mr. van Alstyne, whatever the noise or sound was that had alarmed him, entered the room. Of course, you've noticed the old swords and blunderbusses on the wall over the safe. Our man, even if he had a pistol, wouldn't want to use it. It would mean an instant alarm. So he went after one of the swords from the wall. Mr. van Alstyne, of course, made straight for him. He backed away to get a free swing with the sword. They faced each other squarely. Mr. van Alstyne brought up to his pistol to use it. But Ormsby was too quick for him. He clove his skull in. The pistol was discharged by the involuntary, convulsive movement of Mr. van Alstyne's hand as his arm dropped. You will notice that it first struck the shade of the lamp on the table and finally imbedded itself in the back of a book on the lowest shelf of the bookcase. The pistol was aimed downward when the cartridge was discharged.

"O'Mara, give Mr. Redburn your lamp. Come over here to the body—careful you don't step on that sword and scabbard. Examine the wound. It slants decisively from right to left on Mr. van Alstyne's forehead. It is the positive slant the wound would take from a sword wielded by a left-handed man standing face to face with his victim when the blow was delivered."

Redburn flashed the light on the head of the murdered lawyer, parted the heavy, white locks and saw that Belcher had described the wound correctly. After he had lowered the head, he lingered studying the position of the dead man's arm, took up the hand, and partly opened the still flaccid fingers. Then he arose and asked O'Mara to remove the white covering. He bent again and examined the figure.

"Of course, the sound of the shot, especially as it rang out so loudly in the square," resumed Belcher, "gave him little time in which to escape. In his haste, he left the sword and scabbard to present absolute proof that the crime was the deed of a left-handed man. Such a blow as Mr. van Alstyne was struck would cause him to fall forward. The men were facing each other. Look where the sword is—on the left hand of a man so facing Mr. van Alstyne, the scabbard on the right.

"He got the money. But there is the

alarming shot. Of course, for Ormsby to run away from the house would be a confession. Besides, of course, he had sneaked down to the library in the very rubber-soled felt house slippers he has on. He can move silently. As a matter of fact, where do you find him? He's at Mrs. van Alstyne's back at the moment she arrives at the stairway landing on the first floor. He's the first of any of the servants to come downstairs from their fourth-floor quarters. Of course, he didn't come downstairs at all. He dashed up to the second floor and hid in the darkness. He did not dare go all the way to the fourth floor for fear of meeting the alarmed servants starting down."

"Felton was pretty anxious to throw suspicion on young Jack," observed Redburn.

"Yes, and for a little while I thought he was covering himself. Then I thought he might be trying to cover this bird and was in on the deal with him. But I guess not. He'd not be admitting he was still out of bed when the murder happened if he was mixed in it. No, this Ormsby did the trick alone. I'd pick him out for a crook anywhere, although he's got it on me. I don't think I ever saw him before."

"But the money, Belcher—found in young van Alstyne's clothes?"

"I was getting to that, Mr. Redburn. When I first came in through the window—just when I warned them all to let everything alone, this fellow was in the act of picking up young Van Alstyne's overcoat from the floor as if to smooth it out and fold it. I took it away from him. But not before he had succeeded in planting the money there. He knew with the police on the job so soon, there'd be no chance to get away with it—he knew that everything and everybody would be searched. He had no chance to hide it anyway. Why, Mr. Redburn, the money itself proves that young Van Alstyne couldn't have put it there!"

"I'd be obliged for the explanation, captain. I'm beginning to see where you got your reputation as the star detective of the bureau."

"That's coming it pretty strong," said Belcher, but smiling with gratification in spite of himself. "It's a fact that the physical proof exists that it couldn't have been young Van Alstyne who put that money where it was found in his own overcoat pocket. Look at the young man. He says he stumbled over his father's body in the dark. Were you wearing your overcoat when you came in, young man?"

"No, it was on my arm."

Belcher nodded.

"The young chap has blood on his shirt front and blood on his right hand. Suppose he did the killing and got the blood on his shirt front that way. If he was wearing his overcoat there must have been stains on that too. Say he did the killing but wasn't wearing his overcoat as he says but had tossed it on the floor while he worked at the box before his father came into the room. What would have happened when he put the money into his overcoat pocket. If he used his right hand holding the money as he slipped it into his pocket the money and the pocket would be stained. You've got the money, Mr. Redburn. Look at it."

The lawyer examined the packet closely.

"There is not the slightest bloodmark or any stain for that matter on it." he said. "Hold up your left hand, Jack."

The youth did so.

"That hand, however, Belcher, isn't stained, either."

"Of course, the boy might have been wise enough to use the unstained hand to shove the money into his coat pocket without touching the coat. But hardly. Not an excitable boy like that working in the dark. He'd do the natural, involuntary, automatic thing—feel out the collar of the coat and pick it up so he'd know the direction of the pocket. If he used the clean hand for the money, he'd have used the bloody hand in holding up the coat. There are no bloodstains on the collar of that coat or anywhere else, Mr. Redburn. And there are no stains on the money.

"Why, this fellow knew of the quarrel of the boy and his father and that it was about gambling and money. He figured on suspicion falling on the lad. And planting this money in his pocket was a clincher."

"That's a lie!"

It was the first time Ormsby had spoken. His black eyebrows were twitching, his eyes glittering, his mouth snarling.

"What you are trying to do," he continued, "is to railroad me to save this rich kid. I never——"

The incisive rattle of the telephone bell cut Ormsby short.

"Hello, yes. Captain Belcher, Lieutenant Gray. Good. Shoot!"

The detective listened, and, as he did so,

looked over his shoulder at the manacled Ormsby, gazed directly into the deep-set eyes with his own keen, gray-green eyes. And Ormsby's face became leaden in its pallor. He closed his eyes. His head dropped. He uttered a single, moaning sob, nerve-racking to hear.

Holding his eyes on Ormsby, Belcher said, the receiver still at his ear:

"English Larry, alias John Morris, alias Wilbur Green, alias Don O'Neil. Got a new moniker now, eh, Ormsby? Three terms for safe robbery in England. My word, Ormsby, old boy! What's his method, Gray, does he crack 'em. No? Touch system. So? Thanks. Been in the house two months, eh, Ormsby? Guess it wouldn't take you two minutes to feel out the combination of the lock of that forty-year-old baby of a safe over there. Why the cogs must have clanked when it came to the work sockets of the combination. Maybe that was the noise woke Mr. van Alstyne up!"

Slipping the receiver on its hook, the captain turned to look for Redburn, triumph in his eye.

But Redburn, he saw, had been paying no attention to the telephone conversation. The loose-jointed, gaunt figure of the assistant district attorney was kneeling beside the body of John Stuyvesant van Alstyne from which the white shroud had again been removed. Twice he bent very low and turned his head sidewise as if he were closely scanning the surface of the thick, heavy green plush carpet which covered the entire floor of the library.

Belcher moved over beside him as Redburn arose.

"What is so interesting?" he asked.

"Well—I don't exactly know yet whether its interesting or not. But it may strengthen your case. Got your pistol with you?"

"Yes."

"Let me take it a minute, Belcher."

The detective removed the weapon from the holster slung under his coat, beneath his left arm and handed it to the other official.

"It's loaded, you know," he said as the other took it.

"Right. I'll be careful," Redburn answered.

Then he walked to the library door and turned and came forward from the threshold as one entering the room. He held the pistol in his right hand and made his way along the west wall of the room toward the electric light switch about three paces from the door. Using his left hand to touch the switch he was for an instant with his back half turned, then he moved slowly around to the right and stood facing the room at right angles to the body of Van Alstyne. He slipped the pistol into a side pocket of his coat, knelt and examined the carpet again closely, this time in front of the safe and from thence to the south wall. When he got up he studied the racks of swords and old-fashioned firearms extending from the top of the safe to the ceiling. Then he looked behind the safe.

Belcher, watching, his eyes puzzled, asked:

"What's the idea?"

"You're wrong, captain. A left-handed man did not commit this crime."

"What?"

"A somewhat closer study than you appear to have made shows exactly what happened."

"I'm listening," said Belcher with stressed politeness.

"Mr. van Alstyne entered the room in darkness. Those heavy gray silk curtains would shut out all light from the square. The room would be nearly pitch dark. Is not that the way you found the room on entering to-night, Mrs. van Alstyne?"

"Yes, Mr. Redburn," she answered.

"Naturally, the man robbing the safe was as cautious as he could be. The noise which aroused Mr. van Alstyne could not have been a loud one. There had been probably several slight, merely suspicious sounds. Mr. van Alstyne probably wasn't altogether sure he would find anybody here. But entering the library, he thought the safest method would be to reach the switch, suddenly flood the room with light, and use his pistol on the intruder more quickly than the intruder could use a weapon on him.

"But the thief in the library may have heard him stirring in his room overhead—Felton tells me the bedchamber is directly over this room. Or as he came down the stairs. In any event the thief had no chance to escape from the house. From outside, it is brilliantly lighted. A man running out there in streets nearly vacant of people at that hour would be easily marked. There are special policemen from the private detective agencies on every block. If he attempted to escape the house he would have Mr. van Alstyne armed and at his heels,

who could, at least, alarm the entire neighborhood with pistol shots.

"In this desperate situation, the thief, who for the same reason would not dare use his own pistol presuming naturally that he carried one, bethought himself of a silent weapon easily at hand—one of the swords from above the safe. In the play of his electric torch around the safe, he would certainly have observed the weapons on the wall. He singled out a sword. As I just now demonstrated for myself, Mr. van Alstyne carrying his pistol in his right hand partly turned his back on the room as he reached for the switch with his left hand.

"That was the murderer's chance. He was huddled against the west wall on the other side of the switch. He leaped forward. He seized Mr. van Alstyne's right arm by the wrist and as the lawyer tried to wrench it free and half-faced him he grappled for the man with his left hand. Then the murderer stepped back and slashed down on him with the sword—standing at right angles to him, you understand; or, in other words, at Mr. van Alstyne's right side. The sword was wielded with the right hand. And from this position it would make just such a wound from right to left on the forehead as Mr. van Alstyne bears—the same wound in direction that you described would infallibly be made by a left-handed man using the sword did he and his victim stand face to face as you figured it out. As a matter of fact, Mr. van Alstyne was not standing in front of the safe at the south wall facing his adversary as the position of his body now indicates. His body has been moved. He was standing at the west wall with his back to the light switch. Of course, the pool of blood from the deep wound instantly and positively marked where Mr. van Alstyne's head struck when he fell. But it was the work of two seconds at most for the murderer to seize the dead man's feet and thus swivel the body, bringing the feet from the west wall to the south wall in front of the safe."

"How do you dope this all out, Redburn?" demanded Belcher.

"The carpet tells the story—the carpet and a few other things."

"The carpet?"

Belcher knelt quickly and began scanning it carefully. Chagrin settled on his features.

"I can see by the expression of your face, captain, that you are getting it," observed the assistant district attorney. "That carpet is a new, heavy fabric. It must be fully three inches thick. Its soft plush surface has recorded all the movements of feet and body—as plainly as if they were marked on sand. You can see from the confusion of footprints that the struggle took place where I say it did. There are no such markings in front of the head of the dead man where the sword and scabbard are—just a few and all of the same man. Likewise the nap of the carpet from a point at the electric light switch to the safe and between these points and Mr. van Alstyne's head, is brushed smoothly and in the direction of the body. It is obvious it was so drawn when the murderer lifted the feet and swiveled the body along the carpet from west to south on the floor."

"You spoke of other things?" said the captain.

"Yes. If you'll examine the cord of Mr. van Alstyne's dressing gown you will find that in tying it he knotted it well in front. If he had plunged straight forward in the position in which his body was found the loop and ends of the cord would be under his body. They were when he fell. But in the turning of the feet to change the position of the body from west to south you will observe that the ends of the cord passed from under him and were dragged until they now extend straight out from his left side. Just another proof that the body was moved. If you care to examine further you will find that the right end of Mr. van Alstyne's mustache was dragged under his lip in the process. There is a crescent mark in the plush carpet made by the turn of his chin as his body was moved."

"But the sword and scabbard—scabbard on the right, the sword on the left?"

"I was coming to that. If you will look over the safe you will see on the wall paper marks plainly showing that crossed swords hung there. If you look back of the safe you will find the other sword fell behind it when the sword with which the murder was done was ripped down from the wall. The sword that fell was the sword suspended from the left side of the wall. It was a right-handed man who reached for a weapon, Belcher."

"But that is contradicted by the position of the sword and scabbard on the floor," said Belcher with a show of impatience.

"No. The scabbard was put down from the murderer's right hand. It lies just as it should. But it's different with the sword. That was laid down by a right hand as well."

"It's on the left side."

"But look at the hilt!"

The old saber had a heavy brass guard at the hilt looping to the top of the handle, the device protecting the hand and fingers of the wielder.

"The guard is turned toward the right. Had a left-handed man put the weapon down the guard would have lain the other way. Just a little detail the murderer overlooked in trying to plant the crime on a left-handed man."

"But you heard what I got over the phone, didn't you?" demanded Belcher. "That fellow over there's an old safe-worker and jailbird."

"Yes, but he didn't come into Mr. van Alstyne's employ under false pretenses, Belcher."

"Do you mean to say Van Alstyne knew what he was?"

"Yes. He says he left England after his last prison term determined to go straight. That was because he has an eighteen-year-old boy brought up by relatives over here who knows nothing of his past and Ormsby hoped to bury it for the boy's sake, and, as I say, go straight. He got past the immigration authorities all right, but, of course, was always in danger of being picked up and deported. He did the best thing he could do. He came straight to the district attorney's office and told us—told me his story. I interested Mr. van Alstyne who was always ready to give a man a helping hand, and Van Alstyne put him in his own employ so he could have an unhampered chance to go right.

"But Felton says he must have overheard the talk at the breakfast table about the ten thousand dollars in the safe. A big temptation for a fellow like that, Redburn—reform or no reform."

"I think," said Redburn, "I've shown you pretty conclusively it wasn't the crime of a left-handed man."

"Yes," admitted Belcher grudgingly, "that's so. But that takes it back to the boy or the butler. Of course, they knew this fellow Ormsby was left-handed. But I can't see either of them figuring out that plant in a hurry—on the spur of the moment, Redburn. It would take an expert in crime to do that."

"An expert in crime did," replied the assistant district attorney bringing from his pocket the captain's pistol that he had borrowed and fingering it. "Belcher, you killed John van Alstyne."

Belcher's gray-green eyes widened into a fiercely hot glare of rage. But he quickly narrowed them again. His thin lips spread into what might be described as a half-indulgent smile.

"Where do you get that stuff, Redburn?" he demanded.

But he couldn't keep the anger out of his eyes as he noticed that Mrs. van Alstyne had arisen and was looking at him steadily and keenly, her face still white and graven, that young Van Alstyne had moved toward him and Policeman O'Mara had suddenly assumed a place directly behind him, that Felton and the other servants in the doorway were looking at him in horror and that the deep-set eyes of the manacled man seated at the library table were glittering.

"What the devil are you trying to pull?" he shouted at the assistant district attorney.

"I fancy I know several things that you had no idea I knew," said Redburn quietly, "or, after you had killed Mr. van Alstyne you would never have dared return brazenly as you did to take police charge of the case in the certainty that you could fool the law. I can assure you, Belcher, all you've succeeded in doing is landing both feet in hell."

"Can that chatter," retorted the captain. "What's the stuff you say you've got on me. I'm a police captain and a safe-worker on the side, eh?"

"You took the money as a blind—to build a motive of robbery against the left-handed man here. The police knew of his presence here. Mr. van Alstyne took him to police headquarters where he submitted to the identification process. You knew he was in this house. It wasn't for money you came to that safe to-night, Belcher!"

"Say, Redburn, are you off your head? How would I know the combination of John van Alstyne's safe?"

"I seem to remember a talk you gave us one day in the district attorney's office on the touch system in opening combination locks—how simple it was after a lock had been in use for any length of time to feel out the fall of the hammer into grooves be-

coming worn by use of the same combination, how you sensitized your thumb, forefinger, and index finger by scraping the balls of them with a sharp penknife and in five minutes swung open the door of the safe in the chief clerk's office before our eyes —a fairly new safe at that."

"Well, what next?" demanded Belcher, his defiant attitude in no way abated.

"Two days ago Bennie Lowenstein was croaked in the Crow's Nest resort."

"Sure. He got fresh with some other gent's skirt and a gun fight started."

"That's the way it was reported on the police-station blotter," commented Redburn. "But I knew better. The dead man there knew better. You knew better. John van Alstyne was after you to expose you, to send you to prison. You knew it. You knew if you knew anything at all that when you were up against Van Alstyne you were up against the most powerful individual force in this city. It was a city he loved. It was the city of his ancestors. There was no man knew it better, all sides of it, its upper and underworld, every phase of its life. He was a man of the world who understood that a great metropolis could not be conducted like the village of a religious community. But there were contemptible forms of vice and graft on vice that he would not tolerate. You know what a clean sweep he made of the police grafters and other harpies in the 'Red Light' scandal ten years ago. And you—you were cocksure you were too smart for a man like John van Alstyne! When he came out in interviews in the press denouncing the existence of the wretched stuss and crap games of the East Side and lower West Side where the dimes, nickels, and—yes—even pennies of youngsters were not ignored, and resorts like Breen's that made their game the fleecing of rich boys like young Van Alstyne here, it would have been best for you had you resigned your job at the head of the Gambling Squad and scuttled to the other ends of the earth. But the criminal's vanity again! You thought in your game of big graft that you were too securely hedged in —your secrets in the hands of men who would nor dare betray them. But Van Alstyne sifted out Bennie Lowenstein, your go-between, he had Bennie in this very room for five hours a few nights ago. I guess you know that. And Bennie squealed. And you knew that, too! You tried to corner Bennie and force him to tell how much he had told. That's something I happen to know. But Bennie avoided you. He was more afraid of Mr. van Alstyne than he was of you. He knew what a lawyer of Mr. van Alstyne's prestige, ability, and relentlessness in a purpose like this could do if he started raking over Bennie's past, a past his police friends had obligingly covered up from time to time. Bennie was good for a twenty years' stretch if John van Alstyne chose.

"So you had Bennie's mouth stopped with a bullet. But whom had Bennie implicated? How much did John van Alstyne know? What men must you steer out of the city, the State, the country, out of his reach? What men must be silenced forever, if necessary, as Bennie Lowenstein was?

"You felt sure and rightly, as I happen to know, that in this safe here if you could only dig into it you would find a complete memoranda of Mr. van Alstyne's interview with Bennie Lowenstein."

The assistant district attorney's eyes did not leave those of the police captain and held them with a fascination it was evident the other was seeking with bravado and defiance to fight off.

"O'Mara," said Redburn, "Captain Belcher is under arrest. Search him."

Keys, a watch, an electric lamp, a leather wallet well filled with money were among the articles forthcoming before O'Mara produced from an inside pocket a long envelope of legal aspect. He handed this over to the lawyer who brought out of it some eight to ten foolscap sheets of paper covered with the close, scholarly writing of John van Alstyne.

Redburn nodded.

"The Bennie Lowenstein memoranda."

"I suppose," said Belcher with venom in his gray-green eyes, "the prosecution now rests its case?"

"There's another detail you overlooked, if you want to know," said Redburn. "It's a piece of evidence held securely in the clenched left hand of the dead man himself."

Belcher started.

"What's that?"

"Some forty to fifty strands of human hair—red, Belcher, the color of your own."

Fate and the Fighter

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "The Wild Bunch," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The Willie Meena Mine is discovered by John C. Calhoun, a prospector from Nevada, who came across the line into an adjoining State after having lost the Wunpost Mine through legal trickery. Calhoun is unlettered, and he spells to accord with sound, thus One Post is to him "Wunpost," and "Willie Meena" is his idea of Wilhelmina, the latter mine being named for the daughter of Cole Campbell, an unsuccessful prospector. A settlement is built up about the Willie Meena, when Judson Eells, who, with a lawyer named Philip Lapham, tricked Calhoun out of the Wunpost, appears and claims half of the property under a contract which Calhoun had signed, but failed to understand clearly, the contract specifying that Eells was entitled to a half interest in every claim staked by Calhoun. Calhoun had already given the girl a third interest, and as Dusty Rhodes was his partner when the last mine was discovered, he can be satisfied only with a third interest, although he had deserted his partner in a critical place. "Wunpost" Calhoun therefore finds himself obliged to yield half of his mine to Eells, the latter at the same time scheming to influence Rhodes to sell him his interest, which now amounts to but one-sixth, because of Eells' prior right.

(*A Four-Part Story—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VII.

MORE DREAMS.

IN four days' time Wunpost had seen his interest dwindle from full ownership to a mere sixth of the Willie Meena. First he had given Billy half, then they had each given Rhodes a sixth; and now Judson Eells had stepped in with his contract and trimmed their holdings by a half. In another day or so, if the ratio kept up, Wunpost's sixth would be reduced to a twelfth, a twenty-fourth, a forty-eighth, a ninety-sixth—and he had discovered the mine himself! What philosophy or sophistry can reconcile a man to such buffets from the hand of Fate? Wunpost cursed and turned to raw whisky. It was the infamy of it all; the humiliation, the disgrace, the insult of being trimmed by a lawyer—twice! Yes, twice in the same place, with the same contract, the same system; and now this same Flip Flappum was busy as a hunting dog trying to hire one of his partners to sell him out!

Wunpost towered above old Whiskers and so terrible was his presence that the saloon keeper never hinted at pay. He poured out drink after drink of the vitriolic whisky, which Whiskers made in the secrecy of his back room; and as Wunpost drank and shuddered the waspish Phillip F. Lapham set about his complete undoing. First he went to Dusty Rhodes, who still claimed a full half, and browbeat him until he fell back to a third; and then, when Dusty priced his third at one million, he turned to the disillusioned Billy. Her ideas were more moderate, as far as values were concerned, but her loyalty to Wunpost was still unshaken and she refused to even consider a sale. Back and forth went the lawyer like a shuttle in its socket, from Dusty Rhodes to Wilhelmina and then back once more to Rhodes; but Dusty would sign nothing, sell nothing, agree to nothing and Billy was almost as bad. She placed a cash value of twenty thousand dollars on her interest in the Willie Meena Mine but the sale was contingent upon the consent of John C. Calhoun, who had drowned his sorrows at last. So they waited until morning, and Billy laid the matter before him when her father brought the drunken man to their tent.

Wunpost was more than drunk, he was drugged and robbed of reason by the poison which old Whiskers had brewed; but even with this handicap his mind leaped straight to the point and he replied with an emphatic: No!

"Twenty thousand!" he repeated, "twenty

thousand devils—twenty thousand little demons from hell! What do you want to sell me out for—didn't I give you your interest? Well, listen, kid—you ever been to school? Then how much is one-sixth and one-third—add 'em together! Makes *three*-sixths, don't it—well, ain't that a half? I ain't educated, that's all right; but I can *think*, kid, can't I? Flip Flappum, he wants to get control. Give him a half, under my contract, and he can take possession—and then where do *I* git off? I git off at the same place I got off over at Wunpost. He's trying to freeze me out. So if you want to do me dirt, kid, when I've always been your friend, go to it and sell him your share. Take your paltry twenty thousand and let old Wunpost rustle—serves him right, the poor, ignorant fool!"

He swayed about and Billy drew away from him, but her answer to Lapham was final. She would not sell out, at any price, without the consent of Wunpost. Lapham nodded and darted off—he was a man who dealt with facts and not with the moonshine of sentiment—and this time he fairly flew at Dusty Rhodes. He took him off to one side, where no one could listen in, and at the end of half an hour Mr. Rhodes had signed a paper, giving a quit-claim to his interest in the mine. Old Whiskers was summoned from his attendance on the bottles, the lawyer presented his case; and, whatever the arguments, they prevailed also with the saloon keeper, who signed up and took his check. Presumably they had to do with threats of expensive litigation and appeals to the higher courts, with a learned exposition of the weakness of their case and the air-tight position of Judson Eells; the point is, they prevailed, and Eells took possession of the mine, placing Pisen-face Lynch in charge.

Old Whiskers folded his tent and returned to Blackwater, where many of the stampeders had preceded him; and Dusty Rhodes, with a guilty grin, folded his check, and started for the railroad. Cole Campbell and his daughter, when they heard the news and found themselves debarred from the property, packed up and took the trail home; and when John C. Calhoun came out of his coma he was left without a friend in the world. The rush had passed on, across the Sink to Blackwater and to the gulches in the mountains beyond; for the men from Nevada had not been slow to comprehend that the Willie Meena held no promise for them.

It was a single rich blow-out in a country otherwise barren; and the tales of the pocket miners, who held claims back to Blackwater, had led to a second stampede. The Willie Meena was a prophecy of what might be expected if a similar formation could be found, but it was no more than the throat of an extinct volcano, filled up with gold-bearing quartz. There was no fissure vein, no great mother lode leading off through the country for miles; only a hog back of black quartz and then worlds and worlds of desert as barren as wash bowlders could make it. So they rose and went on, like birds in full flight after they have settled for a moment on the plain, and when Wunpost rose up and rubbed his eyes his great camp had passed away like a dream.

Two days later he walked wearily across the desert from Blackwater, with a two-gallon canteen under his arm, and at the entrance to Jail Cañon he paused and looked in doubtfully before he shambled up to the house. He was broke, and he knew it, and added to that shame was the greater shame that comes from drink. Old Whiskers' poisonous whisky had sapped his self-respect, and yet he came on boldly. There was a fever in his eye like that of the gambler who has lost all, yet still watches the fall of the cards; and as Wilhelmina came out he winked at her mysteriously and beckoned her away from the house.

"I've got something good," he told her confidentially. "Can you get off to go down to Blackwater?"

"Why, I might," she said. "Father's working up the cañon. Is it something about the mine?"

"Yes, it is," he answered. "Say, what d'ye think of Dusty? He sold us out for five thousand dollars! Five thousand—that's all—and old Whiskers took the same, giving Judson Eells full control. They cleaned us, Billy, but we'll get our cut yet—do you know what they're trying to do? Eells is going to organize a company and sell a few shares in order to finance the mine; and if we want to, kid, we can turn in our third interest and get the pro rata in stock. We might as well do it, because they've got the control and otherwise we won't get anything. They've barred us off the property and we'll never get a cent if

it produces a million dollars. But look, here's the idea—Judson Eells is badly bent on account of what he lost at Wunpost, and he's crazy to organize a company and market the treasury stock. We'll go in with him, see, and as soon as we get our stock we'll peddle it for what we can get. That'll net us a few thousand and you can take your share and help the old man build his road."

The stubborn look on Billy's face suddenly gave place to one of doubt and then to one of swift decision.

"I'll do it," she said. "We don't need to see father—just tell them that I've agreed. And when the time comes, send an Indian up to notify me and I'll ride down and sign the papers."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Wunpost with a hint of his old smile, "I'll come up and tell you myself. Have you heard the news from below? Well, every house in Blackwater is plumb full of boomers—and them pocket miners are all selling out. The whole country's staked, clean back to the peaks, and old Eells says he's going to start a bank. There's three new saloons, a couple more restaurants, and she sure looks like a good live camp—and me, the man that started it and made the whole country, I can't even bum a drink!"

"I'm glad of it," returned Billy, and regarded him so intently that he hastened to change the subject.

"But you wait!" he thundered, "I'll show 'em who's who! I ain't down, by no manner of means. I've got a mine or two hid out that would make 'em fairly scream if I'd show 'em a piece of the rock. All I need is a little capital, just a few thousand dollars to get me a good outfit of mules, and I'll come back into Blackwater with a pack load of ore that'll make 'em *all* sit up and take notice."

He swung his fist into his hand with oratorical fervor and Mrs. Campbell appeared suddenly at the door. Her first favorable impression of the gallant young Southerner had been changed by the course of events, and she was now morally certain that the envious Dusty Rhodes had come nearer the unvarnished truth. To be sure he had apologized, but Wunpost himself had said that it was only to gain a share in the mine—and how lamentably had Wunpost failed, after all his windy boasts, when it came to a conflict with Judson Eells. He had weakened like a schoolboy, all his arguments had been puerile; and even her husband, who was far from censorious, had stated that the whole affair was badly handled. And now here he was, after a secret conference with her daughter, suddenly bursting into vehement protestations and hinting at still other hidden mines. Well, his mines might be as rich as he declared them to be, but Mrs. Campbell herself was dubious.

"Wilhelmina!" she called, "don't stand out in the sun. Why don't you invite Mr. Calhoun to the house?"

The hint was sufficient. Mr. Calhoun excused himself hastily and went striding away down the cañon; and Wilhelmina, after a perfunctory return to the house, slipped out and ran up to her lookout. Not a word that he had said about the rush to Blackwater was in any way startling to her, she had seen every dust-cloud, marked each automobile as it rushed past, and even noted the stampede from the west. For the natural way to Blackwater was not across Death Valley from the distant Nevada camps, but from the railroad which lay only forty miles to the west and was reached by an automobile stage. The road came down through Sheep-herder Cañon, on the other side of the Sink, and every day as she looked across its vastness she saw the long trailers of dust. She knew that the autos were rushing in with men and the slow freighters were hauling in supplies—all the real news for her was the number of saloons and restaurants, and that Eells was starting a bank.

A bank! And in Blackwater! The only bank that Blackwater had ever had or needed was the safe in old Whiskers' saloon; and now this rich schemer, this iron-hand robber, was going to start a bank! Billy lay inside the portal of her gate of dreams and watched Wunpost as he plodded across the plain and she resolved to join with him and do her level best to bring Eells' plans to naught. If he was counting on the sale of his treasury stock to fill up the vaults of his bank he would find others in the market with stock in both hands, peddling it out to the highest bidder. And even if the mine was worth into the millions she, for one, would sell every share. It was best, after all, since Eells owned the control, to sell out for what they could get; and if this was merely a deep-laid scheme to buy in their stock for almost nothing, they would at least have a little ready cash.

The Campbells were poor, her father even lacked the money to buy powder to blast out his road; and so he struggled on, grading up the easy places and leaving Corkscrew Gorge untouched. That would call for heavy blasting and crews of hardy men to climb up and shoot down the walls, and even after that the jagged rock bed must be covered and leveled to the semblance of a road. Now nothing but a trail led up through the dark passageway, where grinding bowlders had polished the walls like glass; and until that gateway was opened Cole Campbell's road was useless, it might as well be all trail. But with five thousand dollars, or even less—with whatever she received from her stock—the gateway could be conquered, her father's dream would come true and all their life would be changed.

There would be a road right past their house, where great trucks would lumber forth loaded down with ore from their mine, and return ladened with machinery from the railroad. There would be miners going by and stopping for a drink, and some one to talk to every day, and the loneliness which oppressed her like a physical pain would give place to gayety and peace. Her father would be happy and stop working so hard, and her mother would not have to worry—all if she, Wilhelmina, could just sell her stock and salvage a pittance from the wreck.

She knew now what Wunpost had meant when he had described the outside world and the men they would meet at the rush, yet for all his hard-won knowledge he had gone down once more before Judson Eells and his gang. But he had spoken true when he said they would resort to murder to gain possession of their mine and, though he had yielded at last to the lure of strong drink, in her heart she could not blame him too much. It was not by wrongdoing that he had wrecked their high hopes, but by signing a contract long years before without reading what he called the fine print. He was just a boy, after all, in spite of his boasting and his vaunted knowledge of the world; and now in his trouble he had come back to her, to the one person he knew he could trust. She gazed a long time at the dwindling form till it was lost in the immensity of the plain; and then she gazed on, for dreams were all she had to comfort her lonely heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BABES IN THE WOODS.

Ever since David went forth and slew Goliath with his sling, youth has set its puny lance to strike down the giants; and history, making much of the hotspurs who won, draws a veil over the striplings who were slain. And yet all who know the stern conditions of life must recognize that youth is a handicap, and if David had but donned the heavy armor of King Saul he, too, would have gone to his death. But instead he stepped forth untrammeled by its weight, with nothing but a stone and sling, and because the scoffing giant refused his shield he was struck down by the pebble of a child. But giant Judson Eells was in a baby-killing mood when he invited Wunpost and Wilhelmina to his den; and when they emerged, after signing articles of incorporation, he licked his chops and smiled.

It developed at the meeting that the sole function of a stockholder is to vote for the director of the company; and, having elected Eells and Lapham and John C. Calhoun directors, the stockholders' meeting adjourned. Reconvening immediately as a board of directors, Judson Eells was elected president, John C. Calhoun vice president, and Phillip F. Lapham secretary treasurer—after which an assessment of ten cents a share was levied upon all the stock. Exit John C. Calhoun and Wilhelmina Campbell, stripped of their stock and all faith in mankind. For even if by some miracle they should raise the necessary sum, Judson Eells and Phillip Lapham would immediately vote a second assessment, and so on, ad infinitum. Holding a majority of the stock, Eells could control the board of directors, and through it the policies of the company; and any assessments which he himself might pay would but be transferred from one pocket to the other. It was as neat a job of baby-killing as Eells had ever accomplished and he slew them both with a smile.

They had conspired in their innocence to gain stock in the company and to hawk it about the street; but neither had thought to suggest the customary article: "The stock of said company shall be nonassessable." The articles of incorporation had been drawn up by Phillip F. Lapham; and yet, after all his hard experiences, Wunpost was so awed by the legal procedure that he forgot all about the fine print. Not that it

made any difference, they would have trimmed him anyway, but it was three times in the very same place! He cursed himself out loud for an ignorant baboon and left Wilhelmina in tears.

She had come down with her mother, her father being busy, and they had planned to take in the town; but after this final misfortune Wilhelmina lost all interest in the busy marts of trade. What to her were clothes and shoes when she had no money to buy them—and when overdressed women, none too chaste in their demeanor, stared after her in boorish amusement? Blackwater had become a great city, but it was not for her—the empty honor of having the Willie Meena named after her was all she had won from her mine. John C. Calhoun had been right when he warned her, long before, that the mining game was more like a dog fight than it was like a Sunday-school picnic; and yet—well, some people made money at it. Perhaps they were better at reading the fine print, and not so precipitate about signing articles of incorporation, but as far as she was concerned Wilhelmina made a vow never to trust a lawyer again.

She returned to the ranch, where the neglected garden soon showed signs of her changing mood; but after the weeds had been chopped out and routed she slipped back to her lookout on the hill. It was easier to tear the weeds from a tangled garden than old memories from her lonely heart; and she took up, against her will, the old watch for Wunpost, who had departed from Blackwater in a fury. He had stood on the corner and, oblivious of her presence, had poured out the vials of his wrath; he had cursed Eells for a swindler, and Lapham for his dog and Lynch for his yellow hound. He had challenged them all, either individually or collectively, to come forth and meet him in battle; and then he had offered to fight any man in Blackwater who would say a good word for any of them. But Blackwater looked on in cynical amusement, for Eells was the making of the town; and when he had given off the worst of his venom Wunpost had tied up his roll and departed.

He had left as he had come, a single-blanket tourist, packing his worldly possessions on his back; and when last seen by Wilhelmina he was headed east, up the wash that came down from the Panamints. Where he was going, when he would return, if he ever would return, all were mysteries to the girl who waited on; and if she watched for him it was because there was no one else whose coming would stir her heart. Far up the cañon and over the divide there lived "Hungry Bill" and his family, but Hungry was an Indian, and when he dropped in it was always to get something to eat. He had two sons and two daughters, whom he kept enslaved, forbidding them to even think of marriage; and all his thoughts were of money and things to eat, for Hungry Bill was an Indian miser.

He came through often now with his burros packed with fruit from the abandoned white-man's ranch that he had occupied; and even his wild-eyed daughters had more variety than Billy, for they accompanied him to Blackwater and Willie Meena. There they sold their grapes and peaches at exorbitant prices and came back with coffee and flour, but neither would say a word for fear of their old father, who watched them with intolerant eyes. They were evil, snaky eyes, for it was said that in his day he had waylaid many a venturesome prospector, and while they gleamed ingratiatingly when he was presented with food, at no time did they show good will. He was still a renegade at heart, shunned and avoided by his own kinsmen, the Shoshones who camped around Wild Rose; but it was from him, from this old tyrant that she despised so cordially, that Wilhelmina received her first news of Wunpost.

Hungry Bill came up grinning, on his way down from his ranch, and fixed her with his glittering black eyes.

"You savvy Wunpo?" he asked, "hi-ko man—busca gol'? Him sendum piece of lock!"

He produced a piece of rock from a knot in his shirt tail and handed it over to her slowly. It was a small chunk of polished quartz, half green, half turquoise blue; and in the center, like a jewel, a crystal of yellow gold gleamed out from its matrix of blue. Wilhelmina gazed at it blankly, then flushed and turned away as she felt Hungry Bill's eyes upon her. He was a disreputable old wretch, who imputed to others the base motives which governed his own acts; and when she read his black heart Wilhelmina straightened up and gave him back the stone.

"No, you keepum!" protested Hungry, "hi-ko ketchum plenty mo'."

But Wilhelmina shook her head.

"No!" she said, "you give that to my mother. Are those your girls down there? Well, why don't you let them come up to the house? You no good—I don't like bad Indians!"

She turned away from him, still frowning angrily, and strode on down to the creek; but the daughters of Hungry Bill, in their groveling way, seemed to share the low ideals of their father. They were tall and sturdy girls, clad in breezy calico dresses and with their hair down over their eyes; and as they gazed out from beneath their bangs a guilty smile contorted their lips, a smile that made Wilhelmina writhe.

"What's the matter with you?" she snapped, and as the scared look came back she turned on her heel and left them. What could one expect, of course, from Hungry Bill's daughters after they had been guarded like the slave girls in a harem; but the joy of hearing from Wunpost was quite lost in the fierce anger which the conduct of his messengers evoked. He was up there, somewhere, and he had made another strike—the most beautiful blue quartz in the world—but these renegade Shoshones with their understanding smiles had quite killed the pleasure of it for her. She returned to the house where Hungry Bill, in the kitchen, was wolfing down a great pan of beans; but the sight of the old glutton with his mouth down to the plate quite sickened her and drove her away. Wunpost was up in the hills, and he had made a strike, but with that she must remain content until he either came down himself or chose a more high-minded messenger.

Hungry Bill went on to Blackwater and came back with a load of supplies, which he claimed he was taking to "Wunpo;" and, after he had passed up the cañon, Wilhelmina strolled along behind him. At the mouth of Corkscrew Gorge there was a great pool of water, overshadowed by a rank growth of willows through whose tops the wild grapevines ran riot. Here it had been her custom, during the heat of the day, to paddle along the shallows or sit and enjoy the cool air. There was always a breeze at the mouth of Corkscrew Gorge and when it drew down, as it did on this day, it carried the odors of dank caverns. In the dark and gloomy depths of this gash through the hills the rocks were always damp and cold; and beneath the great waterfalls, where the cloud-bursts had scooped out potholes, there was a delicious mist and spray. She dawdled by the willows, then splashed on up the slippery trail until, above the last echoing waterfall, she stepped out into the world beyond.

The great cañon spread out again, once she had passed the waterworn gorge, and peak after peak rose up to right and left where yawning side cañons led in. But all were set on edge and reared up to dizzying heights; and along their scarred flanks there lay huge slides of shaly rock, ready to slip at the touch of a hand. Vivid stripes of red and green, alternating with layers of blue and white, painted the sides of the striated ridges; and odd seams here and there showed dull yellows and chocolate browns like the edge of a crumbled layer cake. Up the cañon the walls shut in again, and then they opened out, and so on for nine miles until old Panamint was reached and the open valley sloped up to the summit.

Many a time in the old days when they had lived in Panamint had Wilhelmina scaled those far heights; the huge white wall of granite dotted with ball-like piñons and junipers, which fenced them from Death Valley beyond. It opened up like a gulf, once the summit was reached, and below the jagged precipices stretched long ridges and fanlike washes which lost themselves at last in the Sink. For a hundred miles to the north and the south it lay, a writhing ribbon of white; pinching down to narrow strips, then broadening out in gleaming marshes; and on both sides the mountains rose up black and forbidding, a bulwark against the sky. Wilhelmina had never entered it, she had been content to look down; and then she crept back to beautiful sheltered Panamint where her father had his mine.

Wilhelmina gazed up the valley and sighed again, for since that terrific cloud-burst she had been stranded in Jail Cañon like a piece of driftwood tossed up by the flood. Nothing happened to her, any more than to the piñon logs which the waters had wedged high above the stream, and as she returned home down the gorge she almost wished for another flood, to float them and herself away. No one came by there any more, the trail was so poor, and yet her father still clung to the mine; but a flood would either fill up the gorge with débris or make even him give up hope. She sank down by the

cool pool and put her feet in the water, dabbling them about like a willful child; but at a shout from below she rose up a grown woman, for she knew it was Dusty Rhodes.

He came on up the creek bed with his burros on the trot, hurling clubs at the laggards as he ran; and when they stopped short at the sight of Wilhelmina he almost rushed them over her. But a burro is a creature of lively imagination, to whom the unknown is always terrible; and at a fresh outburst from Dusty the whole outfit took to the brush, leaving him face to face with his erstwhile partner.

"Oh, hello, hello!" he called out bluffly. "Say, did Hungry Bill go through here? He was jest down to Blackwater, buying some grub at the store, and he paid for it with rock that was *half gold!* So git out of the road, my little girl—I'm going up to prospect them hills!"

"Don't you call me your little girl!" called back Billy angrily. "And Hungry Bill hasn't got any mine!"

"Oh, he ain't hey?" mocked Dusty, leaving his burros to browse while he strode triumphantly up to her. "Then jest look at *that*, my—my fine young lady! I got it from the storekeeper myself!"

He handed her a piece of green-and-blue quartz, but she only glanced at it languidly. The memory of his perfidy on a previous occasion made her long to puncture his pride and she passed the gold ore back to him.

"I've seen that before," she said with a sniff, "so you can stop driving those burros so hard. It came from Wunpost's mine."

"Wunpost!" yelled Dusty Rhodes, his eyes getting big; and then he spat out an oath. "Who told ye?" he demanded, sticking his face into hers and she stepped away disdainfully.

"Hungry Bill," she said, and watched him writhe as the bitter truth went home. "You think you're so smart," she taunted at last, "why don't you go out and find one for yourself? I suppose you want to rush in and claim a half interest in his strike and then sell him out to old Eells. I hope he kills you, if you try to do it—*I* would, if I were he. What'd you do with that five thousand dollars?"

"Eh, eh—that's none of your business," bleated Dusty Rhodes, whose trip to Los Angeles had proved disastrous. "And if Wunpost gave Hungry that sack of ore, he stole it from some other feller's mine. I knowed all along he'd locate that Black P'int if I ever let him stop—I've had my eye on it for years—and that's why I hurried by. I discovered it myself, only I never told nobody—he must have heard me talking in my sleep!"

"Yes, or when you were drunk!" suggested Wilhelmina maliciously. "I hear you got robbed in Los Angeles. And, anyhow, I'm glad, because you stole that five thousand dollars, and no good ever came from stolen property."

"Oh, it didn't, hey?" sneered Dusty who was recovering his poise. "Well, I'll bet ye *this* rock was stolen! And if that's the case, where does your young man git off, that you think the world and all of? But you've got to show me that he ever *saw* this rock—I believe old Hungry was lying to you!"

"Well, don't let me keep you!" cried Billy, bowing mockingly. "Go on over and ask him yourself—but I'll bet you don't *dare* to meet Wunpost!"

"How come Hungry to tell you?" burst out Dusty Rhodes at last, and Wilhelmina smiled mysteriously.

"That's none of your business, my busy little man," she mimicked in patronizing tones, "but I've got a piece of that rock, right up at the house. You go back there and mother will show it to you."

"I'm going on!" answered Dusty with instant decision, "can't stop to make no visit to-day. They's a big rush coming—every burro man in Blackwater—and some of them are legging it afoot. But that thieving son of a goat, *he* never found no mine! I know it—it can't be possible!"

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW DEAL.

The rush of burro men to Hungry Bill's ranch followed close in Dusty Rhodes' wake, and some there were who came on foot; but they soon came stringing back, for it was a fine, large country, and Hungry Bill was about as communicative as a rattlesnake. All he knew, or cared to know, was the price of corn and fruit, which he sold at Blackwater prices; and the search for Wunpost had only served to show to what lengths a man will go for revenge. In some mysterious way Wunpost had acquired a horse and mule, both sharp-shod for climbing over

rocks, and he had dallied at Hungry Bill's until the first of the stampeders had come in sight on the Panamint trail. Then he had set out up the ridge, riding the horse and packing the mule, and even an Indian trailer had given out and quit without ever bringing them in sight of him again. He had led them such a chase that the hardiest came back satisfied, and they agreed that he could keep his old mine.

The excitement died away or was diverted to other channels, for Blackwater was having a boom; and, just as Wilhelmina had given up hope of seeing him, John C. Calhoun came riding down the ridge. Not down the cañon, where the trail made riding easy, but down the steep ridge trail, where a band of mountain sheep was accustomed to come for water. Wilhelmina was in her tunnel, looking down with envious eyes at the traffic in the valley below; and he came upon her suddenly, so suddenly it made her jump, for no one ever rode up there.

"Hello!" he hailed, spurring his horse up to the portal and letting out his rope as he entered. "Kinder hot, out there in the sun. Well, how's tricks?" he inquired, sitting down in the shade and wiping the streaming sweat from his eyes, "Hungry Bill says you s-spurned my gold!"

"What did you tell that old Indian?" burst out Wilhelmina wrathfully, and Wunpost looked up in surprise.

"Why, nothing," he said, "only to get me some grub and give you that piece of polished rock. How was that for the real old high-grade? From my new mine, up in the high country. What's the matter—did Hungry get gay?"

"Well—not that," hesitated Wilhelmina, "but he looked at me so funny that I told him to give it to mother. What was it you told him about me?"

"Not a thing," protested Wunpost. "Just to give you the rock. Oh, *I* know!" He laughed and slapped his leg. "He's scared some prospector will steal one of them gals and I told him not to worry about *me*. Guess that gave him a tip, because he looked wise as a prairie dog when I told him to give that specimen to you." He paused and knocked the dust out of his battered old hat, then glanced up from under his eyebrows.

"Ain't mad, are you?" he asked, "because if you are I'm on my way——"

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly. "Where have you been all the time? Dusty Rhodes came through here, looking for you."

"Yes, they all came," he grinned, "but I showed 'em some sheep trails before they got tired of chasing me. I knew for a certainty that those mugs would follow Hungry—they did the same thing over in Nevada. I sent in an Indian to buy me a little grub and they trailed me clean across Death Valley. Guess that ore must have looked pretty good."

"Where'd you get it?" she asked, and he rolled his eyes roguishly while a crafty smile lit up his face.

"That's a question," he said. "If I'd tell you, you'd have the answer. But I'm not going to show it to *nobody!*"

"Well, you don't need to think that *I* care!" she spoke up resentfully. "Nobody asked you to show them your gold. And after what happened with the Willie Meena I wouldn't take your old mine for a gift."

"You won't have to," he replied, "I've quit taking in pardners—it's a lone hand for me, after this. I'm sure slow in the head, but I reckon I've learned my lesson—never go up against the other man's game. Old Eells is a lawyer and I tried to beat him at law. We've switched the deal now, and he can play *my* game a while—hide-and-seek, up in them high peaks."

He waved his hand in the direction of the Panamints and winked at her exultantly.

"Look at *that!*" he said, and drew a rock from his shirt pocket which was caked and studded with gold. It was more like a chunk of gold with a little quartz attached to it, and as she exclaimed he leaned back and gloated. "I've got worlds of it!" he declared. "Let 'em get out and rustle for it—that's the way I made my start. By the time they've rode as far as I have they'll know she's a mountain-sheep country. I located two mines right smack beside the trail and these jaspers came along and stole them both. All right! Line! Fine! Let 'em look for the old Sockdolager where I got this gold, and the first man that finds it can have it! I'm a sport—I haven't even staked it!"

"And can *I* have it?" asked Billy, her eyes beginning to glow, "because, oh, we need money so bad!"

"What for, kid?" inquired Wunpost with a fatherly smile. "Ain't you got a good home, and everything?"

"Yes, but the road—father's road. If I

just had the money we'd start right in on it to-morrow."

"Hoo! I'll build you the road!" declared Wunpost munificently. "And it won't cost either one of us a cent. Don't believe it, eh? You think this is bunk? Then I'll tell you, kid, what I'll do. I'll make you a bet we'll have a wagon road up that cañon before three months are up. And all by headwork, mind ye—not a dollar of our own money—might even get old Eells to build it. Yes, I'm serious; I've got a new system—been thinking it out, up in the hills—and just to show you how brainy I am I'll make this demonstration for nothing. You don't need to bet me anything, just acknowledge that I'm the king when it comes to the real inside work; and before I get through I'll have Judson Eells belly up and gasping for air like a fish. I'm going to trim him, the big fat slob; I'm going to give him a lesson that'll learn him to lay off of me for life; I'm going to make him so scared he'll step down into the gutter when he meets me coming down the sidewalk. Well, laugh, dog-gone it, but you watch my dust—I'm going to hang his hide on the fence!"

"That's what you told me before," she reminded him mischievously, "but somehow it didn't work out."

"It'll work out this time," he retorted grimly. "A man has got to learn. I'm just a kid, I know that, and I'm not much on book learning, but don't you never say I can't *think!* Maybe I can't beat them crooks when I play their own game, but this *time I deal the hand!* Do you git me? We've switched the deal! And if I don't ring in a cold deck and deal from the bottom it won't be because it's *wrong*. I'm out to scalp 'em, see, and just to convince you we'll begin by building that road. Your old man is wrong, he don't need no road and it won't do him any good when he gets it; but just to make you happy and show you how much I think of you, I'll do it—only you've got to stand pat! No Sunday-school stuff, see? We're going to fight this out with hay hooks, and when I come back with his hair don't blame *me* if old Eells makes a roar. I'm going to stick him, see? and I'm not going to stick him once—I'm going to stick him three times, till he squeals like a pig, because that's what he did to me! He cleaned me once on the Wunpost, and twice on the Willie Meena, but before I get through with him he'll knock a corner off the mountain every time he sees my dust. He'll be *gone*, but I'll chase him to the hottest stope in hell. I'm going to bust him, savvy, just to learn these other dastards not to start any rough stuff with me. And now the road, the road! We'll just get him to build it—I've got it all framed up!"

He made a bluff to kiss her, then ran out and mounted his horse and went rollicking off toward Blackwater. Wilhelmina brushed her cheek and gazed angrily after him, then smiled and turned away with a sigh.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHORT SPORTS.

The booming mining camp of Blackwater stood under the rim of a high mesa, between it and an alkali flat, and as Wunpost rode in he looked it over critically, though with none too friendly eyes. Being laid out in a land of magnificent distances there was plenty of room between the houses, and the broad main street seemed more suited for driving cattle than for accommodating the scant local traffic. There had been a time when all that space was needed to give swing room to twenty-mule teams, but that time was past and the two sparse rows of houses seemed dwarfed and pitifully few. Yet there were new ones going up, and quite a sprinkling of tents; and down on the corner Wunpost saw a big building which he knew must be Judson Eells' bank.

It had sprung up in his absence, a pretentious structure of solid concrete, and as he jogged along past it Wunpost swung his head and looked it over scornfully. The walls were thick and strong, but that was no great credit, for in that desert country any man who would get the water could mix concrete until he was tired. All in the world he had to do was to scoop up the ground and pour the mud into the molds, and when it was set he had a natural concrete, composed of lime and coarse gravel and bone-dry dust. Half the burro corrals in Blackwater were built out of concrete, but Eells had put up a big false front. This had run into money, the ornately stamped tin work having been shipped all the way from Los Angeles; and there were two plate-glass windows that framed a passing view of marble pillars and shining brass grilles. Wunpost took it all in and then hissed through his teeth—the money that had built it was his!

"I'll skin him!" he muttered, and pulled up down the street before old Whiskers' populous saloon. Several men drifted out to speak to him as he tied his horse and pack, but he greeted them all with such a venomous glare that they shied off and went across the street. There stood a rival saloon, rushed up in Wunpost's absence; but after looking it over he went into Whiskers' place, which immediately began to fill up. The coming of Wunpost had been noted from afar, and a man who buys his grub with jewelry-gold specimens is sure to have a following. He slouched in sulkily and gazed fixedly at old Whiskers, who was chewing on his tobacco like a ruminative billy goat and pretending to polish the bar. It was borne in on Whiskers that he had refused Wunpost a drink on the day he had walked out of camp, but he was hoping that the slight was forgotten; for if he could keep him in his saloon, all the others would soon be vacated, now that Wunpost was the talk of the town. He had found one mine and lost it and gone out and found another one while the rest of them were wearing out shoe leather; and a man like that could not be ignored by the community, no matter if he did curse their town. So Whiskers chewed on, not daring to claim his friendship, and Wunpost leaned against the bar.

"Gimme a drink," he said, laying fifteen cents before him; and as several men moved forward he scowled at them in silence and tossed off his *solamente*. "Cr-ripes!" he shuddered, "did you make that yourself?" And when Whiskers, caught unawares, half acquiesced, Wunpost drew himself up and burst forth. "I believe it!" he announced with an oracular nod, "I can taste the burned sugar, the fusel oil, the wood alcohol, and everything. One drink of that stuff would strike a stone Injun blind if it wasn't for this dry desert air. They tell me, Whiskers, that when you came to this town you brought one barrel of whisky with you—and that you ain't ordered another one since. That stuff is all right for those that like it—I'm going across the street."

He strode out the door, taking the fickle crowd with him and leaving old Whiskers to chew the cud of brooding bitterness. In the saloon across the street a city barkeeper greeted Wunpost affably, and inquired what it would be. Wunpost asked for a drink and the discerning barkeeper set out a bottle with the seal uncut. It was bonded goods, guaranteed seven years in the wood, and Wunpost smacked his lips as he tasted it.

"Have one yourself," he suggested, and while the crowd stood agape he laid down a nugget of gold.

That settled it with Blackwater, they threw their money on the bar and tried to get him drunk, but Wunpost would drink with none of them.

"No, you bunch of boot-lickers!" he shouted angrily. "Go on away, I won't have nothing to do with you! When I was broke you wouldn't treat me and now that I'm flush I reckon I can buy my own liquor. You're all sucking around old Eells, saying he made the town—I made your danged town myself! Didn't I discover the Willie Meena—and ain't that what made the town? Well, go chase yourselves, you suckers, I'm through with ye! You did me dirt when you thought I was cleaned and now you can all go to blazes!"

He shook hands with the friendly barkeeper, told him to keep the change, and fought his way out to the street. The crowd of boomers, still refusing to be insulted, trooped shamelessly along in his wake; and when he unpacked his mule and took out two large, heavy ore sacks even Judson Eells cast aside his dignity. He had looked on from afar, standing in front of the plate-glass window which had "Willie Meena Mining Company" across it; but at a signal from Lynch, who had been acting as his lookout, he came running to demand his rights. The acquisition of the Wunpost and the Willie Meena properties had by no means satisfied his lust; and since this one crazy prospector—who of all the men he had grubstaked seemed the only one who could find a mine—had for the third time come in with rich ore, he felt no compunctions about claiming his share.

"Where'd you get that ore?" he demanded of Wunpost as the crowd opened up before him and Wunpost glanced at him fleeringly.

"I stole it!" he said, and went on sorting out specimens which he stuffed into his well-worn overalls.

"I asked you *where!*" returned Eells, drawing his lip up sternly, and Wunpost turned to the crowd.

"You see?" he jeered, "I told you he was crooked. He wants to go and steal some himself." He laughed, long and loud, and some there were who joined in with him, for Eells was not without his enemies. To

be sure he had built the bank, and established his offices in Blackwater when he might have started a new town at the mine; but no money lender was ever universally popular and Eells was ruthless in exacting his usury. But on the other hand he had brought a world of money into town, for the Willie Meena had paid from the first; and it was his pay roll and the wealth which had followed in his wake that had made the camp what it was; so no one laughed as long or as loud as John C. Calhoun, and he hunched his shoulders and quit.

"Never you mind where I stole it!" he said to Eells, "I stole it, and that's enough. Is there anything in your contract that gives you a cut on everything I *steal?*"

"Why—why, no," replied Eells, "but that isn't the point—I asked you where you got it. If it's stolen, that's one thing, but if you've located another mine——"

"I haven't!" put in Wunpost, "you've broke me of that. The only way I can keep anything now is to steal it. Because, no matter what it is, if I come by it honestly, you and your rabbit-faced lawyer will grab it; but if I go out and steal it you don't dare to claim half, because that would make you out a thief. And, of course, a banker, and a big mining magnate, and the owner of the famous Willie Meena—well, it just isn't done, that's all."

He twisted up his lips in a wry, sarcastic smile, but Eells was not susceptible to irony. He was the bulldog type of man, the kind that takes hold and hangs on, and he could see that the ore was rich. It was so rich indeed that in those two sacks alone there were undoubtedly several thousand dollars—and the mine itself might be worth millions. Eells turned and beckoned to Phillip F. Lapham, who was looking on with greedy eyes. They consulted together while Wunpost waited calmly, though with the battle light in his eyes, and at last Eells returned to the charge.

"Mr. Calhoun," he said, "there's no use to pretend that this ore which you have is stolen. We have seen samples of it before, and it's very unusual—in fact, no one else has seen anything like it. Therefore your claim that it is stolen is a palpable pretense to deprive me of my rights under our contract, and——"

"Yes?" prompted Wunpost, dropping his hand on his pistol, and Eells paused and glanced at Lapham.

"Well," he conceded. "of course I can't prove anything and——"

"No, you bet you can't prove anything," spoke up Wunpost defiantly, "and you can't touch an ounce of my ore. It's mine, and I stole it and no court can make me show where; because a man can't be compelled to incriminate himself—and if I showed you they could come out and pinch me. Huh! You've got a lawyer, have you? Well, I've got one myself and I know my legal rights—and if any man puts out his hand to take away this bag I've got a right to shoot him dead! Ain't that right now, Mr. Flip Flappum?"

"Well—the law gives one the right to defend his own property; but only with sufficient force to resist the attack, and to shoot would be excessive."

"Not with me!" asserted Wunpost, "I've consulted one of the best lawyers in Nevada and I'm posted on every detail. There's Pisen-face Lynch, that everybody knows is a gunman in the employ of Judson Eells, and at the first crooked move I'd be justified in killing him and then in killing you and Eells. Oh, I'll law you, you dastards, I'll law you with a six-shooter—and I've got an attorney all hired to defend me. We've agreed on his fee and I've got it all buried where he can go get it when I give him the directions; and I hope he gets it soon because then there'll be just three less grafters, to rob honest prospectors of their rights."

He advanced upon Lapham, his great head thrust out as he followed his squirming flight through the crowd; and when he was gone he turned upon Eells who stood his ground with insolent courage.

"And you, you big slob," he went on threateningly, "you don't need to think you'll git off. I ain't afraid of your gunman, and I ain't afraid of you, and before we get through I'm going to *git* you. Well, laugh if you want to—it's your scalp or mine—and you can jest politely go to hell."

He snapped his fingers in his face and, taking a sack in both hands, started off to the Wells Fargo office; and, so intimidated for once were Eells and his gun fighter, that neither one followed along after him. Wunpost deposited his treasure in the express company's safe and went off to care for his animals and, while the crowd dispersed to the several saloons, Eells and Lapham went into conference. This sudden glib quoting of moot points of law was a new and dis-

turbing factor, and Lapham himself was quite unstrung over the news of the buried retainer. It had all the earmarks of a criminal lawyer's work, this tender solicitude for his fee; and some shysters that Lapham knew would even encourage their client to violence, if it would bring them any nearer to the gold. But this gold—where did it come from? Could it possibly be high-graded, in spite of all the testimony to the contrary? And, if not, if his claim that it was stolen was a blind, then how could they discover its whereabouts? Certainly not by force of law, and not by any violence—they must resort to guile, the old cunning of the serpent, which now differentiates man from the beasts of the field, and perhaps they could get Wunpost drunk!

Happy thought! The wires were laid and all Blackwater joined in with them. In fact, it was the universal idea, and even the new barkeeper with whom Wunpost had struck up an acquaintance had promised to do his part. To get Wunpost drunk and then to make him boast, to pique him by professed doubts of his great find; and then when he spilled it, as he had always done before, the wild rush and another great boom! They watched his every move as he put his animals in a corral and stored his packs and saddles; and when, in the evening, he drifted back to the Mint, man after man tried to buy him a drink. But Wunpost was antisocial, he would have none of their whisky and their canting professions of friendship; only Ben Fellowes, the new barkeeper, was good enough for his society, and he joined him in several libations. It was all case goods, very soft and smooth and velvety, and yet in a remarkably short space of time Wunpost was observed to be getting garrulous.

"I'll tell you, pardner," he said, taking the barkeeper by the arm and speaking very confidentially into his ear, "I'll tell you, it's this way with me. I'm a Calhoun, see—John C. Calhoun is my name, and I come from the State of Kentucky—and a Kentucky Calhoun never forgets a friend, and he never forgets an enemy. I'm burned out on this town—don't like it—nothing about it—but you, now, you're different, you never done me any injury. You're my friend, ain't that right, you're my friend!"

The barkeeper reassured him and held his breath while he poured out another drink and then, as Wunpost renewed his protestations, Fellowes thanked him for his present of the nugget.

"What—*that?*" exclaimed Wunpost, brushing the piece of gold aside, "that's nothing—here, give you a good one!" He drew out a chunk of rock fairly incrusted with gold and forced it roughly upon him. "It's nothing!" he said, "lots more where that came from. Got system, see—know how to find it. All these water-hole prospectors, they never find nothing—too lazy, won't get out and hunt. I head for the high places—leap from crag to crag, see, like mountain sheep—come back with my pockets full of gold. These bums are no good—I could take 'em out to-night and lead 'em to my mine, and they'd never be able to go back. Rough country 'n all that—no trails, steep as the devil—take 'em out there and lose 'em, every time. Take you out and lose you—now say, you're my friend, I'll tell you what I'll do."

He stopped with portentous dignity and poured out another drink and the barkeeper frowned a hanger-on away.

"I'll take you out there," went on Wunpost, "and show you my mine—show you the place where I get all this gold. You can pick up all you want, and when we get back you give me a thousand-dollar bill. Tha's all I ask, is a thousand-dollar bill—like to have one to flash on the boys—and then we'll go to Los and blow the whole pile—by grab, I'm a high-roller, right. I'm a good feller, see, as long as you're my friend, but don't tip off this place to old Eells. Have to kill you if you do—he's bad actor—robbed me twice. What's matter—ain't you got the dollar bill?"

"You said a thousand dollars!" spoke up the barkeeper breathlessly.

"Well, thousand-dollar bill, then. Ain't you got it—what's the matter? Aw, gimme another drink—you're nothing but a bunch of short sports."

He shook his head and sighed, and as the barkeeper began to sweat he caught the hanger-on's eye. It was Pisen-face Lynch and he was winking at him fiercely, meanwhile tapping his own pocket significantly.

"I can get it," ventured the barkeeper, but Wunpost ignored him.

"You're all short sports," he asserted drunkenly, waving his hand insultingly at the crowd. "You're cheap guys—you can't bear to lose."

"Hey!" broke in the barkeeper, "I said

I'd take you up. I'll get the thousand dollars, all right."

"Oh, you will, eh?" murmured Wunpost, and then he shook himself together. "Oh—sure! Yes, all right! Come on, we'll start right now!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE STINGING LIZARD.

In a certain stratum of society, now about to become extinct, it is considered quite *au fait* to roll a drunk if circumstances will permit. And it was from this particular stratum that the barkeeper at the Mint had derived his moral concepts. Therefore, he considered it no crime, no betrayal of a trust, to borrow the thousand dollars with which he was to pay John C. Calhoun from that prince of opportunists, Judson Eells. It is not every banker that will thrust a thousand-dollar bill—and the only one he has on hand—upon a member of the bung-starters' brotherhood; but a word in his ear from Pisen-face Lynch convinced Fellowes that it would be well to run straight. Fate had snatched him from behind the bar to carry out a part not unconnected with certain schemes of Judson Eells and any tendency to run out on his trusting backers would be visited with summary punishment. At least that was what he gathered in the brief moment they had together before Lynch gave him the money and disappeared.

As for John C. Calhoun, a close student of inebriety might have noticed that he became sober too quick; but he invested their departure in such a wealth of mystery that the barkeeper was more than satisfied. A short way out of town Wunpost turned out into the rocks and milled around for an hour; and then, when their trail was hopelessly lost, he led the way into the hills. Being a stranger in the country, Fellowes could not say what wash it was, but they passed up *some* wash and from that into another one; and so on until he was lost; and the most he could do was to drop a few white beans from the pocketful that Lynch had provided. The night was very dark, and they rode on interminably, camping at dawn in a shut-in cañon; and so on for three nights until his mind became a blank as far as direction was concerned. His liberal supply of beans had been exhausted the first night and since then they had passed over a hundred rocky hog-backs and down a thousand bowlder-strewn cañons. As to the whereabouts of Blackwater, he had no more idea than a cat that has been carried in a bag; and he lacked the intimate sense of direction which often enables the cat to come back. He was lost, and a little scared, when Wunpost stopped in a gulch and showed him a neat pile of rocks.

"There's my monument," he said. "Ain't that a neat piece of work? I learned how to make them from a surveyor. This tobacco can here contains my notice of location—that was a steer when I said it wasn't staked. Git down and help yourself!"

He assisted his companion, who was slightly saddle sore, to alight and inspect the monument and then he waited expectantly.

"Oh, the mine! The mine!" cried Wunpost gayly. "Come along—have you got your sack? Well, bring along a sack and we'll fill it so full of gold it'll bust and spill out going home. Be a nice way to mark the trail, if you should want to come back some time—and by the way, have you got that thousand-dollar bill?"

"Yes, I've got it," whined the barkeeper, "but where's your cussed mine? This don't look like nothing to me!"

"No, that's it," expounded Wunpost, "you haven't got my system—they's no use for you to turn prospector. Now look in this crack—notice that stuff up and down there? Well, now, that's where I'd look to find gold."

"Jee-rusalem!" exclaimed the barkeeper, or words to that effect, and dropped down to dig out the rock. It was the very same ore that Wunpost had shown when he had entered the Mint at Blackwater, only some of it was actually richer than any of the pieces he had seen. And there was a six-inch streak of it, running down into the country rock as if it were going to China. He dug and dug again while Wunpost, all unmindful, unpacked and cooked a good meal. Fellowes filled his small sack and all his pockets and wrapped up the rest in his handkerchief; and before they packed to go he borrowed the dish towel and went back for a last hoard of gold. It was there for the taking, and he could have all he wanted as long as he turned over the thousand-dollar bill. Wunpost was insistent upon this and, as they prepared to start, he accepted it as payment in full.

"That's *my* idea of money!" he exclaimed admiringly, as he smoothed the silken note

across his knee. "A thousand-dollar bill, and you could hide it inside your ear—say, wait till I pull that in Los! I'll walk up to the bar in my old, raggedy clothes, and if the barkeep makes any cracks about paying in advance I'll just drop *that* down on the mahogany. That'll learn him, by grab, to keep a civil tongue in his head and to say mister when he's speaking to a gentleman."

He grinned at the Judas that he had taken to his bosom, but Fellowes did not respond. He was haunted by a fear that the simple-minded Wunpost might ask him where he got that big bill, since it is rather out of the ordinary for even a barkeeper to have that much money in his clothes; but the simple-minded Wunpost was playing a game of his own, and he asked no embarrassing questions. It was taken for granted that they were both gentlemen of integrity, each playing his own system to win, and the barkeeper's nervous fear that the joker would pop up somewhere found no justification in fact. He had his gold, all he could carry of it, and Wunpost had his thousand-dollar bill, and now nothing remained to hope for but a quick trip home and a speedy deliverance from his misery.

"Say, for cripes' sake," he wailed, "ain't they any short-cut home? I'm so lame I can hardly walk."

"Well, there is," admitted Wunpost, "I could have you home by morning. But you might take to dropping that gold, like you did them Boston beans, and I'd come back to find my mine jumped."

"Oh, I won't drop no gold!" protested Fellowes earnestly, "and them beans was just for a joke. Always read about it, you know, in these here lost-treasure stories; but shucks, I didn't mean no harm!"

"No," nodded Wunpost. "If I'd thought you did I'd have ditched you, back there in the rocks. But I'll tell you what I *will* do—you let me keep you blindfolded and I'll get you out of here quick."

"You're on!" agreed Fellowes and Wunpost whipped out his handkerchief and bound it across his whole face. They rode on interminably, but it was always downhill and the sagacious Mr. Fellowes even noted a deep gorge through which water was rushing in a torrent. Shortly after they passed through it he heard a rooster crow and caught the fragrance of hay, and not long after that they were out on the level where he could smell the rank odor of the creosote. Just at daylight they rode into Blackwater from the south, for Wunpost was still playing the game, and half an hour later every prospector was out, ostensibly hunting for his burros. But Wunpost's work was done, he turned his animals into the corral and retired for some much-needed sleep; and when he awoke the barkeeper was gone, along with everybody else in town.

The stampede was to the north and then up Jail Cañon, where there was the only hay ranch for miles; and then up the gorge and on almost to Panamint, where the tracks turned off up Woodpecker Cañon. They were back-tracking of course, for the tracks really came down it, but before the sun had set Wunpost's monument was discovered, together with the vein of gold. It was astounding, incredible, after all his early efforts, that he should let them back-track him to his mine; but that was what he had done and Pisen-face Lynch was not slow to take possession of the treasure. There was no looting of the pay streak as there had been at the Willie Meena, a guard was put over it forthwith; and, after he had taken a few samples from the vein, Lynch returned on the gallop to Blackwater.

The great question now with Eells was how Wunpost would take it, but, after hearing from his scouts that the prospector was calm, he summoned him to his office. It seemed too good to be true, but so it had seemed before when Calhoun had given up the Wunpost and the Willie Meena; and when Lynch brought him in Eells was more than pleased to see that his victim was almost smiling.

"Well, followed me up again, eh?" he observed sententiously, and Eells inclined his head.

"Yes," he said, "Mr. Lynch followed your trail and—well, we have already taken possession of the mine."

"Under the contract?" inquired Wunpost, and when Eells assented Wunpost shut his lips down grimly. "Good!" he said. "Now I've got you where I want you. We're partners, ain't that it, under our contract? And you don't give a whoop for justice or nothing as long as you get it *all!* Well, you'll get it, Mr. Eells—do you recognize this thousand-dollar bill? That was given to me by a barkeep named Fellowes, but, of course, he received it from you. I knowed where he got it, and I knowed what he was up

to—I ain't quite as easy as I look—and now I'm going to take it and give it to a lawyer, and start in to get my rights. Yes, I've got some rights, too—never thought of that, did ye—and I'm going to demand 'em *all!* I'm going to go to this lawyer and put this bill in his hand and tell him to git me my *rights!* Not all of 'em, not nine-tenths of 'em—I want 'em *all*—and by grab, I'm going to *get* 'em!"

He struck the mahogany table a resounding whack and Eells jumped and glanced warningly at Lynch.

"I'm going to call for a receiver, or whatever you call him, to look after my interests at the mine; and if the judge won't appoint him I'm going to have you summoned to bring the Wunpost books into court. And I'm going to prove by those books that you robbed me of my interest and never made any proper accounting; and then, by grab, he'll *have* to appoint him, and I'll get all that's coming to me, and you'll get what's coming to *you.* You'll be shown up for what you are, a low-down, sneaking thief that would steal the pennies from a blind man; you'll be showed up right, you and your sure-thing contract, and you'll get a little *publicity!* I'll just give this to the press, along with some four-bit cigars and the drinks all around for the boys, and we'll just see where you stand when you get your next rating from Bradstreet—I'll put your tin-front bank on the bum! And then I'll say to my lawyer, and he's a *slippery* son-of-a-goat: 'Go to it and see how much you can get—and for every dollar you collect, by hook, crook, or book, I'll give you back a half of it! Sue Eells for an accounting every time he ships a brick—make him pay back what he stole on the Wunpost—give him fits over the Willie Meena—and if a half ain't enough, send him broke and you can have it *all!* Do you reckon I'll get some results?"

He asked this last softly, bowing his bristling head to where he could look Judson Eells in the eye, and the oppressor of the poor took counsel. Undoubtedly he *would* get certain results, some of which were very unpleasant to contemplate, but behind it all he felt something yet to come, some counter-proposal involving peace. For no man starts out by laying his cards on the table unless he has an ace in the hole—or unless he is running a bluff. And he knew, and Wunpost knew, that the thing which irked him most was that sure-fire prospector's contract. There Eells had the high card, and if he played his hand well he might tame this impassioned young orator. His lawyer was not yet retained, none of the suits had been brought, and, perhaps, they never would be brought. Yet undoubtedly Wunpost had consulted some attorney.

"Why—yes," admitted Eells, "I'm quite sure you'd get results—but whether they would be the results you anticipate is quite another question. I have a lawyer of my own, quite a competent man and one in whom I can trust, and if it comes to a suit there's one thing you *can't* break and that is your prospector's contract."

He paused and over Wunpost's scowling face there flashed a twinge that betrayed him—Judson Eells had read his inner thought.

"Well, anyhow," he blustered, "I'll deal you so much misery——"

"Not necessary, not necessary," put in Judson Eells mildly, "I'm willing to meet you halfway. What is it you want now, and if it's anything reasonable I'll be glad to consider a settlement. Litigation is expensive—it takes time and it takes money—and I'm willing to do what is right."

"Well, gimme back that contract!" blurted out Wunpost desperately, "and you can keep your dog-goned mine. But if you don't, by grab, I'll fight you!"

"No, I can't do that," replied Eells regretfully, "and I'll tell you, Mr. Calhoun, why. You're just one of forty-odd men that have signed those prospector's contracts, and there's a certain principle involved. I paid out thirty thousand dollars before I got back a nickel, and I can't afford to establish a precedent. If I let you buy out, they will all want to buy out—that is, if they've happened to find a mine—and the result will be that there'll be trouble and litigation every time I claim my rights. When you were wasting my grubstake I never said a word, because that, in a way, was your privilege; and now that, for some reason, you are stumbling onto mines, you ought to recognize my rights. It is a part of my policy, as laid down from the first, under no circumstances to ever release anybody; otherwise some dishonest prospector might be tempted to conceal his find in the hope of getting title to it later. But now about this mine,

which you have named the Stinging Lizard —what would be your top price, for cash?"

"I want that contract," returned Wunpost doggedly, but Judson Eells shook his head.

"How about ten thousand dollars?" suggested Eells at last, "for a quit-claim on the Stinging Lizard Mine?"

"Nothing doing!" flashed back Wunpost. "I don't sign no quit-claim—nor no other paper, for that matter. You might have it treated with invisible ink, or write something else in, up above—but—aw, cripes, dang these lawyers, I don't want to monkey around—gimme a hundred thousand dollars and she's yours."

"The Stinging Lizard?" inquired Eells, and wrote it absently on his blotter at which Wunpost began to sweat.

"I don't *sign* nothing!" he reminded him, and Eells smiled indulgently.

"Very well, you can acknowledge it before witnesses."

"No, I don't acknowledge nothing!" insisted Wunpost stubbornly, "and you've got to put the money in my hand. How about fifty thousand dollars and make it all cash, and I'll agree to get out of town."

"No-o, I haven't that much on hand at this time," observed Judson Eells, frowning thoughtfully. "I might give you a draft on Los Angeles."

"No—cash!" challenged Wunpost, "how much have you got? Count it over and make me an offer—I want to get out of this town." He muttered uneasily and paced up and down while Judson Eells, with ponderous surety, opened up the chilled steel vault. He ran through bundles and neat packages, totting up as he went, and then with a face as frozen as a stone he came out with the currency in his hands.

"I've got twenty thousand dollars that I suppose I can spare," he began as he spread out the money, but Wunpost cut him short.

"I'll take it," he said, "and you can have the Stinging Lizard—but my word's all the quit-claim you get!"

He stuffed the money into his pockets without stopping to count it, more like a burglar than a seller of mines, and that night while the town gathered to gaze on in wonder, he took the stage for Los Angeles. No one shouted good-by and he did not look back, but as they pulled out of Blackwater he smiled.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK HOME.

The dry heat of July gave way to the muggy heat of August, and as the September storms began to gather along the summits Wunpost Calhoun returned to his own. It was his own country, after all, this land of desert spaces and jagged mountains reared up against the sky; and he came back in style, riding a big, round-bellied mule and leading another one packed. He had a rifle under his knee, a pistol on his hip, and a pair of field glasses in a case on the horn; and he rode in on a trot, looking about with a knowing smile that changed suddenly to a smirk of triumph.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed as he saw Eells emerge from the bank. "How's the mine, Mr. Eells; how's the mine?"

And Judson Eells, who had rushed out at the rumor of his approach, drew up his lip, and glared at him hatefully.

"You're a criminal!" he bellowed. "I could have you jailed for this—that Stinging Lizard Mine was salted!"

"The hell you say!" shrilled Wunpost, and then he laughed uproariously while he did a little jig in his stirrups. "Yeee—hoo!" he yelled, "say, that's pretty good! Have you any idee who done it?"

"You did it!" answered Eells, "and I could have you arrested for it, only I don't want to have any trouble. But you agreed to leave town, and now I see you're back—what's the meaning of this, Mr. Calhoun?"

"Too slow inside," complained Mr. Calhoun, who was sporting a brand-new outfit, "so I thought I'd come back and shake hands with my friends and take another look at my mine. Cost money to live in Los Angeles, and I bought me a dog—looky here, cost me eight hundred dollars!"

He reached down into a nest which he had hollowed out of the pack and held up a wilted fox terrier, and as Eells stood speechless he dropped it back into its cubby-hole and laid a loving hand on the mule.

"How's this for a mule?" he inquired ingenuously, "cost me five hundred dollars in Barstow. Fastest walker in the West—picked him out on purpose—and my pack mule can carry four hundred. How much did you lose on the Stinging Lizard?"

"I lost over thirty thousand dollars, with the road work and all," answered Eells with ponderous exactitude.

"Thirty thousand!" he echoed. "I wish it was a million! But you can't say that I didn't warn you!"

"Warn me!" raged Eells, "you did nothing of the kind. It was a deliberate attempt to defraud me."

"Aw, cripes," scoffed Wunpost, "you can't win all the time—why don't you take your medicine like a sport? Didn't I name the danged hole the Stinging Lizard? Well, there was your warning—but you got stung!"

He laughed heartily at the joke and looked up the street, ignoring the staring crowd.

"Well, got to go!" he said. "Where *is* that road you built—like to go up and take a look at it!"

"It extends up Jail Cañon," returned the banker grimly. "I understand Mr. Campbell is using it."

"Pretty work!" exclaimed Wunpost. "Won't be wasted, anyhow. That'll come in right handy for Cole. Why don't you buy the old hassayamper out?"

"He won't sell!" grumbled Eells. "Say, come in here a minute—I've got something I want to talk over."

He led the way into his inner office, where an electric fan was running, and Wunpost took off his big, black hat to loll before the breeze.

"Pretty nice," he pronounced. "They've got lots of 'em in Los. But I never suffered so much from heat in my life—the poor fools all wear *coats!* Gimme the desert, every time!"

"So you've come back to stay, eh?" inquired Eells unsociably. "I thought you'd left these parts."

"Yep—left and came back," replied Wunpost lightly. "Say, how much do you want for that contract? You might as well release me, because it'll never buy *you* anything—you've got all the mines you'll get."

"I'll never release you!" answered Judson Eells firmly. "It's against my principles to do it."

"Aw, put a price on it," burst out Wunpost bluffly. "You know you haven't got any principles. You're out for the dough, the same as the rest of us, and you figure you'll make more by holding on. But I'm here to tell you that I'm getting too slick for you and you might as well quit while you're lucky."

"Not for any money," responded Judson Eells solemnly. "I am in this as a matter of principle."

"Ahhr, principle!" scoffed Wunpost. "You're the crookedest dog that ever drew up a contract—and then talk to me about *principle!* Why don't you say what you mean and call it your system—like they use trying to break the roulette wheel? But I'm telling you your system is played out. I'll never locate another claim as long as I live, unless I'm released from that contract; so where do you figure on any more Willie Meenas? All you'll get will be Stinging Lizards."

He burst out into taunting laughter, but Judson Eells sat dumb, his heavy lower lip drawn up grimly.

"That's all right," he said at last. "I have reason to believe that you have located a very rich mine—and the only way you personally can ever get a dollar out of it, is to come through and give me half!"

"The only way, eh?" jeered Wunpost. "Well, where did I get the price to buy that swell pair of mules? Did I give you one-half, or even a smell? Not much—and I got this, besides."

He slapped a wad of bills that he drew from his pocket, and Eells knew they were a part of his payment—the purchase price of the salted Stinging Lizard—but he only looked them over and scowled.

"Nothing doing, eh?" observed Wunpost rising to go. "You won't sell that contract for no price. Going to follow me up, eh, and find this hidden treasure, and skin me out of it, too? Well, hop to it, Mr. Eells, and after you've got a bellyful perhaps you'll listen to reason. You got stung good and plenty when you bought the Stinging Lizard, and I figure I'm pretty well heeled. Got two new mules, beside my other animals, and an eight-hundred-dollar watchdog to keep me company; and I'm going to come back inside of a month with my mules loaded down with gold. Do you reckon your pet rabbit, Mr. Phillip F. Flappum, can make me come through with any part of it? Well, I consulted a lawyer before I left Los Angeles and he said—decidedly not! Your contract calls for claims, wherever located, but I haven't got any claim. This ore that I bring in may be dug from some claim, and then again it may be high-graded from some mine; but you've got to find that claim and prove that it exists before you can call for a cent. You've got to prove, by

grab, where I got that gold, before you can claim that it's yours—and that's something you never can do. I'm going to say I *stole* it and if you sue for any part of it you make yourself out a thief!"

He slammed his hand on Eells' desk and slammed the door when he went out and mounted his big mule with a swagger. The citizens of Blackwater made way for him promptly, though many a lip curled in scorn, and he rode out of town sitting sideways in his saddle while he did a little jig in his stirrups. He had come into town and bearded their leading citizen, and now he was on his way. If any wished to follow, that was their privilege as free citizens, and their efforts might lead them to a mine; but on the other hand they might lead them up some very rocky cañons and down through Death Valley in August. But there was one man he knew would follow, for the stakes were high and Judson Eells was not to be denied—it was up to Lynch, who had claimed to be so bad, to prove himself a tracker and a desert man.

Wunpost rode along slowly until the sun went down, for the heat haze hung black over the Sink, and that evening about midnight he entered Jail Cañon on a road that was graded like a boulevard. It swung around the point well up above the creek, and then on along the wash to Corkscrew Gorge, and as he paused below the house Wunpost chuckled to himself as he thought of his boasts to Wilhelmina. He had bet her two months before that, without turning his hand over or spending a cent of money, he could build her father a road; and now here it was, laid out like a highway—a proof that his system would work. She had chosen to scoff when he had made his big talk; but here he was back with his clothes full of money, and Judson Eells had kindly built the road. He looked up at the moon, where it rose swimming through the haze, and laughed until he shook; then he camped and waited for day.

The dawn came in a wave of heat, preceding the sun like the breath from a furnace; and Wunpost woke up suddenly to hear his wilted terrier barking furiously as he raced toward the house. There was a moment of silence, then the spit and yell of a cat, and as Wunpost stood grinning his dog came slinking back licking the blood from a scratch across his nose. He was a full-blooded fox terrier, but small and white and trembly; and the baby blue in his eyes pleaded of youth and inexperience as he crouched before his stern master.

"Come here!" commanded Wunpost, but as he reached down to slap him a voice called his name from above.

"*Don't* whip him!" it begged, and Wunpost withheld his hand for Wilhelmina had been much in his mind. She came dancing down the trail, her curls tumbling about her face and down over the perennial bib-overalls.

"He was chasing Red," she dimpled, "and you know how fierce he is—why, Red isn't afraid of a wild cat! Where have you been? We've all been looking for you!"

"I've been in Los Angeles," responded Wunpost with a sigh, "but, by grab, I never thought that this dog of mine would get licked by an old yaller cat!"

"He isn't yellow—he's red!" corrected Wilhelmina briskly, "the desert makes all yellow cats red; but where'd you get your dog? And oh, yes; isn't it fine—how do you like our new road? They had it built up to your mine!"

"So I hear," returned Wunpost with a grim twinkle in his eye. "What do you think of my system now?"

"Why, what system?" asked Billy, staring blankly into his face, and Wunpost pulled down his lip. Was it possible that this fly-away had taken his words so lightly that she had forgotten his exposition and prophecy? Did she think that this road had come there by accident and not by deep-laid design? He called back his dog and made him lie down behind him and then he changed the subject.

"How's your father getting along?" he asked after a silence, "has he shipped out any ore? Well, say, you tell 'im to get a move on. There's liable to be a cloud-burst and wash the whole road out, and then where'd you be with your home stake?"

"Well, I guess there hasn't been one for over twelve years," answered Billy, snapping her fingers enticingly to his dog, "and, besides, it's so hot the trucks can't pull up the cañon—it makes their radiators boil. But we've got it all sacked and when father gets his payment I'm going inside, to school. Isn't it fine, after all they said about dad—calling him crazy and everything else—and now his mine is worth lots and lots of money! I knew all the time he would win! And Eells has been up here and offered us

forty thousand dollars, but father wouldn't even consider it."

She stepped over boldly and picked up the dog, who wriggled frantically and tried to lick her face, and Wunpost stood mumbling to himself. So now it was her father who was getting all the credit for this wonderful stroke of luck; and he and the others who had called old Cole crazy were proven by the event to be fools. And yet he had packed ore for over two weeks to salt the Stinging Lizard for Eells!

There was a cordial welcome at the house from Mrs. Campbell, who was radiant with joy over their good fortune; but Wunpost avoided the subject of the sale of his mine, for, of course, she must know it was salted. Perhaps she held it to his credit that he had given Billy a full half when he had discovered the Willie Meena Mine; but it might be, of course, that she was this way with every one and simply tolerated him as she did Hungry Bill. He ate a good breakfast, but without saying much, and then he went back to his camp.

Wilhelmina tagged along, joyous as a child to have company and quite innocent of what is called maidenly reserve; and Wunpost dug down into his pack and gave her a bag of candy, at the same time patting her hand.

"Yours truly," he said, "sweets to the sweet, and all that. Say, what do you think this is?"

He held up a box, which might contain almost anything that was less than six inches square, and shook his head at all her guesses.

"Come on up to the lookout," he said at last, and she followed along fearlessly behind him. There are maidens, of course, who would refuse to enter dark tunnels in the company of masterful young prospectors; but Wilhelmina had yet to learn both fear and feminine subterfuge, and she made no pretty excuses. She was neither afraid of the dark, nor afflicted with vertigo, nor reminded of pressing home duties; and she was frankly interested both in the contents of the box and the ways of a man with a maid. He had given her some candy, and there was a gift in the little box—and once before he had made as if to kiss her; would he now, after bringing his lover's gifts, demand the customary tribute? And if so, should she permit it; and if not, why not?

Wunpost sat down deliberately at the mouth of the tunnel, on the broad seat she had built along the wall, and handed Wilhelmina the package; and as she sank down beside him the panting fox terrier slumped down at her feet and wheezed. But Billy failed to notice this sign of affection, for as the package was broken open a dainty case was exposed and this in turn revealed a pair of glasses. Not ordinary, cheap field glasses with rusty round barrels and lenses that refracted the colors of the rainbow; but exquisitely small ones, with square shoulders on the sides and quality showing in every line. She caught them up ecstatically and looked out across the Sink; and Wunpost let her gaze, though her focus was all wrong, while he made his little speech.

"Now," he said, "next time you see my dust you'll know whether it's a man or a dog."

"Oh, aren't they fine!" exclaimed Billy, swinging the glasses on Blackwater. "I can see every house in town. And there's a man on the trail—yes, and another one behind—I believe they're coming this way."

"Probably Pisen-face Lynch," observed Wunpost unconcernedly, "I expected him to be on my trail."

"Why, what for?" murmured Billy still struggling with the focus. "Oh, now I can see them fine! Oh, aren't these just wonderful—and such little things, too—are you going to use them to hunt horses?"

"No, they're yours!" returned Wunpost with a generous swagger. "I've got another pair of my own. I'll never forget how you picked me up that time, so this is a kind of present."

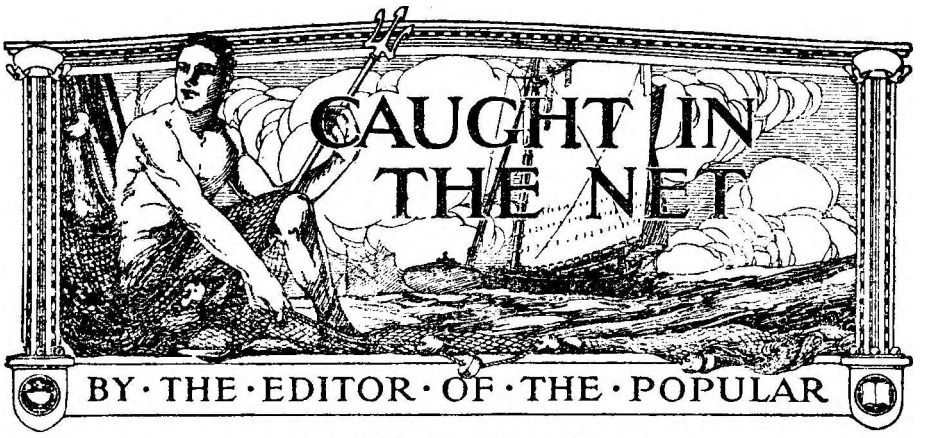
"A present!" gasped Wilhelmina, and then she paused and blushed, for, of course, she had known it all the time. They were small glasses, for a lady, but it was nice of him to say it, and to mention her finding him on the desert. And now her mother would have to let her keep them, for they were in remembrance of her saving his life.

"It's awful kind of you," she said, "and I'll never forget it—and now, won't you show me how they work?"

She drew a little closer, and as her curls brushed his cheek Wunpost reeled as if from a blow.

"Sure," he said, and gave her a kiss just as if she had really asked for it.

TO BE CONTINUED.



PRESIDENTIAL BEES

ALREADY the quadrennial bees that sting men with the highest political ambition are on the wing, and already some of them have chosen the bonnets in which they are to dwell. Consequently, there is a great hum in the land from California to New York.

It is only a matter of months until the national conventions will meet, and even this fall at some of the States' primaries a selection of delegates will be made for those important bodies.

Candidates for the presidency have been announced and there is much speculation as to others. Governor Frank O. Lowden, of Illinois, led the way, as the favorite son of the Middle West, and Senator Hiram W. Johnson, of California, followed in his wake as the choice of the "real" West. Which brings to mind the fact that the West has never been represented in the presidential chair, but its hopes are none the less ardent for that honor. Just hearken to one of its leading organs of thought:

> We have never, in fact, had a president from west of the Mississippi River. Within the last quarter of a century there has grown up a Western empire, in many respects differing greatly from Eastern America in the nature of its resources, in the problems of their utilization, in the character of its population, and in the whole structure of the resulting civilization. . . . Bound as we are by the traditions which most of us have brought with us to our brethren of the East, there is still a growing feeling that we are governed from the East by those who, however well disposed, do not understand our problems, and who, being able to outvote us in Congress, have their way, whether it is our way or not.

Turning our ears to this dominating East, we hear many confused buzzings of presidential bees about the heads of Major General Wood, William McAdoo, William H. Taft, Charles E. Hughes, General Pershing, and Colonel House; but that these siren insects have succeeded in getting under the respective bonnets of these gentlemen is not certain. William J. Bryan, Henry Ford, and Champ Clark are also counted among bee targets.

President Wilson himself is looked upon as a third-term candidate.

The issues will be manifold and epoch-making: League of Nations, internationalism, tariff, taxation, prohibition, profiteering, labor, to name but a few. The reconstruction of the world will rest heavily upon the shoulders of the man finally chosen to the high office. Will he come from the East, the West, the North, or the South?

Wherever he comes from, he will have need for supreme statesmanship.

SECOND G. A. R. FORMED BY DOUGHBOYS

A HIGHLY important and volatile element enters into reconstruction problems in the form of the American Legion, the official organization of soldiers, sailors, and marines who served in American uniform during the war. Five hundred elected delegates convened recently in Paris and started the ball rolling. Membership, to include those who served at home, has a possible total of approximately four and a half millions.

Armistice Day, November 11th, will probably be the standing date for national encampments, it having been selected for the first annual meeting the coming fall. Encampments of the American Legion will be called to order on the precise anniversary of the ending of the war—eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

Whether this successor to the G. A. R. will become a powerful and active political force, as in the case of the Canadian Great War Veterans' Association, is a question of import.

The Grand Army of the Republic, three years after its organization on April 6, 1866, at Decatur, Illinois, ruled that it must never be used for partisan work, nominations, or debates. With the exception of influencing of pensions legislation, this resolution of 1869 has been adhered to amazingly.

Opportunity to exercise political weapons was more tempting with the G. A. R. than it will be with the A. L., for the G. A. R. membership obviously was largely Republican, while the 4,500,000 probable members of the A. L. represent all political creeds and would never come nearer possessing united thought than its larger relative, the country at large.

The G. A. R.—rapidly shrinking to 100,000—reached its maximum membership of 409,489 in 1890. By establishing homes for the orphans of deceased comrades, it considerably assisted the Federal government in handling the after-war burden. To it we owe one of our poetic holidays, Decoration Day, originated by General John A. Logan, one of the earlier G. A. R. commanders in chief.

These picturesque old fellows, marching with faltering step in parades, reminiscing of Pickett's Charge, the Wilderness, and the March to the Sea, were for years the sole American manifestation of a military spirit long supposed dead. But a few years hence and the G. A. R. will have dwindled to a lone man—then oblivion. In its place arises the American Legion, with membership possibilities multiplied tenfold.

ANOTHER UTOPIA

HOW would you like to have the privileges and pay of an artist without being compelled to produce any work of art? How would you like to tramp in foreign lands, with all of a gypsy's freedom from care, and not even a gypsy's necessity for doing enough practical work, or even enough practical thievery, to purchase the means of existence? This is not merely one more foolish question of the type made famous by a cartoonist, nor is this an introduction to a book review.

Bertrand Russell, whose great mathematical mind thousands of scholars admire, tells us in a serious literary work how he thinks such things can be brought about. The world-wide fame of this English pacifist, who went to jail for his opinions, and the universal interest now prevailing in socialistic thought make the utterances of this leader in the "cause" quotable. But almost any normal person must think, upon reading this program: "If the leaders have such ideas, what can we expect from the rank and file?"

"Roads to Freedom," Mr. Russell calls his book. In his communist society every man will do practically what he likes, and, so far as a reader may discern, there is no semblance of a central authority to make him do anything at all. Necessaries of life will be free to all,

> But whatever went beyond necessaries should only be given to those who were willing to work—including those idle through no fault of their own. . . . The comparatively small number of men with an invincible horror of work, the sort who now become tramps, might lead a harmless existence without any grave danger of their becoming a serious burden on the more industrious.

And all tramps might be called artists in this Arcadian scheme. A special section is devoted to artists who, in return for doing nothing but enjoy themselves—there being no compulsion even to produce "art"—would receive a small honorarium from the community. Under this plan every man could live without work:

> There would be what might be called a "vagabond's wage," sufficient for existence, but not for luxury. The artist who preferred to have his whole time for art and enjoyment might live on the "vagabond's wage," traveling on foot when the humor seized him to see foreign countries, enjoying the air and the sun, as free as the birds, and perhaps scarcely less happy. Such men would bring

color and diversity into the life of the community. . . . They would keep alive a much-needed element of light-heartedness which our sober, serious civilization tends to kill.

We are sure there would be no lack of "artists" in this Utopia. We would be among the first to apply. The author tells us that "before we can have freedom" of this kind "we must have good will." Don Quixote might have conceived it all.

SHORTER DAYS

THE agitation of workers for the shorter workday in the large industries began when collective bargaining between labor and capital was less common than now. For many years the eight-hour workday was the chief goal of the workers and became general in most of the important industries after a long struggle, accompanied by big strikes. Other more drastic demands have been made of late, owing to fortuitous circumstances brought about by the late war causing a shortage of labor in some trades. Insistence on these demands would, many believe, result in such a revolt among employers as would place the workers eventually in the position of the man in the fable who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

The first organized movement on a large scale for the eight-hour workday was launched by the American Federation of Labor some years after Samuel Gompers first came into prominence as its head. Before this time the working hours were as a rule nine and ten and often more hours a day in most industries. The leaders in the movement held that shortening the workday lessened the menace of unemployment, the large number of unemployed at that time tending to reduce wages through competition for work. In addition to normal unemployment many thousands were thrown idle in some trades through displacement of hand labor by machinery and when the workday was reduced from nine, ten, or more to eight hours, the menace of unemployment was proportionately lessened.

The law against bringing immigrants here under contract to work was regarded as a means to the same end. It was brought about largely through agitation on behalf of the workers, as if immigrants could have been brought here under contract from European countries, where wages and standards of living were much lower than in the United States, this country would have been flooded with cheap labor and intense competition for work would have reduced wages to the lowest ebb. The eight-hour workday was followed by legislation on behalf of the workers, especially the women, in different States, the whole resulting in friendlier and more businesslike relations between employers and workers in industries employing large bodies of workers.

President Gompers, of the American Federation of Labor, which has a membership of three million two hundred thousand, to be increased by five hundred thousand more by the railroad brotherhoods joining its ranks, has shown during and since the war that he has grown with the times and his conservatism is expected to be a buffer against too radical demands. The A. F. of L., it is true, recently decided in favor of supporting a movement for a six-hour workday contemplated by the unions in some trades, but it will probably be a long time before the demand for the six-hour workday takes definite form and shape. Meantime there is bound to be some readjustment of the abnormal conditions resulting from the war, including the demand for and supply of labor.

KING COTTON'S THRONE TREMBLES

ONE of the permanent effects of war-time crop stimulation will be a lessening of King Cotton's control over the South. That section apparently has broken away from the one-crop policy. Three years ago the South was importing annually some six hundred million dollars' worth of food and feeds from other States; to-day it is self-sustaining in this line and growing powerful as an exporter.

The American cotton belt, greatest in the world, includes eleven States in a territory fifteen hundred miles long and five hundred wide. Last year this district increased its wheat yield by one hundred and thirty-five per cent, oats one hundred and thirty-three, hay one hundred and twenty-eight, Irish potatoes one hundred and seventeen, and sweet potatoes sixty-seven. Six States—North and South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama—have jumped the value of their yearly crop yields from eight hundred and

thirty-nine million dollars in 1909 to well past the two billion mark. Coincident with increased production of corn, the output of hogs in some cotton States has expanded one thousand two hundred per cent.

All this without cutting the cotton acreage. The South has long been notorious for idle farm land; the new crops represent new acreage, not a theft from cotton.

Much of the romance of Dixie is associated with the cotton industry. Popular-baliad writers find it irresistible; minstrel men are never so happy as when doing a soft-shoe dance with a canvas imitation of a cotton plantation or dock as a setting. The cotton-blockade runners of the Civil War added a brilliant chapter to the romance of the high seas.

The industry started in Virginia back in 1621, those first cotton plants being imported. Originally an Asiatic product, it was known centuries B. C. as the "fleece-growing tree;" ancient Hindus wore cotton garments and called them "vegetable wool."

Commercial manufacturing of cotton was developed in Spain in the thirteenth century, spreading from there to the Netherlands, thence to England. Eli Whitney's revolutionary invention got its name, gin, from a contraction of "ingin," the negro-slave designation for the machine.

Statistics sharps estimate that the world will require highly stimulated cotton production from now on. The South will continue with its former magnitude of cotton crop, but it is fortunate in having been weaned away from the one-crop idea—a mistake among farmers so prevalent as to seem almost instinctive. It is neither good for individuals nor for sections of a country, to carry all eggs in one basket. With a diversity of crops, the failure of one need not spell absolute ruin for the year.

POPULAR TOPICS

AT the end of the last fiscal year in June Uncle Sam had taken in and paid out more money than any one would have thought possible in the wildest flights of financial fancy a few years ago—nearly thirty-five billions on each side of the ledger. How our annual expenditures increased during the war period is shown in the following table, postal revenues not included:

Year.	Receipts.	Expenditures.
1914	$ 757,694,389	$ 762,042,758
1915	720,397,783	777,840,292
1916	838,403,969	750,666,159
1917	3,475,159,935	2,651,477,300
1918	20,358,879,098	19,011,301,924
1919	34,508,044,491	34,841,386,515

A GREAT many of us have become coupon clippers. Before the war some 360,000 bond buyers was the total for our 100,000,000 population. But after the Liberty and Victory Loans were marketed we found ourselves 20,000,000 bondholders strong. And now there comes a further call upon our budding investment powers. Foreign and domestic demands are to be made on our pocketbooks. We must finance new business in our own country, and this alone, it is thought by conservative bankers, will take a billion dollars; while there is every prospect that European, Asiatic, and South American countries will bid for our money. Mr. Average American Citizen will have plenty of opportunity to know how it feels to be an international financier.

RALEIGH S. RIFE, of the Bond Statistical Division of the Guaranty Trust Company of New York, has this to say about our wonderful position of advantage in present world affairs:

From the standpoint of material wealth we are in a much stronger position than we were at the outbreak of the war. Our national wealth as measured in dollars in 1912 was $187,000,000,000. Allowing for normal growth and the extraordinary growth of wealth during the war period, as in-

dicated by the annual savings figures estimated by Professor Friday, and allowing for a reasonable recapitalization of our wealth in accordance with the present level of prices, the total monetary value must now approximate $325,000,000,000. . . . In facing the present problems of reconstruction and rehabilitation, let us not center our attention mainly upon the wastes of this war, upon the destruction of property. Let us rather take an inventory of the resources of the world upon which the economic life may be rehabilitated. The war was fought with materials produced at that time. In the active battle areas wealth was destroyed. But the land, the machinery, the great sources of raw materials and power are still with us.

ALREADY Democrats and Republicans of the male genus are busy speculating on what the Democrats and Republicans of the female genus will do in the presidential election of 1920. It is pointed out that since 1916 New York, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Indiana, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Tennessee have granted full suffrage to the ladies. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt says that the League of Women Voters is strictly nonpartisan. Its slogan is certainly simple and effective: "An electorate that reads and speaks English and honors the American flag!"

SPEAKING of voting reminds us of something we came across the other day apropos of prohibition. The vote on the bill to enforce prohibition passed the House of Representatives as follows: Of the 238 Republican members, 168 were recorded in the affirmative and 48 in opposition. Likewise, out of 193 Democrats, 116 were for the bill, 52 against it. Now note this fact: During the years that prohibition has been before the people as a national issue, the largest vote in its favor was cast in 1892, being 264,000; and since that time it has declined to 221,000 in 1916. What is the answer?

STRIKES and lockouts continue, one after another, despite all the methods of mediation and arbitration. As some one said, what is needed is a law that will make an unjust strike impossible and a just one unnecessary. That is a task for a real Solon.

WE are rooters for the metric system, and so we were glad to see that the World Trade Club, of San Francisco, has inaugurated a vigorous campaign to have it adopted by the United States. Our present weights and measures are a relic of the medieval Hanseatic League. James Watt invented the metric system, but the Anglo-Saxon race from which he sprung is the last to adopt its own genius in this important matter. Like ourselves, Great Britain still clings to the unscientific old Hanseatic plan.

INSTRUCTIVE data on the trade of the United States with China have come to light. In 1860 America had 47 per cent of China's foreign trade. In 1910 it had dropped to 6.5 per cent. In 1917 the percentage had increased to 16. Will we keep on increasing it? If we do not, it will be our fault. China has a soft spot in her Celestial heart for the United States.

THIS may interest our friends who own automobiles. There was a man whose car developed a leak in the radiator which could not be reached without taking the whole d—— contraption apart. In fact, a repair man said a new radiator was needed. The peeved owner was not ready to spend thirty dollars in this way. He therefore looked up "dope" on leaky radiators. Then he tried some of the recipes, but got only temporary relief. At this juncture along came a wise bird. "Say," said he, "go to the drug store and buy a nickel's worth of flaxseed, ground, and put it in your radiator—and forget it!" The auto owner saw a josh. "Or get some powdered mustard in the cooling water—a good dose of it," continued the adviser earnestly. Unbelieving, but willing to take a chance, the car owner tried the flaxseed remedy. By Ford, it worked! But we think flaxseed and mustard poultices for leaky radiators are funny enough. If any of our readers try this on their flivver, let us hear results.

Death in the Pot

By Ben Ames Williams

Author of "Storming John," Etc.

Snaith had the chance of a lifetime to pretend he mistook Burton for a deer and so shoot him in the woods, but he waited for a more dramatic opportunity

HE had had no thought of seeing Burton here, in the deeps of the woods. Burton was in New York; that is to say, Burton had been in New York at his last knowledge. When, therefore, the deer turned his head and Snaith saw that the deer was Burton, he was profoundly startled, and trembled where he lay.

Snaith and his wife were in camp on Little Pond, three miles eastward through the thick woods. He had brought Bess up here to get her away from Burton. She had come willingly; so willingly that he was surprised. He had expected her to protest. She had never cared for the woods; she had little patience with his love for them. He had wondered at her readiness to come. He thought bitterly now that he understood. She must have known Burton would be here. Snaith's teeth set harshly. She had known; and here was Burton, under the leveled sights of his rifle, cheerfully oblivious.

Snaith knew the woods; he loved them. He was a big man, a strong man; and to breast the forest and conquer it was the breath of his nostrils. He had left camp at dawn this morning, while Bess was still asleep. She stirred drowsily among her blankets to bid him farewell. He struck northward, circling through the deep valleys among the hills, his pacs plodding through the boggy muck that floored the forest aisles. At sunrise he started a small buck, and took a snapshot at it before it disappeared. He had missed, clean enough; he found the flecked scar of his bullet in a beech, five feet from the ground. He had overshot, in his hurry, and this angered him. Snaith was a good shot, when his hand was steady. He ejected the empty shell as he shot; but after he had located the bullet, he retraced his steps to see if the cartridge had been faulty. He was looking for an excuse for his poor shooting. The empty brass cartridge case had a small dent near the rim. He told himself it had affected the force of the discharge, and cursed the manufacturers, and dropped the cartridge in his pocket to be used as evidence when he should file the complaint he intended. Then he took up the trail of the buck, hoping for another chance; but after a quarter of a mile the tracks were lost on harder ground, and he swung west and south for other quarry.

Toward mid-morning, a foolish partridge peered down at him from the fancied concealment of a cedar, and he clipped its head away with a ball, and dropped the bird in the game pocket of his coat. It was better than nothing. Bess liked partridges. He wondered what she was doing, alone in camp. Sleeping, probably. She was an inveterate sleeper. This was one of the things that made for friction between them. She could not enjoy the cafés, the theaters, the midnight shows which he liked to frequent. Snaith was, at times, fiercely impatient with her on this account.

He had seen no other game during the morning. It was after noon when he heard the distant crack of a twig, and froze alertly, and listened with all his ears, and heard another crackle, and began to creep toward the sound. It might be a partridge, scratching among the fallen leaves; or it might be a gray squirrel foraging against the winter; or it might be a deer. Snaith was so impatient at his morning's ill success that he swore he would shoot, however poor the game. Anything——

When he judged he was near enough, he crawled on hands and knees up the slope of the ridge till he reached the top and could look down toward the spot from which the sounds had come. He was in the thick woods, the pines; but below him there was alder brush, and the white columns of

birches. His eyes could not pierce the shield they spread, but as he lay, he heard the slow stamp of feet, exactly like the sound of a walking man. Such a sound as a deer makes, moving as it feeds. No squirrel, this; no partridge. He searched, inch by inch, the cover before him.

Beyond the low-lying alder thicket, and beyond the screen of birches, perhaps a hundred yards away, there was a rocky knoll. A brook passed below where Snaith lay, and wound through the alders toward this knoll. Snaith probed the depths of the brush with his eyes; and so, abruptly, he saw the deer.

He could see the shoulder and the neck and the head. He could see them clearly, unmistakably. He could almost count the points on the antlers; and the bulk of shoulder and neck told him this was a big buck. He was coldly elated, and he slid his rifle out across the rock in front of him and leveled it and cuddled its stock against his cheek and slowly depressed the muzzle to bring the sights in line. This was a point-blank shot; he could draw fine. He chose the shoulder, low down, where lay the heart and the lungs. There was the surest mark.

His fingers, in the loop of the lever, tightened, pressing the lever up against the safety catch; his forefinger on the trigger began to draw. His rifle had a four-pound pull; and he was accustomed to fire it with a steady, remorseless tug which avoided any chance of throwing off the mark. His pressure on the trigger increased almost to the firing point.

And then the deer turned its head, and he saw that the deer was Burton. Burton, in the brown shirt he wore beneath his hunting coat, with his wide-brimmed hat turned up at the sides. The deer was Burton.

It is not hard to mistake a man for a deer in the woods. A deer is not conspicuous. He is, at most, a patch of shadow-mottled color or a length of neck, or a high-poised head. And the stumps and snags of the trees, and the fluttering leaves combine to hide him and confuse the outline which the hunter sees. Men have shot deer and found their bullets in trees, or marked where the copper scarred a rock; and men have shot deer and killed men. It is an easy thing to do. In Snaith's case, it had been a matter of a split second. If Burton had remained motionless an instant longer, the bullet would have smashed his chest.

When he turned his head, however, Snaith saw at once that the deer was a man, and that the man was Burton. Seeing this much, he saw more. He saw Burton's red hunting coat, where he had hung it on a tree behind him; he saw a bit of white, where Burton's lunch was spread on a rock; he saw a flicker of flame, and then a puff of smoke and understood that Burton had been stooping to light his dinner fire when Snaith discovered him. And he lay, flat on his face, trembling with the shock of his discovery, and with terror at thought of what he was so near doing. An instant more, and he would have killed the man.

Killed a man; and that man, Burton, who loved Bess. He had brought Bess here to get her away from Burton. Damn the man; why had he followed them? How had he known they would be here? What was he doing here? Did she know? *Did* she know?

She had been so willing to come, so surprisingly willing. Was that because she knew Burton would be near her? Were they seeing each other, while Snaith hunted, day by day? The man trembled where he lay, and set his teeth, and cursed the thought. Damn Burton. Why was he here?

Burton loved Bess; Snaith knew that. His friends had told him so, sneeringly. But he had known it without being told. They had met casually, his wife and Burton. But there had been nothing casual about their later meetings. Burton was one of those men, below middle height, compact, and vibrantly alive with a force and an energy and a concentrated power denied to larger men. He was not a woman's man. He was a man among men; an engineer, a builder of bridges in far places, a man who had lived. A man to attract men, and women. Snaith did not know what Bess thought of Burton. But he knew Burton loved Bess. He had seen that in the man's eyes; he had been sure of it when Burton, of a sudden, ceased to come to their home, ceased to see Bess. That was the cursed hypocrisy of the man. Ostentatiously, he avoided Bess; actually, he might be seeing her in secret, day by day. Snaith had tried to be sure of this; he had had Bess watched; he had set men on Burton's trail. But he had discovered nothing. Burton was too clever, he told himself. Too clever. He covered his tracks.

When he could not be sure, he had brought Bess up here. Here, at least, he

could be sure of her; here, at least, he could be sure Burton was not seeing her. This was what he had told himself; this was the fool's assurance he had given himself. And now—here was Burton.

And if Burton had remained motionless another instant, he would be dead, and Snaith blameless. Hunting accidents were always happening; they were unavoidable; they were a part of the hazard of the hunt; they were the chance men took, who came into the woods in the deer season. Burton would have been dead, and Snaith blameless.

Snaith thought, abruptly, of a deer he had killed the year before. The bullet struck it in the fore shoulder; and when he cut up the carcass, he found the whole forward end of the body jarred and torn by the blow, and the muscles full of bloody clots. The little ball had mushroomed; the very body of the deer was wrecked and cracked and disrupted as a house is disrupted by an earthquake shock. Burton would have been like that, if he had stayed still. Why did he have to move? Curse the man! Dead, now, and Snaith blameless, if he had not moved.

His rifle was still leveled over the rock before him; he glanced along the sights. They covered Burton, even now. The man was stooping, sitting on his heels beside his little fire, his back toward Snaith. If Snaith were to pull, now, the bullet would split Burton's spine. The man on the ridge cuddled his rifle closer, and for a moment his finger tightened; then he flung his hand away and dropped his face on his left arm. Why hadn't he fired more quickly, before Burton moved? If he had done that, Burton would be dead now. And he, Snaith, could not be blamed. He could not even blame himself.

He lifted his head, and his face was white. The man was shaking with a murderous frenzy. If he were not a coward, he would shoot, even now. Even now. He could still say he had taken Burton for a deer. No one could prove that he lied. No one would know. They might suspect; they might accuse him. But what could they prove? Proof. That was it. That was what the law demanded. So long as there was no proof against him, he was safe. He knew the law; he was a lawyer; he specialized in criminal cases. And there could be no proof here.

But, no matter what others thought, he would know. He would know he had killed Burton. Could he endure that knowledge? He had seen cases where the criminal's own conscience had betrayed him. He had defended men who were torn and racked by their own sense of guilt. Defended them; yes, and freed them, too. That was the game; that was the game. It was true that more than one of them had gone to death, or worse than death, afterward. The mark was on them; they could never shake it off; even though the courts told them they were clean, they still knew themselves defiled with crime. And could not bear that knowledge. Snaith had always despised such men, called them cowards, thought them afraid to seize the fruits of the victory he had won for them. But—would he not be as great a coward as they? Could he kill Burton and live? Blameless before men, he would yet be convicted in his own heart. If he had only fired before Burton moved. Then he could have acquitted himself. But not now. Not now. This would be murder, no matter what men might say.

He set his lips. By the Eternal, he was no coward. Here, under the muzzle of his gun, was the man who loved his wife; the man who might already have despoiled him. He was swept by a passionate gust of cold hatred for Burton; murderous hatred. Death was too good for the man. Death was mercy to him. But death was in Snaith's hand to deal; and he gripped his rifle and leveled it again. Whatever men might think, whatever he might bring down upon his head by the trigger pressure, Burton should die. Burton should die. He had lived too long; he should die.

He brought the sights in line. This was death for Burton. Death was too good for the man. Snaith would have liked to torture him. But he could only kill. He touched the trigger.

At the touch of the steel, the man on the ridge went cold with a deadly ferocity; his perplexities fell away from him; he was calm as death and all eternity. His mind of a trained lawyer considered the situation, considered its possibilities. He had made up his mind to kill Burton. So be it. But at this distance he might miss. That was a possibility. Or he might only wound the man. That would be unbearable. He must kill. That was Burton's desert. He would kill. But——

If he crept nearer, his shot would be sure. He might even—— His mind leaped to the new thought. He would face Burton, tell him what was coming, let him suffer in that knowledge, then shoot him like the dog he was. That would not be a merciful death; it would be a torment to Burton, for Burton was a man who loved life. He would not face death with a smile. But he would die. Snaith was resolved on that.

He considered. If he faced Burton, shot him down at close range, could the thing still be made to look like accident? Yes. How? Snaith was the lawyer now, framing his own defense. Suppose he shot from where he lay, thinking Burton was a deer. What would he do? First, eject the shell; then walk swiftly down the slope toward where he would expect to find his quarry. Therefore, he must leave an empty cartridge here, where he lay, to be found by those who would investigate the story he would have to tell. He remembered, with a certain grim satisfaction, the empty cartridge case in his pocket, and he drew it out and turned it over in his hands. There ought not to be too many finger prints on the thing. He took out his handkerchief, and breathed upon the metal of the cartridge, and polished it. Then, holding it in the handkerchief in his left hand, he lifted it with the right, between finger and thumb, and pressed his thumb against the butt of it, as he would have done in thrusting it into the magazine. Then he tossed it to his right, over his shoulder, where he lay. The rifle would have thrown it so.

This was his only preparation. He was ready and resolved. He rose and walked swiftly down into the alder run, and hurried through the alders, along the brook, till he burst out on the other side.

Burton must have heard him coming. He heard the man call some word, and when he came into the little open glade where Burton had built his fire, Burton was standing up, looking toward him. It was almost as though Burton had expected some one. Snaith thought of Bess. Perhaps Burton was waiting for her here. The thought tortured him, and it crystallized his determination. Burton should surely die. So much was decided. And if Bess came upon them here —— Why, then, Bess should die, too. Much as he loved her. His soul was sick at the thought that she might come. He loved her so.

Burton, Snaith saw at a glance, was carrying his camp with him. There was a small blanket pack, unrolled and open on the rocks beyond the fire; and there were cans of milk and coffee and the like, scattered in convenient spots. Above the fire, a little black pot was boiling, and Snaith caught the odor of stewing partridge, and of onions. The pot, somehow, fascinated him. He dragged his eyes away from it and went forward, his face white, toward Burton. Burton looked at him and called:

"Hello there, Snaith. Where did you drop from?"

Snaith's voice was steady. "Bess and I are camping on Little Pond," he said, and came within ten feet of Burton and stopped, the fire between them.

Burton looked surprised. "I didn't know that," he said. He glanced toward the fire. "I'm just concocting a partridge stew. You're in the nick of time."

The little black pot caught Snaith's eye again, and an ancient phrase leaped into his mind. "Burton," he said, "there's death in the pot for you."

Burton eyed Snaith inquiringly. He was putting fresh bits of wood on the fire. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I'm going to kill you," Snaith told him.

Burton laughed outright at that. "Fair enough," he said. "But—wait till we've shared the stew."

Snaith did not know what he had expected Burton to say to his threat. He was ready for fear, or for anger that would drive the man to charge him. He was ready for that; his rifle was poised. It covered Burton mercilessly. But Burton only laughed, and stirred the stew in the pot. Snaith's uneasy eyes took in the details of the noonday camp. Burton's rifle was beyond the blanket pack, resting against a rock, twenty feet from the fire. His red hunting coat hung on a tree. But Burton seemed unconcerned; he did not glance toward the rifle. He was absorbed in the business of the stew. The little pot was bubbling cheerfully. Burton had made an expert's fire, a tiny thing that applied just enough heat in just the right place. Snaith saw that the heat had charred one of the sticks that supported the pot. He thought the stick would burn through before the stew was done. Then he dragged his thoughts back to the business in hand, and rage flooded through him.

"Damn the stew!" he ejaculated. "You'll never live to eat it."

Burton grinned up at him. "Why, then, I won't taste the death in the pot, Snaith," he reminded the other man. "If you're sure it's there—it must be for you."

He did not seem to be afraid; he did not even seem to be concerned. He went about the business of preparing dinner as casually as though Snaith were a friend who had come upon him at his nooning. Snaith was furious at Burton's ease; he said with a cold ferocity:

"I'd not joke, if I were in your place, my friend."

Burton was persistently amiable. "Pshaw, Snaith, why not?" he asked. "It strikes me as a joke, if you don't mind. Murder isn't being done, you know. Not by men who have their wits about them."

"I have my wits about me," said Snaith. He held his voice steady; he was trying to imitate Burton's poise.

"Of course," Burton agreed. "That's why I know you're joking."

Snaith laughed a little, mirthlessly. "Burton," he said, "I was out after deer to-day. I heard you breaking sticks, stalked you. You made such sounds as a deer makes. I climbed the ridge, up the run behind me, here. Not over a hundred and fifty yards. And I looked this way and saw a deer. You know how easy it is to see a deer in the woods, Burton. Sometimes the deer you see is a tree; sometimes it is a bush; sometimes it is a rock; sometimes it is a patch of sunlight; sometimes it is a man. In this case, the deer was a man. The man was you. I was pulling the trigger when I—when you turned your head, and I saw the deer was a man, and the man was you."

"I'm afraid I've put too much salt in this stew, Snaith," said Burton.

"If you had not moved," Snaith told him, "you would be dead now. I should not have missed."

"And I wish I had a squirrel to go in with this partridge. The combination is a tasty one."

Snaith smiled bitterly. "Don't be a poser, Burton. Listen."

"Don't be a bore, Snaith," Burton countered.

"When I saw the deer was you," Snaith said insistently, "I was sorry I had not fired. I prepared to shoot. And then decided to come here, to make sure of you."

"And now you realize it isn't being done," said Burton cheerfully. "Sit down, Snaith. Don't make an ass of yourself."

"But before I left the ridge," Snaith told him, "I dropped an empty cartridge there. And I came this far swiftly, so that my tracks will be the tracks of a man who thinks he has killed his deer. And now, Burton, I shall shoot you. Stand up, and take it like a man."

Burton was squatting, feeding the fire with little sticks. "You're a lawyer, Snaith, I can see that," he commented. "You figured it out quickly, didn't you? And now you're afraid to shoot."

"Stand up!" Snaith commanded thickly.

Burton stood lazily erect. "All right, if you insist. But what's it all about, Snaith? It's not quite clear to me. You're shooting me because I'm not a deer? Is that the way of it, old man?"

"I'm shooting you because you're in love with Bess," Snaith told him. The man's mouth was dry; he was fighting to steady his trembling hands.

Burton's eyes became grave and thoughtful. He said slowly: "Yes, I love Bess. I don't see how any one could help it. I don't see how you can help it, Snaith. It's one of the mysteries of the world to me."

"It's none of your damned business about me," Snaith said in a choking voice.

Burton turned his back to the other, walked away from the fire a dozen paces and sat down against a rock and clasped his hands behind his head. "Snaith," he said, "as Dewey told the chap at Manila, you may fire when you are ready—and when you get up your nerve. Meanwhile, I'm going to make a few remarks about you, to you and the ambient atmosphere, and you can listen or not, as you've a mind."

"If you know how," said Snaith, "you'd be wiser to pray."

"When I met Bess," said Burton slowly, disregarding the other, "I thought she was a splendid woman. And I found that others agreed with me. Though no one thought you were particularly splendid, Snaith.

"As I saw Bess, now and then, I found her finer and finer. I suppose she liked me. But about six weeks ago, Snaith, I discovered what you've apparently just found out. I discovered that I was in love with her.

"Now I take no particular credit to myself for this, Snaith; but I tell you, for what

it is worth, that as soon as I discovered this, I took pains not to see Bess any more. Matrimonial burglary never appealed to me. There are two kinds of—love, Snaith. Though I suppose you've had experience of only one. Mine is the other kind. Gold that is stolen is very apt to have a brassy taste in the mouth. Leaving Bess and her own inclinations out of it, I could not love her and—soil her. So—I took pains not to see her any more."

Snaith laughed harshly. "Beautiful!" he said.

"However," Burton told him slowly, "I took some pains to look into your soul, Snaith. I wanted to know what manner of man you were. And—I found out. A number of things. You remember the little stenographer, Snaith. The one who lived on Forty-eighth Street, after she left your office. I saw her one night, in Rector's, and talked with her. She said you were a good old scout, Snaith. But she told me about that first time you took her to dinner—and got her drunk. You remember.

"I found out other things along the same line, Snaith. It was not hard."

Snaith bit his lip to steady himself; he said hoarsely, pretending composure while his pulses pounded: "If I had five minutes of life left, I'd not waste them in drivel."

"When I found out that you sometimes hit Bess, when you were drunk or nasty," Burton told him, "I was inclined to beat your head in. In a book, I might have done so. But, after all, that would have done more harm than good. I suppose it is one of the advantages of matrimony that a man can strike his wife, and still put in the wrong any one who seeks to defend her.

"Snaith, you're a dog and a coward; you're a villain and a sneak; you're a blackguard and a scoundrel, and you ought to be hung. That's the sum and substance of what I found out about you, Snaith. So you will not wonder when I say it made me sick to think Bess was your wife. I struck out; I left town; I came up into the woods."

Snaith laughed. "Because you knew Bess would be here, alone all day. You knew it."

Burton shook his head soberly. "No, Snaith."

"Don't lie, dead man."

For a moment the other was silent, thinking. Then he said: "For Bess' sake, Snaith, you ought to know better than that. After you've drummed up the courage to shoot me, look in the pocket of my coat, on the tree, there, and you'll find a letter. It starts off something like this: 'Replying to yours of the sixteenth from Saskewan——' So you see, Snaith, it proves that I was up here, north of here, three good weeks ago. Were you here, then?"

Snaith and Bess had been in the woods less than a week; he had not spoken to her of the trip till two days before they started. So Burton told the truth. But he thrust the thought aside, furiously. What matter? The man loved Bess; he said as much. Death was mercy for him. A fury possessed the man; he would have liked to beat Burton into bloody pulp, beat the mocking smile into Burton's face. Damn the man!

"You lie," he said harshly. "Lie like a dog. If I weren't here, if I hadn't come upon you, you'd be with Bess this afternoon. You may have been there this morning, for all I know. The trail from the pond crosses the brook just below here. By God, I believe you have been there this morning; sneaking in and sneaking out while I was gone."

"When you've got up your courage and finished this," Burton told him steadily, "you can follow my tracks six miles downstream to my camp last night. I've not been there."

Snaith laughed. "Then it's because you didn't know the way," he jeered. "I'll tell you the way. Down the brook fifty yards, to the trail to town; turn to the right, and it's four miles to the pond. Our camp's at the mouth of the trail. Bess is there. Four miles away. I'll be with her in an hour, when I've done with you."

Burton thought, a little sickly, that Snaith was in the mood to torture Bess. His eyes hardened, and his lips set; and Snaith saw that he had scored. "And, by God, I'll show her I'm her husband still," he taunted the sitting man.

Burton got up and came forward and replenished the fire. Snaith saw, absently, that the thin stick which supported the pot was burned almost through. The fire burned up, and Burton went back and sat down against the rock. He was twenty feet from Snaith. The fire was between them, six feet from Snaith's feet. When Burton was seated again, hands once more clasped behind his head, Snaith jeered:

"Well, what do you say to that?"

"I say," Burton told him, "that it's a lie!"

"So? And—why? Who'll prevent?"

"I'll see Bess before you do," said Burton evenly.

Burton smiled. "Pshaw!" he told the man. "You couldn't kill me with a forty-centimeter cannon."

Half to himself, Snaith whispered: "I'll try that." And whipped his rifle to his shoulder, quick as light, and fired.

Upon the shot, Burton's body gave a twitch and a little leap. A puff of dust came from his left side. His hands unclasped and dropped limply to the ground, and he sagged over as he leaned against the rock. His eyes were half open, swimming. And a stain appeared and spread upon his brown shirt.

Snaith laughed, an insane exultation in his eyes. He worked the lever of his rifle, throwing a fresh cartridge into the breech and cocking the weapon by the same motion. The empty, brass cartridge case dropped to the ground at his feet. He stood quite still, but he was fighting to resist an overpowering impulse. This is one of the most deeply rooted instincts of primordial man. The instinct to finish off a hurt insect, a wounded animal, a disabled enemy. When men become brutes, they give way to it. Snaith wanted to smash Burton into bloody dust; he wanted to destroy the man utterly. He choked with the fury of murderous destruction in his breast.

And Burton's eyes opened wider and cleared; and the wounded man sat up straight against the rock. He looked at Snaith and laughed recklessly.

"Just creased me," he said. "You couldn't kill me with an ax, you murderous hound."

Snaith went insane. He forgot all caution, forgot everything save his frenzy to destroy Burton. He forgot the cartridge in his rifle; he wanted to feel the man's blood on his hands. He wanted to crush in Burton's skull, smash his grinning face. He gripped his rifle by the barrel, swung it up and over his shoulder, and charged forward to bring it down upon the wounded man.

Burton sat still. He was weak and sick. He could not, for the life of him, have moved. But his senses were curiously clear, so that he heard the scream in the woods behind him, and knew it was Bess who screamed. But could not move to look that way.

Snaith did not hear the woman scream; his senses were blanketed by the tempest of his madness. But even if he had heard, it would have been too late.

The fire which Burton had built up had at last charred through the green, crotched stick. The stick began to bend like a melting candle. It bent to one side, slowly down. When it had bent half a dozen inches, the pot began to slide toward it, along the cross stick which ran through the bale. It slid down, struck the charred support, broke it off, fell, and rolled a little away from the fire, spilling the stew upon the ground.

Snaith, when he charged toward Burton, took a step to one side, around the fire that lay between them. The rolling pot innocently crossed his path. His foot struck it; he tripped and overbalanced and fell drunkenly forward. As he fell, he threw out his hands to save himself. The rifle, jerked forward by this motion of his hands, flew in front of him, butt first. The butt struck against a stoutly bedded rock. The jar released the hammer. Such things do happen, let your safety devices be as many as you will.

At the roar of the discharge, Burton's ebbing senses were shocked out of him, and the world turned black before his eyes.

When the universe returned to him, somebody was dabbing at his side with something cold. He opened his eyes and saw a man, one of the guides, from town. Then he discovered another man, and a woman, Bess.

He asked huskily: "What's up?"

"He's dead," said the man. "Top of his head gone. His own gun."

Bess heard Burton's voice and came toward him. He asked her: "How did you come to be here?"

"They brought a telegram for—Mr. Snaith," she said. "It was important. He had said he would work around this way, and we came to meet him. And heard him shoot you. And—we all saw the rest."

"What happened to him?" he asked, strength coming back to him.

One of the guides answered. "Figure he was going to bust your head; but yore stew pot rolled in front o' him. Tripped him up; and he dropped the gun, and she binged him right between the eyes."

Burton lay still, eyes closed, thinking; then he smiled a little grimly. "He said there was—death in the pot," he told them. "Yes. Death in the pot! For him."

The Clean Streak

By Albert Edward Ullman

Author of "The Joyful Jinx," Etc.

A prize-fight yarn which shows that the game is not all brutality and low cunning

PINK from his shower and rubdown, Capper Moyle strode toward the dressing room to don his street clothes. He could hear the voice of Mathewson in the gym talking to the reporters.

"Yes," the manager was saying, "we're meeting the champ and Doyle at the Continental at three o'clock. There may be something to give out then."

"Do you think your man's got a chance with Ted Roberts?" sounded in youthful tones.

"Chance?—he's got a walk-over!" came the voice of his manager—and his voice was the voice of the four-flusher. Capper knew that. Grimly he set his mouth as he went on. A few minutes later the little manager stood in the dressing room watching him struggle with his collar and tie.

"Cheer up, Capper!" he breezed. "Did you see what the morning papers said about Roberts' end of the movies? That go with the Battler paid him a hundred and sixty thousand!"

Capper turned toward him with somber eyes; gone were his usual good-natured grin and bantering voice.

"Yep," he summed succinctly. "I read it and I read somethin' else, too."

"From the looks of you, Capper," joshed the little manager, "it must have been a death notice."

For an instant the big fighter held him with that same somber gaze. Then his lips parted in a crooked smile.

"It was worse than that—to me—Jim." He swallowed hard. "It was about some one foreclosing on the Battler's farm and turning him out. Mebbe you didn't read that?"

"I didn't," replied Mathewson seriously. "Why, I thought the old boy had something laid by."

Capper sniffed loudly and the veins on his forehead stood out.

"Good deeds, mebbe! The only thing he's got is a few friends and—and the thousands he helped. When the Battler's hand was open it was a helping hand; when it was closed it was the fist of a real fighting man. They don't make 'em like him any more, Jim."

"He was a great old guy, all right."

"*Was* is right," sneered the fighter. "He's an ex; and the public hasn't any use for an ex. Otherwise they'd be giving him a benefit."

"Benefit?" repeated the little manager. "He wouldn't stand for that; you know how independent he is."

"There's more than one way of putting a thing over," the Capper said sullenly. "Anyways, he wouldn't be down-and-out now if he hadn't been trimmed of this movie money you've been gassing about."

"Yes; he was trimmed there, I guess," admitted Mathewson shrewdly. "But he was his own manager—and it was his own lookout. If he hadn't been licked——"

"And that was crooked, too," flared up the fighter.

"Ah, now, Capper," protested the other. "I was there——"

"Well, it wasn't fair, it wasn't a fight. Why Roberts pecked and pecked and run away; there wasn't any one for the old man to fight. Yes, he pecked away—at his eyes mostly, until the Battler couldn't see—and wore him down and—and almost broke his heart——"

"It's all in the game, Capper," soothed the manager.

"That isn't what the dictionary says *game* is!" snorted the big fellow. "Why, Jim," he protested huskily, "even the knockout was a scurvy trick. That yellow pup covered the Battler's one good eye—at least it was partly open—with his left glove *and swung with the right.*"

"I didn't get that——"

"A lot of others didn't. But I did; I was

right at his corner. Talk about a champion —a real champion—that jumping-jack!"

"It's the new science, Capper."

"Science that doesn't take a chance; science that hasn't got the guts."

"Don't forget that he can fight," warned his manager.

His big charge looked at him in a way he had never done before; his eyes went hard, then soft, and hard again.

"Sure he can," he breathed. "And he can lick me, too; you don't think I know that, Jim."

"Ah-h, Capper," attempted Mathewson, "I——"

"You're getting me one last split at a purse—that's what you're doing," announced the fighter with strange mildness. "One thing, though," he went on bitterly, "This bird won't finish me until he's got me cut to ribbons—and blind—and as harmless as a kitten. He won't take a chance—he won't fight man to man!" He drew himself up and his barrellike chest heaved. "It won't be like my two fights with the old champ—one a draw and the other a knockout in the twentieth. Them were real fights —I had a *fighting* chance!"

"And you've got a chance now," the little manager told him a little too earnestly.

The Capper waged sarcastic.

"Sure I have," he laughed mirthlessly. "About the same chance as you have of being president." A sound caused him to look through the window. "Here's your taxi-cheater, Jim," he ended lightly. "I'm all dolled up."

He was still smiling as he crowded his hulking form through the taxi door, but as they sped downtown that same somber look returned.

"Cheer up, Capper; look like a winner," enjoined Mathewson as they alighted in front of the old Continental, that rendezvous of sportsmen.

"I don't feel like one," was the grim comment. "Just get this over as quick as you can, Jim."

He was avoiding the outstretched hand of Ted Roberts, world's heavyweight champion a few minutes later, but not his eye. Then the two managers and their charges forgathered around the table in the little parlor. The champion's face was scowling and flushed; the face of the Capper clouded and steady.

There was no empty persiflage about the cock-sure Doyle. He was down to business at once, and his confident tones droned in the Capper's ears. The fighter's mind wandered—he knew that the little manager would look after his end as no other would —and he focused his narrow gaze on the champion seated opposite. The big stiff was showing his gold teeth at some protest of Mathewson's.

Yes; that's what he was, a big stiff! Afraid to fight for money—the money that meant everything to him—afraid to fight for his country. He, Capper, had been beyond the age limit, but he managed to get over there—as a boxing instructor. And, also, to his everlasting pride, he had gone over the top with the rest of the lads not once but several times. A good scout was the colonel, and ignored his breach.

"You don't come in on the movies," he heard the dictatorial Doyle state. "A good loser's end is the best you get——"

A movie champion, that was his number. Battler Hurley had never posed or stalled for the motion-picture machine; nor had Capper Moyle for that matter. Praise be, he was off the same block as the ex-champion and not of this new breed of jumping-jacks.

"You couldn't get a club in this country to give you a thousand for a show with your man," came confidently from between the thin lips of the champion's manager. "Anyhow, we won't argue about that. Half of the box office should bring you ten thousand; and——"

And what was this champion of champions, as the glaring showbills called him, doing while better men than he were over there giving their lives to make the world a better world to live in? He was within the draft age—the big dog—and what was he doing? Doing his bit? Bah! What a travesty. "Two-bits" would better describe Robert's small-change patriotism. Featured in the vaudeville fare of the two-a-day, he gave five minutes of the thirty he was paid for to boosting the Liberty Loans or the several war activities! And for each week of that he pulled down as much as one of our doughboys did in a year—if he lived. Flat feet? it was to laugh. There wasn't a man in the world who could side-step or dance about the ring faster than this champion; his footwork was half his bag of tricks.

"If it wasn't for the motion-picture money we wouldn't be taking your man on; there wouldn't be enough in it." Though it

sounded far away he caught the slurring notes in Doyle's voice. "Why, it wouldn't be pocket money for us."

Money!—money!—that was all the world's heavyweight title meant to this champion. His crown was a tinsel one; a quarter of a million is what the papers reported he had pulled down since winning the championship and they were probably right. All of that money in a year, and here was the old champ being kicked off his little farm for the want of a few thousands—the Battler, who never counted the box office before making up his mind to fight or stall, who would have fought for the love of it if there'd been no purse. No, this fellow was not a fighter, he was a boxer. The new science was what they were calling his method of ring fighting; he, the Capper, had another name for it—the *new bunk!*

The voice of the other manager rose again, prideful, parrotlike in its key.

"You can take my word there won't be less than thirty thousand in the house—the fans all want to see Ted in action again." His smug guffaw was more irritating than his tones. "Of course, if it was a real fight the sky would be the lim——"

A real fight?—how could it be a real fight! Roberts never acted in the ring as if he were fighting for such a thing as the championship of the world. Rather his movements were snakelike—cautious, cunning. He acted as if bent on picking the other man's pocket and making a get-away. Foxy he was, and fearful; fearful of losing money. Yes; he had a blow like a catapult, but he never took a chance. He seemed to be always looking for some weakness in his opponent, some little flaw, some accident that would free the finish from risk to his precious hide. However, he wasn't kidding himself about his chances with the new champion. He would be cut into ribbons, as the Battler had been, by that whiplike left of Roberts; he would be slowly blinded by that constant pecking, pecking; and then would come that sneaking right—his finish. His finish—an inert mass of blood and brawn—a has-been!

"Ted will stall until after the tenth—then he'll land your man." That same guffaw. "It can't go less than ten rounds—that's in the movie contract."

Mathewson's low monosyllable was lost to Capper in the scraping of chairs as the others arose.

The new champion would fake until the tenth; put off his slaughter to make a holiday for the movie multitudes, eh? Not if Capper Moyle knew it; not for a minute. In his dozen years in the ring he had only been knocked out once—by the Battler. And it had been a fight from the first bell to the final count. Give and take, give and take, with never a let-up. No faking, no stalling; sport royal it was.

Like a man in a dream he followed the trio into the lobby where a group of reporters awaited them.

"It's all settled," puffed Doyle, as he piloted the champion toward an elevator. "And it will be some fight—you can tell the world."

Suddenly the Capper thrust his bulk forward. His face was dark, his mouth grim.

"You bet it will be," he croaked. "Boys, listen!" He spat the words out. "Roberts is going to let me live for ten rounds—stalling for the movies. You can take it from me I'm going to spoil that if it lands me on a stretcher!"

Now the sound of the great crowd in the arena beat upon the walls of the dressing room like some tidal wave. During the preliminaries it had been fitful, faint, with an occasional dull roar.

Little Mathewson snapped his watch; at a motion the seconds grabbed their towels and made ready. "On the job, Capper," he commanded cheerfully.

His charge seemed not to hear him.

Again came that thunderous noise from the arena; the call for the big bout from the thousands who had only had their appetite whetted by the tame efforts of the smaller fry.

"Get a move on, Capper," urged his veteran trainer. "Otherwise they'll be pullin' up the chairs."

The big fighter started up at the words. "All right," he said impatiently. "I'm moving."

Mathewson glanced quickly at the Capper. This was not like his man. Usually the big fellow was smiling and joshing before a bout. Tall and powerful stood the Capper in his white boxing trunks. Five feet eleven, he had tipped the scales an hour earlier at two hundred and five pounds. His slender legs, his flat hips, his narrow waist, his barrellike chest, and his huge shoulders and arms made him a truly formidable

figure, but the manager's eyes took on a worried look as they noted the tight mouth, the set jaws, and the tense expression of the fighter's face.

"He knows he's going to lose," he said to himself. "He's licked before he starts." He swallowed hard and his heart dropped. It would be tough to see the Capper go down like that before this new star.

On the heels of the seconds, with their towels and buckets, they filed out of the dressing room into the aisle. From the arena came another roar and a surging of the sea of forms and faces as the little cavalcade winnowed its way to where rose the squared ring, blazing under the many lights necessary for the motion-picture cameras. As he crawled through the ropes and took his seat in a corner Capper Moyle's face still wore that look of grim tenseness, that the fierce, blinding lights only tended to accentuate. His curt nods to the shouts of greeting from the ringside, his brooding air, told his admirers that he was not his old bantering self. No; the big fellow was hard eyed and hard-hearted this night. He was still obsessed with the fistic fate that had played such tricks with the careers of the Battler and Ted Roberts.

"Ted! Ted! Ted! There he is!" shrilled a voice. A great cheer swept the vast throng, a clapping of hands serving as accompaniment. Men leaped to their feet, stood on chairs, to get a better view of the champion as he vaulted over the ropes into the ring. For a moment Roberts stood acknowledging their applause, which still kept its high crescendo.

"Wouldn't that jar you?" sneered the Capper to himself as his hard eyes took in the scene. So they had cheered for the Battler, the greatest fighter of them all. And it had been right in the case of the old champion, for he was the natural-born fighting man of brain and brawn who had kept the title—and kept it clean—for so many years. Now they were cheering this mountebank monarch, this trimmer who had tricked the Battler in and out of the ring. And not content with the downfall of their old idol, they wanted another victim on whom to hold thumbs down. They wanted to see this new gilded idol of theirs knock out another of those old-timers.

Capper Moyle's thoughts were interrupted by the announcer's bawling out of names and pedigrees. Faintly the final peroration came to him: "And Capper Moyle, the greatest exponent of the old school!"

"Old school, huh?" Yes, that was it. Of course he would be beaten—he was convinced of that—knocked out, too. If Roberts could do that to the Battler, he could do the same to Capper Moyle. But before that they would see something. They would see a fight that would make a dent on their fickle memories, for he was going to fight for the battered Battler and the honor of the old school! He was going to get to that dancing, elusive figure; no matter how much the other pecked and ran away, he was going to get to him. He would go down to the mat himself—but before that he would inflict wounds that would leave their mark. It might be only one blow, but it must mar the contemptuous face of this pretender.

The referee called them to the middle of the ring for instructions. Listlessly the Capper heard the old familiar rules of the ring laid down, then strode slowly back to his corner. The bell rang out its brazen signal. With that he scraped one resined sole on the canvas-covered floor and turned to face his opponent.

There was now a tense stillness in the arena. The vast throng strained forward to get a better view of the contestants posed like statues for an instant under the fierce light beating down from overhead. Of the two the champion was the more pleasing picture. His was the form of the perfect athlete, symmetrically lithe, pantherlike in its grace, topped by a dark, cunning, heavy-jawed face. In height he was the taller of the two by several inches and he was heavier by twenty pounds. His long left stood out as a guard to ward off the other man, his right was held loosely before him. The Capper was bull-necked, wide-shouldered, and massive-armed. Under the glare of the lights his highly colored face was redder than ever, the expression in his eyes one which made the champion even more careful than ever.

Their brown gloves feinted and maneuvered, their shoes scraped against the new canvas. The fight was on. To the spectators it was not a question of who would be the winner; it was simply a matter of how long it would last. How long would Ted Roberts let the Capper go before he put away the last of the heavyweight veterans? Naturally, it would be pie for the champion. Capper Moyle had none of the science of the

new school; his school only knew how to fight, not to box. Of course the Capper, with that crashing right of his, was a dangerous man—also he packed a wallop in his left; but could he land either on this modern marvel? At any event it would be interesting—this old against the new—as long as it lasted. That Moyle would last as long as the Battler had lasted they had little hope.

The two gladiators were moving more about the ring as they sparred, moving faster, and their gloves cut more didoes in air. Of the two, the champion was the more active and his footwork beautiful to behold. Likewise his poise was that of confidence and his face wore a superior and supercilious smile, as he circled about his crouching opponent. On the other hand, the Capper merely shifted his position to suit the champion's rapid movements, but his face was set in a look of grim determination, his eyes glaring with the look of one who is to do or die. The spectators settled back in their seats to watch this contest, unequal as it was, that promised them such rich sport.

Suddenly the crouching figure of the Capper jerked upright. There came a lead to the jaw, which the champion flicked aside with his gloved right, then a smashing right swing that he could barely slip inside of. Roberts was surprised—but safe. Followed a moment's furious driving in the clinch, then the referee's shrill command to break. For an instant they stood poised, the champion on the balls of his feet, the veteran set. Without a feint, the Capper's left hand curved in a vicious hook. The champion slipped back. Moyle's right, drawn back to its limit, now followed in a mighty swing. By an inch it missed Ted Roberts, who had danced away, smiling. A nervous laugh from the ringside broke the suspense, then a guffaw or two. The spectators were beginning to grin and enjoy themselves, for the veteran fighter was learning the thing that the Battler had learned—that wicked hooks are easily avoided and that smashing rights can be side-stepped. Sullenly the Capper settled back on his heels, breathing hard from his efforts and waited—for what was to come.

It came in the shape of that pecking left of the champion's. Probing it was, for a few fleeting seconds; then it prodded. Lightly, though surely, it landed on the Capper's left eye, just as the latter was set for another rush. It unbalanced him—that was only too evident—and held him back. That was the trick! Like a snake's tongue the brown glove darted out again to the same mark. Light it was, to be sure, but no lighter than the drops of water that wear away a stone. Again it landed on the glaring, bloodshot eye, as the champion danced in and out of the older fighter's reach, and yet once again. The last was slashing, downward in its movement, and left a mottled streak under the eye. The Capper was shaking his head awkwardly as the bell sounded.

The second round witnessed a still more brilliant display of the new science by the champion. His footwork held the crowd spellbound. His lithe body writhing in and out of tight situations, his head rolling away from an occasional swing of the Capper's, his darting left holding off the other and yet inflicting sure and steady punishment, told them only what they knew too well. What they were watching was little different from bull-baiting. The champion was picador and matador in one, the veteran but the helpless bull rushing to its fate. That prodding left was like so many darts placed in the hide of the bull, that right swinging and poised in turn like the toreador's flashing steel ready for the final thrust. The crowd had, too, something of the feeling of spectators at a bullfight, waiting for the kill.

The champion was working faster now, his prodding left wasplike in its movements. Both eyes of the Capper, his lacerated face, were cruel evidence of the efficiency of that stinging left. Just before the bell sounded, the veteran rushed his taller opponent, only to be met by an uppercut that sent his head bobbing back crazily. It was the first real blow struck by the big Ted and brought a shout from the ringside.

As the third and fourth rounds succeeded the second at minute intervals the feeling of the spectators gradually changed to one of pity. Before their eyes the hard-hitting veteran was being carefully worn down to the point where it would be a mere matter of form to deliver the final knockout. His face was streaked and bloody, his breathing hard; it was only a question of time. There was something moving, though, in the dogged courage with which he carried the fight to the champion. His left had proven

short and his crashing right futile, but he held on with a grim persistency that commanded their respect—even their plaudits. He was dying game, the old Capper, that was sure. Anyhow, his end of the money would allow the veteran to go to pasture—or go to the devil! It was all a part of the game.

Something of this had Capper Moyle sensed as he sat in his corner between rounds, the cold sponge and towels doing their soothing work. Some of the guffawing remarks, even an exclamation of pity, had reached him from the ringside—and he gritted his teeth as he prepared for the fifth round. As the gong sounded he moved forward slowly, his lips drawn back in a snarling, disfiguring smile, his partly closed eyes burning with the lust of battle. Something stung him on the right jaw, stung him again, and then shifted its attack. The champion's left was becoming deadlier; it was wearing him down just as it had worn down the old Battler. With a savage laugh, the Capper rushed in, swinging both arms viciously. Roberts smiled and danced away while the crowd roared. The veteran clicked his teeth and checked himself in another rush. Again the left pecked him and his furious return with the right missed his flitting opponent by several good inches.

"I—I'll land a few on you," he muttered furiously. "I'll leave my mark on you before they carry me out!"

The red rage left him and he became calm. To get into close and mortal combat with this dancing figure he would have to wait. His rushing had earned him nothing but the smiles of the crowd. Also, he was tiring. He would have to save himself for the final effort if ever it did come. He would go down, he knew, but before that he must wreak vengeance on the tricky figure before him. He wasn't fighting for himself, he was fighting for the Battler and the old school—their vindication!

He moved about the ring carefully, calculatingly, using every resource of his old ring craft to the best advantage, for he knew that to get his opening, he must employ every strategem, every modicum of cunning that was at his command. Once he had it, he could let out that red rage that was consuming him, let loose the rain of crashing blows that were stored in his powerful muscles. A stinging left to the mouth toward the end of the round almost made him forget his resolution. He rushed, but pulled back his swinging right. The champion laughed at his apparent wildness and the crowd with him. A feeling of bitterness swept the Capper as he retreated to his corner. It was quickly followed by one of elation as a thought came to him.

During the sixth he proceeded to play his waiting game. The champion's left tapped, tapped him, and the right landed on him more viciously at times, but still he waited for the opening that was to give him his chance. Then he would carry the fight to the big stiff. He would fight until he went down, himself, with flying colors; it wouldn't last until the eleventh. No; he would be no party to the faking—he had announced that—and meant to spoil the champion's little game. To stall for ten rounds, for the money the motion pictures would bring, when you could put your opponent out at any time wasn't honest—and wasn't sport. However, it was like Ted Roberts and his grasping manager. Once he swung at the champion—and missed him by a mile—as Doyle facetiously remarked.

"Look at the poor fish," added that worthy from the edge of the ring. "He telegraphs that right of his an hour before it comes." He chuckled contentedly. "Ted could go to the dressing room and back by the time it travels."

"He'll be going to the dressing room when it lands," bluffed little Mathewson back. "But I don't know about that coming back."

A crooked smile creased the Capper's mouth and he led again with his right. The champion hardly budged an inch this time. He simply let the wild swing go by and laughed the laugh of the victor. It was apparent that he had lost all fear of his opponent and was rapidly losing his respect for him. The veteran indulged in a savage laugh, himself, and led again with the same result. There was another roar of derision from the crowd and some imp in the gallery began to whistle a funeral march. Between his guffaws the champion was watching him as a cat does a mouse. Suddenly the Capper crouched where he stood, drew back his right as far as it would go—telegraphing it, as Doyle had said—and then once more swung wildly.

The veriest novice at the ringside, let alone the eagle-eyed Roberts, knew that it would miss its object by a foot. It was a woeful misjudgment of distance; the blow

swept harmlessly by the smiling face of the champion. As it did, though, the veteran sprang into action, his body shifted, his hulking figure lunging forward like a full-back bucking the line and his massive left shot out like a thunderbolt. A gasp of surprise swept the crowd, for only the sudden roll of Roberts' head saved him from a sure knockdown. An uppercut met the Capper as he waded in, but it only seemed to arouse him to more furious effort. Viciously he ripped both hands to the other's body, alternating with slashing upward hooks to the head. The clanging noise of the bell came only faintly to him, and it needed the referee's hand and shouted command to make him aware that the round had come to an end.

Wildly he looked about. He took in the dazed face of the champion, the white, frightened face of Doyle, the suddenly silent crowd that filled the great arena.

"The big stiff!" he spluttered as he rolled to his corner. "Why didn't you cheer him?" He sat rigid in his chair, his face and muscles tense, his half-closed eyes glaring into empty space. Mechanically he submitted to the ministrations of his seconds and mechanically arose as the stool was whipped from under him at the sound of the bell.

"Finish him in this round, Ted!" he heard Doyle breathe huskily to his charge. "We can't take chances."

The crooked smile came back to the Capper's face; he had spoiled their little game, anyhow. As he exulted, a rushing rain of blows struck him, for the champion had leaped from his corner and was dancing in and out with the ferocity of a panther. The veteran's guard was beaten down, an uppercut landed beneath his heart with the force of a trip-hammer, the champion's right crashed into his jaw with a kick that sent him reeling back against the ropes.

It was coming—he knew it; the canvassed floor was swinging up at him, things were going black. He thought of the old days, the old Battler; the past came to him kaleidoscopically as it does to one who is drowning. Then body and mind came together, coördinated suddenly. By some strange freak of the will the Capper had called himself back to consciousness and he began to fight furiously, blindly. Roberts was standing back to let him drop from the effects of that terrific hook to the jaw. The whistle of that imp in the funeral march shrilled out again.

"He's all in!" supplemented a hoarse voice from the ringside, then his left sought Roberts' jaw, his right plunged to the other's wind.

Furiously, he swept the champion across the full width of the ring with a fusillade of hooks and smashes that backed him into a corner. The latter covered up and slipped under the swinging right of the Capper. Blindly, the veteran whirled about. Before him was a slowly moving object that he must play quits with. Blindly he rushed, but his left found no resting place, and he was almost unbalanced. He had about one kick left in him, he told himself, he was almost done.

With all the strength that was his the Capper sent his right crashing into space. Like a cannon ball it landed on something hard—yet yielding—something that caused the bones in his hand to splinter. Then he staggered forward, stumbling on something inert at his feet, until he brought up hanging onto the ropes.

There was a great roar in his ear, punctuated by a shrill voice.

"Six!—seven!—eight!—nine!—ten!" it came.

Then the roar grew louder, overwhelming.

Some one was hugging him now, sobbing joyous words in his ear.

"Capper! Capper!" the voice was stammering. "You *won*, man!" It was the voice of little Mathewson, strangely altered.

"Won!" repeated the ring veteran brokenly and then paused. "Just—take—my—split—of the gate, Jim," he continued haltingly, "and—send it to the—the Battler from—a loving friend!"

"That I will, Capper," shouted the little manager in his ear. "You're rich now. You're made. You're the champion of the world!" He paused and his voice was almost hysterical: "Yes, you're the champion, Capper—do you hear 'em?—you're the champion!"

Dully his charge raised his head. His eyes were closed and he could not see; but a strange smile moved his bloody features.

"Listen to 'em, Jim!" he croaked. "They cheered for the old champ, the Battler, that way, and that's how they cheered for this new bird, and now it's me!"

Laughing, crying, he stumbled blindly through the ropes.

Genius Ready Made

By J. E. Grinstead

Author of "Hutch Takes Up a Collection," Etc.

Every wife would like to think her husband a genius. And many of them do. There are such a number of ways that one can be a genius that a devoted wife can easily detect the divine fire in her lord if he gives her half a chance. But in this story the bride of George Bradshaw does not wait to discover the sparks of genius in her man. She concocts a plan to put them in his soul and fan them into flame. Poor George, a humble son of primitive Oklahoma, hardly knows what is happening to him, but he is willing to follow any suggestion made by his beautiful and ambitious wife. It is an unusual novel of character and action, full of color, drama, and homely philosophy.

(A Two-Part Story—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

SOME SIDELIGHTS OF HISTORY.

"ANYTHING made of more'n one piece has got elements," said a rangy cowboy, as he sat on the stock-pen fence rolling a cigarette, after loading the first train of cattle shipped from Branchville, Oklahoma.

"Heared a little schoolma'am, about the size of a half-grown prairie dog, tell that to a passel of children at school once," he continued. "Now, me bein' gallantlike, and perlite to ladies, an' her bein' a teacher, I 'low the statement is correct. That bein' true, I also 'low the sassiety of this here town of Branchville has got some elements.

"They's as many kinds of people here as they is people. They's all diff'rent, except in one way—that's bein' tough. They are so cussed tough their spit bounces.

"Bud Foster, he 'lows this is goin' to be a cow town, but I don't. It's too blamed tough. Why the worst gun fighter wouldn't have as much chance among this outfit of cutthroats and black-jackers as a fat man in a bullfight, or a hawg peddler in Jerusalem.

"They ain't bluffers, either. They's a gang hangin' out around that hotel where I stayed last night when I come in to order these cars, that's so bad they have to feed 'em in cages to keep 'em from fightin' over the meat.

"An' the booze they are sellin', take it away! Nine drops of it would make a six-weeks-old cotton-tail rabbit stand on his hind laigs with a pair of duces an' call a growed bulldog with a royal flush. I went up to the dance hall a minit last night, just barely a minit. The women are as dirty as a Cheyenne squaw, an' so ugly they'd have to slip up on the dipper to get a drink.

"Nope, she's no cow town. If Bud ships any more cows from here he'll have to get a new foreman. I'd rather herd sheep in the trans-Pecos without a canteen than to come back to this place. No, not for me. Soon as I hear the couplin's stretch on that train of taller, me for a water hole in the vastness, where I can lay down to peaceful sleep without bein' afraid of anything happenin' to me, worse than gettin' killed."

Branchville was just like that.

When the original run was made in old Oklahoma there was a gathering of the clans from every quarter of the earth, that made the mild and woolly cow towns and mining camps of the Old West look like a Puritan Sunday school. This was the New West. An American institution, the like of which the world had not seen before.

No such a varying, kaleidoscopic agglomeration of human atoms had ever been thrown together to fester in one spot on the bosom of Mother Earth. All the elements, good and bad, of the old-time cow town of the West, the mining camps of the Rockies, and the lumber mills of the great forests were there. Added to that were a hundred ravelings from the social fabric of the country that none of these had ever known, all in a wild scramble for—a piece of land? No. Some there were, of course, who were seeking a home, and these constituted the basis of goodness and decency upon which the State has built, and is still building, a fair name. But, by far the greater part of this first great army of "Oklahoma Boomers" were adventurers, pure and simple.

Hundreds entered this new field with a roll of blankets, a coffeepot and skillet, a piece of side meat, a little flour and accessories. Their assets varied in quantity and quality, but few could be said to have "visible means of support." The only similarity among them was that each carried a knife or a gun or both. Their dexterity with these weapons, and the cold nerve to use them effectively, constituted judge and jury, the court of final arbitrament.

Thus were turned loose on that little territory a hotchpotch of the red and the white corpuscles of human society. Those who had nothing had to get it, and those who had something had to have it taken away from them.

After a year or two of this there began to be evidences of order being brought out of chaos. Town after town was taken in hand by the better element, and made decent, to a degree. The toughs had to go somewhere. There never could be on earth again such an orgy of unlicensed cussedness as they had known. There was nowhere else to go, so they went to the new towns as they were built.

About this time a band of adventurers of a higher class, but not perceptibly better in morals, secured a section of land about thirty miles from the main line, and induced the railroad company to build a branch to the new town site.

This was not an attempt to exploit the people already in Oklahoma—they had long since been fleeced, or had fleeced somebody else—but to gather a harvest from all over the country in lot sales.

The slight grade necessary on the level country was quickly thrown up, makeshift ties and rails were laid down, and the "branch" was built, almost overnight.

On a blistering August afternoon, a giant construction hand stopped with his spike maul suspended in midair, looked over the little cluster of tents and board shacks, and said:

"This is Branchville, and one more hell of a town."

He went on driving spikes, but he named the town, and had also told what kind of a place it was. No effort on the part of the town-site company to give it a more euphonious title, could ever avail against his christening.

Carpenters were building a church, a hotel, and a schoolhouse of lumber that had been hauled overland. The town-site sharpers of "Prehistoric Oklahoma" knew the advertising value of churches and schools. It was the purpose of the promoters to bring in new blood from "the States," and really make this a decent town, and, in fact, they did bring people by trainloads. The most aggressive advertisers in the business world envied the manner in which the company covered the earth with advertising, and induced people to go see their prospect.

But the company had reckoned without the hoi polloi. Every halfway decent town in the territory had an element that was due to move. There was no place outside of Oklahoma tough enough for them—unless they died—so they marched on Branchville and overran it.

There were plenty of undesirables who had money. The town-site company was afflicted with the human malady of greed. They did not know that their proposed scheme of decency for Branchville would work, and besides that they needed the money.

Long before the railroad was completed a man paid a fabulous price for the choice corner lot on the public square. It was not customary in those days to visit a new town, and then go back home for one's effects. Especially was this true if one bought property. Rights were protected by six-shooter titles and possession. Within an hour after the corner lot was purchased two wagons were unloading on it. A big tent was set up, a temporary bar was erected, and before night a cloth streamer across the front of the tent announced the "Cotton-

wood Saloon," in honor of the only tree in the town, which stood at the corner of the square in front of the saloon, a lone cottonwood.

Within a week carpenters put up a "front"—prehistoric Oklahoma was great on putting up a front—and continued the building over and around the tent, until the house was completed without interfering with business.

The "Cottonwood" stood at the northeast corner of the square, and fronted south. Its amiable proprietor figured that if the town should ever have a tough section, that is tougher than the balance, it would lie in the flat between the square and the station, which was near the eastern limits of the town site.

About the same time a gentleman of Hebraic extraction writhed under the Gentile greed of the company, but paid a like exorbitant price for the neighboring corner, which fronted west on the square. He, too, had come to stay, and within a few hours wagons were unloading lumber and corrugated iron, carpenters were filing saws and making trestles, while the foundation of a great commercial institution was being laid. A week later a towering corrugated iron front bore the legend:

WERTZHEIMER & DOBENSKI,
General Merchandise.

So the town grew, until by the time the man rested his spiking maul and named the town, telling at the same time what kind of town it was, there was quite a village. Mostly tents, to be sure, but the railroad would bring lumber and houses would be built.

The bad element, people who were not wanted in other Oklahoma towns, bad as they were, flocked to Branchville as to a city of refuge.

The first passenger train brought a motley crowd from the four corners of the earth. Among them were many respectable people, who took a look and left. There were a few, quite as respectable, who had only oneway tickets, and had brought their household goods. They stayed—and suffered.

The situation was graphically described by a man in a plaid suit, flashy tie, and paste diamond, who stood, suit case in hand, waiting to board the train.

"Leavin', pardner?" asked a brakeman.

"Yea, bo," replied the visitor. "I've rolled the bones and shuffled the pasteboards in every little tough place in America. I've gambled with cow-punchers, miners, lumberjacks, wops, bohunks, dagos, creoles, and canucks, but I never saw another town like this. There ain't any. I like things a little stretchy, but this is too tough for yours truly. I've been about the raw joints of the world some, but take it from me, there is nothing like this between hell and Hardin, Illinois."

"The sheeted dead" did not "squeek and gibber in the streets of Branchville," because no one took the trouble to sheet them, and in a few months the town was looked upon as a plague spot. Nobody knew anything about his neighbor. The opening of the lot sale was Genesis, and Revelation wasn't popular.

A fellow by the name of Boggs came from somewhere, got pinched for his roll by a gang of sharpers, and got a job running the pump at the water tank. A bullet was coming down the street one night as Boggs was going up. They met, and there was a funeral. That was all anybody knew about Boggs.

All the estate he left was a widow and a red-headed girl about sixteen years old. Soon after the obsequies Mrs. Boggs moved into a more or less respectable neighborhood over on Chickasha Street, and began taking in sewing. There were lots of dressmakers in Branchville, but a dressmaker's sign didn't always mean that one could get dresses made.

In Mrs. Boggs' window was a neat, white card, printed in blue: "Mrs. Boggs, Modiste." The rabble mistook the title for modest, and therefore decent, and stayed away. The respectable element understood, and gave her their business—it was not a large cliéntele in Branchville at that time.

"That Mrs. Boggs is mighty peculiar, but she certainly is an artist," said one of the leading ladies of the community to another. And she was right. Whatever this dressmaker might have been, somewhere back the line was a progenitor who had the soul of a sculptor. She looked at people, and then made them over in their clothes, but she never talked of her antecedents.

Next door to Mrs. Boggs lived another widow, a Mrs. Bradshaw. She was a pale, dignified woman, who might have had a past, but if so, it had been some time. She owned the little house where she lived, sold

embroidery that she made, and worked overtime at attending to her own business. The furniture in her home was meager, but the few books in the house indicated that either she or her forbears had been of a different mold from the average Branchville citizen.

Mrs. Bradshaw had a boy about grown, who would have been a freak in a freak factory. He never spoke cross to his mother, never went uptown nights, never wanted to go into a saloon or pool hall, never missed a day from school, worked every Saturday and all through vacation, and yet was not a "sissy."

Mrs. Bradshaw and her son had come to Branchville on the Mayflower, at least they came on the first passenger train over the "Branch." The boy's name was George. He was in the graduating class of the local school, and the Boggs girl was in the grades.

George was the biggest boy in school, and it had been said of him that he was so good-natured and slow that if another boy hit him in the nose on the Fourth of July he would not get mad until Christmas Eve; and was so persistent that he would follow the boy through hell in a feather suit to find out why he did it.

The day Mrs. Boggs moved next door to the Bradshaws George was splitting wood in his mother's back yard. The Boggs girl came to the fence and asked for the loan of a bucket of water, the former tenant having forgotten to leave them a bucket and a rope at the well.

George took her bucket, filled it with water, and, taking it to the fence, set it on a post. The girl, who was wise far beyond her years, seemed in no hurry to take it, and as they stood, each with a hand on the bucket of water, the boy got a "close-up" of something he had never noticed before—a girl with red hair and dark-brown eyes, that were like a couple of bottomless pools of liquid amber. So far as he was concerned that was the "alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end." Every waking hour of his from that time on was a time of worshiping from afar, and possessing his bashful, timid soul in peace, until the paddle wheel of fate should drop its spindle on his number.

The Bradshaw boy was graduated from the Branchville high school at the head of his class. Then he got a job driving a delivery wagon for Wertzheimer & Dobenski. He was too slow to get far in business; and was too honest to get money in any other manner. He would probably be driving that wagon now, and letting his grandchildren ride with him, if it hadn't been for the Boggs girl.

When the Boggs girl finished the grammar grades she quit. She knew more then than the superintendent, but it was chiefly about French novels and Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poems. When the girl quit school she went to work for the local telephone company at four dollars a week. Her mother said she did it as "a means to an end." Judging from the size of the means it seemed probable that the end was a long way off.

Mrs. Boggs must, indeed, have been out of the ordinary, and have had a wide streak of artistic temperament. When her daughter was too young to protest against the crime, she had named her Psyche Aganippe. The lady seemed to realize that nothing short of a special act of the legislature, or marriage, could relieve her child from the Boggs into which she had been led, so she tacked on classics to overbalance it.

After Psyche Aganippe had been in the telephone office a year or two, and still could not see the "end" as a means to which she was laboring, she married George Bradshaw. Not without his consent, far from it, but she married him. As a matter of fact, George had worshiped her over the red picket fence that separated the two cottages, but had never hoped to possess such a wonderful woman as she seemed to him, for a wife. The thing that seemed to him a miracle was, in fact, quite simple. From the day of the water-bucket episode Psyche had known that she could take him just when she pleased.

Miss Boggs had not deluded herself with the idea that she was in love with George. She knew she was not. If she was in love with any one, it was herself. There had never been any special tie between her and her mother even. Mrs. Boggs appeared to regard her daughter as a necessary evil, and the girl looked upon her mother as somebody to furnish board and lodging. Her approaching marriage was to be the result of cold calculating. The direct result of her knowledge that her mother was not satisfied with the number she had drawn in life's lottery, and would welcome another chance, but wanted her daughter out of the way first, and didn't want to make her next

gamble at the matrimonial wheel in Branchville. Mrs. Boggs had even intimated that it was time for the girl to be looking about for some one to help her keep house. In short, it was a clear case of adding two and two together, with a foreknowledge that it would make four. She knew George Bradshaw better than he knew himself. He was harness broke, and would stand without hitching. From somewhere he had inherited the instincts of a gentleman. He possessed the trait of loyalty to a marked degree, and would be easily managed. Psyche was not averse to gambling, but she wanted to play safe, and this looked to her like a good bet.

When she decided that the time was come for the adventure, Miss Boggs gave the subtle encouragement that would carry George out of his head, and cause him to propose. She was properly surprised, but they went to Oklahoma City the following Sunday, and were married.

When they returned to Branchville on Monday afternoon they went to the cottage of Mrs. Bradshaw, where they were to make their home, because Mrs. Bradshaw was a widow and George an only child. Also, because when they went over to receive the "Bless you, my children," from mamma Boggs, they found the house vacant. An old trunk containing Psyche's personal wardrobe and a copy of "Poems of Passion" were on the back porch. Nobody ever knew when, how, nor what for, but Mrs. Boggs had disappeared for good.

Thus they began the circus of life, with a red-headed ring master, who was an expert at holding the hoop, and one acrobat who would jump through when called upon, even if there were no hoop there.

A year later the widow Bradshaw died, leaving her earthly possessions to her son. The aforementioned possessions consisted chiefly of a set of blue delft ware, a handmade "coverlid" inherited by decedent from her grandmother, and an old wooden rocker which had neither upholstery nor secret recess in which a will could have been hidden. That was all the "goods, chattels, and appurtenances, thereunto appertaining," except a mortgage on the cottage, which was speedily foreclosed, and gave no further trouble.

Soon after the funeral George borrowed the delivery wagon, after working hours, and moved his household goods, including items above-mentioned, together with a homemade flour chest and the number-seven Wateroak cookstove, into a couple of rooms rented from a Mrs. Bargas. Among the articles of the Bradshaw household equipment, the old cookstove was the most important, but among its multitudinous infirmities, the catch that held the firebox door was broken. For some unaccountable reason the stove refused to cook unless the door was shut, so they kept a flatiron on the apron of the stove to keep it shut. The little old stove looked like some evil-minded, misshapen hunchback, that was always leering and frowning, and trying to say, "I know something I won't tell."

Mrs. Bargas, the Bradshaws' landlady, was also a widow of some kind. There was a frightful number of widows created in Oklahoma in the early days. She differed slightly from other people in Branchville, in that she had neither Genesis nor Revelation, and wore a scowl on her face that made people glad of it.

For a year Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw got by on the nine dollars a week, and ten-per-cent discount on purchases made at the store. Then it happened. The big story broke. George Bradshaw was a genius!

When the full significance of the catastrophe was realized, it was too late to require proof. George admitted it, and his wife not only corroborated the statement, but condoned the crime!

CHAPTER II.

BRADSHAW'S GENIUS GETS DISCOVERED.

Before proceeding further it becomes necessary to make a slight digression. It has been stated that Branchville was located on the prairie. The reader should fix that fact firmly in his mind, because, had Branchville been situated in a heavily wooded country the squirrels would have carried off the two principal characters at this juncture, and there would be no story to tell. They were both nuts, if my readers will excuse slang.

It has been said that the most benighted people on earth regard deranged people with awe, as having had the hand of the Great Spirit laid on them in a peculiar manner. Observation teaches that it is difficult sometimes to determine whether the hand has been laid on the nut or the nuttee.

Ask a great alienist the meaning of the word sanity, and he will give you a definition that contains ninety-eight per cent

technical expression. All the words you will know the meaning of are "is" and "and." He will talk wisely of the "zymotic process of the microcosm," which causes insanity. According to this theory a little colony of "crazy bugs" get through the human skull, or climb up the spinal cord hand over hand like a monkey on a rope, or in some other manner win a home and start a little settlement in the human brain. The "zymotic process" is a case of fermentation, or in other words, when the individuals in the colony begin marrying, and giving in marriage, the trouble begins, as usual, and the person owning, or having leased rights, on the brain in question, is likely to become a raving nut.

It seems that two or three couples of these bugs are likely at any time to settle in a human brain. They may like the climate and surroundings and start a colony, or they may become dissatisfied and move on without doing any damage. Nobody is immune. A little picnic party of nut weevils is likely to be on the way to a fellow's brain any time.

One fine spring morning George awoke from his lethargy of love and worship to the extent of securing an order for a package of oatmeal and a bottle of bluing, from a family that had "recently located" in Branchville. When he took the order to the store old Wertzheimer patted him on the back, and complimented him on his interest in the business.

Straightway the young deliveryman decided to put his brains and energy into the business and become a member of the firm. He had read of such things in the Rollo books, and in magazine stories, and felt that he had been elected to perform the same stunt. But, the fates were on the job, and George's inspiration was a blank.

It is a well-known fact that there are some things that cannot be taught to the most sagacious performing animal in the circus. Bradshaw's wife had him under complete control, but she could never teach him to call her Psyche Aganippe, so he gave it up, and called her "Peaches." Their acquaintances, most of whom knew very little of Greek mythology, but had a fair working knowledge of horticulture, followed his example and called her by the same name.

On the evening of the John Wanamaker episode in his young life George, who had not yet told his wife of his lofty aspirations, left Peaches putting the blue delft dishes in the cupboard covered with flowered cretonne, and went to the post office.

Now, of all the forgathering places for the goggle-eyed emmissaries of fate, a post office holds the record. They were on the job that evening, and one of them jumped right out the delivery window at George, in the form of a long, official envelope. He opened the letter and discovered therefrom that the estate of Philpott Perdue, deceased, late of the Duck River settlement, North Alabama, had been finally administered. Also that his share in the estate of this maternal uncle, whom he had never seen, and who was said to have died "intestate, and without issue," which George supposed to have been the cause of the poor gentleman's death, amounted to the fabulous sum of four hundred and eighty-nine dollars and eighty-five cents—net.

The letter went on to say that by fixing his proper signature to the inclosed voucher check, he could present it at the local bank and secure this princely inheritance, less exchange.

Mr. Bradshaw returned home highly elated. He had never dreamed of a roll like that. Nine dollars was the most that he had ever been called upon to count at one time, and his knowledge of finances was limited. Before his marriage he only possessed wealth on Saturday evenings, from the store to his mother, who by great care made the little earning provide necessities for them. After marriage Peaches had cheerfully undertaken the management of the exchequer, and he had gladly laid his earthly gains at the feet of his goddess.

In his judgment he could now buy half interest in the store, and in time would perhaps rise to the exalted position of Democratic county chairman. He also dreamed of social prominence, and the possibility of Peaches' becoming president of the Baptist Ladies' Aid, and Branchville Civic League.

Bradshaw and Miss Boggs were little more than children when they married. Three years had elapsed, and they had grown perceptibly. George had developed into a giant. He was a fine, up-standing fellow, well over six feet, with strong regular features, level, honest gray eyes set under strong, shaggy brows. A perfect picture of virile, untrained young manhood.

At the time of her marriage Mrs. Bradshaw had possessed no remarkable charm

more than would be noticeable in any passably good-looking girl, except in her wealth of copper-red hair, and great, luminous brown eyes. She was, in fact, undeveloped and inclined to be scrawny, but time and clean living, wholesome food and plenty of sleep had worked a wonderful change. She had developed, rounded out, come into her own, and was now a wondrously beautiful woman. Instead of Bradshaw's love beginning to wane, it increased. Whereas he had first loved his wife with the great passion of early youth, he now worshiped her as a thing almost sacred, and her influence over him grew stronger each day.

She knew that she was beautiful, and fretted her soul over the fact that such beauty, and such capabilities as she believed she had, should be hidden in a little Western town. She knew in her own mind that she possessed all the attributes of a social queen, but her field was limited. A queen without a realm becomes woefully like an ordinary mortal.

A beautiful woman is never safe, and a woman who is both beautiful and idle ought not to be allowed to run at large.

Peaches was mostly idle. Aside from frying four eggs and a couple of slices of ham for George's breakfast, and preparing a kindred and proportionate meal twice more each day, her labors were light. That very day she had, in the absence of the landlady, explored a closet under the stair in quest of diversion. The woozy emissaries of fate were there and when Peaches opened the door they scuttled under a box of quilts and into some joints of stove pipe, but they left a pale, emaciated pamphlet lying on top of the box, and Peaches grabbed it and took it to her room.

In old times people believed that measles and sore eyes and the like could be carried in books, and no doubt the germs of various diseases were so transmitted by school children. The pamphlet Peaches had discovered seems to have been free of these particular germs, but to have housed an exceptionally frisky and aggressive flock of nut weevils, and they began an immediate scramble for her brain pan. Investigation disclosed the fact that the booklet was a copy of the "Guiding Hand," a publication devoted to information in regard to geniuses who have been discovered more or less by accident, and to advertisement of tools to do it with.

Peaches read this excellent work with avidity. Her mind was not quite fully made up to "discover" George, at the supper hour, so she had let him depart for the post office undiscovered.

When he returned home with his head in the clouds on account of his good fortune, he found his wife sitting at the open window, gazing at the full moon which was just rising over the Presbyterian church.

George sat down in the old wooden rocker, which now had a knit "tidy" pinned to its venerable back with a hairpin, and told Peaches of the check, and his aspirations. She didn't seem to enthuse, and when he had finished she turned her soulful eyes on him and said:

"No, George, you will never be a great merchant. In the first place, nature did not design you for a business man. In the next place, if you should show up at the store with that much money old Wertzheimer would take it away from you. Dobenski would go to New York to buy an immense stock of clothing. He would stop in Kansas City, and in his absence there would be a fire in Branchville. And, besides—— Oh, George, dearest, I have a confession to make."

George gasped like a kid that had spilled a dipper of water down his collar. He wondered why, if she had stolen anything, she had not cooked it for supper. Or, if there was going to be a little Peaches, why she had not told him before.

"For a long time," continued she, "I have known you were not an ordinary man. Indeed, dearest, I knew it long before I married you. I have also known since I was a little child that I was no ordinary girl. The confession I have to make is that I am 'Little Darling.'"

"Gosh, Peaches, I knew that always, and have called you that a thousand times," said George.

"Oh, George, I mean that is the nom de plume under which I wrote 'The Ode to the Captured Vinegarroon,' 'Farewell Summer,' and other poems. They were published in the *Branchville Banner* last year."

Peaches had read in the "Guiding Hand," that lapses from literary labor could not destroy talent. Talent was like gold, and the precious nuggets would lie unmolested for ages, and retain their brilliancy and value until such time as they were discovered, to bless and enrich the world. She had not

been sufficiently bilious to write any poetry for a year or more, but she had no doubt her talent was unimpaired by idleness.

"What did you get for writing them?" asked George.

"Nothing, dear. I had not made up my mind, at that time, to commercialize my talent. The editor said my work displayed real genius."

"What day of the week was that?" asked George.

"Why, I don't remember. What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing, I reckon. He always gets drunk Thursday, after he gets the paper out, and stays drunk until Monday morning."

"George, you are just like a man."

"Thank you, Peaches. Been hoping I would get to looking that way to you."

"I mean," retorted his poetical spouse, "that manlike, you refuse to recognize woman's ability. Your case is even worse. You refuse to recognize your own talent. I have discovered that you are a literary genius."

George regarded his wife in open-eyed wonder. He had about as much sense of humor as a country graveyard on a rainy day.

"Will they pinch me for it, Peaches?" asked George soberly.

That seriously meant, but seemingly frivolous question brought blood—or, rather, tears, which is worse. Peaches threw herself into George's lap and let loose a shower of weeps down the open collar of his blue cambric work shirt, that caused him to wonder that her mother had not named her Niobe.

The old chair, under its double burden, shrieked and groaned as if in labor, but no hidden will, or other important offspring could it produce. If George had permitted himself to be discovered two minutes sooner he would have been a fool. If he had waited two minutes longer he would have been a horse thief. As he was neither of these he kissed away the tears and said:

"All right, Peaches, I'm a genius. Your move."

Peaches moved with alacrity. She had held the hoop and George had jumped through, according to bill. She grabbed the precious copy of the "Guiding Hand," and went to roost on George's knee. She told him of the wonderful revelations she had read therein. She elaborated on the case of one Mr. Jim Fennimore Cooper, who got fired out of Yale for putting a lizard in the teacher's ink bottle, or something of the kind, and was therefore not technically prepared for literary work. The story went on to say that this same Jimmy Cooper plowed hemp all one forenoon, and mulled over the moaning of talent in travail. When the dinner horn blew he threw his bull-tongue plow in the fence corner, turned the mule in the lot, knocked the dirt out of his O. K. plow shoes, ate a dinner of hog jowl and turnip greens, and immediately became a genius without further ado. He went out on the back porch after dinner, kicked a cat out of a chair, sat down and started a fire in his old cob pipe. When the clock struck one his wife "discovered" him there, dreaming out the string of books that afterward made him famous. The "Guiding Hand" went into detail in the Cooper case, and told how Mr. Cooper gave the bull-tongue to a nigger, pensioned the mule, and let the field grow up in crab grass, while he followed the devious ways of genius.

Peaches read the long list of celebrities who had been discovered in strange and precarious ways, and became famous without education or preparation. At last George was converted to the belief that quitting menial labor was the same as quitting tobacco and whisky—all one had to do was to quit, and stay quit, and he was cured without danger of relapse.

George and Peaches then filled out the order for the "Sixteen Secrets of Success," and all the other books suggested in the advertising pages of the sacred parchment. They added up the list, and found that they had ordered a hundred dollars' worth of implements with which to inflict punishment on magazine editors who try to stand between the innocent bystander and trouble, and to protect the public from a constant shower of unripe nuts. By the time they had finished their labors the milkman was "cussin' the bull pup" at the front gate.

About nine o'clock a boy from the store came to the house and asked Mrs. Bargas where George was.

"Both dead, I guess. Ain't heard 'em stirrin' 'round none," she replied.

Just then Peaches came out into the hall clad in a faded kimono and some hairpins.

"Don't speak so loud, please, you'll wake Mr. Bradshaw," she said.

"I ain't wantin' to disturb nobody," said

the boy. "Old Wertzheimer said if George was sick he needn't come, an' if he ain't sick he's fired, so he don't have to come nohow."

With that the boy went away, and Peaches turned to Mrs. Bargas and said:

"Mr. Bradshaw has decided to quit work and develop his literary talents. We shall keep the rooms for the present, but expect to remove to New York next year, where we can be nearer the center of literary activities."

The landlady gave Peaches a stony glare, and replied:

"You kin keep the rooms as long as ye pay the rent—in advance."

About noon Peaches had breakfast ready. It consisted of coffee, dry toast, oatmeal, some blue, tired-looking milk, and like delicacies that Peaches conceived to be brain food. As George had missed his breakfast, and as noonday was the hour at which he usually put away a pretty good feed, he viewed this array of alleged thought fertilizer with some concern. He realized that his change of diet was about what would be proper for a bull elephant that had suddenly metamorphosed into a chipmunk, but having burned the bridges he decided to take what the gods had sent, and let it go at that.

Peaches had once read an article on "Bohemia," in the Sunday Magazine of a golden-hued journal, and she at once proceeded to put her knowledge to use. She left George reading the "Guiding Hand," and taking on a second installment of tenants for his think factory, and went uptown to make some mysterious purchases. When she returned she was accompanied by a delivery wagon loaded with cruel and unusual things.

Among other things she had brought a beautiful green tin spittoon, which bore a representation, done in gold, of the wilting leaves of a female hibiscus, on one side, and the mutilated skeleton of a grand-daddy spider on the other. The next "item of interest" was a pound package of Sailor's Joy smoking tobacco, and a couple of cob pipes.

"You will, of course, smoke, George," said Peaches. "You know the "Hand" says Jimmy Cooper smoked a cob pipe when he was thinking. I don't object to smoke, at all."

"Oh, but I do!" said George, turning pale. "I tried to smoke once when I was a kid, and I had to live on weak lime water and peppermint drops for a week."

"You'll soon learn to like it. You must," said Peaches. "I think I'll learn to smoke."

She filled one of the pipes and handed it to him. He looked at her as if to say, "You're holding that hoop pretty blamed high, but I'll make one jump at it, anyway." Then he lit the pipe and took a few good, strong pulls. Inside of five minutes he had renounced all claim to the oatmeal and toast that he had eaten earlier in the day, and was talking to Peaches in a weak voice about shipping his body somewhere for burial.

But, persistent effort works wonders, and George was persistent. No human frailty should put grass burs in the trail to fame for him, so he learned to smoke, and in due time to like it.

About a week later when the expressman went to the house to deliver the first installment of books and a secondhand Wheeler & Wilson typewriter, he almost fell in a fit. He had seen Peaches a hundred times, but when she came to the door dressed in her idea of a bohemian layout, she made a sensation.

The man carried the box in, and got another shock. George was sitting near a window, mumbling over the "Guiding Hand" like a monk telling his beads. He was a little pale and hollow-eyed, but he had a cob pipe stuck in the south side of his head, and a cheery fire going. The smoke cloud in the room was so thick the moths lit on it to rest their wings. George was clad in a kind of robe that was halfway between a shroud and a Siberian overcoat, and wore a little round cap on the top of his head.

The expressman told his story. It was corroborated by a few others who had "seen the performance," and the couple were duly adjudged insane by the populace. The populace was right, too. Bradshaw's wife had gone daft from idleness, and brooding over having her beauty hidden in a little country town. The man himself had gone dippy through suggestion.

If the matter could have stopped there, it would have been a joke, and aside from losing a job and having to hunt another, Bradshaw would have been none the worse. But tragedies are often built on the insecure foundation of frivolous things, and this became a tragedy.

Peaches was to learn that the matrimonial machine with a flat wheel, because the love was all on one side, could wabble

worse than a broken-down apple cart. Also, that when a woman ties up for life with a man she does not love, merely as a matter of convenience and expediency, and relies on his worship of her to get her by all kinds of rough places, she is monkeying with a buzz saw that runs both ways at once. And most pitiful of all, she was to learn that those selfish people, who persuade themselves that there is no such thing as passion, and longing for love, awake sometimes with an unquenchable fire burning in their breasts.

CHAPTER III.

SOME EXCITEMENT AND A LITTLE POLITICS.

By some inadvertence no bird's-eye view of the city of Branchville in pioneer days was ever made. A crude pen sketch for the reader's information will have to suffice.

The public square was situated in the exact center of the mile-square town site. The Cottonwood Saloon, as stated, stood at the northeast corner of the square, fronting south. Potawotamie Street ran through the town from north to south, on the east side of the square. The people, in their hurry, called it Pott Street. The side of the Cottonwood was therefore toward this street.

Running east and west through the town, on the north side of the square, and crossing Pott Street at the Cottonwood corner, was Cimarron Street. By some strange whim of the people, they did not call this Cim Street. On the north, or Cimarron Street side of the square, where they could get their backs to the wind, stood a block of alleged business houses of varying degrees of importance.

The owners of these establishments had conflicting views as to the distance a sidewalk should be from the ground. Some of them followed a fixed rule, while others evidently subscribed to the ruling of President Lincoln when he was asked what was the proper length of a man's legs, and replied, "Long enough to reach the ground." As a result, a walk along the street gave one a practical demonstration of the ups and downs of life.

Next door, and directly west of the Cottonwood, stood a store that was struggling to become a rival of Wertzheimer & Dobenski. By some strange freak of the human mind it was not unusual for a man, in the early days of Oklahoma, to name his store for the State from which he hailed. This establishment was called the "Texas" store, its proprietor being a native son of the Lone Star State.

Just half a mile east of the square, at the terminus of Cimarron Street, was the railroad station and yards. Halfway between the square and the station stood the ice factory. The surmise of the popular proprietor of the Cottonwood, as to the tough section of the town, had been erroneous. At least up to that time a "segregated vice district," in Branchville, had not been arranged. Probably because it would leave too many vacant houses in the balance of the town. There was just one house in "the flat," besides the ice factory, and that was the story-and-a-half box shack in which lived Mrs. Bargas and her tenants, Mr. and Mrs. George Bradshaw. There was no other house within two blocks of it.

The west end of Cimarron just ran out onto the prairie and stopped, and seemed to be pointing an accusing finger at San Francisco, and threatening feebly to go on out there some day.

The east side of the square was built up about like the north side, but the south and west sides left a jagged wound in the sky line, as if waiting for the wave of progress.

South, on Pott Street, just one block from the square, was a little store on the corner, and a "camp yard." A little farther along, on the same side of the street, was a three-room house with a sod chimney.

At the corner of Pott and Cimarron, standing like a wedge driven into the angle between the Cottonwood Saloon and Wertzheimer & Dobenski's, was a two-story, barn-like building, called the "Branch." It was a hotel, and it was not the original intention to so christen it. A sign painter started to paint "Branchville Hotel," on the front of the building. He had spent some time at the Cottonwood, and his sense of perspective was not just up to standard. He painted the letters, B-R-A-N-C-H, and discovered that he had used up about three-fourths of the space. About that time he turned his colors off the scaffold. There had been no more paint brought to Branchville, except nose paint, so the sign remained the same, and the place was known as the "Branch," and many a thirsty soul drank at the Branch, for it had a flourishing bar and dance hall in connection.

Thus was the outline of Branchville, the reader can sketch in details to suit himself,

not failing to picture the public well and watering trough in the square.

This is a lot of description, but description is like capsules—they have no medicinal value, but one sometimes has to take them in order to get the medicine.

Branchville had grown persistently, progressively, cumulatively, and cussedly tougher from the day of its founding. One hot, thirsty September afternoon a tired team of mules dragged a covered wagon up East Cimarron from toward the depot, and stopped in the shade by the side of Wertzheimer & Dobenski's store. There was a man and a woman on the seat in the wagon, and two little children, a girl about six and a boy about four were peeping out from under the wagon sheet, where it had been tied up on the side to let in the air. There was a lead horse tied behind the wagon.

The man got out, stepped up on the sidewalk as if to enter the store, glanced across, and saw the word "Texas" on the front of the rival establishment and went over there.

"I vish dot tam sign vould blow down," said old Wertzheimer," as he took his cheroot from his mouth and squinted around the corner at the wagon and team.

Two drummers sat on the porch of the "Branch," across the street. They read on the side of the wagon "Old Hickory Wagon, Sold by Brown & Wilcox, Georgetown, Texas."

"Texas outfit," said one of the drummers, "and look at that horse behind the wagon. Ain't he a picture?"

"Some right smart horse," replied the other. "Reminds me of the horse in the statue of the "Terry Ranger" in the capitol grounds at Austin. Ever see it?"

The stranger was coming across the street, carrying a can of baking powder, some coffee and a few other packages in one hand. In the other he had a bag of candy and bananas for the children. He put the packages in the wagon, and stood for a moment with his left hand resting on the dashboard, looking toward the west and the watering trough in the square. The low sun was shining full in his face, but he didn't squint. He stood like a figure in bronze. He was a little under six feet, long of arm and thick of chest. His collar was open, and his great neck came out of his shoulders like a tree on a mound. His sleeves were rolled to the elbow, and his arms fairly glistened in the westering sun.

There is no denying that the Texas man, the son of the pioneer who fought Indians with one hand and raised a crop of bread corn with the other; who could talk to a man in a tone that would put the fear of God into his heart, but couldn't say a cross word to a woman or a little child, is an institution. Here was a real, "Texanesque Texan," and no mistake. His face—well, you can look at the Man on the Horse when you go to Austin; it's too big a job to describe it. It just looked like nature had taken about a million years to shape it out of bronze, and hadn't quite finished the job.

As he let his hundred and eighty pounds down on the spring seat the springs flattened out and the seat went down.

"Tired, mamma?" he asked as he took the lines, in a tone soft and tender as that of a young mother crooning to a little child.

The look on the woman's face, as she made some low-toned answer, would have repaid a man for a life time of toil.

All this time the great deep-chested, round-barreled bay horse had been standing behind the wagon. His sides were covered with dust and sweat, he "rested one hind foot," and looked gaunt and jaded. A little gust of wind drove a piece of paper under his feet, and he came alive like a flash. The steel muscles tensed, the head went up and fire flashed from the eyes.

"Lord, what a horse," said the drummer again, "wouldn't you like to have him?"

"Yes," drawled the other fellow, "but I'd wait until after his owner dies before I tried to get him."

The wagon drove around the corner, turned down Pott Street, and stopped at the camp yard.

"Lookin' for a location?" asked the proprietor, as the Texan was feeding his mules next morning.

"Well," drawled the Texan, "I might be checked in my mad career if I could find the right kind of a trade."

"See that house with the sod chimbley? Well, I'll give you that house an' two lots, an' this wagin yard an' sto', for yore wagin an' mules, an' that bay hoss an' five hundred dollars."

"You're shore right liberal," said the Texan, "but if I had five hundred dollars I wouldn't want no wagin yard. Besides that, when I talk about tradin' I don't never mention that bay hawse. He's mine."

They went on talking trade, and that

afternoon the wagon was unloaded at the little house with the sod chimney. The woman was busy getting supper ready, the big bay was in the lot back of the house, and the two little children, having pulled some green grass from around the well, were poking it through the crack of the fence for the horse to nibble at. The Texan and the former proprietor of the "little sto' " were making an inventory of the meager stock of groceries and feed. The trade was concluded, and the following morning the former owner drove away with the wagon and mules.

That afternoon the Texan went uptown to get acquainted. He told the proprietor of the Texas Store, that his name was Clint Frye. Frye wasn't much of a talker on short acquaintance, in fact there had never been but one man in Branchville as quiet as he was, and that was a deaf-mute that begged on the platform once between trains.

He did manage to tell his fellow Texan that he had been born and brought up on a stock ranch. Was appointed to the Texas Rangers and served four years, but had resigned because a man with as good a wife as his had no business away from home. That when Oklahoma opened he had taken his wife and two little ones and gone there with the expectation of making good, but had failed at first one thing and then another. Said he thought the country around Branchville would be fine when developed, and that the town would be all right when the "new wore off."

That was about all anybody found out about Frye, then. He went on back to his store, and attended to his business. As he walked away two men standing in front of the Cottonwood Saloon observed him.

"Ain't that the slenderest-lookin' big man you ever saw?" asked one.

"Yes," replied the other, "an' watch him walk. Yuh couldn't trip him up on greased ice."

The winter months slipped by. The town was still awful tough, but a few more respectable people came in and in the spring election, by some strange shaking of the political dice, a majority of decent, law-abiding men were elected to the city council. The civilizing influences were beginning to work, even on Branchville. Yet, with good men in the council there was little relief, because the people had insisted on reëlecting the old city marshal, who was the worst renegade in Oklahoma.

It finally dawned on the council that their peace officer, like some other marshals, was levying tribute on the thugs and letting them go free. The marshal was called on the carpet and it was made pretty plain to him that he was to take a firm hand in the next general rough house that was started in town.

One night in April, just a few days after the election, a gang of toughs came in, loaded up on busthead whisky, and proceeded to shoot up the town. In such cases it was customary to put out the lights and lie low until the circus was over.

The town marshal, who had been told to do his duty, started in to quiet the bunch. They took his gun away from him, proceeded to truss him up to a chair in the corner of the saloon, and then went out to make a good job of it. They raced up one street and down another, shooting and yelling. As they passed the little house with the "sod chimbley" where Frye lived, they did more to civilize Branchville than had ever been done before, all put together.

Frye and his family had gone to bed. The two little children were sleeping in the room with their parents, on a cheap little bed with a solid headboard. A fusillade of shots echoed through the streets, and Frye heard a crash in his room. Jumping from the bed he struck a light, and saw that a large caliber bullet had passed through the head of the children's bed, and splinters from it lay in the little girl's curls.

Without a word he put on his trousers, reached under the bed, pulled out a pair of boots with the spurs already on them, and drew them on.

Mrs. Frye, who was also very quiet, reached up and took a Colt's forty-five from the head of the belt, belt, scabbard, and all, and handed it to him.

A few minutes later, as the gang of outlaws sat on their horses under the lone cottonwood at the corner of the square, loading their guns for another round, a towering bay horse catapulted into them. Something crashed on the skull of the leader of the band, and he slipped from his saddle like a bag of sand. A shot was fired, flame spouted from the muzzle of Frye's forty-five and a man pitched from his horse. In a minute it was over. Six men were down; one with a fractured skull from Frye's first blow, two dead and three hurt too badly to want to continue the fight. A man ran up to the

scene of the trouble when he saw that the danger was over.

"Where's the marshal?" asked Frye.

"In the Cottonwood Saloon. Them fellers tied him to a chair an' then shot at his toes an' made him dance."

Frye strode into the saloon, his spurs trundling on the plank floor. He walked over to where the marshal sat tied to a chair, and taking him by the back of the neck with one hand carried him to the door and kicked man, chair, and all out into the street. Then taking out his knife he cut the marshal's bonds, and said:

"Go clean up that mess, you damned yaller hound. You are a fine peace officer. Take people's money for protecting them, and then let a gang of cattle like that endanger the lives of women and little children."

The big bay horse was standing in the street where Frye had dropped the reins on the ground. He mounted and coolly rode back home, leaving the marshal and a few others to "clean up the mess."

These bands of bad men were not just a crowd of boys from the ranches come to town to have a little fun, as had always happened in the old-time cow towns. They were outlaws, horse thieves, cattle rustlers, train robbers, murderers, the riff-raff of criminals who had been driven out of other States, and were making their last stand in Oklahoma. A price was on the head of many of them. Some of the leaders were really game, bad men, fighting with their backs to the wall. Civilization was pressing them. The last of them constituted the train and bank robbers that continued for many years to make Oklahoma notorious in an unpleasant way. Many weak young men from the older States went to Oklahoma with no bad record behind them, fell in with evil companions, committed some petty crime, persuaded themselves that they were bad men, and became outlaws indeed.

Frye's battle with the outlaws was the beginning of the great house cleaning in Branchville. Soon afterward the marshal resigned, "to go back to see his folks in east Tennessee," he said.

A meeting of the better element of the people was held, and Frye was appointed city marshal by the council. When the mayor and council went down to Frye's little store to notify him of his appointment, he was sitting on an empty soap box. He had just lighted a fresh cigar, but as the conversation progressed he threw it away and began rolling a cigarette in brown paper. He was a graduate of the State university, and talked English by the book ordinarily, but when he had anything on his mind he was like a foreigner who thinks best in his native language, and would lapse into Texanese. When the mayor stated his business Frye said:

"Much obliged, gentlemen, but I reckon I can't take the job. In the first place I'm just about a plumb stranger here. In the next place I ain't a killer by instinct, an' they's more people need killin', per capity, in this town than any place I ever saw, an' I seen a few, at that. No, I'd like to oblige y'all, but I reckon I can't."

The mayor insisted. He painted a glowing picture of a clean, orderly Branchville. Said that once the stigma of its bad record was removed, the town was sure to prosper. He went on to say that he knew it was an unpleasant duty to perform, but that the duties of citizensip must fall alike on all good men, and that no one could afford to shirk those duties.

When the mayor used the word "shirk," Frye began to waver. To him it was one of the ugliest words in the language.

"I reckon I might conquer my natural disposition to keep out of trouble, but who's goin' to square me with the Federal government and Saint Peter for reducin' the census of Oklahoma, just when they are tryin' to muster enough people to get admitted as a State?" drawled Frye.

The mayor saw his advantage and pressed it. Three days later a gang rode in to town late in the afternoon. They stopped at the watering trough and let their ponies drink. They were a tough-looking mob. The leader was a black, heavy-browed cutthroat. "Like master, like man" might have been said of all his followers. They rode up to the front of the Cottonwood and started to get down. A slender-looking man got up from a seat in front of the Texas Store and walked out toward them. Standing with his hands in his trousers pockets he said in a soft, pleasant voice:

"Good evenin', gentlemen. Y'all want anything partic'lar in this town?"

"What t'ell's it to you? Trying to make arrangements for a funeral?" snarled the leader.

Frye's gray eyes focused on the bad man,

and bored into his very marrow. His voice lost its mellow drawl and his tones became as cold and even as a frozen lake. His smiling lips changed to a hard, grim line across his rugged face.

"No," he said. "Ain't fixin' fer no funeral. They's two or three ways out o' this town. You an' yo' gang pick the shortest one, an' get out. If you ever come back, they won't be no funeral, but just a common buryin', like they do with glandered hawses and other carrion in decent communities."

Frye never made a move for his gun, never took his hands out of his pockets, but just stood quietly watching his opponents. Presently they turned about and rode out of town.

Bystanders expected to see the new marshal riddled with bullets, for this gang had sent word that they were coming in, and that the new marshal couldn't put anything over them, like he did the Walnut Creek boys. Not a shot. Not a gun drawn. One man expressed his amazement.

"Oh, I jes' got 'tween them fellers an' their nerve," said Frye. "That kind of bad folks ain't very dangerous until they get a few helpin's of liquid cereal into 'em."

That was the last big battle, and the biggest battle, ever fought in Branchville. Ten toughs had come in to shoot up the marshal. He had met them with a smile of greeting, and driven them out of town with a sneer of contempt.

A few words from the leader of the gang to a kindred spirit explains the situation. He said:

"That new marshal over to Branchville packs somethin' else besides a gun. When he's riled they's a picture of a graveyard with the gate open, in each one of his eyes, an' his mouth looks like a general invitation to anybody that wants to, to come in. I have an idee Branchville is goin' to be a right quiet town for a while."

Old Wertzheimer had stood in front of his store and watched the performance. As Frye passed, on his way home, Wertzheimer said:

"I don'd like dot vay mitt der marshal peesness. Vot for you drife men out of town. Ve can sell noddings eef people vill not come, und people vill not come if you drife dem avay. As vell might ve stay in Kansas, vere it iss so dry yet."

"Well, Mr. Wertzheimer," drawled Frye, "if you want the trade of that gang yo' better get some wagons to move you over to the county seat. They won't be back. If you think you won't like this town when it gets to be real decent, I'd advise you to begin packin' an' lookin' for transportation."

CHAPTER IV.

PEACHES' SOUL STIRS IN ITS SLUMBERS.

For a year now George had divided his time between reading books on literary technique and writing stories. His high-school education had been thorough, because he had made it so. From some unaccountable source he had gathered considerable knowledge of the classics. He had a powerful, though apparently diseased mind, and a memory like a sponge. The precepts of the "master builders" in the fiction writing game, and the men who publish books on story writing, once read, were his for all time.

The year of study and labor at his desk had changed Bradshaw perceptibly. From lack of accustomed exercise and fat-building food he had grown gaunt, and his clothing hung loose on the giant frame of the man. The snap and flash of youth in his eyes had changed to the slumberous glow of the concentrated mind, of the deep thinker. Young as he was there was the look of the dreamer in his face, of the half-demented alchemist who seeks the secret of transmutation of metals. He was seeking a hidden secret of which he had discovered all but the last, baffling link, and that drew him on to constantly greater effort.

Bradshaw and his wife had few friends. He had not been what one would call "a man's man," because he took neither interest nor pleasure in the things that engaged the great majority of the men in Branchville. A few there were, who were interested in him and his work, at first, and he talked entertainingly to them, sometimes, but rarely. More often he was deep in a book or busy at his desk, and left the conversation to Peaches. Seeing that he was absorbed in his work, almost to the degree of distraction, gradually the friends fell away, and the couple were practically isolated from the world.

George had been a fine, companionable fellow before he fell under the spell of social apathy. His finely shaped head and clear, honest gray eyes, set under shaggy brows, were an index of a powerful character, if

released from the thrall of madness under which his wife had placed him.

On the other hand, fate was working its gruesome will with Peaches, and stacking the deck against her. The year had increased her beauty until she was unspeakably lovely.

No matter how much a man may have decried Mr. Luther's "wine, woman, and song" propaganda, and sought to make a few merrily whistled tunes and an occasional cigarette meet his requirements of joy, he could not look at Peaches in her alleged bohemian attire, which she wore religiously when at home, without a quickening of the pulses and a brightening of the eyes.

She was still in her early twenties, but a finished model of beauty from the great workshop of nature. Well above medium height, but not too slender, her skin clear, pink, and healthy, she had those large, baffling, velvet-brown eyes and tawny red hair over which artists rave.

For a man who blindly worshiped beauty, as Bradshaw did, or for one who had no soul, and who gave rein to the gross, animal passions, there was grave danger in such a woman. But to one who sought the finer things of life, the spirit and essence of happiness, she was like a rare casket that had never contained a jewel.

As one looked at this matchless beauty, whose soul seemed to be dwarfed and stunted by cold calculating, and designing for the main chance, he could but marvel, and wonder what the result would be, should her spirit ever awake, look out the wondrous amber windows of her eyes, and cry out for its mate.

There could be no doubt that Bradshaw was enthralled. In his eyes his wife could do no wrong. His faith in her was implicit. If she chose to go half clad in the presence of other men it woke no pangs of jealousy in him. She was a queen, and her wish was law. She could not be untrue to him, she was infallible.

To do her justice, Peaches seemed to have no thought of evil. She craved homage, but in a distant way. The hot breath of passion was a stranger in her nostrils. But she was far from being a fool. She knew that her great beauty and physical desirableness seared the hearts of men with the hot blasts of passion like a blighting draft from the furnaces of the damned, but she beheld their writhings much as a scientist would regard the wrigglings of an insect, impaled on a pin.

She was scheming to make George Bradshaw famous, in order that she might enjoy the spotlight with him. She was a monomaniac on the subject of fame, and the hope of its reward in gorgeous display and homage. She did not love her husband. She had never loved anybody, not even her own mother. Her brain was awake and alert as to the cells of cunning and selfishness, but those cells that produce emotion and affection were locked and barred.

By this time George's inheritance was far spent. Peaches, though a master hand at stretching a dollar, was hard put to it to make ends meet. George was writing essays and short stories, and sending them to magazines. They were, of course, nothing more than composite pictures of things he had read, and poorly drawn pictures at that. He had no style. That is a thing that gets crimped into a man by the blows of life's battles, and George had never been hit hard enough to dent a piece of tin foil. The result was a bill for postage and a steady flow of rejection slips.

In order to encourage Bradshaw, Peaches got busy writing poetry. But, when she cinched the saddle of sentiment on Pegasus she couldn't get her feet in the stirrups, and had to hold his head up to keep from being thrown entirely from her mount. The old lilt and swing that had produced the "Captive Vinegarroon," and "Ather Poems," failed her, and no amount of pencil chewing and mooning would bring it back.

Peaches was shrewd enough to know that the muse had been forced out of the running by other talents, and that poetry and problems of finance could not roost in the same tree. That attempting to make herself a social queen, by making her husband a literary king, had put the muses to woolgathering in a hopeless manner.

Occasionally George would have a glimmer of reason, and would complain of the long, hard road to fame, and of how scurvily fate was treating him in the matter of withholding his mantle and chaplet of genius.

At such times Peaches would console and sooth him by calling his attention to an article in the "Guiding Hand" wherein it was stated that many of the masterpieces of literature had been bandied from pillar to post before their merit was discovered, and their authors made famous. She also read

to him the confessions of popular writers, that much of their best work had been sold on its thirtieth, and even fiftieth trip out.

The long, hot summer dragged to a close. Bradshaw was a little thinner, a little more gaunt and hollow-eyed, but still laboring away at his literary retorts and crucibles, seeking the missing link in the chain of fame.

About the first of September Peaches became worried and restless. She fell into the habit of taking long walks into the country. Not with any evil intent, but just because God made the outdoors for people who are in mental trouble. She would come in from these walks with her arms full of flowers, and would talk enthusiastically of the beauties of nature. Sometimes it would almost seem that her soul was peeping out of its prison.

It pleased Bradshaw to see the sparkle in her eyes and the color in her cheeks after the walks. He had taken a fancy to write a great novel that would be published as a serial, and afterward in book form. The short story did not give scope for his talents. He worked like a slave, and could not spare the time to go walking, but he insisted that Peaches walk every day. She never asked him to go.

She did not go out to meet a man. Of the men in town, the overwhelming majority were of a class that could have no thought in common with her. A few there were who were of her class, but they were men "wise with much travel." Men, perhaps, who were not too careful of the conventions, but who could see that here was a slumbering volcano. They were men who thought, and thinking, realized that favors from her would not only be theft of the honor of a good man and his wife, but promised an aftermath. She passed them all with a simple nod, and gave none ground to make advances, but they were wise men. They knew the signs of restlessness, and they knew the woman did not love her husband. But they had seen, too often, the broken vases that God had created in beauty, and in which the demon of fate had planted the tiny, beautiful flower of passion. A lovely, tender flower at first, which changed in a twinkling to a dragon plant, wrecking that vase and others that stood near it. Too often they had seen those cases that ended with gun, knife, or cyanide, or yet worse, with the painted travesties on woman, to be found in the dance halls. They were rough, Western men, but they had a semblance of honor, and they were wise. But——

The twenty-fifth day of September in that year was a day on which the angels of mercy forgot to keep watch and ward over George Bradshaw and his wife. It was one of those days when the alchemist of nature makes the air hazy by mixing wine with it. A day, the beauty of which causes the artist to fold his easel, and sit gazing in rapt wonder at a picture God has painted, and that no mortal can copy.

Late in the afternoon Peaches went for her walk. Her soul was stirring in its slumbers. She had caught the spirit of the wide places. One evening she had seen the sun go down in a bank of mist, and flaming, violet rays, like the spokes of a monster wheel with a golden hub, had been cast up into the sky, and she asked herself: "What is beyond?"

On this fateful afternoon she walked as if in her sleep, and her mind was busy with strange thoughts. The executors of nature's great law were beating at the gates of her heart, and crying, "Open, in the name of the king," and she did not recognize their voices.

As Bradshaw sat writing there was a step on the porch and a knock at the door. He answered the summons and invited the visitor to enter.

"You do not remember me, Mr. Bradshaw," said the man, "Cortland is my name."

"Oh, yes," said George, "I remember you quite well, now, but it has been some time since I saw you." He invited the visitor to take a seat, and continued: "You were interested in the Holcombe addition and lot sale, several years ago."

"Yes," replied Cortland, "and it is in regard to that venture that I called on you. There is still considerable property in the addition unsold. One of the original promoters died, and I am seeking his heirs, in the hope of straightening out a legal tangle that affects the title of the property."

He then drew from his pocket a list of names and read them to George, saying as he did so, that he had been told Bradshaw had lived in the town since its founding, and knew every one that had ever lived there any length of time.

George knew the people. None of them lived in Branchville at the time, but he was able to tell where they had removed to.

They sat a while talking over old times, and the changes in the town, and then Cortland thanked George for his kindness and rose to go.

There is something almost uncanny about the timing of events. If Mrs. Bradshaw had made her walk a few minutes longer that fateful September day it would have changed the whole course of her life and that of her husband. Just as Cortland rose to take his leave there was a light step on the porch, and Peaches entered the house. She did not know there was a visitor there, and when she reached the door of the room and saw Cortland she stopped.

Why God ever made a thing so beautiful is beyond comprehension. As the woman stood at the threshold of the room a flood of golden-red light, cast through the sunset haze of Indian summer, fell like a spotlight of destiny over her. She was clad in a simple, brown walking dress that fitted her form, and wore a plain straw hat. In her arms were a profusion of goldenrod and purple wild flowers. She had been thinking, and a strange new light was slumbering in her eyes. Her lips, ruby red, were parted, showing strong, even, white teeth, and a faint tinge of color was in her cheeks. A moment she stood thus, and then regaining her composure advanced into the room. Only a moment, but in that moment Cortland had made a strange sighing sound through his teeth.

George introduced them, and after a few minutes' conversation, in which Cortland displayed the charm and ease of a polished and intelligent man of the world, he said good-by, expressing a hope that he would see them again, as he should be in town several days.

A little later, from the long-distance telephone booth at the Branch, Cortland talked to some one in Oklahoma City, giving the names and addresses that Bradshaw had given him. He closed his conversation by saying:

"Don't know. Have changed my mind, and may stay here two or three weeks," and hung up the receiver.

Cortland was apparently approaching thirty-five, but his complexion was the kind that gave little index to age. He was a well-set-up man, a little above medium height. His hair was sandy and his eyes blue. He had a very agreeable manner, and would have been a really attractive man, but for a peculiarity of his eyes that would not be noticed by a casual observer. The line of demarkation between the white and the iris in them was not clearly defined, and they shifted slightly when one looked squarely into them. He was expensively but tastefully clad, and extremely courteous to those he met.

Early the following afternoon Cortland, immaculately clad, presented himself at the Bargas home and called on Bradshaw. There was, he said, a minor matter that he had overlooked asking about the day before. After he had been given the information he sat talking to Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw. He discovered that George was devoting his time to literary work, and at once entered into an interesting discussion of the subject. Like most amateurs, George was not only willing, but eager to talk shop. He permitted Cortland to read one of his efforts, and that gentleman promptly pronounced it excellent. The afternoon slipped away, and Peaches forgot all about her walk.

"It is so rarely one meets such cultured people in the West," said Cortland at leaving, "that I hope you will permit me to call again. I am deeply interested in your work. I once thought of a literary career for myself."

The next afternoon he arrived just as Peaches was preparing to start for her walk.

"I shall not stay, Mr. Bradshaw," said Cortland. "I have no right, in my selfishness, to take up your time, and Mrs. Bradshaw is going for a walk. I shall go back to the hotel and spend a lonesome afternoon, unless"—he hesitated—"unless Mrs. Bradshaw would show me where those wonderful flowers grow."

Peaches graciously consented to show him, and Bradshaw waved them away and returned to his writing.

Cortland had no further business in Branchville, but from the moment that he had first seen Peaches standing in the sunlight on that fateful Sunday evening, he had been madly, passionately, insanely in love with her. His only knowledge of love was the passion of desire, and he did not stop to scruple that she was another man's wife, but set coolly and deliberately about winning her. He came of a line that believed might was right, and he would take her if he could. He had never been accustomed to denying himself anything that he desired, and possession of this wonderful woman

seemed to him the most desirable thing on earth.

Throughout the walk he wisely refrained from any hint of his purpose, but talked charmingly on various subjects, occasionally making a veiled hint at her beauty and loveliness. Peaches had never before been in the company of such a man. She knew there were such, and the moving aspiration of her life was to reach a position where she would be thrown constantly in the company of polished men and women. In her unsophisticated mind polish and outward refinement should atone for all the sins of the world.

Again the next day, and again and again Cortland walked with Peaches, and poor, blind, trusting George slaved on at his story.

Slowly, adroitly, insidiously Cortland pursued the conquest of the woman's heart. By the end of the first week he permitted himself to say things to her that brought the crimson to her cheeks, but she did not resent it. He was a polished gentleman.

For two weeks he paid tribute to Bradshaw's genius, and compared his work favorably with that of the best writers of the day, and in the afternoons deliberately wove his web about the heart of Bradshaw's wife. Peaches was bewitched. The strange voice that had been calling for some time in her heart, was crying out in insistent tones.

The men of the town saw Cortland and Bradshaw's wife together, but said nothing. They were wise men. No man living could have hinted to Bradshaw that his wife was indiscreet, but some day there must be a settling of the score.

Then, on the second Sunday afternoon, Cortland went to Bradshaw's and proposed that they all three go for a long walk. He knew full well that he had fired the crazed mind of Bradshaw by specious flattery of his work, and that nothing could pull him away from his labors on the novel, which was now nearing completion.

"Ephraim is joined to his idols," said George with a tired smile. "You and Peaches go, and I'll finish this chapter." And he waved them away again. Had he but known the tragedy he was abetting he would have rather his hand withered.

Cortland and Mrs. Bradshaw took a longer walk than usual, far out into the country. In crossing a rough place in the way he extended his hand and she took it. The touch sent the poison wine of passion through his very being.

Ascending the little declivity, they stopped for a moment's breathing spell. Seizing the opportunity Cortland laid aside all pretense, and poured out his passion with such eloquence as the woman had never heard before. He declared a boundless, unquenchable love for her, and held out to her all the allurements of riches and social position, and the admiration that the world would give her wonderful beauty. Gently he took her hand and raised it to his hot lips. As she stood thus, swaying upon the abyss of guilty love, he passed his arm around her.

The age-old light flamed in her eyes, then smoldered to a steady glow. Ever so slightly she leaned toward him. The battle was almost won, and the carnal gleam of lust glittered in his eyes, and then——

Some prescience told her to beware. Some subtle voice whispered in her heart, and she staggered back from him and cried: "No, no, I can't do that. I cannot go with you," and stood, wide-eyed and panting for breath, as if she had put forth her hand to pluck a beautiful flower, and had touched a coiled serpent, with head raised ready to strike.

Quick as thought Cortland saw he had pressed his advantage too soon, and just as quickly he shifted to the old subterfuge that the devil used in the Garden of Eden.

"Oh, forgive me," he cried, "I was wrong, I was mad, but you cannot know the effect your wonderful beauty and loveliness has on me. I can see now that I had no right to hope. You are too pure, too good, too noble, but please do not let us part in anger. Let me remember these two weeks as the happiest of my life. If the stem of the red rose of love must be broken, let me at least graft on it the pure, white lily of friendship.

"You have told me that you are poor, that you feel that your husband could win fame if only he had money for books, and a little more time. Show me that you do not despise me, by taking this," and he pressed a roll of bills into her hand. "It means nothing to me, and it would mean so much to you and to him."

Slowly they walked homeward, Cortland pleading with her not to despise him, she clasping the crumpled bills, and deliberating whether to keep them. In the end she yielded to the greed for the things that money would buy, and slipped the bills into the bosom of her dress. Cortland saw her

yield to the temptation, and with an eager light in his eye he said:

"Take this card, and if you ever need a friend call on me at that address," and as Peaches took the card he made a mental pledge that she should need one soon.

Cortland did not enter the house, but turned away toward town. When Peaches went in there was that in her face which her husband could not read, because it was a language he did not know.

It was dusk, and halfway between the Bargas cottage and town two people stood for a long time in earnest conversation. They were—Cortland and Mrs. Bargas. Cortland left on the next train.

CHAPTER V.

THREE ACES AN' A PAIR OF FIVES.

Buck Masters was an honest real-estate man. Don't laugh. A real-estate man in the boom days of Oklahoma could be as honest as anybody—if he didn't sell any real estate, and Buck didn't.

Masters came to Branchville early in the game. He bought a lot on the east side of the square, and built a little shack on it. The building had a square, official-looking front on it, and across the front was painted the single phrase, "real estate." Whether the legend was intended to indicate that some person, or persons, within dealt in real estate, or merely that the property was so inventoried in the tax lists, was not apparent.

Buck was a "character," but then characters were quite common in Branchville in those days, and no one paid any attention to him.

He had undoubtedly come from somewhere, but people were not inquisitive. Unlike many citizens of the town, he impressed one that his name had always been Masters. From time to time, as people got disgusted and wanted to leave town, Buck bought a lot here and there. That constituted his activities in the marts of trade.

Most of the time Masters sat near the front window of his little office. Sometimes he was reading a well-worn, small, leather-bound volume. The gilt lettering of the title was disappearing, but the word "Omar," could still be made out. Generally he was just looking at the passing throng.

If Achan had had a face like Buck Masters' he could have stalled by Joshua with that Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver and wedge of gold that he had buried in his tepee. But then, Achan was a Jew, and they are all more or less excitable about money matters. Masters had the only real, frozen, poker face in the world. It was not messed up with the fine wrinkles of dissipation, but was cut into hills and valleys by the deeper lines of character and serious thinking. His hair, once black, was iron-gray at the temples. His eyes wanted to be blue, but sometimes they gave up the struggle and were black. Whatever the hue they chose, they always resembled the points of two chilled-steel instruments.

When one got well acquainted with Buck he noticed that there was always a glint of sunshine back of the ice, as if he knew a joke on the world, but was afraid to tell it, for fear the world wouldn't laugh. He rarely smiled, and when he did it reminded one of a rift of sunlight on a mountainside, on a day when clouds were flying.

Frye saw Masters sitting at his window day after day. He noticed that there were always two buttons on the front of Buck's overshirt that were unbuttoned, and that he seemed to have some kind of an unnatural growth under his left arm. In fact, Mr. Clint Frye noticed a great many things about the people he saw, and was a good judge of men and horses. He wagged his head, and said to nobody in particular:

"There's a good, tough, rangy old he hawss that don't appear to belong to nobody's mount in this man's town. If he ain't been outlawed, nor spoilt, he ought to be a good goer."

A few days later there was a right ugly little gun fight and general melee in the Cottonwood, and Frye was in it. For one time Mr. Frye was outclassed on the gun play. When all the guns were empty two men were down, a bullet hole was in Frye's hat, and two in his coat, and four tough customers were advancing to close in on him. He got hold of the leg of a stool, swung it once and a man went to pieces—so did the stool. It was one of the old-fashioned kind, with legs mortised into a seat of solid, two-inch wood. Frye still retained one leg, with about a third of the seat on the end of it, and a sculptor could have gotten a nice study of the great god Thor, if he had been looking. Down they went before the mighty hammer. One bucko had backed into a cor-

ner to reload his gun. As he was in the act of raising it to open fire on Frye the hammer sailed through the air, took the man amidships, and he crumpled up on the floor.

Frye felt a gun pushed into his hand, and a quiet voice said:

"Right pretty, Mr. Frye, but not just according to ring rules. But the marquis isn't here, so it don't matter. Masters is my name, Buck Masters."

Masters was standing by Frye's side, and spoke as coolly and courteously as if he had been in a drawing-room on Riverside Drive.

"This is a right awkward place for meetin' people," said Frye, "but I'm glad you come. Just hold the gun until I load mine, please."

In a few minutes another "mess was cleaned up," and Branchville was civilized some more.

That was the beginning of the acquaintance between Frye and Masters. Frye fell into the habit of stopping at Buck's office as he passed, and the two men found a common interest in life.

One day Frye got a letter from the sheriff, the county seat was twenty miles away, in which was a description of two bad men, and a request that Frye look out for them. As Frye passed Buck's office that night on his way to the scene of his nightly labors, Buck was sitting out in front smoking an old pipe. Frye stopped, and after a moment said:

"You ever visited around hell much, Buck?"

"I am not familiar with the downtown district, but I have been around the suburbs considerably," replied Masters.

"I'm goin' right down the main street of the place to-night, and I'd shore admire to have you for company. If you ain't got no depity's badge I've got two, both forty-fives."

"I like a forty-one better," said Masters, as he stepped inside, laid his pipe on the desk, and got his hat.

The Branch, as stated, was ostensibly a hotel, but it was, in fact, several other things, and none of them good. About the best feature of the place was being a "fence" and a hang-out for thieves. From that point its characteristics went on down the line, reached a point of depravity that couldn't be printed, and passed on to where the vice of the ordinary town would blush to think of it.

There was a big ball on at the Branch that night, and that was the place Frye was going to look for his men. It was a warm, June night. The windows were open, and the atmosphere was rife with evidence of an hilarious time. Two fiddles and a piano, evidently made of boiler iron and baling wire, were furnishing alleged music in the dance hall, a man was "prompting" in a raucous voice for an old-time "square dance," glasses were clinking in the barroom.

The proprietor of the Branch was not particularly fond of Mr. Marshal Frye. He held very much the same view of Frye's activities as had been expressed by Mr. Wertzheimer. He realized that the Branch was about due for a house cleaning, but didn't like Frye's methods. When Frye and Masters entered the barroom they were given a scowl by the proprietor and his three busy bartenders.

They walked about for a while, and it soon became apparent to Masters that Frye was looking for some one. Finally they walked out, went across the street, and sat down on Wertzheimer's sidewalk.

"They's a little gun fight gettin' ripe in there," said Frye. "A bunch from the county seat is tryin' to run the show. As soon as the home gang gets a few more helpin's of that cocaine and tobacco juice, they are pretty apt to get to complainin'. If they was any decent people a-tall over there I'd go over an' try to stop it. It shore takes a lot of ammunition to be marshal in this town, an' I think I'll let them use theirs up first."

The two men sat talking a while longer, Frye looking into the windows of the dance hall across the street and studying the signs of activity, then he said:

"Let's move over in front of the Cottonwood, they's a better breeze over there. I ain't never much afraid of bullets when I'm in a fight, but some people are mighty careless with a gun."

They had no more than reached the front of the Cottonwood when a shot was fired in the Branch, and pandemonium broke loose. It was over in a minute. The crowd poured out and got away. Two men had made a run to get out one of the front doors, and a leaden hail had mowed them down.

The shooting ceased and Frye and Masters went over to assess the damages. The proprietor met them at the steps. He was complaining bitterly, and when he saw Frye he said:

"What's the use havin' a marshal, if he ain't goin' to protect nobody none? If you'd been here you might er kept them fellers quiet. One of my bartenders, the best one, is kilt, an' another one's all shot up. Fo' men down an' two women crippled in the hall. 'Sides that, here's these two gents on the porch. They was guestes of the house, an' when they started to run out the do' some crazy coyote drapped 'em like he was pottin' prairie dogs for practice."

"Well, now, that's right bad," said Frye, "but y'all ain't got no call to think hard of me. I was over here a while ago, an' you didn't even say howdy. 'Peared like yo' thought I wasn't invited.

"If I'd been here they would jes' be that much mo' mess to clean up, and you might have had me to pack out. Bring a light, an' let's have a look at the two guests."

The light was brought and the two men were rolled over on their backs. They were the two men that Frye was looking for. Masters, who had not spoken a word, made a peculiar little noise in his throat, a glance passed between him and Frye. That was all. The poker face was on the job again.

"I'll take care of your two guests," said Frye. "The sheriff wants 'em. They seem to be oncommonly dead, but they'll be worth just as much to the sheriff that way. I'll just take their baggage, too."

"No, you won't," said the proprietor. "I'll keep the baggage."

"I think the gentleman's arms are cold, Mr. Masters. Put these wristlets on him." The steely glint came into his eyes, and his gun was ready for any business that might come up.

The house cleaning was on. The crippled bartender and the remaining sound one, together with a few others about the place, were arrested. Sheets were thrown over the dead, and some of the worst of the "mess" was cleaned up. Masters did a man's part in the night's work, and said nothing.

Morning brought the sheriff. The house was searched and many things were found that didn't belong in a hotel, enough, in fact, to send everybody connected with it over the road. Subsequently the dance hall was cut up into bedrooms, the bar was removed, and the place became a real hotel. Thus another step had been taken toward the civilization of Branchville.

The evening after the ball at the Branch, Frye and Masters sat in Buck's office.

"My work is about done," said Masters. "I followed those two men eight years. They lured my only brother, a wayward, harmless, laughing boy, into a Chicago dive and murdered him. The notoriety and disgrace of it caused my friends to fall away from me. The woman I loved turned against me and married another man. They robbed me of everything I held dear, except my personal honor. I followed them across the sea. I trailed them back to the West. I heard of them in Cripple Creek, and I went there. Again I heard of them in Oklahoma, and I came to its toughest town. Another hand fired the shot that found their guilty hearts, but the desire was strong in me to kill.

"Now they are gone, and I have no mission in life. I haven't a relative living. I have traveled about until my friends, if I ever had any, have forgotten me. My little fortune is gone, except a few lots in this town. I am a Harvard graduate, and was educated to the law, but have never done anything. Those men wrecked my life soon after I left college, and I have never thought of anything but them."

"Well, now, Buck," said Frye, "that was a mighty hard deal, but I shore hate to hear you talk about quittin', because you wouldn't make a good quitter.

"Life's a square game, an' God A'mighty is a square dealer. The bones ain't loaded. Sometimes it shore do look like a fellow throws a powerful lot of treys an' deuces in the first half of the game, but it's the piker that lays down—that loses. Just keep on buckin' it an' you'll shore win in the game of life. Some day you'll throw three aces an' a pair o' fives, or something like that, an' that'll be about right. Flushes an' straights ain't good for a man."

Along in September, just before Cortland made his visit to Branchville, Frye met the mayor on the street.

"I been pretty close on this job for quite a spell," said Frye, "an' I'd kinder like to get off for a few weeks an' get the smoke out of my eyes, an' sleep some in the nighttime. Bud Foster's wife, she's kinder distant kin to my wife, an' Bud 'lowed he'd like for us to come out for a while."

"Well, Mr. Frye, you have been doing some mighty good work," said the mayor, "and you are entitled to a little rest. You have this gang pretty quiet, but don't you think they will get wild again if you leave?"

"They might," said Frye, "but if you'll appoint Buck Masters he'll ride herd on 'em pretty close while I'm gone."

So, Buck was appointed and Frye got his rest, and it just happened that Frye never got those sharp gray eyes of his on Cortland.

When Frye came back about the middle of October Buck's office had been painted, and there was a sign on the front which read:

WM. M. MASTERS,
Lawyer,
Real Estate—Rentals,

and on the district court records there was an entry showing that William Marion Masters had been admitted to the bar.

Buck had "ridden herd pretty close," and turned over the escutcheon of office in good shape. Frye looked at the outside of Buck's office, then he went inside and looked at some neatly arranged cases of law books and a new roll-top desk. Then he turned to Buck with the strong light of friendship in his eyes, extended his hand, and said:

"Put her there, Buck. You've thrown three aces and a pair of fives. Let the aces stand and throw to 'em."

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF HIS TRANCE.

Bradshaw was under his wife's influence, of course, but that was not all that was troubling him. He was suffering from that peculiar mental malady that affects geniuses, and he would go on working at it, and never be able to see a crisis in his affairs until he was grabbing at the poorhouse doorknob, with his landlord and the sheriff only two jumps behind him.

When George had mailed his story he relaxed a little. There was nothing now for him to do but wait a few days and get his chaplet. He would not write any more until he got used to the laurel leaves tickling his ears, and could walk in his robe of fame without stumbling.

He had kept his wedding suit up to that time, and it was practically new. Such other scanty articles of wearing apparel as he had bought from time to time were worn out. The wedding garments were the attire of a gentleman of taste. Old Dobenski had bought it with a job lot of clothing. Wertzheimer had sold it to George because he couldn't sell it to any one else. In the first place it was much too large for the average man, and then gentlemen in Branchville at that time were partial to checks and plaids known as California goods, rather than to brown and gray worsteds.

Bradshaw put on the wedding suit, remarking as he did so that he would wear it a few days until his check came, and then he would have the tailor make him a suit. He didn't see Peaches' face when he said it, or he would have awakened then.

When George had gone uptown and got a shave and a haircut he was about as handsome a specimen of young manhood as one could wish to see. When he returned home, proud of his achievement, hopeful of the great reward he was to receive for his labors, and with the light of worship for his beautiful wife shining in his eyes, George Bradshaw was a man worth looking at. If Peaches had possessed such things as a heart and soul she would have fallen in love with him then, if she never had before. But Peaches was busy. She was again toying with the door and fixing to jump. She was looking just a little way down the road of life to that rough place where she was going to quit the old boat. Preparing right then to throw away her last chance to be a woman worthy the name.

Then one morning Bradshaw went to the post office and received a package. It was his returned manuscript. There was no comment. The editor seemed to be afraid he would write some more. It was as if he had called at a strange house, and had not been invited to return.

In a flash he saw that he had been reaching for the handle on the poorhouse door, and didn't know it. Nothing is so apt to rip the lining out of an hallucination as the rattle of an empty flour barrel, and the ungratified complaining of a healthy stomach. George awoke from his hypnotic dream so suddenly that it dazed him. Wearily he returned home, laid the manuscript on the table, and said:

"Well, Peaches, it has returned. I am a failure. Your guess that I was a genius seems to have been wrong."

"You were a long time finding it out," replied Peaches, "I have known it for the last year."

"Why—why didn't you tell me?" stammered George.

"I didn't think you would believe it," she replied coldly.

Peaches was right. He would not have believed it. In his heart he did not believe it then. Through his mind were running a hundred encouragements that he had read in the "Guiding Hand." But Peaches' influence over him was still strong. If she said he was a failure, it must be true. Nothing further was said about the matter, and after noon George put on his old work clothes that had been held over from his delivery wagon days.

"I'm going up to see Wertzheimer about a job," he said as he left the house.

His wife made no reply, and Bradshaw passed out the gate and started up the street. He was thinking as he went along that this must be the crisis in his life, but he was mistaken, or, at least, if it was, there was to be a super-crisis.

George went direct to old Wertzheimer and applied for a job.

"Vere you been?" asked the merchant.

"Right here in Branchville."

"Vat you been doink?"

"Studying and writing," replied George.

"Writing, iss it? Vat for, yet?"

George explained what he had been doing. Wertzheimer exhaled a cloud of cheroot smoke, wrinkling his nose and snorting as he did so.

"I don't like de vay you kvit. I got a boy for seven dollar und feefty cent that does the same work. I giff you a chob in the varehouse, one tollar a day, ven you work, but not regular. Sometimes mabbe so all veek, sometime two, tree day."

George didn't have as much money sense as a millionaire's baby daughter. He had not asked Peaches how much was left of his inheritance, but he knew it could not be much. He had been so absorbed in the writing game that he had taken no note of time. Now that he was momentarily out of the thrall his mind began to work. He wondered how Peaches had managed so long on so little. He did not suspect his wife at all, but to the contrary blamed himself for having been selfish and thoughtless of her. He knew he could not make a living for himself and wife at the job Wertzheimer offered him, so he refused it.

He walked out the front door of the store, turned to the left and started aimlessly down the street. Buck Masters had known George when he drove the delivery wagon, and had a speaking acquaintance with him, but in those days Buck was not seeking friends. Now he was. Just as George reached the front of Buck's office, he stepped out the door:

"Why, hello, George. Glad to see you. Go in and take a seat. I'll be back in a minute, as soon as I mail these letters," said Buck.

George entered the office in a dazed sort of way and sat down. He realized that he had no special business there, but it was a good place to get his bearings. It will be remembered that Bradshaw had been little better than an anchoret for almost two years. The last few winter months he had been laboring at his story, writing and rewriting. He did not know or realize the changes that had taken place in Branchville, nor could he understand the warm greeting that Masters had given him.

George was as guileless as a little child. Had he gone to old Wertzheimer dressed in his wedding clothes he would have been employed because he looked prosperous, but going in his work clothes he was turned down cold. Bradshaw was a literalist. He was looking for work, and had dressed the part.

Masters was gone longer than he intended, but George sat in the office as if he were keeping an important engagement. He could not have told why, but as the westering sun fell through the windows of the law office something seemed to awake within him. He rose from his seat as if to leave the place. Peaches had not snapped her fingers before his eyes in orthodox manner, but the spell was gone.

Just as George was about to reach for the door latch Masters opened it from the outside and entered:

"Met a fellow at the post office, and couldn't get away from him. Sit down, George."

Buck filled his old brier pipe and threw the tobacco sack to George, mechanically. George, quite as mechanically, drew his pipe from the pocket of his jumper, filled it and returned the tobacco. They sat smoking for a long minute. Masters was looking out the window at a barrel weed that was romping across the plaza in the March wind. George was looking inward, at his own soul, half dazed at what he saw. Suddenly Masters turned to him and said:

"Well, George, how's the writing game?"

CHAPTER VII.

MASTERS SUMS UP THE CASE.

After Masters' question George sat for a full minute as if tongue-tied. It was the first time in his life that a man had spoken to him in kindly tones as to an equal, and expressed an interest in his personal affairs. Masters had known George several years, but had he never seen the young man before, his knowledge of men would have told him that here was a strong and worthy character. Then, too, it had been but a short time since he had thrown his own first three aces and pair of fives in the game of life, and he was grateful and willing to help.

"My writing was a failure," said George, with a kind of sob in his voice, and near tears shining in his eyes.

"Oh, no," said Masters in kindly tones, "don't say that. You may have failed to sell what you have produced, but no amount of time spent in thinking and reducing one's thoughts to words and sentences on paper was ever a failure. There is no occupation in life that such effort does not fit a man better to hold. It is quite probable, too, that the first efforts of the world's greatest writers, if published, would have been very much like placing grain in the sheaf in the show window of a delicatessen store. The grain was there, but it was a far cry from cakes and pastry."

"I have always thought failure was the opposite of success, and I have not succeeded as a writer," replied George bitterly.

"I seem to have been under the influence of a hypnotic dream," he continued, some strange magnetic force in Masters drawing him on. "I had persuaded myself that I couldn't fail, and not until the last few hours have I begun to realize what the trouble is with my writing. I can't write because I don't know anything to write. Almost two years' study of such books as I have has given me the mastery of a few words, the ability, perhaps, to build clear sentences in English, but not knowledge. The men who have written books on literary technique have overlooked the fact that, no matter how skilled a man may be at story-telling, he must first have a story to tell. I have none.

"The thought has come to me in the last hour that Dante could not have painted such a vivid picture of hell if he had not some time seen the lid off. I have been like a carpenter set down in the middle of Sahara and told to build a palace of California redwood. Good intentions, bright new tools, technically prepared, perhaps, but with no redwood. There is plenty of redwood in California to build a whole flock of palaces, several flocks in fact, but there are several thousand miles of storm-tossed water between the material and the building site. My trouble seems to be that I have been trying to build literary palaces of material that I hauled in old Wertzheimer's delivery wagon. That is all the worth-while work I have done.

"I have just been back to ask for an opportunity to gnaw the bones in my old kennel, but there was another poor devil on the job," concluded George bitterly.

"You mean that you tried to get a job from Wertzheimer when you found that your story had failed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it has not failed. You have told me something that you say has come to you in the last few hours that it has taken many a good man the best years of his life to learn. That, and the fact that you have the courage, after being knocked down by disappointment, to get up and try again, is indication that yours has been one of those anomalies—a successful failure—the most valuable thing in the battle of life."

"Perhaps so," said George, "but that does not remove the fact that I am broke and out of a job."

"You are not broke" said Masters. "No man is insolvent in this life, so long as he has the courage and the physical strength to try again."

By this time the sun was almost down. The two men sat gazing out the window at the sunset, saying nothing. Buck knew he had about as much use for a clerk in his little law business as the devil has for a rosary, but he was making up his mind as to the best way to help George Bradshaw. The world would be a much better place if more men spent some time in the same manner.

"How would you like to bring your typewriter and come in here with me? I couldn't pay you much, but it would be a job, something to keep you busy until you can do better. I'll pay you ten dollars a week, and you can pick up a little on the outside, perhaps," said Masters.

George would gladly have taken his old

job back at nine a week. This offer was a godsend to him, and he promptly accepted it, and thanked Masters for it.

"All right," said Buck. "Show up in the morning and we'll see what we can do."

When George got home Peaches and Mrs. Bargas were talking earnestly in low tones. He had noticed for several months now that there seemed to be a growing intimacy between his wife and the landlady, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Bargas was rough and uncultured. He had thought little of it, but this evening it struck him as remarkable that a woman of any refinement could find anything in common with Mrs. Bargas, who was obviously of the lower classes. When George entered the house his wife observed him narrowly, and there was a furtive look in her eyes. George was all aflame with getting a better job than he expected, and the matter of his wife's intimacy with the landlady passed out of his mind.

When Bradshaw explained to his wife what the new job was she made no comment. She knew Masters slightly, but he had a way of looking at people as if his mind was on something the other side of them, and he didn't take the trouble to go around, but just looked through them. She and Cortland had met him the evening of their last walk together, and he had looked at them just that way.

Early the next morning George put on his wedding suit, shined his shoes, took his old typewriter and went up to Buck Masters' little office. Peaches didn't offer to kiss him good-by or to pin one of the early spring wild flowers on his coat as an emblem of good luck for his new enterprise. Peaches was still busy, still looking a little way ahead on the road of life. George was still trusting, and failing to notice any change in her. So he walked away to his new job, with gladness in his heart.

Buck Masters slept in a room at the back of his office. He always took a long walk in the early morning and stopped on his way back for breakfast. That morning he had gone earlier than usual, and as usual had left the office door unlocked.

When he returned the office and the sidewalk were swept, his desk and bookcases were dusted, and a fine-looking, well-dressed young man was sitting in the office. Buck had almost put on the dignified air in which he addressed prospective clients before he realized that it was his understudy. The morning greeting between them was open and cordial.

About ten o'clock old Wertzheimer came bustling into the office:

"I say, Puck, I vant that you shall foreclose on that house and two lots of vidder —vat t'ell, I say, good morning, Pradshaw, vere iss Puck?"

"Mr. Masters has gone out for a few minutes. Won't you have a seat?" said George.

"No, I chust come back again, yet," and he went out, leaving an odor of cheroot smoke in the office, and a pleased smile on the face of Bradshaw.

As he walked back to his store Mr. Wertzheimer said under his breath: "Vy the devil I didn't giff that fellow a chob yesteddy. Now he bees a lawyer, und he vatches me. I guess I don't foreclose dot mortgage yet. Mabbe so he knows about it."

He stopped in front of his store, stood on the edge of the sidewalk, and watched a small pile of trash that was burning in the street. Presently he rolled his cheroot to the other side of his mouth so the smoke could go in the other eye for a while, wrinkled his nose like a sheep fixing to sneeze, and addressed himself again:

"I tought dot feller vas gone, und den I tought he vas broke, und now he iss neither. I knew always he vass a smart tam fool, because he ain'd a tam fool no vay. I guess I chust put dot mortgage back in the safe."

When Buck came back George told him of Wertzheimer's visit.

"Yes," said Buck, "he has been here twice before to have that mortgage foreclosed, and took cold feet both times before he disclosed the identity of the property. I am very proud of my profession, and the one thing that gives me the greatest pleasure in connection with it is that Mr. Wertzheimer is not a client of mine. If it will afford you any pleasure I hope you will not hesitate to throw him out the next time he comes in."

As a result of Mr. Clint Frye's ability as a house cleaner, he was appointed deputy sheriff for the Branchville bailiwick soon after the affair at the Branch. On account of his new honor he was out of town when George assumed his duties as a law clerk, and did not return until three days later. He had never seen George, and George had never seen him.

The morning after Frye's return he walked into Buck's office. Masters introduced the two men, and there was almost a

smile on his face as he watched the giants shake hands. George went out on an errand, and Frye said:

"So that's the fellow I been hearing was nutty, is it?"

"Yes," replied Buck.

"Looks awful sane to me. Bet he'd make a good depity." That was the highest praise Frye knew.

Buck told Frye the whole story of George's career a few days later, and that he had given the young fellow a job when he didn't need him, just because of what Frye had done for him when he was ready to give up and quit the game.

"I'm bettin' you drawed a good whole card when you got him," said Frye. "I never saw a feller I liked better in a little while than I do him. Accordin' to what you tell me he ain't crazy enough to do any good, either. If everybody in the world that tried to pull something before it was ripe was crazy, you'd have to put the sane ones in the hawss traps, and turn the range over to the nuts."

For a week or two George got along fine, and then Masters began to notice that he had fits of abstraction. When Buck would talk to him he seemed all right, but it was plain that something was on his mind, and that he was troubled and unhappy. At first he thought the young man was lapsing into his literary madness again, but his interest in the law business belied that. Masters knew of Bradshaw's worship of his wife, and he knew something else, but he said nothing to any one.

From the day that George had given up the writing game there had been a complete change in Peaches. She had never been particularly demonstrative toward her husband, but now she was positively cold. At last George couldn't help noticing it any longer. He frankly tried to find out the cause. He thought he was doing the manly thing, and that he had, in fact, been very fortunate. He had a job that would keep them in comfort, with a promise of something better. When George talked to her she wisely saw that she was overplaying her hand, so she relented a little, and played her double game more shrewdly. This relieved his mind, but he didn't know of her aspirations and entanglements.

Time slipped by well into early April. Farmers were busy and the town was very quiet. Frye dropped into the office one afternoon and the talk turned on the changes in Branchville.

"Yes," said Frye, "there has shore been some changes in the old town, but Buck, I don't believe they ever was as much real cussed meanness here as it looked like. Since I been here the clew to the killin's all stuck out like a sore thumb. Now, they's lots of places where you don't find a dead man ontel the hawgs has got him half et up, and it takes a lot of time to find out who done it, and what for. That kind uh killin' is murder, an' the cold-blooded devils that does it is dangerous bad. If you'll just stop and think, every killin' that has happened here we got the man and either give him a jail sentence or a vote of thanks, accordin' to the evidence."

"Yes," said Buck, "comparing Branchville to neighboring towns reminds one of the fellows who said, 'life is not such a serious matter, if you compare it to being dead.' "

When George had been about a month in Masters' office business took a sudden jump. Property was changing hands, there were deeds and conveyances to write, and they were pretty busy. One Saturday evening they worked until after sundown. As George covered up his machine and prepared to go home Buck walked over and handed him a twenty-dollar bill.

"I have no change, Mr. Masters," said George.

"None coming," replied Buck. "If business stays like it has been lately, you get that every week hereafter."

George was carried out of himself with gratitude. He thanked his employer, put on his hat, and hurried out. After George left, Buck stuffed his old brier pipe, set a match to it, and sat down by the open window. As he sat gazing at the fading twilight there was an expression in his eyes that few men had seen there. Cold, real, heartbreaking sorrow had softened him inside, while in self-defense, and as a means of relieving the necessity for the world to look upon the wounds of his past he had put up the curtain of a poker face, and a hardened exterior. In the few weeks that he had been daily associated with George he had come to regard the young man very highly, and had found in him an object for his natural affection. Frye was a friend, but he was as old as Masters, and far from needing assistance, except that which one red-blooded

man can give another in the great crises of life.

Twenty dollars a week for that time was a fabulous salary. Few men received so much, even in the highest positions. It could not be paid out of Buck's earnings, except at a great sacrifice on his part. He was making that sacrifice. He was morally certain that only an unusual amount of money could keep Bradshaw's wife with him, and that if she left him it would wreck and ruin his life. Buck's final mental comment was:

"When a man's wife reaches the point that he can only keep her by his side with money, his home has become little short of an antechamber of hell, wearing the badge of legal marriage and respectability as a blind."

Hours later Buck slowly rose from his chair, groped his way through the darkness to the back room, and went supperless to bed, and to a night of unhappy dreams.

When George left the office there was joy in his heart. His first thought was of Peaches, and he walked into Wertzheimer's store in quest of a present for her. It was the first time that he had taken the initiative, and presumed to spend a part of his own money in his own way. But the amount had been doubled. Instinct told him that Peaches would take no pleasure in a few pieces of china, or a spread for the little table in their living room, to make the place more homelike. The gift must be something for her personal adornment, a tribute to her vanity.

As he entered the store he passed a stand of parasols bearing a screaming placard, "Latest Importations from Paris." An attractive one in silk trimmed with lace lay open for inspection. He asked the price. It was five dollars. George did not know that the wonderful Parisian importations were made in a New York sweat shop, and were worth about a dollar-fifty. He selected a modest one, with the thought that if Peaches were not pleased with the color she could exchange it. The purchase was wrapped, and George handed his twenty-dollar bill to Wertzheimer, who had chanced to wait on him. Instantly the merchant's shrewd mind added twenty-dollar bill and Saturday evening together, and made week's wages of it. He became effusive in his desire to show more goods. When nothing more was wanted Wertzheimer changed his tactics:

"You are looking fine, yet, Chorge. I beleef you make a great lawyer, ain'd ut. Und dot frau, she iss der beautiful—vat iss it you call her—Peaches. Himmel! Ven she comes by dot umbersol she iss more like der birds by paradise out."

Elated by the old Jew's brutal compliment to his wife, the purpose of which George did not fathom, he left the store and went to a confectionery a few doors away. He was hot and thirsty. He looked at the cooling beverages, but did not buy. He must save, to buy things for Peaches, and make reparation for what he had heretofore failed to give her. A fancy box of candy caught his eye, and he paid two more dollars for that, and, taking his purchases, started for home.

As George went down the street there was a smell of new-turned gardens, peach blossom, and lilac in the air. In one yard a woman was setting out violets by the front door. A little child, mimicking its elders, as children are wont to do, was digging with a stick in a miniature flower bed near by.

Bradshaw felt like singing, but he had tried it once and the result was not gratifying. There were songs in his heart, but his voice was not attuned to them. He was happy this evening. He was getting ahead in the world, and hope for the future loomed large in his mind. There was promise that some day he would be a lawyer, prosperous, with a home like these he was passing. There would be lilacs and flower beds in the yard, and wicker rockers on the porch. In the warm spring evening he and his beautiful wife would sit in them, and listen to the familiar night sounds, inhale the fragrance and be happy. To-night he would lay his first gift at Peaches' feet. She had been cool and distrait of late, but he would win her smiles again.

In this frame of mind he entered his home with soft step, laid his packages on the little table in the living room, and tiptoed to the door leading to the kitchen thinking to surprise Peaches at her household duties. He would feast his eyes on her for a moment, and then would give her the presents, and tell her of his wonderful good fortune.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The Sun Catcher

By Herman Howard Matteson
Author of "Tiger Weather," Etc.

Among the Eskimos, where they worship the sun and the school-teacher. Adak, the sun catcher of the tribe, tries to make a more earthly catch If you read "The Marry Missionary" in a recent number of *Popular* this will afford you a companion piece to it

THE whipping wind from the Bering Sea lashed the blanket of fog into shreds. As through a torn, dirty curtain she could see dimly the greasy, black buildings of the whaling station, the masts of the ship warped in at the dock before it. The boat's winches ground complainingly as they hoisted aboard the great cases of canned whale meat, destined for the Japanese trade, the boxes of herring and salmon for the Seattle market.

At three o'clock of the afternoon, the ship would weigh. Until the spring following there would be no other. For months, she would be alone, on Nagichak Island, with three hundred Eskimos and half-caste Japanese, the only white person save for the presence of Swend Arn, the gigantic Finnish boss of the whaling station.

She stood before the narrow window of the school igloo, tapping the thick pane. Within an hour the ship would depart, then—three hundred Eskimos and half-caste Japs, and Swend Arn.

A shudder passed over her. More than once she had seen Swend Arn seize an Eskimo or Japanese flenser, or blubber cutter, hurl the native to the floor, walk on cursing, striking right and left among the men and women workers toiling at the rendering vats. One worker only he neither struck nor cursed, him called Adak, the sun catcher.

Three hundred Eskimos—and Swend Arn. And the long night coming, the Arctic night when she would light her way from her igloo to the school with a *chochon,* or lantern, labor with eighteen flat-faced, filthy, stupid Eskimo pupils.

Even yet, after six months' residence on Nagichak, the stench from the whaling station nauseated her though she was coming gradually to a stoic state of endurance as an apprentice nurse may come finally to bear the smells and sights of the operating room.

And the fog, always the fog. No wonder the benighted Eskimo worshiped the sun, imbued it with every quality of good, warmth, happiness, they so seldom saw it. Fog, and always fog. It was as if some evil power, hating the world, had spread over it a perpetual shroud.

Oh, the brutality of the life about her! At night, the power boats, towing in dead whales from the open, would scream like triumphant monsters bringing in their quarry. In response to the whistle blast, Eskimo and Jap workers would crawl from their igloos, run like fantastic gnomes swinging their paper lanterns, howling fiendishly: *"Go hogi torri mashita! Go hogi torri mashita!"*—Here comes a whale.

Here, surely, was existence in the raw. To the cackle of shrill laughter, Eskimo and Japanese would rush in among a herd of the soft-eyed, almost human-faced seal, and kill, kill with the walrus-tusk braining sticks until their arms grew tired.

Raw blubber, for the greater part, was the native food, blubber torn many times from the still warm, palpitating bodies of seal, or walrus. The very houses, igloos, *kashims,* were constructed of skins stretched upon frames of whale jaws and ribs. Skins were the clothing. The very lamp upon her table was a monster rudely carved from walrus-tusk ivory, holding a portion of rancid whale oil that the heat of the burning wick quickened into insufferable foulness.

Worst of all, the smallpox, she had heard, was raging on the adjacent Diomede Islands, and among the natives of both capes. Inevitably, the scourge would come to Nagichak Island. Stricken natives, in the belief of the Eskimo, were possessed of a bad devil that must be exorcised. To accomplish this, the delirious wretches were turned out upon the ice floes to wander and die.

Six months of this environment she had

endured. But these had been the months of daylight, of the rare warmth of the Arctic summer. Now was coming apace the long, long night. In an hour, the ship would weigh.

Why not go, escape from this frozen hell of fog and snow? The missionary superintendent of the schools had written her that she might close any time that the smallpox threatened. Her mother had begged her to return. He, *he* had also written, commanding her to come.

And she wanted to go. She had never wanted to do anything so badly in her life. During the six months, she had grown soul-sick for the sight of a happy, white, human face. She wanted again to feel the frail thinness of a china cup between her lips, hear the swish of a silk petticoat. She longed for a newspaper, yearned for the movies, music, parties. All these delights were there, in the Outside. On Nagichack Island were only fog and chill, the long night coming, the vile smell of the whaling station, blood, violence, ignorance, brutality, and the flat, stupid faces of eighteen Eskimo scholars.

But she had promised, agreed to remain a year. She had mastered the four-hundred-word language of the Eskimo, had come north, to Nagichak Island, to remain a year.

He, *he* had derided the notion. He had called her venture one of fanatical madness. He had wagered that she would not stick it out for three months, let alone a year.

He had laughed, and said she would not stick it out more than a fraction of twelve months.

Her face, as it looked through the narrow window toward the ship, set itself into lines of determination. She would remain even if it killed her.

Hastily she wrote the superintendent, her mother, and a letter to him. She would remain the year—or die. To *him,* she wrote:

> You are just starting out to establish yourself. Young doctors sometimes have to wait for patients. I will remain my year. You laughed at me, therefore I shall remain. When the year is up—then we will see.

She signed her name, Nan Somers, ran down the slope, handed her three letters to the ship's purser.

Presently, as if the unwholesome fog had struck a chill to even its iron lungs, the ship whistled hoarsely, warped out into the stream.

The sun, a sickly, jaundiced yellow, glazed over like the eye of a dying man, sank behind the gray bank of the Siberian coast.

Night had come, the long, long night.

Nan's brightest pupil, or, rather, the pupil having most assurance, was Adak, the sun catcher. Adak was about twenty-four years of age, was no taller than she, had eyes as black and shiny as shoe buttons, gorillalike arms, and a chest of immense depth. Adak was esteemed the boldest, most successful hunter of the seal, walrus, and whale on Nagichak Island, of the two Diomedes, or of the adjacent coasts. With his throwing stick, which, in effect, rendered his arm the length of three arms, he could bury an ivory-tipped spear a yard deep in the side of a humpback whale.

The other pupils, male and female, deferred to Adak. Adak had always the warmest place beside the school igloo fire. Questions addressed to the school in general, and not infrequently to individuals as well, Adak would answer. Even if his answer was incorrect, which was often, Adak would glance about the room, grin, bob his head in a manner to indicate that he was very well satisfied with himself.

Nan had taught the school a couple of months before she understood why Adak was so respected, so preferred both within the schoolroom and without. She called him to her desk at the close of a session, asked him.

He gazed at her in astonishment. Did not the nice teacher know?

"I," he said, throwing out his breast like a preening puffin bird, "I *po-klihm ta-ghunuga,* I the sun catcher. Sure."

Then he explained. A shaman, or Eskimo medicine man, held office for life. During his incumbency, the shaman was empowered by the gods to select a single youth renowned for valor. This youth was called the "sun catcher." From the sun god, Amolek, came all good things, warmth, abundance of game, fish, whales, moss for the reindeer. Literally, in the Eskimo tongue, the youth chosen by the shaman had power to capture and to hold the various beneficent manifestations of the sun deity. The sun catcher was a very darling of the gods. All spiritual gifts were his, and all temporal. Other hunters slowed down their kayak to permit the sun catcher to kill the

largest walrus of the herd. The warmest place at the fireside was his. At the death of the shaman, the sun catcher succeeded to this high estate, in turn to select a sun catcher to follow himself.

Adak prattled on at a great rate, explaining that, as sun catcher, it was his duty to see that every Eskimo lived up to the code, honored the shaman, worshiped the shades of ancestors, named babes after the dying that the memory of the departed be kept alive. If an Eskimo killed another, it was the function of the sun catcher to force the slayer to carry the news of the tragedy to the widow or widows, provide them with provisions to last until the coming of the next sun.

"Oh, sure," Adak concluded pompously, "I the sun catcher. All Eskimos keep back when I go hunting. I get most seal, walrus. Sure. And what wife I want, I have it. Amulek god tell the shaman and the shaman he tell it to me what wife I want, one wife, two, three, I have. Sure. I *po-klihm taghun-uga.*"

With the zeal of a proselytist, Nan strove with Adak over this matter of wives. It were sin, mortal, deadly sin for a man or woman to take more than one wife or husband.

Adak's black eyes stared incredulously. "You say bad have two, three wife?"

"Decidedly, Adak, a deadly, mortal sin."

"Two, three wife, go to hell sure?"

Nan nodded her head.

Adak's broad face had worked itself into a picture of distress. "Too bad, I say it," he declared sadly. "Too bad. Soon I would have had two wife, Keulk and Kinuga. Already I give it to Keulk's father and to Kinuga's father two bales sealskins. Too bad, I say it."

But again Nan repeated, insisted. It would be sin, mortal sin for Adak to take two wives. The wives, if they consented to plural marriage, would be equally guilty with Adak.

"I go hell sure then," he said, his eyes widening with terror. "I go hell; Keulk go hell; Kinuga go hell. Too bad. I say it."

Holding up three thick fingers of one hand, with the index finger of the other hand Adak counted off the souls that had been in jeopardy, repeating: "Adak go hell; Keulk go hell; Kinuga go hell."

Adak shrugged his shoulders, looked about apprehensively. Decidedly, Adak did not desire to go to hell, for the Eskimo hell is a very literal one, not of fire, but a frozen hell in which the starving, naked sinner is cast away upon a floe of ice, there to be devoured alive by polar bears, the torn and lacerated body renewed each night, Prometheuslike, against the repeated torments of the following day. Adak did not desire to go to hell.

Meditating fearfully, wagging his round head, Adak took his way to his igloo.

The following morning, Adak was not at his desk. During the midday recess, Nan saw him land from his kayak, come puffing up the slope and into the school igloo. He leaned over her desk confidentially, smiling as one who is the bearer of glad tidings.

"I go to igloo of Keulk," he said, "and I go to igloo of Kinuga. I say it to their fathers that I no marry hees girl. Both mans mad and want to fight. I say it I no have Keulk and Kinuga for wife. I take my bundles seal furs and I go. I no marry two girl and go to hell. No."

Adak glanced over his shoulder at the other pupils, leaned toward Nan a bit further, whispered: "You know, teacher dear, I the sun catcher. God say it to the shaman and the shaman says it to me that I have what wife I want. Sure. Teacher dear, I no go to bad hell. No. So I have you for just one wife, you, teacher dear. I like you good."

Nan stared at Adak wildly. He grinned, gave her shoulder a friendly and reassuring pat, waved his pudgy hand in a gesture of finality, walked to his bench.

With the departure of the last ship for the Outside, the beginning of the long night, it seemed to Nan as if the world had split, leaving her upon a bleak hemisphere of ice and snow, where savage men fought for survival with savage beasts. Her old life was a pleasant phantasy, a dream of things impossible.

These dreams, day by day, became less real and vivid, less poignant. The inexorable law of existence, that thickens the fur of Arctic animals against the cold, that robs a cave-bound fish of its useless eyes, was shutting down upon her, fitting her to its rugged mold.

She began to sense a radical physical revolution. The appalling intensity of the cold, the ever-blowing fog and sleet had driven her to take recourse in the native fur *kamik*

boots, and long-belted, fur parka, or cloak. Insistently, her being began to cry out for heat-producing foods. Without repulsion, she began to eat of the fat of slain walrus and seal.

Hydrocarbon foods, in the frozen North, they must have or miserably die. She stood upon the bank, gazed with exultation when the kill of the gentle-eyed seal were numerous. Now, with the natives, swinging her *chochon,* she ran screaming to the wharf at the cry, "here comes a whale!"

Swend Arn, blood-stained to the hips, his great pawlike hands dripping, frankly an abysmal brute, was, nevertheless, the rugged answer to the North's demand for man's cunning, brute ferocity, and strength. At first, Nan had regarded Swend Arn with a deadly loathing, then with amusement. With the coming of the long night, she had come to look upon him with tolerance, respect. He was colossal, merciless, equal to every demand made upon him. Master of the island was Swend Arn, of every soul thereon save only the shaman, Adak, the sun catcher, herself.

Every day now, after the close of the school session, Swend climbed the hill to Nan's igloo. There, for hours he would sit staring at the whale-rib rafters covered with walrus hide, cracking the joints of his immense fingers, his chasmlike mouth wide open, fanglike teeth gleaming in the light of the whale-oil lamp.

He almost never looked directly at her. His eyebrows were long, tangled, nearly white. And his eyes were nearly white—bluish white. Sometimes, with an unpleasant sense of being under espionage, she would find him peering at her covertly, the white-blue eyes masked by the overhang of bushy eyebrows.

By degrees Swend's diffidence left him. He became loquacious, related moving tales of adventure at sea, sang for her boisterous songs of the fo'c's'le, in the harsh Finnish tongue, songs, had she but known, themed largely of the dallied loves of sailor folk ashore.

He told her of the customs in Finland. A man came every day, sat with a young woman. Then, if he liked her, he married her.

"*Ja,*" said Swend, spreading his jaws, "soon now you be my woman. We go to Russian priest on Diomede Island. *Ja!* Soon now you be my woman."

Nervously, shriekingly, she had laughed.

Swend Arn, springing from his seat, had leaned over her, his great fists clenched, the thick lips snarling away from his teeth. From his deep chest had come a roar like that of a challenging, enraged beast.

"*Ja! Ja!*" he shouted. "Soon now you be my woman!"

She had crouched away from him, wide-eyed, deathly pale. He had seized her, tossed her as if she had been a doll, had given her a kiss that left her lips burning, throbbing, bruised as from a blow.

Adak had gone forth in his kayak, or one-man canoe. The hour was shortly after noon, but a midnight darkness hung over the sullen swells of the Bering.

Darkness didn't matter to Adak. He had been born, raised in the cellar dark of an igloo; in the dark, some time, he would die. In heaven there would be sun, warmth, light.

Adak planned seriously, deliberaately on going to heaven. Also he counted on having in heaven with him, the nice, white teacher. He liked her. She was good to him. He delighted to sit and stare at her, watch the nimble play of her slender fingers as she wrote "c-a-t" and "d-o-g" upon the board. Very much he liked her even though with both lips and eyes she had laughed when he had told her that she was to be his one and only wife.

That laugh had not deterred Adak from renewing his romantic declaration a second, a third, even a fourth time.

Finally, with conclusive seriousness, Nan had told Adak that she could never, never marry him for the reason that she was white, he a yellow-skinned Eskimo.

This decree Adak finally had accepted, though he did not too clearly grasp the subtleties of the argument. Anyway, the reply of the nice, white teacher had not, forever, barred him from hopes. She had told him that in heaven all were equal, white and black, yellow and red. While upon earth he might never have Nan Somers for his own, in heaven he could—and would. Therefore, Adak proposed to go to heaven, and, none the less important, he was going to see to it that nothing kept Nan from going.

For the purpose of meditating these several thoughts, Adak had put to sea. Always, he could think better, more clearly, logically, in the open.

A humpback whale arose, spouted, not fifty yards ahead, turned upon its side with a swinelike groan, crunched its baileen-armed jaws to sieve out the water from the mass of wriggling herring it had seized. Handily beside Adak rested the sharp-pointed whale spear, and the porpoise hide lanyard, the float board, and the inflated seal's bladder to mark the place where the quarry went down.

But that particular whale dove and arose, spouted and fed unmolested. Adak was thinking of heaven, and Nan Somers, and Swend Arn.

Swend Arn had lied, had lied and lied again to the nice, white teacher. Shamelessly hidden in the rank salt grass of the tundra where he could watch and listen, Adak had marked the coming and going of Swend Arn. A score of times Swend and Nan had walked so closely to Adak's hiding place that he could have reached forth and touched them. And Adak had listened, weighed and pondered the words of Swend Arn to the white teacher.

Nan had been good to Adak, still was good to him. He liked her. Also, latterly, by growing degrees, she had been nice to Swend Arn. For this latter circumstance, Adak could find no explanation save for the fact that the whale boss' eyes, skin, eyebrows, hair were white.

Adak paddled about aimlessly for a time, then swung the kayak, and made for shore. All was clear now. He would go to heaven. So should Nan Somers.

"Two wife, two husband, both go hell sure," repeated Adak half aloud as he beached the kayak. "Go hell sure. She says it."

He detached the porpoise hide lanyard from the haft of the whale spear, took the throwing stick, and with both stick and spear under his arm, climbed the bank. In the corner of the wharf shed, out of the line of light from the oil lantern swinging before the door, Adak waited.

The whistle blew. Eskimo and half-caste Japanese flensers, boys and girls from the trying vats, their *chochons* lighted, came chattering forth from the building, took their several ways to their igloos.

And still Adak crouched back in the shadow and waited.

Finally, the gigantic form of Swend Arn blocked the doorway.

Swiftly, dexterously, Adak fitted the haft of the spear to the end of the throwing stick. There was a hissing sound. Through and through the deep chest of Swend Arn had pierced the whale spear. The vast bulk went down with a crash, lay an inert heap on the slippery, blood-puddled planks.

A moment Adak stood gazing at his most noble kill. He wagged his head, tucked the throwing stick under his arm, walked to the beach, shoved off the kayak, and climbed in.

A half-caste Japanese, returning to the whale house to renew the fire beneath the vats, found the body of Swend Arn. In response to his excited cries, a dozen Eskimo and half-breeds came running.

On the haft of the whale spear, was some fanciful carving, the mark of Adak, the sun catcher. No Eskimo spoke, and a half-caste uttered the name of the killer: "Adak, the sun catcher, the shaman that was to be."

School had assembled in the morning before Nan learned of the killing of Swend Arn. A half-caste related the details, reporting that Adak had escaped in his kayak. Word had been sent to Diomede Island, by a canoe man. The United States marshal would come, organize a search, find and arrest Adak, take him to the strong, iron igloo for the remainder of his days.

White faced, Nan sat staring at her desk. She had promised to marry Swend Arn on the following Saturday. They were to have gone to Diomede, to the Russian Catholic priest.

Shrill cries sounded from the wharf. Bidding her scholars remain in their places, Nan followed the half-caste who walked ahead with the *chochon*.

Two kayaks had just landed. Adak was coming up the slope, accompanied by a young Eskimo woman who was carrying an infant. The infant had a flat, yellow face, and whitish-blue eyes.

With a savage, guttural cry, the Eskimo woman threw herself upon the body of Swend Arn.

Adak had disappeared, but only to reappear shortly, his arms piled high with chunks of whale blubber, with seal and walrus fat packed in skins. Here were provisions to last a family until the coming of the sun. Adak placed the food stuff in the Eskimo woman's kayak.

Two natives ran, dragged forth a umiak,

or two-manned canoe. Half a dozen men carried the body of Swend Arn, placed it in the umiak. The Eskimo woman, suddenly grown contained and philosophic, tucked the provisions under the skin hood of the kayak, thrust the pale-eyed infant in on top, picked up the paddle. The kayak and the umiak set forth. The funeral cortege of Swend Arn had started for the adjoining island.

Presently a umiak emerged from the fog, beached itself, its occupants a white man and an Eskimo. The former was the United States marshal.

Adak walked up to Nan Somers, stood smiling up at her.

"Some time, teacher dear," he said softly, "I see you in heaven."

He reached, took Nan by the shoulders, rubbed his nose against hers.

"Good-by, teacher dear."

Adak walked to the United States marshal, held out his thick wrists for the handcuffs.

Kinugmut, an old Eskimo who lived on the lower end of Nagichak, had been stricken with smallpox. The shaman had decreed that, to placate the black gods, Kinugmut should be turned out upon an ice floe, to die.

Simultaneously, Nan dispatched a message to the shaman, and one to the marshal at Diomede Island. Under threat of the severest penalty, the shaman was ordered to await the coming of the white man.

The kayak messenger returned from Diomede. The marshal was not coming, the native reported. Instead, a big, white man's steamboat, with an ice breaker, was coming with two white shamans on board.

The great ship with the ice breaker warped in, the powerful, coast-guard ship, *Bear,* the American ensign fluttering from the monkey-gaff.

Some one was coming up the slope. This was a white man for all his *kaviks* and parka. He came to the igloo's low door, knocked.

Nan's knees would hardly support her as she crossed the floor.

"Nan! Why, Nan! Nannie, little girl! There! There! There was a call for doctors—smallpox among the natives in the Arctic. I thought if you could stand this north-pole stuff, I could—for a while. So I came. Nan!"

But for his supporting arms, she would have fallen.

"The school is to close, Nan, all the native schools. You are to have quarters aboard the *Bear.* As soon as we have the epidemic in hand, which, I trust, will be shortly, we leave for the South, for Puget Sound."

Nan began packing her belongings, working in a sort of daze. After a time, the young doctor returned to the igloo, accompanied by a seaman who carried her luggage to the ship.

She insisted upon going to the school igloo for a final look about. By the light of the *chochon* she showed him the tiny room, the round stove, the grievous scrawls upon the board.

"Upon that bench there," she said, "sat Adak, the sun catcher. He was my—he was the sun catcher."

With a look lingering, reluctant, she glanced at the gnawed, round-cornered First Reader reposing upon the desk. She lifted the battered cover, read the name.

"Adak, he was my—he was the sun catcher."

She turned, closed the door. Beside the young, white doctor, she walked down the slope to the ship.

FORETELLING THE VERDICT

THOMAS S. MARTIN, Democratic floor leader in the United States Senate, is a kindly man, slow to criticize harshly. On one occasion, however, when he was trying a law case in Virginia, an attorney on the other side annoyed everybody in the courtroom with silly "objections" and "exceptions."

"I never encountered such a nuisance," said an attorney associated with Martin. "He couldn't win a case to save his life!"

"Well, let's think that over," suggested Martin. "If he were accused of possessing intelligence, I'm inclined to believe he could conduct his own defense and be acquitted."

Makin' Book for Clementine

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "Too Many Games," "The Hygeenic Kid," Etc.

There's no pest in the world like a woman at a race track. It may be the sport of kings, but it will never be the sport of queens. And this fellow's whirl goes a good way toward proving it

SPEAKIN' of boils on the back of the neck, little boys with drums, and next-door neighbors slightly addicted to the cornet habit—there's no pest in the world like a woman at a race track. The guy who rigged the game up called it the sport of kings, and that's its name—you can't make it the sport of queens!

The ladies may be a highly ornamental addition to the general picturesqueness of a grand stand, but they're out of place. The green ones, with their bright chatter about the pretty suits the jockeys wear, would—and do—drive any hard-workin', conscientious male better to drink. And the wise ones—Jesse James, Judas, and Ananias combined would be a person of exemplified character compared with the best of them!

Time was when I didn't mind passin' an idle moment exchangin' sparklin' repartee with a good looker that some other John had brought down to see 'em run, but that was before I'd encountered Archie Ball and Clementine.

Archie invented himself to me one day at Belmont. A dog named Umbrella—so nominated proba'ly because of his prominent ribs—had just romped in at the fancy odds of forty to one, pillagin' the race from what looked like an awful good thing and doin' me dirt thereby to the amount of seventy-five silver certificates. A home-made lookin' young feller burst through the gloom that surrounded me, and apprehended me bashfully by the cuff. It was Archie.

"Who won that last race?" he asked me.

"The bookmakers," said I, edgin' away.

He opened up his program, and studied it careful from front to back and the reverse.

"I don't see no horse of that name," he told me.

"There ain't," said I. "That's only a manner of speakin'. The actual, unbiased truth is that a broken-winded, spavined hay hound named Umbrella got the referee's decision in the last encounter."

"Umbrella!" he exclaimed.

"Uh-huh," I grunted. "And I'm left out in the wet."

"Where do you get your money?" he asked me.

"I don't," I said. "Other people get it from *me*."

"You don't understand," he said, smilin' politelike. "What I mean is where do I get mine?"

"I'm not partic'ly int'rested," I informed him, "but if you want me to guess I'll say you get it for dealin' out parsnips and distributin' canned salmon in some raw-food establishment."

He grinned at little at that.

"You still don't understand," he said. "I want to know where I get what I won on Umbrella."

"What you won on Umbrella!" I exclaimed.

My surprise was genuine. I honestly didn't get him till just then. How anybody could bet spendable currency on a broken-down, flat-tired vehicle like Umbrella was beyond me.

"Yes," he said. "I bet ten dollars on Umbrella."

"What made you do that?"

"Oh," he said, "I've got an umbrella!"

"Some hunch!" I asserted. "It's lucky you happened to think of it!"

What I'd assumed to be something sharp and sarcastic in the way of rejoinders passed right over his helmet.

"Wasn't it!" gurgitated Simple.

"Easily," I agreed. "On whom did you perpetrate your wager?"

"That man right there," he said, pointin' to a bookmaker about three feet away.

"You ain't such a mental deficient at that!" thought I. "You may be as innocent

and guileless as your conversation indicts you of bein'—but you've got acumen enough to watch the bird you hand your coin to!"

I ascertained his badge number by the simple expedition of glancin' at it, and aided him to amputate his dough from the Ishmaelite he'd bet with. I thought his eyes would pop out of his head when the cashier counted him out a bale of tens and twenties—four hundred and ten dollars in all. He sunk the kale deep in his kick, and began to peer apprehensively through the ambiatin' atmosphere—proba'ly he expected a banditti of brigands to appear momentously to despoil him of his wealth.

"Ain't this an easy way to make money!" he exclaimed, his eyes dancin'.

"Sure," I said. "What else do you do for a livin'?"

"Nothin'—just now," he told me. "I'm out of a job."

"When you work, I mean," I amplified.

"I'm a shippin' clerk," he confessed.

"How much do you make?"

"Fifteen a week."

"Well, listen, son," I asseverated, "you've had a rare break to-day. You've impounded more profits than you make at your work in six months. Put what you've acquired in the bank—and start job huntin' to-morrow. Don't never come down here again. What made you come to-day, anyways?"

"Oh," he said, "I was out trolley ridin'. The car broke down in front of the track—and I just dropped in."

"That proves it!" I exclaimed. "Luck's been awful good to you—this once. Followin' the ponies is fascinatin' but precarious. As one of fluid speech might put it, this here is a bum game! You can't beat it—and you're a fool if you try! Raise your right hand, impose your left on this form chart and give me your bonded oath you won't come to the track again."

"Well," he offered doubtfullike, "it's an awful easy way——"

"It ain't!" I parried with. "I've been victimized by the bangtails for a de-cade—and I know. You've got an elegant little lump of lucre now—but you won't have if you retrace your footsteps to the source thereof, and try to run it up. You'll lose your shirt!" was my forecast.

I continued to prattle in kind, and he gazed at me raptly with the look in his eye that Madame Buttercup wore when Cap'n Pinkham never, never come—a over-the-hills-and-far-away stare that demonstrated that my words of wisdom was hittin' the tinpannium of his ears all right enough, but boundin' away without leavin' no impression on his brain. Not bein' his legal guardeen and desirin' to consave my breath to cheer in future winners with, I soon ceased firin' and let him go. He was hooked anyhow. One stroke of fortune had placed in his keepin' what must have looked to him like the wealth of the Indians, and he was beginnin' to be disturbed by visions of steam yachts and winters at Palm Beach.

I was right. He was down the next day. I saw him doin' a Marathon through the bettin' ring after the second race. You'd think I was a process server, the pains he was takin' to dodge me; but I collared him.

"Well, son," I greeted him, "how're they runnin' for you to-day?"

The suspicion of a smirk illumined my classy features as I projected the inquiry. I was all prepped to say, "Ha, ha! I told you so!" when he poured out the sorrowful tale of the inroads that already had been made on his winnin's. But:

"Fine!" he said. "I've won $200!"

"Beginner's luck!" I scoffed. "It won't last."

"How're *you* doin'?" he inquired—right back at me, as it were.

Valuin' my voracity above all, I had to own up that the depressin' siege of hard luck I'd been in lately had not abated. The declaration won a smile from him—a superior one.

"I must have talent for this," he confided with shameless unhumility. "It's the easiest way of makin' money I ever saw! Why, I've won a year's pay in two days!"

What's the use of talkin' to them!

"What're you thinkin' of playin' in the third?" I asked him.

"Sofa Cushion," he said, "We've got a sofa at home just covered with them!"

That decided me.

"Philip," I began——

"My name's Archie," he said.

"Archie," I substituted, "the time has come in your career on the turf for you to learn that horses do not win races *only* because of their pretty names. The owner of Sofa Cushion might just as well have called him Sewer Digger. The speed and endurance of the animal would not have been

disturbed thereby. Bet on Sofa Cushion if you wish, dear boy, but, if you'll lend your ear to an old campaigner, I will endeavor to convince you that you should shift your wager to Mr. Flub. His title is less de-corative but his limbs speedier than those of Sofa Cushion, who has never won a race."

I bet fifty on Mr. Flub at seven to five, while Archie, I learned later, risked twenty dollars of his winnin's on Sofa Cushion, who was so highly regarded by the books that as good as twenty-five to one could be got against him.

Mr. Flub was left at the post, and, even with that handicap, was just beaten a hair by—Sofa Cushion, of course!

For ten days Archie was Dame Fortune's own little boy, and durin' that time he gathered to himself the tidy little sum of five thousand berries. Think of it—a five-thousand winner from a ten-dollar start!

With tears in my voice I begged him to quit.

"Archie," I pled, "you have enough to satisfy your youthful dreams and embark on a mercantile career on your own hook—in other words, buy out the merchant prince who fired you from your last job."

"Not yet," said Archie.

"How much?" I asked.

"I want ten thousand dollars," said Hopeful.

"Yes," I sneered, "and if you get ten thousand, you'll want twenty thousand; if you get that, you'll want forty, and, the first thing you know, your veracious eyes will be squintin' longin'ly at a million! Also, the first thing you know, you'll get what you deserve and find yourself with just what you come to the track with first—nothin'! Oh, I've seen birds like you before!"

"Not like me," said Archie. "*I* have a plan."

"Oh, *you* have a plan!"

"Yes. When I've made ten thousand dollars, I give you my word that I'll never come to the track again. I'm goin' to get married," he said, grinnin' foolish and blushin', "fit up a nice little home and start in business."

"Who's the unlucky young lady?" I asked him.

"I don't know," said Archie.

"You don't!"

"No. I'll find her after I've made my pile."

"That plan of yours is immense!" I stated. "If you only had the money you'd get married—if you only had the girl."

"That's it," he said serious.

"Why don't you display a spark of human intelligence—and quit now?" I begged him.

He shook his head. I ought to have known better than to talk to him anyways. The horse racin' germ had bit him—and the symptoms stood out all over him. He'd invested part of his winnin's in some duds—the kind affected by our best touts—black and white check garments, patent leather shoes with cloth tops, Arizona sunset neckties, pearl-gray bonnets, a couple of pounds of di'monds and a pair of field glasses in a russet leather case. In short, he had all the gear. You couldn't have drove him away from the track with a gun.

When his luck showed signs of totterin' I weaned him off his system of playin' horses with names like Glitterin' Silver and Peaches and Cream. I demonstrated by means of some mathematical calculations and a form chart that the horse's ancestry, previous exploits and present physical condition had more to do with him winnin' or losin' a race than the fact that some guy had tagged a fancy name out of a book on him. He was none too speedy at figgers, but he soon began to dope 'em in an amateurish, blunderin' way. He was relyin' on me, though, mostly, and I was deliverin' the goods.

I'd took him under my wing, first to shield his sweet innocence from the wolves and jackals of the turf, and, second, because his deep-laid plot to win a wife and a business out of speculatin' on the turf appealed to my sense of the ridic'lous. I wanted to see what would happen—and what he'd do if it did. I guess I liked the kid a little, too; maybe even had a sneakin' feelin' that if he achieved his fool ambition things wouldn't be so worse. His missus—if he ever got one—*might* be able to keep him off the track.

Then one day he showed up with a gal. She wasn't the kind you'd have expected a sporty-*lookin'* boy like Archie to fall for—unless you happened to know the simple-hearted yokel that was camouflaged by the nightmare clothes. She was a little gal, on some side of twenty, I'd say; pretty as a bundle of gold backs; dressin' nifty without undue clamor—kind of a Hoboken, New Jersey, type. You know—not loud or sassy,

but livin' close enough to the metropolis to know that the best people don't make a practice of dinin at the Automat. She looked smart, too—enough anyhow to be able to run the switchboard in an office that wasn't very busy.

"Is that her?" I asked Archie when he'd checked her in a grand-stand seat. "Looks like a classy filly," I tabbed her.

"I don't know" said Archie. "I just met her at a party last night."

"You're workin' pretty fast at that," I remarked. "She looks like the kind a steady feller ought to tie to—sensible and all that."

"Yes," said Archie, "and she plays the pianner elegant."

"That helps, too," I certified. "It makes the fingers limber for potato peelin', and saves the price of a self-playin' attachment."

"Her name's Clementine," he communicated. "A nice name, ain't it?"

"Still pickin' 'em by names!" I observed. "I suppose if her name was Maggie you'd have passed her up!"

"She just told me that," he rebutted. "Until five minutes ago I knowed her only as Miss Duff."

"Ha, ha!" I grinned, shakin' my finger at him. "You're off to a flyin' start. Gettin' down to a first-name basis the first time you go out with her ain't bad at all for an amateur Lotharium!"

"Oh, I don't *call* her that," he blushed. "She just told me so's I'd know her from her sister when I called her up."

"Don't rush her," I advised him, "and don't bring her down here too much. The track's no place for a nice gal. Just drop around to the house a couple of ev'nin's a week, and——"

"She won't let me," Archie broke in. "She says her folks won't let her entertain gen'lemen friends—until she's older. That's why I invited her down here. Come up and meet her," he said suddenly.

Not havin' the prejudices then which I developed later, I followed him up to the grand stand where he spoke the words that made me acquainted with Clementine. She struck me as bein' nice as she looked—cute and polite and actin' like she thought she was havin' a wonderful wild time and doin' somethin' awful darin' and unconventional by showin' herself at a race track.

"O-o!" she squealed. "Isn't it exciting! O-o! I'm all thrilled! O-o! What lovely horses! O-o! Look—why, the riders are only little boys! And what lovely colors their suits are!"

"I'd have bet that she'd pull that one!" I whispered to Archie.

She rattled on about this and that, managin' to work some kind of a remark out of about everything that was visible to the naked eye. I found her ravin's kind of amusin'.

The collection of track lizards whose appearance had aroused her emotions so much finally found their way to the barrier.

"O-o!" warbled Clementine. "They're going to start! O-o, look! The one with the red suit is turnin' all around! O-o! O-o! O-o!"

"With a deeper voice," I said to Archie, "your little friend would sound like a steamboat whistle."

"O-o, Mr. Ball," she asked Archie, "who do you think will win?"

"Rameses the Second," said Archie in the bored kind of way that all wise guys use in answerin' similar interrogations at the track.

"O-o! Did you bet on him? Which one is he?"

"The one with the green blouse and yellow cap," said Archie. "He's on the outside."

"O-o! I hope he wins! O-o! I'm going to cheer for him! O-o! This is just too exciting! O-o! How much did you bet?"

"F-f-five dollars!" said Archie.

I looked at him quick, and right way I knew that this little jane was the one. That's a funny thing—the way fellers always lie to a woman at the track. If it's some dizzy dame that they're just tryin' to make a flash with, they multiply their bets by about ten. A feller, though, who's got his wife, or some moll he really cares about, always cuts his bets down when he tells about them. I guess he's afraid of lettin' the dame know he's fool enough to risk fifty or a hundred on a horse's chances—if he happens to lose.

And I'd seen Archie bet fifty on Rameses the Second myself!

Well, Rameses won, which put Archie a hundred to the good startin' off the day. I thought Clementine was some relation of St. Vitus while they was runnin'. She hopped up on the bench, danced around, squealed, clapped her hands, and, although both of us went to great pains to point out Rameses to her a half dozen times durin' the race, and he was all by himself goin' under the wire, when it was all over she

hadn't the vestment of a notion what had happened.

"O-o!" she giggled when we'd explained to her that Archie's money was safe, "I was so excited! Isn't this thrilling! O-o, Mr. Ball, you *must* make a bet for me in the next race!"

"All right," said Archie—the poor simp!

"O-o!" Clementine had another paradox of squealin'. "O-o! I wonder who I ought to bet on."

"Jasper Black," proclaimed Archie, and a real sensible choice it was.

"O-o! I don't like that name! O-o! Here's one with a nicer name—Flowers of Spring. O-o! And what nice colors his jockey wears!" she burbled readin' from the program, " 'Purple blouse, white splashes on sleeves, yellow bars on back and chest, canary cap.' O-o! Mustn't that be picturesque! And *such* a pretty name! Flowers —of—Spring!" she said, real slowlike and with a little flip of her hand.

"Your own soul mate!" I whispered in Archie's ear. "Observe with what unerrin' skill she picks the ones with the pretty names!"

"O-o!" squeaked Clementine. "I wonder how much I should bet? Would fifty cents be too much?" she asked Archie.

I know what *I'd* have told her!

"Yes, ma'am!" I would have blurted with all the haste my tongue could stand and all the fever my soul held! "Fifty cents would be far too much!" I would have vowed. "Two bits would be ample!"

Because, you see, I knew the kind of a brace game a guy is up against when he makes bets for a woman. *He's* got to put up the money, and, if Miss Better loses—as she usu'lly does—he's got about as much chance of collectin' as a tommy cod has of eatin' up a whale.

But Archie, poor, misguided nut! blinded by love and otherwise uncapacitated as to the use of reason, piped up with:

"Oh, dear no! They don't take as small bets as that. You've got to bet two dollars —anyhow."

"O-o!" Clementine developed a fearful excitement. "O-o! Bet—bet—bet five dollars for me. O-o! But I'm an awful sport!" she giggled. "O-o! A regular gambler!"

Of course, she didn't make a move to hand Archie the V.

"You saphead!" I called him when we'd left the grand stand. "Won't you never learn nothin'? Don't you have to sweat hard enough for your dough—without throwin' it away makin' fool bets for a gal!"

"I ain't goin' to bet for her," said Archie. "I'm goin' to hold the dough out. I'll tell her I bet for her. Anyways, Flowers of Spring ain't got no chance of coppin'."

"That's right," I agreed, lookin' at the nearest slate, where Clementine's choice was quoted at one hundred to one.

Both Archie and me went to Jasper Black —heavy. Archie throwed aboard the hundred he'd copped in the first race, and I cast a double century into the palm of a layer of prices. Jasper was two to one and looked like somethin' that was all wrapped up ready to be took home.

"O-o!" Clementine greeted us when we joined her in the stand. "O-o! did you make my bet?"

"Sure," said Archie.

"O-o! It's so terribly, awfully exciting! How much do I get?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Archie. "If you win," he added.

"O-o! Five hundred dollars! O-o! After this race I'll have five hundred dollars!"

"If Flowers of Spring wins," Archie reminded her.

"O-o!" she exclaimed, all serious in an instant. "Don't you think he will?"

"I hope so," Archie lied.

"Did you bet on him, too?"

Archie thought it over for a second.

"Yes," he said. "I did."

Without battin' an eye, too—the young liar!

"O-o! Isn't that lovely! O-o! Think of all the money we'll have after this race!"

Archie looked at her like a trained sea lion looks at a fish—one of those mushy, oozy, sloppy, simpletine glances.

"Wait, Bushman!" I thought. "Wait till you have to explain to her why Flowers of Spring lose!"

Clementine started "ooin' " like a baby steam calli-o-pe the instant the horses appeared. With her near us we was unconspicuous as a pig in a synagogue. The whole grand stand took their eyes off of the race to watch her—and cocked up their spare ears to listen. Archie and me sat there as comfortable as two bears in a trap. We couldn't duck, or I guess we'd have done it.

Finally they're off, and then Clementine begun workin' real good!

She pulled some of the fastest footwork and hit some of the highest notes I ever seen or listened to.

"O-o-o-o-o!" she screamed. "O-o-o-o-o-o! Look at that! O-o! My horse is winning! O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!"

Her last note was a pip! It sounded like the gentle coyote callin' to its mate.

Archie and me grinned. Flowers of Spring did get off in front, and, to an uninitialed racegoer like Clementine, it really may have looked like he was winnin'. But that's the way them hundred-to-one shots often do—tear along like Roamer for a couple of furlongs, and then just nachally lay them down and dee.

About the time they passed the three-quarters pole—it was a mile race—Archie and me stopped grinnin'. Flowers of Spring was still three lengths in front—and just gallopin'!

I looked at Archie, and Archie looked at me.

"Well," I said, "why don't you cheer? *You* bet on him, you know!"

"O-o-o-o-o! Look!" Clementine screeched. "*Our* horse is winning!"

"See!" I exclaimed, nudgin' Archie in the ribs. "*Our* horse is winnin'! Go on—cheer, you poor fish!"

"Hurray!" he called kind of limplike, takin' off his hat and wavin' it.

"Hurray!" I yelled, imitatin' him. "Come on—make some noise!" I hissed in his ear.

"Hurray!" he called again with all the animation of a jellyfish. He was sick—and he looked it! One hundred on the nut for his own bet—and five hundred more he'd have to pay Clementine! Fine business!

"Hurray! Flowers of Spring!" I shouted.

"Aw, shut up!" grouched a guy in front of me.

"I'll shut *you* up!" I told him, grinnin' at him with a smile that reflected my thoughts of my lost two hundred. "Come on you, Flowers of Spring!" I articulated gruffly. "Make some noise!" I ordered Archie. "*Your* horse is winnin'!"

"Hurray!" Archie's cry was very weak. He was tryin' to smile, but as an actor he was some frost! He was hollerin' "hurray!" all right, but he looked like a guy who'd heard the judge say: "Thirty years at hard labor."

Clementine, though, was dispensatin' enough honest and heartfelt enthusiasm for the whole stand. I guess at that she had the only bet at the track on Flowers of Spring. That's why he was one hundred to one.

"O-o! O-o-o-o! O-o-o-o-o-o-o!" she was screaming, as Flowers of Spring passed the judges. "O-o-o-o-o! Flowers of Spring! O-o! My own horse! O-o-o-o-o!"

"Well," I said to Archie when it was all over, "congratulations! You certainly are one lucky stiff! Think of winnin' five thousand dollars like that!"

"O-o!" squealed Clementine. "O-o, Mr. Ball! You won five thousand dollars! O-o! I thought I was lucky to win five hundred—but five thousand! O-o! Isn't that nice?"

"The lady says 'isn't that nice?'" I informed Archie, who looked about ready to drop dead.

"Oh, yes! Oh, sure! Fine!" He certainly strained himself to act like a winner!

"Why, Mr. Ball," gushed Clementine, "you don't seem a bit glad!"

"Oh, he's glad all right!" I butted in. "But he's sorry, too! He wanted to make a bigger bet on Flowers of Spring—and I wouldn't let him."

"O-o! Aren't you mean!" Clementine told me. "But never mind, Mr. Ball, you'll have better luck next time. Now run down like a good boy and get *our* money. O-o! I can hardly wait to get my hands on it!"

"Yes," I chimed in. "You mustn't forget to get *our* money."

Archie took an inventory when we got out of sight of Clementine.

"Holy smoke!" he gasped. "I ain't got enough money to pay her off!"

"You're *some* bookmaker!" I laughed. "What're you goin' to do—take the fence?"

"Lend me fifty," he said.

I gave it to him, and he went up and handed Clementine five hundred.

"O-o!" she chirped. "What a lot of money!"

I noticed she counted it very carefully, too, before she submerged it in her handbag.

"O-o, Mr. Ball!" she said then, givin' Archie a five-hundred-dollar smile, "let me see what you won. It must make an awfully big pile!"

"Why, er——" began Archie, fiddlin' in a pocket.

I leaped to the rescue.

"Mr. Ball," I said, "has a private understandin' with a bookmaker. He has all his winnin's paid by check!"

"O-o!" I could see my little *shonsong* had put Archie's stock up at least a point and an eighth. "But I'd think you'd rather get nice money—like this," she said, tappin' the hand bag, "than an old check."

"He would," I deposed, ambulatin' the Brothers Grimm again, "but 'twould be a beastly bore," I remarked, "to bring a brace of Gladstone bags down to the track ev'ry day."

"Gladstone bags! What for?"

"To carry his winnin's away," I told her. "He's a wicked winner, Mr. Ball is!"

"O-o! Isn't that lovely!"

"See!" I whispered to Archie when I got a chance. "That's the stuff—the salve!"

An awkward pause ensued. Archie was thinkin', which made it impossible for him to be doin' anything else; Clementine didn't seem to have any partic'ly weighty topics to introduce, and I didn't want to abstruse any more hokum upon her. I was afraid she might fall in love with *me* if I permitted her to sound the depths of my conversational powers. So I just sat, and let my thoughts wander idly.

"I'll bet," was the substance of my cogitations, "that the first sound that is uttered in this gatherin' will be 'O-o!'"

It was.

"O-o!" said Clementine. "I'll have to win some more money!"

She opened her program and began to study the entries for the third race. Archie rubbed his chin.

"I *love* Miss Duff's selections!" I uttered. "One wins so much when one plays them!"

"O-o!" announced Clementine. "Here's one! Diamond Star! What a *pretty* name! Don't you think so?" she asked Archie.

"Prettiest in the world," he told her with a languishin' look that made me snigger. "Except Clementine," he added.

I nodded my admiration of his tek-neek.

"You *must* make a bet for me on Diamond Star" said Clementine, lettin' Archie's compliment slip right through. "Let me see—I'll bet—I'll bet—a hundred dollars!"

I thought Archie was goin' to collapse under the seat, and it was with difficulty that I retained my own equilateral. A hundred bucks! You could have *bought* Diamond Star for a hundred—and I think his owner would have thrown in a couple of saddles to boot!

"Er, er—h'm—er——" sputtered Archie, coughin' like a flivver on a twenty-percent grade. You could *see* the chills settlin' about his feet.

"Shut up!" I hissed, jabbin' my elbow into his cigar pocket. "Tell her yes—it's your chance to get some of your five hundred back!"

He picked up the cue.

"Oh, sure—sure!" he exclaimed, grinnin' sickfully. "Yes—sure—of course! Er—just give me the hundred——"

"Give you the *hundred!*" cried Clementine, with exclamation marks after ev'ry word. You'd think Archie had asked her just casuallike to lay down her life for him. "I should say not! Why should I?" she demanded.

"To bet it," explained Archie weakly.

"O-o, *Mister* Ball! *My* money!"

"Well, the bookmaker will want it," said Archie, without conviction.

"O-o, the idea!" said Clementine, shocked. "The mean thing! I'd think he'd be willing to trust you for it!"

"Well——" poor Archie was afraid to press the matter. He kind of hesitated for a second. "Well, will you pay it to me—in case you lose?" he asked in one of those hopin' against hope tones.

"Lose!" Clementine tossed her head. "O-o, I guess so," she said carelesslike. "But I'm not going to lose. That's why I don't see any use of giving that man my money."

You can't beat 'em!

"Archie," I said in a mad voice, "aren't you ashamed of yourself to argue with a lady about a miserable hundred dollars!"

There was murder in Archie's mild eye as he looked at me.

"O-o! I should think he ought to be!" was Clementine's verdict in the case.

"Come on," I said, pullin' Archie by the arm. "Let's go down and make our bets."

"Well," I teased Archie when we'd reached the ring, "bet a hundred for the lady!"

"Aw, you know I ain't got a hundred!" he growled.

"Gee, you're in tough luck!" I laughed.

"I'm goin' to play bookmaker again," he announced.

"How can you pay off?" I asked him.

"Pay off—me eye!" he snorted. "Diamond Star can't win. I'm aimin' to get my hundred back."

"Diamond Star's twelve to one," I informed him, "if he wins how're you goin' to slip the lady twelve hundred beans?"

"He won't win," said Archie.

I didn't think so myself, so I bet fifty apiece for us on Rolly. Then we went back to Clementine.

"O-o!" she hailed us. "Did you make my bet?"

"Sure," said Archie. "Twelve to one."

"O-o!" squealed Clementine, clappin' her hands. "Twelve to one! That'll be——" she did a little rapid calculatin' on her fingers—"seventeen hundred dollars I'll have after this race! O-o! What a lot of money!"

"It is," I agreed, "whether you've got it or not."

The third race was a six-furlong affair. As the horses were linin' up at the barrier, Clementine turned to Archie.

"O-o! I can hardly wait to get all that money!" she told him.

"I'm afraid you'll have to," he said, not so polite as a feller ought to talk to his girl.

"Sh-h!" I cautioned him. "Don't gum your own game!"

"O-o-o-o-o!" screamed Clementine suddenly. "They've started!"

They had, and as I looked at them, I begun to grin. Diamond Star was practically left at the post, and was trailin' along in the ruck like the tail on a kite.

"Pretty soft!" I whispered to Archie.

"Gee!" he muttered, hardly believing his eyes. Then the life seemed to come back to him again. His white cheeks flushed, and his starin' eyes fell back to normal. He began to grin, and the first thing I knew he was hoppin' up and down and yellin'.

"Diamond Star! Diamond Star!" he screeched.

"O-o! Is he winnin'?" asked Clementine.

"Sure!" beamed Archie. "Don't you see him there?"

"O-o! O-o! O-o!" cried Clementine. "I knew he'd win!"

"Sure you did!" said Archie. "Diamond Star" he yelled.

It was too bad that Diamond Star got off to that bum start. With a decent break he'd proba'ly have won by ten lengths—instead of only three! The nag seemed to have wings! As the field turned into the stretch, I wouldn't have bought Clementine's bet with Mexican money. Then things began to happen! Diamond Star shot through the bunch like a circus rider goes through a paper hoop. He win pulled up, with his jock lookin' over his shoulder and grinnin'.

I thought Archie was goin' to die on my hands.

"Sufferin' cats!" he gasped. "Did you see that?"

"Could I miss it?" I asked back.

"He *win!*"

"He did," I agreed, "and now we'd better go down and get *our* money."

"O-o, yes!" wheezed Clementine, who was rockin' back and forth on her feet and scarcely able to speak for excitement. "You must get *our* money, Mr. Ball!"

"B-b-but——" Archie stuttered.

"Come on, fool!" I barked in his ear. "Don't tip your mitt! You can stall her off."

"What *am* I goin' to tell her?" Archie moaned when we'd hit the lawn.

"Anything!" I suggested, givin' him a wide choice.

"I—can't pay her!" he groaned.

"I know it," said I.

"Oh, my seventeen hundred dollars!" he wept. "And I wanted them for *her!*"

"She's gettin' them," I reminded him.

"Oh, how can I ever get my ten thousand!"

"The question before the house just now," I asserted, "is how you're goin' to keep Clementine from takin' seventeen hundred kopecks out of your hide! Listen, Unconscious," I bade him, "tell her that from force of habit you made the transaction with the bookmaker who pays you by check; that he doesn't pay till to-morrow, and that you'll fix her up then."

"All right," said Archite.

And he told her that.

Clementine looked like she couldn't quite make up her mind whether she was bein' swindled or not.

"O-o!" she said. "Is it all right? Are you sure?"

"Oh, you'll get your money all right," promised Archie, wincin' at the thought of draggin' twelve hundred big iron men out of the bank in the mornin'.

Archie's inability to pay had one good effect. It dulled the edge of Clementine's desire to speculate further that day, which should have caused three hearty cheers to animate from Archie's lips. For Clementine, relyin' entirely on her eye for color and her ability to select the nicest soundin'

names, without turnin' a hair just beat the card! Yep, she picked ev'ry last winner —and there was some juicy ones!

Next day, of course, Clementine was on deck again.

"Did you pay her?" I asked Archie.

"Yes," he said with a sigh that came from the depths of his soul, "at noon today I placed twelve golden-backed centuries in her lily-white hand. Here's yours," he said, handin' me the hundred he'd borrowed the day before.

"Thanks," I mumbled, windin' the bill around my roll. "And how goes the courtship?"

"Courtship!"

"Yes. You and Clementine."

"Oh," said Archie. "I don't know. She don't seem to be the mushy kind. I extended myself another kind invite to see her at the house last night, and she declined it with thanks. Comin' down on the train to-day, I tried to tell her a few things—about her eyes and like that, you know—but it didn't get across. All she could think of was how much money she was goin' to win to-day."

"Oh," said I, "then she's goin' to tempt fortune further!"

"She is," assented Archie, hope in his face. "She's got the whole seventeen hundred she win from me in her—well, she's got it with her anyways."

"Wish you luck," I grinned.

"Oh, I'll get it all back," promised Archie. "The bookmaker *always* wins."

"Sure he does," I agreed. "That's why you and me come down here ev'ry day—just so's the bookmaker can win."

"Aw, you make me sick!"

"It ain't me," I told him. "It's losin' that seventeen hundred!"

Well, Clementine didn't speculate very heavy that day. Horses with pretty names was a very minor feature of the card. She risked one five-spot on a two-to-one shot entitled Radiant Dream that lost. Moreover, with a whole lot of gigglin' and "ooin' " she paid the five to Archie directly the race was over.

It made him more happy than if he'd win a thousand.

"See!" he enthused. "She's all right—she pays!"

"Yes," I said, "but it's goin' to take you quite a while to get back seventeen hundred —at five a crack."

"She won't be bettin' fives very long," said Archie.

And she wasn't.

Archie, displayin' eloquence and a commandation of language that surprised me, started to tell Clementine about the rich rewards that awaited those who were fortunate in guessin 'em right. Only, he impressed on her, those rewards were not for the piker. Oh, no! He who bet only five dollars never tasted of the fruits; he was predestinated for a pauper's grave as was befittin' for one of his unadventuresome and pussylanimal characteristics.

It worked grand! Clementine began bettin' fifties and hundreds and the next day two thousand dollars!

When Archie got so he could speak, he did so—to great length. His utterin's were a bit ramblin' and he fell into the error of needless repetitions, but abridged and reduced to its lowest common multiplier, his oration ran about as follows:

"Sweet-smellin' skunks! In three days the woman has nicked me for thirty-seven hundred bucks!"

"No, Archie," I reproved, "your calculations are unaccurate. Thirty-six hundred, nine hundred and ninety-five is the correct answer. You forget the five you win back from her."

"Half my bank roll!" moaned Archie.

"You know the bookmaker always wins," I reminded him.

"If I didn't love the girl," said Archie, "I'd be tempted to cheat her—give her a wrong steer on some horses and get my dough back."

"You're sure you love her?" I interrogated him.

"I worship the ground she walks on!" declared Stupid.

"Even when she says, 'O-o! O-o?' " I persisted.

"Worse then than ever," he vowed, rollin' his eyes.

"Then," said I, "your way is easy. Forget the money she win. Let her keep it. Draw the rest of your dough out of the bank, and let her have that, too! No sacrifiss is too great when one loves," I told him, quotin' a line I'd heard a vawdeyville actress get off.

"That would put me in a wrong position," said Archie.

"The same bein' what?" I pressed him to tell me.

"She might think I was marryin' her for her money," said Kid Intellect.

I near swallowed my cigar!

Words of contumeliousness and reproach rose to my lips, but I did not speak them. He was in tough enough, I figgered, without me addin' other burdens to his feeble brain.

"Then you *are* goin' to marry her?" I said. "Congratulations!"

"I hope so," he muttered.

"Hope so! Ain't you asked her?"

"Not yet," spake the boob.

"Possibly you're waitin' for me to do it for you—like Brazilla and John Eagan," I suggested.

"No," said he with a noble look. "I ain't. But I will not ask her for her hand in marriage until I am in a position to do so."

"That bein' when you've won your dough back?"

He nodded what should have been a head.

"Some courtship!" I assured him. "Now, listen, you peanut," I said, becomin' serious, "you've got four thousand beans. She upon whom you've set your heart has four thousand more. Call it square now; waltz up to her and plot your trough. I'll buy a bottle of wine if you do," I offered.

Once more he shook the thing that stood on his neck.

"Four thousand bucks is more than you could ever *earn!*" I informed him. "It's more than enough to fit up the prettiest little flat in the Bronnix."

"No," said the noble fool.

"O. K." said I. "Who do you like in this race?"

"Nothin'," he told me. "I ain't bettin' no more. I'm just makin' book for Clementine."

"Better take on a few more players, I advised. "It'll give you a chance to round out your book."

"Clementine's enough," he said.

"You'll never win her love by winnin' her money," I told him.

"It's the only way," said Foolish.

And back he went to the unequal struggle.

Clementine began sparrin' pretty careful at this junction. She acted like the ache in her corns or somethin' prophesized a change in luck. She quit bettin' centuries and half centuries, and began to shoot tens and twenties at Archie. Just enough to tease him. And her luck was uncanny! This day she'd win a hundred; the next a hundred and a half; the followin' day fifty—a little bit at a time, but in a constant stream that would have broke the Bank of England!

Archie was frantical! His bump of intellectualness seemed to decrease with his bank roll. And crazier about Clementine ev'ry day! All the time he was separated from her at the track—maybe ten minutes a day—he'd go into ecstatics about her beauty and her brilliance and her pianner playin' and her other talents and physical properties.

"Do you talk like that to her?" I asked him.

"No. She won't stand for no rough stuff."

"Rough stuff!" I exclaimed. "Rough stuff! If she calls such goo-goo rhapsodies as you indulge in rough stuff! But we'll let that pass. By the way, have you won her hard-hearted male parent's consent to lettin' you take a whirl out of the sofa and the front parlor lights yet?"

"No. He still objects to her entertainin' gen'lemen friends."

"But he lets her traipse down to the track ev'ry day!"

"Oh, no; that's under cover. Her folks is church people, and don't believe in gamblin'."

"It must be admitted," I said, "that Clementine's a credit to her bringin' up! Well, how are you furtherin' your suit—do you meet her outside, and walk in the park with her?"

"No!" he exclaimed, as though horrifised. "Clementine wouldn't do *that!*"

"Then gamblin's her only weakness?"

"It ain't a weakness," objected Doltish. "I *forced* that on her. I'm sorry now. To lead a fine gal like her into a life like this!"

"And force your dirty dollars on her," I intervened. "Five thousand of them. You must feel like a criminal!"

"I do," he said.

"But you'll make amends with the pureness of the love you offer her."

"I hope to."

"I suppose you toss a posey or two at her occasionally—or a ton of candy?"

"Ev'ry day," he said, "she gets a box of American beauties and some mixed chocolates."

"I'm glad," I said, "that somebody's winnin' besides Clementine."

"Who do you mean?" he asked.

"Huyler and Thorley," I said. "By the way, Archie, I've got a friend in the florist business. He's a Greek, but a nice feller. Pinkokrakas is the monicker. You might try him for an American beauty or two."

"No," said Archie, "I've got a standin' order."

"I'll lay you nine to five," I said, "you ain't got nerve enough to pop the question to Clementine now."

"It ain't nerves," he said. "It's a matter of principle."

That day Clementine jipped him for a cool thousand. She just parlayed one mean little ten-specker through the first three races; then put up the blinds and closed shop for the day.

The next three days saw her separate Archie from some three thousand more.

I knew he was sufferin' from a severe mental strain when he showed up at the track the followin' afternoon without his pants bein' pressed.

"To-day," he informed me, "either makes me or breaks me."

I flaunted my interest with a look.

"I've got just an even five hundred left," he said. "Clementine has the rest. If she don't start to lose to-day——"

"The rocks go," I finished for him, indicatin' his diamonds.

"Phonys!" he told me with quiverin' lip. "I hocked the real ones last week."

He got his quick. The first race was enough. Clementine ventured a hundred-dollar bet on a skate with the agonizin' entitlement of Fallin' Star. Said animal breezed in on the bit at five to one, and, as a bookmaker, Archie was through—not to say finished!

I thought Archie looked relieved more than anything else when Fallin' Star tripped lightly under the wire. I wouldn't say he occupied exactly an envious position—but he knew where he stood financially at any rate!

To Clementine the occurrence, of course, was just an ordinary eventuation.

"Well," said our hero when we'd reached a safe place—the bar it happened to be—"I'm beaten."

"But not disgraced," I added. "What'll you have?" I invited, "and what do you do next?"

"Licker," he said, and: "I don't know."

I gave him time to hide three fingers.

"Archie," I asked him kindly, "why don't you go to the little lady—and make a clean breast of it? Tell her all," I said. "It ain't so bad as if you'd lost your roll to an utter stranger. You've kept it right in the family; entrusted it to your future bride—just like lots of young fellers who are savin' up to buy the furniture. Have another drink. That's right—take a good one! It's like takin' money out of one pocket—and puttin' it in the other. Tell her you're broke, and that you love her. The two things usu'lly go together anyways. Then tell her *why* you're broke. If you like, you can make it a good story—let her think you lost the dough to her on purpose. Say you were afraid if *you* kept it the bookmakers might get it. 'Get the idea? Sure! A stall like that will just about knock her dead! She'll hurl herself into your arms, and nothin' will remain but to name the day. How about it?"

Archie was feelin' highly courageous after his two shocks of rum.

"By gosh, I'll do it!" he exclaimed. "Come on!"

He grabbed me by the arm, and led me up into the stand where Clementine was sittin'.

As if automatically she thrust out her hand for her winnin's.

"Miss Duff—er—Clementine——" began Archie.

"That's the boy!" I nodded at him over Clementine's shoulder.

"Er—Miss Duff——"

"Go on! Go on!" I motioned.

"Here's your money," he blurted out, shovin' the roll at her like it was hot.

She spread the bills out, wet her thumb and started to count.

"Keep it up! Keep it up!" I half whispered, shakin' both my fists at Archie.

He swallowed his Adam's apple a few times. Then:

"C-C-Clementine," he stammered. "I'm broke."

"O-o!" exclaimed Clementine, still countin'. "Ain't that too bad!"

Archie's jaw dropped a little. Her remark wasn't so very encouragin' at that.

"Clementine," he said again, "I'm broke."

"Who told you you could call me Clementine?" she asked. She never even looked up—just went right on countin'.

"I went broke," said Archie, "so's you could have a bank roll."

"Say! What are you talking about?" asked Clementine.

She'd finished countin', and was puttin' the bundle of twenties in her hand bag.

"So's you could have a bank roll," repeated Archie, slightly discountenanced by the interruption. "I went broke," he said again, "so's you could have a bank roll. You won my money," said Archie, as though afraid he hadn't made himself quite clear, "and you have a bank roll. *I* haven't."

He took a long breath.

"As I said before," he continued, "you have a bank roll, and I haven't. That's why I'm broke. Do you see?"

"O-o, *Mister* Ball!" said Clementine. "You've been drinking!"

"Only a couple," Archie apologized. "Well, I'm broke," he said. "I haven't a bank roll any more, but you have! That's what I wanted to tell you."

He loosened his collar, which was becomin' tight, and braced himself as though expectin' Clementine to dive into his arms.

Clementine looked at me.

"Do you know what he's talking about?" she demanded.

"Why, er——" I started to say.

"Don't you get me?" asked Archie, his voice breakin'. "You made bets. I made them for you. You thought I was takin' them to the bookmakers, but I wasn't! Ha, ha, ha! I fooled you! Ha, ha, ha! *I* was the bookmaker!"

Clementine got a glimmer of what he was drivin' at.

"O-o!" she screeched, suddenly all angry. "You *cheated* me!"

Great snakes! Cheated her! And she hadn't even put up the dough for her first bet!

"O-o!" she squealed again. "You *cheated* me!" She stamped her foot, and made her little hands into fists. "You *cheated* me! You—you—you—cheat!" she called him.

Archie thought he saw an openin'.

"I love you!" he cried in a soft, sweet tone—like a starter would use on a sixteen-horse field.

Some love scene! I guffawed myself, and some people near us, who couldn't help but be takin' things in, just about rolled off their seats.

"You love me!" countered Clementine in a voice that nearly matched Archie's. "How dare you!"

"I love you!" shrieked Romeo again. "I place my feet at your heart! Oh, Clementine! Be mine! Be mine!"

This last was like the bleat of a sheep led to the slaughter house.

"Say!" barked Clementine, and you wouldn't think such a nice-lookin' little gal could speak so nasty. "Who ever gave you any encouragement?"

I began to suspect Archie wasn't doin' so good as I hoped he might. But there was no stoppin' him.

"I am the light of my life!" he informed her. "I mean *you* are! Without you——"

"Would you mind calling a policeman?" Clementine asked me.

"Wh-what for?" I asked back.

"To arrest this drunken loafer," she said, indicatin' Archie. "Oh, you dishonest thing!" she cried, turnin' to Archie again. "O-o, how glad I am I found you out! Tryin' to cheat me out of my money! O-o, you—you—gambler!"

"Oh, my love! My love!" moaned Archie. "I would——"

"Stop it!" she ordered. "Shut up! You you—fool!"

I don't think at this point there was much doubt about the truth of her last remark. I was beginnin' to get nervous. It looked like only a question of time when a flock of race-track detectives would descend on us, and give the whole bunch of us the run. Clementine was worked up to the point where she was liable to boil over at any minute.

"O-o, what an escape I've had!" she cried, gulpin' down a sob. "I always did suspect you! But I don't c-c-care!" The tears were comin' at last! "I've f-f-found you out! I've s-s-saved my money from you—and I'm going to m-m-marry m-m-my J-J-Joe!"

"Joe!" Archie and me shouted at once.

"Y-y-yes!" she sobbed. *"He'll* p-p-protect me from m-m-men like you! *He's* not a l-l-low g-g-gambler! O-o-o-o-o-o!"

With this last yelp she dashed down the steps and disappeared under the stands.

"Never mind, Archie," I said. "Blighted Hopes is entered in the next race. Play him—it looks like a hunch! I'll stake you."

"No, thanks," said Archie. "I'm through. I'm goin' back to work! But think of J-J-Joe—with my eight thousand!"

In their place, they're the noblest work of the Creator; but at a track—excuse me!

Ark Right

By Frank William Chase

Author of "The Mark," Etc.

This is one of the weirdest pieces of fiction that has come our way in years, and for that reason we want to pass it along to our readers. "Is it possible? No, it isn't. Yes, it is." Such is the argument it leaves in your mind

THIS is not a story for skeptics; it is not for those who doubt that Jesus of Nazareth rose on the third day. If you feel that spirit does not exist because you have never seen it, then you cannot believe the story of Ark Right. One can only relate the facts.

Rated as one of the world's greatest surgeons, financially independent, with a warm sympathetic personality, Doctor Spencer Hutson wore almost continually an air of melancholia, which his wealthy patients ascribed to the loss of his wife many years before.

It was not generally known that his wife had died in childbirth. Only Mrs. Breen, who had been housekeeper at Hutson Hall for twenty years, and a few relatives knew that the infant was a boy and survived its mother. Two or three remembered that the boy's name was Loring after his mother.

None of the relatives had ever seen the lad. Vaguely, they remembered hearing the doctor say that Loring lived at his country place in Bedford where he passed week-ends.

They had an impression that visitors were not welcome at Hutson Hall. One or two knew that the grounds were surrounded by a high fence made of young spruces with the bark on them, nailed close together. The entrance gate was made in the same fashion. It was always locked. They had never been inside.

About five-thirty Saturday evening Doctor Hutson stepped out of his motor car and pushed a button cleverly concealed in one of the spruces which flanked the entrance gate. The doctor reëntered his car and waited. Presently the gate swung open. The motor purred inside and circled a bluestone road.

Larson, the caretaker, closed the gate and followed, scowling and muttering his thoughts:

"Never looked at me. Wouldn't hurt him to speak a civil word. I'll quit the job some day. Let him find another man. It won't be easy. All that I put up with. Never once have I abused the lad. Eighteen years I've watched over him, same's I would my own. An' kept my mouth shut. It ain't appreciated."

Mrs. Breen, a white-haired, motherly woman of fifty, had been housekeeper at Hutson Hall since the day when Doctor Hutson had come with his bride, over nineteen years before. When it developed after Mrs. Hutson's death, that the infant was not quite normal, she had cheerfully accepted the rôle of nurse and foster mother. For a time Doctor Hutson had spoken of his son as an example of retarded development. After the seventh year he hoped for improvement. But the seventh year had passed, and then the fourteenth year and there was no improvement. Physically, Loring was normal. Mentally, he was an infant with an infant's vocabulary and a very bad temper. When crossed he would thrash about, and bump his head against solid objects with incredible violence. At such times the ever-watchful Larsen usually strapped him in a padded chair until the frenzy passed.

Following a custom of years, Mrs. Breen donned a fresh white apron on Friday afternoon. She placed her chair near a side window from which she could see the driveway and also glance into the sitting room where Loring Hutson was whining like an animal and biting at the wrist straps which were riveted to the arms of his heavy padded chair. She hoped that the boy would quiet before his father arrived.

Loring had not been so well of late. Twice during the week Larsen had brought him in his arms from the playground and strapped him in the padded chair. The vio-

lence of this last attack, Mrs. Breen decided, might be attributed to a mud pie which Loring had swallowed while Larsen's back was turned. She decided not to tell Doctor Hutson about the mud pies. He would reproach Larsen for negligence.

Doctor Hutson left his car for Larsen to drive to the garage. As usual, the doctor had brought a leather bag filled with dainties: Fruit for Loring, a box of candy for Mrs. Breen, tobacco for Larsen. The housekeeper took charge of the bag. There was also a large, heavy package which Doctor Hutson insisted on carrying into the house himself. It was a mechanical toy, a tiny self-propelled submarine with diving fins, ballast tank, and a real water-tight conning tower. Doctor Hutson had bought the expensive toy, fully aware that Loring would hammer it into junk at his first opportunity. But always there was a chance of lifting his feeble thought out of its dungeon into the light.

At sight of his father, Loring's blue eyes steadied for a moment.

"Hello, son. Been bumping your head again?" Doctor Hutson tried to be jovial. He always spoke to Loring as though he comprehended. There was a faint sign of recognition as Doctor Hutson loosened the wrist straps. Weakened by his struggles, Loring did not attempt to leave the chair. He huddled apathetically while his father untied the box and took out the toy submarine. At sight of the red paint he brightened and held out his hand.

"A new boat, son. Let's go out and see how it works."

Loring followed his father outdoors and across a stretch of lawn to a shallow artificial pond. With infinite patience, Doctor Hutson tried for an hour to win Loring's interest in the new toy, but with small success. Dully ignoring the button which made the propeller revolve, the boy poked at a fish worm stranded on the cement walk.

"Look at me," commanded Doctor Hutson. He held Loring's gaze and tried the formulas of the Psychopathic Hospital, spoken with all the energy he possessed.

"Rouse yourself, son. You are a conscious entity. You have the gift of reason. Throw off this dream which makes you a beast. Claim your freedom. You can do it if you try. You can begin right here now. What do you say? Let us get the upper hand of this thing and strangle it!"

Unmoved by his father's appeal, which was also something like a prayer, Loring's attention had strayed back to the fish worm. Masking his disappointment behind a sad smile, Doctor Hutson led Loring back indoors where Mrs. Breen had prepared supper.

As usual, Loring ate ravenously. With the fall of darkness he invariably curled up wherever he might be and fell asleep. And every night big Larsen gathered the boy in his arms and carried him off to bed. He seldom woke up even while Larsen removed his clothes. Indeed, it would be almost impossible to awaken him until daylight. In this respect, Doctor Hutson reflected, Loring was not unlike the primitive cave man. A throw-back, perhaps. But that was all theory. And Doctor Hutson had a theory of his own. It was coming to be a sort of obsession.

From a great number of books in the library he selected a volume on brainology. He sat down by a shaded lamp and read for over an hour. At length he turned back to a marked paragraph and studied it for perhaps the hundredth time.

Doctor Hutson's eyes strayed from the textbook. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He pictured himself in another place. One side of the room was frosted glass. Before it was an operating table, and on either side, white-capped nurses were laying out instruments on glass tables. He had just sterilized his hands for the last time. He was about to perform an operation never before attempted. With gloves his touch might fail.

The doctor was aroused from his daydream by Larsen who came running through the sitting room calling for Doctor Hutson. He was excited and quite out of breath.

"There's been a smash-up," he blurted. "An automobile bottom up beside the road."

"Whereabouts, Larsen?"

"Near the gate. Better come, sir. There's some one groanin' under the car."

"Of course, Larsen. You run out to the garage and get a jack. A fire extinguisher also. We may need them."

Doctor Hutson paused in the hall for an electric flash. Larsen overtook him in the driveway.

"I heard the crash when it happened," Larsen resumed. "It's a heavy car. There it is now. One headlight is still burnin'."

It was of the roadster model. The radiator

was crushed. A dangling steering rod told what had happened.

Doctor Hutson dropped on his knees with his flash light. The driver had evidently been alone. His head was wedged under the wheel. Doctor Hutson directed Larsen in placing the jack. A feeble groan beneath the wreckage speeded his efforts. As the car lifted Doctor Hutson crawled underneath with a loaded hypodermic. A moment later big Larsen lifted the unconscious driver in his arms and carried him to Hutson Hall.

II.

In May, 1915, John Wendare, newspaper and magazine writer, journeyed to France and applied for admission in the Foreign Legion. Rejected for near-sightedness, he tried the ambulance service, where he vainly argued that he could drive a car to hell and back. The French officer shrugged and smiled with a hint of pity, and Wendare took the next steamer home. Two years later he presented himself at a recruiting station in Boston, only to be rejected a third time.

During the following year Wendare wrote his masterpiece, and then, one night at dinner, he spoke of Bob Morse, an aviator and classmate, who had sent eleven Hun planes crashing and then lost his life in his twenty-sixth year.

"He lived, Edith, and I envy him. What wouldn't I give to——"

"No doubt he felt the same about you, John," said Edith Wendare quickly. "A writer. Established in the work you like. Could you ask for more?"

"Established! A wordsmith! What does it amount to? This war is the greatest game in the world, Edith. I'd like to play—even a few minutes."

"You have tried," said Edith tactfully. "Every one knows you would fight if you could."

"Just because I can't see without my glasses!" Wendare exclaimed. "Silliest thing I ever heard of. Charlie Stevens wears glasses and he's a captain at Devens."

"Helen tells me he is going across soon," said Edith thoughtfully. It had just come to her what it meant to a man to play the part of an onlooker while friends and classmates were going to France to battle the Hun.

"I think I'll run out to Devens and see Stevens," Wendare observed. "Maybe he could get me in somehow."

"It's late, John. Why not wait until to-morrow?"

"Charlie is a busy man. If he loafs at all, it's after supper. I want to talk with him to-night. To-morrow, he may be on his way across." Always a man of quick decision, Wendare left the table and slipped on a light driving coat. "I'll be back early," he called back. "Don't wait up."

Edith watched as he drove out of the garage; she saw the headlights after he had turned north on the State road. They swept across an open space and then vanished. It was thirty miles to Devens. John would make it in an hour. If he stayed at the camp until ten, even ten-thirty, he would be home before midnight. Whatever the hour, he would toast crackers and make tea. She resolved to wait up and toast the crackers herself.

Wendare had never outgrown his newspaper days. He loved to begin writing at midnight. Edith often crept into his workroom at three in the morning and insisted that he go to bed. At such times, Wendare laughed at her notion that he must sleep more. Sleep was for the worms, he told her, for bears who hibernated, for thick-skulled cave dwellers with prehensile feet.

After consulting with the maid as to tea and crackers and loaf sugar Edith Wendare devoted an hour to the heel of a woolen sock, destined overseas. The knitting progressed badly; she gave up at length, and tried reading. Later she sat at the piano for a time, strumming bits of half-forgotten tunes. She felt restless, strangely depressed. Her thoughts refused to take anchorage. Odd notions about John crept into her head. He had lost something. He had not kissed her good-by. He had met with an accident. He was calling her.

Quite convinced that she had heard his voice, she walked to a front window and looked out. For a long time she stood listening, and heard nothing but the wind. And then a blind slammed in the rear of the house. Startled, she fled to John's workroom and tried to get interested in his unfinished manuscript. Her eyes read the words, and reread them, but her mind pictured the turns in a dark road. The mood grew upon her. She drifted, strangely detached, on memory's swift tide. His mannerisms, odd sayings, flashed and died out.

And then suddenly she was wide awake, thinking of something John had said only the previous evening.

"Thought transmission is possible," he had declared. "Space is no handicap, nor time, nor circumstances. It's like wireless, merely a question of instruments. Take two persons of like sympathies and development —you and I for example. Place us miles apart. Something happens to one of us—to me, we will say. Suppose I only have a second to live. I would think of you. And you would know it. You might not get all of the message. But you would know I had sent one."

It was twelve o'clock. Edith Wendare walked to a window again. She looked out vainly hoping to see headlights. She could not shake off a conviction that John had met with an accident.

It was absurd, of course. Nothing had really happened. He had been delayed a little. He would be back in a few minutes now. He would laugh at her when she told him her fears. She walked to the kitchen and set about preparing their lunch. That would fetch him. She softly hummed a lilting tune, toasting the crackers. Between turns she stole to a window looking for the headlights. They would be coming up the State road in a jiffy now, she told herself. John would know that she was thinking of him. He would drive carefully. She must put her mind on it. It would be fun to see if he got her message.

The telephone bell crashed like a fire gong. Edith answered, wondering. A pleasant masculine voice asked to speak with Mrs. John Wendare.

"Mrs. Wendare speaking."

"Oh, yes. This is Doctor Hutson. I thought perhaps I ought to tell you that Mr. Wendare——"

A queer numbness was creeping over her. Edith heard the rest imperfectly. John had been crushed under the car. He had never regained consciousness.

Hours later, Elith Wendare, still fully dressed, knelt in front of a window and dully watched the birth of a new day. They would be bringing him back soon. She must bear up. John disapproved of mourning. She must try and believe what he had believed, what he had reiterated countless times in her presence.

"Death is but an incident, like moving into a new house. When we die we don't go very far away. We change undoubtedly, as the grub changes when it becomes a butterfly. The butterfly may not remember where it came from. But that does not mean that the place is far removed. The butterfly may return to the very tree under the bark of which still hangs the empty cocoon, the grub's former home.

"Remember that, Eed, if I go first. Leave the old cocoon hanging under the bark. Maybe I'll flutter back some day and recognize old landmarks."

Edith Wendare stood erect and watched the rim of a red sun appearing in the east. She turned presently and wandered through the house.

It was the sort of a house which a writing man would pick out. A good distance from the road, it had two big chimneys and twelve-pane windows. A stockbroker had modernized it and then taken a loss. The Wendares had blessed him morning and night.

Edith had stopped sobbing; there was a hint of expectancy as she passed from room to room. An unanswered letter lay on John's desk. It was from the artist who had illustrated his last story. Beside it was a penciled manuscript, the final sentence uncompleted.

Returning to the living room, she walked to the fireplace and thoughtfully regarded a brier pipe, overturned on the mantelshelf as he had left it. She must caution Jane not to disturb things. Old landmarks! There was a measure of comfort in the thought that he might return to them.

III.

Obeying Doctor Hutson's instructions, Larsen carried the unconscious driver, later identified as John Wendare, to the guest chamber on the second floor of Hutson Hall.

In an adjoining room Loring Hutson gurgled fitfully in troubled slumber. It was not a pleasant sound. Doctor Hutson closed the door and sent Larsen for a drop lamp. With aid of a stronger light Doctor Hutson found that his patient had a skull fracture so severe that he wondered at the still-fluttering heartbeats. It was a desperate case. The man could live only a few moments at best. Doctor Hutson decided to operate. Trepanning might prolong life. More than that could hardly be hoped for.

Larsen was dispatched to the garage for

the doctor's instrument case, which he had left in his car. Mrs. Breen was hastily summoned and told to tear up linen sheets and sterilize them in the kitchen oven. While she was thus occupied Doctor Hutson burst into the kitchen and asked for a rubber bathing cap. The housekeeper exhumed one from the depths of an old trunk. It was bright red in color, and looked quite odd on Doctor Hutson's gray head, but neither Larsen nor Mrs. Breen dared ask questions.

Later, when the doctor had carried the sterile bandages upstairs and shut the door, they whispered together and sniffed suspiciously as the smell of ether crept through the house. At length they returned to the kitchen and closed the door. Larsen noticed that it was nine o'clock.

At half past nine, Doctor Hutson hurried downstairs again and told Larsen to take the car and drive to Bedford. There was a drug store in the square. He would telephone. He regretted asking Larsen to go out so late at night, but he needed more ether. The need was urgent. Even half an hour might be too late.

Larsen lingered to refill his pipe, and Doctor Hutson seemed unable to control his impatience. In a querulous voice he commanded Larsen to make haste, to drive like mad!

The doctor was overwrought, Mrs. Breen decided. She asked after the patient. Doctor Hutson did not reply. Apparently he had not heard her. He walked toward the library, his head bowed, seemingly deep in thought.

A whine of brakes announced Larsen's return. Doctor Hutson closed his textbook and met Larsen in the hall. He seemed more composed. He unscrewed the cap of the ether can and sniffed professionally.

"Did I make it in time, sir?" Larsen asked.

Doctor Hutson stared at him; he was thinking of something he had just read. He answered absently:

"Ah—oh, yes; I think so—— In fact I —I'm glad you got a large can, Larsen—— I was afraid——"

He turned and walked upstairs.

"Anything I can do, sir?" Larsen called.

"No; I think not, Larsen. Thanks for the—— Nothing more, to-night—— Tell Mrs. Breen not to wait up."

Larsen waited in the hall for a moment, listening. He heard Doctor Hutson close a door and was quite sure a key turned. He returned to the kitchen to talk with Mrs. Breen.

The housekeeper was sweeping up ravelings and muttering to herself. She had heard a dog howling, she said. It was the full of the moon. A bad sign. Black horses would stop at the gate ere long. She had never known it to fail.

Larsen laughed, but only half-heartedly. On his way to bed he tried a door which opened from Loring's room toward the rear of the house. He usually stepped in to see that the lad was all right. The door was locked. Larsen waited a moment and then crossed the servants' hall to his own room. He left the door open and undressed. For some time he lay awake listening. There were queer sounds across the hall. Quick, light footsteps, an occasional ring of metal on glass, a persistent grating noise like a squirrel nibbling a nut.

Just before midnight Larsen heard some one go downstairs. Presently he heard Doctor Hutson talking over the telephone.

IV.

Sunday morning Doctor Hutson intercepted Mrs. Breen in the upper hall and told her that their patient had not survived. A black carriage had taken him home in the gray dawn.

Mrs. Breen repeated the news to Larsen and did not forget to remind him that she had heard a dog howling the previous evening. Misfortunes never came singly, she added. Loring had taken another one of his sleeping spells, Doctor Hutson had told her. The doctor seemed worried. He had moved into the guest chamber so as to be near the boy in case he took a turn for the worse.

In spite of a sleepless night, Doctor Hutson remained at Loring's bedside all day Sunday. Mrs. Breen carried his meals upstairs. The door to Loring's room was closed.

The boy was still asleep Monday morning. His pulse was stronger the doctor reported. It was a sort of stupor, as baffling as sleep itself. It might continue for a day or indefinitely. Loring might wake up with a normal mind, and he might never wake up. Wednesday morning Doctor Hutson asked Mrs. Breen to telephone his office

that he would be absent for several days. Loring's condition remained about the same, he said. It must change soon, either for better or worse.

In her report to Larsen, Mrs. Breen dwelt upon the doctor's changed appearance.

"With the sleep he's lost, he looks like a ghost," she declared. "An' fidgety! Why he doesn't even sit still to eat his meals!"

On Saturday Doctor Hutson appeared downstairs, for the first time in a week. Although haggard of feature, he seemed more cheerful. Loring had been awake for nearly an hour, he said. He wanted something to eat.

Mrs. Breen prepared a lunch and Doctor Hutson insisted on carrying it up himself. Loring was not quite ready to receive visitors, he said. His mind seemed clearer, but a new face might confuse him. They could not afford to take chances.

Another week elapsed before Loring Hutson was up and dressed, and still another week before the doctor allowed him to go downstairs for lunch. He sat opposite his father in the pleasant dining room which overlooked a stretch of lawn and first hole of a golf course.

Loring looked around the dining room with the air of a guest who was making his first visit.

Doctor Hutson smiled tolerantly. It was not quite normal of course, this notion of Loring's that he was a guest amid strange surroundings. But it would be unwise not to humor him. Even this delusion was a vast improvement over the unhappy years behind them. In his heart, Doctor Hutson was piteously afraid that the improvement might prove only temporary. If he could keep Loring's awakened mind at work, the delusion might recede. After all it was quite natural that the boy should act a little shy, like a sleep-walker who wakes up in a strange place and does not remember where he came from.

"You must learn to play golf, son," said the doctor. "Suppose we try it after lunch."

"Thanks. I'd like to. Haven't had a club in my hands for ages."

Again the doctor smiled. He doubted that Loring had ever swung a golf club in his life. He would outgrow these notions after a while. As soon as his new concepts became commonplace, and the edge of memory was not quite so clearly defined.

Loring excused himself and spoke of golf togs. He had a suit of tweeds in his room, he thought.

Doctor Hutson's gaze followed Loring out of the room. He was conscious of a strange emotion, a surge of fatherly pride. It hardly seemed possible that this upstanding lad could be the same boy who, three short weeks before, had gibbered at a fish worm.

The doctor shuddered at thoughts of Loring reverting to his former condition. It would be doubly hard now, to see him dragged back into the slime. And yet that might happen. Like a gust of wind, as quick as thought itself, the pack of invisible demons might drop from nowhere and harry him back into the pit.

There was a hint of perplexity in Loring's eyes as he came downstairs.

"I didn't locate the golf togs," he remarked absently. "In a closet somewhere. Singular. Couldn't even find the closet."

Doctor Hutson laughed. It was best not to notice the lapses.

"Never mind, son. Let's get out in the sunshine. Bet you a dollar I go around in eighty."

"Bet's on," said Loring calmly. He explored his pockets.

"Queer," he frowned. "I had money I think. Quite a lot."

Although he knew that Loring had never carried money in his life, his father professed to take the statement seriously.

"In another suit, maybe," he observed. "Lend you a five."

At his first opportunity he would place a few dollars in Loring's pockets. It would be an interesting test.

On five successive afternoons Doctor Hutson and Loring circled the golf course at Hutson Hall. From the very first Loring took to the game, and on the fourth day, he made the course in seventy-eight, a feat which delighted his father who came in with eighty-one.

The boy was improving physically, that was certain. He stood as straight as a drill sergeant, and seemed never to tire. His features were hardening up a bit, taking on character. But there were other symptoms not quite so favorable. To some degree he had dropped the notion of being a guest in a strange house. In place of this he had other delusions.

He spoke of a bank account. He could not remember where it was. It was queer

that every one else received letters. But he was glad of it, as he had forgotten how to write.

With some misgivings, Doctor Hutson began the labor of teaching his grown son how to read. He felt doubtful of the outcome, but Loring's increasing restlessness seemed to warrant the experiment. They held class forenoons and devoted the afternoons to play.

Contrary to the doctor's expectations, Loring took hold of his studies with enthusiasm. His progress was amazing. At the end of a week he could read and spell ordinary words. He mastered the written alphabet in a single lesson and within a fortnight he was reading the newspapers.

The doctor had been five weeks at Hutson Hall when he received an urgent message summoning him to Newport to attend a distinguished patient. Loring's condition seemed so satisfactory that he decided to go. Arriving after a day's journey, he found the case far more serious than he anticipated. There were daily consultations with other surgeons, and at length preparations for an operation.

In this way two weeks passed and Doctor Hutson had not returned to Hutson Hall. Meanwhile Larsen was beset with anxieties. More than once he had been roused some time in the night by strange sounds; a window latch, doors closing. Larsen decided to sleep in the porch hammock for a few nights. Two days later, at three in the morning, he suddenly put out his hand and held fast. He sat up and lighted a match. The prowler was Loring Hutson. He blinked stupidly at the light. His eyes were glassy like a sleepwalker's. Larson opened the front door. Loring entered and walked upstairs. Larsen noticed that his tan shoes were wet with dew.

V.

Although nearly two months had passed since John Wendare's funeral, to Edith it was still a nightmare of black raiment and hushed voices and sickish odors. It was a nightmare which she was trying to forget.

Little by little time was adjusting the scales. There had been many bright spots in their married life. She clung to them. No longer did she avoid things which made her think of him. His tobacco, manuscripts, golf clubs, each one brought memories. Instead of tears, she smiled.

Nothing that had been his should be changed, not even the ashes from his overturned pipe. She would leave the old cocoon hanging. It was sentiment, of course. Butterflies never come back.

And then came a morning when the living room smelled of tobacco smoke. John's pipe was not in its accustomed place and there were crumbs of fresh tobacco on the rug. Edith summoned Jane immediately. The maid insisted that she had disturbed nothing at all on the mantelshelf. She knew her orders.

Edith Wendare smiled her unbelief, and Jane stole back to the kitchen, sulking.

No doubt the maid had carelessly brushed the pipe off the mantel and then, remembering her warning, she had destroyed the evidence. But that did not explain the lingering scent of tobacco smoke, nor the crumbs of tobacco on the rug. The incident troubled her. Night prowlers usually came to steal. She made a tour of the house to see if anything was missing. Excepting John's old brier pipe, everything seemed to be in its accustomed place.

During the day Edith remembered the small wall safe in the library, an inheritance from the stockbroker, in which John had stored manuscripts. He had never given her the combination. She had tried once or twice to open it, but without success.

Edith knelt on the rug in front of the safe. She had just thought of a possible combination: 8-14-88. It was the date of John's birth.

She debated for a moment whether to begin turning left or right. John was right-handed. She tried the right, but the knob would not turn. She twisted the handle. The door opened. Inside, on a shelf directly in front of her, lay a brier pipe!

Slowly, as though fearing that it might vanish, she raised her hand and touched it. It was real, substantial. It was like the other, she told herself, but not the same one. It couldn't be, unless—— Of course there was an explanation. The door had not been locked at all. Or else——

She closed the door again, but did not lock it. She rose mechanically and wandered to another room. Yes, it had been locked. She remembered trying to turn the handle. It had been locked and she had unlocked it accidentally. The time before this. She had stopped on the right number and then given up.

With the foregoing and similar arguments Edith Wendare tried to convince herself, but as the day wore on she found herself doubting. She tried not to think about it, but she could think of nothing else. The door had been locked. She would swear it had. And some one had opened it. A real Jimmy Valentine, perhaps, who had calmly smoked a borrowed pipe and then left it with disappointing manuscripts.

That evening before going to bed, Edith Wendare tried the locks of doors and window. As usual, she locked her chamber door. Hours later she suddenly wakened from a troubled sleep. She thought she had heard the door latch click back and forth. She sat up in bed listening intently. Five minutes passed, and she heard nothing. Ten minutes. Just as she was about to lie down again, a light suddenly gleamed across the lawn below. She stole to a window and looked down. The light evidently came from a room on the ground floor. Of course it might be Jane. Summoning her courage, Edith softly unlocked the door and crept out into the hall. She could see the light plainly downstairs. It seemed to come from John's workroom. She listened a moment and then called Jane's name. There was no response. She called again, and almost immediately some one switched off the lights.

Badly frightened, Edith retreated to her room and locked the door. She slipped into a dressing gown and waited, with nerves strung to the breaking point, the expected sound of footsteps ascending the stairs.

Ten minutes passed, half an hour, and she had not heard a sound. Shivering a little, she sat down on the bed and tried to think calmly. To reach Jane's room she must cross the upper hall and pass through a corridor. There was a light switch on the left. Nerving herself, she crept into the hall, switched on the lights, and made a dash for the maid's room.

At daylight, Jane armed herself with a broom and cautiously explored the house. Edith trailed as far as the telephone and waited developments. Jane came back presently, and reported. She had looked in each room, ransacked the closets. The doors and windows were locked. All valuables were accounted for. The maid hinted that her mistress might have been mistaken.

Edith did not argue the point. She thought of reporting the matter to the police, but decided not to. Nothing had been stolen. After breakfast, she walked to the village and bought a businesslike revolver. There was a safety device. Edith signed the register and returned home. Later in the day, she called up the telephone company, and ordered an extension set to be installed in her bedroom.

It was not until the following afternoon that Edith noticed the manuscript. She had been dusting John's desk. With a frown she noticed that the penciled sheets of his last story had been scattered. The wind, perhaps. Jane had left a window open. She rearranged the sheets, glancing again at familiar paragraphs. The last sheet, she remembered, was only half covered. Each paragraph, each line, the final uncompleted sentence, all were etched in memory.

Edith uncovered the sheet, stared at it for a moment, and then rushed shrieking from the room. With clenched fists pressed against her temples and incredible terror in her wide eyes, she rushed from room to room like a woman suddenly stricken insane.

Half an hour later, after Jane had led her to a couch and telephoned for a doctor, Edith Wendare stared at the ceiling with unseeing eyes and whispered:

"Let me see it again, Jane. Bring it to me. In there—— In his workroom. The last sheet. Don't you understand?"

The maid comprehended at length. She fetched the sheet, and then sadly shook her head. Mrs. Wendare was losing her mind. Otherwise, why should a sheet of paper bring on a fit of hysterics?

Doctor Paul Elwood was a middle-aged local practitioner with a ready laugh and a slow-moving practical mind. Mrs. Wendare's rather incoherent story did not impress him as rational. Such things did not happen. He bluntly told her so.

"But it *has* happened," she replied wearily. "Can't you believe me? Why, I've read his manuscript countless times. I wondered why he had not completed the last sentence."

Doctor Elwood took up the page and studied it.

"It's not the last sentence now," she explained. "But it was."

She knelt excitedly beside his chair, pointed with her forefinger, and read aloud:

"'Trench building, he decided, was the best sort of——'" She paused, holding her hand over the next word.

"John left that sentence uncompleted, just as you see it," she went on. "How many times I have guessed the next word. *Exercise,* I thought. And yet——" She lifted her hand. "You see how wrong I was. *Discipline.* 'The best sort of discipline.' See how much better that fits the context."

Trembling, strangely agitated, she indicated a half dozen lines that followed.

"The handwriting is just the same," she whispered. "No one else could have written it. It is his work, every word of it. He has come back, as he told me he would, and I didn't see him." She threw herself face down on the couch, sobbing piteously.

"My dear woman," Doctor Elwood soothed. "You must put this idea right out of your mind. You mustn't allow yourself to think of it. I advise you to go away for a time. If you stay here this notion may become a reality and——"

Edith sat up suddenly, her dark eyes blazing. "It is a reality," she cried. "John Wendare has come back—back to his own house. He has sat at his desk and continued his work."

"My dear woman," Doctor Elwood repeated. "You must realize that all this is impossible, that you are on the verge——"

"It is not impossible," Edith interrupted passionately. "He has been here. I believe it. Just because I have not seen him, is that proof? Maybe I cannot see him. But he has been here in this room. I know it. Who else could write this? Who else could open the safe? His pipe was inside. I smelled tobacco smoke in the——"

"His pipe!" echoed the doctor blankly. "Tobacco smoke! Surely you do not think that—— You do not think——" He seemed unable to go on.

"Oh, I don't know," said Edith wearily. "I don't know what I think. Only that I am tired, and you will never understand. I would like to be alone, if you——"

"My dear woman," the doctor began, but something in her eyes silenced him.

"Please go now," she said sweetly. "I want to think all by myself."

VI.

Edith Wendare walked to the railroad station. She wore a heavy black veil and carried a hand bag. She bought a ticket for Boston and slipped it in her glove. After paying her fare on the train she opened the hand bag and took out a clipping which she had cut from the personal column of the *Herald*:

Madam Viraldo
Trance Medium
19 Lewis Place

The address was not familiar to her, but that did not matter. She would find it. She leaned back in the cushions and closed her eyes. Probably her errand would prove a disappointment.

Humbug! Chicanery! Doctor Elwood had snorted. And still Edith remembered the newspaper account of two other doctors who had solemnly announced that they had weighed a man's soul as it took flight. John had been much impressed by the experiment at the time, she recalled. It supported his theories.

"The grub leaves the shell behind," he had declared. "Its soul flames as a butterfly, and goes on."

Edith took a taxi from the North Station, and quite shortly she was ascending a flight of stone steps in the lodging-house district. To the right below the street level there was a Chinese laundry, and on the left a basement tailor shop. Above the tailor shop Madam Viraldo's black and gilt sign hung in a front window.

A sharp-eyed mulatto girl in nurse's uniform answered the bell. She conducted Edith to a dimly lighted reception room where two young women of the waitress type were evidently waiting their turn to interview Madam Viraldo.

The maid offered to check Edith's coat and hand bag, a service which was courteously declined. The maid seemed surprised.

"Madam Viraldo won't like it," she remarked in an undertone. "It's her control, you know. She's queer that way. If a visitor wears a hat or carries anything like a parasol or hand bag, she doesn't respond—the control, I mean. Madam Viraldo can't reach her. Of course you can try it, but if——"

Edith removed her hat and surrendered her hand bag. It was rather childish, she thought. A bit of stagecraft, intended to impress credulous shopgirls, like the two across the room who were whispering eager anticipations and giggling. Edith gathered that each had been expecting a letter from a certain young soldier somewhere in France. And now both of them expected Madam Viraldo to bring a message from overseas.

It was rather pathetic, Edith thought. And yet their hopes were not unlike her own. It was odd that one should half believe the unbelievable, and then smile at others for a similar faith. She wondered if they, too, had seen evidence which nobody could explain. It was possible. There had been accounts in the English magazines, she recalled, of women who had felt a presence, heard their men speak. And then, days later, had received a telegram, naming the same hour.

Madam Viraldo occupied a large upholstered chair behind a table in the bay window. The shades were drawn and the room was dimly lighted. Edith was conducted to a chair facing the desk. Thin shafts of light crept in between the shutters. Madam Viraldo was large and swarthy and asthmatic. She had gray hair and wore a waist of black lace over red satin. She looked at Edith for a moment without speaking.

"You have not been here before," said Madam Viradlo presently. "I will try and get your name."

She leaned back and closed her eyes.

"I am not quite sure," she said at length. "Is it Wendell?"

Edith's negative did not disturb her.

"We will leave that," she went on dreamily. "The name will be clearer in a moment. My control is bringing some one. I can hear them coming. It is a man. He is holding his arm over his head. He has been hurt. He is calling some one. He says—he says——"

Madam Viraldo hesitated, and Edith waited tensely. Unconsciously, she bent forward and whispered: "Tell me. Tell me what he says."

Madam Viraldo shivered slightly and opened her eyes.

"I couldn't quite hear it," she said dully. "There was a cross current. Did you—— Did I say anything you wanted to hear?"

"Yes, er—that is, you were just going to. Please try again."

"I will, dearie. And this time, you might ask questions. That often helps. But wait until I reach the control first. You can tell. My voice changes."

Again Madam Viraldo leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Presently she began speaking in a strange far-off voice.

"I see him very plain now. He is sitting at a desk writing a letter. No; it is not a letter. There are too many pages. He is writing a story. I see his name on the title page. It is John—John Wendare!"

Edith had not expected to hear John's name. It was uncanny, a sort of black magic. She felt like screaming.

"Ask him—ask him why he did not come last night," she panted. "I waited for him—in his workroom—all night long."

In a strange, flat voice Madam Viraldo repeated the question and then waited for her control to answer.

"He did come, he says. He passed through the room and spoke to you, but you could not see him."

"Why—why could I not see him?" Edith asked, her voice trembling with anguish.

"To see him, you would have to go with him into the spirit world," droned Madam Viraldo. "He will wait, he says. Time is nothing, nor space. He will watch over you. He wants you to——"

Waves of emotion swept over Edith Wendare, and left her sobbing. No longer did she hear Madam Viraldo's droning voice. She felt choked, stifled. She wanted air, sunlight, freedom. Groping, she found a door, and opened it. Instead of the gloomy reception room, Edith stepped into a cheerful sitting room, evidently belonging to Madam Viraldo. She crossed the room, looking for another door. Finding none, she turned back, and at that instant Madam Viraldo was roused from her daydream by a strip of bright light through the open door.

The name held Edith's glance as she passed the reading table. It was printed in bold type at the top of the page:

John Wendare, writer, born 1888.

Underneath were newspaper clippings giving an account of Wendare's fatal accident, a list of his writings and the name of his wife, whose engraved card lay on the table. The scrap book was filled with similar data. Beside the reading table was a large filing case for index cards. Drawer W was open, Beyond the filing case were bookshelves and more scrapbooks.

As she grasped the full significance of her visiting card and the open scrapbook, Edith Wendare broke into mirthless, hysterical laughter, which quieted as she recalled the faces of the two girls who had preceded her. Now she understood why they had looked so frightened when they came out.

Evidently Madam Viraldo's card index included names on the casualty lists.

Brushing past Madam Viraldo, who wheezed in the doorway, afraid to trust her make-up in the bright light, Edith found her way to the reception room where she boldly counted the money in her hand bag in front of the astonished maid. She threw a dollar on the hall table and held her skirts closely about her as she walked out.

Doctor Elwood's judgment had been sound after all. But she felt quite sure that he would never know how she had confirmed it.

VII.

After lunch on the day that Edith Wendare visited Madam Viraldo, Loring Hutson found an old magazine on the library table. He carried it to the porch hammock and settled down for a lazy afternoon. It was a story of adventure laid in scenes that seemed strangely familiar. He read slowly. Occasionally he closed his eyes. The backgrounds seemed wonderfully vivid. He had not noticed the name of the author. He turned back the pages. The story was by John Wendare.

With careful deliberation Loring Hutson closed the magazine and laid it on a wicker table in front of him. The curtain of memory had lifted suddenly. He visualized a familiar scene, like the opening act of a forgotten play. He remembered a row of typewriter desks and dangling green-shaded lamps above them. Wendare's desk was second from the door. He reported at five o'clock. Loring looked at his watch. It was quite a distance he thought. He set off down the drive, conscious of solid objects, and yet seeing only his goal. He did not know where it was, but in some mysterious fashion he knew the direction, as a homing pigeon lays its course at night.

Larsen was clipping a barberry hedge near the gate. He looked up as Loring passed. The boy was staring straight ahead; he did not return Larsen's greeting. Disturbed at Loring's behavior, Larsen ran forward and pretended to help open the gate.

"You're going to the village?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon," Loring's blue eyes held no recognition.

"You'll be home to supper, sir?" Larsen persisted.

"No; I think not. I have an engagement," said Loring vaguely.

"We're expecting Doctor Hutson, you know. I thought perhaps——"

"Sorry I can't wait, I'd like to meet him."

With this polite comment Loring turned south at a brisk walk. Larsen started to follow him, but after a moment he turned back, sadly shaking his head.

From Bedford, Massachusetts Avenue runs generally south. During the afternoon passing automobilists saw a bareheaded youth walking toward Boston, often in the middle of the road. One or two, passing close, noticed the peculiar stare in his blue eyes, and then they swept past and forgot him.

Loring passed over the Charles River bridge at five o'clock. Crossing Beacon Street, he continued on to a square where the streets fork.

Ignoring traffic, narrowly missing a flower bed in a little park in the middle of the square, he held to his course, guided perhaps by the same uncanny sense of direction as that which sends a honey bee winging surely hiveward above a forest.

A block beyond the square he entered a doorway and climbed a flight of stairs. He walked along a dimly lighted corridor and opened the third door on the left. The room was blue with tobacco smoke. There were several typewriter desks in a row. Beneath dangling green-shaded lamps, men in shirt sleeves were typing on yellow sheets of paper. The youth at the second desk was in deep thought. Loring spoke a second time before he answered.

"Wendare? No; never heard of him."

Puzzled, at a loss for words, Loring failed to notice an elderly man at an adjoining desk who had heard the name.

"Looking for John Wendare?" he asked.

"Yes; he reports at five."

"He used to, son. Not now. Two years since he left the *Herald*."

"Strange," said Loring. "He ought to be here. This is his desk, isn't it?"

"It used to be his desk. But he's not here any more."

Loring blinked stupidly. "There must be some mistake," he said. "I'll come in later."

"No use, son. John Wendare is dead."

"Oh, I—I see. He isn't here. Queer. There was something I was going to—— I beg your pardon. Isn't your name Rogers?"

"Sure is; Sam Rogers. I don't remember you, though."

"My name is——"

The curtain of memory fell without warning. For a moment Loring Hutson swayed in black oblivion, and then pressing his temples, he stared in astonishment at strange faces and strange surroundings.

"How did I get here?" he asked dully.

"You've been drinking pink lemonade, son," said Rogers solemnly.

Loring did not seem to notice the laugh. He was trying to bridge the gap which lay behind. Yesterday, the previous hour, the previous moment were absolutely blank.

"I must have come from somewhere," he mumbled.

"Of course you did, son. You'll think of it in a moment."

Loring squinted as though trying to concentrate. Mechanically, he searched through his pockets.

"I had a cardcase, I think," he said absently. He pulled something from his pocket. It was a five-dollar bill.

"Money, but no name," he muttered. "Thought I had more money somewhere. I had money in a bank."

"Sure, you had money," said Rogers in the tone that men reserve for inebriates.

"I don't remember how I got here," said Loring, perplexed.

"You walked in, old top. You were looking for John Wendare. Remember?"

Loring shook his head.

"I know how it is, my boy," said Rogers jovially. "They're mixing some awful drinks these days. Come outside and get the air."

Rogers hooked his arm through Loring's. They walked out through the corridor and downstairs to the street.

"All right now, old man?" Rogers asked.

"Perfectly all right," Loring declared, absently shaking hands. "I feel better outside. Thanks, very much."

Loring turned south. Rogers watched him for a moment and then hurried back to his work.

It was past six o'clock. The streets were comparatively quiet. The office buildings had emptied; their windows were dark. Further south, electric signs winked from rooftops. Loring walked toward them. He approached something like the entrance to a cave. Stone steps led down under the street. Men and women were hurrying in and out. There was a subdued roar underneath. Wondering, he passed on.

The blazing sky signs were nearer now. Traffic was thickening. Loring drifted to the outskirts of a crowd which had surrounded a wooden platform at the edge of the sidewalk. A bugle burst forth with the stirring strains of reveille. The crowd quieted for a moment, thinking of some one overseas. Before the spell had passed, a recruiting officer began talking. He was a stocky, ruddy-faced man with a bristling white mustache and the gift of direct speech. He had lately returned from France. For fifteen minutes he told of the things he had seen, of the desperate need for men.

Making his way nearer the stand, Loring listened with quickening heartbeats. The plight of France affected him strangely. French names aroused vague memories, as though, in some previous life, he had lived in that stricken land and known its people.

The officer held up a battered steel helmet.

"We want men," he challenged. "Real men to fit this hat." He waited a moment. "Come on, boys. You're needed. Step up and put your name down."

He searched the faces in front of him. One by one he singled out the men who were wavering. His keen eyes met theirs; they pushed forward to grasp his outstretched hand.

Loring made up his mind quite casually. He would have to think of a name, he reflected. On the roof of a theater above the recruiting officer's head, an electric sign obtruded upon consciousness.

ARK RIGHT

The missing fourth letter might be *W* he thought. A moment later he had signed up for the duration of the war. *Ark Right*. It sounded a bit odd, but the sergeant asked no questions. They were all sorts of names in the army. He lined up the recruits and passed a few remarks. They would get on all right if they obeyed orders. Otherwise there would be hell to pay. The hero stuff was all bunk. If they got by the surgeons, they would be in France in ninety days. Lucky dogs!

VIII.

Friday afternoon Doctor Hutson returned from Newport to Hutson Hall. Within an hour after his arrival, the entire police force of eastern Massachusetts began a search for Loring Hutson. Meanwhile, quite oblivious

of past ties, Private Ark Right and four hundred other rookies in khaki were swinging down a dusty country road returning to camp on their first hike. Footsore and tired, they were looking forward to a shower bath, and supper, and refreshing sleep.

At three o'clock, this same afternoon, the Reverend Arnold Ross called on Edith Wendare. The Wendares had attended his church. He had been a frequent dinner guest and a frank critic of John Wendare's work. Edith knew that John had respected his opinion.

Reverend Ross was a large man, with kindly eyes, and a soothing, deliberate voice. Edith led the way to John's workroom. It seemed a fitting background for the revelation she had in mind. She wondered if he would smile skeptically like Doctor Elwood.

"Nothing is changed, Mrs. Wendare," he said, surveying the room. "It almost seems as though John were still with us, as though he had just stepped out somewhere and would presently come back."

"He has come back," said Edith quietly. "Monday night, he was here in this room."

The clergyman wiped his glasses with a white handkerchief. "I have lived fifty years," he said slowly. "And I still believe that Christ walked on the waves. Tell me about it."

Without emotion, as one relates commonplaces, Edith told him about John's pipe which had disappeared from the mantel over the fireplace. She told how she had found it in the safe which had been locked. She showed him the manuscript, the completed sentence, the paragraph that followed, all in John's handwriting. She told him of John's speculations about the hereafter.

Reverend Ross listened sympathetically. He was a tactful man. He did not doubt Edith's sincerity, but she might be mistaken. These things might have happened, but all of his experience argued against it. Also his experience told him that her very lack of emotion was a bad sign. For a woman like Edith Wendare, apathy foretold a nervous breakdown. He decided on heroic measures.

"You have had a remarkable experience, Mrs. Wendare," he said. "If you stay here it may be continued. It may not. In either case, staying here will not be good for you. You are much too young to live always in the past. You need to go away for a time, to get interested in something outside yourself."

"That is not easy," said Edith. "One's thoughts travel with one, you know."

"It is not easy, Mrs. Wendare, but it is possible. New scenes bring new thoughts. You really ought to go away."

"Where?"

"You might go to France," said the clergyman, after a moment's thought. "There is need enough. It would be hard work, but I rather think hard work would be good for you. It would help you forget this—these strange happenings of the past few days."

"I am not afraid to stay here," said Edith wearily. "I am troubled perhaps—because he has come back and I have not seen him."

"If the departed return, Mrs. Wendare, and I think they do, they are in a different plane. Between them and us the All Wise holds a veil. They may see through it. We cannot."

"If I should go away, he might come here and not find me. He would look for me, I think."

"So long as you remain here, Mrs. Wendare, you will always be waiting for something to happen, always thinking, listening. The mood will grow upon you. I urge you to go away before it results in a serious breakdown."

"John loved France," said Edith absently.

"I remember. He tried to enlist, did he not?"

"Yes; he was rejected, and before that he had tried to join the Foreign Legion. Of course he could not have served. He could not see across the room without glasses."

"Bayard Ross, a cousin of mine, is chaplain of the twenty-fourth Canadians," observed the clergyman. "There are many avenues for service, he writes."

"Do you think he could find a place for me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I think I will go," said Edith quietly.

Reverend Ross wiped his glasses again. "Bayard was at Clermont in April," he said. "I will send him a cable."

IX.

The convoy had anchored offshore during the night. At dawn the big ships crept into harbor under their own steam, there to anchor again waiting for diminutive tugboats that berthed them one by one at long piers of new piling which had supplanted the

old and inadequate stone wharf of a small French port situated at the mouth of a famous river.

A party of nurses, including Edith Wendare, disembarked about seven in the morning. They had breakfast in an ancient inn whose stone gables seemed to lean half across the narrow street. The fried sole, which was very good, was served by Madam Gace, an old lady who somehow reminded Edith of a cricket, she was so spry and cheerful. With shrugs and smiles and many words she apologized for the bread. It was not good any more.

After breakfast, M. Gace, a wiry little man of seventy, came in and opened the windows. Soldiers were passing from the ships, he said. The walls were thick. *Les filles* were slender, also they must wait for trains. Five could sit in each window. He helped them up, and watched with shining eyes while they waved handkerchiefs and cheered the lads from home.

As she watched the khaki columns swinging past, and listened to the beat of their shoes on the pavement, Edith's thoughts wandered back over the drab days in the training school. Three months of drudgery, and then the trip across with its monotony and drills and sleeples nights. She wondered if the marching lads in the street were as glad as she was that activity was drawing nearer. They were fine-looking soldiers, these bronzed boys from home. How John would have thrilled at sight of them on foreign soil, or better, to have been one of them!

By leaning far over the sidewalk she could see a troop train rolling out of the station. Soldiers were leaning out of the windows waving their hats. Soon they would go into battle that same way—cheering. And then after a little, one out of every ten would labor back to the relief stations, broken and weary, but uncomplaining. One out of every ten! Edith found herself counting the closed ranks. One out of every ten! Of course they knew the chances. And still they swung blithely forward, hats tipped saucily, smiling at the friendly sidewalks.

A sudden chatter on the window ledge diverted her thoughts.

"I think he is looking at you!" exclaimed Miss Tuttle, nudging Edith with her elbow.

Curiously enough, Edith first noticed the gap in the ranks where he had been a moment before. And then she saw him pushing close to the sidewalk and looking up into her face. There could be no mistake. He was not ten feet distant. There was a strange dreamy expression in his blue eyes, something like the rapt gaze of an artist before the canvas of a master. Edith turned her head; she felt confused, vaguely conscious of turbulent emotions.

"At least you might speak to him," Miss Tuttle sniffed.

Edith smiled. "I resemble some one he knows," she whispered.

"There! Now it's too late," Miss Tuttle exclaimed, as a wrathy sergeant yanked the moonstruck soldier back into line. The villagers, out for a holiday, shouted with laughter, waving and smiling at Edith, who pretended not to notice them. For a moment, her eyes followed the mysterious soldier, and then he blurred into a khaki river, sweeping on like a tide.

X.

Came a night's railroad journey, a routine month at the base hospital at Aincourt, and a morning when Edith squeezed into a crowded motor lorry, curled up in her raincoat and went blissfully to sleep while the lorry jolted northward in a driving rainstorm. Drops of moisture oozed through the canvas top and spattered her face, but she did not wake up until the lorry sloughed into a shell hole and labored out again with a roar of exhausts.

Notwithstanding the change in weather, Mangin was still pressing toward Soissons, a counterstroke to be described later as the turning point of the war. Americans had brigaded with the French for months. Now they were fighting with them, and fighting with a dash which assured victory—and losses.

The motor lorry, churning along in the ruck, had as its objective Château Vierzy, where the still habitable servants' wing of a stone ruin had been selected for a field hospital.

Other transports laden with equipment and baggage had gone ahead, and upon their arrival the nurses found rows of cot beds already set up in a long, high room, obviously a medieval dining hall, with an uneven stone floor ages old, and very narrow windows high up in its stone walls. Higher still were ancient black rafters sup-

porting very modern electric lights installed within an hour by a squad of engineers, who had connected their wires with a portable gasoline engine, now coughing intermittently from a cleared space under a stone arch, which was all that a high explosive shell had left standing of the château proper.

The ward filled rapidly. There were a large number of shrapnel wounds, ugly gouges which would grow worse with the hours. One of Edith's boys who had gone quietly to sleep, moaned fitfully as the ether were off. At one in the morning he suddenly sat up in bed and burst into delirious laughter. Edith took his temperature and added to an ascending line on his chart, curtly labeled in chalk: *Both eyes.*

"Awful slow . . . tripped . . . wire cutters . . . Now I get . . . mud . . . How in hell . . . Got him! . . Through the stomach . . . good man, Tracy . . . I . . . can't wait . . . ."

He quieted, but as Edith moved on, he gripped her hands.

"Don't go." His voice seemed more natural. "You tell her," he went on. "She's waiting up for me."

Edith's thoughts leaped to another scene. She saw herself toasting crackers in a New England kitchen. She knelt beside the soldier's cot, and listened. He was rambling on.

"I see her . . . there in a window . . . Must tell her . . . Edith! Queer, how she——"

He whispered her name again, and then after a silence:

"Closet upstairs . . . Send them . . . I've quit the *Herald,* Eed . . . manuscripts in the safe . . . man's part . . . going to France . . . "

With bated breath, Edith Wendare waited, studying his mouth and chin. John Wendare had died; but his soul lived in the form of a youth. It was unfathomable; so was life itself. Between life and death, there must be a sort of a vestibule. She would wait there for his return. Her pulse beats seemed minutes apart.

When he spoke again, she heard the voice of John Wendare and it did not seem strange. He called her by name. She had expected that, also.

"I'm glad you came, Eed," he said wearily. "I got to France all right. We went over yelling. Mud; blood; gray wax faces . . . I've seen it all, Eed. No place for you. But I'm glad you're here with me . . . . We'll write great stuff, won't we? When we . . . go home . . . "

Edith felt his hand relax. He sighed gently and drifted with the tide which flows out into the dark. They buried him next day, and marked his grave with the usual wooden cross. When they had gone, Edith walked to the place and read the aluminum name plate.

ARK RIGHT
76 Inf. A. E. F.
July 17, 1918

The name, doubtless, was in accordance with regimental records; but Edith Wendare knew that the records were wrong. And the next day the aluminum plate was missing. In its place, some one had pinned a visiting card, with four words written above the engraved name:

Rests the soul of
JOHN WENDARE

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Not long ago my friend, Doctor Elwood, showed me a book on brainology which he had picked up in a second-hand shop. From a notation on the flyleaf it appears that the book once belonged to the late Doctor Spencer Hutson, whose library was recently sold at auction. On page 161, the following paragraph is bracketed with pencil marks:

Vivisection has proved that it would be possible to replace diseased cells of the human brain with similar cells from a normal human brain, providing the substitution was made at the moment of dissolution.

A Chat With You

IN the Capitol in Washington hangs an interesting and colorful canvas, the title of which we forget. It shows in a broad, general way the westward march of civilization. Indians retreat before scouts and pioneers, and behind this advanced guard of the arts and sciences come the railroads, the towns, and the other things we associate with civilization. It gives expression to the general idea that civilization has always moved toward the setting sun.

Since the movies have been installed at Hollywood, California, it begins to appear that civilization has no farther to go. Across the Pacific in China is a civilization older still. As a matter of fact, the march of civilization has always been northward from the south quite as much as westward from the east. For years before Columbus made his celebrated voyage it was altogether northward.

THE oldest civilization we know anything about arose in the valley of the Nile. The Mediterranean, which we are accustomed to regard as an almost tropical sea, marked farthest north for the swarthy gentlemen who built the Pyramids. Occasionally savages from somewhere out on this dark sea, men from the isles of Greece or the shores of Tuscany landed in Egypt and were captured and put to work by the civilized folk who never ventured into these Northern wilds. When the Israelites grew tired of making bricks without straw, and decided that a wilderness was better than the land of Khem, they headed north by east into the barbaric unknown.

A little later civilization herself moved north. The cultivated people lived on the two southern peninsulas of Europe, the Italian and the Greek. The mysterious country to the north of them was still barbarous and too cold for the ordinary cultivated man. Then, by some magic, cold and forbidding Gaul was turned into sunny France, the home of art and intellect, and the gloomy island of Albion turned into Great Britain, famous for its laws and its capacity and willingness to take up the white man's burden. For a while Ireland was running a civilization of its own, and just about the same time there was a distinct Northern civilization with headquarters in Iceland. Coincidental with the Italian Renaissance, the Low Countries, a spot which Cæsar had described as practically uninhabitable, blossomed forth into a highly sophisticated and populous commercial region with an art and architecture and government which placed it in the very vanguard of civilization. If Columbus had not set sail from Spain, they might to-day be building cathedrals in Greenland and painting masterpieces at Archangel. They probably will be some day, anyway.

THE Spaniards who first settled the New World, following ancient precedent, stuck pretty close to the tropics. It took a daring bunch of Englishmen to get as far north as Virginia, and a still more daring bunch to steer for Plymouth Rock. The French went north because they had to, but they greatly preferred Louisiana to Quebec. It was not until some one discovered the possibility of hard wheat that will grow in a cold climate with

a short summer that Canada began to appear on the map in real earnest. Whether it is due to the fact that we wear more clothes, burn more coal, cut down forests, or raise better food it is undeniably true that we are able to stand the cold weather better than some of our forbears. Perhaps the climate itself is changing, but it is certainly true that we are all moving north. Now young Mr. Stefansson announces his intention of starting out across the polar ice floes without provisions and living off the country. Reindeer and polar bear are a hearty enough diet for any man. Some day we may be going to the north pole for the heated months, just as we go to the mountains now. It is all, we dare say, in being used to a thing.

FICTION, sound fiction, always moves just a little ahead of material progress and lights the way. They were flying and sailing submarines in books before they did it in real life. How much the West owes to the Western stories that sent men's aspirations out toward the sunset can never be told. We sometimes think that just at present the best adventure stories are written about the North. We have one of the best of these, a full-length novel complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR. It is called "The Long Traverse." The author is Craig Gordon, new at present to THE POPULAR, but worth watching. It is a tale of the Canadian Northwest, of the fur trade. A story of mystery and adventure, a story with all the lure of romance and with all the homely charm of likable, understandable everyday people. There is only one objection to reading it. It will make you want to go to Canada.

"OLD Kid Opportunity," by W. R. Hoefer, is the tale of the young, up-to-date American business man who has everything in his favor, including a pretty wife, save money and a good opportunity. The money comes first, in the form of a twenty-dollar bill, the opportunity comes next in the form of a prize fighter. Big business, American energy, and the prize ring are the ingredients that go to make an exhilarating funny story with a lot of wholesome laughter in it.

ALSO in the nature of a business story is Arthur Crabb's story, "An Old-Time Principle." There was a time when a contractor was a man with red flannel underwear and a pipe, who used to be a bricklayer. That was long ago. Now the building contractor sits at an office desk with a stack of blue prints in front of him or argues with a banker in his private office. This is distinctly a story of the building business as it is to-day on a large scale. It is inside stuff, hard to get, and worth reading when you get it. The romance of the man who rears the skyscraper up toward heaven is the newest and most interesting sort.

ALL the above-mentioned stories are to be found in the next issue of this magazine, out two weeks from to-day. It is scarcely necessary to urge upon you the advisability of ordering your copy now. There are a lot of other good things in it, stories like the one of the two safe-blowers by Roy Hinds, or the narrative of Western adventure by Grinstead. We have only noticed one or two of the good stories in a magazine that is all good stories and nothing else.

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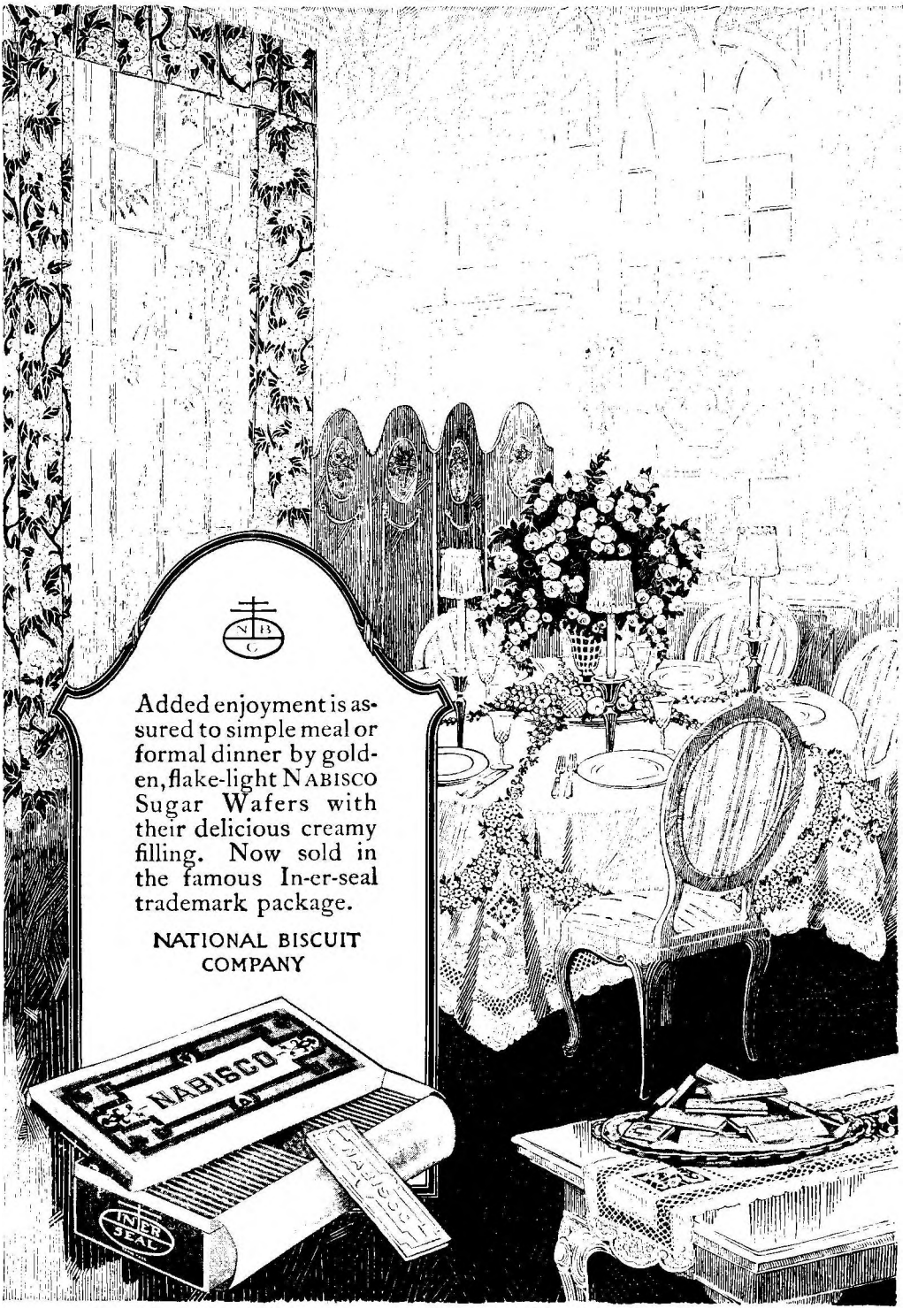
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"But it's a bigger tube," I protested, "you get more for your money than in the regular 35 cent size."

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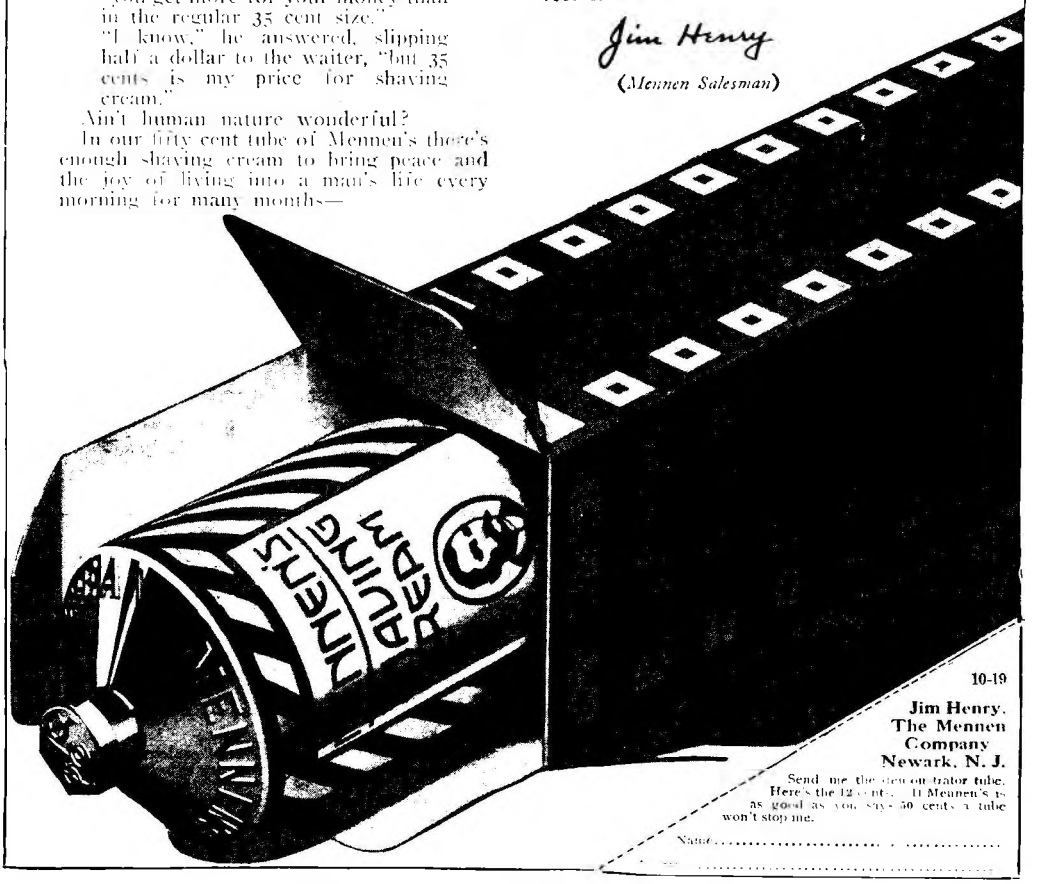
—and then slipped the razor down the east facade of your jaw in the most deliciously glorious shave of your career?

You've got to know Mennen's to like it. Send me 12 cents and I'll mail a demonstrator tube. Try it! Then reason with yourself calmly if many months of such shaves aren't worth the price of two Perfectos.

Jim Henry

(*Mennen Salesman*)



10-19

Jim Henry,
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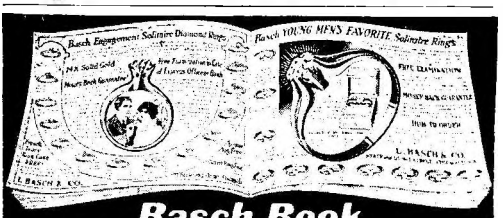

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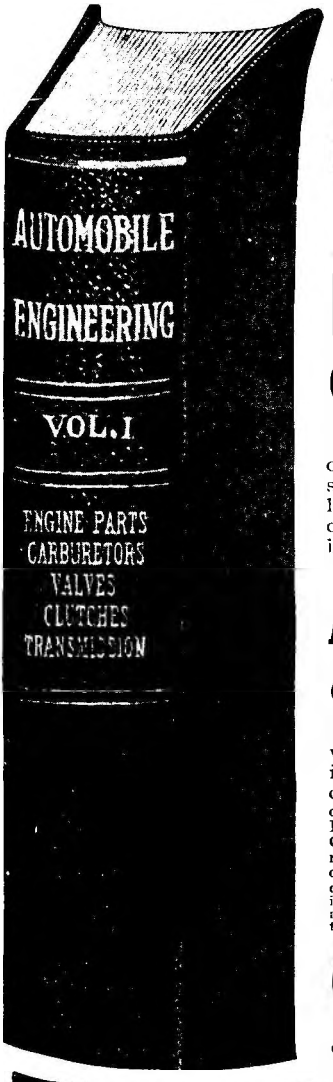

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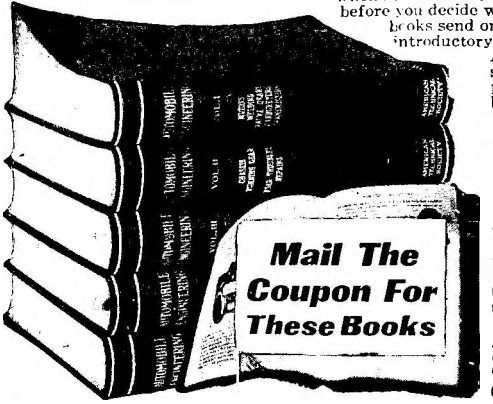

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Here is what you get in this Big Special 133 Piece offer: 100 pieces of high quality, snow-white Birthstone Dinnerware; 26 pieces of real Rogers' Nickel Silver, exquisitely designed; an attractive hemstitched Table Cloth and 6 Napkins—all at a price far below the regular cost of the dinner set alone. All for only $1 with order. And think of this: *more than a year to pay!*

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But best of all: *your own birthstone*—the lucky gem that symbolizes the month of your birth—is on each and every piece of the Dinner Set, artistically embellished by a floral decoration in beautiful colors. Each piece is carefully patterned after the Colonial; the daintily aristocratic Martha Washington Shape. The large, wide handles are covered with Gold. Each piece is edged with a rich Gold Band. It is a set you will proudly display on all occasions.

30 Days' FREE Trial
Easy Monthly Payments

Remember, we trust you gladly. Simply sign the coupon, mail to us and we will send this beautiful, complete Dining Table Service to you on 30 days' FREE trial. Use the 133 pieces in your home. Use everything as if it were your own—all without the slightest obligation to buy. Then, if you do not sincerely believe that this great combination offer represents a big $50 worth—a saving of at least $12—you may return the articles and we will refund your first payment and all transportation charges. The trial will not cost you a penny—you run no risk—you cannot lose a cent. Our Money Back Bond is the squarest guarantee in the world. Send the coupon now—convince your-self. **Order No. WA 2980. Sale Price for all (Dinner Set, Rogers Tableware and Damask Table Set) $37.95. Terms $1 with order, $3 Monthly.**

President

Spear & Co.

Pittsburgh, Pa. Dept. S 201

Send for this FREE Book of 1500 Bargains

All on Credit

Everything for your home on easy monthly payments at prices amazingly low. The greatest book of big bargains in furniture, carpets, rugs, stoves and household goods is now ready for you. We trust you gladly. Everything sent on 30 days' trial with money back bond. Mail coupon today; no obligation to buy.

100 Pieces Dinnerware

12–9¼ in. Dinner Plates	1 Small Platter
12–7¼ in. Pie or Lunch Plates	1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces)
12–6¼ in. Bread and Butter Plates	1–9½ in. Round Open Vegetable Dish
12–7¼ in. Soup Plates	1 Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces)
12–5½ in. Dessert Dishes	1 Cream Pitcher
12 Cups	1 Sauce Boat
12 Saucers	1 Oblong Open Vegetable Dish
1–14 in. Large Platter	1 Salad Dish
1 Medium Size Platter	1–9 in. Cake Plate
	1 Bowl
	1 Open Butter Dish
	1 Pickle Dish

26 Pieces Rogers Table Ware

6 Teaspoons	6 Tablespoons
6 Knives	1 Butter Knife
6 Forks	1 Sugar Spoon

Knives have French Shaped Blades

1 Table Cloth and 6 Napkins

This set is made of Full Bleached Satin Finish Cotton Damask. The design is very attractive. The table cloth is attractively hemstitched; it measures 58 x 60 inches; an extra large size. The napkins are hemstitched to match the table cloth and are larger than usual; they measure 17½ x 17½ inches.

Write plainly in this box the Month of your Birth

SPEAR & CO., Dept. S 201, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once the 100 Piece Dinner Set, the 26 Piece Rogers Nickel Silver Set, and the Table Cloth and 6 Napkins, as described above. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $3.00 monthly. Order No. WA 2980. Price $37.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. **Please print or write name and address plainly.**

Name _____

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