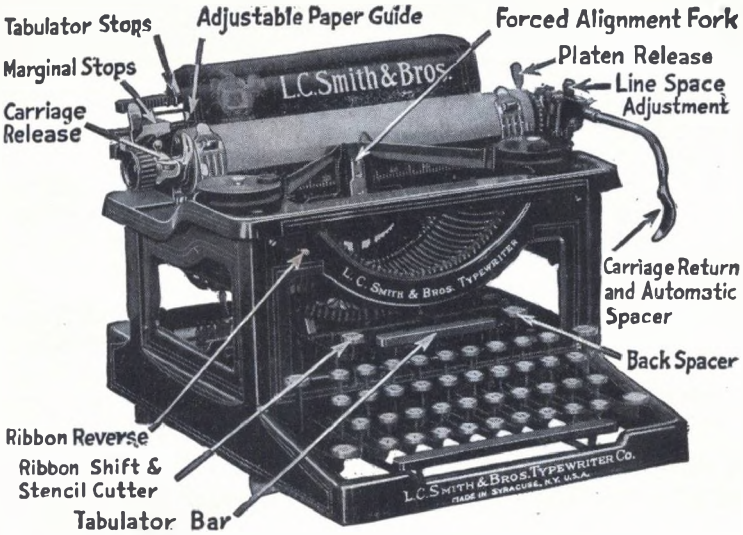
TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

Top-Notch Magazine

PUBLISHED
JULY 1, 1917

FOR GLORY'S SAKE

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK



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VOL. XXXI JULY 1st, 1917 NUMBER 1

TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

CONTENTS

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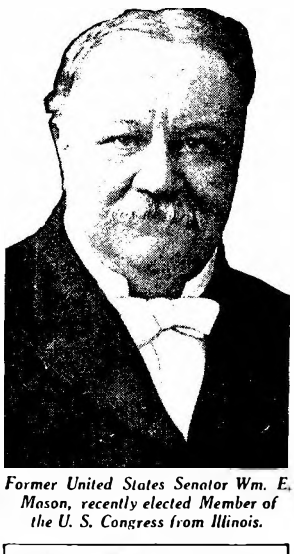
Takes Nuxated Iron

to obtain renewed strength, power and endurance after the hardest fought political campaign of his life in which he was elected Congress man from the State of Illinois. The results he obtained from taking Nuxated Iron were so surprising that

SENATOR MASON NOW SAYS

Nuxated Iron should be made known to every nervous, run down anaemic man, woman and child.

Opinion of Doctor Howard James, late of the Manhattan State Hospital of New York and formerly Assistant Physician, Brooklyn State Hospital, who has prescribed and thoroughly tested Nuxated Iron in his own private practice



Former United States Senator Wm. E. Mason, recently elected Member of the U. S. Congress from Illinois.

WHAT SENATOR MASON SAYS:

"I have often said I would never recommend medicine of any kind. I believe that the doctor's place. However, after the hardest political campaign of my life, without a chance for a vacation, I had been starting to court every morning with that horrible tired feeling one cannot describe. I was advised to try Nuxated Iron. As a pioneer in the pure food and drug legislation, I was at first loath to try an advertised remedy, but after advising with one of my medical friends, I gave it a test. The results have been so beneficial in my own case I made up my mind to let my friends know about it, and you are at liberty to publish this statement if you so desire. **I am now sixty-five years of age, and I feel that a remedy which will build up the strength and increase the power of endurance of a man of my age should be known to every nervous, run-down anaemic man, woman and child."**

Senator Mason's statement in regard to Nuxated Iron was shown to several physicians who were requested to give their opinions thereon.

Dr. Howard James, late of the Manhattan State Hospital of New York, and formerly assistant physician, Brooklyn State Hospital, said:

"Senator Mason is to be commended on handing out this statement on Nuxated Iron for public print. There are thousands of men and women who need a strength and blood-builder, but do not know what to take. There is nothing like organic iron Nuxated Iron to give increased strength, snap, vigor, and staying power. It enriches the blood, brings roses to the cheeks of women and is an unfailing source of renewed vitality, endurance and power for men who burn up too rapidly their nervous energy in the strenuous strain of the great business competition of the day."

Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston physician who has studied abroad in great European medical institutions, said: "Senator Mason is right. As I have said a hundred times over, organic iron is the greatest of all strength builders.

"Not long ago a man came to me who was nearly half a century old and asked me to give him a preliminary examination for life insurance. I was astonished to find him with the blood pressure of a boy of twenty and as full of vigor, vim and vitality as a young man; in fact, a young man he really was, notwithstanding his age. The secret, he said, was taking organic iron Nuxated Iron had filled him with renewed life. At thirty he was in bad health; at forty six he was care worn and nearly all in. Now at fifty, after taking Nuxated Iron, a miracle of vitality and his face beaming with the buoyancy of youth.

"Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don't get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron. If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next, take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again, and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while double their strength and endurance and entirely rid themselves of all symptoms of dyspepsia, liver and other troubles in from ten to fourteen days' time simply by taking iron in the proper form. And this, after they had in some cases been doctoring for months without obtaining any benefit. But don't take the old forms of reduced iron, iron acetate or tincture of iron simply to save a few cents. The iron demanded by Mother Nature for the red coloring matter in the blood of her children is, alas! not that kind of iron. You must take iron in a form that can be easily absorbed and assimilated to do you any good, otherwise it may prove worse than useless.

"Many an athlete and prize fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance and filled his blood with iron before he went into the affray; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron."

Senator Mason's championship of Pure Food and Drugs legislation, his fight for the rural free delivery system, and his strong advocacy of all bills favoring labor and the rights of the masses as against trusts and combines, made him a national figure at Washington and endeared him to the hearts of the working man and the great masses of people throughout the United States. Senator Mason has the distinction of being one of the really big men of the nation. His strong endorsement of Nuxated Iron must convince any intelligent thinking reader that it must be a preparation of very great merit and one which the Senator feels is bound to be of great value to the masses of people everywhere, otherwise he could not afford to lend his name to it, especially after his strong advocacy of pure food and drugs legislation.

Since Nuxated Iron has obtained such an enormous sale over three million people using it annually—other iron preparations are often recommended as a substitute for it. The reader should remember that there is a vast difference between ordinary metallic iron and the organic iron contained in Nuxated Iron, therefore always insist on having Nuxated Iron as recommended by Dr. Howard James, and other physicians.

NOTE—Nuxated Iron which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians in such a great variety of cases, is not a patent medicine nor secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists and whose iron constituents are widely prescribed by eminent physicians both in Europe and America. Unlike the older inorganic iron products it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach; on the contrary, it is a most potent remedy in nearly all forms of indigestion as well as for nervous, run-down conditions. The manufacturers have such great confidence in nuxated iron that they offer to forfeit $100.00 to any charitable institution if they cannot take any man or woman under 60 who lacks iron, and increase their strength 100 per cent or over in four weeks' time, provided they have no serious organic trouble. They also offer to refund your money if it does not at least double your strength and endurance in ten days' time. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXI Published July 1, 1917 No. 1

For Glory's Sake

By William Wallace Cook

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

THE ONLY THING TO DO.

RICHARD FANNING was disappointed. He had expected to find some one in the little log cabin on Oak Flats, but there was not a soul about the place. He was surprised as well as disappointed, for the interior of the cabin was in disorder. The drawers of a bureau had been pulled out and left empty on the floor in the midst of their scattered contents. An old trunk in one corner of the living room stood open, with a litter of personal belongings around it. A clock with a battered dial looked down from a shelf and ticked stridently while Fanning stood in the front room and stared about him with troubled and wondering eyes. He had been a frequent visitor at that little home in the cañon, and never before had he seen it in the condition it was in at that moment. What had happened?

He made his way to the kitchen and out by the kitchen door, still hoping that he might find Glory or her father. They were nowhere to be seen. From the rear of the cabin a deeply worn path crossed the flats, winding among the oak trees and vanishing into the mouth of a gulch that nicked the cañon wall. In that direction lay Griswold's lode claim and placerings, and Fanning's gaze wandered speculatively along the path.

A rumbling report, like the distant crash of a big gun, suddenly broke the hovering silence of the hills. It was preceded by a little plume of dust and smoke that fluttered whitely against the brazen sky, above and beyond the oaks, and dissolved slowly into thin air. Fan-

ning was reassured, and a smile of relief crossed his sun-browned face. Nothing could be wrong on the flats if Peter Griswold was peacefully mining on his lode claim.

Fanning turned away and drove Crack o' Doom, his pack burro, to the small corral behind the cabin. The pack was removed at the corral gate, and Crack o' Doom sent into the inclosure with a friendly slap. Fanning tossed an armful of baled hay over the fence and then strode away toward the gulch. Well inside the mouth of the lateral defile, he halted, and his heart warmed as he surveyed the scene before him.

A gravel "bench" lay tucked in an elbow of the gulch. Below it was a pool formed by damming the thin little stream that flowed toward Castle Creek Cañon. A girl was crouched at the edge of the pool, deftly manipulating a gold pan. She wore an old sombrero of her father's, and from under it hung two braids of dark-brown hair. The sleeves of a flannel shirt were rolled back, revealing shapely arms that might have served as models for a sculptor of ancient Greece. The whole figure, as Fanning had more than once told himself, was as graceful and free in every flowing line as any statue of Diana the Huntress. But the face of a marble goddess was not to be compared with the face of Glory Griswold.

While the girl dipped the pan in the pool and dexterously spilled the water and the waste over its edge, Fanning approached and stood beside her, unnoticed. "How much will it go to the pan, Glory?" he inquired.

Glory sprang erect and whirled. "Dick Fanning, if it ain't!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Where on earth did you drop from, Big Pard? I allowed you was still hunting a pay streak in the desert. Found anything yet, Dick?" She put down the pan and offered him her hand.

"The biggest pay streak," Fanning answered, taking the brown, capable hand in his grasp, "the very finest pay streak I've ever discovered in these hills, is right here at Griswold's."

Glory flushed. "That's what you call romancin'," she said, laughing. "If I was Irish, now, I'd call it blarney. Why are you back so soon? I'll bet a row of dobes it wasn't any pay streak at Oak Flats that dragged you and Crack o' Doom away from the gold hunting. What's the big answer to that, Dick?"

"You've known me for three years, haven't you, Glory?" Fanning returned.

"Off and on," she answered, manifestly puzzled at the trend the "big answer" was taking.

"Am I a different man from what I was when you first saw me tottering up Castle Creek Cañon?"

Glory's eyes were clear gray. Lovely at all times, on occasion they could develop a piercing scrutiny that was almost uncanny. They studied Fanning now with all their powers.

"Different!" echoed Glory. "You're so different now from what you was then, Big Pard, that you're another man entirely. You was thin as a rail and white as a sheet when dad and me saw you first. And you had a cough. Dad allowed you was tryin' the Arizona air a little too late; but you fooled him, Dick. You had grit; the way you hung on to life durin' the first six months in these hills proved that. Now you're a reg'lar hard-shell, tough as whalebone and sound in wind and limb. That's what the hills has done for you, Big Pard." Glory's eyes glowed with pride as she finished.

"I'm more than sixty-four inches tall?" went on Fanning.

"If you're an inch," the girl answered, "you're all of six feet between your heels and your hat brim."

"I'm about the right weight for one of my height?"

"I should reckon you was."

"Well," Fanning went on, something like affection in his eyes as he spread out his arms and turned a long look over the surrounding hills, "I was given up to die, and came here, as you might say, at the last gasp. The hills and the deserts were good to me. They took a weakling and made a man of him. It looks as if there was going to be war, Glory," he continued, becoming more matter of fact and dropping his earnest eyes to the girl. "I got hold of a newspaper some one had left at a water hole in the desert—the first newspaper I have seen for weeks. If there is to be a war, then I must do as all the Fannings have done before me—enlist."

No rumors of war had reached Castle Creek Cañon, slumbering peacefully in the heart of the desert hills. Glory was startled by Fanning's announcement. "There's plenty to go without you, Dick," she said. "What's the use of war, anyhow?" She kicked the gold pan angrily with the toe of one of her rubber boots. "With all the work to be done in the world, it seems to me like this country might have somethin' better to do than fightin'." Her voice softened as she added: "You ain't really goin', are you, Dick?"

"I belonged to a military company once," he answered, "and I know something about this soldiering game. Men with even a smattering of that sort of knowledge will be needed, and I think it's my business to help." He laughed. "We'll talk about it later, Little Pard. I've a claim to dispose of before I pull out, and it may take me some time to get my affairs in shape. Is Peter up on the ledge?" He shifted his eyes to the gulch wall on the left. "I thought I heard him blasting a little while ago."

"That was dad, all right," Glory answered. "We'll go up to the claim and see how he's getting on. Dad'll be mightily surprised to find out we're going to have a war."

"Peter Griswold is a patriot, if I'm any judge, and the news will give him a thrill," said Fanning. "Every time your birthday comes around, Glory, he brings out that tattered old flag with the bullet holes and hangs it over the stone fireplace in the cabin. That looks as if he might be trying to make a patriot of you, too."

"I reckon he started that when I was born by calling me 'Glory,'" returned the girl. "But the old flag is only brought out on my birthdays, and that's sort of queer for a man who wants to be a patriot the whole year round." She paused abruptly in her climb from the gravel bench and turned to face Fanning. "The flag was over the fireplace this morning, Dick," she observed.

"I know." Fanning smiled. "I traveled hard in order to be sure and get here for the day. I've got something for you, too," he added, "but I'm not going to hand it over until we get back to the house."

There was that in his eyes and in his voice which caused Glory to face the other way abruptly and continue the climb. The ungainly rubber boots seemed no handicap. She sprang lightly up the steep path, and was soon on the ledge where Peter Griswold had staked his claim. She was peering about her uncertainly when Fanning reached her side.

"I can't see dad nor hear him at work," she said. "Wonder if he went back to the cabin without me seeing him?"

This was hardly possible. In order to get to the flats from the ledge, Griswold would have had to pass close to the placerings. If Glory had not seen him, Griswold would surely have made himself known.

"Dad!" the girl cried. "I say, dad!"

There was no answer. Griswold's sledge and bundle of drills lay near the brink of the ledge. Not far away was a coil of fuse and a couple of sticks of

giant powder. On a rock was a box of caps.

"Something queer about this," remarked Fanning, and made his way through the heaps of rock that cluttered the ledge.

He came presently to the place where the blast had been set off, and halted in consternation. A chill of dread raced through his nerves. He turned to tell Glory to keep back, but she was beside him before he could speak. "Dad!" she screamed, and the next moment had thrown herself down by the limp form on the rocks and lifted the gray head in her arms.

Peter Griswold was dead, evidently caught by the blast before he could get to a safe distance. A fragment of flying rock had caught him, and it must have dropped him in his tracks. The shock of the discovery was stunning, and Fanning moved away to collect his numbed and scattered wits.

Griswold had been his friend, and the sense of personal loss was keen. But there was Glory. What was to become of her now that her father, her sole protector in those lonesome hills, had been snatched away? Fanning was slow in adjusting his mind to this new situation. His own responsibility, however, lifted itself above the disorder of his thoughts. It was his part to do what he could for Glory Griswold.

He went back to the girl, where she crouched on the rocks with her father's head in her arms. He bent down and touched her shoulder gently. "Go to the cabin, Little Pard," he said. "Be brave, as you always have been. I will look after everything."

There were no tears in the girl's eyes. "You can't take him to the flats alone, Dick," she said in a tense, dry voice. "I'll help you."

Dick knew her too well to protest. It was hard work getting the lifeless form down the steep path, but Glory was strong and ably seconded Fanning's efforts. So, into the humble home which had been his for more than a score of years, the home in which his wife had died long before, Peter Griswold was borne and laid on his bed.

"There's a parson at the Springs, Dick," said Glory in a quivering voice. "Take my riding horse and go for him, will you?"

"Hadn't you better go to the Springs and let me stay here?" he asked.

She smiled at him wanly. "You ought to know me a heap better than that, Dick," she answered quietly. "Dad and I can't be together much longer, and I want to stay with him to the last."

The Hot Springs were six miles up the cañon. A man named Randall had a large establishment there and contrived to take care of the people who came to try the waters. Mrs. Randall came from the Springs with the minister.

Two days later, there was a new mound beside the old one under the oaks near the cañon wall. The minister had returned to the Springs, but Mrs. Randall had remained at the flats to be with Glory until she should decide on her future plans.

A strong soul was Glory Griswold's. The course of her life was to be changed, but she faced the change fearlessly. Fanning was touched by the deep sorrow reflected in her face, and the contrast of her high spirit groping into a world unknown for the years to come.

"I can't understand how such an accident ever happened to dad," she hazarded tremulously. "He had handled dynamite all his life, and he wasn't ever careless with it, like some of the miners. His getting caught by the blast don't seem reasonable to me, somehow. Dick, somebody got in here while dad and me was away that morning. The house was turned upside down."

"Some thieving Mexican probably was looking for money or gold dust," Fanning suggested.

"There wasn't any money or dust a thief could get at. For a long time dad had a feeling something might happen to him. A year ago he deeded over the placerings and the lode claim to me, and he didn't say a word about it till it was all done. He had his mind made up, and he wouldn't have it any other way. And he told me, too, that if something sudden took him off I was to get a letter out of his trunk—a letter addressed to me—and read it."

"Did you find the letter?" Fanning asked.

Glory shook her head. "It wasn't in the trunk," she answered. "Somebody had come here that morning and taken it. And the flag," she added, her eyes turning to the fireplace. "That was over the mantel, and the same man that took the letter must have taken that. Why? It's all a mystery, I think, and it's—it's all connected with what happened on the ledge."

Fanning was silent and thoughtful, but the mystery was too deep for him.

"There was something else dad told me," Glory continued. "If I was left alone here, he said I was to go to his sister at Needles—my aunt, Hesther Holcomb. I reckon," she added drearily, "that's what I've got to do. I'll sell the placerings and the lode claim to Job Cargill, in Phoenix. Cargill has wanted the property for a long time. Then—then I'll go to Needles. You'll help me get away, Big Pard?"

What Fanning had brought Glory for her birthday he had not given her. He felt that he could not, as circumstances were then. "Help you, Glory?" he answered huskily. "You know I'll help you. It is right for you to go to Needles to your aunt."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Randall, "it's the only thing for Glory to do."

CHAPTER II.

AS NAPOLEON SAID.

GLORY'S riding horse and her father's were sold to Randall. The rancher also agreed to look after Crack o' Doom while Fanning was away getting Glory started for Needles. Randall himself drove a buckboard to Phoenix with Glory, Mrs. Randall, and Fanning as passengers. Glory was to be outfitted for her journey into the world, and the rancher's wife was the one to see to that.

The lode claim and the placerings were sold to Cargill for two thousand dollars. With some of the proceeds Glory would have been gowned in black by Mrs. Randall had she not protested. "Dad made me promise that I wouldn't wear mourning if anything happened to him," said Glory.

"Your pa was a mighty strange man," commented Mrs. Randall, inclined to argue the point. "It's only by way of showing respect to his memory, honey."

"I don't want to show it that-a-way," Glory murmured, her lips trembling; "I just want to keep it locked up here"—she pressed a hand to her heart—"like it was something sacred."

The result of the shopping was an impossible silk gown of a bright yellow and an even more impossible hat twined with vivid flowers. Fanning wished that he had not trusted so implicitly to the judgment of Mrs. Randall. The rancher and his wife started back to the Springs after two days in town, and Fanning was almost enthusiastic in bidding them good-by. He did not know how much further than the wardrobe his misplaced confidence had carried Mrs. Randall, and he felt a great relief in having her activities cut short.

Glory was to leave on a morning train. The evening before her departure, Fanning called at the boarding house where she was staying and gave

advice which he considered necessary. He spoke as one who knew much of the world to another who knew little of it.

For twenty years—as long as she could remember—Glory had lived in Castle Creek Cañon. In the ordinary meaning of the term, she had had no schooling. Mrs. Griswold had been a school-teacher, however, and while she was spared to the little household on the flats there had been daily instruction in what Old Peter called "the three R's." Glory could read and write and was naturally apt at figures. That, Old Peter had declared, was enough education for any woman.

Twice each year Glory was taken to Phoenix. Her experience with the outside world was limited to these brief annual excursions. In Fanning's judgment, this left much to be desired now that Glory was to travel to Needles by way of Ash Fork and change cars at the junction point. Fanning went exhaustively into that little journey for the girl's benefit.

She listened soberly as he talked. "I ain't one of the fainting kind, Dick," she remarked, when Fanning had made an end. "Don't you reckon that a girl with considerable sand and a fair amount of sense can get along in one place about as well as in another? I've seen railroad trains a lot of times. I don't remember ever having had a ride on one, but that don't count. If I step off while the cars are goin', I deserve to get shook up; and if I don't step off when they stop at the place where I'm goin', then I haven't got as much savvy as your Crack o' Doom, and ought to get lost in the world and never found." She laughed a little. "I'm twenty-two years old, Big Pard, and, while I haven't been around much, I've kept up a heap of thinking. Let's you and me take a last evenin' pasear together."

They went for the walk, Glory arrayed in the yellow silk and the beflowered hat. She was not especially proud of her new clothes, having an instinctive feeling that there were not as they should be. "I reckon I can be a lady if I want," she said.

"You never could be anything else, Glory Griswold," returned Fanning.

There was a moon that evening, and it shone upon Phoenix as it always shines—from a sky of blue velvet sown thickly with nuggets of gleaming gold. Glory and Fanning found themselves, after a time, among the moon-silvered cottonwoods by the town acequia. It was a time and place for deeper confidences, and Fanning's determination not to lay bare his heart was overborne by the spell of the hour.

"Glory," he said, "I want to tell you something that I have dreamed about in many a lonely camp on the desert, and that I had intended to tell you on your last birthday. The loss of your father kept me silent, but something is urging me to speak now. I will come on to Needles in a little while, on my way to San Francisco to offer my services to my country. Before I go north, I wish you would take this"—he held up a ring—"and when I get to Needles I——"

Glory lifted her hand quickly and laid it across his lips. "Wait a minute, Big Pard," she said, a catch in her voice. "I don't want you to talk to me that way now, and I'm going to tell you why. We'll sit on this pile of lumber for a few minutes while I do the hardest thing a woman can do—hurt her best friend. It's a hurt, though, that maybe will be for your good."

Some one was going to build a little house there by the Town Canal, and Fanning, a bit bewildered, seated himself at Glory's side on a heap of boards and waited for her to go on. The clear notes of a whippoorwill echoed out of the tree shadows. Glory listened with bowed head to the trill of melody, and

a half sob broke from her lips. Fanning put out his hand quickly. She caught the hand, patted it softly, and put it away.

"You came to Arizona, Dick," she said, instantly regaining command of herself, "because you needed the dry air of the deserts. As a prospector, you haven't really been hunting a gold mine, but something worth all the gold mines in the world—your health. You found it, and you found a mountain girl in Castle Creek Cañon, and she sort of took your fancy right from the start. But the mountain girl had a warnin', Dick. The day you first staggered up the cañon and pegged out right at our door on the flats, dad and I toted you into the cabin and worked over you to bring you back to life. There was a picture of a girl in your pocket—dad and I couldn't help findin' it. Judgin' from the picture, that girl is a regular thoroughbred. Across the picture she had written: 'With love from Margaret.' You've told me, Dick, that you've got a brother, but no sisters."

"Margaret Hapgood has been married four years now," said Fanning. "I knew her at college, and the man she married was my classmate and particular chum. I was best man at the wedding."

"What was you doing with her picture in your pocket?" Glory asked breathlessly.

"My chum's picture was in the same pocket. I consider him and his wife two of my best friends. Margaret and I, at twenty-one, did not feel the same toward each other that we did at nineteen. And you've been thinking of that picture all these years!" Fanning laughed softly. "Why, Little Pard, if that's all——"

"It ain't all, Dick," broke in Glory. "You never told dad or me very much about yourself, but I spent a lot of time sizing up your case. The Fannings and the Griswolds are different outfits altogether. That ain't much of a guess, either. You've got relatives, and I reckon they'd be mightily put out if you married the Castle Creek Cañon girl. I—I——" Glory's voice broke, but she fought down her rising emotion bravely. "I reckoned I was goin' to hurt you some," she went on, "but I seem to be hurtin' myself more. I'm goin' to take the ring and wear it, but for a keepsake—somethin' to remind me always of my Big Pard." She held out her hand. "You can put it on yourself," she finished, "if you'll agree to that understanding."

"You'll not change your mind, Glory?" begged Fanning. "After you're out in the world a while you will see this matter differently."

"If I do," she said, "you come around and I'll let you know."

She wore the ring back to the boarding house, and when she left him at the front gate she put her two hands on his shoulders and kissed him. "That's for the best pard a girl ever had," she said, then turned and hurried into the house.

Next morning, Fanning took Glory to the station, put her aboard the train, and a brown face wet with tears looked out from under the beflowered hat at him through the coach window. Then the train started, and Glory threw him a kiss—and was gone. Directly afterward, Fanning hired a riding horse and retraced his lonely course toward Castle Creek Cañon. A man was to look at his claim next day with a view to buying it. That night, Fanning planned to spend at the cabin on Oak Flats.

It was evening when he halted to water his horse at the three adobe houses known as Frog Tanks, and it was crowding nine o'clock when he came up the cañon and drew close to the oaks and the mouth of the gulch. He was in a pensive reverie from which he was startled by a report of firearms, rattling and reverberating between the

cañon walls. The horse gave a frightened leap that nearly threw Fanning from the saddle. He checked the restive animal with a firm hand and leaned forward to peer through the dark.

There was trouble among the oaks. Lurid flashes split the night, and singing lead was in the air. Familiarity with surroundings enabled Fanning to judge that the cabin was being attacked. From a window or door one smashing report after another answered the volleying from outside. Not a gleam showed in the cabin to draw the enemy's fire, although intermittent powder flashes offered chances for swift marksmanship.

It was all exceedingly fantastic to Fanning. Nations might be at war, and musketry cracking and big guns booming leagues and leagues from Castle Creek Cañon, but not since the days when the Indians were "up" had such a furore been staged among those peaceful hills. What did it mean?

Fanning spurred his horse close to the cañon wall, dismounted, passed the reins around the trunk of a paloverde, and skirmished toward the flats. Abruptly the firing ceased and a voice called: "You geeve up, Bodley! You come out pronto, or we burn the house. W'at you say?"

The answer from the cabin was in a smothered roar—a profane defiance of all "greasers" north or south of the border.

This crossfire of talk was illuminating to Fanning. He knew a man named Bodley; in fact, he had prospected with such a person for months through the Harqua Halas. This companionship had aroused in him a deep respect and liking for Bodley. That this man besieged was the same Bodley there was no doubt, now that his voice had helped to establish his identity. Fanning was surprised to run upon his old prospecting partner in such a dilemma. The firing was resumed as Fanning got into mental adjustment with the unexpected situation.

To leave Pop Bodley to perish in a burning cabin at the hands of Mexican foes was not to be considered for a minute by Fanning. There was a solid-framed, .45-caliber revolver in Fanning's saddlebag, and a whole box of ammunition. He went for the gun and dropped a handful of cartridges into his pocket; then he rushed the flats. "This way, men!" he yelled at the top of his voice, leading an imaginary host to a counter attack. "Three of you go around back of the cabin, the rest of you come with me!"

Napoleon used to talk of "two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage," a bravery that dares to the uttermost while sleep pulls at the eyes and drags on the nerves. The "Fighting Fannings" all had that brand of grit, and none of them in greater degree than Richard himself. He tried to make noise enough for a dozen. The revolver barked rapidly and emptied itself, and was replenished and barked again, throwing lead furiously, but at random. And the lone-handed, whirlwind charge bore results. The shooting of the attackers ceased, and the door of the cabin was hurled open with a clatter.

"Here's help!" whooped Bodley, a vague shadow against the lighter background of the cabin wall. "By the great horn spoon, here's help! Stop them greasers! Stop 'em!"

Halting the Mexicans was an impossibility. They could be heard scurrying into the cañon, and a moment later drifting up the cañon to a diminuendo of clattering hoofs. All sounds died away, and Fanning made for the cabin while raising a hail for Bodley: "Come back, Pop! You're out of that fix and had better let well enough alone."

Bodley, wildly anxious to effect a capture, had reached the edge of the

flats on his way up the cañon. Fanning's voice stopped him, and he returned to the cabin.

"Where's the possey-come-and-get-us?" he inquired.

Fanning laughed. "This is no *posse comitatus*, old friend," he answered. "It's just your old side partner of the Harqua Halas, dropping in on you at the right time."

"You, Dick!" cried the shadowy form, lurching forward and reaching out a hand in the dark. "Well, I'll swear! However did you know I was needin' help?"

"I didn't know it," Fanning answered, "until I came riding up the cañon a few minutes ago. Then your necessities burst upon me all at once."

"And there ain't nary man with ye?"

"No, Pop; I'm all alone."

Pop Bodley threw back his head and exploded a laugh. "Well, it's no more'n I might have expected of you, Dick," he commented, as soon as his mirth would allow him. "You sure arrived at the zoölogical moment, as the man says. Come on in and we'll light up."

"Wait till I get my horse and turn him into the corral," said Fanning, and started back down the cañon.

Five minutes later, he was inside the little home, now made desolate by the going of Old Peter and the absence of Glory. The loneliness of the place was tempered by the grizzled old veteran of the deserts, who sat by a table in the glow of a kerosene lamp.

Pop Bodley must have been sixty years old, but he was second-growth hickory. The winds of life could bend, but could not break him. He had been a prospector for forty years, and there seemed no reason why he should not be prospecting for forty more.

"Dick," he said, "close the door, then sit down and tell me something. Where's the folks belongin' to this place? It's important for me to know."

CHAPTER III.

WRAPPED IN THE COLORS.

FANNING closed the door and dropped the stout bar across it. Then he pushed a chair closer to the table and sat down. It seemed strange to him that Pop Bodley should have any business on hand other than that of looking for gold, and particularly business that had brought him to Griswold's. But there had always been something mysterious about the old man. Fanning remembered him, in the Harqua Halas prospecting, as given to moods of somber reflection.

There had been hours, now and then, when not so much as a syllable could be got out of him. Pressed by his partner as to the subject of his reflections, he would shrug, toss his hands, and answer laconically: "I'm jest a bit loco by spells, son, but don't you mind." For a space, Fanning sat studying his friend.

"I know your stampin' ground, when you ain't out lookin' for quartz," Bodley went on, "is right here in this cañon. You knowed Pete Griswold, too, and that girl of his. What's become of 'em?"

Fanning told him what had become of Old Peter and Glory. Bodley manifested deep interest, and proffered queries that brought every detail of Griswold's last day—the rummaging of the cabin, among other things, and the theft of the flag and the letter. Bodley became excited. "You seen that flag, Dick?" he asked.

"Once a year, on Glory's birthday, it was brought out and hung over the fireplace," said Fanning. "I can't remember seeing it the last time, but I saw it twice before Glory's last birthday."

"Listen!" continued Bodley tensely, leaning forward across the table. "Did it have three bullet holes in it—one through a star in the blue field, another

through a white strip near the top, and the third through a red stripe lower down? Did it?"

"Yes," returned Fanning. "I used to wonder about those bullet holes, but Old Peter wouldn't tell me about them, and Glory didn't know how they came to be in the flag. It was queer, Pop, the way Griswold displayed the flag on Glory's birthday and never at any other time."

"I wisht to thunder she'd found that letter!" Bodley sank back in his chair, and, with hands none too steady, filled and lighted an old brier pipe.

Fanning was curious. "How do you happen to know about those bullet holes in the flag, Pop?" he asked. "Did you ever happen in here on one of Glory's birthdays?"

"I ain't never been inside Griswold's cabin afore," the old man declared, "but I'll gamble a blue stack I seen that flag a lot, more'n twenty year back. Aye, and I seen them holes put into it." He drew a long, rasping breath. "From the time I was forty," he went on, "I been runnin' out that Star-Spangled trail; and now, by the jumpin' horn toads, I'm gittin' nigh the end of it."

He smoked in silence for a few minutes, then got up, unbarred the door, and stepped out into the night. He returned presently, secured the door as it had been, and resumed his seat by the table. "They're plumb gone, them greasers," he remarked; "skeered out like a lot of onnery jack rabbits. I'd give a heap to know if Juan of the Scar was with 'em. That Juan of the Scar is bad medicine, Dick, *muy malo* clean through."

"Who is he?"

Bodley did not answer the question directly. "Twenty year ago," he said reminiscently, "a white man didn't take his life in his hands every time he strayed south of the Rio Grande. I prospected in northern Mexico, and off and on I'd come back acrost the line to Tres Alamos Ranch, in Mesilla Valley, New Mexico. Gordon Travis owned the ranch, and he was a regular white man. Him and me hit it off fine. Travis had soldiered in his early days, and he loved that red-white-and-blue flag more'n I can tell. Oncet I got hooked up with a bunch of doughboys that was chasin' Geronimo, and we flushed a bunch of hostiles and held 'em from cover while waitin' for reënforcements to come up. I called my old rifle 'E Pluribus Gittum,' and every time she spoke it meant a skelp. Allers after that scrimmage I was knowed as 'E Pluribus Bodley,' my initials bein' 'E. P.' for Edgar Pennyworth, which sort of chinked in with 'E Pluribus.'

"Well," Bodley went on, "it was that fool nickname that made a hit with Gordon Travis and warmed him up to me. Oh, yes, we sure got along fine. Whenever I put in at the Tres Alamos, the best Travis had was none too good for E Pluribus Bodley. That's where I got to know little Edna Travis, the sunniest crowin' youngster a man about ever seen. Mujercita I called her. Mujercita, bless her baby eyes and her funnin' baby talk! Dick, they's been a hurt in me ever since I seen her last, kerried off by Juan of the Scar, smothered in the flag, and me a-layin' flat on my back with a bullet in my thigh."

The old somber mood came over Bodley as he sat by the table, the yellow lamplight falling over his grizzled, sun-bitten face and the iron-gray of his tangled hair and beard. Fanning's curiosity had grown. He was keen to hear more, and impatient of the old man's silence. He waited for the rest with what grace he could, keeping his peace, knowing well that the surest way to stop the flowing narrative was to prod Pop Bodley with questions.

The old man shook himself clear of his reflections presently. "Right in front of the Tres Alamos ranch house," he resumed, "was a flagstaff. Every

mornin' at sunrise the Stars and Stripes was hauled to the top of the staff, while Gordon Travis and everybody else that happened to be around uncovered. And every night at sunset the flag was hauled down ag'in. This was a regular proceedin'.

"Well, to saw this off short, Travis had a row with his greasers, over their pay, or a bunch of stock that had been run off or somethin'—I disremember now just what the cause was. Greasers don't need much excuse to cut up rough—leastways, greasers like Juan of the Scar and his compadre, Black Tadeo. Juan and Tadeo was both trouble makers. Old Porfirio Diaz run 'em out of Mexico for bein' bandits and insurrectos, and they crossed the border and was took on by Travis as vaqueros. Them two was sure hard to get along with, and Travis was fiery and wouldn't put up with a lot. The worst of it was, Juan had all the other greasers on the ranch crawlin' to him and feedin' out of his hand, as the man says. The row, as it comes back to me, started with Juan of the Scar, along about sunset, when Old Glory was about to be lowered.

"I had been loafin' for a month about the ranch, figgerin' on pullin' out with my burros, but jest hangin' on to fool away time with Mujercita. It was allers hard for me to git away from them diggin's, Dick. Queer how a little un like Mujercita could tangle her baby hands in the heartstrings of an old Hassayamper that-a-way. I ain't explainin' a thing, but jest tellin' you.

"Well, there Travis and me was, with our hats off, and Travis jest fixin' to undo the flag halyards. Then Juan of the Scar came up, ugly over the dispute he had had with Travis, and wouldn't take off his high-crowned sombrero. Travis told him to uncover or get off the ranch and stay off. Juan whipped out a gun. I started to interfere, thinkin' he was layin' to take a shot at Travis. That wasn't the idee, though. Juan could shoot, I'm tellin' you flat. He up with the gun afore you could bat an eye and emptied it at the flag. And if he didn't shoot the rope in two and drop the flag at the foot of the pole, I'm an Injun! Travis let out a war whoop and grabbed the flag out of the sand. There was three bullet holes in it, like I told you, and Travis couldn't have took it harder if Juan had shot at him instead of Old Glory. He dropped the flag and jumped at Juan. Right there a heap of things began to happen.

"That shootin' of Juan's was a signal for trouble to commence poppin'. Greaser ranch hands rushed from every direction, shooters bangin' to beat Fourth of July. Juan pulled another gun and give Travis a shot that dropped him. I didn't have old E Pluribus Gittum by me, but I ducked for the place where I had my derringers. About two jumps, and Black Tadeo had me on the ground with a crippled right leg.

"The riot was on then, full blast. I jest had to lay there and squirm and watch it all. The ranch buildin's was fired, and while they was burnin', Juan rushed out of the smoke with Mujercita in his arms. The little girl was scared and cryin'. She held out her arms to me—and I'd 'a' given my life for jest ten minutes with a couple of good feet under me. Juan grabbed up the flag and smothered the kid in it, then climbed his caballo and stampeded. I was makin' a scene, so mad with it all I was plumb crazy, when Black Tadeo fetched me a crack on the head that made me forget my troubles.

"When I woke up, there was people around—white people, who'd seen the smoke of the ranch buildin's and forked their cayuses pronto and hustled for Tres Alamos. They got there too late. The greasers was gone, and good old Gordon Travis had raised Old Glory for the last time, and Mujercita couldn't be found. Mrs. Travis had saved her-

self, after the baby had been snatched from her arms, by hidin' in a corral. She was half dead with fear and grief, and in less'n a year she had taken the Long Trail to find her husband. So, as I was sayin', the last I seen of Mujercita was in the arms of Juan of the Scar, wrapped in the flag and ridin' into kentry unknown."

Pop Bodley drew a hand across his eyes and cleared his throat. "The sight of that baby," he added, "holdin' out her arms to me and cryin' as if her heart was broken, has been with me for twenty year. Seems like she's been callin' always across the years, Dick, for Pop to help her, to save her. Up to now I haven't been able to do a thing." The old man drew a long breath and stared absently at the fireless bowl of his brier.

"The little girl was the daughter of Gordon Travis?" asked Fanning huskily, drawing marvelous conclusions and building up wondrous theories from what he had heard.

"No," said Bodley. "She was the daughter of Gordon Travis' brother, Captain Raoul Travis, of the army. The captain's wife had died, and he had left Mujercita with his brother while he was soldierin'. The captain's a colonel now, and he's somewhere on the Pacific coast. But there's more, Dick." Bodley knocked the ashes cut of his pipe, filled and lighted it again, and puffed for a while reflectively. "Everybody in New Mexico was huntin' for the little girl. Cap'n Travis got a furlough and gave his time to the search. Rewards was offered and all that. No go. I did considerable huntin' myself. When everybody else give up, I continued to hang on. And I've hung on for twenty year, kind of dogged and hopelesslike, and for the last five year I've clamped my teeth shut on the subject of Mujercita and Juan of the Scar. But jest as plain as ever, that little un has been holdin' out her arms to me. It's kept me goin' and searchin' and hopin'.

"Then, two weeks ago, I run onto Black Tadeo in Tucson. He'd got his gruel in a knife fight with another greaser and was breathin' his life out in a hospital. The papers had an account of it, callin' Black Tadeo by the name of Tadeo Garcia. The Tadeo part of the name hooked my attention, and I went to the hospital on a chance. It was him, all right. If I'd had any doubts, after all the years that had passed, he settled 'em by admittin' who he was.

"Tadeo told me that he and Juan had brought Mujercita into Arizona and left her, flag and all, in a shack in Castle Creek Cañon—jest dropped her in the place when nobody was to home. He allowed the man who owned the shack where Mujercita was left was Brisco, or Griscom—it had been a long while, and names like that git blurred by time. I thought right off of your friends here, the Griswolds, and started from Tucson.

"It was fallin' dark when I got to these flats. There wasn't no one in the cabin, and the door was barred inside. I got a winder open, climbed in, and had jest lit the lamp when some un pounded on the door and ordered me to open up. It was a greaser, and I got suspicious on the spot. Purty soon the guns began to go off, and there was the fight which you interrupted with your purtended reënforcements. I reckoned Juan of the Scar knowed I was after Mujercita, and had a reason for keepin' her away from me. Kind of far-fetched, I grant ye, to think he'd be holdin' a grudge for all this time, but how else was I to explain an attack like that by greasers? Arter what you tell me about Griswold's takin'-off and the stealin' of the flag and the letter, the the'ry about Juan don't look so plumb foolish."

"Did Black Tadeo tell you anything

about Juan of the Scar?" asked Fanning.

"Tadeo thought Juan had been shot for a rebel in Mexico, but he didn't know anythin' definite."

"You'd know Juan if you saw him?"

"Time couldn't change that greaser so he'd fool me," Bodley declared. "He's got a scar across his left forehead and down across his left cheek clear to the chin. If I ever see him I'll know him." The old man's face darkened ominously. "And if I ever see him, I'll make him pay for what he done to Gordon Travis and to Mujercita. That shot goes as it lays, Dick."

Fanning got out of his chair and walked the floor. This was wonderful news about Glory, and as amazing as it was wonderful. She was not the daughter of Peter Griswold, after all! That missing letter of Peter's undoubtedly contained a revelation matching that just made by Bodley.

Fanning halted in front of the old prospector. "Glory is in Needles," he said, "and she can be found. It is right that we should go to her as soon as we can, Pop, and tell her about this."

"She's a woman grown now, I reckon," mused Bodley. "Hasn't she got ary idee at all who she really is?"

"No. She would have told me about it if she had. Griswold has never breathed a whisper to Glory. She thinks Peter Griswold was really her father."

"That's kind of low down in Griswold, seems like. I can sabe, though, how he'd want to claim Mujercita for his own, arter seein' her as I seen her at the Tres Alamos. You're keen to help me run out this trail, Dick?"

"I insist on helping you, Bodley. Glory needs friends, and we can help her to friends she never dreamed she has. Her father is a colonel, you say?"

"Aye, and he comes of the best stock in the country. The Travises are fine people, Dick. This Glory girl is comin' into the aristocracy with colors flyin'. When can you start for Needles?"

"To-morrow, if the man who's to buy my claim presents himself according to agreement. If he doesn't show up, then the claim can wait till I get back from Needles. This business of Glory's is something that cannot wait. It must be attended to without delay."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAIL TREACHEROUS.

FANNING'S desire to be helpful to Glory, in bringing about the full realization of new possibilities and hopes, was no stronger than that of Bodley himself. The motives of the two were rooted in different angles of the situation. Fanning was in love with the girl, and looked to the future; Bodley's promptings were entangled with the distant past and inspired by a vision of baby arms reaching out to him across the years. Each brought a zeal to the work ahead which would suffer no bar or hindrance.

On the morning following, the man arrived to look over Fanning's claim, and the deal was closed. Hardly was this matter disposed of when an agent of Cargill's presented himself and took over all the Griswold holdings, including the cabin and the plot of ground on the flats.

Bodley owned two burros and a saddle horse. The pack animals were left with Randall, and on Bodley's return to the cañon they were to be claimed, along with Crack o' Doom. Fanning, having no further use for the faithful burro, had insured his comfortable future by giving him outright to Bodley. Early in the afternoon the prospectors mounted and began their sixty-mile journey to Phoenix. They reached town in the wee sma' hours of the night. At eight o'clock they caught the train for Ash Fork en route to Needles, the second day after Glory had started.

They were in Needles that night, too late to go looking for Mrs. Holcomb. Early next day, however, they began a search that ended in consternation and disappointment. Mrs. Holcomb had moved from Needles two months before, going to the desert town of Goffs with the intention of buying a restaurant there and catering to tourists who traveled the trail between Barstow and Needles. The house in which Mrs. Holcomb had lived was now occupied by a man employed by the railroad. The railroad man's wife informed the prospectors that Glory had called, inquired about her aunt, and expressed her determination to go on to Goffs by first train.

For some reason, Fanning was vaguely uneasy over this turn of events. Rather than wait for a train to take himself and Bodley to the desert town, he avoided delay by hiring an automobile and starting at once to overtake Glory.

In the afternoon he and Bodley reached Goffs. Here they experienced another disappointment and found real grounds for alarm. They found the restaurant which Mrs. Holcomb had intended to buy, and there disturbing information was given by the proprietor, a man named Prentiss. Mrs. Holcomb, after personally considering the situation at Goffs, had decided not to engage in the restaurant business in the place, but had gone on to Barstow. She had made this move apparently very soon after leaving Needles.

"Has there been any one here inquiring for Mrs. Holcomb within the last day or two?" Fanning asked.

"There was a young woman here about ten this morning," Prentiss answered. "She said that Mrs. Holcomb was her aunt and that she had come from Needles looking for her."

"Is she still in Goffs?" Fanning went on eagerly.

Prentiss shook his head. "No, she went right on to Barstow."

"What train did she take, neighbor?" Bodley inquired.

"She didn't take the train. You see, she'd have had to wait quite a spell if she'd done that, and she was in a hurry to be moving on. She went by automobile."

Fanning and Bodley exchanged perplexed glances. "However did she come to do that?" Bodley asked.

"A couple of tourists—a man and his wife—happened in while the girl was talking to me. They heard what she said, and seemed to be right accommodating. Their automobile was out in front and they were on their way to Barstow. They invited the girl to ride with them and she went along."

"What was the name of the man?" queried Fanning.

"He didn't say," returned Prentiss. "They had a big, seven-passenger car, though, and looked like they were well to do. Just touring, I guess. A lot of machines are coming and going through the desert at this time of year. The man was sort of dark and had a scar on his face."

Fanning's hands clenched convulsively. Bodley's face grew dark. "A scar like this?" the old man asked, tracing lines on his face with his forefinger. There was a glitter in his eyes as he leaned toward Prentiss and hung breathlessly on his answer.

"You've nicked it," said Prentiss.

"What time did the car leave here?" went on Fanning, his voice none too steady.

"Not much after ten."

"And it took the Barstow Road?"

The restaurant keeper seemed surprised at the question. "Why, sure," he said; "they were all for Barstow and there was only one trail they could take."

Bodley took Fanning's arm and drew him out of the place. "That two-faced

greaser has put one over on us, Dick!" he growled wrathfully. "There's somethin' goin' on that we can't sabe. What happened to Griswold, the missin' letter and flag, the attempt that was made to 'git' me at the flats, and now this underhand business at Goffs! It's all part of a crooked scheme, if I'm any prophet."

"We'll keep this car and go on to Barstow," said Fanning. "Our business is to find this Juan of the Scar and make sure no harm comes to Glory. What's going on we can't understand, but we'll get to the bottom of it!" His lean jaws closed with a snap and he stepped out into the road to speak with the driver of the machine that had brought them from Needles.

The driver, who was being well paid for his time and his car, had no objections to continuing the journey to Barstow, "or to Seattle," he declared, if that was where Fanning and Bodley wanted to go.

The tank was filled to the brim with gasoline, the radiator with water, and the engine with oil. "The time to travel these deserts is after sundown," said the driver; "the engine drinks less, and it's a lot more comfortable for the people that's travelin'. In two hours it'll be dark."

"Make your old gasoline wagon hum, friend," urged Bodley; "that's all we want of you."

The machine was driven as fast as possible, taking into consideration the nature of the road. Bodley sat in front with the driver, spurring him constantly to a faster pace. Fanning was in the tonneau, his thoughts circling about Glory and the unforeseen difficulties she had encountered. He blamed himself for not having gone with her and stayed with her until she had been left safely in the care of Mrs. Holcomb. Had he done that, of course, he would not have met Bodley at the flats and would not have learned of the brighter prospects that had dawned for the girl. But his mind was concerning itself with Glory's safety and was filled with forebodings.

Something at the roadside caught his eye, and he jumped to his feet excitedly. "Stop!" he cried tensely.

"What's to pay, Dick?" asked Bodley, as the car slowed to a halt.

"We just passed something that lay by the trail," Fanning answered, as he opened the tonneau door and leaped out.

Bodley also got down from the car and followed Fanning back along the road. The sun, like a fiery ball, was half below the dark hills in the west. Sufficient daylight was left for Fanning's discovery.

Fanning had picked up a hat, a wide-brimmed hat twined with vivid flowers. He was surveying it with startled eyes as his friend came up and joined him. "That's nothin' to stop for when we're in a tearin' hurry," the old man complained. "Some woman must 'a' lost it while goin' over the trail."

"It happens to be the hat Glory was wearing when she left Phoenix," said Fanning.

Bodley became interested in the clew at once. "How do you reckon it got away from her, Dick?" he inquired. "Mebby the girl found out there was some skulduggery afoot and tried to escape from the machine! And mebby the greasers cut up rough with her and she lost the hat off in the fracas." This theory filled the old man with wrath, and he gripped his big hands and swore furiously as a relief to his surcharged feelings.

Fanning had another idea, however. He began examining the ground beside the trail and found a point where heavy, rubber-tired wheels had left the road and rolled directly into the desert. He called Bodley. The latter, giving over his tirade against all Mexicans in general and Juan of the Scar in particular, hurried to Fanning's side. "That hat

of Glory's was not dropped by accident, but by design," said Fanning. "The Mexican turned his car out of the trail right here. The hat was left to attract attention to the fact, Pop."

Bodley rubbed his forehead with one gnarled hand. "You reckon Mujercita was wise enough for that, Dick?" he queried.

"Glory is a brave girl and a clever one," asserted Fanning. "Finding that she was in the hands of an enemy, she decided to leave a clew as to the way Juan was taking her."

"How did she reckon you and me would be trailin' the greaser?"

"I don't believe she dreamed of such a thing, unless Juan or his wife said something to suggest it. She just hoped some one would discover she had not reached Barstow and would come looking for her. It was her way to do everything she could to help the searchers. Before it gets too dark, Pop, we must follow the tracks of Juan's machine."

"Keno, Dick!" exclaimed the old man. "Jest wait till I raid my war bag for my two guns. I'm goin' to need 'em if I come within shootin' distance of that greaser!"

Fanning returned to the car with Bodley, left Glory's hat in the tonneau, and removed the revolver from his suit case. Bodley would not be the only one to shoot if they overhauled the other machine and Glory's safety called for a fight.

"We want to follow a car that left the trail and started across the desert," said Fanning to the driver of their automobile. "The trail is a hard one and we'll have to run it out on foot. You stay here and wait for us. I don't know how long we'll be away, but if we're not back before dark, switch on your headlights and leave them burning as a guide for us in getting back to the trail."

"What you say goes," answered the driver. "You men don't want to get lost, though. A couple of fellows got stalled in this desert a few months ago and left their machine to go huntin' for water. When they were found, one of 'em was dead and the other only pulled through by a scratch. Come dark, I'll keep the headlights going. Don't you get so far away you can't see 'em—that's my advice."

Fanning and Bodley started back to pick up the tracks left by the Mexican's car. Their driver ran after them and gave them a pocket flash light.

"That may come handy," said he. "If you fail to locate me when you come back, shoot off a revolver occasionally. I'll be listening, and like enough it will help me to find you if you lose your bearings."

"Son," remarked Bodley, "I'm a reg'lar desert rat. For forty years I've roamed the mountains and mesas, and I'll make anybody a present of a gold mine who'll lose me in the desert kentry. Dick, here, ain't no tenderfoot, neither. You'll see us back at the trail when we're ready to come. If you hear any shootin', make up your mind that there's a ruction goin' on, not that we're lost."

Following the tracks of the machine proved even more difficult than Fanning had imagined. The sun had set and shadows were flying across the desert. The failing daylight was the worst handicap in the trailing. The two prospectors pushed on and on, however, and finally made use of the flash light. A ridgelike swell of the sandy plain had carried them out of sight of the headlights of their machine. A short time after they had lost sight of the far-flung rays of the lamps, the electric torch failed them.

"I reckon we're up ag'inst it right," grumbled Bodley. "We could foller if we could see, but from now on we're only wastin' time in the dark. If the moon 'u'd come up it would help, but

not a whole lot. I allow, Dick, we'd better go back to our car and camp till mornin'."

"I think I see something ahead," Fanning answered. "It may be no more than a patch of cactus or greasewood, but we'd better investigate. I don't want to delay this hunt until morning if we can possibly go through with it to-night."

"No more do I," returned Bodley. "Glory ain't safe a minute in the hands of that treacherous greaser."

Fanning moved on through the starlit gloom, Bodley following close at his heels. The object Fanning had seen, like a vague shadow, proved to be an automobile, deserted and without a light showing. It was the Mexican's car, without a doubt, and left at a point where the going had proved too rough for farther progress.

The question that immediately offered itself was what had become of the Mexican and his wife and Glory. The hills to the west bulked blackly against the horizon. On the right of the car, faintly distinguishable, was a swale between two sandy mounds. Fanning led the way into the swale, passed a turn in it, and came to a startled halt. There was a gleam in the darkness of the swale—the gleam of a lamp shining through an uncurtained window.

"Some hombre's claim shanty," muttered Bodley. "Folks do take up claims in this kentry oncet in a while. Them two greasers must be there, Dick, and Mujercita must be with 'em. Let's hurry on. Be first with your gun if t'other side starts the fireworks."

The friends moved on cautiously. The shanty was small and flimsily constructed. There was talk going on inside, talk in masculine voices that indicated the presence of several men besides Juan. Revolvers in hand, Fanning and Bodley crept to the door of the shack. Before Fanning could stop him, Bodley had flung open the door.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE GRIM DESERT.

FANNING saw at once that Bodley had been too impetuous. In his zeal to be of aid to Glory Griswold, he had proceeded rashly and thought less of discretion than of springing a surprise. Just within the door of the claim shanty the two were greeted by an instant order of "Hands up!" and found themselves looking into the threatening muzzles of two revolvers. Although in hand, their own weapons were for the moment useless.

"Well, sufferin' catamounts!" muttered Bodley, considerably dashed, lifting his arms above his head.

Fanning was equally prompt in obeying the order of the spokesman. There were seven men in the room, although only two of them seemed to be armed. Fanning's eyes swerved from man to man in quick appraisal of the menace to himself and his companion. There was an odd assortment of characters gathered in the one room of that desert shack.

They were sitting on empty boxes and chairs. There were swarthy men and men of lighter complexion; men in the rough clothing of laborers, and others neatly clad for business and the city; but not one had an American face, so far as Fanning could judge. All were foreign.

This company was grouped in a half circle, facing a bench on which lay a clutter of papers. A man said something in a language Fanning could not understand. At once a middle-aged woman, wearing a motor hat and long dust coat, stepped through the half circle and threw a blanket over the bench and the papers. Fanning's glance followed the woman as she retreated to the place from whence she came—a

chair in one corner beside a table with a lighted lamp. On the other side of the table, and perhaps ten feet from it, sat a second woman—Glory.

One remarkable thing about the mountain girl was the command she had of her nerves. She must have been surprised at this undreamed-of appearance of Fanning, but she did not show it. She met his eyes calmly, and in the very calmness of her look there was a message for Fanning, but he could not read its meaning.

Glory seemed none the worse for her recent experiences. There was a red bandanna handkerchief knotted about the slim, brown column of her throat —a handkerchief, no doubt, that the girl had used as a protection from the desert dust. As she peered at Fanning, she lifted her hands, untied the handkerchief, shook it out, and spread it in her lap. A minute later, absently as it seemed, Glory's right hand crept under the spread kerchief. No attention was paid to the girl by the seven men or the woman in the dust coat. They had eyes for no one just then but Fanning and Bodley.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said the man who had commanded the hands of the newcomers to be raised. His face was square-jawed and heavy, and he wore a bristling mustache turned up at the ends. The English was faultless, but with an alien intonation. "What is your business here, gentlemen?"

"My business is to massacre that coyote with the scarred face!" said Bodley savagely, his eyes on one who could have been no other than Juan of the Scar.

Fanning withdrew his gaze from Glory and fixed it on the treacherous Juan. He saw a man beyond middle age, swarthy, and with cruel, calculating, black eyes.

"*Por Dios!*" laughed Juan. "E Pluribus Bodley is on the wrong side of the argument. He was always a fiery gringo. How is the hip? Tadeo's bullet left you lame, no?"

Bodley eased his feelings like a prospector who has suffered a kick from a vicious burro. He added, more rationally: "If I had my chance, greaser, I'd show you how lame the shot left me. What's the idee of runnin' off Miss Glory Griswold?"

"Keep your hands up!" snapped the man with the bristling mustache, noting an unsteadiness in the elbows of the lifted arms. "There'll be shooting if you try any tricks."

"Miss Glory Griswold, Señor Bodley," returned Juan, "is a guest. The señora will see that she has what comforts there are in this poor place. But there will be no comforts for you and the other gringo. You might have been spared this had you been less warlike in Castle Creek Cañon some nights ago."

"I reckoned you was back of that," said Bodley, looking shiftily from left to right for some royal road out of the forlorn situation.

"Pelz, step out and take their weapons," commanded the captain of the seven, addressing the man who held the other revolver.

The man moved toward Fanning. A silence fell over those in the shanty. Pelz was just reaching for Fanning's gun when a weapon exploded in the corner of the room. The lamp on the table was shivered with a crash. Darkness fell instantly, followed by a scream from the señora: "The señorita did that! *Madre de*——"

Her voice was drowned in a perfect bedlam of noises—a shuffling of feet, an overturning of chairs and boxes, sharp orders, hoarse oaths, and a smash and rattle of broken glass as if a chair had cleared a window out of its frame.

"Get clear of 'em, Dick!" came the voice of Glory, in a shrill pitch. "Meet me at the mouth of the swale!"

Fanning and Bodley heard that clear

call and were guided by it. Both were busy. Fanning had seized Pelz and was using him as a shield. He could not see Bodley, but judged that he was busy with his clubbed revolvers.

"Uno!" the old man was chanting, as a dull impact as of a blow came to Fanning's ears. Then *"Dos!"* and *"Tres!"* the hoarse voice clamored, with a jubilant note. "Where are ye, Juan of the Scar? I been owin' ye somethin' for twenty year and here's my first chance to break even!"

"The door, Pop!" shouted Fanning. "The door! Glory's clear of the house and needs us!"

"Comin', son; right after you!"

Fanning fell backward through the door behind him, locked with the squirming Pelz. When he had freed himself of the man and gained his feet, Bodley was at his side.

"Get them, and the girl!" yelled the familiar voice of the captain of the gang. "You know what it means to us!"

"Best foot foremost, Dick!" cried Bodley. "This has got to be a runnin' fight."

They delivered a broadside and then whirled and raced. Shots whined around them, or stung the earth at their feet; but the night, heavy and black in the swale, favored them. They rounded the turn of the shallow gash, unscathed.

"Glory!" called Fanning.

"Here!" answered the girl's voice. "Don't stop to shoot—run! It's neck or nothin', Dick!" She bounded to his side and seized his arms. "We've got to run, Dick!" she insisted breathlessly.

"Are you coming, Bodley?" Fanning called.

"Like a skeered coyote makin' for home and mother," was Bodley's answer from close at hand. "I'm hatin' myself some for doin' it, but we got to think of the girl."

They bounded out of the swale and into the clearer light of the stars. Behind them, in frantic pursuit, straggled the seven—or as many of the seven as were able to take part in the chase.

"Nicked in the wing!" panted Bodley. "Lucky it wasn't a leg or a foot. Keep the girl in front of you, son."

Fanning had been trying to do that, and at some cost to the speed of their flight, but Glory had rebelled. "I ain't one of the faintin' kind, Dick," she protested. "You ought to know by now. Wait a second!"

They were charging past Juan's automobile. Glory halted by the machine, bent down, and fired a shot. A hiss of escaping air followed the bullet. She went to another wheel, fired again, and then turned and raced on.

"They'll not use that automobile for a while," she observed. "How'd you get here, Dick? What brought you, and how far have we got to go?"

"We came in a machine," Fanning answered, "and it's in the trail."

"Are we goin' right to reach the trail?"

"Right as a die," put in Bodley. "We'll see the lights as soon's we top the swell ahead."

The old man's spirit was young, but his sixty years dragged at his feet. He was laboring, and the wild pace was beginning to tell on him.

"Are you badly hurt, Pop?" Fanning inquired solicitously.

"Nothin' to mention," he answered, with a gasp. "But time has put some kinks in my old legs. You go on; I'll muddle through somehow."

"No," declared Glory, "we stay or go on together. Dick, we'll get on each side of him."

Bodley's protests fell on deaf ears. Fanning and the girl helped him by an arm on either side, and he was dragged at a faster pace. A look into the shadows behind showed Fanning that not so many were following them. A few of the pursuers had gone to

Juan's automobile and were trying to get the crippled machine into the chase. Glory's resourcefulness was working out to the great advantage of herself and her friends..

There was no more shooting now. Pursued and pursuers had settled down to a test of endurance. Glory, Fanning, and Bodley crossed the rising ground, and the streaming headlights of their car broke on their eyes in a blur of light.

Bodley was hanging heavily and more heavily in the support of the girl and Fanning. The latter had a bullet or two left in his revolver, and he lifted the weapon and fired. The light in the trail changed from a single mass of light into two gleaming eyes. "Good for our driver!" said Fanning. "He's coming toward us with the car."

A hundred feet farther, and they met the machine. "Some one chasin' you?" asked the driver, as Bodley was lifted and dropped in the tonneau.

"Do you think we're doin' this foot race on a bet?" asked Bodley in a half whisper. "Git us out of here, man, quicker'n blazes!"

On his knees in the car, he went into action over the tonneau door. He had cartridges left, and his right arm was usable.

"I'm hoping they won't put a bullet in the engine," remarked the driver, bending to the wheel and opening the throttle.

The pursuers, realizing that their intended prey was getting clear of them, fired several shots. A hole or two must have been torn in the car's top, and one bullet struck the side and glanced into space. The motor and the tires escaped, however, and the passengers—excepting Bodley's "nicked" arm—remained unscathed.

Over the rough surface of the desert the driver forced the machine at a wild clip. The car rolled and bumped as it negotiated the uneven ground. The swaying and lunging, however, lasted for only a few minutes. The machine held together and kept in working order, and when it finally turned into the trail and found easier going, all those aboard drew long breaths of relief.

"We're headed back toward Goffs," remarked the driver, "but we'll point for Barstow if you think it's safe."

"Never mind Barstow now," said Fanning; "Goffs will do." He was in the seat beside the driver, and Glory was in the tonneau with Bodley. "We'll have to look at Bodley's arm," Fanning went on. "I think it's all right to stop now."

"Never mind stopping," called Bodley. "Mujercita has tied up the arm, Dick. Say," he added joyfully, "we done it, didn't we?"

Fanning laughed. He could enjoy the situation now that Glory was with them.

"If Glory hadn't helped us," he said, "we'd not have come out of it so well. You had a handkerchief spread out on your lap, Little Pard," he added, "and there was a revolver in your hand under the handkerchief?"

"An automatic, Dick," the girl answered. "They didn't think I was armed, and all along I was only waitin' for a chance to use the gun. When I saw you come into the shack I could hardly believe my eyes. How did you know I was in trouble?"

"Bodley knew trouble was to be expected from the Mexican with the scarred face," Fanning returned, "and we started right after you when we learned he and his wife had picked you up at Goffs."

"How did you know I had come to Goffs? Why were you two lookin' for me?"

"There's more to all that, Glory, than we can tell you at this time. By the way, Bodley is an old friend of yours. Do you remember him?"

Glory was painfully mystified. "I

can't remember ever havin' seen Bodley before, Dick," she said, "although I remember hearin' you speak of him as a partner in your prospectin'. When did you and me ever meet?" she inquired of the old man.

"More'n twenty year ago," Bodley answered. "It ain't in reason you'd remember, I suppose, but ain't that name Mujercita got a sort of familiar ring in your ears?"

"No," said Glory.

The old man heaved a sigh. "Twenty year makes a heap of changes in young folks," he observed. "Mebby, though, when you see me in daylight you'll sort o' remember where you seen this old rawhide, back around the beginnin' of your life. I'm here to do somethin' big for you, Mujercita. She's due for a big surprise, eh, Dick?"

CHAPTER VI.

A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES.

IN the bare little parlor of Craddock's Wayside Tavern, at Goffs, a momentous interview took place that evening. Glory, Fanning, and Bodley had the room to themselves. The old prospector, refusing to see a physician, had bathed his injured arm with snake oil, a bottle of which he always carried with him. The injury was not serious, as Fanning was convinced by an examination. Bodley made light of it, declared that he was "feelin' first chop," and sat back in his chair and smoked in comfort. Glory was eager to learn of the big surprise Fanning and Bodley had in store for her, but the old man insisted on hearing her experiences before the more important subject was broached.

"You know about all that I can tell you," said Glory. "Aunt Hesther wasn't in Needles, so I came to this place. She wasn't here, either, and I was figgerin' on taking the next train for Barstow when that man you call Juan offered to give me a lift in his automobile. I reckoned it was all right to go with him and his wife, but the machine wasn't more'n two miles out of Goffs before I guessed I'd made a mistake. It was just a feelin' somewhere inside me—a hunch; what my Big Pard calls a premonition. I've been used to premonitions like that all my life. When things don't go right, the idea of trouble ahead grabs hold of me, somehow, and I can't rest easy. I was on the back seat with the señora, and all at once I called to the greaser to stop the car, and said I reckoned I'd get out and go back to Goffs.

"Well, that was plumb foolish," Glory went on. "After I'd made the break I was put out with myself. All I'd done was to tip my hand that I was suspicious, and without helpin' the case none. If I'd insisted on leavin' the car, out there in the desert, I'd have had a show-down with Juan and Mrs. Juan right off, and the chances was two to one ag'inst me. The señora looked daggers, and Juan faced around in the front seat and wanted to know what had come over me all of a sudden. I was cornered, but I crawled out of it as best I could by explainin' that I hadn't got my aunt's address in Barstow from the restaurant keeper, and opined I'd better go back for it. That was a lame excuse, but I was sort of dazed and worried and not at my best. 'Oh, we'll look out for you,' says Juan. I thanked him, real grateful, and leaned in my corner of the seat and pretended to be in a doze. Out from under the brim of my hat, though, I could see Mrs. Juan watchin' me like a cat. By and by she got sleepy herself.

"Mebby I could have dropped out of the car without her or her husband knowin' a thing about it. That move came to me, but I decided ag'inst it. If it failed, the two with me might find out about the little gun I had in my pocket. It would be just as well, I told

myself, to keep the gun for a better chance. Pretty soon we turned out of the trail and headed right into the desert. That hunch of mine was proved up on, right off. I dropped my hat out of the car. I can't say I hated to part with that millinery, though it did cost eight dollars and four bits at Madame Tingley's in Phoenix."

Glory sighed, took the recovered hat on her knee, and surveyed it none too fondly. "But I'm obliged to you and Bodley, Dick," she went on, "for takin' such good care of it for me. When I dropped it I hadn't the least notion you'd be the ones to pick it up. I was takin' a long chance of bein' missed in Barstow, and havin' my aunt come huntin' for me. A mighty slim chance, but I risked eight dollars and four bits on it.

"'Where's your hat?' says Mrs. Juan, after we'd been shook up on the desert for a spell and the car had come to a stop.

"'My goodness!' I says, like I was just waking up. 'Say,' I says, 'I must have lost that hat over the side while I was dozin'. We've got to go right straight back and look for it.'

"They wouldn't do that, though, and I knew all along they wouldn't. I was bluffing, just to keep them from thinking I had lost the hat on purpose. There were only us three in that desert shack when we first got there. Durin' the afternoon, though, more men began arrivin' by ones and twos. Mrs. Juan had told me that I wasn't going on to Barstow for quite a while. She didn't tell me why, but just said I wasn't to worry or make any trouble. It seemed queer, all those men dropping in there. I gathered from what was said that they came by roundabout ways, and not through Goffs or by the trail. Each man had a number and all the others called him by it. All had papers, but none of 'em gave up the papers until Number One—the big man with the mustache—happened along, considerable after dark.

"The whole crowd seemed glad to find me in the shack. Juan was Number Three and everybody shook hands with him and said luck had helped him to pull off a mighty important piece of work. I tried hard to sabe what was goin' on, but the men talked in such a guarded way it wasn't possible to catch their drift. After shakin' out the talk, there was hardly a trace of 'color' left in the pan. There wasn't any doubt, though, about its being a put-up job to get me to the shack and keep me there. Number One hadn't been in the place fifteen minutes, Dick, when you and Bodley showed up. I shot the lamp off the table and broke out a window with a chair. No one tried to stop me, in the dark—you and Bodley were grabbing the heft of the attention. That's about all," Glory finished.

"I'm stumped to figger what-all's goin' on," remarked Bodley. "What happened to Mujercita is all mixed up with what happened in Castle Creek Cañon. That crowd of seven, sneakin' into that desert shanty with papers, has sure got me guessin' a lot."

Fanning shook his head in perplexity over the problem. "What those men are doing is a mystery," he remarked; "but we have blocked their plans so far as Glory is concerned. Tell her about what took place at Gordon Travis' ranch twenty years ago, Pop."

The old man went over that for the benefit of the wondering Glory, just as he had told the story to Fanning. The girl's face was a study as she listened. "You're tryin' to make out," she said, when Bodley had finished, "that I ain't Glory Griswold at all, but this Edna Travis?"

"That's the idee," returned Bodley. "In my mind, Mujercita, there ain't a mite of doubt. Didn't you ever suspect you wasn't Griswold's daughter? Wasn't anything ever said or done that

led you to guess Peter Griswold might not be your father?"

Glory got out of her chair and walked to a window overlooking the dark street of the little desert town.

"That letter Griswold left for you, now," continued Bodley, "don't it look like the outcroppin' of a true fissure buried under the country rock for all these years? I'll gamble a blue stack, Mujercita, that Peter Griswold told you how you come to him and his wife in that letter. Black Tadeo didn't have no cause to lie to me. When a man, even a greaser, is jest settin' off acrost the Great Divide, he's purty apt to tell the truth. Then there's the proof of that flag with the three bullet holes in it. No gettin' around that, girl! You're Edna Travis, and your father is Colonel Raoul Travis, U. S. A. Dick and me are goin' to take you to Colonel Travis, and not quit this trail of right and justice till we've plumb wound it up. I've dreamed about doin' that for twenty year." The old man's voice shook with deep feeling. "Arter it's done, I can go back to the deserts and die in some prospect hole, satisfied that a little somethin' worth while has come out of my wanderin' life."

Glory whirled away from the window, walked directly to the back of the old man's chair, put her arms around him, bent over him, and kissed his leathery, bewhiskered face.

"If that ain't jest like Mujercita as I knowed her years back!" exclaimed Bodley, in a smothered voice. "Them hands of yours, girl, have been tangled in my heartstrings for years."

Glory straightened and looked at Fanning with a radiant face. Her eyes glowed strangely. "Big Pard," she asked tremulously, "what do you think of all this?"

"I'm happy—for you, Glory," Fanning answered.

"I'm happy for myself. It makes a big difference, don't it, whether a girl's plain Glory Griswold of Castle Creek Cañon, or Miss Edna Travis, daughter of Colonel Travis, of the United States army?"

"Changing your name and your prospects will make no difference in the real Glory Griswold," said Fanning, with conviction. "Whether in a log cabin on Oak Flats or in a palace on Fifth Avenue, there could be no change in your heart."

"It makes a change in what people think of you, though," replied Glory, with a wise shake of her head. "'Circumstances alter cases.' I've written that more'n a hundred times in the writing book Mom Griswold gave me when I was little. And you bet it's true! I'll have a standing in the world as Edna Travis that I'd never have as Glory Griswold."

Fanning was puzzled by the happiness the girl seemed to get out of this argument. It thrilled her and brought the crimson into her cheeks and an added brightness into her eyes. She lifted the bright yellow skirt daintily with a thumb and forefinger and minced up and down the room. When she halted, it was with a low curtsy to Fanning and Bodley.

"You'll do!" cried the old prospector, with a loud guffaw. "By the great horn spoon, Mujercita, Colonel Travis has only to set eyes on ye to be proud and happy to take you into his arms! You've been lost for some sort of a while, and I'll gamble the colonel will be plumb dazed by his good luck."

Glory's face, always mobile and expressive, suddenly underwent a change. She sank into a chair, and a mist of tears rose in her eyes. "It seems, somehow, like I wasn't doin' right to cut loose from Dad and Mom Griswold in this way," she murmured plaintively. "They was always good to me. I can't remember a time when either of them was cross or said a hard word. But here I am, now, when they're both gone,

actin' as though I'm happy to be rid of them. It ain't that, Big Pard; I don't want you to think it's that."

"Don't think for a minute that I misjudge you in any way, Glory," said Fanning gently. "I know you too well. But it's late," he said, rising, "and time you were in bed."

They separated for the night; and next morning, Fanning and Bodley caught the driver of their car before he had started back to Needles and got him to make a reconnoitering trip out to the desert shanty in the swale. They took two more armed men along with them, and were determined to bring Juan of the Scar back to town if he was still at the place.

But Juan was not there; nor was the shanty there, for all that remained of the structure was a heap of smoldering ashes. The seven and the señora had burned the shack and vanished. Glory's satchel was found, however, lying at a little distance from the place where the house had stood. But not a scrap of evidence had been left behind as to the business of the mysterious seven, or the barest clew to indicate where they had gone.

"I'm stumped for fair," said Bodley, after he and Fanning had returned to Goffs and paid off their driver.

"The activities of that crowd needn't bother us now," said Fanning. "No harm can come to Glory now through Juan of the Scar with you and me to look after her and get her safely into the hands of her father."

"I've a bone to pick with that Juan," went on Bodley, with a scowl. "He's alive, Dick, and he's got to be brought to book for the killin' of Gordon Travis."

Glory came at that moment to get a report from her friends. "Oh, well, what's the odds?" she asked, when the situation in the swale had been made clear to her. "They tried to do something and didn't make it out, so I guess we needn't bother any more about Scar Face and his friends. I'm lucky to get back the satchel. You see"—and she laughed—"I was in too much of a hurry last night to think about it. It was real thoughtful of some one to take the satchel out of the shanty before the fire. I'll bet the señora did that. Tell me," she added, "my father's name is Colonel Raoul Travis?"

"That's him," Bodley answered.

"I've got some news for you, then." She held a newspaper in front of Fanning's eyes and pointed to a short article on the front page. "My real dad is in Los Angeles, if we're to believe that."

The article stated that Colonel Raoul Travis had come to the coast on detached duty connected with the coast defenses of the States of the Pacific slope. His headquarters, for the time, were in Los Angeles.

"I knowed he was in Californy," said Bodley, "and now we've got a direct line on him. This is good luck, Mujercita! We know right where to go, now, for the last move in puttin' you where you belong."

"It makes me nervous when I think of that last move," murmured the girl. Fanning took her hand and patted it reassuringly. "Bodley and I are going to be with you," he said.

"And we'll stay with you plumb to the wind-up!" declared the old man. "I got to tell the colonel what I know, you understand, in order to make it a clear case. But he ought to recko'nize you the minute you show yourself."

"Recognize me!" repeated Glory. "When he hasn't seen me for twenty years?"

"I did," averred the old man stoutly, and no doubt he really thought he was telling the literal truth. "I could 'a' picked you out of a thousand women if I'd seen you anywhere. Now, if I was able to do that, why shouldn't the colonel do the same thing?"

Glory smiled at Bodley. Very likely she thought, as Fanning did, that the old prospector's wish was parent to the conviction.

In the late afternoon the three of them boarded a train at Goffs for Los Angeles. During the journey, Fanning found occasion for a confidential chat with his old prospecting partner. "Without that letter of Griswold's, Pop," said Fanning, "I want to warn you that it may not be so easy as you seem to think to establish Glory in her rights."

"What's to hinder?" Bodley bristled.

"It would have been well," Fanning suggested, "if you had taken a sworn statement from Black Tadeo, in Tucson."

"If this Colonel Travis doubts my word about that," snarled the old man, "him and me's goin' to come together, hot blocks. But he can't turn down that girl oncet he looks at her. It ain't in reason, Dick, and I'll leave it to you."

CHAPTER VII.

A BIT STAGGERING.

ON detached duty and by special orders wearing civilian clothes, Colonel Raoul Travis sat at his desk in his temporary headquarters in Figueroa Street. He was a fine figure of a man, exemplifying as he did the best traditions of the military arm of his country. His career in the service had been distinguished by ability and courage of the highest order, and by a single-hearted devotion to the flag that had again and again been measured by life itself.

On this morning, when momentous events were pending, he was reading a communication from the war department. He put the letter aside thoughtfully and got out of his chair to walk across the room. Halting before a picture of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," he pushed the frame aside. The circular door of a wall safe was revealed. He worked the combination, opened the door, and took a reassuring view of the safe's contents. After closing the safe and replacing the picture in its original position, he went back to his desk and the letter:

SIR: The reports and your recommendations, in the matter of the coast district with which you are now concerned in an advisory capacity, it is perhaps needless to remind you are of great value, and must be carefully safeguarded. These must not come to this department by the usual course. A trusted courier will present himself to you, within a few days after receipt of this letter, establish his identity as the department's agent, and receive the aforesaid reports and recommendations, transferring them in person.

Please acknowledge.

Colonel Travis refolded the letter carefully and locked it in a small steel box in one of the desk drawers. He had barely finished this work and straightened in his chair when his secretary knocked at a door and entered from an outer room. "There are two men and a young woman to see you, colonel," the secretary announced. "They will not state their business, but say it is important and personal."

Colonel Travis fished a cigar out of a box. "What are their names, Larry?" he asked.

"Fanning and Bodley. They did not give the young woman's name."

"Oh, well, have them come in. They're cranks, I suppose, with some dream or other for the defense of the country. Too bad the papers got wind of my being here." The colonel smiled. "Just be sure they haven't any bombs in their pockets before you admit them, Larry," he added, with a chuckle.

Fanning and Bodley came into the colonel's private office alone. Bodley very carefully closed the door behind them. Silently the two advanced and stood before Travis. He surveyed them with keen eyes. "Well?" he said interrogatively.

"Give me a good sizin', Colonel Travis," Bodley requested, squaring himself, with a smile. Travis did so, supplementing his scrutiny with a pair of nose glasses. "Remember me, colonel?" Bodley asked.

Travis shook his head.

"Think back a long ways, colonel," Bodley persisted. "Twenty year—down close to the New Mexican border—your brother Gordon—the row at Tres Alamos Ranch. Don't all that jog your mem'ry a little?"

A frown crossed Travis' face. "My memory is jogged," he answered tersely, "but not to the extent of placing you."

"You don't mean to say you've plumb forgot E Pluribus Bodley?" the old man barked, as though the failure to recognize him constituted an affront.

"I'm sorry to have to say, Mr. Bodley, that if I ever knew you you have passed completely out of my mind."

"Well, I'll swear!" mumbled Bodley, casting a blank look at Fanning.

"Twenty years is a long time, Pop," spoke up Fanning. "Colonel Travis didn't know you very well, did he?"

"He seen me onçet," Bodley answered; "talked with me face to face, same as now. I told him all about the fracas kicked up at Tres Alamos by Juan of the Scar. I grant ye, Dick, that one man might see another that-a-way and forget him complete in twenty year—but I'm blamed if I see how it could happen under circumstances like we had at the time."

"Juan of the Scar!" exclaimed Travis in a low tone. "I remember hearing of that scoundrel—yes, and combing the New Mexico hills for him. It is very possible that I saw you and talked with you, as you say, twenty years ago at my brother's ranch. I had other matters to concern me then, and it is not to be expected that I would remember a chance acquaintance for so long. But sit down, gentlemen," he added. "If you smoke, help yourselves from that box."

Pop Bodley had suffered a grievous disappointment. He took a cigar thoughtfully, lighted it, and lowered himself into a chair. "I don't know as your rememberin' me is so blamed important, at that," he mumbled, "but like enough it 'u'd help some. Fanning, here"—he ducked his head toward his friend—"will tell ye straight that Pop Bodley's word is as good as his bond. Hey, Dick?"

Before Fanning could testify to the old man's truthfulness, Colonel Travis interposed: "The marks of the wild places are on you, Bodley. I know your brand. You're as square as a die—if I am any reader of character. I'm not questioning your veracity. But what has that to do with your business here?"

Bodley looked relieved, and thawed out instantly. "It's got a considerable to do with what brings Dick and me to you this mornin'," he said. "How much of your time can we have, colonel?"

"As much as you need," was the answer.

Fanning left the talking to Bodley, and the old man launched at once into the distant past. He told of his friend, the colonel's brother, of his visits to Tres Alamos Ranch, of Juan of the Scar and the troubles he had caused, and finally of the rising of the Mexicans, the slaying of Gordon Travis, the burning of the ranch buildings, and the taking away of the colonel's little girl, wrapped in the folds of the desecrated flag.

Colonel Travis listened as one who saw a grievous picture torn out of the past and placed suddenly before his eyes. He held his cigar between his fingers on his chair arm, and the fire died out of it. Bodley halted his narrative, and for a space there was silence in the room, broken only by the muffled click of a typewriter coming from beyond the closed door.

The colonel looked up, his face drawn and almost haggard. "You have described that old affair, Bodley," he said, "as only an eyewitness could do it. Gordon was my older brother—a man of noble character and the highest ideals. You were his friend, and I am glad to meet you after all these years." He leaned forward and gripped the old prospector's hand warmly.

"I ain't done yet, colonel," went on Bodley, vastly pleased. "There's a big idee comin'." With simple directness, not without its pathos, he told of the baby arms stretched out to him as the little girl was borne away from the scene of fire and pillage, and of the little hands that had ever since been tangled in his heartstrings. "Do you recollect Black Tadeo, the compadre of Juan of the Scar?" the old man broke off to inquire.

The colonel nodded. Bodley proceeded to tell how he had found Black Tadeo dying in a Tucson hospital. Travis' eyes widened as he listened to the revelations of Tadeo. Then, as the old man continued his story and described his journey to Castle Creek Cañon and what had happened there, the colonel's wide eyes narrowed. His face hardened as the account of Bodley's and Fanning's pursuit of Glory was poured into his ears, and he smiled grimly at that part of the recital dealing with the desert shack and the "mysterious seven."

A change of some kind had come over Colonel Travis. Fanning was impressed with the fact even more than Bodley. "You expect me to believe that this Glory Griswold is the daughter I lost so many years ago, Bodley?" Travis asked sharply.

"Why, sure," Bodley answered.

"What proof have you? The letter you say Peter Griswold left might, or might not, be in the nature of evidence; and the flag with the bullet holes would, in a way, be a prop to this wild story. But both the letter and flag have vanished."

"The best proof we got is your daughter herself, colonel," asserted Bodley. "She's in t'other room, waitin' to be brought in."

"Don't bring her in," said Travis, his voice tense and hard. "It would be worse than useless."

He was a different Colonel Travis now, and the geniality he had shown a few minutes before was gone. His mood, for some baffling reason, was distinctly hostile. Fanning was astounded. Bodley was not only astounded but red with anger and indignation. He leaned forward and shook his finger in the colonel's face. "Wuss than useless, eh," he cried, "to bring before ye the little girl you ain't seen in twenty year!"

"You have been deceived," said the colonel. "Black Tadeo did not tell you the truth."

"He was at the last gasp," said the old man hotly, "and he didn't lie."

"You are either deceived," insisted the colonel, "or else there are ulterior motives back of this move of yours."

Bodley jumped to his feet. Fanning interposed and pushed his friend back into his chair. "Steady, Pop," said Fanning. "Let me put in a word." He faced the colonel. "Sir," he went on, "the Fannings of San Francisco may be known to you. Egbert Fanning, my father, was prominent in the city up to the time of his death, some five years ago. I am Richard Fanning, and my word should carry some weight. There is no ulterior purpose in what my friend Bodley and I are trying to do. This old man"—he indicated Bodley—"is moved by one thought alone, just as I am—to do you and your daughter a service. The circumstances are such that I do not see how we can possibly be deceived. Will you not meet the young lady known as Glory Griswold?"

"It will be useless, as I have already told you; but out of deference to the

Fannings of San Francisco, and to you who are one of the family, I will see the young woman."

"Have Glory come in, Bodley," said Fanning quietly, and resumed his chair.

The old man got up and opened the door. "This way, Mujercita!" he called huskily.

Glory came agitatedly into the room. The yellow silk dress and the beflowered hat, owing to harsh treatment, were even more impossible than they had been. In contrast with the brown face and limpid eyes of the girl, her costume was garish and could not be expected to strike a note in her favor. But Glory herself! Fanning could not understand how Travis could resist the sweetness and beauty of her face. Travis arose and stood beside his desk, peering steadily at the girl.

She met his gaze quietly, expectation in her glowing eyes and a heightened color in her cheeks. "Dad!" she murmured softly, half putting out her hands and taking a step forward. "I reckon Bodley and Dick have told you all about me. It's plumb wonderful, ain't it, how you and me have found each other? It seems so much like a dream that I can't hardly sabe it myself. What's the matter?" the girl asked, her hands falling as Travis made no move to take them. "Ain't you glad I came?"

Travis did not answer. Slowly he crossed the room to the door, keeping his eyes on the wondering Glory the while. When he had reached the door, he spoke for the first time: "Wait a minute."

He called his secretary and said something to him in a low voice, then closed the door and went back to his desk. "Young lady," he said, "have you any reason to believe that you are not Glory Griswold?"

"I've had a hunch that mebby I might be somebody else," was the girl's answer, "but I didn't know nothin' positive till Dick and Pop Bodley overtook me at Goffs."

Poor Glory! Her appearance, even her soft voice, rippling its unlettered way through years of life in the wild cañon, were against her. Travis was anything but impressed. "Miss Griswold," he continued, "your friends are deceived, and, innocently I believe, have deceived you."

The door opened. A slender, beautifully dressed girl entered the room. She was dark, with eyes that varied from gray-blue to blue-gray. She was apparently about Glory's age. "You sent for me, father?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear," said Travis. The girl went to his side and he put an arm about her waist. "Here is my daughter Edna," went on Travis. "She was restored to me only a few weeks ago, and in a way that leaves no doubt as to her identity."

Fanning was stunned. Bodley staggered back against the wall, bewildered and speechless. Glory's face grew set and ominous. She stared at the girl by the colonel's side. "That woman's mother was a greaser!" declared Glory.

"Her mother," returned Travis sharply, "was one of the Hamptons of Virginia."

"Then the Hamptons of Virginia was greasers," insisted Glory. "Nobody can't fool me! I can tell a greaser as far as I can see one. A game has been played on you, Colonel Travis!"

"Father!" sobbed the dark-haired girl, and threw her arms about the colonel's neck and hid her face against his breast.

"Get that woman away from here!" cried Colonel Travis wrathfully.

Pop Bodley found his tongue at that. He would have caused a scene had Fanning not interfered and pushed him from the room. "You go, too, Glory," said Fanning. "No, don't say anything more." He gently led her to the door. "I want to speak with Colonel Travis

alone," he added, and shut Bodley and Glory outside.

He turned to confront the colonel, calm and self-contained, but with resolution reflected in every line of his face.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLOW AT THE COUNTRY.

COLONEL TRAVIS looked up at Fanning. "I don't care to pursue this subject any further," he said pointedly.

"I have left most of the talking to Bodley," returned Fanning. "As a matter of mere justice, colonel, I ask a few words with you on my own behalf—in private."

"I have already exonerated you and your friend so far as ulterior motives are concerned. I give you credit, Fanning, for having tried to serve me in a very important personal affair, and I thank you. But the very clear proof that you have been deceived should make an end to this trying scene."

"Just a few words more," persisted Fanning, "between ourselves."

Travis yielded. After he had dismissed the girl with every mark of parental confidence and affection, he turned a little impatiently upon his caller. "Now, what more is there to be said?" he asked.

"Being deeply involved in this matter of Miss Glory Griswold's, and having influenced her to come to you," Fanning returned, "I ask you how you know that the young lady accepted as Miss Travis is really your daughter."

The colonel took a fresh cigar. "Inasmuch as you are a champion of Miss Griswold's," he said, "you have a right to that information. First, let me put a question to you, as man to man. My family is one of high and honorable connections in the East. We are descendants of a Puritan who came over in the *Mayflower*. As a Fanning, you ought to understand the pride we Travises feel in our lineage. Compare this Griswold girl with my daughter. One, with her grotesque appearance, her illiterate language, and her forwardness. The other—I leave it to you, Fanning."

"For a superficial judgment of that sort, colonel," returned Fanning, "I'll admit you have some excuse. Glory Travis, however, was in a trying position and not at her best. I have known her for three years, and I assure you that she has qualities of heart and mind to be envied by any lady in the land. What could you expect? Here is a girl, through no fault of her own, living twenty years of her life in a mountain cañon, with no companions of her own age and sex, no schooling, and hardly any knowledge of the world from which she was barred by the desert hills and the wrong-headed ideas of the man whom she believed to be her father. She grew into womanhood with all the limitations of Castle Creek Cañon; but she has a proud and courageous spirit and a character as beautiful as it is admirable. In the few minutes you saw her, only the results of environment flaunted themselves in your eyes; there are saving graces of heredity, unmistakable, but which would reveal themselves only through a closer acquaintance. Be fair, colonel; this is not a matter in which you should be hasty."

Travis surveyed Fanning with curious eyes. The younger man's warm pleading aroused his interest, even though he was not swayed by the argument. "You throw a good deal of your heart into this cause of Miss Griswold's, it seems to me," remarked the colonel.

"All of it!" declared Fanning—and glance met glance in a way that left no doubt in Travis' mind of the true situation.

"For your good, then," the colonel went on, "allow me to state why I know Miss Griswold to be a pretender."

He reached into a drawer of his desk

and removed a gold watch, swinging by its ring on a silver neck chain. "This chain," he proceeded, "was worn by my little girl when I left her at my brother's ranch. The watch was my brother's, a gift from me when he was twenty-one and I was still at school in my teens. The watch is inscribed on the inner side of the case, and it bears, in each case, two small photographs, as you see."

He opened the cases and displayed the dull, time-stained photographs. "One is a picture of my brother's wife, and the other of my brother himself. Edna came to me bearing this incontestable proof, Fanning. There was no claptrap evidence such as a flag or a letter—either of which might be cleverly duplicated. My girl came to me from Denver, brought by the man into whose hands she had fallen when a child—a man who had not held the information from her and who had not denied her any of the advantages of life. The inscription in the watch—'Raoul Travis to His Brother Gordon'—in the course of years formed the clew that restored Edna to me. So I say again you were deceived, and the evidence proves it."

There was logic in this against which it was useless to contend. Fanning contented himself with a question: "Will you give me the name of the Denver man who cared for your daughter during the years she was lost to you, colonel?"

"Pelz; Mr. Raymond Pelz."

Fanning caught his breath at the name. He started to speak, but thought better of relieving his mind on that particular point. "I will not take up any more of your time this morning," he said finally, "but I think you should hold yourself open to further conviction, colonel."

"I am satisfied," said Travis, "and that is final."

Fanning left the office in a brown study. Glory and Bodley were not in the outer room, and the secretary told him they had left the house. Out in front he found the old prospector walking up and down and impatiently waiting for him. "What's the use wastin' any more time palaverin' with a man like that?" asked Bodley. "He ain't got no sabe at all. I could 'a' hit him for the way he said: 'Take that woman away from here!' No more feelin' than a buzzin' sidewinder."

"Don't let your temper get the best of you, Pop. There's a good deal to be said in Colonel Travis' favor. Where is Glory?"

"I left her hirin' a place to stay acrost the street." The old man's eyes kindled. "She's a reg'lar brick, that Mujercita girl," he breathed exultantly. "She's plannin' to camp down in this neighborhood and fight for her rights. Come on and let's go over and see how she's makin' out."

Fanning was troubled with the thought that Glory's sense of injury might carry her too far in the fight she was planning. He and Bodley crossed the street to a large, rusty-looking frame dwelling on the door of which was tacked a card bearing the word: "Rooms."

Glory, always quick in following her intuitions, had rented a room on the second floor front. The windows gave her a clear, unobstructed view of the house in which Colonel Travis had his headquarters. "I'll show that Mexicana she can't run in any rhinecaboo on the real Edna Travis!" Glory declared, with flashing eyes. "Right here is where I am goin' to hold out until something happens, or until I can make it happen. You wait!"

"But, Glory," interposed Fanning, "is this wise?"

She looked at him with a faint smile. "It's wise to finish anythin' you start, ain't it, Big Pard?" she asked. "Colonel Travis don't like me. He didn't like

my clothes or the way I talked. Mebby I *was* too boisterous, but I wouldn't put on—it ain't in me to put on. He's my father, though, and I'm fightin' for him just as much as I am for myself. That Mexicana is a counterfeit, and I'm goin' to prove it. If Colonel Travis don't want me after that, I'll go to Barstow and hunt up Aunt Hesther."

"That's you!" approved Bodley, in a rumble of joy. "But if this fool colonel don't take you, Mujercita, I claim the right to make a home for you myself. I got some good prospects, and I'm able to make up to you for all the schoolin' and them other advantages you've missed. And, by gorry, I will!"

Glory took his rough hand and patted it affectionately. "Barstow is the place for me, Pop," she said gently, "if I ain't wanted where I belong. But you and Dick will stand by me—you will see me through?"

"As long as there's breath in me, I'll stand by ye, girl!" averred the old man.

"You know I'll not leave you until you're settled somewhere, and in safety," added Fanning.

"If there are more rooms to be had in this hang-out," Bodley went on, "me and Dick will camp under the same roof so's to be handy."

Glory shook her head. "I want you where I can get at you," she said, "but not so close. I've my reasons. You go back to the hotel and stay there. But send my grip to me here. What did you say after we left, Dick?" she asked.

He told her and Bodley of the watch and the neck chain, by means of which the supposed Edna Travis had established her identity. But he did not mention the Denver man, Raymond Pelz. That was something he wanted to think about before he aired his suspicions.

"Where do you reckon the Mexicana got that watch and chain?" Glory inquired.

"That remains to be discovered," said Fanning.

"There's deviltry afoot," said Bodley, "and you take it from me that evidence has been faked. It's some puzzlin', though, and that's a fact."

"Certainly there's a plot," agreed Fanning; "and you will have to watch carefully and be wary, Little Pard, to avoid being caught as you were at Goffs."

"They'll catch a weasel asleep if they hook me ag'in," asserted Glory.

"You're a match for the hull passel of 'em," the old prospector remarked, with confidence.

Fanning and Bodley returned to their hotel, leaving Glory with her nebulous plans, sitting by one of the front windows and watching the house across the street.

The old prospector was not easy in his mind. The city annoyed him, with its clanging street cars, its swarms of automobiles, its crowds, and its hurly-burly of traffic. He had lived so long in desert places that he was unfitted for the haunts of men. "Heaven made the kentry," he declared, "and men make the towns; and I never seen a settlement yet that it wasn't right pleasin' to git away from. However Mujercita stands this rush of humans at all is more'n I know."

The two friends stayed pretty close to their hotel, waiting for some word from Glory. Before word came from her, something else happened that gave a most important turn to the affairs of Colonel Travis. They had a caller at eight o'clock that evening. It was the colonel's secretary, and he came directly and unannounced to Fanning's and Bodley's room in the hotel. Bodley admitted him. "You're the hombre that was in the front room at the colonel's," said the old man, none too pleasantly. "You bringin' some word from the colonel to us?"

"I've been hunting for you for three hours," the secretary answered, "and at the request of Colonel Travis. I have been chasing around from one hotel to another, asking for you, and I'd about made up my mind you had taken quarters in some boarding house when I happened to drop in here. I'm glad I've found you at last." He sank wearily into a chair. "My name is Truesdell," he added.

"Why were you so anxious to find us, Truesdell?" Fanning inquired.

Truesdell exploded his bomb. "About the time of your visit, or a little later," said he, "Colonel Travis was robbed."

"Robbed!" Fanning echoed.

"He robbed himself this mornin'," remarked Bodley unemotionally, "of more'n ary other man could take from him." This was cryptic, and over the head of Truesdell. "What seems to be missin'?" Bodley asked.

"Some villain has struck a blow at the country—a grievous blow that involves the colonel deeply. I can't tell you what has been taken. It is being guarded as a help to the recovery of the property. I ask you gentlemen, on honor, not to divulge anything I am telling you. The colonel told me to find you and to ask a few questions."

"What is it you want to know?" returned Fanning. "We would resent a blow at the country, Truesdell, as quick as any man who is a true citizen."

"The colonel has confidence in you, Fanning," Truesdell went on. "Otherwise he would have proceeded differently in this matter. You were the only callers at the house this morning, and no one else showed themselves up to the time he discovered that the—er—valuables had been taken. He is not so sure, however, of—pardon me—Bodley or the young woman who came to the house with you."

Bodley bristled at once. "Travis as much as called me a liar," he cried, "and now does he reckon that I'm a thief?"

"Steady, Pop, steady!" said Fanning restrainedly. "This is a matter in which circumstances warrant Colonel Travis in thinking any man guilty until he proves his innocence. I would not blame him for suspecting me. What can we do, Truesdell?" he continued, turning to the secretary.

"Will you go with me to see the colonel at once," the other answered—"you and your friend and the girl, Miss Griswold?"

"Why the girl?" asked Bodley. "If Travis allows she had anythin' to do with his missin' property, he and me'll pick that bone to a standstill."

"Miss Griswold is not here, Truesdell," said Fanning, "but if she is wanted, after our talk with the colonel, I will have her in his office to-night."

"A machine is at the door," observed the secretary. "Will you go with me now?"

Bodley sputtered wrathfully as he picked up his hat. As they were about to leave the room, a boy from the office knocked at the door and delivered a note. "It was left downstairs by a messenger," explained the boy, "for Mr. Fanning."

The note was from Glory. Fanning read it with a troubled frown, but did not show it or repeat its contents to Bodley. "I'll tell you about it later, Pop," he said, thrusting the note into his pocket. "It's a matter that can wait for a little while. Just now, we are at the colonel's service."

"I'm goin' to the colonel's shack ag'inst my better judgment," growled the old man, "and that's flat. If he opens his head to say a thing ag'inst Mujercita, colonel or no colonel, I'm goin' to hit out straight from the shoulder. I've had my fightin' clothes on ever since we was to his house this mornin'."

CHAPTER IX.

CROWDING PROBLEMS.

IT was on the stroke of nine when Fanning and Bodley were ushered into the colonel's private room by Truesdell. Travis, seated at his desk, lifted a face in which the finger of calamity had traced startling changes —and all within a few hours. "You have been gone a long time, Larry," he said.

"I have been hunting for these gentlemen every minute, colonel," the secretary answered. "They were hard to find."

"Where is the girl?"

"Mr. Fanning says that she will be here if you insist on questioning her."

"I do insist!" The colonel's voice was sharp. "If a mere request is not sufficient," he added, "then we will call in the aid of the police."

"Not while I'm above ground you won't!" declared Bodley.

He would have said more had not Fanning interposed a warning glance and a question: "Why are your suspicions leveled at Miss Griswold, colonel? She was under the eyes of your secretary or yourself every minute she was in this house."

"A tremendously serious thing has happened here, Fanning," said Travis. "Unless something is done, it will mean disgrace and humiliation for me, even ruin, perhaps. It is not a time for soft speeches, but for blunt statements. I contend that Miss Griswold's coming here was not for the purpose of making claims to being Edna Travis. That is preposterous on the face of it. The claims were a cover for other designs. When you and your friend and the girl called on me, the valuable property I had was safely in my possession. Apart from Truesdell, you were the only ones in this room—except the members of my household, who are above suspicion—up to the moment, two hours later, when I discovered the property to be missing."

Bodley began to rumble like an active volcano. Fanning laid a quick hand on him and gave him a look that caused the threatened eruption to subside—for the moment.

"I want you to understand, Fanning," Travis continued, "that I think you have been deceived. Bodley was your friend, and you took his word for the wild story regarding Miss Griswold. It is my duty to suspect any person or persons who could possibly be connected with the theft. The pretensions of Miss Griswold, fantastic and unwarranted as they are, point to the conclusion that she and Bodley may know something as to how my property happens to be missing. I do not wish to do any one an injustice, but I shall probe this matter to the bottom."

An apoplectic red filled the rugged face of the old prospector. In bitterness and wrath he delivered a broadside of biting words. His clamor, intended as a defense of Glory, resolved itself into a scathing denunciation of Travis himself. Fanning tried to subdue Bodley, and brought him under control only after his outraged feelings had spent themselves and left him breathless. The colonel kept himself firmly in hand. "Talk of that kind, Bodley, disproves nothing and gets you nowhere," he said.

"I will personally vouch for Bodley and Miss Griswold," declared Fanning. "I know them both better than you do, colonel. Any suspicion involving them is leveled at me as well."

"I tell you," snapped the colonel, "you have been deceived. I'll admit that I may be deceived myself; I am deeply troubled, and leaving no stone unturned to get back what I have lost. It is a grave situation."

"Its very gravity should make for cool counsel and clear judgment, colonel," said Fanning, "if you are not to

waste valuable time in running out a false trail."

"I must talk with the girl."

"You'll not talk to her as you've talked to us about her!" said Bodley defiantly. "She'll not see you if I've got anythin' to say about it."

"No good can come, Colonel Travis, of having you meet Miss Griswold in your present mood," struck in Fanning. "I can answer any questions you may wish to ask her."

"You refuse, then, to let her come here?" the colonel demanded. "You will force me to call in the police?"

At this moment, when the tension was almost at the snapping point, Truesdell opened the door. "Miss Griswold is here to see you, colonel," he announced.

This was dazing. Before Fanning or Bodley could say another word, Glory stepped into the room and halted with startled eyes on her two friends. "Don't this beat all!" she exclaimed. "Dick, didn't you get that note of mine?"

"Yes, Glory," he answered, "and Bodley and I intended to act upon it according to instructions. It is not yet ten o'clock. Why are you here?"

"To see the colonel," said the girl, "and to tell him a few things."

"Before you speak what is on your mind, Miss Griswold," spoke up the colonel, "I want you to listen to me."

He waved his hand to a chair. Glory seated herself and surveyed him questioningly.

"If she had anythin' to do with that robbery," remarked the old prospector, "I reckon she'd be blowin' in here like this, wouldn't she? Huh!" he jeered.

"Robbery!" Glory echoed.

"Let me tell you about it," said the colonel. What he said was substantially along the line of his and Truesdell's previous statements. "Do you know anything about it, Miss Griswold?" he finished mildly, for the girl's appearance of her own accord must have afflicted him with doubts.

"Sure I know something about it," was Glory's amazing answer.

Fanning looked alarmed. Bodley gasped. The colonel's jaws tightened. "Then tell what you know," said Travis, "and be frank with me."

"I'm goin' to be frank, all right. Dick"—Glory turned to Fanning—"read him that note I sent to your hotel."

Here was another problem that vastly puzzled Fanning. He did as he was told to do, however, and read the note:

"Big Pard: Already something has happened. You and Pop get an automobile and wait with it at the corner below where I am staying. Better do this a little after ten tonight. At half past ten a machine will call for me. You and Pop follow it, but keep in the background. I'm mighty certain a lot will turn up if we work this right. Glory."

"What's the idee of that?" asked Bodley.

"I reckoned, after I sent the note to Dick," said Glory, "that it would be a fine thing to have Colonel Travis in the automobile along with you two, and follow the one that was takin' me somewheres. That's why I came over here. Not till this minute did I know the colonel had been robbed. That information lets in a heap of light." She smiled complacently.

"I can't understand," remarked the colonel. "What has this affair of yours to do with the robbery, Miss Griswold?"

"Wait till I put you wise to something else," Glory went on. "When I left here this morning, colonel, I went to board across the street. My room is on the second floor, and I can see your house from my front windows. Somebody besides Dick and Pop Bodley found out where I was, and a man named Jarvis—anyhow, he said his name was Jarvis—called to see me about seven o'clock. This Jarvis was

a smooth talker. He told me he knew what trouble I was havin' in provin' up on the claim I've staked out in the Travis household, and he allowed he could furnish proof that you couldn't get around.

"Jarvis didn't fool me for a minute," she continued. "I'd been caught once by Juan and his seven, and I wasn't swallowin' any yarns like Jarvis had to tell. But I pretended to take it all in, hook, line, and bobber. When Jarvis said he'd call between ten-thirty and eleven with a car to take me to a place I was to get my proof, I said I'd be ready. The minute Jarvis left me, I sent that line to Dick so's he and Pop would trail after me. Then I got to thinkin' about you, colonel, and reckoned it wouldn't be a bad idea to have you in the trailin' party. That's why I'm here."

"I am not concerned in this matter at all," protested the colonel. "Something of more importance claims my attention now."

"If you want to get back what you've lost," said Glory earnestly, "you'd better come along."

"Why?"

"Just a hunch I've got, that's all. You've been asking me questions; now let me ask you a few. Where's the Mexicana?"

"Who?"

"The girl who claims to be Edna Travis," said Glory. "She left here at three o'clock this afternoon. I saw her from my window; and she went with a man."

"I deny your right to spy on my daughter in that way," said Colonel Travis, with dignity, "or to ask questions about her coming or going. However, I don't mind telling you who she went with, or why. That man was her foster father, the man who had cared for her during all the years she was separated from me, and who restored her——"

Glory sat up suddenly. "Him!" she exclaimed. "The Mexicana's foster father!"

"And they went," pursued the colonel, "to get that flag which, according to your story, was removed from the log cabin in the mountains where you had lived for so long. Edna's foster father has had it in his possession ever since my little girl came into his care. Edna may return to-night, and she may not be back until to-morrow. But when she comes, she will bring the flag."

That interview with the colonel had been filled with little problems, but here was one easily to be solved. If Edna Travis' foster father—the supposed Edna Travis, that is to say—had that old bullet-riddled flag, then Glory, Fanning, and Bodley knew very well how he had secured it.

"Colonel," said Glory earnestly, "you've heard how I was taken from Goffs by Juan of the Scar and his wife, and how I was held in a desert shack while seven men had a meeting there. The girl you call Edna has fooled you if she said the man she went away with this afternoon was her foster father. That's a big one! Why, I saw that man in the desert shack, friendly as you please with Juan of the Scar and all the rest. I heard his name, too, and his name and Juan's were the only ones I learned. Pelz, that's the man's name."

"Pelz!" cried Bodley. "Why, he was the cimiroon that was ordered to take our hardware, Dick!"

"Yes," said Fanning; "a man hand in glove with the rascally crowd who schemed to spirit Glory away from Goffs."

"He is an honest and an honorable man," asserted Colonel Travis. "He restored my daughter to me, and he would have no part in any questionable work."

Bodley laughed derisively. "Pelz is

a coyote!" he declared. "And he's got somethin' up his sleeve."

"I tell you Pelz has proved himself a man of honor and integrity," went on Travis warmly, "and I will hear nothing against him—not even from you, Fanning. I am indebted to him for restoring my daughter to me."

"The Mexicana's real father," declared Glory, "is Juan of the Scar; and her mother is Juan's wife, the señora. They look as much alike, that girl and the señora, as two peas in a pod. If you saw Mrs. Juan once, colonel, you'd know this as well as I do."

"This is wild!" exclaimed Travis. In his agitation he got up from his chair and paced the floor. "I'll not listen to such talk! In an hour when I am harassed and worried over a puzzling robbery, why do you come to me with such a preposterous story?"

Glory's voice softened as she said: "Because I want to prove that you're the one that's deceived, and not us. I'll prove I am what I say I am, colonel. I don't ask you to make a daughter of me—not bein' the sort of girl you seem to want for a daughter—but I'll prove I didn't come to you with a lie, and then I'll go away and that'll end it. But," she added, her voice hardening, "if the other girl is what I say she is, she knows somethin' about that stolen property of yours. I'm accused, and I claim the right to show you that you're wrong. The Mexicana——"

"Stop!" Travis commanded. "You're carrying this crazy plan of yours too far. It is out of all sense and reason to think——"

"Where was that property of yours?" Glory broke in.

"Locked in a concealed safe."

"Did the Mexicana know where the safe was?"

"Certainly! As my daughter, I trusted her im——"

"Did she know what was in the safe?"

"Undoubtedly. Why should I have kept the secret from her? She watched the property while I was away from the house—cared for it as jealously as I did myself."

"She knew how to get into the safe?" proceeded Glory, unmoved by the colonel's forbidding manner and protests.

"Yes, but——"

"Then it's clear as daylight to me—everything. The plot to keep me away from you, to put somebody else here in my rightful place, and for nothing else than to get that property, whose loss, as you say, means so much to you." Glory whirled on Fanning and Bodley. "Can't you see it, Dick?" she appealed. "Pop, ain't it plain to you?"

"Plain as a pikestaff!" cried Bodley excitedly. "A frame-up on the colonel, that's what!"

"Here is a clew, colonel," said the startled Fanning, "and one you must surely follow."

Glory started for the door and paused with her hand on the knob. "Jarvis has a frame-up on me, too, and I'm goin' to let him put it across. I'm goin' back to the boardin' house and wait for him to come with the machine. Then I'm goin' with him. It's the only way. You and Pop will come after me, Dick," she added, "and don't fail to bring Colonel Travis. He has more to get out of this than I have."

The door opened and closed—and Glory was gone.

CHAPTER X.

THE WORKINGS OF CHANCE.

FANNING was lucky in his choice of a driver for the night's expedition. The man whose car and services he secured was a genial "native son" by the name of Quilby. This jehu of the gasoline car knew southern California topography as he knew his two hands. Not only was he a past master in the art of driving, but he showed

wonderful aptitude in the difficult business of "shadowing" by motor.

The large car that picked Glory off the walk in front of her boarding house at ten-thirty-five traveled a devious course along boulevards and unimproved country roads, sometimes a vague blur to those in the machine behind and sometimes lost to sight completely; but Quilby was equal to the task of keeping far enough in the rear to avoid arousing suspicion, and yet staying sufficiently close to hold the trail. When the car ahead finally halted, after an hour of cross-country rambling, Quilby clapped on his brakes at a distance of a hundred yards and just where two rows of giant pepper trees threw the road into heavy shadow. As his car stopped, the crooning engine died and the gleaming lights were snuffed out.

"There you are, gents," remarked Quilby, with manifest pride in his achievement; "we're right on that other machine, and no one aboard of it has the least notion that we've followed every step of the way from Los. They've pulled up in front of a ranch bungalow—as lonesome a spot as you'd care to find in these hills. You'd better hurry ahead on foot and do your scouting. When you want me, I'll be here."

Colonel Travis had not been won over to that expedition without a struggle. All during the ride, the folly of what he conceived to be a waste of time had grown upon him. Now he was against leaving the car, and all Fanning's persuasive powers were needed in getting him out of it and to the bungalow.

The other automobile had dropped two passengers and gone on. Those passengers, of course, were Glory and the scheming Jarvis. Fanning, Travis, and Bodley were near enough to the bungalow, when its front door opened, to make sure of the identity of the girl. In the light that streamed from the open door, those at the front fence were also able to see distinctly the dark-haired girl whom Glory declared to be a Mexicana. She was admitting the two on the veranda.

This discovery brought an exclamation to the colonel's lips and interested him suddenly and profoundly in the night's business. "We'll go into the house immediately," he said.

"Not yet," said Fanning; "let's find a place, if we can, to watch what goes on inside, and not show ourselves until we're needed."

"No," returned Travis firmly. "This looks like a plot of some kind against my daughter, and I'll not leave her alone for a minute. You two can hang back, but I'm going in there at once."

He was as good as his word. Fanning and Bodley, however, held to their own plans, and were fortunate enough to find an open, screened window with a raised shade. The window commanded a view of the living room of the bungalow, where those inside were assembled.

Pelz was there, and Juan of the Scar and the señora. The girl who had been accepted by the colonel as Edna Travis had just admitted Glory and the man Jarvis.

"So this is where you came this afternoon, Miss Travis!" Glory observed. "I reckoned you'd have to see Juan if you wanted the flag."

"Any trouble getting her to come with you, Jarvis?" Juan of the Scar inquired.

"Easy as fallin' off a log," said Jarvis, and was pluming himself on the supposed success of his act of treachery when the colonel's knock fell on the door.

The summons startled those in the living room. They exchanged quick glances. "Is it—Number One?" faltered Pelz.

"It may be, and it may not be," Juan

answered sharply, "and that means we're to play safe."

He stepped to the side of Pelz and exchanged words in a whisper. Pelz moved to the side of Glory. "A word from you about Juan or the señora," he said, "and it will be your last! You've made us trouble enough!"

The señora hurried forward, put her left arm around Glory's shoulders and her right hand over her eyes. Juan thereupon moved to a fireplace and hid inside it a package wrapped in a newspaper. "Now, Fanita!" said he crisply, turning away.

The señora left Glory, and she and her husband stepped behind a screen in one corner of the room. "Ready, Pelz!" Juan called from behind the screen. "The window shade, Jarvis!"

As Pelz started to interrupt the insistent and impatient knocking at the front door, Jarvis drew the window shade and cut off the view of Fanning and Bodley. "He was a little late pullin' down the curtain, Dick," said the old prospector. "That was the flag he tucked away in the fireplace, I'll gamble a blue stack. Don't you reckon we ought to go in now? I'm gittin' narvous about Mujercita."

"We can use our ears, if not our eyes, and keep track of what is going on, Pop," whispered Fanning. "It's an interesting situation in there, with Juan of the Scar and the señora behind the screen. Maybe it's a good thing the colonel is right in the thick of it. Let's wait. If we have to make a move in a hurry, we can smash the screen and get in through the window."

A few details of what was taking place in the living room had to be left to their imagination, but what Fanning and Bodley overheard enabled them to follow events with tolerable clearness.

"Why have you brought my daughter here, Pelz?" the colonel asked. "And why is Miss Griswold here?"

"Both young ladies are here, colonel," Pelz answered, "on the business I told you about."

"Getting the flag?" The colonel's voice suggested surprise.

"Exactly," Pelz went on. "It disappeared, and Edna and I believe this Griswold girl has it. Jarvis, there, is a friend of mine. I asked him to get Miss Griswold out here this evening. He succeeded in that by making her think he would help her prove that wild yarn she and her friends told you."

"I disapprove of such two-faced methods," said Travis sternly. "Getting the flag is not so necessary as all that."

"How did you know I was here, father? How did you know where to come to find me?" This was the supposed Miss Travis. Her voice betrayed some agitation.

"We need not discuss that now, my dear," returned Travis. "I want you to go home with me at once. I do not countenance this sort of plotting. Miss Griswold hasn't the flag. Had it been otherwise, she would have produced it when she called on me with Bodley and Fanning. Come, Edna!"

"Don't hurry, colonel," said Glory, speaking for the first time since Travis' arrival. "There are others here that you ought to see."

"Others!" the colonel echoed.

This turn of the talk rendered Fanning himself apprehensive. Glory—as might have been expected—was doing exactly what Pelz had ordered her not to do. Bodley, also filled with forebodings, laid both hands on the screen.

"In a moment, Bodley," said Fanning in his friend's ear. "Wait!"

"Let us go, father!" exclaimed the girl whom Travis thought to be his daughter. "Let us go without delay. Don't listen to that woman."

"He will listen to me," went on Glory. "Do you think the threats of Pelz will force me to hold my tongue —now? There are two people behind

that screen, colonel. You ought to have a look at them and——"

A sound of sharp movements was heard by Fanning and Bodley, followed by a stifled cry—apparently from Glory. Bodley could wait for no more, and Fanning himself thought it wise to wait no longer. The screen was torn from the window, the curtain brushed aside, and the old prospector tumbled into the room. Fanning was with him by the time he had gained his feet. Their unceremonious entrance wildly alarmed every one in the living room, with the exception of Glory and Travis.

The colonel was standing between Glory and Pelz, and apparently had just forced Pelz to take his hands from the girl. Glory was pale, but there was a glow of determination in her eyes. She had backed against the wall and was clutching her small automatic pistol, holding it ready for use.

The coming of Fanning and Bodley brought a look of relief to her face. "I allowed it was about time you and Pop showed up, Big Pard," she remarked. "The Mexicana is trying to make out I was brought here so'st she could get the flag. She had the colonel half believin' it."

"What do you men think you're doing, anyhow?" Jarvis demanded, facing Fanning and Bodley aggressively. "You're not here by anybody's invitation. Beat it—the same way you came!"

"I don't think they will leave by your order," said the colonel. "Something is wrong here, and we'll find out what it is." He turned to Pelz. "I'm surprised at you," he went on. "Miss Griswold, by your own showing, was brought here through a treacherous story told by Jarvis. She is entitled to courtesy, Pelz, and you have shown yourself to be a brute. Is there some one behind that screen?"

The screen was thrown flat on the floor by those behind it and the Mexican and his wife were revealed to Travis' astonished eyes. He started back. "Juan!" he gasped. "Juan of the Scar!"

Juan stepped farther into the room. "I didn't want to see you, Colonel Travis," said he, in silky tones, "after the lies Bodley told against me years ago and now is taking the trouble to repeat. At some other time I had intended refuting his statements, but not to-night."

A doubt of his integrity always fired Bodley's temper. "What're you tryin' to say, greaser?" he cried in crackling tones, advancing a step.

"Hold on to yourself, Pop," cautioned Fanning. "Your arm isn't in shape for any rough work. Let Juan talk."

"What happened to my brother years ago," said Colonel Travis, his face set and hard, "was told to me by others besides Bodley. You shot Gordon! You led the Mexicans in their deviltry! You stole my little girl away from the ranch! Don't dare to deny it!"

"I deny shooting your brother or leading the Mexicans," Juan answered, "and I took your daughter away from Tres Alamos to save her from the maddened men who were burning and pillaging. Small thanks I am getting for it."

"If you took her away to save her," asked the colonel, "why didn't you bring her to me during those weary weeks when I was searching the country over to find her?"

"Por Dios!" exclaimed Juan, and laughed derisively. "I would have looked well showing myself around Tres Alamos when every man's hand was against me! I did the best I could and got the little girl into the hands of Pelz, who was surveying mining property in the Mogollons. That was the best I could do. The señorita stands there now"—he waved his hand toward the dark-haired girl—"and neither you

nor she has any cause to reproach me for what I did. Bodley is trying to play a double game, Colonel Travis."

Bodley was dazed by these misstatements. He rocked on his feet and his horny hands clenched and unclenched. "I don't know why I'm standin' here and lettin' his crooked tongue clatter that-a-way," he mumbled. "Dick, we can clean up on this bunch and snake 'em all back to town and have 'em put through for their lyin' and schemin'. Why're you hangin' fire?"

"My testimony, in any court, will substantiate Bodley's story as to your guilt in the matter of my brother," said Travis sternly. "Between us, Juan of the Scar, your fate is as good as sealed."

"You'd do that, after what I did to save your little girl?" Juan inquired.

"I deny your kindly intentions so far as my little girl is concerned." The colonel turned to the one he had accepted as his daughter. "Edna, leave this house," he added, "and wait for me in the road. I think you had better go, too, Miss Griswold," he finished.

"Let us all go, father, and leave these men to themselves."

"When I go," declared the colonel, "I take that scoundrel with me. He owes the law a debt, and it concerns me personally. I——"

Travis was interrupted by a crash that shook the bungalow. The front door was broken in and three men ran into the room. Pelz made a jump for the open window, but one of the newcomers leaped in front of him and blocked his flight. Juan also had shown signs of panic, but was cowed and held in his place by another of the strangers. The señora and the dark-haired girl screamed and ran into each other's arms.

"What does this mean?" the colonel asked.

"We're secret-service men," answered one of the three, "and are here to arrest the last of a gang of dangerous spies. We've bagged five of the crowd. One of them weakened and told where we could find two more—Juan of the Scar and a man called Pelz. It's easy to pick out Juan. Is that other fellow Pelz—the man who bolted for the window?"

At this point, Pelz contrived to draw a revolver and fire. His target was not one of the secret-service men, but Bodley—on whose testimony hung the fate of Juan for the slaying of Gordon Travis. Simultaneously, Juan conjured a weapon into his hand and pressed the trigger. He fired at Colonel Travis, and the two reports sounded as one.

The quick and vigilant Bodley saved himself by falling flat on the floor, helped by a push from Fanning. Glory, watchful of the colonel, had caught him and thrown him out of the path of Juan's bullet. That bit of lead patted into the wall and harmed no one. But the ball intended for Bodley, by a strange decree of chance, struck Juan of the Scar in the breast. Juan's knees crumpled under him; he flung up his arms, his smoking revolver fell from his limp fingers, and he dropped sprawling on the floor. He tried to lift himself, but fell back, gasping.

"Juan!" cried the señora, and ran to him and knelt and lifted his head in her arms.

"Father!" screamed the dark-haired girl, wild and grief-stricken. "Ah, *padre! Padre mio!*" She also ran to the wounded man and sank down at his side.

"I told you!" said Glory.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD GLORY AND YOUNG.

GRIEF rolls many a stone from the sepulcher of secrets. Here, in one word, a carefully built-up deception had been revealed. No question of the guilt of the señorita could re-

main in the colonel's mind. He stood staring at Juan and the two women beside him in blank amazement.

The amazement passed and left his face hard and stern. "That Mexican must be spared to tell what he knows," said Travis; "everything he knows."

The leader of the secret-service men went to the limp form and looked down at it over the bowed heads of the señora and her daughter. Juan's hurt was mortal; there could be no doubt of that. He tried to talk, and the effort snapped the frail thread of life. His head fell back, his scarred face twisted in a final spasm, and fate wrote "Finis" on his dark career.

The señora, betrayed by her emotions at first, showed strength of character in that trying moment. Gently she lowered Juan to the floor and got up to draw her daughter away. "It is better like that," she murmured. "Juan's life has been forfeited for years. You are not to blame our girl, Señor Travis," she added, drawing her daughter closer to her. "What she did she was forced to do—by her father and the seven. All that Juan could have told you I know. A plot? Yes, there has been a plot. It began with the spies, who wanted information of you regarding this country's defenses. Ysabel, here, was merely a tool, an unwilling confederate, as I was. Pelz——"

"Don't talk!" cried Pelz huskily. He sat in a chair, his face livid and his body shaking.

The señora looked at him with loathing and defiance. "I will talk as I please—now," she said. "You got Juan into this. He is gone, and I must think of Ysabel and myself." She swerved her glance to Travis. "Can you not understand what Pelz and the others wanted?" she continued. "You had secrets which the seven felt they must have. A daughter in your confidence would help. My Ysabel was to be that daughter, and circumstances made it possible for her to play the part. I cried out against it, but Juan threatened me and Ysabel. We were compelled to yield. So it happened.

"Ysabel is the age of the Americana." The eyes of the señora comprehended Glory for a space. "They are not greatly alike, although Ysabel's eyes are not Spanish, but in a way like the Americana's. But Juan had the silver neck chain and the watch of Gordon Travis which he had taken from Black Tadeo. He had these, Señor Travis, and he had the plausible tongue and the coöperation of Pelz. So the little play was staged some weeks ago and you were deceived and Ysabel accepted by you and installed in your home. Then, with all going so smoothly, word came from Tucson that Black Tadeo had told the truth to Señor Bodley and died in the hospital.

"The seven took steps immediately to set aside the threatened danger," she went on. "Men were sent into Castle Creek Cañon. Two battled with Griswold, coming upon him suddenly just as he had touched a match to a fuse and was setting off a blast. He was struck down and left where flying rock would finish the work. Then the cabin was searched, and a letter and a flag were taken. Later, when Bodley came, he would have gone the way of Griswold had not the plans failed.

"But the seven felt almost secure. Bodley's story, coming from Black Tadeo, could not be proved. The flag and the letter were in Juan's hands. If the Americana were out of the way, the last menace to the complete success of the seven would be removed. Juan and I, in the car, followed the Americana to Goffs from Needles. Fortune served us, and we were able to take her in our car to the rendezvous. And there fortune failed us, for the two Americanos came and took the girl away.

"The desert shanty was burned and the seven scattered, hard pressed by

men of the government. The Americana and her two friends were in Los Angeles. I was living here, where I had lived for years. Ysabel was posing as the daughter of the colonel, and he would not consider the Americana's claims. It seemed as though all might yet be well, only the Americana was persistent and still to be feared. Ysabel knew the Americana had gone to live in the house across from the colonel's. She had seen her at a window. Ysabel told Pelz. Then Pelz hatched a plan with his friend Jarvis. Jarvis brought the Americana here for me to keep until her being at large would no longer be a source of danger.

"So this sorry affair of to-night happened," said the señora wearily. "We had not expected you, Señor Travis, any more than we had the two Americanos and the three men of the government. But all is done now. I am anxious only for myself and Ysabel, and Ysabel most of all. Spare her! I have been talking freely and for that alone." She walked to a built-in bookcase, removed a book, and took a letter from between its leaves. "See," she added, handing the letter to Travis, "there is the letter taken from the trunk in the cabin by Pelz. Juan had it and gave it to me for safe-keeping."

Travis passed the letter on to Glory without a word. She opened it, read it, pressed it to her lips, and her eyes were moist as she returned it to the colonel. He read what was written and handed the sheet to Fanning. The latter and Bodley looked over the brief statement:

GLORY: You are not of my blood. Loving you as a daughter, I have dreaded to tell you this. Now that I am no more, it is right for you to know. You were left at our cabin, wrapped in the flag, while Mother and I were away. This was years ago. On each anniversary of the day of your coming to us, Mother and I had a habit of bringing out the flag and calling the day your birthday. Who you are we do not know. We have called you "Glory," because of the flag. I have turned over everything I possess to you by deed. You have been kept in the mountains, for I feared to have you away from me. Always I was haunted by the idea that those to whom you rightfully belonged might find you and take you away. PETER GRISWOLD.

"We're beginnin' to git to the bottom of this," said Bodley. "I reckon, in the face of that, you can't deny my word is as good as my bond, Travis."

Colonel Travis had nothing to say.

"Search the house!" said the leader of the secret-service men to his two companions.

Pelz and Jarvis were handcuffed and the detectives began a thorough search of the premises.

"I'm not one of the gang!" protested Jarvis.

"You'll get the benefit of that doubt after we look up your record," was the terse answer. "I've information about Juan and Pelz only, but you may have been overlooked. The women, too, will have to go with us."

The señora paled and threw a look of appeal at Travis. "No," said the colonel, "they at least are to have the benefit of the doubt. I will hold myself personally responsible for them. Considering the circumstances"—he nodded toward the form on the floor—"I think you will agree with me."

"This house," spoke up the señora, with dignity, "has to-night for the first time been used by Juan in furthering his lawless plans. What was done here to-night was over my protest."

Nothing in the way of incriminating evidence was found about the place. After the secret-service men had so reported, Jarvis and Pelz were taken away. When the señora and her daughter, Glory, Travis, Fanning, and Bodley had been left to themselves in the bungalow, Travis moved closer to Ysabel. "You know what I have lost," said he. "Where is it?"

The girl looked at her mother. The latter nodded, and Ysabel went to the

fireplace and came back with the bundle.

"If she hadn't got it herself, colonel," put in the old prospector, "we'd have got it for her. Dick and me was lookin' through the window when Juan hid that package."

"I waited until we were alone," returned Travis, "before mentioning this personal matter. And I'm glad the señorita got it for me with her own hands."

"These here gover'ment men sure miss a bet now and then," commented Bodley.

The package, unwrapped, proved to contain an old, tattered, bullet-riddled flag, and the flag was folded about something else which Colonel Travis quickly transferred to his pocket. Most of his load of trouble dropped from him, and he flung back his head, squared his shoulders, and lifted the flag to his lips.

"The emblem of my country," he said, with a touch of feeling, "never shielded evidence of greater importance to my country, nor has public and patriotic duty ever been more closely entangled with the private affairs of a loyal soldier. Old Glory!" he murmured, and stepped to the girl of the mountains and laid the flag about her shoulders. "You were well named Glory by Peter Griswold, and to your courage and high spirit I am under an obligation this night beyond my poor ability to repay. But I will do what I can."

He laid both hands on Glory's shoulders and looked at her long and earnestly.

"How could I be sure, after so many years," he went on, "that Ysabel was not what she professed to be? I am getting old and have been practically alone in the world. When Pelz came, with his plausible story, I was only too eager to believe him. The chain—the watch—they were cleverly used in forging the deception. Now the mist of years clears away, and I see in you your mother's eyes, her face——" The colonel's voice trembled and died on his lips.

Glory's arms went round his neck. "I ain't what you'd like to have me," she said, in a smothered voice, "but I can be all that if you'll give me the chance. I'll work night and day to make myself different. I'll——"

Fanning and Bodley made their way to the door and left the house. "The colonel was right handsome about givin' in," remarked Bodley, his own voice husky and unsteady. "Nothin' more I can do for Mujercita now. She brought this all around herself. Bein' quick, as she was, is the only thing that saved the colonel. Juan would have dropped him the same time as Pelz dropped me. Ain't that some remarkable, Dick, the way fate took holt of this business and twisted it around so'st right and justice come uppermost?"

Fanning leaned on the fence and looked up at the stars. He made no answer to his friend.

"Although I'm let out, son," Bodley went on, "and will be hittin' the back trail for the mountains and mesas, you're still in the big game as the man says. Glory told me you wanted to marry her, and she told me she wanted to be different and be a credit to you afore she said *'Si.'*"

"As if that could make any difference with me!" said Fanning.

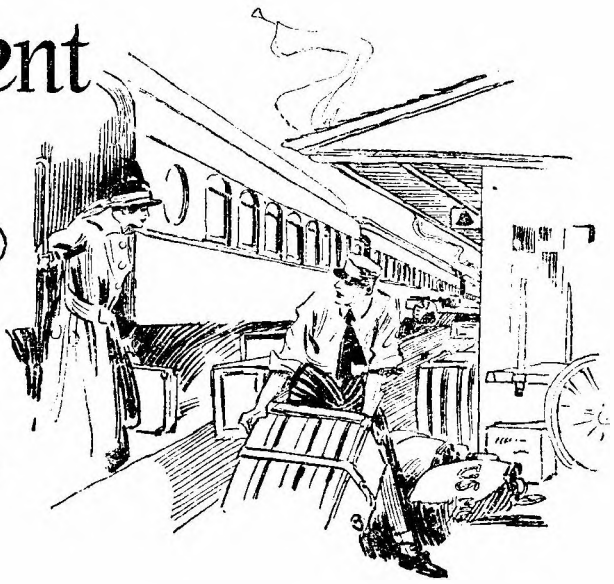
"Mujercita has her idees," continued Bodley. "When you go to the war, Dick, that ring of yourn'll still be on her finger; and when you come back, if you do come back—there's a chance you won't—I'll drop the prospectin' to be at the weddin'. Dick, to-night I'm plumb happy!"

E Pluribus Bodley was not the only one who was "plumb happy."

The Agent at Hyatt

By Russell A Boggs

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)



CHAPTER I.

JUST WHAT HE WANTED.

THE division operator peered over his glasses and across his desk in Crandall's direction. "Mr. Crandall, have you no explanation to offer?" he asked. His voice betrayed a little irritation, for he felt, in some way, that he was being egged on unwillingly.

Apparently young Crandall had nothing further to offer. He had been staring out of the window, his face grave, watching a piece of driftwood floating down the river, capriciously bobbing up, and then disappearing in the trough of the waves. He was thinking that piece of driftwood was free; it did not have to meet a train at one minute after seven every morning. He would like to be free himself; six years at one station as agent and operator without a vacation or day off was not good for any one—no, not even if the station was in what could be called his own home town.

At the division operator's question, Crandall faced around into the room where the little investigation was being held. Besides the division operator and himself there were only two others present—Rensworth, the division operator's chief clerk, and Skelly, the day dispatcher.

"No, Mr. Fosner," replied Crandall mildly; "except what I have already given. I was busy in the freight house checking a shipment of household goods, after which the local freight pulled in and unloaded. While they were unloading, No. 17 came and I had to handle her and take the mail to the post office. When I got back to the office the dispatcher was calling me on the wire. I answered, and he wanted to know where I'd been; he said he had been trying to raise me for an hour. He was wrong; I had been out just twenty-five minutes." Then the agent from Hyatt looked out of the window again, watching the river, as if the matter did not in the least interest him further.

"Yes," returned Fosner; "but Mr. Skelly here says you were then most disrespectful—using rude names and other things."

Crandall now gave the impression of one in deep thought, turning around and studying the floor intently, his brow winkled. Then his face cleared,

and he looked up brightly. "That's right," he said. "Come to think of it, I believe I did say some things."

The division operator resented the cheerful tone, and he frowned disapprovingly as he picked up a slip of paper from his desk. To him an investigation was a solemn matter.

"I have here," he said heavily, "a list of the expressions Mr. Skelly claims you used." The division operator started to read them, but they were so impolite that he changed his mind and instead handed the slip to Skelly for verification. "Is that correct?" he asked the day dispatcher.

Skelly read, and passed the paper back. "It is," he said emphatically.

Fosner gave it to Crandall. "Is it correct?" he asked.

The agent from Hyatt looked it over carefully and deliberately; then he returned it also. "I guess you got about all of them," he admitted, his voice gently reluctant. "It was all I could think of at the moment." His eye brightened suddenly, and he contemplated Skelly hopefully. It was plain that he could have added to the list then. Skelly, however, discreetly looked away, so Crandall refrained from any additions.

The division operator gaped. "You admit the allegation, then?"

"Yes, sir," said Crandall.

"But have you no excuse, no explanation?" demanded Fosner, amazed.

"None other than I have said," replied Crandall. "I was busy in the freight house——"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the division operator impatiently. Such passivity was maddening. He did not want to have to suspend Crandall, for he was puzzled as to where he could get an extra man to send down to Hyatt to relieve him. Fosner had a shrewd suspicion that Crandall knew it, and, wanting to get off, merely prodded him on so that no alternative was left.

"Then you used this disrespectful language—for no other cause?"

"Mr. Fosner," Crandall said slowly, "did you ever try to check three wagonloads of household goods, keep the freight-house door clear of the freight that three husky brakemen shot into it at top speed, handle a passenger train, and carry mail all within the space of twenty-five minutes, and then have some one ask you why you didn't get on the job—inquire if you were dead?"

Crandall said this more as a statement in justification than as a question which should be answered. He might have mentioned an unseemly word or two that Skelly had used. Nevertheless he did not, for it seemed to him the part of wisdom that they be not brought up in order that his own desire be attained.

The division operator glared, chewing his lip. Crandall was a good agent, and good agents were scarce, mighty scarce. Still, what could he do? He could not overlook such insubordination so candidly admitted. The more he reflected the more helpless and angry he became.

"Mr. Crandall," warned Fosner, "this is a most serious infraction of the rules of conduct." He wanted to give Crandall a last opportunity to express his apologies.

Crandall, however, had no such thought in mind. He was now engaged in a pensive study of the profile of Rensworth, the chief clerk. He did not care much for Rensworth; he was too sleekly dapper and plump; he was too neat. What hair he had was brushed too smoothly, and betokened much care and vain consideration before the glass in the privacy of the chief clerk's bedchamber.

"Therefore," continued Fosner, after a short pause, seeing that Crandall made no attempt to reply, and did not even look around, "in view of your own acknowledgment of the allegations

against you, I shall have to suspend you for two weeks." His voice was stern. "You'll be relieved to-morrow!"

Crandall eyed him reproachfully. "Two weeks?" he questioned disappointedly.

"No; make it three!" shouted the hectored Fosner.

Crandall jumped to his feet and hurried to the door. He looked back, his eyes sparkling. "Thank you," he said as he went out.

The division operator swung around to his chief clerk as the door shut behind the departing agent. "Now whom will we send to relieve him?" exploded Fosner. His eye fell upon the slip of paper containing Crandall's list of expressions. He used one of them.

Rensworth, who had been taking notes, looked up. His eyes were perfectly guileless. Yet a keen observer might have thought he had been waiting expectantly for this question. "There is Miss O'Hara," he suggested as he watched Fosner covertly.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SAME CASE.

HYATT, a small town of some odd hundreds, lies in a pleasant valley amid pleasant hills. And there, in his little depot office, Jerry Crandall sang merrily at his morning duties. He could not remember when he had last sung thus, but No. 17 would be in soon, bringing his relief. It was good to be getting away.

No. 17 came directly, and Crandall, busy at mail, express, and baggage cars, perceived but one passenger, a girl, alight from the coaches. The train pulled out, and when Jerry had gathered up his mail sacks the lone passenger was nowhere in sight.

The station was divided into three rooms. On the east end was the men's waiting room, in the middle the office, and on the west end the ladies' waiting room. Crandall, hustling back from delivering the mail, entered through the men's waiting room to his office. He was conscious of a sense of disappointment. What if they were not going to send a man to relieve him, after all? Still, his relief might have missed connections and would come on No. 21, the noon train. He decided that was it, and, in good spirits once more, again started to sing.

"If you don't mind," said a soft voice at the ticket window of the ladies' waiting room, "I've been sent down to relieve you."

Jerry Crandall spun about. The girl who had got off No. 17 was standing at the window, regarding him with mirthful eyes.

"What?" gasped Jerry incredulously. Whatever embarrassment he may have felt was lost in his surprise.

"I've been sent to relieve you," repeated the girl calmly, as she shoved her credentials under the grating—a letter addressed to Miss Jane O'Hara, instructing her to take charge of the office at Hyatt until further notice, and signed Division Operator Fosner.

"My stars!" exclaimed Crandall, returning the letter. "They have their nerve!"

Miss O'Hara's face rippled into a smile, but her blue Irish eyes clouded belligerently. "Show me the job!" she said with spirit. "I'm not afraid of any of them."

"I'll bet!" said Crandall, with what might have seemed needless enthusiasm. He sprang to the office door and swung it wide open. "Come in!" he said. "My name is Crandall, as you probably know, and your name is Miss O'Hara, as I do know. I'm glad to meet you."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," the girl said, laughing, "but really I was the only extra agent operator they had."

"Not at all! Not at all!" Crandall remonstrated. "Nevertheless, this is no place for a lady."

He read the question in her eyes. "This is one of those small agency jobs that are known as 'roasts,'" he explained. "Lots of heavy freight and express. Three towns back here in the country have their outlet through this station, and that means work, let me tell you. See that spur down the track? That belongs to the Northern Lumber Company and runs up to their mill, several miles out. You would be surprised at the number of cars they shoot down here in a day. More work!

"And mail!" Crandall threw out his hands in an expressive gesture of resignation. "Say! I've made as many as three trips to get the mail from one train up to the post office. Bless the inventor of the parcel post! However, don't think I'm trying to scare you. It just makes me sore to think that they would send you here against such a proposition."

Miss O'Hara's expression grew a little perturbed. "Is it really as bad as that?" she said. "I'll have to manage some way. Couldn't I hire somebody to handle the freight and mail for me?"

"You could," replied the indignant Crandall, "but by the time you paid him and deducted your board from your salary you would be in debt!" He waved his hand. "I tell you, ignorance does it—ignorance and lack of consideration! Is it any wonder I badgered Fosner into suspending me so that I would get a vacation?"

Miss O'Hara laughed merrily at that. "Is that the way you managed it?" she said. "I thought he seemed rather worked up when he instructed me to come here. Tell me about it."

Crandall's face fell a little ruefully. "You can blame it all on me," he said. Then he blushed with guilty pride as he told her, omitting, of course, the list of expressions.

"I was completely fed up on this job," he finished. "I came here just six years ago and haven't had a day off since. And I'll confess to you frankly that I don't expect to come back. You know the saying, 'Once an agent always an agent.' Well, that's so, and I know I'll never get any higher, all fiction to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Then you never have saved the superintendent's child nor been loved by the general manager's daughter?" said Miss O'Hara, yet she looked at him with perfect understanding.

"No," he returned. "Neither have I ever thrown the switch and saved the special, nor even flagged the limited at the washed-out bridge."

"Very careless!" she said. "How, then, could you ever expect to rise?"

"I don't," Crandall admitted, after their laughter had subsided. "Not any more. I'm going back to the farm."

"Oh!" she cried. "Don't say that."

"Why not?" he questioned. "It beats this."

"It surely does!" Miss O'Hara exclaimed. "I came from a farm myself."

"You don't say!" Crandall looked at her with new interest and noted, with more appreciation, her tall, strong figure. "Well, now!

"You see," he went on, "I always lived on one, too, until I began to get foolish notions about private cars and special trains. It took me about one year to lose the notions and five years to get nerve enough to quit. I've got the nerve now, I believe, so I'm going."

Homesickness was in the girl's eyes. "That's sensible," she said gravely. "Don't ever come back." She swept her hand around at the dingy, gloomy little office with its clattering telegraph instruments, its hooks full of waybills and reports, the battered desk, the old stove, the account books.

"It's all so drab, so colorless, so monotonous! It gives me the horrors sometimes." She paused a moment, brooding; then she aroused herself. "Where is your farm?" she asked.

"Two miles south of here," Crandall replied. "A fellow offered it to me dirt cheap."

His eyes lit up. "Say—if you could only see it!" he exclaimed. "A big, old-fashioned brick house sitting back from the road in a big, shady yard, and, back of the house, the garden and the orchard; a big barn, too, and all around the wide, flat meadows with the creek running past on one side—a creek where the big maples lean out from the banks, their tops nearly touching across the water.

"And to the north and to the south the gentle, wooded hills stretching away, dozing in the sunshine. That's what I'm going to have instead of a private car. I'll be in debt—for a while—and lonely, too, I expect. But I'm going. I'm through with this."

He was surprised at the warmth, at the glow of recollections reflected in the girl's eyes. Almost there were tears, it seemed to him.

"You make me so homesick!" she cried, a tiny quiver in her voice. "I used to wonder if any one else ever felt so weary, so stifled as I did. But I have to stick with it."

"What!" he ejaculated. "Are you all alone, too?"

"Yes," she said.

The unconscious pathos in her answer struck Crandall. Something warm swept through him; a sudden boldness came to him. He leaned toward her. "Come with me!" he cried boldly. And then, as suddenly, he stopped and stammered, unable to say more, astounded at his own impetuosity, yet strangely rejoicing in it.

Jane O'Hara stared at him, bewildered, startled by the light in his steady eyes, his earnest face. "Oh!" she faltered, confused. "You—you misunderstand me. You mustn't—I didn't—I spoke without thinking——" She drew back and gave a little, embarrassed laugh, desperately striving to think of something to say to cover the awkward silence that fell between them.

Crandall, abashed, saw that she thought he had spoken from pity, from sympathy. Her pride touched him, pleased him, even while he berated himself for his blundering.

"Don't you think we had better be making the transfer, so that you can go?" Miss O'Hara finally managed to say, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact manner.

Crandall's face burned red for a moment. "Yes," he replied, "probably we had better." He picked up a bunch of waybills. "I'll write up the freight reports if you'll close the ticket book for the day."

CHAPTER III.

IN NO PARTICULAR HURRY.

AT noon Crandall and Miss O'Hara had lunch at his boarding house. Crandall had recommended it to the girl, so she made arrangements to stay there while in Hyatt. After that, at his suggestion, they went for a short stroll through the little, quaint old town. They walked down the shady, pleasant main street, where every one knew every one else, down to the old bridge that spanned the stream which placidly flowed by at the edge of the town.

"The same creek that runs by the farm," Crandall told Miss O'Hara. She nodded, face averted, peering down into the deep, tranquil water.

"I'm beginning to feel glad that they sent me here," she said. "It's such a beautiful place," she added, then, a trifle hastily.

Then they went back to the station, where, about three o'clock, they completed their task, disturbed now and then by the coming of an occasional patron or a call on the wires, and, just as they had finished, by the arrival of the local freight.

"There," Crandall said, tossing the last of the books onto the desk; "it's

done!" He handed the girl a bunch of keys. "Now," he said, "you're the boss."

Miss O'Hara took them, smiling bravely. "And now you can go," she said.

Crandall made no immediate response, and while they waited the noise of an approaching train reached them; a long whistle sounded.

"That'll be the local," said Crandall, jumping up. He hurried to the rear of the office. "I'll have to get these bills out of the press."

The freight pulled in and stopped. One of the brakemen came running. "What you got for us?" he shouted as soon as he reached the waiting-room door. When he came to the office window and saw Jane O'Hara within he whistled with surprise.

"Ah, there, sweetheart!" he cooed. He was a new brakeman, very green, and quite obsessed with the conviction that he was invincible with the ladies. He did not see Crandall at the back of the office. Miss O'Hara eyed him expertly. "Watch your step!" she said coolly. "Where's your conductor?"

The man winked. "Now, now, sweetness, don't be huffy! Going to be here long?"

Miss O'Hara looked annoyed.

"Go away," she said. "And behave yourself."

"Oh, now, my dear——"

The office door flew open; a hand grasped the invincible one's coat collar. He was jerked to the waiting-room door. He fell sprawling, face down, onto the gravel platform, ten feet away from the toe of Crandall's right foot.

The brakeman picked himself up amid the jeers and guffaws of the oncoming conductor and the two other brakemen. All that saved the unfortunate one was his surpassing sang-froid. He wiped the dirt and grime from his face with careful fingers, then he bowed gravely to Crandall. "Excuse me," he said, quite unabashed; then he quoted surprisingly:

"'Excuse me, ma'am!' the gentleman said;
'I did not know that you were wed!'"

"That'll do!" warned Crandall. He turned to the amused conductor. "Here's your switch list, Billy. What you got?"

Crandall went to the freight house while the crew unloaded their freight. Then, when they had finished and after they had done their switching and gone, he reëntered the office.

Miss O'Hara met him at the door. "Thank you," she said softly, and held out her hand.

He tingled at her touch, and his face colored. "The new ones are always the worst," he said apologetically. He wondered if she had heard the brakeman's words. "Sometimes they have to be handled rather—er—quick."

"It seemed quick to me," she said, laughing. "But they don't bother me often," she added. "Generally they are very good."

Still, it seemed a shame to Crandall that she should be bothered ever. He was conscious of a wish to prevent it, but remembering his outburst of the morning he kept silent. Nevertheless the girl apparently divined his thoughts, for she turned away so that he could not read her face too clearly.

She went back to where the train had interrupted them. "I expect you'll be going now?" she said inquiringly.

Crandall hung the freight-house key on a nail beside the ticket window. "Why," he replied hesitatingly, uneasily, "why, I'm in no particular hurry. I've got three weeks in which to go out and look the place over and to decide definitely—not that there's the least doubt but that I'll stay, though. So I was just thinking I would hang around until to-morrow perhaps—anyway, until you get a little better acquainted with the job."

He was afraid she might not understand. "I can carry the mail for you," he explained, "and maybe help out a little until we see if we can't figure some way to make it easier for you." He wondered if it sounded as lame to her as it did to himself.

She smiled at him enigmatically, her eyes filled with a baffling something.

"I don't want to keep you," she said, "but—I'll be glad!"

CHAPTER IV.

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS.

JIMMY THE KICK and his partner, Fancy Fred, upon evil bent, unloaded from a westbound extra freight at the lonely water tank, one mile east of Hyatt. The time was near sundown, and from then until dusk the two kept under cover. Then, in the twilight, by unfrequented and silent paths they made their way toward Hyatt. For by secret and unexplainable channels they had learned that a prize was coming west on No. 49, due to reach Hyatt at seven-ten that evening. A noble prize, well worth serious effort.

The train was late. When eight o'clock came the loungers at the station became discouraged and gradually disappeared, first one by one, then in pairs, and finally what remained drifted away in a body. At eight-fifteen Jane O'Hara and Jerry Crandall, waiting in the office, had the place all to themselves. To themselves, that is, if the two silent, unseen watchers were not counted—the shadows peering out from between the piles of lumber and railroad ties arrayed along the tracks across from the depot. Their plans completed, they waited patiently, alertly. The reward would be ample.

The two within the office conversed pleasantly, quite unmindful of the delay. Generalities they kept to for the most part, with only now and then a touch of the personal, yet each discovering more and more of the admirable in the other. A few hints Jane unconsciously dropped here and there of some of her problems, over which Crandall shook his head, frowning and perplexed. And when he several times mentioned the broad acres along the creek where the big maples grew her eyes would grow deep with wistfulness, and, seeing that, he would break off, remorseful and uneasy. For both kept thinking of his impetuous words of the morning and progressed carefully.

"There is one of those old, big, open fireplaces in the living room"—this is one of the things he told her—"and on a cold winter night when the wind howls without and with a roaring fire within——"

"And a table at your elbow piled high with magazines and books——" Jane's eyes were half closed as she added to his picture. Then abruptly, afraid, they switched the subject.

At eight-thirty No. 49 whistled in the distance. They went out to meet it, Crandall with the pouch of mail in his hand.

"Here's a signer for you," the express messenger said to Miss O'Hara when the train had stopped. He held out his receipt book and a sealed parcel.

She took them, saw that the package was marked currency, value five thousand dollars, addressed to the Northern Lumber Company, Hyatt, and, signing her name opposite the entry, handed the book back.

Crandall, who had thrown the sack into the mail car, pulled the baggage truck away from the train as it started out.

"That's the Northern Lumber Company's monthly pay," he told Jane, indicating the package of money. "They'll be after it in the morning."

He hooked up the handle of the truck, and as he did so he happened to glance in the direction of the men's waiting room just as the solitary pas-

senger from the train stepped through the doorway. The new arrival's face was silhouetted against the light for a second. It was the division operator's chief clerk!

"Rensworth!" exclaimed Crandall. "What's he doing here?" He turned to Jane, and was surprised at the expression of annoyance on her face. In a flash he guessed. "He's one of your problems?" he queried.

"Yes," she returned; "unhappily."

Crandall angrily clenched his fists. Jane noticed it, and laid her hand on his arm. "No," she said, "don't do anything like that. Not that it wouldn't do him good, but he can make it very unpleasant for me. I'm not at all afraid of him—only he is just such a—a pest."

Crandall comprehended her dilemma. "I see," he said, and stood scowling; then he picked up the mail sacks which the train had left. "I'll take these up to the post office." But still he hesitated; looking at her questioningly.

Jane's hand tightened ever so slightly upon his arm; she knew why he waited. "Please—hurry back," she said.

Crandall took the hand from his arm, gripped it tightly within his own for an instant, and hurried away without a word as she went toward the station.

CHAPTER V.

THE SAME AS CHAPTER ONE.

"HOW do you do!" greeted Rensworth as Jane entered the waiting room. He smiled and bowed ingratiatingly.

Miss O'Hara returned his greeting evenly. "This is a surprise," she said. It wasn't exactly, but she had to say something. Her lips smiled slightly; her eyes not at all.

Fumbling with her keys, she feigned not to notice the proffered hand. She unlocked the office door and entered. He followed, smirking.

"And a pleasure, I hope," he said. His complacent little eyes twinkled.

Miss O'Hara offered no reply, and, going to the desk, laid the package of currency and some routine railroad mail upon it; then she turned about to face him.

"To-morrow being Sunday, I thought I would just run down over the day," Rensworth went on. "Thought you might feel lonely here by yourself."

"You're very thoughtful." She had meant to say it more cordially, but despite herself the words dripped sarcasm, for anger was gathering within her. She was so weary of this creature, this ninny, following her about. She felt that she could not control herself much longer. Her eyes flashed hotly.

"Not at all," he said; his skin was very thick. "Only too glad——"

"Hands up!" said a voice. Jimmy the Kick, masked, stood in the office doorway. An automatic pistol waved threateningly.

Miss O'Hara and Rensworth complied with the demand without delay. The fright on Jane's face was only exceeded by that on Rensworth's. He nearly collapsed as the pistol pointed his way.

"I want that five thousand!" the masked one continued. "Quick!"

But Jane, even if she were frightened, did not lose her wits. She tried to fight for time. "I haven't——"

"No fooling!" snapped Jimmy the Kick sharply. "Stand over to the side, away from that desk, both of you!"

They obeyed again, Jane's heart losing all hope, as the sealed package was thus disclosed to view from behind her.

Jimmy the Kick chuckled as he beheld it. "Good!" he exclaimed. He took one step through the doorway. "I knew you had——"

A shot crashed outside startlingly. The masked one whirled precipitately and fled, without the prize.

Jane, gripping the edge of the desk for support, had but one thought. "Jerry!" She breathed his name from

trembling lips. A second shot came from the darkness.

Crandall, hastening back to the station from the post office, rounded the corner of the depot where a dim platform light burned. A pistol was shoved in front of him, aimed at the middle button on his coat.

"What's your hurry?" asked Fancy Fred. "Put up your hands!"

"Sure!" acquiesced Crandall. His hands shot up. Likewise his useful right foot with the precision and drive of a full back making a punt from his own goal line.

The outside guard uttered a grunt of pain, simultaneously and instinctively pressing the trigger as the gun flew from his shattered fingers. He missed—by a scant half inch, the bullet passing through Crandall's coat between his body and left arm.

Fancy Fred ran, headed east, at his best speed. And Crandall let him go, merely pausing to snatch the pistol from the ground. He had other matters to attend to.

A flying figure sped from the waiting-room door, some thirty feet distant; this one was headed west. Crandall threw the point of the gun down and fired. The figure never wavered. Another glimpse—and Jimmy the Kick also was among the vanished.

"Missed!" exclaimed Crandall, but it didn't bother him much.

He leaped into the waiting room and to the office. The tragic figure within startled him.

Wavering upon her feet and clinging to the desk, her face white, Jane's blue eyes were staring with the shock of fear and misery. But there was no mistaking the wave of gladness, of joy and something else that transfigured them when she so suddenly beheld him.

"Why—Jane!" he cried, almost shocked—and glad. He sprang to her side.

She looked up into his face, swaying a little.

"I thought—I thought you were ——" she whispered. She choked with a little, sobbing catch of her breath, unable to finish.

Crandall took her into his arms, eager words upon his lips.

And after a time, when he had comforted her, a sudden thought intruded upon his new-found happiness. "Where's Rensworth?" he asked her.

She pointed to the rear window; it was open. "He jumped and ran," she said, "at the first shot."

"There'll be no more of that," Crandall told her, thinking of Rensworth and her problems.

She snuggled closer to him; then presently. "Say it again," she said.

"There'll be no more——" he began promptly.

"No," she said; "the other."

For only a second he was puzzled. Then he understood. "Come with me!" he whispered.

And this time her answer was as he wished.

Had Pity On the Crows

I CAN'T find any old clothes for the scarecrow," said the farmer.

"Use some of the fancy things the boy brought home from college," said his wife.

"I'm trying to scare the crows—not make 'em laugh 'emselves to death," said the farmer.

Very Unkind

SUPPOSING I decide to let you have the money, how do I know that I shall get it back at the time you mention?" asked Spiffkins.

"I promise it, my boy, on the word of a gentleman," replied Biffkins.

"Ah, in that case I may think better of it. Come around this evening and bring him with you."

Driving An Auto Winner

By
Ralph De Palma
(FAMOUS RACING DRIVER)

IN A TALK WITH
JANE DIXON

IF I had a jitney for every time that I've been asked how to become a race driver, I'd make the output of a United States mint look like a pocketful of loose change. This may seem like an exaggeration of the truth; but it is not so much of an exaggeration as at first appears. Every boy, at some time during his adventuresome period, is firmly convinced he was cut out to be a race driver, just as girls in the romantic stage believe they were born to be great actresses.

I am constantly in receipt of letters from youths in all parts of the country asking me to tell them how to break into the game. This is especially true before and after big racing events when a fifty-thousand-dollar cash prize melon is to be cut. The get-rich-quick money fires their ambitions, and well it may, when you stop to consider that a cash prize of, say, twenty thousand dollars, not unusual for a winner, is double the annual salary of many a bank president.

Plenty of men work hard all their lives without accumulating a twenty-thousand-dollar fortune. To win it overnight arouses the gambling instinct latent in every one of us. Add to this the adventure, the excitement, the glory of fame as well as gain, and you have the answer to the heavy crop of "race nuts" that ripens every season.

My first impulse, when an eager young prospect comes nosing around trying to sneak into the big tent, is to take him by the arm, look him straight in the eye, and, with all the power of command in my system, say: "Run away and forget it." The young man who imagines he is going on a pleasure jaunt when he starts racing is about to find himself in the same position as the chap who enlists because he hears a band play and likes the looks of the uniform, and suddenly wakes up to find himself looking down the muzzle of a machine gun.

II.

THREE initial factors are necessary to the making of the successful driver—courage, endurance, strength. Without any one of these three, the candidate will never get past the practice lines.

It takes courage to face death at every turn for several hours at a stretch; to stake life on the judgment of a second. True, drivers do not think of this in the tense moments of the race—they have no time to think of anything but the matter in hand—but the sword hangs suspended over their head, just the same, by a thread so delicate that the turn of a wrist could bring it clanking down on its victim.

As to endurance, it is as essential to the race driver as paints are to the painter or as a good eye is to a ball player. Not only must the nerves be tuned up to endure the pace, but there must be the power to endure physical pain no matter how severe. Painful accidents are by no means unusual during a race. Often, a tooth will be snapped off by a sudden bump, as clean as if it were made of china. Another car will throw a small stone, which at the terrific rate of speed becomes little less than a bullet. A thousand and one physical accidents are liable to happen under the intense strain. The driver must have the endurance to disregard the pain and keep up with the bunch—in other words, the nerve to take punishment.

The importance of strength is obvious. The boy who has not got it will find himself hopelessly lost behind the wheel of a racer. Every day for weeks before a race, and during the event itself, he will be called upon to exercise the iron muscle.

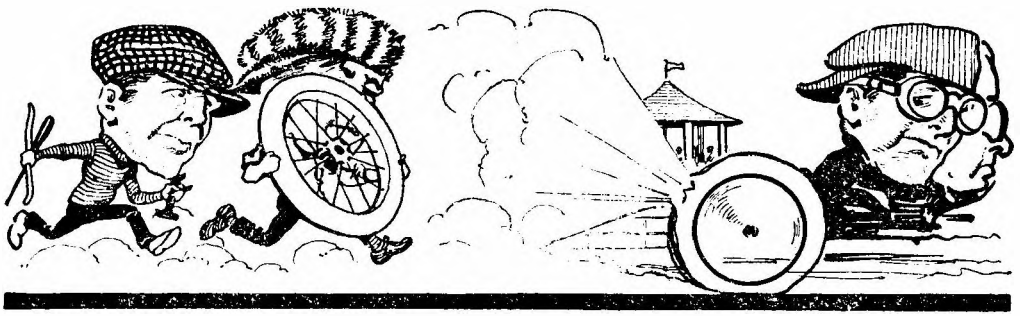
Given these three qualifications already specified the motive power, without which they are absolutely useless, is still required. This is headwork. The average observer may think a star driver is a wild and woolly sort of a bug who goes out on the course, opens up his mount to the limit and lets her zip. Such a man would have no chance with the brainy boys of to-day.

III.

THE race game as it is played now is like a chess match; every move is figured out in advance. In the emergencies which occur, the driver must have judgment that is almost instinctive. He must be able to decide and act in a space of time less than a lightning's flash. He must have a sure eye for distance; to know to the minute part of an inch how close he can hug another car in passing. He must have a sure sense of speed and distance, so as to avoid bumping the car ahead. He must be able to figure out the other man's disadvantages, as for instance when his opponent is running ragged, to force the driver to change a tire. A change of tire has lost a race for many a near winner.

Racing methods are entirely a matter of the individual. Some drivers prefer to set a pace at the start and try their best to maintain it, trusting to their mount to hold up to the finish. Others refrain from setting the pace, and conserve their strength for the finish. Personally, I am for sticking well to the fore with the leaders.

The clockwork system appeals to me as being the most consistent winner. By this I mean that on every lap of a race I shut down at the same time. I never take a turn too fast, and I shut off at the top of the bank. By driving wide, I get more of a cut on the turn and do not have to slow down so much as if I took it close and at high speed. I believe this is not only a time saver, but a machine saver as well, lessening the strain on both the chassis and motor. This method has been per-



"The tire crew swoop down on it."

fected to the point where in action I frequently do not vary two-hundredths of a second in the laps.

IV.

IT has been my policy on the tracks not to bother about who is passing me. This can be learned from the pit signals, which inform the drivers exactly how they stand in the race. By being thoroughly up on the signs so that their meaning can be caught at a glance, all thought can be concentrated on driving without the distraction of keeping tally on opponents. Now and then there may be a slight brush between two leaders. This is not solely for the entertainment of the crowd, as has been charged, but for the actual value it may have testing out the speed of an opponent, to know what his car has.

Here is an important point: Never let the other fellows know in practice how fast your car can go. Keep the limit of your speed for your trump card in the big event. Racing is like a game of poker. Show the other players what you hold, and they will get busy with ways and means to beat you. Look wise and say nothing, and they will immediately begin wondering what you are keeping back on them. They are not sure whether you are bluffing or whether you have the goods, and the uncertainty undermines the self-confidence that does as much as any one thing to bring a driver in first under the wire. Given a scared automobile jockey with a fast mount, and a confident driver with a medium car, and I will pick the latter every time for winner. A quitter can lose more races than bad tires or broken machinery.

Let me impress upon the candidate for gasoline honors the importance of having his racer in perfect condition. He should know his mount as well as he knows himself, every screw, every bolt, every piece of metal, every bit of mechanism in or on it. I have never heard of a driver coming into town the day before an event and winning the race. To pluck the golden apple he must have made a pal of his motor for weeks. He must have studied the course over which he is to speed—especially if it is a road race. He must have become familiar with atmospheric conditions and have tuned up his mount to meet them as a violinist tunes his violin to give out every nuance of the music embodied in it.

V.

TIRES are always one of the first considerations. Their inflation plays an important part in a race. The only way to regulate this properly is to test the tires until the inflation that will give the best speed in the existing conditions is ascertained. Many factors must be considered: heat, weight of car, track. I vary the pressure of the tires I use in racing anywhere between eighty and one hundred.

For days before an event, the tire-

changing crews are busy at practice. Each man has his work to do, and his business is to do it in the least possible time consistent with efficiency. Before the car is well stopped, the tire crew swoop down on it, jack it up in a jiffy, spin off the disabled wheel, spin on a new one, and the mount is once more ready for the race. All this is done in less than sixteen seconds.

Experience has taught that the quicker way is to change one wheel at a time instead of trying to change two. Before the race every extra wheel is tested to see if the threads are perfect, so that a single turn of the hand will spin it to where it will click into place. Where seconds mean hundreds of dollars, not to mention the reputation of the car, there is no time for sticky or burred threads. Some of the tire crews could give greased lightning a lesson in quickness.

Another point is to be sure that the wheel is perfectly balanced, each part of equal weight. If one tire shows wear more than the others, it means the car is out of balance. If the trouble is in the rear the wheels are offset to counteract the fault. If it is the front tires that wear, the engine is not placed right. It must be moved until the balance is perfect and the wear on tires equalized.

Gear ratio is a most important item —different tracks requiring different gearing, according to the steepness of their banking. In road racing, hills enter into the question.

Lubrication must be studied carefully. There should be lighter grease in the transmission on a cold day than on a hot day. Atmospheric conditions have much to do with a race. A car is five miles faster in California than it is in the East because there is more oxygen in the air in that climate. The delicate mechanism of the mount must be attuned to meet these conditions and make the most of them.

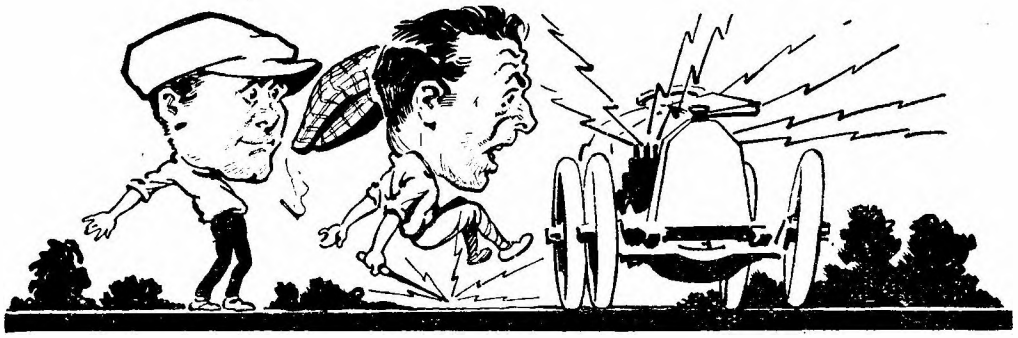
A highly organized racing car is like a high-strung race horse—it must be pampered and petted into doing its best. Its whims must be catered to; its eccentricities either corrected or made into assets. Its cooling system must be watched as carefully as the circulation and blood pressure of a trained athlete. The driver must have tested out the spark plugs to be sure that they are perfect, and have given the valves the third degree to be able to bank on the fact that they will not warp.

And so it goes from one end of the car to the other. Every piece of it must have been tried in the fire of top speed and proved itself worthy of the task before it. Even then, unlooked-for accidents will happen to cause one or more of the parts to weaken or break and the work of weeks is lost. This takes the heart out of a driver more than any other kind of a calamity.

During the try-outs, racing cars are taken apart and rebuilt by the drivers and their mechanicians as casually as a baby builds and topples a house of blocks. This is necessary in order to overcome the defects; to replace questionable material with the real dependable article. It is not enough that a professional driver is able to sit behind the wheel and tear loose. There are plenty of speed bugs who could drive a car at a fast clip. But the star driver knows the inside of a racing mount as a skilled surgeon knows the vital organs of the body, and he is quite as sensitive to its ailments as is the surgeon to those of a human being.

VI.

SO much for the car itself. And now, how about the human machine which is a part of the whole and must be quite as fit as the mount? I have always been strong for the driver taking the best possible care of himself



"The driver must have tested out the spark plugs."

physically. A clear head and a clean body is a safe bet any time.

The wise ones keep in first-class physical trim, and within weight. They do not allow their muscles to become flabby or bound. Before a race I make it a practice to walk long distances every day. There is no training I know which so thoroughly exercises every muscle of the body and puts one in trim like walking. It generates strength, and the driver will be able to use all the reserve power he can store up.

The superstitions of the benzine jockeys are well known among followers of the game. As is the case with most men who gamble against big odds and death, they strive to placate the goddess Luck in every way possible. A search through the pockets of the drivers just before a big event would reveal some strange contents.

A well-known driver for a long time attributed much of his success to the bone from a racoon's foot nailed to the dashboard of his car. A racing team which broke a few records worth while carried a bottle-fed pig as a mascot. His piglet swaggered about in a blue sweater made to match those worn by the drivers and had his own private set of goggles. He was a temperamental little pet, too, disdaining the common herd that crowded about to offer him sweetmeats and other fruits of fame.

None of us is particularly pleased to be handed the number twenty-three in a race. As for thirteen, that is, of course, entirely barred.

It certainly looks to a casual observer as if fortune followed some of the stars and snatched them right out from under the feet of disaster. A hundred times these lucky boys have been so close to a smash that a penny for their lives would look like throwing away money which might buy a newspaper. For other drivers, just as clever and more cautious, things will break bad right along. Most of them have been in some sort of smash-up or other.

VII.

MY closest call was in Milwaukee, in 1912. I had won the Vanderbilt Cup race three days before. We were driving for the Grand Prix and Caleb Bragg was leading. The course was a cloud of dust, and I could see only a few feet ahead of my car. Suddenly Bragg flashed up right in front of me, and before I could slow down I had telescoped him. I was thrown through a mesh of telephone wires into a field of cornstalks. One of the stalks penetrated my chest just below the heart. It looked like my last race; but I guess a driver is like a cat, nine lives to go and one thrown in for good measure.

I am often asked how I broke into the game. Strange enough, I leaped in on the heels of an accident. I had done

"Had his own private set of goggles."

considerable bicycle racing in the old days, but when the automobile began to give the bicycle the eclipse I crawled on the band wagon. It happened I was mechanician with Campbell in the Briarcliff road race in April, 1907. We were getting along fine in practice until the car upset and Campbell was disabled. I begged so hard for the mount that the entrant consented. The day of the event I felt that I was sitting on a cloud with my feet hanging over, and, though I did not win, I was the happiest man on the course, not excepting the victor. This started me on my career as a race driver. After that one experience, it would have taken an army to stop me. The fever was in my bones.

VIII.

"WHEN are you going to play safe and become a staid business man?" my friends often inquire.

I have asked myself the same question many times. The only excuse for sticking to the game I can think of is, I *have* to race. Maybe it is like the stage; once the smell of grease paint gets in the nose nothing can get it out again. I like racing, not for the profits alone, but for the sport itself. A lot of us are that way. We say "just one more race and then we will quit for good." And we mean it, too, when we say it. Then a big event comes along. We are confident we have the goods to win. The thing gets to beating in our blood, and the next we know we are out on the track tearing away at the speed records, giving every atom of our energy, or strength, or brain, to getting there first.

Recently, I have been building my own idea of a perfectly set-up car in Detroit. It is a tremendous satisfaction to create something which fulfills your own ideals and send it along to some one who you know can appreciate good work. I believe I have the automobile down to the finest point of its present day possibilities, and I say this without egotism, because back of me is the experience that makes for such achievement. The finished product is the crowning glory of my career as an automobilist.

But race driving—that is another thing. When will I quit? Hard to tell. Maybe—some day.

Spending to Save

IT was an ingenious husband who sent his wife shopping in a taxi the other day. A friend who happened to see him say good-by to her from the curb remarked on his apparent extravagance.

"It's economy really," replied the husband. "Whenever she's in a store she'll be worried to death because the taxi is eating up money all the time, so she won't stay long enough to spend half as much as she would if she went on foot."

Nothing—Flat

By Ralph Boston

THE train for New Orleans, via Pensacola, leaves Jacksonville, Florida, at eight-ten in the morning. Most of the passengers for this train eat breakfast in Jacksonville before getting aboard; consequently, the men who smoke are ready for their after-breakfast cigars as soon as they hand their grips to the porter. This was the case on a certain morning in mid-February, and there were five in the smoking compartment of the parlor car, puffing the fragrant smoke wreaths and chatting as men will when under the spell of my lady Nicotine.

One was a stout man in a silk skull cap and a linen duster. He may have been fifty-five, and the weed had loosened his tongue in a frankness that was dashed with brag and replete with folly. His cigar was a long, dark panetela. He remarked that he had a good supply of the panetelas, all manufactured in bond from tobacco guaranteed by the government to have been imported from Havana. They had cost twelve dollars a hundred in Tampa.

This man revealed the fact that his name was Abner Q. Brisco, that he lived in Montana, that he had been doing Miami and Palm Beach and—he said this with a wink—hunting the poker game in its secret hiding place. In one of his bursts of confidence he showed a letter of credit for three thousand dollars, and against which only a thousand had been drawn. His ready money he carried in a little leather case in the form of travelers' checks.

Another of the five smokers was a hatchet-faced, squint-eyed man in a gray cap. He smoked cigarettes, and his eye fired covertly at the sight of the Montana man's letter of credit and checks. This man said that his name was Hostetter—Eugene Hostetter, and York State was where he came from.

In the course of the conversation, which rambled from the war to cotton, to the slashed trees bleeding turpentine along the right of way, and finally to the Mardi Gras at New Orleans, Hostetter inquired the time. He never carried a watch, he said, because of an odd family superstition, so he had come

to depend upon the watches of others. He volunteered no information regarding the superstition that held him watchless, and none of the others pressed him on the point. Brisco removed a gold timepiece from his pocket and reported that it was ten o'clock.

"A stop watch!" exclaimed Hostetter, eying the resplendent ticker. "Is it reliable?"

"To the thousandth part of a second," averred Brisco, in the large, impressive manner characteristic of his utterances. "I have bet on many a horse race, up in the country where I live, and have pulled down thousands—yes, and paid out thousands," he admitted, his double chin quivering with a good-natured chuckle, "on the sole warrant and authority of this watch. It cost me two hundred dollars, and Old Reliable is its middle name."

"Some sport!" chirped a stoop-shouldered man, who wore crumpled clothes, needed a shave and was smoking a battered brier pipe. There was a touch of irony in his voice which Brisco did not seem to catch.

"Some sport is right," said the Montana man. "Don't let 'em tell you different." He patted the watch lovingly and slid it back into his vest. "What did you say your name was?" he asked, cocking his eyes at the man who was overdue at the barber's.

"Dewman G. Berry," was the answer.

Brisco stared, and in time his wits scintillated. "Dew Berry! What do you know about that, huh?" He rumbled like a volcano and erupted in a roar of mirth. "Dew Berry!"

II.

EVEN the youngish man in nose glasses, who talked little and seemed anxious to efface himself, smiled in an apologetic way. "I knew a man once, in Sent Looey," he ventured to remark, "whose name was Uriah Robinson Dunn. U. R. Dunn," he elaborated. "And he wasn't a crook, either."

"Blamed funny!" said Hostetter; "but my friend Charley there," he nodded toward a pasty-faced youth,-"is named Swift. And he happens to be Swift—on his feet, I mean. Nothing fast about him, in an unlovely sense. He can do a hundred yards in ten seconds, flat. Eh, Charley?"

Charley Swift was manufacturing a cigarette, and a tobacco bag was swinging from his teeth by a pink string. He couldn't talk because of the string, but he could nod—and he did.

The Montana man's mind was stabbed with a doubt. "Come again with that, Hostetter," he requested.

Hostetter came again, and with emphasis. One hundred yards—ten seconds. He spoke from intimate knowledge of Swift and would not be gainsaid.

"Some runner!" remarked Dew Berry, with his usual irony.

"Believe me!" exclaimed Brisco. "I ain't what you would call in touch with foot racing, but a hundred yards is three hundred feet; and ten seconds for three hundred feet means thirty feet every second, according to my geography. It ain't in reason, when you consider the human frame."

"I haven't any travelers' checks," observed Hostetter, "but I have what is known as the long green." He showed the long green, in a roll as thick as his wrist. "Half a thousand in that wad," he went on, "and I'll lay it on Charley at even money, and you can time him with your own watch. Now, where is the good red Montana blood?"

"Candy!" chortled Brisco. "But where'll your friend run? On the roof of the train?"

"This train halts at Lloyd's for fifteen minutes for a chicken dinner," returned Hostetter. "We can measure

the course in the cinders by the track. While the other passengers eat, we can have our little fun. Later, or before if we wish, we can have our noon meal, too. This is a buffet-broiler car."

"You're on," declared the Montana man promptly, "providing you'll let me pace off the course and hold the watch."

"That suits me," Hostetter answered.

The train was not due at Lloyd's until one-twenty-three. During the three-hour interval the forthcoming race against time was brushed temporarily aside and the conversation took many angles.

One angle was this: An aged man named Brownlee had drawn on his home bank in Kansas a draft for ten thousand dollars. A nephew in Kansas had requested the bank not to pay the draft. The nephew had taken train for St. Petersburg, Florida, where his aged relative was spending the winter, determined to investigate matters and find out why his uncle wanted so much money.

Brownlee had resented the meddling of his nephew. He had fallen in with a fascinating gentleman who had shown him how, by investing ten thousand dollars in the New Orleans races, the two could clean up thirty thousand dollars. Brownlee said he would thank his nephew to mind his own business. Brownlee was old enough to take care of himself, and had made his pile before the nephew had finished teething. If the bank wouldn't honor the draft, then Brownlee would see the game through with the fifteen hundred dollars he had about him. The day after this talk with his nephew, Brownlee had disappeared and the police had been unable to locate him.

"Skin game!" grunted the Montana man. "The old fool was hooked by confidence men."

"Clear case," said Hostetter. "There's one born every minute, though, and there are not enough minutes to go around."

"Maybe you think there's one born every ten seconds?" commented Brisco, his wits again flashing humorously.

Hostetter shook his head and disclaimed any such thought. The man with the nose glasses had come out of his shell to recite the known facts regarding Brownlee; and now he drew back into his shell again.

III.

IN due course the train reached Lloyd's, famed for its refreshments, all cooked in the most appetizing Southern style. But there were five passengers who did not flock with the others into the eating house. They went off by themselves to the vicinity of the water tank, and the fat man from Montana paced off a very liberal hundred yards.

Then, watch in hand, he climbed to the top of a pile of railroad ties, midway of the course, and announced himself as ready to time the race. Hostetter climbed up beside him, stood close and eyed the face of the watch. Dew Berry was at the starting line and the gentleman with the nose glasses at the finish. Charley Swift, stripped to his shirt and wearing canvas shoes, jumped from his professional crouch when Berry imitated a starting pistol by sharply smiting his palms.

It was clear to all that, while Charley Swift could run, he was not a phenomenon in a hundred-yard dash. Any high-school boy of average speed could have shown his heels to Charley Swift. Nevertheless, the stop watch whose middle name was Old Reliable showed that the course had been covered in ten seconds! The five returned to the smoking compartment just ahead of the crowd from the dining room.

"I'll trouble you for the stakes, Mr.

Berry," said Hostetter to the man in the crumpled clothes.

"And I'll trouble you for the watch in your right-hand coat pocket," cut in Berry. "It isn't a stop watch, but it is very dependable—in ordinary circumstances—and just now we need it particularly."

"What do you mean?" Hostetter demanded.

"I'm getting ready to explain what I mean. First, give me the watch."

"You must be crazy! I haven't got a watch——" Hostetter's words died on his lips as one groping hand drew a hunting-case watch from his pocket. "How in Sam Hill did that get into my coat?" was his startled question.

"If it wasn't so blamed serious," returned Berry, "you might call it a joke. Swift left the starting line at exactly one-thirty-two. At that precise moment, Hostetter, Mr. Brisco with one hand dropped this watch into your pocket. You didn't see him—you were too busy watching and manipulating Old Reliable, so——"

"Manipulating?" echoed Hostetter, in an ominous voice. "Why, man, how could I do any manipulating? Brisco held the watch himself."

Berry smiled grimly as he looked at the hunting-case time-recorder. "That suggests a remarkable condition of the human anatomy, Hostetter," said he, "and I'll get to it presently. Say," he went on, "Swift is surely a wonderful sprinter. This watch registers one-thirty-two, and is at a dead stop. According to this watch, your man did the hundred yards in nothing—flat. Some speed! He finished just when he started."

"There—there's something wrong with that watch, Berry," Hostetter declared, showing signs of nervousness.

"You bet," Berry agreed, "and not only the watches but something else is wrong. Here are your stakes, Hostetter." He jerked a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and, quick as a flash, snapped them about Hostetter's wrists.

"What's—what's the idea?" faltered Hostetter, his face going white.

Charley Swift, dropping the tobacco bag with the pink string and a little square of brown paper, murmured something about going for a drink and faded from the compartment.

"Good-by, Charley," Berry remarked, tossing his words after the retreating form. "If I had wanted you I would have kept you. Here's the idea," he proceeded. "Let me have *your* watch, please," he said to the youngish fellow with the nose glasses. The third watch was handed over, and Berry laid it against one of Hostetter's manacled hands. "Look!" requested Berry.

IV.

ALL eyes were on the watch dial. The second hand was at a standstill. Berry took the watch away and the second hand continued to flutter around its diminutive circle. Two or three times Berry repeated the experiment.

"You see," he explained, "a watch can't run on Hostetter. There's no family superstition about it. Hostetter was born with a temperament that plays the deuce with timekeepers. The way the police in half a dozen big cities have it, Hostetter is full of magnetism, and a watch goes out of business whenever he tries to wear it. This, wonderful as it appears, is a known and well-attested fact. The watch trick is Hostetter's long suit. By touching a perfectly reliable watch with his finger he can hold back the time, second by second.

"That's what he did in this case," Berry went on. "While Charley Swift was running, Hostetter, standing close in his seeming eagerness, two or three times let his finger touch the face of the watch in Brisco's hand. Ordinarily the action would pass as merely

that of an excited man. Thus Hostetter was able to make the watch register exactly ten seconds when Brisco stopped it. Also, if a watch is put in his pocket and left there it stops work altogether. Hostetter, we've got the goods on you."

"Then I was framed by you and Brisco?" demanded Hostetter bitterly.

"You were caught red-handed, that's all," Berry answered. "The stop watch Brisco held is really mine. I had him wear it conspicuously on purpose. The instant Swift started, he quietly dropped his own watch in your pocket so we could make sure you were Magnet Mahoney, alias Live Wire Collins, alias Eugene Hostetter, of York State. A man answering your description was last seen with Brownlee, of Kansas. I imagined that man might be you. Our aim was to prove, beyond a shadow of doubt, that you were the one and only magnetic confidence man. To that end we have directed our efforts. The test succeeded, and it is a cinch that you know what has become of old Mr. Brownlee and his fifteen hundred dollars. Now tell us about Brownlee. He has a nephew who wants the information."

The four in the smoking compartment heard a muffled cough by the green curtain that draped the doorway of the little room. They looked up to see an old gentleman with muttonchop whiskers standing in the entrance.

"So Hostetter's a crook, is he?" the old gentleman asked. "I was in a forward car—Hostetter said we ought to ride on different ends of the train to avoid suspicion—but I saw that race from the porch of the eating house and it made me curious. I came back here, after the train started, to find out what was going on, and I've seen and overheard enough to bother me some. Hostetter is really a crook, eh?"

"He is!" declared Berry. "You are Mr. Brownlee?"

"I am, sir. I was going to New Orleans with Hostetter to get what he called a little velvet off the races there. He's magnetic, all right. He can put a rube's wits out of commission just as easily as he can stop a watch. I think he must have had me hypnotized. But who are you?"

"A plain-clothes man," replied Berry, and pulled back his coat and displayed a nickel-plated ornament on his vest. "This gentleman from Montana," he went on, "volunteered to help me and play the part of a 'come-on' with his letter of credit and his travelers' checks. You did it well, Brisco," he said to the stout gentleman, "and I thank you for your interest in the cause of law and justice."

"The pleasure is mine," Brisco returned, his double chin moving happily under the influence of a chuckle. "It worked, Berry, although I had to swagger considerably and do a lot of pretending to make it go. Here's your stop watch."

V.

BERRY took the ornate stop watch and dropped it into his pocket. Brownlee stepped into the compartment and confronted the man with the nose glasses.

"Davy," he said, "you knew a lot more about Hostetter than I did. I'm an old fool and ought to have a guardeen. I figure that you have saved me fifteen hundred dollars in hard cash—let alone the disgrace of having folks at home find out how I had been hooked by a sharper. I'll not forget this, Davy!"

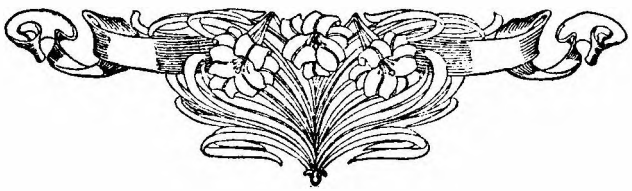
His eyes were moist and his voice trembled as he put out his hand.

"Hostetter was altogether too magnetic for his own good, Uncle Silas," returned Davy, his own eyes a bit dim as he arose and took the old man's hand affectionately. "He might have hooked me with his smooth tongue and

his watch trick if I hadn't been wise to his game. Now that I have found you again, uncle, we'll forget all about Hostetter. The folks back home will never know a thing about this. Magnet Mahoney is wanted for other crooked deals besides this affair of yours."

"I am getting off better than I deserve," remarked Brownlee. "We'll go to New Orleans together, Davy, and take in the Mardi Gras. And we won't go anywhere near the races. Come back into the other car with me, my boy. I want to have a long talk with you."

They left the smoking compartment together, and Berry and Brisco looked after them and smiled.



BEFORE SPEED WAS KING

By Eli Crotty, in "Dumb Animals"

OLD Dobbin hangs his gentle head,
His poor old heart is sad;
He stands neglected in his stall,
He misses lass and lad.
The purring motors whizzing by
Sad memories to him bring;
He longs for harness, rein, and road
In vain, for Speed is king!

What though the auto—thing of steel—
Beams not in joy and pride
As youngsters scramble recklessly
All eager for a ride;
The gentle eye, the happy neigh,
Of faithful, honest steed,
How quite forgotten seem to be
Before this king of Speed!

But Dobbin, good old comrade,
A place shall e'en be thine
Long after glaze and searchlight
Have lost their brilliant shine.
For thoughts will turn to happier days—
Days that have taken wing—
When cozy comfort meant a lot,
Ere speed became our king!

The Pacifist Pitcher

By Burt L. Standish

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

NOT JUST AS HE EXPECTED.

A LOW-BROWED, brutal-looking ruffian—that was the sort of person Mat Clearly was waiting to welcome with open arms. At any rate, that was the sort of person he expected to see among the passengers now disembarking from the *Silver Star*, and, much as he might dislike the fellow, he was prepared to give him a cordial, even joyous, reception. Fourteen passengers came down the landing plank to the wharf, and not one of them, to Mat's disappointment and dismay, remotely resembled the ruffian he had pictured in his mind.

"Now," bless our native land!" growled Matthew Clearly in angry disgust. "He's gone and got tanked up on the way. Probably he's stopped over in Lockland for a high old tear. And we've got to play the Bruisers this after——"

A hand touched his arm. "When you get through talking it over with yourself," said a rough but not wholly disagreeable voice, "you might loosen up and tell me where I can locate a gent by the name of Clearly."

He was a young man, a very young man, well-built and square-jawed. He wore an inexpensive suit that needed pressing. He carried a bulging suit case, held together by straps. A clean shave might have improved his appearance. The brim of his soft hat was tipped downward over his left eye. This, however, did not conceal the fact that that eye was discolored darkly, as if from a recent violent mishap.

In no pleasant mood, Mat surveyed the brusque stranger from head to feet. In doing this, his eyes fell upon three baseball bats which were strapped to the side of the bulging suit case. On one end of the suit case he also perceived the initials "D. A. H.," boldly stenciled. His jaw sagged.

"You," he gulped—"you can't be 'Butch' Hanrahan?"

"Can't I?" sneered the other. "Who told you so? Show him to me and I'll ask him why. Either he's wrong or I've been battin' outer my turn."

"But—but you don't look——"

"What'd you expect to see, a roughneck? I know I got a rep, but I can be a gent—off the field, anyhow. Feller over there"—he jerked his thumb indicatingly—"said you was Clearly, the

chap that's runnin' these Stonehaven 'Sharks' that I'm to put a little backbone and pep into. If the bunch is as slow and full of dope as you are, I don't wonder it's gettin' mauled by the other teams in this Tide-water League of yourn."

Mat flushed. Then he laughed good-naturedly, and grabbed the man's free hand. "Greetings, Butch!" he exclaimed heartily. "Welcome to our sea-washed shores! I certainly booted one I shouldn't have missed. I've got a bad eye——"

"You've got nothin' on me, but you oughter see the two eyes of Umpire McCarthy, of the late lamented Northern Lights League. Much as I hate that sort of a thing, we'd had a coupla mild little scraps before the Lights blew out, and, happenin' to run inter him after that, I took the trouble to tell him politely just the sort of a mush-headed, long-eared porch climber he was. Odd to say, he didn't seem to like it. Anyhow, though he didn't say as much, that's what I gathered from the fact that he interrupted by pokin' me in the lamp right in the middle of my remarks. Mebbe he'll be outer the hospital in a few days now."

Clearly laughed again. "We've got some pretty bad umps in this league," he said; "but it's Hunk Dorman and the Lockland 'Bruisers' who've got our lads fazed and fanning. Tyndall, manager of the Bruisers, has seen what Hunk does to us, and he keeps him saved up for us. Hunk is sure to pitch against us this afternoon. Speed! Yea, verily! It takes lightning to dodge one of his swift ones, and when he's working he always shoots one or two at any batter who's recently got a clean hit off him."

Dan Hanrahan's lips curled. "I know them kind of four-flushin' pitchers," he declared contemptuously. "They're the biggest white-livered dubs in the business."

"Don't judge Dorman by those you know," warned Mat. "He's an ex-prize fighter. The Bruisers are all scrappers. They always come by special boat from Lockland, and bring a bunch of fighters with them. We've had one riotous old row here on the island, and another like it will mean the busting up of our team. It's Hunk that's got to be subdued and tamed down somehow, without kicking up another pitched battle."

"Leave it to me," invited Hanrahan. "I'll find a way to pull his stinger. Meanwhile, you might lead me to where I'm to dally with the eats. I ain't had a square feed sense I got outer the woods, and, compared to my department of the interior, an absolute vacuum is worse overcrowded than a box of sardines."

"Gimme that suit case, and follow on," returned Clearly cheerfully. "You're going to put up at the Sea View, with the rest of the summer visitors and rich swells. But, as it'll be a good two hours before you can do any dining there, we'll stop at a quick-lunch shop on the way. Yonder stands my flivver, impatiently fretting to whisk us away." He indicated a little automobile at the shore end of the wharf.

"They have them things ev'rywhere, don't they?" asked Hanrahan. "I thought mebbe on this island——"

"This island is six miles long, with a good road from Stonehaven to the Northern Head. And Stonehaven's twenty-one hundred population in winter, and almost three thousand in summer. At the present moment there are nine gas wagons roaming around these parts, one of them being a real motor car. Speaking about the same, take a look at it."

Round a corner from the main street of the town, which lay scattered picturesquely on the sloping hillside that surrounded the snug little harbor, shot a huge, bright-red roadster, following the warning shriek of a siren horn.

Down toward the wharf it dashed at reckless speed. At the wheel, the only occupant of the car, sat a young woman, her motoring veil streaming out behind. The siren screamed again.

"Give her room!" exclaimed Dan Hanrahan apprehensively. "She's goin' to overrun the base and slide clean through the steamship into the drink on t'other side! Ty Cobb, comin' spikes first, ain't a patch to this!"

But the young woman applied the brakes, and the red roadster came to a full stop on the wharf, the radiator not ten feet from a rearing, snorting horse that was attached to a small truck wagon.

"That's her usual way," said Clearly, laughing.

"Somebody ought to cure her of it," growled Hanrahan, scowling darkly at the good-looking young lady at the wheel.

CHAPTER II.

MORE OF THE UNEXPECTED.

ALTHOUGH a husky, broad-shouldered, red-faced man had seized the creature by the bit, the frightened horse continued to plunge and snort, endeavoring to back away from the automobile. The rear wheels of the cart were forced over the heavy foot-and-a-half timber at the edge of the wharf, but the rising head of a stout outside pile luckily blocked further movement in that direction.

The man at the animal's head was furious. He roared at the horse, and then swung round to one side and drove a heavily booted foot into the creature's ribs.

Dan Hanrahan sprang forward. "Cut that kind of stuff!" he snarled, grabbing the fellow by the collar of his woollen shirt. "The hoss ain't to blame; it's the woman. Quit it!"

Mat Clearly dropped the suit case he had taken from Hanrahan. "Land of the brave!" he exclaimed. "He's tackled Bill Beecher! Now we'll see whether Butch Hanrahan's rep is built on bluff or not."

Beecher was the king-pin scrapper of Stonehaven. He had indisputably established his right to be recognized as the champion of the island by finishing off Red Toler, the bully of the granite cutters, in one straight round that had lasted twenty-seven minutes. It had been a brutal battle, but Toler, who had come to Stonehaven with a record as a prize-ring pug, had finally been knocked out. Henceforth Beecher had bulldozed whomsoever he pleased.

In astonishment, Bill turned his head round to look over his shoulder at the careless person who had dared put a hand on him and address him in that commanding manner. Then he yelled to Tate Stafford, an admiring and sycophantic fellow truckman: "Hey, Tate, hold this fool beast while I fix this chap's eyes so they'll match up. I don't like the way they look."

Stafford sprang forward and grabbed the horse, a joyous grin of anticipation on his face. "Soak him, Bill!" he urged. "Hand him a sleep maker, so he'll know better in future. Go to it, boy!"

Hanrahan released the fellow's collar and stepped back lightly, swiftly. Beecher misunderstood the action as one of alarm. His aroused wrath as yet unspent, he feared the young man was about to run away.

"Wait a jiffy," he requested. "You just come off the bo't, didn't ye? For a stranger, you're mighty free and brash. You oughter be learned somethin'. I'm goin' to give ye a free lesson."

But when he leaped in and shot out his fist in a stabbing smash that would have knocked the other down had it landed, Hanrahan was not there. Apparently a panther could not have moved more quickly than the young

man, who ducked under that blow and whirled before the surprised truckman could regain his self-wrecked poise.

Astonished, and expecting the elusive person to try to seize the advantage, Beecher wheeled and lunged again in great haste, without taking sufficient time to get his feet under him as well as he should. This time Hanrahan did not try wholly to avoid contact with the burly truckman, although he fell back somewhat before Beecher's rush.

Somehow the stranger in Stonehaven managed to catch the wrist of his antagonist and snap the outshot arm, elbow downward, over a shoulder that had been turned like a flash, so that he was practically back to Beecher. He had dropped to a half-crouching position. His body rose, and he gave a downward surge at Beecher's wrist. The heels of the island champion cut an arc in the air; his huge bulk went whirling over Hanrahan's shoulders; he felt himself flying through space.

Out over the side of the wharf spun the husky truckman. There was a great splash as he struck the water and disappeared. Pulling himself together, Hanrahan stepped a bit nearer the edge and looked down, waiting for Beecher to come up.

Having caught up the suit case again, Mat Clearly rushed to the side of the athletic young man. "Fancy work, Butch!" he applauded.

"Can that big dub swim?" asked Hanrahan. "If 'tain't necessary, I don't want to go in after him."

"Oh, he can swim all right," was the assurance. "Home of the free! You tossed him over like he was a feather!"

"Yes; he can swim," said Hanrahan, as Beecher came up, choking and spluttering, and struck toward the shore. "He's all right, and mebbe he needed a bath, anyhow."

The people on the wharf were staring. The young woman in the red roadster, standing up, straight and slender and graceful, clapped her gauntlet-protected hands.

"Splendid!" she cried. "You ought to be in the pictures. I'll agree to get you a job at fifty a week, to start with."

Butch Hanrahan looked at her disapprovingly. "You started it," he accused. "You scared the fellow's hoss with your horn and the crazy stunt you pulled with that tub of yours. If you was a man, I'd swear out a complaint against you myself for reckless drivin'."

The expression of her face changed swiftly from admiring approval to astonishment, followed the next instant by a look of blazing wrath. Her eyes flashed and her lips curved into a sneer. Her gloved hands became tight, hard little fists. Had she been near enough, perhaps she would have struck him.

"Insolent ruffian!" she cried, her full, deep voice shaking with anger. "How dare you! Do you know who I am?"

Hanrahan laughed. "Seems to me I've lamped you somewheres," he answered easily. "But that how-dare-you stuff went outer date long before the spitball come in. You must be playin' leads with a ten-twent'-thirt' bunch. See you at the Opery House."

Then the girl scorched and flayed him with her tongue. She told him exactly what he was—in her estimation. As he afterward expressed it, "she put something on it ev'ry time she pitched, and got the most of 'em over." Shocked and horrified, a few of her own sex hurried from the wharf; but the most of the males stood, open-mouthed, drinking it in with their ears, their eyes wide and popping.

The object of those machine volleys of wrath cocked his head to one side and listened attentively, a whimsical grin on his face. He seemed to enjoy it greatly. When she had blazed herself out, he said: "Now I know just what I am, don't I? Somehow, I never had the patience to listen when anybody started to tell me before this. It

gives me somethin' to think about, and you must feel better now you've got it outer your system. Thanks."

She gave him a final withering look. Then she sat down—hard—at the wheel, flung the gears into reverse, looked over her shoulder, jammed the throttle wide open, and sent the red roadster shooting backward from the wharf. When there was plenty of room to do so, she turned the car with a careening sort of swoop, stopped short, and made it almost appear to jump from the ground when she started ahead. With the cut-out wide open, the roadster snorted up the hill, turned the corner, vanished.

"And she didn't tell me who she was, after all," said Butch Hanrahan regretfully.

"She's Thesta Markell, the great picture actress that draws down umsteen thousand dollars a second as her salary," Clearly enlightened. "She's had some sort of a breakdown; temperament exploded, I guess. So she's sort of recuperating up around here, with a special doctor and a couple of trained nurses. She's staying at the Sea View, and you'll have a chance to see lots more of her, I reckon."

"So that's Thesta, who turns off the vampire stunts for the screen! Well, well! Thought I'd seen her before. When it comes to vamping, she's there with the merchandise, that girl! Now, seems to me——" He stopped, his brow puckered thoughtfully.

"We'd better be moving along," suggested Mat.

"Thesta Markell!" Hanrahan went on, chuckling, although Clearly fancied he suddenly had become oddly disturbed. "And we're goin' to be rubbin' elbows in the same hash joint. If she could slip one over on me—— Oh, well, 'tain't likely. I should worry. Come on!"

They were in Mat's little car and starting away, when Bill Beecher, his dripping clothes sticking to his muscular figure, came up from the muddy beach. The truckman gave Hanrahan a glare of hatred, and started to shake his right fist, but dropped his hand and shook his left fist. "I'll get you for that trick, good and proper!" Bill shouted.

"His bath don't seem to have cooled off his temper much," said Butch.

"He'll lay for you," warned Clearly. "You'll have to fight him to a finish if you stay in Stonehaven."

"Now, ain't that annoying!" said Hanrahan, with a sigh. "I'm a natural pacifist, and, if there's anything I hate, it's a fight."

CHAPTER III.

A LOVER OF PEACE.

BUTCH HANRAHAN sat in a corner of the Busy Bee Restaurant and ate two orders of ham and eggs. He was disposing of his custard pie and a second cup of coffee when Tate Stafford and his friend, Pod Jones, came in for a mid-forenoon snack. Without observing Hanrahan, they gave Jim Spratt, the proprietor of the restaurant, a somewhat biased and inaccurate report of the encounter at the wharf, making it appear that Bill Beecher had come forth second best through carelessness on his own part.

"And he throwed Bill over inter the drink?" cried Spratt incredulously. "What sort of a steer you tryin' to hand me? Go on! Go on!"

"It's straight," piped Pod Jones. "I see him do it. He just sent Bill cartwheelin' over his head kerplunk inter the watter. And he done it just as e-e-easy."

"I'd like to look that gent over once," remarked the restaurant man. "But I s'pose he's dead now. Of course, Bill killed him just as soon as he swum out and got ashore."

"He would, I reckon," said Stafford;

"but somehow his shoulder was twisted outer joint or somethin' so that he couldn't use his right arm. He's gone to see Doctor Brown. But he told the feller that he'd get him, and he says he's goin' to scrape up a gang and go up to the ball grounds this afternoon and raise thunder with the dub."

"What's that?" barked Spratt, who was a rabid baseball fan. "Bill Beecher never goes to no ball games. Who was this party that tossed him inter the harbor?"

"We found out he was some new pitcher that Clearly's got holt of. Mat was down to the wharf to meet him."

Jim Spratt's jaw sagged. Then he suddenly slapped his thigh and burst into a shout of laughter. "I know who he is!" he roared. "Mat told me he was after him. Mat's got him to run up ag'inst Hunk Dorman. No wonder Beecher met his match. Why, that feller was Butch Hanrahan! Ain't you never heard of him, you two poor ignerant gollyhawks?"

They confessed that they had not.

"Hanrahan's an outlaw," explained Spratt. "He was in the big league, but he licked ev'ry umpire that ever give a decision agin' him, and ev'ry player that he took a dislike to, not to mention any fan he could get at that handed him any sass. Once he challenged the whole team that was playin' ag'inst his club, and met 'em one at a time after the game was over, and lammed the everlasting packin' outer them all.

"Why," he went on, "that boy is sad and miserable unless he's got three or four scraps on his hands or in immediate prospect. He would 'a' been runnin' the league, with ev'rybody eatin' outer his hand, if they hadn't fired him out of organized baseball and put him on the black list so he can't never play with them big teams no more."

"You don't say so!" gurgled Stafford. "That makes it dif'rent."

"He's nervy," said Jones. "Looker the way he talked to that movin'-picher actress, and laughed right at her face when she got mad and squalled at him."

"Butch Hanrahan!" exulted Spratt. "And Mat has really got him here! Somebody better tell Bill Beecher not to go meddlin' with Butch no more unless he's anxious to get himself took all apart. I wasn't goin' to that game to-day, but I'll be there, even if I have to shut this place up and let folks starve. I wanter see him curry Hunk Dorman down. The Bruisers are liable to carry Hunk home on a stretcher to-night."

Having finished eating while listening to this, Hanrahan rose to his feet and rapped on his table with one clenched fist. "Bring me my check or tell me how much the bill is, so I can pay and get out," he growled. "You people make me sick, talkin' the way you do about a mild and peace-lovin' person. Somebody's been slanderin' me somethin' fierce."

They stared at him, gaping. Stafford took a backward step, apparently ready to leap for the door. "Tomcod and tinkers!" he gasped. "It's him! Why didn't you tell us he was here, Spratt?"

"Him?" gulped the restaurant man. "'Tain't possible! He can't be Dan Hanrahan. He don't look the part."

"And that makes me more sick!" sneered Butch. "What you expect to see, a big, bull-necked, peanut-headed tough? That stuff about me fightin' because I love it is bunk. By nature I'm the most peaceful chap you ever let your lamps light on. It's peace I love. But I got sense enough to know that nobody that amounts to anything in this world can't have no real, decent, dignified peace that's worth havin' until them that's alwus struttin' round lookin' for trouble find out that he's ready and prepared to fight as sudden and quick as a tomcat can wink its eye."

Jack Spratt began to laugh. "If it's peace you're lookin' for in this baseball

league, you've come to the wrong place, Mr. Hanrahan. There ain't never a game that don't come near bustin' up in a row three or four times. Last year we had the best scrappers, and we gobbled the pennant. This year the Lockland Bruisers are better fighters, and they're leadin' the league."

Hanrahan looked genuinely disgusted. "That ain't baseball," he declared; "it's a howlin' fracas. That's what I've come to put a stop to. Watch me do it. When I get through, the dove of peace will be hoverin' and cooin' over your old Tide-water League."

"Mebbe," said Spratt. "But you ain't seen Hunk Dorman yet."

"Not yet, but soon. He ain't seen me, either; but, perhaps, he's heard of me. I've took the trouble to look up his record in advance, and I'll bet ten to one that a sick jellyfish has got more backbone than he has. Anybody want to take me?"

CHAPTER IV.

GIVEN FAIR WARNING.

BALL games on the island always began at three o'clock. They were called early to make it possible for the visiting teams to make the homeward trip by special boat before darkness came on.

Long before three, on the day of Dan Hanrahan's arrival at Stonehaven, almost the entire population of the granite-cutting town, as well as the greater number of the summer visitors, heard that he was there. Nearly everybody had heard some sort of a story, more or less exaggerated and twisted, of the encounter between Bill Beecher and the new pitcher. On one point, however, this gossip agreed: Hanrahan was a fighter who could whip his weight in wild cats, even if he didn't look the part.

That afternoon one of the largest crowds ever seen at a ball game on the island pushed and jammed its way into the inclosed field of the Sharks. Nevertheless, instead of a game of baseball, a large percentage of the gathering had come hoping to witness a clash between Butch and Hunk Dorman, the heartily detested twirler who had overawed and cowed the local players.

Dorman himself had been told about Hanrahan almost as soon as he set foot on the island. At first he was incredulous. "They got that bird here in this squirt of a burg?" he scoffed. "Go lay down! Gotter pitch one closer to the pan than that before I bite. They couldn't dig up the price on this island to hire Butch to pitch an innin' in this league. There was twenty clubs after him before the Northern Lights went blooey, and all biddin' up like a crazy bunch at an auction. This ain't April first. Behave before I get peeved."

"But they say it's a fact, Hunk," said Mank Tyndall, manager of the Bruisers. "Tom Coffin gave it to me straight. He belongs in Lockland, and he's over here working in the quarries. He says Hanrahan started right in, soon as he landed here to-day, by manhandling Bill Beecher, the toughest nut on the island, and throwing him off the wharf into about twenty foot of water. What'll you do if Butch really is here?"

"Do?" grated Dorman. "You wait and see! If he *is* here, and he gets fresh with me, I'll take him by the scruff of the neck and shake his back teeth outer his head before he can get set for action. Leave it to me."

Standing six feet and an inch in his stockings, Hunk doubtless had been a fine physical specimen at one time. He was still powerful, although his waist measurement was far more than it should have been, and still increasing. He had a scarred face and the undershot jaw of a ferocious bulldog. His hair, cut "dead rabbit," grew low upon his brow. His eyebrows grew, heavy

and coarse, above a pair of savage and awesome eyes.

The Sharks were practicing when the Bruisers arrived at the playing field. The visitors quickly got into their uniforms in the dressing room under the grand stand. From above their heads the murmur and laughter of the assembled spectators, broken by occasional shouts and loud remarks, came down to them.

"That's him!" Dorman heard somebody cry. "That's Hanrahan talking to Clearly now. Mat's going to pitch him to-day. Look at his build! Ain't he put up proper? Old Hunk better not get gay round here this afternoon. Butch will throw him over the fence if he does."

Tyndall saw his big pitcher carefully and anxiously feeling his arm. "What's the matter?" asked the manager.

"I was just wonderin' if the old wing was all right," answered Hunk. "She's been just a little stiff and lame ever sence the last game."

"Get out and limber her up," ordered Tyndall. "You've had four days' rest, and you've got to pull the teeth of these Sharks to-day. You can do it, same as you always have."

"Sure," agreed Dorman. "I got 'em so tamed they'll feed right outer my hand."

"But don't forget that maybe you'll have to tame Butch Hanrahan. That may not be so easy. It's up to you."

"I told ya to leave it to me. What's the matter with ya, anyhow?" Nevertheless, although Hunk snarled these words fiercely enough, Tyndall had an apprehensive feeling that the big fellow was not as eager as he might be to get up against the fighting outlaw.

The crowd hailed the Bruisers when they came out. A big bunch of Lockland fans had come over with them on the special steamer, and they made a great uproar. When this had subsided a Stonehaven man stood up and shouted: "Do all your hollerin' now, Lockland. You'll be about as noisy as clams after the game is over."

Tyndall sauntered over to speak to Clearly. "What's this stuff about a new pitcher you've got, Mat?" he questioned, assuming an easy and smiling manner.

"I guess we've got one," Mat answered. "Anyhow, we're going to give him a chance to show you fellows if he can pitch."

"What's his name?"

"Dan Hanrahan. Mebbe you've heard of Butch Hanrahan?"

"Not that old has-been they kicked out of real-league ball two years ago? I've been told he never was a real pitcher. Going to try a bluff, hey?"

"Bluff for bluff, mebbe," returned Clearly serenely. "Your Hunk Dorman bluff is going to be called, anyway."

"Where is the old skate?" asked Tyndall curiously. "I see a stranger with your gang of would-be's, but he's too young——"

"That's him, Mank; that's the lad."

"You don't tell!" exclaimed the Lockland manager in great surprise. "He don't look to be such a ruthless sort of brute. Better caution him not to irritate Hunk, for Hunk ain't feeling real pleasant and forbearing to-day."

Clearly's lips curled. "Mank," he said, "you won't never win any more games from us by that sort of stuff. That boy you're looking at can thrash the daylights out of Dorman, with one hand tied behind him. He'll do it, too, if Hunk tries any of his nasty, intimidating tricks here to-day. And, besides the rest of our crowd, we've got about a hundred stonecutters over there on the bleachers who'll eat your tough gang up alive if they make a move to get onto the field to back Dorman up. If Hunk is the cause of a free fight starting here to-day," Clearly went on,

"when your old steamer sails home tonight it'll resemble a hospital ship loaded with the maimed and wounded who have been fighting in the trenches over in Europe." After which cautioning statement, Mat turned his back on the other and walked away.

CHAPTER V.

CALLING THE BULLY.

THE rival pitchers had warmed up. Practice was over. The game was about to begin. Through a megaphone the umpire announced the batteries: "For Lockland, Dorman and Prince; for Stonehaven, Hanrahan and Grimshaw."

"Yow, yow!" barked the stonecutters. "Let 'em go at it!"

Clean and graceful, yet beautifully built, Dan Hanrahan walked out toward the mound. The crowd cheered. He caught the ball which the umpire tossed to him, and waited until the noise had died down. Then he spoke, his voice carrying distinctly to every part of the field.

"Gents and ladies," he said, "baseball, when it's played right and clean, is the greatest game that ever was invented. When it's played any other way, it can be the rottenest. Get me? I guess you all like to see it played right, without no bulldozin' and rough stuff. I do. I'm a pacifist, but I ain't one of the kind that's ready to lay down and be walked over by any bluffin' roughneck that comes along. I believe in the sort of peace that lets ev'ry gent stand up and look ev'ry other gent straight in the lamps, without doin' the cringe or crawl stunt. And that's the kind of peace that I'm ready to fight for."

The crowd applauded and the stonecutters howled joyously.

"Sometimes," resumed Dan Hanrahan, "a bluffin' pitcher with lots of speed, an empty bean, and nothin' else but a tough-lookin' mug, can keep batters nervous and ruin their hittin' average by borin' 'em now and then with a swift one. That spoils the game. It ain't baseball. It's a low-down, cowardly trick."

Again he was interrupted by an uproar of applause. Again he spoke when he could make himself heard:

"It ain't hard to tell when a pitcher hits a man on purpose. Anyhow, it ain't hard if he has a reg'ler habit of hittin' 'em that way. Sometimes it's an accident, for the best tosser in the business loses control once in a while. Now, gents and ladies, there ain't nobody goin' to be hit intentional with the ball here to-day. Get me? That's all."

Chuckling, Grimshaw pulled on his mask, crouched and gave a sign. Hanrahan wound up and delivered a smoker meant to cut the inside corner. The batter pretended to dodge. In doing so, he thrust out his hip, and the ball barely grazed it. He dropped the bat and grabbed the spot where the leather had touched him.

Up from the bench rose Hunk Dorman, uttering a roar. Fierce in aspect as a bloodthirsty lion, he sprang forward, his awesome eyes fastened on Hanrahan. "You common hot-air blower!" he shouted. "You hit the first man!"

Butch dropped his hands lightly upon his hips, and stood looking straight at Hunk. The spectators held their breath.

"Go back and set down, you bluffin' dub!" advised Hanrahan. "You know he dodged inter it. If you step over the base line onto the field, you won't do no pitchin' to-day."

Dorman stopped one stride from the base line, and the young man on the mound smiled scornfully. "I got your number, Hunk," he declared. "You stalled along as a pug, never matchin' up with nobody in your own class, until Blister Cohen, a quince of a fourth-rater, made you lay down for the count. Then you went inter baseball and bul-

lied your way along as a pitcher, but Peewee Burns, the shortstop of the Haskegon Reds, who is a dwarf side of Rabbit Maranville, gave you a lickin' and made you holler quits. You ain't got as much sand as could be piled up on the point of a sewing needle. You're yaller as a good ripe lemon."

Hunk choked and glared. "You—you got me wrong!" he spluttered. "That's all rot, what you say. I never met no Blister Cohen, nor had a mix-up with Peewee Burns. Somebody's handed you a mess of lies."

"Mebbe," agreed Dan Hanrahan. "But the only way you can prove it is to step over that base line and give me a chance to try you a whirl myself. Otherwise I'll have to believe it."

"There is ladies lookin' on," said Dorman feebly. "Mebbe you would try to fight me, and that would make it disagreeable for the ladies."

"But more so for you, Hunk," said the young man, bursting into unrestrained laughter. "You poor four-flusher, you're the biggest joke that ever made faces to scare little kids. Chase yourself!"

"I'll see you after the game is over!" howled Hunk, shaking his fist at Hanrahan, his face purple with wrathful humiliation.

"You won't if you can run fast enough to get away," flung back Hanrahan.

And now the amazed crowd began to hoot at Dorman, unable to find terms to express their scorn and contempt. They stood up and called him "bluffer," "quitter," "coward," and many things far worse.

No less amazed, Mank Tyndall ran out, fairly frothing his disgust, and grabbed Hunk by the arm. "Why, you big fool!" he snarled. "You've let him call you before this whole bunch! You've let him get away with it! That cooks your bacon in these parts! Your name is Mush! A tame rabbit is a wolf compared to you! These islanders are liable to rotten-egg you before you can get aboard the boat to-night. And Lockland will be so sore that maybe you'll be handed a coat of tar and feathers. Good night for you!"

All the awesome fierceness had gone out of Dorman. Tyndall could feel the man's arm quivering nervously beneath his fingers. The swaggering, blustering bully was now a pitiful object to contemplate.

"He's got a gang here to-day," he gulped. "If I'd climbed aboard that chap, we'd all got our heads broke. I knew it, and I thought it wasn't best to start anything."

"You wouldn't climb aboard a cockroach!" returned the Lockland manager witheringly. "He made you do a crawl. Get back to the bench before the crowd begins to throw things at you."

His head hanging, Dorman returned to the bench, hooted still more derisively by the great gathering of spectators.

CHAPTER VI.

ACCUSED BY THE FILM QUEEN.

THAT was Dorman's finish in the Tide-water League, although he didn't fully realize it until, having sat through the first half of the opening inning and watched Butch Hanrahan dispose of the first three Locklanders in a row, he heard Tyndall tell Skid Joy, a youngster, to ascend the hill. "Why, boss," said Hunk, "I thought you was goin' to use me."

"You've got a lame arm and a chicken heart," Tyndall told him with unrestrained contempt. "You won't be any more use to me."

"What you mean?"

"You got me the first time."

Then Dorman knew he was to be handed his release, fired, practically kicked out in disgrace. His mates of the team, who had hitherto catered to him almost humbly, were now sneering

at him openly. They felt that he had brought humiliation upon them all, and they despised him. Squid Magee, the little shortstop, whom he had cuffed around a great deal, laughed into his face. Nick Stover, one of the subs, elbowed him over on the bench, and nearly pushed him off. All had something disagreeable and contemptuous to say.

Dorman stood it until the last of the second inning, when the Bruisers were again on the field. He had seen young Joy make a fine start on the mound, the islands not being able to get a safe hit off him in the first round. He glowered at Butch Hanrahan while that serene youth with the black eye that told of a recent fistic engagement easily held Lockland down in the second.

When the visitors took the field again, Hunk stole to the dressing room under the stand, feverishly tore off his playing suit, got into his regular clothes, and hustled away. The afternoon boat for Lockland, connecting with the Boston steamers, left Stonehaven at half past three o'clock. There was time to spare, but, fearing he might be left, Dorman ran nearly all the way to the wharf.

The game went on, with Hanrahan and Joy pitching for their teams, and for once the islanders saw a clean, snappy, sportsmanlike battle that it was a pleasure to watch. The Bruisers fought every inch of the way, but did so in a decent, legitimate manner, without recourse to the intimidating and offensive methods that had made them so heartily hated.

On the other hand, only for the objection of Hanrahan and restraining hand of Mat Clearly, the Sharks, rejoicing and rather cock-a-hoop over the downfall of Dorman, might have become offensive themselves. "Keep 'em full of pep, Mr. Clearly," urged Butch, "but make 'em play like gents. The other kind of stuff don't pay, even in the bushes, and you've had too much of it in this league. Decent people don't pay their coin to see a low, brawlin' scrap when they come to a ball game."

"That's right," Mat agreed; "but it isn't the kind of advice I expected from you. What was it organized baseball blacklisted you for, anyhow?"

Hanrahan grinned, and winked his uninjured eye. "Us pacifists that's willin' to fight for peace are likely to be got wrong," he replied.

The Sharks secured a run in the fourth inning, but the Bruisers made two hits and tied the score in the fifth. Then, with only one out, Hanrahan whiffed the two following batters, bringing roars of satisfaction from the crowd that had suddenly grown apprehensive.

In the seventh, Hanrahan, leading off, hit safely, went to second on a sacrifice, and stole third a moment later. Then the squeeze was tried, the batter hitting into the diamond.

Tearing down from third, Butch saw that the play at the plate would be close. In position to tag the runner before he could touch the rubber, Prince crouched for the throw, his hands going out. Hanrahan hit the ground, shooting past as the catcher got the ball and lunged at him. He overslid the registry station, and Prince, recovering, lunged again and tagged him.

Laughing, the pacifist pitcher jumped up and walked toward the bench. "You're out!" shouted the umpire.

Instantly an angry roar of protest went up from the spectators. There was tumultuous excitement. Shouting that it was robbery, scores of men were ready to charge onto the field. Apparently a few seconds more would see a riot in full progress.

Hanrahan had turned to the umpire. "How'd you see it, bo?" he asked. "He didn't touch me when I slid by him."

"And you didn't touch the plate when

you slid by that," declared the arbiter. "You missed it by four inches."

Quick as a flash the pitcher faced the crowd, holding up his hand. That silenced the shouting. "It's all right, boys," said Butch. "Nothin' the matter with that ump's eye. I knew I missed the dish, but it was up to him to see it. He did. I was out."

The silence became a hush of astonishment. Then somebody groaned. "What d'yer know about that?" cried a hoarse voice. "He owns up to it! That's pullin' somethin' new in this league."

Reluctantly and dazed, the sympathizers with the local club settled down again. There were arguments, however. Some maintained that Hanrahan should have held out and tried to bluff the umpire. Others were of the opinion that he was no bluffer, and expressed admiration for his action, even though it might cost Stonehaven the game.

"You just saved me from having a grand chew with that umpire, Butch," said Clearly at the first opportunity. "I was just about to tell him that a ground mole had it on him for eyesight. How'd you happen to miss the pan?"

"Had to keep away when he reached for me with the ball. That shot me off my course."

"Well, if we ever lose this game now, half of Stonehaven will say we gave it away. Hold 'em, Butch! We've *got* to win this one! If we fizzle, with Dorman out of it, they'll reckon the Bruisers too fast for us, anyhow."

"I'm puttin' all I got on the pill, chief. Let me murmur in your ear that that boy Joy is some lad of a pitcher as far as he's went. But mebbe he'll crack."

"When he has a day like this he don't even bend, much less crack."

Hanrahan and Joy continued to fight it out, nip and tuck.

At one side of the field, beyond the line of bleachers that ran down toward third base, several motor cars were parked within the inclosure. One of these was Thesta Markell's red roadster. From her seat at the wheel, the motion-picture actress watched the struggle.

At the end of the ninth inning the score was still tied, neither team having been able to make another tally. Then the screen star pressed a button, and the self-starter spun the engine of her car into life. Regardless of astonished protests, she drove out upon the field and toward the home plate, near which she stopped.

"When it comes to bluff," she cried, standing up, "some bluffers are better than others. There's a good one." A scornful finger was pointed straight at Hanrahan. "He put it all over the other bluffer, who lost his nerve and quit. But he's only a busted straight, himself. Butch Hanrahan! That's what he calls himself, but he's no more Butch Hanrahan than I am! He's sailing under false colors, and laughing in his sleeve over the way he's fooled you all. I saw Hanrahan pitch a game in the Northern Lights League before I came to Stonehaven, and I know what I'm talking about. I'll prove it, too, before long."

She sat down again, threw in her gears, and was away toward the distant gate before the amazed crowd could fairly get a full breath.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESULT OF PREPAREDNESS.

GRINNING, apparently not at all disturbed, the accused pitcher watched her depart. "How about that, old top?" cried somebody. But he merely shrugged his fine shoulders, grinning still more, as he walked out to the mound. And he proved that he had not been ruffled by striking out three batters in rapid succession.

"Butch Hanrahan or not," shouted a voice, "he's delivering a fine line of goods."

Clearly met the pitcher near the bench. "If you're not Hanrahan," he asked, "who are you, and how do you happen to be here?"

"She had her little knife ready, didn't she?" was the chuckling reply. "And she tried to sink it to the hilt. I guess she felt peeved over our polite exchange of compliments at the wharf this mornin'. Havin' been hasty, and mebbe not a real gent, on that occasion, I kept corked up and didn't tell her what she was a few minutes ago."

"If you're not Hanrahan," Mat went on, "Dick Fletcher slipped something over on me, and I've reckoned him as my friend. He wrote me he could get Hanrahan, when he got wise that the Northern Lights wouldn't last, and I wired him to go to it."

Butch frowned. "What's the matter with you?" he growled. "Fletcher coaxed me to come. If you ain't satisfied, we can mighty soon fix that. There's plenty other teams want me, Mr. Clearly."

In the midst of the stonecutters, a man stood up. His right arm was in a sling. He was Bill Beecher. "There ain't nobody could throw me off Tinker's wharf except Butch Hanrahan," he bellowed. "That dame skidded. I ain't seen a ball game in four year, but that boy is a pitcher and a scrapper, too. He's the real article, and soon's I can use my arm ag'in I'll agree to prove it to anybody that says he ain't."

Clearly laughed. "Looks to me as if you've got a backer you didn't reckon on having, Butch," he said.

"That comes from bein' ready to fight for peace," Hanrahan declared. "That's the only way to make some troublesome people friendly and respectful. I've got the dope right about that."

"Guess you're right," agreed Mat cheerfully; "but the man who fights has to be prepared to win, and that goes in baseball as much as anywhere. You're all right as far as you've gone, but if we lose this game——"

"I get you," cut in Butch. "Let the clash proceed."

Gash Tewksberry, third baseman for the Sharks, was the first man to face Joy in this extra inning, and Gash was the weakest hitter on the team. Joy knew this, and, trying to save his arm for better batters, he carelessly put an easy one over for Tewksberry. Gash made the first three-bagger of his baseball career.

This was Stonehaven's chance to win, and the crowd went into wild convulsions. Amid that uproar Grimshaw bunted the ball foul twice; then took a lusty swing at it and missed cleanly.

Hanrahan was up. They beseeched him, implored him, told him it was his chance to win his own game. And he missed Joy's first two pitches, both of which the young twirler warped over.

Joy was smiling grimly. Butch admired his nerve. But, as in poker, sympathy is fatal in baseball. Butch wondered what Joy would do next. Most pitchers would waste one or two. Something told Hanrahan, however, that the youngster, who had been "using his head" all through the game, wouldn't do that.

"He's thinking I'm expecting him to do it," was what flashed through Butch's head, "so perhaps he'll shoot a fast one over, on the chance of catching me napping."

Joy did just that. High and swift, the sphere came whistling from the long-armed pitcher's fingers. Pretended carelessness on the part of Hanrahan had led Joy to fancy he saw his opportunity. His heart leaped into his throat at the sound of Hanrahan's bat crashing against the leather.

It was a clout to deep center, a long, high fly. Starting toward first, Butch paused to shout over his shoulder:

"Back to the hassock, Tewksberry! You can score after the catch!"

Gash dashed back to third and held himself ready to run. As the ball fell into the hands of the center fielder, Tewksberry tore away toward the registry station. He made it, standing, for it was necessary to relay the throw to the plate.

The crowd charged onto the field, howling admiration for Hanrahan; but the man who had made good had run for the dressing room under the stand. Clearly found him there, sitting on a box and looking strangely downcast.

"You'll own the island to-night, Butch," said Mat. "Hear 'em yelling for you yet. They're liable to turn out the band and serenade you."

"If they do," growled Butch, "I'm goin' to find a hole and crawl into it. It's the worst part of havin' to win, the fuss people make about it. Where's that lad Joy? He's a real pitcher, and a comer, not a has-been. He oughter make the big league, take it from me."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HERO WHO DIDN'T PARADE.

IN any bush league a baseball hero is pretty sure to receive the homage and admiration of a hero indeed. Every small town that becomes afflicted with the baseball fever has its Christy Mathewson, its Walter Johnson, or its Ty Cobb. The male "bugs" proclaim him the greatest wonder in the business, and the female "bugs" adore him, flirt with him, and are ready to scratch the eyes out of any other lady he may chance to smile upon. For the time being he is absolutely It in that burgh.

Such a hero is expected to show himself on parade upon the public streets of the town, particularly so whenever he has been in any degree responsible for a recent victory by his team. On an evening following such a victory the fans swarm out to watch him pass along and to tender familiar ovations. They hail him with rough but endearing phrases. If he pauses upon a corner, they cluster around to shake his hand, bask in his smile, and hearken to such pearls of baseball wisdom as may fall from his lips. And maidens, all in gladsome garments, float past, bestowing glances of allurement and witchery upon him. Oh, yes, he's IT—spelled just like that!

On the balmy evening following the downfall of Hunk Dorman and the triumph of Butch Hanrahan the ball cranks of Stonehaven, old and young, male and female, came forth to see the victor put himself upon exhibition. They were disappointed. Up and down Main Street they tramped and jostled, looking for him in vain. As the evening wore away and Butch failed to appear they began to feel hurt and aggrieved, and many became openly resentful.

Mat Clearly was at work in the office of the Stonehaven General Store, cleaning up some business correspondence which his duties as manager of the Sharks had caused him to neglect somewhat, when a self-appointed committee of three rabid fans walked in on him.

"Look here, Mat," demanded Jud Higgins, the plumber, "where's this new scrapping pitcher of yourn that rubbed it into the Bullies to-day?"

"That's what we want to know," snapped Eben Bigelow, foreman of the stonecutters. "What's he think he is, too good for folks to look at?"

"If I had two wings in workin' order," growled Bill Beecher, still carrying his arm in a sling, "I'd go after him and make him come out, or he'd have to throw me further'n he did before."

"He ain't got no right to keep under cover to-night, with all Stonehaven waitin' to give him the up 'nd down," remarked Higgins. "It's makin' ev'rybody sore. I guess he ain't poked his nose outside the hotel. If he was John

D. Rockabilt he might stay there, and be darned; but, bein' a better man than John D., it's up to him to come forth and mingle some."

"We want you to go get him 'nd bring him out," said Bigelow.

"I hadn't an idea he wouldn't come out," protested Mat. "Maybe he's gone to bed by this time."

"Then tear him loose from the hay," urged Beecher. "Make him get up and come. If he don't it's goin' to hurt him, for lots of folks'll think he's stuck up."

They insisted so vigorously that Clearly presently agreed to go after Hanrahan and get him, if possible.

"If you think mebbe you'll need any help, we'll come along with ye," said Higgins.

"I don't believe that would be wise," returned Mat. "He's touchy, and it's necessary to handle him with gloves. He'd be sure to resent it if he thought he was being forced into anything. I'll go alone. Wait for me here."

They had to wait nearly thirty minutes. And then Clearly came back alone, looking somewhat puzzled and worried. "No use, boys," he told them; "he isn't at the hotel."

"What?" shouted Beecher. "What's that? Ain't there? Then where is he?"

"I was told," Mat answered, "that he'd gone out motoring."

"Motorin' on this island? Where to?"

"Northern Head."

"Who with?"

"Thesta Markell."

That struck them dumb for a moment. Then Beecher snarled: "I don't believe it! Why, he had a chew with her down to the wharf, and ev'rybody knows what she said about him at the field to-day. If he's fell for that dame after she tagged him for a bluffer 'nd a truth-twistin' son of a——"

Higgins burst into a roar of laughter. "The vamp has got him! He's a goner! I seen her in the pichers, and I know what she does to 'em. They just go to the dogs when she gets after 'em, and ain't no use for anything. It won't take her long to have him so he won't be no good for the Sharks or anything else."

"Maybe it's a mistake," said Bigelow, grasping at a straw of hope. "I can't believe it myself. Who saw 'em?"

"Several," replied Mat gloomily. "Another couple went along on the accommodation seat. Hanrahan was sitting with Thesta Markell. Report is that they seemed chummy."

"I thought him a real man," moaned Beecher. "He's just like all the rest that fall for the skirts. He's a boob. If he hadn't went bats over her she never could 'a' copped him so sudden after what happened. He's weak in his top story. I got his number now, and if he's round here when my arm gets right ag'in I'll put a crimp in his reputation as a fighter. Next time I'll go at him dif'rent, 'nd he won't catch me by no trick and throw me over his head."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE VAMPIRE'S CLUTCHES.

SHORTLY before ten o'clock the following morning, just when Clearly was hustling to clean up some work at the store in order to go out to the field for morning practice, Thesta Markell sailed in on him and requested a few words in private.

Mat took her into his office. "All right, Miss Markell," he said bluntly. "Let's hear it. Fire away."

The girl hesitated and seemed to tremble, flashing a frightened glance at him, and then veiling her large and lustrous eyes with beaded lashes. Her slender and supple figure seemed to shrink and cower. A shapely hand was lifted to her bosom, as if to still the tu-

multuous throbbing of her heart. It was a neat bit of business.

"I wonder if you will understand," she murmured almost brokenly. "I am only a woman."

"Being only a man, probably I won't," Clearly returned. "But, then, you might take a chance."

"Perhaps you know what Shakespeare says about a woman scorned."

"When he said it he probably was thinking of Potiphar's wife."

At this Miss Markell showed symptoms of alarm, like a person being pushed into water a trifle too deep. "Anyhow, Shakespeare registered," she hastened to say. "He put over a bull's-eye. This new pitcher of yours—er, Mr. Hanrahan—didn't make much of a hit with me at first. He handed me a slam that got me sore, and I told myself that I'd come back at him good and hard. So I got into the picture out at the ball field yesterday, and gave it a little ginger. But now I want to take back what I said; I want it cut out of the film. I fibbed when I said I knew he wasn't Butch Hanrahan."

"Your worry is needless," Mat told her blandly. "I don't think anybody believed you."

That didn't seem to please her much. For a moment her eyes stabbed him. Then she smiled pleasantly, though a trifle sarcastically. "I'm glad to hear you say that," she remarked. "I've since had the pleasure of chatting with Mr. Hanrahan, and I find him a perfect gent—er—gentleman. We have come to an understanding, and I'm sure we're going to be friendly."

"But not too friendly, I hope," said Mat anxiously. "I hired him to pitch, and I want him to keep his mind on his business. Anything as stunningly fascinating as you are, Miss Markell, is liable to distract him so that he won't know whether he's coming or going. More than one good pitcher has been robbed of control and spoiled by a bewitching woman who maybe couldn't hold a candle to you."

Clearly had her "fanning;" apparently she couldn't quite make up her mind whether to be angry or flattered. "I don't think you need to fret," she retorted somewhat haughtily. "He'll need some congenial company when he isn't playing baseball, and he might fall into society that would do him more harm."

"We'll let it go at that," returned Clearly, laughing. "I'm an optimist myself, even though I've seen you on the screen."

However, had he realized how completely Hanrahan might seem to become fascinated by the "vampire woman," and what effect it would have upon him, Mat might not have been so cheerfully hopeful. For Thesta found a way actually to monopolize the new pitcher when he was not practicing or playing baseball, allowing him no chance to get away from her. And, beneath the spell of her domination, Butch grew solemn and downcast and dejected.

He had won his standing in the Tidewater League, however, in that first game with the Bruisers, and by the players of other teams his gloominess was mistaken for sullen bad temper, which led them to believe still more firmly that he was a good man to let alone. Therefore, his bloodless victory over Hunk Dorman, who had departed for pastures new, brought about such improved conditions that it was possible to attend the games without witnessing shocking exhibitions of wrangling and fighting.

Fortunately Hanrahan's pitching continued good enough to enable him to win the greater part of the games in which he worked. Nevertheless, Clearly's conviction grew that Butch was never in his best form, and Mat became worried by a fear that he would some day go to pieces, get himself ham-

mered off the mound, and cease to be of any value to the Sharks from that hour onward.

Nor, in spite of his success, was Butch popular with his teammates or the townspeople. He did not seem to be a "mixer," and his heavy atmosphere of melancholy forbade efforts at friendliness. The younger men of the town called him a grouch, and the girls, envious of the film queen, perhaps, pretended to disdain him as a coarse and vulgar person not worth wasting an effort upon.

Thesta Markell brought him to the field in her car whenever there was a game, watched the contest through from the red roadster, and bore him away when it was over. Whether he felt so or not, he pretended to be cheerful while in her company.

She accompanied the team whenever it left the island by boat to play with the other clubs upon the mainland. "The beautiful vamp is right on the job ev'ry minute," was the remark Grimshaw, the catcher, made about it. "I'm waitin' for him to go crazy and choke her to death some day."

"There's something behind it we don't get," declared Gash Tewksberry sagely. "I got eyes, and, believe me, he'd *enjoy* chokin' her. I seen him look at her once or twice when she was lookin' the other way."

"It's me to steer clear of vamps hereafter and forevermore," said Grimshaw. "I thought mebbe they was just that sort in the pichers, and like human bein's outside of 'em; but when it comes to charmin', one of them hooded cobrys ain't got a thing on this lady."

"You should worry!" returned Gash, laughing. "With that mug, you'd scare all the vamping outer the best vampire lady in the business. Butch is a handsome beast, even when he wears his heaviest garments of gloom. I'll say that for him, though I hate to."

CHAPTER X.

BETTER THAN THE REAL THING.

MAT CLEARLY was in his office, talking earnestly with a tanned, keen-eyed, middle-aged man, when Hanrahan came striding in upon them, without asking permission. "I'm done, Clearly! I'm all through!" Butch announced savagely. "I'm getting out by the next boat!"

"Why the great haste?" asked Mat coolly. "I've got you slated to pitch this afternoon, and you can't hand me a deal as raw as that."

"That woman told me she was going to leave three days ago," said Hanrahan. "Said she had to get back to work. Now she says she's going to stay here the rest of the summer. This island isn't big enough for us both!"

"Why, I thought you were very fond of Thesta. You sure have appeared to be."

"I had to. I had to make that bluff to keep her from showing me up to you and everybody else as a liar. She told the truth when she claimed to have my number. I'm not Dan Hanrahan."

To the young man's surprise, Clearly did not seem to be greatly astonished by this statement. "That's all right," he said. "I've known for three days that you were Frank Archer, a Harvard man who can't play on your college team because, being poor and having to work your way through college, you have played baseball for money."

The pitcher sat down heavily on a chair. "You've known it for three days?" he said. "You didn't say anything to me about it. How'd you find out?"

"Well," answered Mat, laughing, "somehow you didn't size up, from the very first, as the sort of thug I imagined Butch Hanrahan was, and the further you went the less you looked the part. I'd never heard that Butch was the kind to fight merely because he desired hon-

orable peace. As far as I could learn, he fought because he loved it. Your little mix-up with Beecher was the only encounter you've been in since you came here. It wasn't right. So I wrote Fletcher and put it up to him, on his honor. I got a line from him, inclosing this from Dan Hanrahan, himself." He passed over a sheet of paper that was covered with scrawling handwriting.

MR. CLEARLY.

DEAR SIR: Mr. Fletcher has asked me would I write you the facks, and I'm doin so, though I haf to do so with my left hand. My rite arm is still hung in a sling frum the twist that lad Archer gave it when he flung me about twenty foot over his head in the fite we had after the leage went bust.

I pikt up the row with him becaws he had just likt umpire jim McCarthy, and it looked like a good chanse to show him who was the best man. Well, I got my nose busted and lost two teeth and was punched ruther hard, but I kept on goin at him til he cort me some way and give me that histe over his head. The doc sed I was a lucky man not to have a broke arm.

Well, Mr. Clearly, Frank Archer's the furst person ever put me out in a scrap, and I had to take of my hat to him. He's a corkein good pitcher, too, and so when you writ Mr. Fletcher and wanted me and nobody else, just because I had a rep as a fiter, we fixed it up, and sort of coaxed Archer to go down their and pertend he was me. You see I couldn't go, for may bee I won't never git back the use of my old arm so I can pitch agane. Archer he didn't want to do it, but he neded the coin, so he went.

That's all their is too it. If you ain't got the real Dan Hanrahan, you got a lad that proved he was a beter man in one scrap, anyhow. Some day may bee I'll be able to lik him, just to even things up. But I guess he won't hurt my rep none down in that lege by letin anybody else lik him. Yores,

D. HANRAHAN.

Having read it through, the young man passed the sheet back to Clearly. "I came here to tell you my name is Archer, not Hanrahan," he said. "They did make me think it would be a good joke to pose as Butch, but I'm sick of it, anyhow, even if I hadn't been forced to flatter Miss Markell to keep her still. She saw Butch pitch in the Northern Lights before she came here. She was up in that country for her nerves then. You must have a mighty poor opinion of me, Mr. Clearly. But don't think for a second that I'm proud of myself."

"As an impostor," returned Mat, "you've been more valuable to us than the real thing. Hanrahan would have squashed Hunk Dorman, but it's likely he would have picked up other rows and kept us in hot water, perhaps caused the league to disband. You brought peace and decency, so that the games can be patronized now by respectable persons."

"But I can't go on bluffing that I'm Hanrahan. I've told Thesta Markell that I'm through; told her she might go out and tell the whole of Stonehaven who I was and what I was, for all I cared. After this, you see, I won't be much use to you, Mr. Clearly."

"No," agreed Clearly, "after to-day I don't believe you'll be any use to me whatever. You're about done with the Sharks, Archer—unless you turn Mr. Curran down. Shake hands with Tom Curran, scout for the Blue Socks. He saw you pitch two games with the Northern Lights, and he traced you here, after a lot of trouble, to get your name on a Blue Socks contract."

"And I propose to get it, too, my boy," said Curran, as he wrung Frank Archer's hand heartily.

Just Curiosity

STRANGER: "I noticed your advertisement in the paper this morning for a man to retail imported canaries."

Proprietor of Bird Store: "Yes. Have you had any experience in that line?"

Stranger: "Oh, no; I merely had a curiosity to know how the canaries lost their tails."

Cloud Ranch

By Ethel and James Dorrance

BY the death of his Uncle Robert, Norman Upton, who had been out in Montana, came into possession of Cloud Ranch, a tract of land up in the Ozark Mountains, some miles from the town of Libertyville, Arkansas. The ranch was apparently worthless—a "white elephant." It was composed of rock and brush and was useless for farming, ordinary stock raising, and there were no mineral deposits. Only the comfortable ranch house seemed of any value. Upton found Ezra Moffat, his uncle's grizzled old foreman, taking care of the place, but soon found that Moffat's daughter, Carolina, a pretty, piquant, and efficient girl of twenty-two, was the real foreman. She told Upton that the ranch was known as "Upton's Folly." The day after he took possession, young Upton received a visit from Banker Sherbrooke, a lean, middle-aged man, sharp in feature and sharp in business, who practically owned Libertyville. Sherbrooke, stating that he owned the land south of Cloud Ranch and wanted to buy the adjoining property, offered Upton twenty thousand dollars for the ranch. Upton was suspicious and asked time to think it over. On investigation, he found that Sherbrooke had lied—he did not own the land to the south. Why, then, did the banker want Cloud Ranch? Did the property possess some hidden value which Upton had overlooked? Distrusting Sherbrooke, Upton refused to sell. The banker flew into a rage, but Upton declared his intention of keeping Cloud Ranch and finding some means of making it pay. Knowing that Sherbrooke was interested in Carolina, he half suspected that Moffat and his daughter were somehow in league with the banker. Also, he suspected that Lawyer Snively, who had transacted the legal business of the inheritance, was not trustworthy, and he decided not to employ him further.

One day, while walking on the shores of Flection Lake—part of Cloud Ranch—Upton came on the cabin of Dade Marham, a senile old man whom Upton's uncle had allowed to live there rent free. Upton agreed to continue the arrangement. He met Marham's daughter Sara, a beautiful girl who was making a brave fight against poverty. Upton liked the girl, and, returning home, instructed the Moffats to send the Marhams Brown Betty, a fine milch cow, and a butter churn. Carolina made an excuse for not sending the churn,

and Upton realized that she disliked and looked down on the poor mountain girl. He sent a churn himself from the village.

Meanwhile, Upton evolved an idea for making the ranch pay. He went away for two weeks without giving the Moffats any information. They and Sherbrooke could make nothing of it; nor of a telegram instructing Ezra to erect wire fences around certain parts of the ranch. A few days later, Upton returned with two carloads of elk, in charge of two cow-punchers, one of whom was Bud Preston, who was to stay on at Cloud Ranch. The arrival of the elk caused a sensation in Libertyville. Sherbrooke was furious, realizing that Upton might make a success of an elk ranch. Before the animals were unloaded, Upton caught Shep Wheelock, the town bully, cruelly manhandling Tomboy, a big elk that had twisted its antlers in the latticework of the stock car. Upton thrashed the bully, who then drew a gun. Bud Preston interfered and the shot went wild. Wheelock was arrested. A few days later, Upton learned that Sherbrooke had gone bail for Wheelock. Upton smiled grimly at this news. It might mean nothing; but there was something sinister about it, and he felt that it meant the beginning of trouble. He felt that he had a fight ahead of him.

CHAPTER IX.

Against Innovation.

DURING the first hour after daylight, Bud Preston, who now called himself elk-puncher, slipped into Upton's room in the main house of Cloud Ranch and shook him into a state of consciousness. "Fence down again," he said softly, that he might not awaken the others asleep on the floor.

"Many gone?" was the owner's laconic query, as he kicked off the blankets and scrambled from the cot to begin a hurried dressing.

"Half a dozen head, judging from the tracks. And them tracks——"

"Well?"

"Just you look at them tracks and you'll take back your fell words about Little Bud being a trouble hunter!"

"Suppose you saddle Hurrah and your own nag. Guess we don't need to waken Moffat. I'll be down in a jiffy."

The ex-cow-puncher, who had been persuaded to remain in the Ozarks and herd elk when his companion of the black mustache had started back to their previous Montana heath, padded down the stairs and out of the house.

In a troubled frame of mind, Norman Upton continued his dressing. He knew what Bud was thinking from the charge he had made the second time the wire fence had gone down and several elk escaped, to be taken up for trespass by indignant farmers whose gardens they had ravaged before they could be retrieved. He was not surprised that his faithful friend from the West had picked out a bit of elk footmark evidence to support his charge, any more than that he should be up betimes to discover the latest breach in their fencing.

After the novelty of the innovation had worn off, there had been numerous evidences of resentment, not only on the part of the neighbors, but from those so far afield as to have no personal interest. The elk had certainly taken to their surroundings; or, to be more literal, were rapidly taking their surroundings unto themselves. As brush clearers their equal had never been seen. Acre after acre was being swept clean of brier and bush, of buds and leaves to the height of eight feet, to say nothing of weeds. In the three weeks that had passed since their arrival, they had recovered from the stress of the long train trip and seemed en-

tirely acclimated. No serious damage had been done to any one's property by the two previous escapes that were charged against the herd, and all claims had been settled in cash.

Yet the clamor against the elk ranch seemed to increase rather than diminish. So unreasonable was some of it that Upton wondered whether there might not be some organized propaganda against his venture. Naturally his suspicion turned toward Sherbrooke, whose enmity was now open. Not only had the banker furnished bail for Shep Wheelock, but Hiram Snively, who now appeared as the bank's attorney, had defended him on the charge of assault with a deadly weapon. Even more surprising was the fact that, when fined two hundred dollars upon the quick trial of the case, the bully, who in the past seldom had two dollars to rub against each other, had paid promptly and walked out of court a free man, to the obvious surprise of the judge. However, Upton was forced to admit that he had in no way been able to connect the banker with the public feeling against his elk. Beyond sneering and repeated comment that the experiment was bound to be a failure, Sherbrooke seemed to have taken no part.

In ten minutes, Upton was dressed and in the stable yard, where Bud had the horses saddled. They mounted and rode to the break in the fence. "You will notice them hoof marks," directed the elk puncher-detective. "We'll discuss 'em after."

"How did you come to be on the job so early—to make the discovery so soon?"

Bud grinned in self-adulation. "I had a pre—pre—pre-something-or-other that things wa'n't right. It got so strong that it woke me up before the roosters."

Although Upton had urged the young Westerner to occupy a vacant room in the big house, Bud had insisted on sharing the "bunk shack" with the single hand which the poverty-stricken ranch afforded. He had expressed the fear that his snoring would trouble "my lady," as he always referred to Carolina Moffat.

Thanks to his premonition, they were not long in rounding up the strayed or stampeded elk. Six of the seven that had escaped the inclosure were found browsing along the roadside. The seventh, a young bull, was located in Freeme McTurg's barnyard, giving battle to the farmer's collie. By eight o'clock, through skilled driving and the fact that travel had not begun over the highroad, they had all the missing animals corralled. At breakfast they were met by Moffat's gloomy prediction that the elk would be the ruin of Cloud Ranch yet.

After the meal, Upton and Bud went out to examine the evidence. Their first interest was the fence. As Upton pointed out, the wire strands had not been cut; the break looked as if it might have been made by animals seeking freedom.

"And a rope strung from the wire fence to a saddle horn aboard a good cayuse would make just as clean a break," reminded the puncher.

Upton was forced to admit the point.

"Them elks what we've just rounded up went out last night hop-skippety-jump, which ain't like 'em unless they're driven. Smoke on that for a while, boss, and see what you see in the whiffs."

Upton's expression grew more troubled. It was clear from the spacing of the tracks that the animals had left the brush pasture on the run, which would only have been the case under the stress of fright or a drive. He hated to think that any of his neighbors would deliberately try to make trespassers out of the animals he was trying to domesticate, but Bud surely had backed up his theory.

On their way back to the ranch house, they came to that part of the inclosure fancied by Tomboy, the sultan of the herd. By now he had entirely recovered from the excitement of travel and his unpleasant experience with Wheelock. Upton had taken the fine specimen personally in hand and was rapidly breaking him to drive to harness before a light cart. The sagacious beast's confidence had been won by uniform kindness and liberal bribes of salt and corn, for which he had an inordinate appetite. Now he came forward wagging his superbly antlered head in request for his expected portion. Upton dealt him several handfuls of shelled corn which he produced from his coat pocket. "I notice that Tomboy never joins these stampedes," said Upton, with the detached air of reflection.

"Not this old buck," agreed Bud. "He knows when he is well off. Likely, too, that whoever's making the trouble is afraid of his horns. He'd go for a stranger right enough, though he looks a sight more dangerous than he ever is."

Upton stroked the long nose of the beast, which was sniffing in his pockets for more corn. "Why don't you take better care of your family, Tomboy?" he asked, more than half convinced, at last, that his elk-puncher was right.

"Why don't we take better care of them?" Bud demanded. "We brought 'em into this here alien land and it's up to us. If you say the word, boss, I'll ride fence nights for a spell."

But Upton advised that they should wait for more tangible proof that the elk were not doing their own fence breaking.

"You was quicker out in Wyoming, Norm Upton," was Bud's caustic comment. "I don't know just how to brand you here in Arkansas." Upton laughed good-naturedly as the elk-puncher stamped off, quite indignant at the thought of ruction postponed. Bud was not gifted with patience, which is always a virtue when dealing with unseen enemies.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW KIND OF FISH.

THE following day, Upton received a message. It must have been some time before daylight that the note was tucked under the door. As usual it was Bud, the early member of the outfit, who discovered it. He did not know, of course, that any cow had ever been sent up the mountain and might never have noticed the addition of a red one to the barnyard herd had Upton not pointed her out to him later. He was too thoroughly a puncher, too used to large herds, to study the peculiarities of cattle, as units.

The note was addressed to "Norman Upton, Esquire." Perhaps it was because of Bud's premonitions, possibly of the feminine handwriting on the envelope—at any rate, he said nothing of his find during breakfast; nor did he deliver the envelope until he and his boss were out among the elk.

"Where did you get this?" demanded Upton, when the puncher gave him the missive, which was addressed in a hand strange to him.

"Under the kitchen door," returned the Westerner, grinning.

"What you pulling?" his employer inquired with obvious incredulity. "Who would leave a note like that?"

"Why don't you read your billy and find out? That's what I'd do if any lady was to write to me and deliver unbeknownst."

This advice appealed to Upton's practicality. He ripped open the envelope, glanced first at the signature, and whistled his surprise. "What in the world does this mean?" he exclaimed.

He read the missive; then tossed it

to his Wyoming friend, who perused it with a pardonable lack of understanding. It ran thus:

DEAR LANDLORD: Thank you for the churn. The cow you sent has nothing to put in it, so my father is bringing her back to you. He hopes to catch a milch fish. If he does we'll have that butter on your next visit. Sincerely, SARA MARHAM.

"What's the dame's idea?" inquired Bud. "She must be kidding about that milch fish, for such ain't."

Upton turned abruptly, and with frowning face strode back to the barnyard. Among the cows there, he picked out one that had been designated to him as Mother Hubbard and a fit subject for the butcher. He had forgotten about her in his absence, but remembered now that he had not seen her since his return until this morning.

For a time the ranchman busied himself working on the harness which he was designing for Tomboy's first appearance as a gentleman's trotter. Bud smiled to himself, as he rubbed oil into the leather of his favorite saddle, which he had brought with his cayuse from Wyoming. He could see very plainly that the "boss" was not interested in harness making that morning. That Upton's preoccupation was due to something the note had told him was easily determined. He wondered over the identity of the signer—Sara, of whom he had not heard before.

Before long, Upton sauntered toward the house, where Miss Moffat could be seen sitting upon the porch absorbed in a magazine. "When I was called out West," he remarked, after a perfunctory comment on the unpardonable heat of the day, "I asked if you had sent a certain cow named Brown Betty up the mountain for the Marhams."

The girl did not try to hide her annoyance. "That's so, you did," she said, her manner that of one who sniffs at poor people.

"You sent the cow—Brown Betty?"

At this repetition of bovine nomenclature she showed more consideration. "You're twisted on names, Mr. Upton. You said we were to send Mother Hubbard. Fritz drove her up. Why do you ask?"

"Just wondered," was all Upton could trust himself to say. "I won't be here for dinner, by the way."

She looked up quickly. "Where away—to the lake?"

He nodded. "I want to see if old Marham has succeeded in catching a milch fish," he said, as he left the porch.

Out in the pasture the fine Jersey named for her color was rudely disturbed before she had half a cud. Upton slipped a rope around her neck and tied her in the yard while he saddled Hurrah. He was mounted before Bud realized what he was doing, but when he did the puncher was convulsed with mirth. "If the bunch on Lazy B could see you now!" he cried, as he leaned against the door of the harness room. "Norm Upton *leading* a cow! Lordy, lordy, if it isn't a sight for sad eyes!" He slapped his sides in honest mirth. "You'll be learning how to milk next."

"Already know," returned the elk rancher amiably, realizing his violation of range practice, which invariably is to drive stock. But he felt entirely justified in using a lead rope. The trail he intended to follow to the cabin at the lake made driving an animal even as docile as Brown Betty impracticable.

All amiability of mood left him, however, once he was beyond the range of vision of his friend and critic; so thoroughly was he convinced that Carol was not playing fair with him. She knew the milch cows on the ranch better than did he, and, as he had mentioned the Marham's lack of butter and milk, she must have known why he was lending them an animal. In fact, he remembered distinctly having told her so and mentioning the Jersey by name. She must have known that the red heifer,

poor old Mother Hubbard, was dry as a bone. It seemed incredible that she should carry her spite against the mountain girl to such a length, yet he could place no other interpretation upon the deliberate substitution.

Further thought was even more illuminating. If she had deceived him in this, what was he to believe concerning her statement that she was not engaged to Sherbrooke? If she was capable of behaving so shabbily in one instance, might she not have prevaricated in the other? Yet what could be her object? He could find no answer to this last question unless that she was so addicted to coquetry that she wished to include him in her list.

An hour later found him rowing Marham's old, weather-beaten, fishing skiff around the mirror lake, with Sara, looking slightly uneasy in her unaccustomed idleness, facing him from the stern. The veteran, in an ecstasy of delight over the arrival of the substitute cow, had remained behind to milk her. "It's a privilege, Norman, that ain't come nigh me since yon skinflint foreclosed on our farm," he quavered.

So incredulous had Sara seemed over his story of how Carol had sent up dry Mother Hubbard intentionally that Upton admitted the possibility of the blunder having been his own. Even the best-intentioned ex-cow-puncher shouldn't be too sure about distinguishing a milch cow from a milkless one, he agreed with her, because he could see that she wanted him to.

"Carol may be a mite selfish, on account of having been spoiled by her parents," she said earnestly, "but I'm sure she wouldn't be as mean to us as that!"

So he had shouldered the blame and as atonement pointed out that he had led the Jersey up the mountain trail himself. In consideration of all this, Sara had not refused his request that she come out on the water just as she was, her hair in its two loose braids, her calico slip clean, if faded. It had taken some effort for her to conquer her embarrassment over her attire and the comparisons he must be making. But she had grown so accustomed to being at a disadvantage that her philosophy rose to the occasion.

Soon she was smiling up at him in her gentle, rather wistful way, and following his lead as best she might in the conversation. "What do you mean to do with the elk, Mr. Upton?" she asked.

"They're calculated to make Cloud Ranch pay, of course! Did you know, my young tenant, that I am indebted to you for the whole scheme?"

Sara studied him a moment, then glanced away, a slight pucker of reproach showing between her eyes, just above those fascinating freckles. "You're joking now—and I live so far away from joking that it is hard to make pert answers when I try. Don't you suppose I remember every word that——" She paused, flushing, then continued steadily: "I never could have mentioned elk to you because I know nothing whatever about them. I thought dad must have been a mite off the other day when he came home with a yarn about how you'd started a circus ranch, which is his idea of a zoo. What can you mean by saying, Mr. Upton that I——"

"Your father calls me Norman," he interrupted. "If you are a true daughter it seems to me that you could show it in no more convincing way than following his example."

"Oh, I hope you don't mind!" she exclaimed. "It's a way he has of not waiting for any of the formalities, as soon as he feels sure of anybody's friendship. He is getting old now and so——"

"Of course I don't mind! Norman's my name, isn't it? Tell you what I'll do, Miss Tenant, if you'll call me Nor-

man just once, I'll answer your question."

"I'm dying to hear, Norman!" she flashed, with all of the girlishness that had ever rung in Carol's coquetries and far more of sincerity.

"That sounds good to a man in a land that's strange from long absence, one who has only a few friends he feels sure of." He nodded at her gravely. "Well, here's my fell secret! The last time we met——"

"You mean the first time," she interjected.

"I mean both. On the spot and minute you showed me the short-cut trail —you remember—you likened your strength to that of one of the deer that used to be so prolific in these mountains. That and that alone started me thinking about the vast elk herds in the West. The possibility of acquiring one for Cloud Ranch got on my imagination. You must come down one day soon and see what wonderful brush cleaners they are. I want to introduce you to Tomboy, my prize bull elk; for a little later, if you'll do me the honor, I'm going to take you for a ride behind him."

The girl showed much interest in the subject and urged him for details. Pleased, he poured out his plans and theories to her as he had done to no one else. The elk were superior to goats at clearing undergrowth, he declared, for they browse as low and twice as high. And there was the further advantage that brush thus cleared stays cleared. "Have you ever eaten venison?" he asked.

Sara shook her head. "The deer were all killed off in the Ozarks before I was born, but I've heard dad speak of it in a mouth-watering way."

"You shall have a saddle from my first killing. The flesh of the wapiti is the sweetest of all venison. The flavor is distinctive, suggestive of mutton rather than beef."

Her intelligent questions brought out his definite hopes for making the herd pay. By their browsing they would reclaim for him many a brush-grown acre that would then be put under cultivation. Although the meat could be raised at less cost per pound than beef, mutton, or pork, because of its rarity it commanded as high as forty cents a pound in market. The animals dressed up to eight hundred pounds, and there were the horns and hide to be considered as a by-product.

"It sounds like—like money in the bank!" she exclaimed. "Perhaps, Mr, —that is, friend Norman, you can find some way my father can help you. We'd be so glad if he could, in return for your kindness and the rent, you know, until I become a wage earner."

"Perhaps I can. Tell me, how are the teacher studies progressing?"

She looked surprised. "You know?"

"Miss Moffat told me."

"I feel that I was a little hard on Carol in what I told you the other day," she said. "Since then she has shown me that she does not hate me at all by sending up several of her seminary textbooks for me to study. I found them inside the churn with your note. That's why I just can't believe she meant the mistake about Mother Hubbard."

"Has Miss Moffat ever sent you books before?"

"No. She ceased to notice me when father lost the farm—that's why I thought she didn't like me."

"It was certainly very good of her to send the books." His eyes were watching a water snake that was wriggling away from the skiff. "I wonder," he added, smiling strangely into the inscrutable water which mirrored only what was above its surface, "whether she's going to marry Sherbrooke."

"Oh, I'm sure of that!" Sara caught her breath on a sudden thought and

looked at him solicitously, then murmured: "I'm sorry if you care."

"Why are you so sure?"

She glanced into the woody shore a moment, the expression of a disappointed child about her mouth, then turned her eyes back to his. Her girlishness had vanished; she seemed more like the boy chum to which he had likened her on their former meeting.

Her face had the determined look of one who considers the truth better than evasion. "There was an evening party down in Libertyville while you were away to which I was invited. I went—on the back of Julius Cæsar. All the young folks and some who are older were there. Mr. Sherbrooke told a friend of mine that he and Carol were engaged. As she was wearing a solitaire diamond ring, of a size that no one we know except the banker could afford, I don't think there can be any doubt that he was telling the truth."

"She wore the ring openly then?" he asked, with an effort to conceal his disappointment.

"But not on her engagement finger, for, of course, there's been no announcement. I'm very sorry if you care," she repeated gently.

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH THE SHADOWS.

IT was after eight the following evening when Upton returned to the ranch after a day spent in Libertyville. He stabled Hurrah, but, instead of going directly to the ranch house, stopped in at the bunk shack, to find Bud Preston engaged in braiding a splice on his favorite lasso.

"You look cloudy about something, boss," was the puncher's greeting. "What's gnawing you?"

"I am troubled, Bud," Upton placed several parcels upon the table which held the lamp and glanced into the other room to see that they were alone.

"Spill it to your hireling."

"It's about you, poor fellow."

Bud flared: "Don't you poor-fellow me! I got money in the bank."

"You're a very sick man, Bud," Upton continued in somber tones. "In the morning you'll not want to get up—won't get up, in fact. I'll have to send to Libertyville for the doctor."

The puncher looked startled. He felt his head, pummeled his chest, ran his hands down over his lean thighs for an examination of his knee joints. "Say, what's the lead, anyhow? You keep on a-talking to me that way and I *will* be sick. Why, I feel a fever rising already!"

"Look at yourself, Bud. That ought to convince you."

The puncher arose, found with obvious relief that he was steady on his legs and strode across the room to a cracked mirror. There he gravely made a long survey, examining the whites of his eyes and the color of his tongue. When he turned back, his face was worried, but with concern for his friend. "If you was a drinking man, Norm Upton, I'd say——"

"Open up those parcels, and see the medicine I've brought you. Can't have good old Bud spoiling on my hands."

Again impressed by the possibility that he was the victim of some unknown ailment, Bud obeyed. The next moment he looked up with a grin upon his clean-cut, pleasant face. "I get you, Steve!" he exclaimed, and hurried into his own room with the "medicine."

The doctor whom Upton summoned the next afternoon for the unfortunate friend who lay in the bunk house and refused to move was frankly puzzled by the symptoms he found. Sleep seemed to be the predominant one, and daytime sleep for one so wontedly active as every one declared the puncher to be was disturbing. As several days passed with no improvement, the medicine man—whom Bud insisted must be

a "hoss doctor in disguise" from the medicines he prescribed—wondered if he could actually be attending a case of sleeping sickness and asked whether his patient had ever been to Africa.

On one point Bud was adamant—he would have no one to nurse him. Even Miss Moffat's offer to help attend him had met with an embarrassed, but emphatic, refusal. He had nursed himself through Rocky Mountain spotted fever, two rattlesnake bites, and a broken arm. Whatever was the matter with him now, he wasn't going to be coddled, not if he died for it!

But he was going to try not to die, he added, in a weak voice; he felt that he wouldn't, so long as his appetite held out. So he slept or drowsed most of the day in the small, partitioned room. At six o'clock Upton carried him a tray of supper from the main house, and, had he not been the originator of Bud's disease, he must have marveled that one so ill could have so voracious an appetite. And it seemed but one of the queer symptoms of the malady that caused the patient to demand sandwiches for midnight consumption. Until eight o'clock or so each evening, he would chat with Barker, the regular hired man, but as soon as the latter's snores sounded from the outer room, he would become moved to activity.

It was so to-night. Barker, tired from a hard day in the field, went early to bed. Bud, also tired, but from different causes, dressed himself rapidly. Then, shotgun in hand, he left the bunk shack by way of the window and slunk through the shadows toward the elk pasture.

This was not the first time in his brief but checkered career that he had ridden fence. On the Lazy B and other ranches he had literally "ridden" as a protection against rustlers or rival ranchmen. In past instances he had carried a .50-50 repeating rifle, and when he shot had done so to kill. Here on Cloud Ranch, with only forty acres or so under fence, he felt it neither necessary nor practical to ride; felt that a shotgun loaded with rock salt was as far as he cared to go in repelling the human marauders whose visit he was confidently expecting.

On reaching the fenced-in tract, which the imported animals were clearing of brush with such rapidity, he made a round of the fence to satisfy himself that there had been no twilight break. Then he took to cover in a clump of alders which commanded the side of the fence that gave upon the highway, where all the previous breaks had occurred.

In some respects this secret vigil was worse than Wyoming fence riding. He missed the companionship of his cayuse, which means much when horse and man understand each other. To be sure, he had his pipe, the smoking of which he risked, being careful with his matches. And hidden in the alders he had a blanket for protection against the chill of the Ozark night. Yet after five dark vigils, the task was growing monotonous. His most fervent hope was that Upton's enemies would strike again and that soon.

At midnight, the three-quarter moon was well overhead, suffusing the surroundings with its gray half light. From his pocket Bud had taken a sandwich and was munching it, the shotgun across his blanket-covered knees. An unexpected sound from up the road caused him to toss away the crust, seize the gun, and rise to his feet. A moment later, peering through the half light, his eyes discerned a horseman turning out of the road into a copse which might well be used as a place of concealment for the animal.

It was as Bud had suspected, for soon the man appeared on foot. With rapid strides he approached the fence, a coil of rope over his arm. Pausing only to notice the general build of the

man and such of his garb as could be distinguished in the half light, Bud went into action. Realizing the disadvantage of being unmounted in case of a premature alarm, he made it his first object to get between the fence wrecker and his mount. In this he might have succeeded had not an unseen root tripped and thrown him, discharging one barrel of the shotgun.

In the stillness of the night the report sounded like that of a cannon. At once the startled maurader gave up his attempt upon the wire fencing and made a dash for his horse. As Bud scrambled to his feet, he had a glimpse of a frightened face, one that he recognized despite the faint moon-glow. Rage seized him. "Hold up, you!" he shouted. "Hold up or I shoot right at you this time!"

As the headlong race for the mount continued, Bud let go with the unexploded barrel. A cry of pain testified that the charge had found its target, but, sting as it surely does, rocksalt does not necessarily halt a fugitive. Bitterly now did the puncher regret that he had not "gone the limit" and loaded his shells with buckshot.

He lumbered on in pursuit, not pausing to reload the gun. But the advantage was all with the culprit, who had a comparatively free path, while the pursuer was forced to break a way through the brush. By the time Bud reached the open, his quarry had mounted and was galloping down the road.

By no means as pleased with himself as he had expected to be, Bud started back along the fence to ascertain what damage, if any, had been done.

"Is he going to believe?" he asked himself, but could not answer. "Somebody ain't going to sleep regular tonight or for some nights to come—that's sure. But will Norm Upton believe who it is?"

He reached the point on the fence line where the intruder had been at work. There he found a lasso neatly woven into the strands of wire. It was so fastened that if horse power should be applied by the loose end being attached to a saddle horn, an entire section of the fence would be torn out. He ran the rope through his hands, mechanically coiling it, a subconscious act for any real cowboy. Then his fingers encountered a splice and the coiling ceased, while he made as close an examination as he could in the moonlight. A smile caressed the face usually so smoothly shaven, but now covered with a five-day growth of stubble out of respect for his "sleeping sickness."

"He'll believe," said Bud. "With this here tangible evidence and in the face of all the probabilities, even Norm Upton's gotta believe!"

He spent the rest of the night watching that coil of rope in the hope that the man who had used it would realize how telltale it was and attempt to retrieve it. Both barrels of the shotgun were reloaded, and he would have enjoyed nothing more than sending home their loads of salt; but daylight found him with that pleasure denied him.

CHAPTER XII.

HOME TIES ASUNDER.

THE appearance of invalid Bud Preston at breakfast that morning was a surprise. The puncher did not offer explanation beyond the fact that the veterinary whom Upton had brought from Libertyville was "sure some doc." On finding that the reports of his shotgun had not carried as far as the house, he said nothing at the time regarding the attempt upon the elk inclosure which his watchfulness had checkmated.

The arrival of a messenger from Libertyville furnished the next excitement,

sent by Ezra Moffat, who had driven into town the previous day and had not returned. Two missives were presented, one for Carolina and one for Upton. As the girl had not come down to breakfast, Upton sent the message to her by the colored servant; then he opened and read the one addressed to him:

DEAR UPTON: You will please accept this as my resignation from the position of foreman at Cloud Ranch. Elk are not in my line, and for some time I have not been satisfied with the prospect. An opportunity has come to me unexpectedly to take over one of the largest and best farms in the valley on shares. I must look after my own interests. Because it is necessary for me to make an immediate visit to Little Rock, I trust that you will let our furniture and personal effects remain until our return. Yours truly,

EZRA MOFFAT.

Without comment he handed this to Bud, miraculously restored to health, who read it with occasional chuckles that puzzled his employer.

"Sudden, isn't it?" Upton remarked.

"Oh, I don't know as it's so all-fired sudden at that," returned Bud, with sage waggings of the head. "I seen something was coming."

"He doesn't say whose farm——"

Bud did not hesitate to interrupt. "That's easily guessed. Who but your dear friend Sherbrooke would be interested in rustling your foreman just as harvest was coming on? This is a new move—a raw one—to make all the trouble in the pot for you."

Upon consideration, Upton was inclined to agree, but did not go beyond a frown in expressing his resentment of the latest interference of the banker. Well, they were mightily mistaken if they thought they could force his hand, he mused with rising determination. "Do you suppose you can corral your cow-punching pride, Bud, and turn granger in an emergency?" he asked.

The puncher made a wry face. "Stock's my specialty, but I can do anything once. I suppose my lady's note tells her to pack up and hike back with the messenger."

"Of course she couldn't stay on here with her father away. Doubtless he's going to take her with him to Little Rock."

"Little Rock, my eye!" exclaimed Bud scornfully. But he did not explain what he meant.

Upton paced the living room a time or two, then picked up his hat and the heavy-braided quirt which lay beside it on the table. "You speed the parting, Bud," he said. "I might be moved to speech that I'd regret. Besides, I have important business up the mountain."

From the edge of the front porch, the puncher watched him go to the barn, saddle Hurrah, mount and ride away. Bud grinned to himself. "Thought so—thought so!" he murmured. "He's taking it hard, but it's the best thing for him. She's a pretty puss, but she's got claws. I wouldn't admire to see her riding herd on any friend of mine." Far from dodging the task assigned him, Bud sat down to await Miss Moffat's coming with keen anticipation.

Before long, flushed with excitement, she descended the stairs. She was dressed for town, in a blue suit and black sailor hat. She peered into the dining room, then went to the porch, where Bud arose and saluted her with a profound-appearing deference.

"You are better, I see," she said, smiling in a preoccupied way. "Where is Mr. Upton?"

"Rode off half an hour ago—some business up the mountain."

The girl's expression deepened to positive annoyance. "When will he return?"

"Didn't say." Bud could be laconic on occasions.

"But does he know?" she cried.

"I reckon he knows all he needs to know—that your parent's jumped the ranch for a Sherbrooke farm. He had a letter, too."

"And he rode off deliberately?"

"There didn't seem nothing accidental about his going, my lady."

She turned, but not in time to hide the flush that was rising from her collar, and walked to the end of the porch. There she called to the messenger, who was waiting on the seat of the buggy that had brought him. She would be ready to go with him in a few minutes, she said.

Bud could hear her taking leave of the startled servant, who had not, indeed, seemed particularly devoted to her exacting young task-mistress, but now threw herself into an orgy of farewell. "Lan' sakes, Mis' Carol," wailed the woman, "if I'd a-dreampt you was going to leave us, I'd put custard, which you favors, into the layer cake last night instead of chocolate!"

Bud could hear her stop at the piano and run her fingers over the keys. He knew that she had stepped to the windows and gazed out a full minute. His ears testified accurately that she partly descended the stairs three times before she finally reappeared.

But Bud could not know the doubt and loneliness that had surged into Carolina's heart at the probability that she was saying farewell to the only home she had ever known. That mountain house which she had made so comfortable, that vari-colored landscape which had never grown wearisome to her eyes as child or maiden, the delicious quality of that high air to which she was used—altogether, they meant home to her, the only thing in her life she had ever really cared about.

Should she go, she asked herself rebelliously. But, then, none had invited her to stay. If only the good-looking heir, whom she had come to like and respect, had stayed to express his regret at the present necessity for her departure, she might have hoped that——

But he had not. So, poor, proud, selfish little Carol gulped down her regret and chagrin and stepped out on the porch with a haughty expression that might have deceived a more subtle judge of physiognomy than Bud Preston.

The puncher arose hurriedly from his lounging attitude on one of the porch rocking-chairs. "Will you please tell Mr. Upton that I am sorry not to have seen him, but that this is not good-by?" she asked. "If I can't persuade my father to reconsider this change, I'll at least have to return to pack up. Then there are—well, several things I must tell him."

Bud grinned amiably as he thought: "You'll never persuade your parent." Aloud he said: "I'll deliver your message, sure. Maybe I can help you with your baggage."

She acknowledged her need of aid, and the only available gallant brought down a heavy suit case and bag, which he placed in the buggy.

"This is so very sudden that I don't know yet what it is all about," she said, in a hesitant way, as he stood with the obvious intent of helping her follow her luggage. "Have my father and Mr. Upton had any misunderstanding?"

"Not that I know of, miss," declared Bud, who, with reservations, was an admirer of this bit of femininity, much as he disliked and distrusted her father.

"It is queer—very queer," she murmured, as she settled in the seat beside the impatient messenger.

Bud was amazed to see that there were tears in her luminous eyes as the team started. Instantly his mood toward her changed, much as does a piano's tone when the player applies the soft pedal. "Good luck and happiness to you, my lady!" he called after her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHTING POINT.

MEANTIME, Norman Upton visited the cabin at the lake, to make specific his invitation that Sara Marham ride to town with him behind his elk. "Tomboy seems to be sufficiently broken," he assured the girl, as they sat with her father in the shade thrown by the west side of the slab structure. "Would to-morrow suit?"

"I declare it would," inserted old Dade before his daughter could reply. "Yes, Norm, it sartinly would!"

There was momentary embarrassment which the old veteran evidently failed to grasp, for he went on: "I've rid behint of mules—and on 'em—oxes, thoroughbreds, and plugs, but this here elk drive is going to be a new experience for Dade. The critters don't bite, do they?"

Upton looked at Sara appealingly, and, smiling, she came to his rescue. As gently as possible, she explained that the cart would hold only two and that the invitation had been for her. Upton backed her up by adding that it would be his pleasure to give Marham an individual drive at the earliest opportunity.

Somewhat to their surprise, if not altogether to their comfort, the old man grinned. "A sparking junket? I catch it! Waal, you-all will only be young once; enjoy yourself. It's your privilege."

And so it was arranged that the next morning Sara should ride Julius Cæsar as far as the ranch house, as it would be impossible to drive the elk cart up the mountain.

Bud was waiting upon Upton's return and faithfully recited the message which Miss Moffat had left, not forgetting to mention the tears that had saddened her departure. At the shadow that crossed Upton's face, his puncher friend exclaimed with sympathetic haste: "Cheer up, boss—it's all in a lifetime! Come along out to the elk corral; I've got a surprise for you."

He led the way directly to the point where the lasso had been entangled in the woven wire. "Last night I watched a human coyote fix this rope," he declared, his usually placid face a-snarl at the outrage.

"And with the other end snubbed around a saddle horn on any good horse quite a section of the fence would have come out!" Upton commented. "What did you let him get away for?"

"Didn't I come a cropper trying to get between him and his horse?" Bud deplored his failure. "One barrel of that shotgun you brought for medicine went off unexpectedlike. I let him have the other barrel *pronto*, but rock salt don't stop a man like lead does, event if it does burn him up. Take a look at this rope! Ever see it before?"

Upton gave the lasso a closer examination, paying particular attention to the braiding of the noose and to the splice which the puncher pointed out to him. "Looks like yours," he remarked, but with a lack of surprise that disappointed the puncher.

"And mine it sure is! I'd recognize that Comanche splice in the dark—darned few white men know the trick of it. It was hanging in the barn while I was writhing in my bed of pain and pouring the doc's medicine into the bunk-shack stove." Bud chuckled wickedly. "There was a moon last night. The man who weaved that rope into the fence wire, the traitor that's been scattering your elk, the hound what's carried away a back full of my rock salt was——"

"Ezra Moffat!" supplied Upton, and in the same moment regretted not having been more unselfish, Bud looked so disappointed at having his trap sprung for him.

"You knew all along?"

"Didn't know, but I got a strong suspicion that afternoon I brought home the medicine. It's worked out just as I hoped it would, and I'm just as glad Moffat got away. How'd you like to be foreman of Cloud Ranch?"

Bud accepted on the spot his first promotion. For a moment he mourned that the outfit consisted of only one man—besides himself and the boss—Barker, as phlegmatic a granger as ever boasted the title of hired man. As the elk herd increased, more help would be needed. In an improvised sort of ceremony, Bud vowed that he would make good, make a reputation for himself. Soon, however, his interest returned to what had happened in town to change his employer's mind about riding fence on the elk.

It seemed that at breakfast on the morning in question, Moffat had stated that he wanted to spend the day on his own place, a small one which he was farming on shares. Upton being quite willing, he had set out on horseback shortly after the meal. With no definite suspicion, under the excuse of attending to some errands, the rancher later had decided to ride into town. There he had been surprised to see his foreman, supposedly miles away, walking along Main Street.

Before he could be observed, Upton had turned into a store, watched until Moffat passed, then had followed him. The foreman had entered the First Bank of Libertyville. When he did not emerge within a reasonable time, Upton had sought a vantage point that would command the bank windows, finding it in a billiard parlor across the street. He had spent two hours of the afternoon, seemingly practicing fancy shots on the first table, in reality watching through the windows of Sherbrooke's private office, where the banker could be seen in animated conversation with Moffat. After a time the pantomime had seemed to indicate controversy, with most of the spirit on the side of the transplanted Easterner. In the end, however, they evidently came to an agreement, for they shook hands, and Moffat left the office.

"Of course you followed?" put in Bud, who had been nodding in a self-congratulatory way over the good fortune and shrewdness of his "boss."

"You'd better believe I did! No Apache scout ever trailed more stealthily. The reward was overseeing—I didn't dare get near enough to overhear—Moffat meet Shep Wheelock."

"That manhandler of dumb brutes!" ripped from Bud's lips accompanied by a characteristic imprecation.

"The same. And the result of their conference evidently pleased both of them. Then it was that I bought the shotgun, shells, and rock salt. Naturally, I thought that the next raid on our corral would be negotiated by Wheelock, but I'm just as well pleased that it turned out as it did."

Bud pulled off his sombrero—he had discarded his chaps out of consideration, for local practice, but held to the Stetson—and ran his fingers through his curly brown hair. "Will you tell me one thing, Norm?"

"Any answer in my repertoire is yours."

"Then why did I have to play sick? Why that hoss doctor? Why them drafts of bitters that I didn't get poured into the stove in time?"

Upton smiled at his friend's suppressed indignation. "I knew that Moffat was watching us. With you sick abed under the doctor's care—and he was a real physician, Bud, not a veterinary, I swear it—with me showing indifference by turning in early and staying abed, the coast would seem clear, wouldn't it? Result—what happened last night."

Neither needed any diagram to understand Moffat's procedure. Doubtless he had ridden out from town late

the night before, intending to pull down the fence, scatter the elk, slip into the house and to bed. The wakefulness of Bud, whom the foreman believed to be really ill, had overturned these plans.

The painful rock-salt wound in Moffat's back could not have been concealed, had he returned the next day, and must have directed suspicion toward him, even if the rope, which he had been forced to leave behind in his flight, had not already done so. It was Upton's belief that he had hastened to Sherbrooke and told of the necessity of throwing up his place. He was probably now under treatment at the banker's house in Libertyville.

"You're well rid of the viper!" declared Bud angrily.

"Indeed we are, for a secret enemy within an outfit is the hardest kind to fight," agreed Upton. "I'm only sorry that, as all the straws seem to indicate, Miss Moffat is fated for such a thorough-going scoundrel as Sherbrooke."

"There's the girl on the mountain to cheer you up," reminded Bud.

But Upton seemed not to have heard. For a moment he was silent, his face set in grim lines. When he spoke, his voice had a metallic ring. "We've reached the fighting point, Bud, and something's going to drop. We'll feed what's left of that rock salt to the elk; trespassers on Cloud Ranch in the future get lead!"

With characteristic vehemence, Bud flung his sombrero into the air. "Now you're shouting! Now you're Norman Upton, the going man I knowed in the West. Put her here!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OFFICIAL VISIT.

IT was through no fault of Tomboy, the elk—either of wildness or lack of willingness to draw the cart—that Sara Marham was denied her visit to town the next day and Libertyville deprived of a sensation. The girl arrived at the ranch house at the appointed time, and Julius Cæsar was duly stabled behind the finest oats-corn banquet of his mule life. The elk was led from the corral and harnessed, with the assistance of Bud, to a light, two-wheeled cart, such as is ordinarily used for breaking colts. The driver and his bright-haired guest climbed in from behind and were off down the highroad at a brisk trot, which Upton declared their steed could maintain for hours without tiring.

After the first mile, any nervousness which might have been felt because of their unusual motive power and his peculiar gait had worn off. Soon they were chatting away as any couple might who were buggy riding behind the most staid of Dobbins.

"I didn't notice Carol about the house," Sara remarked. "I wanted to thank her for sending those books."

Upton's face clouded momentarily. "Moffat and I have parted company," he said, realizing that some explanation was necessary. "Naturally Miss Moffat has gone—to town or, perhaps, on a trip to Little Rock."

"Well, that is surprising! It must have been a wrench for her to pull up and leave so suddenly. She has lived all her life there, except when she was away at school."

Unable, in view of Bud's disclosures, to say that he was sorry to have them go, Upton avoided any expression of feeling. "I understand he's to take a large valley farm on shares—one of Sherbrooke's, I imagine."

With sidelong glances the girl studied his expression and misread the frown she saw there. The rumors of Carolina's engagement to the banker must be well founded, then. Doubtless it was all settled and Moffat had already begun to reap the reward of the forthcoming alliance. The man beside her did care—possibly cared so much that

he had broken with his foreman. She felt genuinely sorry for him and just a little bit sorry for herself. She changed the subject with a suddenness which he, in his turn, misunderstood.

"By the way, Mr. Landlord, did you know that you had left your riding whip at the cabin yesterday?"

"You mean my quirt—a braided one, with an ivory handle? I hadn't missed it."

Sara nodded. "I laid it out to bring to you to-day, but rode off without thinking of it again. It's not every day I get to go driving behind an elk. I'll have father tote it to you next time he's passing on the way to town."

"There's no hurry about it." Upton's attention was distracted by the excited behavior of a team drawing a light buggy that was approaching from town.

Undoubtedly the horses had never passed an elk-drawn vehicle on any road; beyond question they had made up their minds to be frightened. Indeed, Tomboy, with his magnificent spread of antlers, his great head and shaggy neck, must have presented an awesome sight to their equine eyes. The elk, on his part, was plodding steadily on, intent only on minding his own affairs, for he had grown accustomed to horses at the ranch.

Seeing the driver's difficulty and fearing to cause a runaway which would add to the disfavor of his venture, Upton checked the elk's trot and drew him into the ditch at one side of the road. Only by using the whip was the driver of the horses able to get them to pass. They did so at last, but with a shying movement which threatened to overturn the buggy.

As Upton was guiding Tomboy out of the ditch, a shout from down the road caused him to turn in the seat. He saw that the team had stopped, that a well-dressed stranger was coming back toward them on foot.

"Here's where we have to listen to a protest against elk driving on the highway," he said to his companion; "but I guess I'm as much within my rights as are the drivers of motor trucks and 'flivvers.' Watch me stand up for Tomboy!"

But the stranger had not come to protest his use of the road. "Is this Mr. Upton, owner of Cloud Ranch?" he asked.

Upton nodded.

"I was just on my way out to your place," said the man in the road, producing a card, which read: "Frederick Thum, Bureau of Biology, United States Department of Agriculture."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Thum?"

"Among other duties, I serve as game warden when the occasion requires," said the official, a lean-built, competent-looking man of middle age. "We have received a complaint that you are holding a band of elk in restraint and preparing to ship venison contrary to law. I have been sent to investigate."

From his first glance at the card Upton had suspected as much. "Might I ask who made the complaint?"

"That I cannot answer, as all such communications are held confidential by the bureau. I am anxious to hear your side of the matter."

"The elk of Cloud Ranch, of which Tomboy here is one, are under private ownership, legally acquired," said Upton. "I have shipped no venison as yet; when I do, it will be in strict compliance with the law."

The official's manner was not unpleasant as he put another question. "You are prepared to prove your statement that the elk were legally acquired?"

"I have the papers at home, but we were just driving into Libertyville." He gave Sara Marham a troubled glance.

"Don't mind me in this case of im-

portant business," she urged at once. "There are other days for pleasure."

His eyes thanked her. "We'll turn back," he said to the game warden. "Out of consideration for the skittishness of your team, I'd advise that you drive on ahead and put up at the ranch house; your driver probably knows the place."

On the way back Sara Marham won his further gratitude by the cheerfulness with which she accepted the interruption to her holiday plans. He felt that her disappointment must be great, for her outings were so few, but she hushed his expressions of regret.

When he had liberated Tomboy from his harness and started the girl off on Julius Cæsar, he joined Warden Thum on the porch and ushered him into the living room. There he placed before him the bill of sale for the elk he had purchased from a Montana rancher and a certificate of ownership of those secured from the department of agriculture.

"I see," said the warden. "Some of the surplus from the Yellowstone herds. This all seems entirely regular, sir. It strikes me, Mr. Upton, that you have one or more active enemies in this region."

"Several," agreed Upton grimly.

"What seems to be their objection to the elk?"

"There is no real objection to the animals; they are being used merely as an excuse to make trouble for me—a desire founded on an entirely different matter. I'm getting my enemies pretty well lined up, though, and before they're through they'll know they've been to a fight."

He did not add that the real mystery of why Edgar Sherbrooke wanted Cloud Ranch remained as insoluble as when he had begun to probe it. Instead of going into his own troubles, which could not interest the stranger, he asked him to come out and inspect the elk range.

Warden Thum was keenly interested, particularly in the way the animals were clearing the brush. He made copious notes, declaring that he would take a detailed report on the enterprise to his bureau at Washington. In return he gave Upton a piece of cheering information.

"They have just about decided at headquarters that our game laws, in so far as they prohibit or restrict the inter-State shipment of venison, are a species of conservatism gone to seed," he declared. "The high cost of living has rather punctured the old argument that civilized man already has a variety of meat sufficient for his needs in the ordinary domestic animals. I should not be surprised if by the time your herd has multiplied sufficiently you'll find the laws changed so that you can ship your domesticated elk when and where you please under some restrictive scheme of tagging or branding."

"I feel like thanking Edgar Sherbrooke for bringing about your visit," said Upton laughingly as the warden was departing, "even though his motive was the hope of making trouble for me."

The official smiled discreetly at this mention of the name of the man whom his host suspected. Evidently he was not to be surprised into making admissions. "I congratulate you on your enterprise, Upton, and I'll take pleasure in setting you right with the game officials at Washington. Take good care of Tomboy—as fine a specimen as I've ever seen."

But neither the owner of Cloud Ranch nor his chief supporter needed any official admission to assure them of the original incentive of the visit. Edgar Sherbrooke probably knew only enough about the game laws of the country to hope that he could make serious trouble for the importer of the

elk. It was not likely that he had any accurate information of the situation in the Yellowstone, where the animals had actually become a nuisance to the ranchers on the border when the winter snows sent them to the plains begging hay that was sorely needed for cattle. Certainly the ease with which this official investigation had been satisfied was assurance that the caller had not known the manner in which the Upton herd had been secured.

"Caught with a busted flush, wasn't he?" said Bud, grinning, as the game warden departed.

"I'm afraid Miss Marham will think I only held four of the suit," answered Upton, with a worried expression.

But the puncher shook his head. "She ain't worrying about you, and I'll bet she don't know a euchre from a pinochle deck. She's all there, if you want my girl-greener opinion. Tell me, what's next on the ranch program?"

"Isn't one victory enough per day?" Upton asked in turn, with that smile of his which his friend and most enthusiastic admirer had never understood.

Bud seemed in belligerent mood. "Let's slope down to Libertytown and give somebody what he's got coming to him."

Upton shook his head.

"You would in Wyoming," criticized the puncher.

"In Arkansas we'll have to be satisfied with defense, Bud. Carrying war into the enemy's camp wouldn't be understood down here and would be especially disastrous for me, as I've made up my mind to settle in this rock-ribbed land of my fathers. I reckon the two of us can stand off any further raids of the Sherbrooke-Moffat combination. Come, we've got work to do!"

Picking up a measuring tape from the porch table, he led the way into the brush and began to lay out the boundaries of the new corral to which the elk soon were to be moved. The brush in the first forty acres of lowland was nearly cleared, and, until the herd was in condition to supply the venison market, profit must be in their land-clearing activity.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM ANOTHER ANGLE.

THERE was an element of defiance in the fact that when Upton drove to town the following day to arrange for additional fencing, he held the reins on Tomboy, rather than on the buckboard grays. He did want to show the banker that his elk had come to stay, that his machinations were making no headway, that Cloud Ranch, whatever its secret, was surely out of the market. A further consideration was his desire to complete the willing beast's road education, and that, he felt, required the frequent use of him.

For his second road trial the elk harnessed even more easily than on the day previous; once on the road, he showed even greater speed, no doubt due to the facts that he was becoming accustomed to the drag of the cart and that the clamp of the harness reminded him still less of captivity. Upton had the backing of the past performances of other noble animals of the species in his hope to make an unsurpassed road animal out of Tomboy, as well as his desire to prove to the community that elk could be domesticated as easily and as successfully as oxen.

Some years before he had had the pleasure of watching a racing elk at a Western fair, a beast so speedy that he could beat the fastest plains trotters brought against him. If Tomboy developed as promised, the rancher saw a chance for both profit and pleasure in taking him around the Arkansas circuit.

Several times on the way it was necessary to turn him into the ditch to permit the passing of startled teams coming in the opposite direction. There

was no difficulty about the traffic headed toward Libertyville, for nothing equine overtook them. Indeed, the elk covered the ten miles in considerably less time than the grays ever had been known to do it and without turning a hair.

As he drove down Main Street, he realized one trifling disadvantage of his unique steed. Tomboy attracted far too much attention to permit tying him up at any of the hitching racks. He must surely have drawn a crowd, and there was the danger of a repetition, in some form or other, of the torment to which Shep Wheelock had subjected him on the day of his arrival from the Yellowstone. Upton decided to prevent any such possibility by driving to a livery stable and renting a box stall in which to leave the elk while he transacted his business.

As he turned at the bank corner to go to the stable of his choice, he had the satisfaction of seeing Sherbrooke standing on the steps of his institution of finance. The pretense which the banker made of not seeing him was too obvious for his credence.

Halfway down the block was Sherbrooke's bungalow. Upton's eyes swept the front porch and were rewarded with a fleeting glimpse of Carolina Moffat's piquant face. This confirmed his suspicion that Moffat had not really gone to Little Rock; that the girl had been summoned to nurse the wound inflicted by Bud's blunderbuss. For her sake, he was glad that his puncher friend had been cautious enough to use nothing more dangerous than salt. As for Moffat—well, Upton was human enough to hope that the smart died slowly.

After preliminary sniffs of suspicion over the strange stable, Tomboy, under his master's soothing touch, stabled quietly enough and Upton set out about his business. His first visit was to a hardware store where his uncle had long traded and where he had established credit some weeks before. He had need of some fencing material to complete the next "run" into which he would shift his four-footed brush eaters —not enough to warrant sending to the city, but yet a considerable order according to village standards.

The proprietor himself quoted him a price on what he wanted, one that he found satisfactory. "I'll have to ask you to pay cash for this, Mr. Upton," he said, with a show of embarrassment, as the rancher was turning away.

"Thought we'd arranged that I was to settle with you every three months," protested the young man. "What is the idea?" He thought his own answer before the other could stammer out excuses—Sherbrooke again!

"Well, you see," began the hardware man, "things have happened since then. When I said you could have three months' tick I didn't know about the elk—thought you were going in for regular ranching. Now I hear that Moffat has left you. To be frank, I can't afford to do business on any such shaky basis."

"You bank with Sherbrooke, don't you?" asked Upton mildly.

The merchant's face reddened. "That's got nothing to do with this matter of credit between us."

"Cancel the order." Upton turned on his heel.

At the only other hardware establishment in town he was told that they did not care to open any new accounts, that they were trying to put the business on a cash basis. This might be true, but it seemed unlikely in Arkansas, where rural credits were so general. However, he did not dispute the statement and started for the street with the casual remark that he would find his goods where terms were easier. If the store was acting under suggestion from the banker, it would not ease his position to show the irritation he felt over

the fact that the man who was trying to force his will upon him had such power in the community.

As a matter of fact, this assault upon his credit was as hard a blow as Sherbrooke had yet succeeded in striking. The tearing down of his fences and scattering of his elk had been a nuisance, but no great loss. He had reason to hope that the rather drastic rock-salt lesson recently taught would bring this sort of interference to an end. At any rate, since he was convinced that the elk themselves were not responsible, he felt confident of being able to protect his fences by night riding. The abrupt departure of his foreman could by no means be considered a loss, now that he knew the man to be a traitor at heart and in league with the peculiar opposition which confronted his enterprise. The appeal to the United States game authorities had been easily and, he believed, finally disposed of.

But loss of credit was a more serious matter. He was by no means at the end of his resources, but his reserve fund in the West was variously tied up —in cattle that could not be sold on telegraphic notice, in land that could only be disposed of at a sacrifice, and in loans to friends that could not be collected, if at all, except to his personal mortification.

It had cost him several thousand to purchase the elk and a considerable sum to transport them from the Yellowstone to the Ozarks. He had used nearly all of his reserve, counting on the credit which had been assured to carry him until the fall, when he could market his first venison. It was not unlikely that Sherbrooke, schooled in finance, had ascertained his situation and that he would use his power to the limit.

Upton had always been resourceful in the face of adversity, a habit which stood him in good stead in the present unexpected turn of affairs. Crossing from the hardware store to the Big Bend Hotel, he drew a porch chair to the rail, lowered the brim of his hat until it shaded his eyes, and raised his boots to a comfortable altitude. Thus settled—and inconspicuously, for his attitude was characteristic of the country —he proceeded to thrash out the situation.

He had sufficient cash in pocket and in the Wyoming bank to supply grub and pay wages until there should be return from the elk herd and the small but luxurious crops of his lowland. The purchases he had intended to make on credit, but which had been denied him, were of fencing for a new elk corral, it being a part of his plan to have one in reserve for the frequent changes of brush pasturage that would be necessary. In the course of half an hour's consideration he hit upon a course of action that restored the confidence to his face and helped him to look defiance toward the dapper banker, who chanced to pass down the opposite side of Main Street.

He had reharnessed Tomboy and was about to start for home when the beast began to snort and shake with fright. Upton looked up to see that Shep Wheelock had entered the yard and drawn near. Whether by sight or smell or sheer instinct of the wild, the animal seemed to remember his tormentor from their one unpleasant meeting.

"Out of the way there, Wheelock!" cried Upton sharply. "The beast remembers you and I don't want him upset to-day."

"I ain't going to do him no harm, Mr. Upton. I want only a word with you. Hold his head around, can't you?" Noting a frown that probably prefaced a very natural refusal to talk with one who had attempted to shoot him, Wheelock hurried on: "I want to beg your pardon for my flare-up down at the track that day. I was lit up, or

I wouldn't 'a' laid hold of the deer, to say nothing of pulling a gun on a gent."

"You've answered to the law for what you did; my pardon's unnecessary," said Upton.

The uncouth trouble-maker came nearer. "I'm answering to more than the law, though I ain't toted a gun nor touched a drop since."

So plaintive sounded the voice usually so blustering that Upton relented sufficiently to ask the nature of his subsequent trouble.

"I queered myself with the whole community by that raw break," Shep replied. "There won't nobody believe I've reformed, and I can't get a job nowheres. I'm hungry half the time. Ain't there something I could do out to your ranch—my keep'd be all I'd ask until I made good. It'd be Heaven's own act if you would give me a chance."

For a moment every man's right to the benefit of the doubt clutched Upton. He had always been kind to a down-and-outer, and helped many of them. If Wheelock was being unduly punished for one rash act——

But he checked his leniency with certain remembrances. Edgar Sherbrooke had gone Wheelock's bail after the assault. Further, it was common report that the banker had supplied the roll of bills from which the bully had paid his fine. Undoubtedly this was another move on the part of his enemy. With Moffat off the ranch, he needed some one to report what went on there. He felt that this sending of Wheelock to play upon his sympathies was an insult to his intelligence. "Nothing doing, Wheelock," he said, in a hard voice. "Cloud Ranch is an elk ranch now, and you don't get along with that animal. Tell your friend Sherbrooke your troubles."

The bully ignored this reference to the banker. "You owe it to me!" He was blustering now. "You're the cause of all my hard luck."

At the sound of his raised voice the proprietor and several villagers stepped out of the stable office.

"I owe you nothing," returned Upton indignantly.

"It'll be better for you if you pay!" The threat was scarcely veiled.

Upton climbed into the cart, slapped Tomboy's back with the reins, and they were off with an elk start. So much quicker is this than that of a horse that Wheelock was cheated, if he really expected to force a fight upon Upton.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SINISTER FIND.

SUNDAY afternoon found Norman Upton alone at the old ranch house—and decidedly lonely the place seemed in view of the gayety which Carolina Moffat had always managed to create about her. Bud had gone to the lake for a day's fishing with old Dade Marham, on the owner's insistence that he had surely earned a day's sport. Barker, the farm hand, was in town for the wedding of a convenient sixteenth cousin. Even the woman, who cooked and did the housework, was off the ranch, gone to a camp meeting across the ridge with a spring-wagon load of her own people.

It was only natural that Upton's mind should return to the ex-foreman and his piquant daughter. Their belongings were scattered about, for he had had no word of when they would come to pack. They were associated with his every remembrance of the rambling old structure since he had come to take over his inheritance.

He smiled as he thought how different reality had been from his early imaginings as the train bore him eastward. He had expected to settle down to quiet ranch life in an old, settled community; in peace, prosperity, and comfort to

raise his flocks and crops. Instead, he had entered upon an existence more turbulent than any he had known in the West in later years, a maze of intrigue that seemed impenetrable.

He was puzzled as to when Moffat had gone over to the man who was now so openly his enemy. His belief was strong that the foreman had been sincere in the first days after his arrival. His manner had been frank at first, as was instanced by the fact that he had given the stranger his first intimation that Sherbrooke was not fairly stating his reasons for desiring to own Cloud Ranch. What had changed him? Had he been admitted to that baffling secret of the value of the ranch, taken on as an active tool when the banker found the new owner disinclined to sell? Was he to share in whatever prosperity might follow if Upton was discouraged by adversity into selling out? Or was he simply currying favor with the banker out of eagerness that Carolina should make an ambitious match?

And what of the girl—of the little Carol who had been so helpful in the first days, who had excited his interest and admiration, who had aroused his desire for a lasting friendship? But here, he threw up his hands. With her contradictions, her changes of manner, her subterfuges of one moment, her delightful straightforwardness of the next —he did not know what to think. He was tempted to complain that his inheritance should have a mystery. Why couldn't he be left to work out the vindication of Upton's folly alone and without interference, now that he had settled upon the elk method?

To escape the complicated puzzle, he found his hat, with the intention of taking to the open until it should be time to milk the cows and feed the horses. As his chief present interest was the herd, it was only natural that his steps should be directed toward them.

But before going among the elk themselves, he visited the new range which he had blocked out for them, to which they must be transferred within a couple of weeks. The thoroughness with which Sherbrooke had succeeded in cutting off his local credit promised to involve considerable labor and a deal of watchfulness that would otherwise have been unnecessary, but he was able to smile at it because of the plan of circumvention he had worked out.

Had he been able to get fencing, he would have built a second inclosure as large as the first, with a temporary runway between. Then it would have been a simple matter to transfer the animals to their new pasturage of brush.

Since new fencing was denied him, it would be necessary to utilize the old, removing it post by post, strip by strip. While this work was under way he planned to drive the animals up the mountain, where they would have to be "close herded" night and day. But he was confident that this he and Bud, trained from years of cow-ranch work on the plains, could accomplish successfully. Many a blizzard night, he and his "stirrup-pardner" had handled many times the cattle in circumstances much more adverse than any that could come in the Ozarks from natural causes. Further human interference he was prepared to meet with drastic measures.

As he turned back from the proposed new pasture, he caught sight of a familiar figure riding hurriedly over the up-road on muleback. "Dade! Dade Marham!" he called. "What do you mean by going past without giving us a visit?"

But the veteran only waved an arm at him, then urged Julius C. to greater speed. "Queer cuss!" commented Upton to himself; then forgot the incident.

Strolling around to the small inclosure near the horse corral, where Tomboy had been confined since his driving lessons had begun, he entered from the

rear. The knowing beast came up wagging his great head in advance thanks for the shelled corn and salt which he knew were likely to be produced from his master's pockets. Upton fed him, stroked his small ears, and felt the velvet patches which were beginning to get scarce upon his horns. Then he climbed the front fence and started back to the house to undertake the chores which were his for the night.

His eyes, roving ahead, picked up what seemed at the distance to be a bundle of old clothes, lying a short distance away from the fence. Curiosity quickened his stride, for he was certain that there had been nothing of the sort there the previous day. As he drew near, he realized that he was approaching the huddled figure of a man. His step quickened into a run.

Kneeling beside the inert mass, he turned it over, to disclose the distorted features of Shep Wheelock.

Recovering from the momentary shock, Upton slipped his hand within the tattered blue shirt to feel for a heartbeat. There was none. He touched the face, usually so ruddy, to find its flesh cold. The wrist showed not the slightest flicker of a pulse. There could remain no doubt that his enemy was dead, probably from the blow which had raised an abrasion over his left temple.

Upton arose to his feet and stared around him; so far as he could see, so far as he knew, he was the only human being on the ranch. In this he sensed an element of danger as he stared down at the dead bully with whom he had fought in Libertyville. The possibility that he might be suspected flashed across his mind.

The instinct of self-preservation commanded the imminent question: who could have done this murder? Bud Preston, in an excess of zeal for the protection of the elk? That seemed impossible, since the puncher had gone to Flection Lake on a fishing expedition. Upton himself had forced the outing upon his faithful aid, realizing the stress of overtime work that was about to fall upon them through Sherbrooke's attack on his credit.

Another thought brought the picture of Dade Marham disappearing up the trail astride his mule. Could the old man by any possibility have worsted the ruffian? Was that the reason of his strange behavior in hurrying away from the home ranch without making a call—Dade, who was so socially inclined? Could the mountaineer have found the strength for such a blow? If so, what could have been the cause of the attack? Was there some old feud between the two or had the aggressive Wheelock forced his own undoing?

Speculation along this line became acute at thought of Sara Marham. If the old man had killed Wheelock, no matter what the cause, the blow would fall heaviest upon the mountain girl. Upton decided to say nothing of having seen Marham just before finding the body, at least not until he had an opportunity to question him.

Yet for his own protection the authorities must be notified and without delay. The law must be upheld. Leaving the body as it lay, that the officials might have full advantage of all the surroundings, he hurried to the barn and saddled Hurrah.

The necessity for a ride was forced upon him because there was no telephone at Cloud Ranch, it having been one of Robert Upton's whims that they were abominations, and young Upton having postponed installation of service until his elk venture should be on a firmer basis. But he knew that there was an instrument at the Applegate farm two miles nearer town and started at a gallop. A sentence or two served to set the tragedy before his neighbor and to ask what official could be reached

most readily, since Libertyville was not the county seat.

"Why don't you try Delehanty, the sheriff?" suggested Applegate. "He lives down in Liberty. As to-day is Sunday, he'll likely be to home or somewheres around town."

Upton soon had the desired connection and the good fortune to get the sheriff himself on the wire. Delehanty promised to drive out at once and asked Upton to wait at the farm until he arrived.

His mind working swiftly, Upton rode at a gallop back to Cloud Ranch. He felt that there was something sinister in his find of the morning. What had Shep Wheelock been doing on the ranch? Perhaps the sheriff's investigation would bring something to light.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter XVII., following an interesting sketch of what has gone before, introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out July 15th. It began in the June 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

KEEP YOUR HEAD

By R. F. Hamill

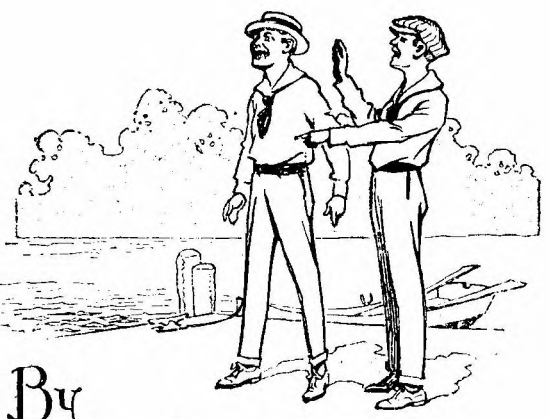
I KNOW it's hard to force a laugh
When the team goes to the bad;
It's hard to hear the bleachers chaff
Without feelin' sort of mad.

When some chap with a ball and prayer
Has the whole team on the blink,
It's hard to fan the empty air
Without sayin' what you think.

There's nothing quite so hard to stand,
When the season's nearly done,
As to have your two best batters canned
When the flag is nearly won.

But even when your temper burns,
When your eyes are seein' red,
There's one thing every good one learns,
Be a wise guy, keep your head.

That Lovely Canoe



By F. Walworth Brown

MY friend John Painter was a quiet sort of a chap, who usually thought things out pretty thoroughly before he acted, and, in consequence, usually arrived at the point he set out for. "If you go off at half cock," he would say, "you're liable to kick yourself in the face."

Perhaps as a result of this philosophy, he arrived at the age of thirty unmarried and heart-whole. He was good looking, good-natured, with an adequate income and fine prospects. Many a nose had been powdered for him, but up to this time he had escaped. He professed entire contentment with bachelorhood, though with no disdain for matrimony.

Then one summer his path crossed that of Jean Temple, and he swung out of his uncontrolled passage through life and into an orbit with her as the center quite as if he had thought the whole matter out in advance and had been only waiting for her predestined appearance.

Unfortunately Jean seemed to have her doubts. She was only twenty-three, and, while John was eligible on all counts, he was so quietly efficient that she was a little afraid of him. So she delayed a decision, and this gave opportunity for the entry of the villain.

He wasn't a bad sort of a villain, being a youngster fresh from college with a boisterous exuberance of spirits and the name of Tommie Leach. He took one short look at the charms of Jean Temple and went after her with the promptness and ecstasy of a fox terrier after a cat.

Thereupon Jean led a gay life. Painter seemed to have been left at the post. Jean and Tommie sailed and picnicked and went canoeing and surf bathing together, and Painter circled desolately around the outskirts of their merriment and bided his time. After all, Tommie was only a frivolous youth, and Painter told himself that ultimately Jean would weigh him in the balance and find him wanting. Still, he fretted more or less, and, to get his mind off his present troubles, he proceeded to build himself a boat.

He was a long time doing it, and when he got through he named her *Fat Lazarus,* because she was broad in the beam and was constructed of barrel

hoops and cast-off lath and other resurrected material he found about the place. She was neither beautiful, commodious, nor swift, but he took a great pride in her, having fashioned her with his own hands.

He said she was a canoe, and maybe she was. Certainly she was pointed at both ends, though there was some suspicion that this was due to the fact that, having built one end that way, it was easier to make the other like it. She had about an inch and a half of freeboard, which vanished entirely if two persons essayed to ride in her. Then she became, to all intents and purposes, a submarine, and the raised sides of the cockpit alone stood between the occupants and wet disaster.

You sat in the bottom of the *Fat Lazarus* with your feet stuck out in front of you and the edge of the cockpit eating into the small of your back, and you paddled her carefully straight into the wind or straight before it, because, if she ever got to rolling in the trough of the waves, there was nothing to do but swim or wade ashore, dragging her behind you, turn her over to get the water out, and start over again.

She had to be painted about once a week or she leaked in her canvas seams —I mean she leaked worse if she wasn't painted. You usually sat down in a nice dry spot, only to have your weight shift the center of equilibrium, and feel a cool rill of river water come from somewhere under her deck and run gently but firmly up your trouser leg. As may be gathered, she was no lady's hack. She looked harmless, but was full of tricks. She had a bad eye and was warranted to kick, bite, back, and lie down when least expected.

Painter, by industriously paddling her around the river day after day, learned to know her idiosyncrasies, and was usually able to foresee what she was about to do in time to frustrate her evil designs. But he was the only person who ever really tamed her and had her in subjection.

II.

THE break in Jean Temple's preoccupation in Tommie Leach was a long time coming, but it came at last just as Painter had anticipated. Apparently there was no quarrel, but Tommie's constant presence seemed to pall a little. The three were sitting on the yacht club veranda one day, John a little removed, Tommie at Jean's feet.

"How about some tennis?" suggested Tommie.

"Oh, I don't feel like it," said Jean.

"A swim then?" he proposed.

"Why do you always want to be doing something, Tommie?" The tone was a bit impatient.

"Well," said Tommie, "what's the use in living if you can't make things hum while you're doing it?"

"Run along and play then," said Jean. "I'll stay here and talk to Mr. Painter."

Tommie seemed to become aware of Painter's presence for the first time. "Hello, Painter," he cried. "How's the *Fat Lazarus?* Tipped you over yet this morning?"

"She's a very steady boat if you know how to handle her, Tommie," said Painter, with a trace of condescension in his tone.

Tommie gave a whoop. "Steady, my eye!" he cried. "She steadily dumps you into the river about three times a day."

"And not only steady but fast," said Painter coolly.

Again Tommie emitted a war whoop. "Fast!" he chortled. "You mean fast to a dock. Oh, yes, she's fast, all samee like a mudscow."

"I'm thinking of entering her in the men's singles in the regatta next week," said Painter.

Tommie fairly bounced off the club-

house steps. "Race in that thing!" he cried. "Why, the rest of us will have finished before you get her under way."

"Think so?" said Painter, with exasperating coolness. "If properly handled I'm satisfied she is very fast."

"Why, man," cried Tommie, "she isn't a canoe. She's a barge, a canal boat, a washtub."

Painter's face darkened as though he resented the remark. "I'll enter her," he said wrathfully; "and, what's more, she'll show you the way to the finish."

"Oh, my stepsister-in-law!" bubbled Tommie. "This is splendiferous. I must tell the bunch what we're up against. By-by! See you later," and he ran away to spread the news.

Painter turned smiling to Jean, who had listened with growing interest. "Nice boy," he said, "only a little too cocksure."

"Do you really mean you're going to enter her?" she asked incredulously.

"Why not?" asked Painter. "It'll add to the fun at least."

"Well, I hope you do beat him," she said. "He *is* a little too cocksure."

"I said I'd show him the way over the finish line," said Painter. "I don't mean to race for the prize."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Wait and see," said Painter.

III.

PAINTER duly entered the *Fat Lazarus* for the open race in men's single canoes at the fall regatta of the club. It took nerve to do it. Two of the committee on entries were for excluding her on the ground that if she could be called a canoe anything that would float and was sharp at both ends was a canoe. But the third member argued them around by observing that she couldn't, in the nature of things, cut any figure in the race, and that she would, on the other hand, add much to the gayety of the occasion. So she was finally accepted, and the whole river laughed and determined to be on hand when the day came.

Then Painter got very busy. With the race one week away, he hauled the *Fat Lazarus* out and took her to the shop in his back yard, where she had been created, and he shut the doors thereof and locked them and admitted no one. He informed inquirers that he was tuning her up for the race. How he was doing this a good half mile from the water did not appear.

Tommie spent a joyous week baiting the imperturbable Painter whenever he met him. "How's the fat lady coming on?" he would inquire. "Can she do a hundred yards under twenty minutes yet?"

He also put in considerable time developing a conspiracy among the other young bucks about the club with the object of making life miserable for "Old Painter," as he called him, after the race.

"Let's guy him to a fadeaway," he urged. "Best way will be to go at him seriatim, first one and then another and so on. I'll walk up casually and pin him on a cork and watch his wings flutter for a minute, and then one of you fellows happen along, and we'll keep that up till we get his Rocky Mountain, see?"

Thanks to Tommie's activities every one within a radius of miles learned of the entry of the *Fat Lazarus*. And since the interest of both Tommie and Painter in Miss Temple was a matter of common knowledge, it was whispered that there was more at stake in the race than appeared in the published list of prizes. As a result of much gossip on hotel porches, interest in the outcome waxed steadily during the week, and the day of the regatta found a feverish tension in the air.

Of course, this was gossip. Certainly in Jean's mind there was no thought of the race having any bearing

on her final decision, nor had the idea of eliminating "old Painter" by beating him in the race occurred to Tommie. As for Painter, the evidence is not so clear. Certainly Tommie had so used the week as to place himself in a decidedly ridiculous position if by any chance he should follow Painter over the line.

IV.

NOBODY saw the *Fat Lazarus* until the morning of the race. Then it was discovered that she had been hauled down to the river and launched during the night, and, as the rays of the rising sun fell upon her, beholders were treated to a rare and inspiring vision. The *Fat Lazarus* had been painted, nor had paint been spared. She beat upon one's retina with all the colors of the spectrum and then some.

It had been put on largely in stripes which ran in all and sundry directions across and around her so that she looked like a dish of particolored spaghetti. Here and there a bunch of stripes curled round and brought up in what resembled the bull's-eye of a target, while at one point on her forward deck there was evidence that a can of vermilion paint had been overturned and allowed to dry as it spread.

Now, it would have been a crime and an outrage to have so disfigured a real boat, but, of course, it made no difference with the *Fat Lazarus*. She had been the recognized clown of the river all summer, and an extra dab of paint on the end of her nose was only in keeping with her reputation. Painter hardly left her all day. He tied her to a stake off the clubhouse dock, where she attracted attention like a dynamite explosion. But no one was allowed to inspect her closely.

Two o'clock came. There were races for women, races for boys, races for mixed couples, and a punting match. Then came the great event, the singles quarter-mile canoe race for men. The contestants, nine in all, paddled up to the starting line, Painter among them, seated majestically in the violently decorated *Fat Lazarus*. All the others, including Tommie, wore bathing suits; Painter was clad in spotless white flannels, and ostentatiously smoked his pet pipe.

Getting a canoe race started satisfactorily is only less difficult than starting a horse race, and there occurred the usual delay of several minutes, while the canoes backed and bumped and the starter bellowed through a megaphone. During this interval Painter sat serenely in his awful tub with the paddle lying idly on the deck before him, apparently taking no interest in his rivals or in their claims.

Finally the starter's pistol cracked, and eight paddles flashed as their owners drove them down in the effort to be away first. Painter calmly removed his pipe and knocked out the ashes. He blew a cloud of smoke into the air, picked up his paddle, and gently thrust it into the water.

To the astonishment of the howling crowd on the shore the *Fat Lazarus* responded to that leisurely stroke like a greyhound stung by a hornet. She fairly leaped forward. Her bow rose out of the water and a white wave curled away on either side, while her stern settled till the following wave broke on the combing of her cockpit. Half under water, she started after her rivals like a wild thing.

Meanwhile, Painter leaned comfortably back on a cushion and plied his paddle first on one side and then on the other, gracefully, nonchalantly, and with exasperating deliberation. His competitors might toil and sweat and struggle, but as for him, this was merely a summer afternoon's enjoyment.

Tommie had got a good start and

was already leading the field by half a length. He bent to his paddle with fierce determination, and the way the light shell beneath him sprang forward with each thrust spoke well for both his muscles and his skill. Barring accidents, he didn't see now how he could lose, and a grin spread over his face.

V.

THE *Fat Lazarus*, tearing along like a singed cat, overtook her rivals one after another, passed them, and gave them her wash. In the first hundred yards she had headed all but Tommie, and a minute later had him lapped. It was downright mysterious. The first thought that occurred to us spectators on the bank was that Painter had put a gasoline motor in her. But you can hear the "putt-putt-putt" of a gas engine for a mile over water, and nothing of the kind was issuing from the *Fat Lazarus*. So far as we could detect she was running as silently as the other canoes.

Tommie, suddenly aware of another boat overtaking him, redoubled his efforts without looking back at her. It was labor wasted. Whoever it was clung to his quarter, and even continued to gain on him. He cast a glance sideways, and his mouth fell open and his paddle slipped in his loosened fingers.

What he saw was the kaleidoscopic *Fat Lazarus* plowing through the water like a ricocheting shell, only her forward half showing above the surface and a swirl of broken water spreading in a wide V behind her. Painter, sitting at ease, deposited his paddle in the water, stroked it back with precision and smoothness, twitched it at the end of the stroke enough to bring the ramping craft back to a straight course, lifted it deliberately and repeated the operation on the other side. His movements depicted neither haste nor anxiety. He looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, but kept his gaze fixed on the stakes which marked the finish line.

The contrast between his cool, unhurried motions and the violent progress of the *Fat Lazarus* was ludicrous as well as uncanny. What would happen if he should take to imitating his straining rivals? Would that glorious concatenation of antagonistic color schemes take wings and fly?

As Tommie hesitated in paralyzed amazement, the *Fat Lazarus* swept majestically past him, and Tommie suddenly faced ignominious defeat instead of the easy victory he had imagined. Desperately he plunged to his work, and in his haste and eagerness tipped his canoe so that his paddle barely touched the water and he caught an awful crab. At the same instant the wash of the departing *Fat Lazarus* struck him, and the combination was too much for his cranky craft. Over she went and out went Tommie with a surging splash.

Twenty yards from the finish the *Fat Lazarus* began to slow down. Painter glanced back for the first time, saw that he had a commanding lead, and apparently decided to let her momentum carry her over. At any rate he ceased paddling, and the boat covered the remaining distance with steadily decreasing speed. Even so she crossed a good four lengths ahead of her nearest competitor. Then Painter paddled slowly up to the dock and climbed out with a perfectly sober face to meet a crowd of uproarious friends.

It was not a defeat; it was a rout, a massacre, a public humiliation. The crowd was wild. Staid citizens laughed till they fell on the ground. Men slapped their neighbors on the shoulder and vowed it beat a three-ring circus. It was the cleverest thing ever pulled off. It took old John Painter to think up a stunt like that!

VI.

TOMMIE swam ashore and came dripping up the clubhouse steps fairly frothing with chagrin and indignation. He was on his way to file a protest with the regatta committee, but the howls of laughter which greeted his appearance halted him, and a moment later he was driven from the clubhouse by the storm of witticisms which broke about his head.

"Go at him seriatim!" yelled one young fiend.

"Pin him on a cork and watch him flutter!" shouted another.

"Oh, you Tommie, is the water wet?"

Thus they baited him till he fled on the plea of having to dress. Painter, meantime, was holding a reception on the veranda surrounded by a laughing crowd. The chairman of the regatta committee shouldered through and confronted him. "A protest has been filed against your boat, John," he said, "on the ground——"

"Oh, that's all right, Billy," said Painter. "I wasn't after the cup. Count me out."

Meanwhile, some of us were down on the dock inspecting the victorious craft. What we found was this: John had taken one of those little toy boats that you wind up, and he had faithfully copied the mechanical works on a scale to fit the inside of the *Fat Lazarus*. She was as full of machinery as a submarine, and would run like a torpedo boat for about a quarter of a mile. Then she was dead till you wound her up again, and it took about thirty minutes of downright toil to wind her up.

"But why the paint, John?" asked one of the crowd.

"Well," said John, "I didn't want you fellows to get interested in her insides, so I figured I'd decorate her outside till you'd forget everything else. It worked first rate."

He was sitting in a quiet corner of the hotel porch that evening with Jean Temple.

"They say Mr. Leach left on the six-o'clock train," said Jean.

"Is that so?" said Painter. "Why?"

"Couldn't stand the pressure," answered Jean.

"Well, that's really too bad," said Painter generously. "He's a nice enough boy, but a bit too cocksure perhaps. I expect he'll be back in a day or two."

"I can stand it if he doesn't come back," said Jean. "I must say I found him rather tiresome. Will you take me out in the *Fat Lazarus*, John?"

Painter thought a moment. "Yes," he said slowly; "if you'll wear your bathing suit and carry a life preserver and promise to come up smiling if she sinks under us and kicks you as she goes down."

Her First Victory

MAUD: "Why do you call that ring a war relic?"

Ethel: "I won it in my first engagement."

Getting on Nicely

WILLIE was a smart boy, and anxious to get on. His first job was in a bank.

"Well, Willie, my boy," said his uncle to him, as he met him in the street one day, "how are you getting on in business? I suppose you'll soon be the cashier, eh?"

"Yes, uncle," replied Willie, "I'm getting on nicely. I'm already a draft clerk."

"Really?" replied his relative. "A draft clerk? That's very good."

"Yes, uncle," remarked the bright lad. "I open and shut the windows according to order, and close the doors after people have left 'em open!"

At The Golden Moment

By Preston Ward

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

BY MEANS OF INTUITION.

LETTING out a whoop, McGinnity, second deputy police commissioner, rolled up his sleeves and in various other ways made a great show of getting down to work on the question of sleuthing young Robert van Fleet. It promised to be a very simple matter, for Bobbie was universally dubbed "harebrained." Moreover, it was filling columns of the newspapers which might otherwise have been used in damning the detective bureau of New York. If Van Fleet was promptly caught it would redound to the credit of McGinnity in a manner out of all proportion to the importance and cunning of the arrest. However, it was a case on which there could be no falling down.

Big Mack, as the chief of detectives was universally called, got out of bed, and rushed down to his office immediately word of the murder was phoned him. There he had not long to wait for developments. The net had to be spread, and, being a routine job, was done at once. Big Mack, immediately he knew that every train, freight and passenger, every steamer, cattle or cabin, had been apprised of the murder, waited impatiently for some news to trickle down to headquarters in his direction.

Had he been a man accustomed to waiting for anything, probably he would have been in his desk chair a month afterward. But, whatever else the faults of the city detective, he does not wait for things to come to him. After fifteen minutes of nervous vigil, Mack viciously dislodged the receiver from its hook, and proceeded to ring up every coroner he could get hold of. And right there Big Mack began to smell what is popularly called a rat. For no coroner was willing even to admit that he had been called in on the Corwin murder, nor could the body of the reported dead man be located at any hospital. The detective pondered for another five minutes.

"It's a high-finance job," he remarked

aloud to himself. "Corwin was killed after hours in his own bank. Maybe it's a 'hush-up' story."

After the manner of one who had "wised up" to financial affairs through years of experience and bootlicking, he then proceeded to jump into his department automobile and make himself as scarce as possible, allowing reporters and others interested to know that "he was working along certain lines of his own." He then disappeared completely until he could get a line on what course the principals were likely to take.

In this particular instance, however, this proved to be about the most foolish thing he could have done. True, there were heaps of what he was pleased to call high finance about the assault, but that was being investigated by others than himself or even the authorities of the State banking department. Big Mack could never have comprehended the infinite details which surrounded the silent yet minute investigation which, one might say, had started simultaneously with the blow delivered by Bobbie van Fleet.

On returning late to his office the following day, he found that the reporters were swarming about the portals with strange, wild theories to advance, but that he himself had dismissed till the situation had developed quite a bit more. Banker Corwin had not been killed, but was decidedly uncomfortable, with a bad case of concussion of the brain. The surgeons called into consultation had decided that there was little to be feared from any fracture, and while Mr. Corwin fretfully proceeded to convalesce, the affairs of the Atlas Trust Company were taken over by the president of the board of directors, who happened to be, in this instance, Peter A. van Fleet, the Spider of the Street, as he was endearingly termed by those unfortunates who had come in contact with him in a commercial way.

Big Mack waited another day, till he was pretty sure that the administration was sincerely in favor of capturing young Van Fleet, then thoughtfully began a shrewd investigation.

He first ascertained that Coroner Powell, who had been summoned by the Atlas night watchman immediately that employee discovered the senseless body of his employer lying on the handsome rug of the private office, had called into consultation Van Fleet, father of the boy who was responsible for Corwin's condition. Naturally Van Fleet had the affair hushed up as much as possible, and Corwin was immediately removed to his own home, and attended by the Van Fleet physicians instead of being removed to a hospital. Coroner Powell had cleared his own skirts.

"And here," argued Big Mack to himself, "is where I clear my own of any blame, and yet do my duty by the city." Then he summoned before him James Harrison, than whom no more dogged bloodhound ever took a scent.

"Jimmie," said the chief paternally, in the manner of one conferring diamonds and great wealth upon a minion, "I have looked things over pretty carefully, and it seems this young Van Fleet has shown a clean pair of heels."

Harrison drew his beady little eyes down at the corners and frowned. He had been fairly tugging at the leash all this time, feeling certain that he would be the one sent after the young chap.

"But," continued Big Mack, "I haven't given up hope altogether. I'm pinning my last hope on your bringing him in, Jimmie. You get that? You stand alone between the department and ridicule. We want Bobbie van Fleet, and we've got to get him."

The thin lips of James Harrison opened and closed, looking uncomfortably like the jaws of a steel trap. As McGinnity looked at the thickset, broad-shouldered man before him he felt curiously uneasy. There was some-

thing about the bulging jaw muscles of the cheeks, about the undershot, blued jaw, about the mouth, nose, and keen, piercing blue eyes that told him the detective might be successful in even such a quest as this. Harrison studied his superior officer quietly, coolly. He was an old-timer on the force, and had no intention of softening his remarks.

"I said we want Van Fleet," irritably repeated Big Mack.

"*Do* you—on the level?" questioned the subordinate. He listened quietly a second or so to the chief's blustering inquiries as to his meaning, then interrupted abruptly: "I only asked, because you never sent me after any one yet you wanted very badly. You've wasted two days looking yourself, and I understand that old Van Fleet is in charge at the Atlas bank. I want to know before I start whether you really want the young fellow brought down here." He tapped a thick, muscular forefinger harshly upon the desk, as though in his own mind the whole question was whether the department wanted the man caught. The catching he took for granted.

The commissioner, because he was by nature and training a dyed-in-the-wool bluffer, met the searching glance of his detective with a glare of outraged virtue, then thumped his heavy palm upon the desk to emphasize his words: "I tell you, Harrison, that I want Van Fleet brought in. That's final, and it's up to you. Go out and get him."

As if he were a trained soldier, James Harrison nodded shortly, whirled on his heel, and went out of the door, leaving Big Mack to stare after him uneasily. He could never get accustomed to the implicit obedience Harrison rendered him, for he knew in his innermost heart that the man despised him. Harrison never asked questions, never bothered any one. He took an order, and went about the executing of it in as matter-of-fact manner as if it had been a request to step across the street.

After cashing a large-sized order for funds, that had been left for him outside, Harrison wandered out of the building, his broad, low brow wrinkled in tense thought. He was not one to start blindly on anything. For years he had been in the detective branch of the police department of the city, and for years he had managed to uphold a wonderful reputation for the capture and apprehension of criminals whom the rest of the department had given up. The yellow press delighted in printing his picture with all manner of lurid expressions under it—"The detective with the sixth sense" being their favorite.

And it was literally true that Harrison did possess a sixth sense, and, more than that, used it continually in his business. He seemed to take a dead trail unerringly, follow it along without rhyme or reason until he came upon some real clew; after which he was a sure victor. The woods of northern Minnesota knew his footprints; the trails of Alaska had heard his "mush on—mush;" the rice fields of South Carolina had been familiar with Jimmie Harrison. Even in the cities, in the vortex of Chicago, the mazes of New York, he had used his intuition—which he called "hunch"—and nailed his man. As Sheridan in the same department had a camera eye that indelibly registered every face he set eyes on, so did Harrison scent his quarry.

Immediately on leaving the building, the detective got in the subway and called at the residence of Mr. Henry Corwin, where he was refused admittance by the nurses and doctors alike. This seemed rather to please Jimmie, for he left smiling, and went downtown again, where he was shortly inside the inclosure of the Atlas Trust Company, insisting strenuously that he must see

Peter A. van Fleet immediately. He was mistaken in this, for it was a full hour before Mr. van Fleet sent word that he was at liberty to attend to the visitor.

CHAPTER II.

AS THE DOOR CLOSED.

HARRISON looked the long, wiry figure of the old gentleman over carefully before starting in on his line of questions. He knew the face well from having often seen it in the public prints, but there was a certain ruthless strength to the jaw, a cruelty to the indifferent, but keen brown eyes, a bloodless, just quality about the whole face that made him tremble. Evidently the old man did not purpose to start the conversation, and he gloated in silence over the discomfiture of the detective.

"I'd like only about five minutes of your time, Mr. van Fleet," began the detective, in the time-honored prelude of the service.

"You've had it," precisely and accurately murmured Mr. van Fleet, regarding the clock on the wall, just above his visitor's head. "Good-by, sir."

If he expected to get rid of James Harrison by any such methods, he was making a great mistake in his man. The detective's heavy jaw set, and he placed his closed fist upon the polished top of the banker's table, and stared steadily about the room. Finally his eyes riveted upon a dark stain upon the handsome rug, the stain of ink which had been found opposite where the injured Corwin had been lying when discovered by the watchman. Harrison felt himself wondering how this old man could voluntarily select this place to work, this place where the evidence of his own son's guilty conduct was always before him.

He looked up again, and the shadow of a smile touched the thin lips of the old man. "I'm from central office, Mr. van Fleet," he began ponderously, "and have just got the detail to look for your son——"

"Quite so."

"I'm going to be frank with you, sir," continued the detective heavily.

"Very well."

"Frank with you," repeated Harrison, a trifle bewildered by the terse interjectory speech of the old gentleman. Although he did not recognize what it was, the detective was beginning to wonder whether it was natural for a father to help the pursuer of his own flesh and blood. "I want to know," he rushed on breathlessly, "whether you will interfere?"

"Why should I interfere?" mildly questioned the aged banker.

"You are his father——"

"I am chairman of the board of directors of the Atlas Trust Company, and have been in charge during Mr. Corwin's obligatory absence up to an hour ago." Mr. Peter van Fleet waved his emaciated hand slightly, as if to intimate that he had explained his entire attitude.

"You mean," blundered Harrison, "that you want to see justice done, no matter who it hurts. That's the respectable thing for——"

"We can dispense with compliments, sir."

Harrison figuratively threw up his hands, and then took a deep plunge into midstream. He felt that there could be nothing but defeat in fencing with this being of watery blood, that he could never understand him; therefore, providing he did not get kicked out first, he had better come to the point.

"Was the motive for the assault theft?" he questioned.

"From my search into the Atlas affairs, I am not quite certain," cautiously and calmly answered Van Fleet. "Of course, you understand that anything said in this connection must be strictly between ourselves. I do say, however,

that there is almost one million dollars which cannot be traced."

"You are not helping your son out?" questioned Harrison, instinctively retreating a step, as though expecting a blow; but, seeing no sign of emotion on the aged face, following up the lead. "I know your son, sir; arrested him once myself in the old days when I was a roundsman, and he a college boy. I'd know him anywhere; he's an easy one to follow. Now, could you say whether he is provided with funds?"

"I could not say. From the best of my information and belief, he was without much money. Two days before I had refused to give him another cent allowance. Mr. Corwin tells me that the night of the assault he pleaded poverty. I think, in fact, that he had no money."

"And you will not supply him should he request it?"

"In the present circumstances—no."

"You are making up this million-dollar deficit personally?"

"No, not at present."

Harrison got to his feet. The interview, brief though it had been, was of a sort to take all the wind out of his sails. He could not believe what he was hearing; yet, as he looked at the aged multimillionaire, he felt that the man would not move a hand to interfere with him. A shudder of something very like revulsion passed through his broad frame as he slowly rose to leave. At the door he bumped into a stout, elderly gentleman, whom he was acquainted with by sight, and a beautiful young woman. He seated himself abruptly, while the banker looked at him in astonishment.

"I was just going to stop in at Colonel Middleton's," Harrison heard himself apologizing. "If you don't mind, Mr. van Fleet, I can spare myself the trouble."

Although he addressed his remark to the banker, his eyes passed the choleric ones of the colonel, and rested inquiringly upon those of the young woman, whom he instinctively knew for the daughter.

"I'm off for Porcupine, Peter," wheezed the colonel pompously, utterly disregarding the interloper. "Thought I'd run up before the cold spell got too bad, and take a look at those mining properties I tried to interest you in the——"

Peter van Fleet coughed slightly, his eyes twinkling a particle as he saw that Harrison disregarded hint or spoken request to leave.

"This gentleman is a detective, Colonel Middleton," he said dryly. "He speaks of calling on you——"

Colonel Middleton paled to the depths of his wicked old soul, and then his eyes shifted meaningly from those of Harrison to his daughter. The life of an elderly gentleman of the colonel's wealth and the colonel's sporting proclivities is conducive to a great and overwhelming chariness in encountering detectives. He pulled himself together with an effort, as he managed to make out from Harrison's explanation that he was "detecting" in connection with young Van Fleet. Then Middleton started to bluster, but the man's face showed that it was useless.

"You understand, miss," Harrison was explaining to the daughter of the house, "that immediately after the assault Mr. van Fleet called on you. May I ask if he said anything that would lead you to suspect where he intended going?"

"To his club, the United—yes," the girl answered quietly. In the brown old eyes of Peter van Fleet there leaped an admiring light.

"He said nothing of the crime?" persisted Harrison, himself admiring the cool wit of the girl.

"What crime, sir?" her tone was haughty.

"His theft and the assault."

"I do not believe any crime has been

committed by Mr. van Fleet," she answered defiantly, turning, as if for protection, to the old gentleman.

Colonel Middleton interposed swiftly, taking her arm as if to assure her she need not be annoyed. "By what right, may I ask," he growled ominously at the detective, "do you ask these impertinent questions of my daughter?"

Harrison grinned. "I don't want to be a nuisance," he protested mildly, "but it's this way: Between ourselves, I didn't think the department wanted the young fellow caught. It's the biggest attempted murder in years, and it's one of the biggest thefts in years. I wasn't called in, and I'm Harrison—James Harrison," he said it quietly, as if expecting them immediately to recognize that when James Harrison was not sent out on a case it looked strange. "He's had two days to make a getaway, and now I'm called in. Chief tells me the young feller is wanted bad. I comes to verify it. Mr. van Fleet tells me it's out of his hands. There's only one thing for me to go on——"

"And that?" questioned the girl, leaning slightly forward.

Harrison flushed slightly under her level scrutiny. "I don't quite know how to put it," he apologized in advance, "but I'm going to lay all my cards on the table—they ain't enough to do any harm. You see, we detectives have most of our dealings in the criminal line, and we always look for the woman in a case where——"

"Then I'm the woman in the case?" softly questioned Mildred Middleton, resting her hand upon the quivering arm of her father, as that gentleman began to rumble and roar.

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to put it that way," blundered the detective blushingly. "But I've got to ask just one more question. From all I can gather Van Fleet had no money when he left. Did he get any from you when he called, Miss Middleton?"

And then the colonel exploded, while his daughter flushed white hot with rage. Harrison regarded her keenly, shrewdly, then smiled quietly, as if very well satisfied.

Mildred noticed the smile, and calmed her father with a word. "Why, yes," she murmured. "He had plenty of money when he left. I believe he got it at the club, however."

Harrison accepted the information with a blank face, although a careful observer might have seen that he had deposited his tongue in one corner of his cheek. With a low bow he silently left the room, leaving the three to look at each other in wonderment.

Colonel Middleton was the first to recover, and, after a final objurgation against the detective, whirled upon his daughter. "Why did you tell me he was penniless when he called?" he demanded; then to the aged banker: "Beg pardon, Peter, but this is no case for a young girl's name to be mixed up in."

"He was penniless," she answered coolly. "However, thinking that he had money will enlarge the scope of his own possibilities for escape, and minimize the chances for his capture. That is all."

"But, dash it all," rumbled the father, "what do you care for——" He turned quickly to Van Fleet, who was watching him narrowly, not a particle of expression on his face. Somehow Middleton got the notion that menace was in his manner, although common report had it that the old man was dead set against his only son. "I beg pardon, Peter," he began. The old man interrupted. "Unnecessary, Middleton. I wish to see strict justice meted out; that is all."

The girl started to flash him a look of withering scorn, but something in the serenity of his face made a puzzled expression replace it.

Peter van Fleet's unemotional voice was sounding again. "You called to

mention anything else besides going up to Porcupine, Middleton?" he queried crisply.

And, while she studied him in growing wonder, he talked quietly, briskly, of certain investments in which the colonel was seeking to interest him. Business—business—business was the prime topic with the bloodless, colorless, remorseless old man at the desk. Yet she could not understand, could not quite force herself to believe that he had wiped Bobbie utterly out of his heart and mind. Instinctively her eyes fastened upon the splotch of ink that had ruined the handsome office rug, and she wondered if Bobbie had thrown the inkwell at Corwin, or how the stain had come there upon the floor. Her eyes sought the desk, and she saw that a big piece had been chipped from the heavy glass well.

She shuddered as she rose to follow her father from the room, wondering how it was possible for a man so to submerge his heart and soul in the accumulation of dollars that he could sit in this office, with its recent memories everywhere to haunt him, yet never even think of them. Something drew her eyes back, as she was closing the door, and Peter van Fleet was leaning forward in his chair, his face buried in his hands, as if lost in deep thought. And yet she did not think it thought entirely.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE ATLAS.

BIG MACK, in drawing his diagram of the only possible methods of escape left open to Bobbie van Fleet, did not catch that young gentleman, nor did he draw the net as closely together as he thought he had. In other words, Bobbie van Fleet got away. Science hung its head, and the press of New York damned Deputy McGinnity, and, because Bobbie was born under a lucky star, the dead man of the papers proceeded to get well slowly, but surely, and everybody was then glad that young Van Fleet had escaped, because no one had ever liked Corwin, anyhow, and really it was too bad that Bobbie's fists hadn't been—— Well, never mind. Those thoughts occur often when a banker has risen from the ranks, and, in the rising, has had much to do with the refusal of loans to customers. The important thing is that Bobbie van Fleet got away.

Two evenings after his appearance at the United Club, he painfully clambered out from under the second coach of the Cobalt Express, where he had been enjoying a long, interminable trip on the rods, with the clacking trucks so close he might reach out his hand and have it severed instantly at any time he chose. He had never before traveled on the Cobalt Express, consequently he was not quite positive whether the road was more in need of a file or a muffler. It struck him, with peculiar force, however, that it might do worse for travelers underneath the coaches.

His face was filthy, his eyes screwed almost shut from the cinders that had been hurled up into his face with the stinging force of a needle driven by a ninety-ton engine, his clothes and hands were torn and grease-begrimed, his manner apologetic as is the manner of the dog whose caudal appendage is decorated with a tomato can instead of a blue ribbon. He stared about him in a dazed fashion, listening absently to the objurgations heaped upon his youthful head by a small "wiper," who had hauled him by the heels from under the coach.

The wiper was red of hair and fiery of spirit, and birth and training had inbred him against the hobo. Therefore, having a poor opinion of the valorous qualities of the average tramp, and also being possessed of the small man's delight in browbeating a large man who will stand it, he carefully felt his way

along from taunts and gibes to stinging insults, and finished up by jolting Bobbie a nasty punch directly in the stomach. Young Mr. van Fleet, having fasted for two days, and having dissipated for eight years, coughed, staggered, bent double, then recovered, and, reaching out both of his huge fists, grasped his tormentor by the shoulders, holding him powerless in his grip.

"You are making me angry," he said politely. "Please keep your hands out of my stomach. I don't like your face, little man, and I don't feel quite right about changing the shape of it just now."

The wiper struggled desperately for a moment until he saw how absolutely powerless he was in those steel paws that bit into his shoulders as if they were being pressed together by a vise. Then a slow grin spread over his homely face, and he gave the high sign of surrender. Bobbie looked at him suspiciously, then released him, and rubbed his stomach ruefully. "It was below the belt," he said finally, "and for that I should maul you, little man. But I like your nerve, and so I will be kind."

A quick retort was upon the tip of the Canadian's tongue, but he withheld it, and, instead, surveyed his tramp with a curious expression upon his face. "You had better think it over, son," gravely advised the little man, "and be more careful with the tip of your tongue hereafter. I know you just as well as though you were my own pal. You are the celebrated Bobbie van Fleet——"

He darted swiftly back as instinctively the great fist of the young fugitive from justice shot squarely out from the shoulder, cutting a swishing hole in the surrounding atmosphere. A light glinted in Bobbie's eyes as he advanced stealthily to deliver another blow, but the little man was darting from side to side, pleading with the hulking fellow to take a grip on himself. Van Fleet finally understood that the fact of this man's knowing his name did not of necessity mean that he was an enemy prepared to deliver him over to the law. He stammered an apology instantly.

The little man was bristling all over, but he curbed his anger sufficiently to make his splutterings partially intelligible. "You *are* a fathead," he finally decided. "You will make nice meat for the chair or rope, but I think there is something in you. I am glad to introduce you to this country, Van Fleet. How did it happen?"

"Toby Blarcom spoke of the top of the world at the club," began Bobbie lamely, then grinned apologetically. "But, of course, you don't know Toby. He's the wisest man that ever paraded as a fool, and I trust him."

"Toby Blarcom was the friend of my childhood days," solemnly answered the wiper, drawing himself up to his full four feet eleven inches. "But it must be a different Toby—at that time he was the most owlishly asinine youth that ever paraded as a lily-bedecked Solomon."

"You know Toby!" Bobbie stared at the little man long and steadily, then reached out and smeared his face a little more in vain efforts to make it clean enough to get a good view of the features under the coat of grease and tan. "Ah-ha!" he cried finally, taking the protesting small body into his huge arms, and waltzing a few steps up and two-stepping a couple more back again. "I have discovered you, O'Neill! You are the little cox of the Johnnies crew; you are the little Canuck who coxed me out of the New London race. O'Neill, I have always had it in for you for that work, and if it were not for the love I bear you I would beat you. But how in thunder did you ever come to this?"

"You've gota fine right talking," sneeringly retorted the little wiper, re-

turning the supercilious stare of the other. "But as you never did step any more lightly on a man's feelings than an elephant with the maternal instinct nursing a brood of chickens, I will answer you in three short words. Thirst and poetic temperament made of me what you see. I started in to learn my father's business from the ground up; I started in to labor for fifteen years, with the final ambition of being written up in your widely disseminated periodical, the *Post*. I would be a builder of empires, a knitter of rods of steel that bind the Atlantic to the Pacific. I would form the great country instead of the country's forming me. I inherited the poetic temperament from father, and father has built this and other railroads. The thirst has kept me down, sad to relate, and I am still a wiper on the line of which I some day expect to be president."

He paused and looked Bobbie over carefully, then appraisingly felt the bulging biceps of his arms. Drawing a long sigh, he once more looked nervously about the yards. "It must have been an awful poke, Bobbie," he said. "You know," he admitted, "I sometimes think I'd be a regular man if I had a punch like that."

Bobbie van Fleet shook his head moodily. Swiftly the whole scene in that office of the president of the Atlas Trust was recalled to him. He looked into the inquiring eyes of O'Neill, then threw out his hands in a frank, involuntary gesture. "Kidding aside, O'Neill," he said, "I think you ought to know; somebody ought to know. Maybe it would make me feel better, maybe it would help out to have some one giving a real thought to me. I did kill Corwin, but he had it coming to him. It was an accident and——"

"Of course," agreed O'Neill.

"There was nothing for it but to take it on the run," Bobbie continued gravely. "I hated to do it, but nothing else remained. I'm not a quick thinker, O'Neill, but every little link in the chain of evidence that would put me in the chair with the steel nightcap on my head flashed across my brain, just like a butler's drawing the portières into the dining room—clear as that, O'Neill, it rose before me in the fraction of a second.

"I'd been a high roller and a bad egg. When the old man was out of town, I'd get money anyhow. I was pretty well filled with rum all the time. My record for check transactions was bad, because I knew everything would be all right, and I didn't like to stop and explain. Then the old gentleman got me this secretary job in the Atlas Trust. I give you my word I wanted to work—I was proud of it; I——"

"Another empire builder," nodded the little, red-headed man sagely. "And the thirst got in front of your eyes. Uh-huh—I'm wise to it."

"Hardly that. I was really anxious to do more than I had a chance to do. You see, there was somebody else whom I wanted to make good for——"

O'Neill stared at the toe of his square boot, and winked hard a couple of times, then coughed impatiently. "There always is," he grunted. "Get something new in your lecture, doctor; the film is old and ragged about the edge. Get to the punch. I'm interested in that."

"Well, Corwin had been doing a bunch of monkey-doodle business about the bank. Things were getting a bit hot for him. Collateral securities pledged with the Atlas for loans, under the proviso that they were not to be used, kept showing up in the Street. Then the bank examiner came along, and poked his nose into things. There was a meeting of the clearing house committee, and Corwin came before them. I was the goat—get it, O'Neill? I was the goat. I was a fool; I monkeyed with checks; I was a drunken, good-for-noth-

ing brawler; I was Bobbie van Fleet; and I was secretary of the trust company. The old man was notified, and tied a large-sized can on my tail—that is, he took a real, ungnawable sailor's hitch in the knot he had tied there several weeks before. Corwin called me into his office, about eight o'clock in the evening."

"He was a game man," nodded O'Neill.

"He paid no attention to the sporting page," retorted Bobbie. "He called me into his office, and concisely laid the evidence before me, proved me a thief by my own signature to certain documents——"

"Your own signature?"

"Certainly. Imagine yourself being placed in charge of this road."

"I would sleep illy o' nights were I to do so," said the little man. "I have an imagination, Van Fleet, and I would thank you to speak of less horrible things. I can hear the screams of the wounded."

"He is a great banker, a human figuring machine. He proved so conclusively to me that I had stolen over a million dollars from the bank that I felt in my pocket to see whether the five-dollar note there hadn't taken root and grown into a million since I got it. But he was too clean-cut in his evidence. I happened to recollect, in a hazy sort of way, the nature of some of those documents. Then a long line of them grew clear, and I give you my sober word, O'Neill, I became in that vivid instant a great and astute banker.

"I looked over those papers quietly," he went on, "and my mind grasped every last detail in them. And out of the maze, combined with what I knew, I caught in a flash that he was the thief, and had carefully laid out a chain of evidence against me. I saw that I was in for it, saw that he was the one who had been working on the old man to tie a can to me, saw that I was a thief, and would wear a pretty, little zebra suit while that hound went on swiping coin to his heart's content. As I say, O'Neill, it wasn't so much the hurt to me; it wasn't that I resented. I resented it all as a banker. Somewhere in me, hidden deep under my cultivated depravity, there must be a strain of the banker inherited from the old gentleman. I always had felt the responsibility to others that the trust company represented, and it was the only responsibility that I ever did feel."

"I understand." The little wiper was fairly standing on tiptoe during the recital, his cheeks glowing white and red by turns, his nose quivering with eagerness and anxiety.

"I looked at him a minute, and he must have seen that I was measuring him up for a blow. As a matter of fact, I intended to slap his face, take him by the nose, and haul him that way round to the club, where he would make a confession. That might have been rough a bit, but——"

"Essentially delicate, and the work of a mental giant," responded Mr. O'Neill. "You are an astute—— But no, you killed him instead."

"He grabbed the paper weight, and let fly at me," Bobbie continued lamely. "I caught it just under my hair, heard it whistle. It was a short left hook a tiny bit to the right of his big chin, O'Neill. The spot was dancing before my eyes, just as though some one had painted a bull's-eye there. I hooked her over on him, and he didn't budge. Funny thing! He didn't budge. It didn't even jostle him—must have been so hard and snappy that it just was all taken up by his nerves. I talked to him for a minute after that, before his position made me think something was queer. I felt him, and——" He made a wide, sweeping gesture with his shoulders and arms, as if to say that he was here, and that was an end of the matter for the time being.

Little O'Neill, lost between admiration for the strength that could deliver a killing blow and natural horror at the situation and anxiety for some method of assisting Van Fleet to get out of the consequences, kicked thoughtfully, moodily at the cindered path, then stared fearfully up the track at the little speck that represented the depot.

"At first," he finally said, "the wires were hot after you. We were all on the lookout, Bobbie. To-day there hasn't been much fuss made. I think they believe you're hiding out in New York some place, and are just waiting patiently for you to show your head. There's only one thing for you to do, and that's to get away—get far away from any one who is likely to know you. This is the country for that. It's big! It's *too* big for me—too big altogether."

"I've had the feeling," Van Fleet admitted shamefacedly. "Under that coach," he explained, jerking his head toward the coach, "when I was hanging on for my life, listening to the devilish hiss of the escape valves, the eternal clicking of the ties, the squealing of the trucks and the chains, I couldn't help feeling ashamed of myself, not knowing how to do what the poorest drifter could manage naturally."

"What's the use of a college education?" asked O'Neill whimsically. But there was no smile on his ordinarily merry face, no laughter in his eyes. He continued to kick at the cinders.

"It's being worthless and having the old gentleman know how worthless I am that hurts a lot, too," he continued, as though he had not been interrupted. "Up North, there's a world that hasn't been scratched by a boot. It's virgin, Bobbie, and there's only one prop that a fellow's got up there to keep him straight. There's Indians and breeds, and now and then a white man, and the white man is only responsible to himself, and, if he doesn't keep on thinking all the time of the fact that he is white, he's a goner. It doesn't make any difference to any one whether he remembers, except himself. That's the sort of world it is. It's enough to make a fellow want to fight, isn't it?"

"What for?" Van Fleet queried.

"You lack the temperament," said O'Neill ruefully. "To-night, there is a train leaving here for the North, and attached to that train is a box car filled with machinery for one of the mines. I intend sealing you in that car with the machinery, and, taking what money you have upon your person at present, sending you up there."

Bobbie van Fleet nodded quietly. It sounded like something of a contract, but he realized that one place was very much the same as another to him now, just so he would not be carted back to New York State. "You're on," he assented, pulling a dirty wad of paper, which represented his bank roll, from his pocket, and thrusting it into O'Neill's hand. "Now, I'm going to play hide and seek around the cars till you rustle up some food."

O'Neill started to protest, then thought better of it, and drew back the door of one of the cars, and motioned Van Fleet to step inside. With the promise of returning as soon as he was able to get away from actual work, he started on his rounds, the oil can discharging its contents over the joint which the tramp had just mentioned as being squeaky.

But something seemed pressing heavily upon the little fellow's mind, for he gave his work scant attention, and finally quit altogether, and crossed to the dispatcher's office, poking his head into the window. "All through with number six, Jim. Say, just find out what's doing about that Van Fleet fellow who killed Corwin, will you? I'm going to hustle a bite of grub."

"All right," assented the operator readily, and busied himself at the instrument.

CHAPTER IV.

A NAME TO CONJURE WITH.

LANGDON O'NEILL sped swiftly up the rickety street. Stopping in the restaurant, he ordered enough food to stock an army—or, at least, so it seemed to the jocular waitress—then ambled back to the depot. "Find out about that murder?" he asked the dispatcher.

"Corwin's laid up with a sore mouth and a bad heart—that's all," indifferently responded the man. "Those States' papers will have old Gabriel tooting his horn for reveille when it's taps of the night before."

O'Neill sucked in his lower lip meditatively, his brow creased in thought for a moment; then he slowly walked down the tracks, the fretwork of wrinkles about his merry eyes growing more complex with every step. He located the car in which Van Fleet was, looked queerly at the big, husky, sleeping young giant, then squatted down upon the floor and debated some vexatious problem with himself. How long he sat there he did not quite know; he only knew that his legs were cramped and sore when he finally rose and began pacing up and down the rough floor.

What he thought it was given no one to know, for he did not speak a word. Later in the afternoon he wandered into the offices, and sent in his resignation as wiper. At eight o'clock he rose from his seat in the grocery store of North Bay, and stepped round to the station, to find the station agent in a frantic state. He caught O'Neill by the shoulders, and shook him roughly. "Your old man has been raising the devil ever since he got word of your quitting. What shall I tell him, Lang?"

"Tell him," Langdon cheerfully replied, "that I'm going to do something, or tackle something, that will give me a chance." With which sapient remark he strutted cheerfully down the tracks, his shrill whistle blending with the shrieks of the newly made-up train.

He managed to awaken Van Fleet by kicking him vigorously in the ribs, and got through that sleepy gentleman's head the necessity for hastening toward the box car of machinery concerning which he had spoken. It required no effort to find it and get in, and they had not been inside long before they heard the click of the padlock on the outside. In silence they waited for the sounds of voices without to die away before speaking, then O'Neill lit a big, plumber's candle and fastened it in its own grease upon the floor of the car. The train breathed heavily, and with difficulty, then shrieked in pain. In another instant each coach and car jumped forward under the sudden pressure of steam, then the sturdy couplings brought them crashing back together, and the creaking of wheels underneath told them that the journey was begun. Once more the horrid, crunching jolt, and a figure shot out of the darkest corner, and rolled against the candle.

"Welcome to our party," remarked O'Neill merrily, staring down at the lumbering figure of the half-breed who had appeared so unexpectedly. With a curious mixture of grunt and sigh, the uninvited party rolled blissfully upon his side, then straightened up with a wheezing exclamation of pain as one side of his face came in close contact with the candle. He looked about him in a dazed sort of fashion for a few seconds, disregarding the grinning faces staring at him, then slowly rose.

"Allow me to introduce my only rival in North Bay for the doubtful honor of being the biggest fool in the place," said O'Neill, with a wagging motion of his hand. "Charlie Itchy is the pronunciation of the name that was wished

upon him early in life. Charlie Itchy, shake hands with my friend Bobbie. Bobbie—Itchy.

"Li'le boy friend of Charlie's friend," the Indian murmured, in a soft, ringing voice. "Maybe some tam Charlie help li'le boy."

There was something about his voice, about his manner as he respectfully lurched back to his corner, that took away the laugh that had risen to their lips. Somehow, it seemed very possible that Charlie Itchy might some time very possibly do what he expressed a desire for doing. He seemed a part—true, a very disreputable part—of the new, strange world into which they were going. Gradually the breed's snores mingled with the other sounds about them, the shrill blasts of the locomotive, the rangling clatter of the trucks, the whine of the couplings, the heavy crashes of the coaches upon the tracks. And a queer, continuous, sighing sound came to their ears, impregnating itself with the other sounds, and finally overriding them, making itself all important. The New Yorker looked inquiringly at his companion, who smiled a bit sadly.

"I call it the song of this new empire," Langdon O'Neill said softly. "It's the wind, Bobbie; the wind that never stops around here. It's the song of Canada."

For a long time neither of them spoke, huddled together about the big candle that was spewing its white stream along a chink in the floor. Then Bobbie looked up. "By the way, where is this wonderful gold country for which we are bound?"

"Porcupine," shortly answered the little fellow.

Bobbie whistled. "Sounds prickly," he remarked.

"It is prickly," answered the other. "They say it's the prickles of the porcupine it's named for, though. When you get the prickles of the country in your hide they don't come out. There's work to do that's worth while there, and it's calling men, real men to do it. It asks a lot, but it gives a lot in return. It's a fair land, and it's square, and it's the place to bring out everything that's in you."

"Porcupine," muttered Bobbie van Fleet, over and over to himself, his face clouding slightly. "By George, it sounds sort of primitive, fighty. There's a 'buck-up' quality about the name."

"There's gold there," answered O'Neill seriously, "and whoever tears gold away from nature has got to buck up. It's waiting for the Bobbie van Fleet and the Langdon O'Neill who might have been but are not; it's waiting for those individuals if they're not dead. And," he added vehemently, stretching his arms in a tight gesture above his head, "I'm going to find out."

"Me, too," added Bobbie.

From the corner came the satisfied grunt of Charlie Itchy. Charlie seemed glad to be getting back toward home.

CHAPTER V.

TOWARD THE TOP OF THE WORLD.

TOM RAY, super of the Rome-Extension Mine, laid firm hold on two pairs of legs, and carefully but firmly proceeded to haul to the cinder siding the hobos who were mingled with his machinery. It must be admitted that Van Fleet and O'Neill were unlovely young gentlemen, appearing to fit perfectly the classification of tramp into which the mining man promptly placed them; also they were sheepish and tongue-tied.

"Well," he sternly demanded, "what are you doing in with my stuff? What are you doing in this country?"

Big Van Fleet turned naturally to O'Neill for an answer. As a matter of fact, the Van Fleet mind was in a turmoil, and the naturally slow machinery operating under his heavy thatch of yellow hair took quite a time to grapple

with an idea. What was he doing in this country? What was he doing in that box car? True, he might have said that he was getting away, but that would hardly serve as sufficient answer to satisfy any one of an inquiring turn of mind.

He looked to his little partner, and found him glib and ready. "I," said O'Neill solemnly and sincerely, "am here to make something of myself, and my friend is here to find a few acres of gold. Isn't that what the stuff's here for—to be found?"

Tom Ray scratched his head. He himself had first arrived in camp via shank's mare, as a man without visible means of support, but then he was an old miner, had trailed from the Klondike to the Transvaal—a prospector known to the world of mining men, but this pair represented the genus hobo. There was a difference which he could see, but could not put adequately into words.

O'Neill was continuing his remarks, gaining confidence as he saw the super was at a loss. "I know Porcupine is a solid town, don't want hobos and all that sort of thing, but just the same most of the prospectors up here are working out on other people's grubstake. We got here a bit late, I know, but we're willing and anxious to work; we're both here prospecting. I'm sorry we used your car, but it looked the only way for us to get out without attracting a lot of attention. My friend," he rested his hand confidently upon the sleeve of Mr. Ray, and sank his voice to an impressive whisper. "My friend, if I were to tell you our names you would be astonished—*as*-tonished."

Bobbie van Fleet shivered a bit, and shuffled uneasily. There was not the slightest doubt in the world that his name would agreeably astonish a number of persons. He nudged his little, red-headed partner fearfully, but Langdon O'Neill, by this time, was carried away by his own eloquence. "You would be astonished, I say, if you knew our names. We do not travel in box cars because we are unable to do otherwise, but because of an overwhelming desire to make our fortunes in this new land. We——"

"Well, get a hall for that," rather roughly suggested the astonished superintendent. "What I want to know is who you are. I'm not keen on being astonished. Just tell me who you are, and I'll promise not to be astonished, young man."

O'Neill shook his red head sorrowfully, and Bobbie breathed a huge sigh of relief. He had expected his young companion to round out his climax by the announcement of his identity. Mr. Ray slowly took the complacence out of the pair by getting a firm grip on their shoulders, and urging them with him. Now, Bobbie van Fleet could probably have licked the super with one hand tied behind his back, for he was of wonderful strength, but there was something in the grip of the Ray fist, something about the fixed purposefulness of the man written large all over him, that made him feel like a child, and offer no resistance.

"In that case," decided the super, "I'll have to turn you over to the constable. Sorry, boys; don't like to do it to men from the States, but up here in Porcupine we're all trying to keep the place decent. It's up to everybody to work, for it's a new camp."

The Van Fleet heart pumped so loudly that Bobbie thought fearfully of the danger of his captor's hearing it against the bony citadel that held it. If he was haled up in court there would be small chance of ever getting clear. Some one would be there and recognize him for Bobbie van Fleet, wanted for theft and the sensational murder in the Atlas Trust offices.

Like the sifting sands of a kaleidoscope that travel at bewildering speed

and nonpurposefulness, then suddenly shift into pictures, clear and distinct, incidents began to loom before his mental vision. He recalled that many of the young chaps in his set from New York had hit the trail for the Cobalt region—Tom Mallow, Jimmie Harrow, Christy Falkenberg. He recalled the sensational amount of space accorded another and even lesser murder in the high-rolling, rich set of New York. Why, the world was on the lookout for Bobbie van Fleet—the whole, wide world. He was probably the most widely pictured individual in the country. And here he was, a tramp, pulled out of a box car in northern Ontario; hidden away on a freight train, escaping to another country than his own. Yes, they would know instantly who he was; some one would know.

"Better spill your names, boys," cheerfully encouraged Ray, his grip never relaxing, however. "They haven't any use for hobos up here in this country, you know. You seem to be all-right fellows, good line of talk, not bad looking. Better spill your names to me."

Bobbie glanced swiftly into the seamed, kindly face, then looked away. The man had no idea of what a tremendous thing he was asking. Singularly enough, even after the scare that O'Neill had handed him in the yards at North Bay, when he spoke his name, it had occurred to neither of them—the absolute necessity for an alias. There was something sneaking, cowardly about the thought, too, that would have repelled the big fellow. Even now it did not occur to him as a possible way out of the dilemma.

His wavering glance took in every detail of the country, and photographed it upon his brain. There was something about its barrenness that made his great chest expand, and filled his eyes with a strange light of regret. He would enjoy becoming a part of this place of big distances. The glistening water of Porcupine Lake threw the shadows of the three towns upon its borders back to him in eerie, waving reflections. Roundabout, on every side, lay the low-lying country, covered with its stumps of trees which had been felled to make place for the pretty bungalows that seemed to blend incongruously into the rugged view.

The air was filled with sounds, the monody of the diamond drill, rasping of axes, thudding of hammers, squeals of saws, all pertaining to mining, reaching out and forcing a fortune from Mother Nature's treasure chambers.

Tom Ray's voice recalled him, something kindly, amused in its tones, making him look up hopefully. "Come, now, I don't want to turn you over. You're up here on a grubstake from New York—ain't you? I heard tell of some Broad Street brokers staking a bunch of husky young fellows."

Bobbie van Fleet realized in a curiously detached sort of way that the super was suggesting things which they might be; was hunting an excuse of his own to turn them loose. O'Neill, from his face, evidently got the same idea, for his countenance lightened suddenly, then fell again.

"I tell you what, Mister Man," he said desperately. "I'm O'Neill, Langdon O'Neill. You probably know my old man. I'm no 'count, and I'm trying to make something out of myself, so I got my friend here to come along."

"And your friend's name is——" suggested the super.

The little fellow bit his lip vexatiously. He had expected to be laughed at when he told who he was, but evidently the man believed him. He somehow did not like to lie for Bobbie, and was in two moods as to whether he would care to have the big fellow use an alias. Van Fleet, in turn, was troubled by the same thought. He opened

his mouth to speak a couple of times, but something held his tongue.

"You've got to be here on something definite," continued Ray kindly. "Now, if you're trying to prospect up north of here a ways, that sounds reasonable to me, Mister—Mister——"

Bobbie opened his mouth, while his chin thrust forward pugnaciously. There was nothing to it—he might as well out with his name. Somehow, as he looked into the twinkling eyes of the man, he had a suspicion that the super knew already who he was. But at that particular moment there was a slight, furtive sound from inside the box car, a clanking of machinery, and then a slender, very dark, and dirty figure leaped lightly to the ground, to be nabbed instantly by the alert Ray. It was Charlie Itchy, the breed, whom they had completely forgotten during their long ride and his protracted slumber.

For a moment the super of the mine seemed in two minds as to whether to be angry or to laugh, but finally compromised on a grim smile that lacked anything of reassurance. Charlie seemed absolutely without perturbation. As a matter of fact, he cared very little what became of him, so long as he could make his trip into the real Northland when the winter fell.

"I don't suppose," drawled Ray sarcastically, "you've got any more tucked away in the boiler of the engine, have you?"

Their silence seemed to be making him indignant, for he shook his great shoulders decisively, and with a short word of command started to take them toward the town.

Bobbie suddenly seemed to find something laughable in the whole situation, or, perhaps, it was the calm indifference with which the breed took in the situation. "I might as well confess, mister," he said decisively, "that my name is Van Fleet—Robert van Fleet. You see why I wasn't particularly keen on handing out my name."

He grinned wryly, unconsciously half extending his forearm as though to signify that, having told his secret, he realized fully nothing remained for him but to submit to arrest. As a matter of fact, he rather rejoiced in the fact that he had no secret from this new world into which he had so unceremoniously entered. A great weight seemed lifted off him, mentally and physically. And then he realized that a curiously satirical grin was twisting the super's lips.

Ray laughed derisively, and waved his hand largely. "Get along with you," he scoffed. "I catch three tramps in with a load of my machinery, and one claims to be the son of the richest and most powerful railroad builder in the Dominion, the other boasts that he is the man wanted in New York for stealing a million dollars. I suppose your friend here is the Sultan of Turkey in disguise, fleeing the vengeance of Europe and his late harem. Tell it to Sweeney, boys; tell it to Sweeney."

Bobbie's lower jaw dropped in amaze. Then he caught a kindly something in the super's eyes which made him hold his peace, and also clamp that jaw tightly together. The man knew that he was what he represented himself—that he was the Bobbie van Fleet wanted for the huge theft, and also the murder of the mighty bank president, Corwin, and still he withheld his detaining hand.

"That," he remarked emphatically aloud, "is what I call white."

But Tom Ray sneered contemptuously, and waved his hand toward the distant plains that stretched away, far as the eye could reach. "On your way," he commanded sharply. "I've got to get this car unloaded. This is a working camp, understand, and it has no time for loafers."

He whirled sharply on his heel, and was leaving them abruptly when little O'Neill put a detaining hand upon his sleeve. "See here, friend," he suggested, "it doesn't seem to make much difference to you who we are. What's the matter with your taking us on to work until we can scrape enough coin together to start out for ourselves? I was handing it to you straight enough about being up here taking a chance to clean up good and plenty. We're strong and willing, and want to learn."

The super's face wrinkled into a frown of doubtful perplexity as he regarded the three men. Truly, they did not look the type of laborer, and three dollars' worth of work was what Ray wanted and was accustomed to get for every two dollars' wages expended. Dirty and bedraggled though they were, there was something intellectually clean-cut looking about the pair of white men, and he knew the type represented by Charlie Itchy too well to expect much from him after the first snow flurry.

"We've got plenty of strength," smilingly urged Bobbie, unconsciously throwing out his magnificent chest. "My little friend here and I have done a bit in the amateur-athletic line, and Charlie is a hardened——"

The super wagged his head impatiently, then jumped decisively into the box car holding the machinery. His voice came out to them, sharp and commanding, and entirely different from the half-jocose manner he had taken before. "Lend a hand in here, you fellows; hustle it now."

O'Neill, accustomed to such quick decisions in the railroad business, slapped the wondering Van Fleet on the shoulder, and they clambered through the wide door, where Ray was already selecting the bits to be moved first. Charlie Itchy stood quietly on the siding, waiting for anything that might happen, indifferent as to what it might be, a born fatalist of the wild.

CHAPTER VI.

FRAUGHT WITH MENACE.

IT was well along in the evening before the machinery was moved over to the mine shaft, and the three men had clearly shown their worth. Little Langdon O'Neill and the breed had both outdistanced Bobbie in actual labor expended, although he tried his utmost. But the super saw that he had struck a likely lot of workers, most difficult to do in this country, when the laborer stands as much show of being a millionaire on the morrow as the capitalist. He paid them three dollars apiece, with orders to return the next day, and also certain instructions regarding a suitable lodging house and keeping under cover a bit.

Charlie Itchy seemed to have attached himself for good to the pair, and they were rather glad than otherwise to accept him. In fact, they had taken on a new-found respect for this breed, who easily outlifted them both together, whose long, sinewy muscles seemed capable of any burden, any fatigue. Reticent and at the same time good-natured to a degree, Charlie was a different man from the reprobate they had struck in the car of machinery.

Without difficulty they found their way to the town, though it was only through the guiding hand of Charlie that they were kept in the right direction. One time, O'Neill was so certain of himself that he would have wandered on to the north pole before ever he reached South Porcupine city had it not been for the breed. They noticed that the town was nothing like what they had ever heard, or read, of mining camps. Every one seemed intensely matter-of-fact and serious in his outlook upon life. Here, there was none of the mad hunt for the thrill of whisky

and the gaming tables, none of the boisterous, dance-hall merriment that was so common in the pioneer days of the Western country.

Although the town had been burned to the ground by forest fires but a short two or three months before, already the tent city that sprang up the next day was giving place to substantial dwellings of brick and logs and planed timber. A couple of moving-picture theaters, a music hall where soft drinks only were sold, and the hotels furnished the only chances for amusement. They found the place to which they had been directed, a small stationer's shop kept by the widow of a Dutch mining engineer, known to the camp as Mary. She found them room above her shop, making them feel in a few minutes that they had struck a real home—and then the nine dollars in their pockets began to burn through the cloth and into the skin.

"That King George Hotel looked a bit good to me," suggested Bobbie reflectively—and, regardless of the fact that they were now laboring men, to the King George they went, and ate plenteously of the fare provided for them. Without a murmur the check was paid, and the three found themselves just a bit poorer than when they were dragged from the car by Tom Ray. But it had been a good meal—quite as good and high-priced as New York, Bobbie admitted—so there was no fault found. Charlie Itchy seemed to take on a new-found respect for his friends after the meal, and rolled countless cigarettes in dreamy content.

Listening to the chatter about them of the miners, roughly clad and free-handed; watching the Englishmen—who are to be found in every new spot on the globe—in their inevitable riding breeches and puttees; drinking in the music of the clinking dice boxes, the three gave themselves up to utter enjoyment of the life about them. It had cost eleven dollars, and meant they would work on empty stomachs to-morrow, but—what would you?

O'Neill, as he undressed that evening, preparatory to piling into the comfortable bed, came to his senses. He surveyed the happy pair long and thoughtfully, then berated himself and them softly and sincerely. "Gentlemen," he announced, "I am stiff and sore and aching in every muscle and bone of my body. To-morrow is another day again, and to-morrow night I feel it in the air that we will make bally fools of ourselves once more. Now, what I want to know is where we get off eating dinners that consume more than we earn during the day?"

"Peace, little one," calmly invited Bobbie. "Did you ever eat a venison chop broiled to equal the ones we had this evening?"

"I have not," agreed O'Neill, "but I——"

"Well, then——" answered Bobbie, in a tone of finality, but the red-haired wiper would not thus easily be downed.

"I say we will be just as broke at the end of ten years as we are to-night if we keep this up. I say that——"

"But the muscles and bones will not ache any more," mildly interjected the New Yorker. "Then we shall be happy. Here is a splendid café; the food and service is excellent; we are laboring men, and yet we dine like millionaires. Charlie, I leave it to you, could mortal man ask for more?"

Charlie Itchy fairly kissed his hands to the four walls of the room in his agreement, and also appreciation of the meal which had been served them. O'Neill finally gave up in disgust, grunted, and rolled over on his side to try and find slumber. But it would not come to him. Something was touched under his thatch of carrot hair, something which he was trying hard to figure out, but which would not come. He, too, liked the good things of this

world, reveled in them mightily, and would not do without them so long as he had the price, but he did realize that it was not the way to get ahead by indulging them. In the morning he was red-eyed, while his companions seemed in perfect humor. Camp gossip was lively, as they speedily found. Evidently Mary had found out as much of the trio as they themselves knew, for she joked them in her broken English about the meal they had enjoyed the evening before—and served them coffee and toast.

Also there was a curious twinkle in the eyes of Tom Ray when they reported for work. At the noon hour he called them off to one side, and gave them a long lecture on the folly of their ways. Bobbie wondered at the smallness of the place that could take cognizance of such trifles, but, although it began to worry him, kept faithfully at his work in the shaft. It was interesting, this work really so closely allied to the only work he had ever known anything about. Accustomed to the handling of gold and its squandering, he was now to realize the difficulty with which that gold was torn from the rock. Now and then he would drop everything else to pounce upon some particularly dark streaked bit of porphyry, and revel in the glistening sands of free gold he could see hidden away in it.

O'Neill was working just as zealously, but with a more practical object in view. What he wanted was to find out all he possibly could, in order to start prospecting for himself. But Charlie Itchy! Itchy worked for no other reason than that he liked the companionship of the two youngsters, with their ebullient spirits in so great contrast to the brooding, simple nature that seems to be engrafted upon the Canadian voyageur.

And so it continued for three days—three days of aching muscles and wearied bone and sinew. At the end of the third day's labor there was a peculiar sighing wind rustling, a wind that made Charlie Itchy toss his head back and sniff longingly, a soft light in his great dark eyes. Without having the remotest idea of what the trouble was, the two white men were visibly alarmed. The breed was looking about him moodily, at the darkling distances, at the tiny estuaries of the lake, waving alluring arms in gentle, ceaseless motions. Immediately below them the town seemed a very fragile thing in all this primeval solitude of the bush, which might have been the birthplace of the sighing wind.

"Feels like snow," remarked Bobbie.

"Smells like snow," echoed O'Neill, his eyes fastened searchingly upon Charlie Itchy.

"Too beeg crowd all tam," muttered Charlie. "Mebbe bymeby dose crowd keep shoving on me an' all tam keep pushing me back, mebbe some tam Charlie Itchy pretty soon be crowded off thees roof on the world."

O'Neill glanced meaningly at Bobbie, then drew him to one side. The breed paid no attention to them, swaying lightly on the toes of his boots, staring wistfully into the distances to the north and beyond.

"Charlie's going to quit us, Bobbie," began the little railroad man. "He's got the fever for fair—it's this smell of snow in the air. And if Charlie quits us, then——" He made a sweeping gesture with his hands, as though to intimate that, with the quitting of Charlie Itchy, all their hopes would go.

"It stands to reason," he continued breathlessly, "that Charlie knows more about this gold than any one in camp. Think of it, Bobbie! Itchy was born up here in this country; and his father and his father's father, and then back of that even. They've always kicked against this crowding, always been in the wild places, the pioneers with eyes that miss nothing. Don't you suppose

they knew about this gold, and better claims than this will ever be, long before it became anything but a blank space on the map? I know these voyageurs, Bobbie. They hate progress; hate anything that will bring the railroad into the country. They don't care a hang for the gold, even when they do know about it. Haven't you ever seen the contemptuous expression on Itchy's face when he works in this mine?"

Now, it took ideas a long, long time to get through the cranium of Bobbie van Fleet. But he had noticed exactly the thing which O'Neill now called his attention to, and he had given it much thought. It seemed to him as something of a certainty that Charlie Itchy knew where they could find heaps of the yellow metal. He looked at the breed with new respect.

O'Neill had touched Charlie on the shoulder, and was looking him squarely in the eyes. "Charlie," he said reproachfully, "you're thinking of throwing the hooks into us—pulling up stakes and sneaking out. I know," he continued quickly, interrupting the breed's ready protest. "You don't like the crowd; you're smelling the snow, and it's calling you North. You're going to shake us."

Charlie slapped his broad chest vehemently. "Me," he cried, tapping the fingers of his slender, sinewy hand against his breast, "I doan' care notheeng for dose crowd, nor dose snow. Doan' you know, m'sieu, who Charlie Itchy he stay all tam in dose countree where all tam eet is snow, notheengs but snow, no heart, no soul, no song; doan' you know why all tam Charlie Itchy he go North when dose places lak thees hold heem. But dose crowd push heem North all tam for get her breath. When dose waters sing chansons for Charlie Itchy, when dose leaves whisper to Charlie Itchy, he mus' go North een snow an' col' an' ice because dose crowd what push Canayan voyageur up—up—up, all tam, ba gar."

His fists were clenched tightly, his lips compressed with the vehemence of his passion at the injustice of it all. O'Neill was watching him keenly, calculatingly, with a touch of appreciation on his face. "You ought to know this country well by this time, Charlie?" he ventured craftily.

"Countree, m'sieu!" The breed spat contemptuously. "Charlie Itchy drive her canoe through thees lake before crowd come an' push heem North, before dose mans come, all tam talking 'bout gold. Gold," he jeered. "They push all tam lak gold was in the ground for pick out lak—lak dirt."

O'Neill laughed with a tinge of gentle raillery in his tones. Then he kicked thoughtfully at the ground meaningly, knowing that it was an act calculated to rouse Charlie Itchy to great ire. For he stood on the famous Sidewalk of Gold, a vein stripped for hundreds of feet, that measured over six feet in width at any place along it, which ran down no man knew how far, and was filled with the precious yellow metal.

"Guess Canada can't show any more gold than is in this vein," he remarked, as though to himself, noting with satisfaction the curl to the breed's lip.

"Dose gold," he answered quietly, "come mebbe from rocks an' mebbe some tam from sand lak pebbles. Charlie Itchy know many places where dose gold come up for take. You think mebbe gold buy happiness, song, but you don't know dose bleeding heart for Charlie Itchy what dose gold mak all tam. Nobody care for Charlie Itchy when gold comes by. It's push--push—push——"

The distinct sound of voices came to his ears, and made him cease talking instantly. The less quick-eared white men, noticing his attention, soon made out the sounds also. Darkness was falling heavily, with a sprinkling of steel-

cut stars glowing in the heavens, now and then being obscured to milky density. The voices came closer, closer, one of them the thrilling tones of a woman. Somehow or other, those voices seemed fraught with menace to the three men, or, perhaps, it was the leaden mood into which the breed had thrown them. Abruptly, as though risen from the very ground at their feet, four figures came before them, three men and a woman. O'Neill pressed Bobbie's arm tightly, and the three retreated out of sight. Looking back over their shoulders, however, they could see quite plainly that it was Tom Ray pointing out the Sidewalk of Gold to the visitors.

"I think I know those people, Lang," said Bobbie van Fleet, drawing a deep breath.

The little, red-headed ex-wiper did not reply for a long time. Then he drew a deep, deep breath. "It's a hunch—a kick—a boost," he muttered. "We've got to leave, Charlie."

The breed did not answer for a moment, did not answer till, looking up, they noticed that one of the figures at the ascent was missing, and they could catch the *flump—flump* of moccasins close at hand. Before they could even make a move to leave, Tom Ray scrambled out of the bush into their midst, his face glowing with excitement.

"See here, you all," he cried, "you've got to beat it; take it on the run. Porcupine will be so hot for you by morning that your feet will be blistered."

"I thought that was Middleton, the old blowhard," Van Fleet answered quietly, more as though thinking to himself. "So he recognized me, and bubbled over right off the bat, eh?"

Ray did not answer. He came a shade closer to the big fellow, and studied his face long and earnestly. What he saw there seemed to satisfy him, for a smile lightened the tense lines in his face.

"I've known who you were all along, Van Fleet," he finally spoke. "When you told me your name I knew there wasn't a sneaking bone in your body. I don't know whether I'd have turned you over anyhow or not; I'm not keen on earning blood money. I don't believe you stole that money down there in New York, and I haven't believed it at——"

"Doesn't Colonel Middleton?" Van Fleet queried, a touch of satirical bitterness in his tone.

"Even though he is heavily interested in the mine, and pays my salary," fervently replied the super, "I say I don't care what the colonel says! I'd rather stick a pin in what his daughter said when he began shooting off his hot air. I'm for giving you a chance. There's a central-office man on your trail—probably in town now—and you haven't got a chance unless you beat it North. You've got a good guide in Itchy—there's no mistaking the breed of——"

"But the coin?" Bobbie said, laughing. As a matter of fact, he was rather glad that the whole thing was over and done with. Without money he hadn't a chance on earth of going North.

Ray glared at him. "I'm putting up for the three of you. Don't string any of that stuff about accepting charity," he expostulated roughly. "I'm grubstaking the three of you, same as everybody in this camp is being grubstaked. I think it's a paying proposition, understand. Is it a go?"

He reached out his hand, and Bobbie shook it fervently, while little O'Neill still held his eyes on Charlie Itchy's face. The breed was very nervous, irritated. His face was a bit puzzled, also, as if he were wrestling with something inside himself which was putting up a tough fight.

Something soft and wet flattened against his cheek, causing him to look

swiftly toward the sky. As though by magic every star had been blotted from the face of the night, while a grayish haze spread low over the land. Softly, silently, gently the wet flakes smote him on the cheek as he stood there; then he whirled sharply upon the three white men, nodding his head abruptly in assent.

"Hang round the shaft house," warned Ray quickly. "I'll have a miner's stove, sleeping bags, grub, and stuff for you by two to-night."

They watched his tall, robust figure disappear, then rise again in the vicinity where the party was impatiently awaiting his return. Evidently the snow was frightening them away, for a short time after the super joined them they disappeared.

Bobbie and Langdon quickly made for the shaft house, Charlie Itchy slowly following. Intuitively the pair seemed to know that he was making a great sacrifice in even thinking of guiding them into the fastnesses of his beloved country, "where he could get breath." But they knew they must trust him implicitly, allow him to fight out the battle with himself. It was several hours later that Charlie Itchy came in out of the swirling snow, and joined them. The moodiness had left his face, the languorous indecision had departed from his figure.

Briskly he walked over to the eager pair, both hands outstretched. "Comarades," he cried, as he clasped the hands of Van Fleet and O'Neill, then, over and over again, as though finding out what a wonderful thing it was to be able to say: "Comarades, comarades!"

And it was thus that Tom Ray found the three, in the center of the floor, silent, glad with the gladness that comes but to those who know only unselfish friendship. And being of the wilderness places of the earth, where friendship is a precious thing to guard and keep above all other things, the super understood, and allowed them to waste much precious time that might have been well utilized in distributing the burdens.

For the stocky, black-mustached gentleman with the square-toed boots, who had dropped in at the King George Hotel, and who had spent his time asking an innumerable lot of questions regarding a gentleman who could be none other than Bobbie van Fleet, was—although obviously a detective—no laggard, and Tom Ray knew it well.

CHAPTER VII.

ECHOES OF THE NORTH.

TO those who knew Harrison and his methods—or lack of them, as you will—there is no need to explain the curious impulse that took him to Buffalo on the trail. Harrison would have been the first to deny that he was moved by anything other than by the most rigid logic. In an aimless sort of way he figured that it would be absolutely impossible for a man to escape from New York in any other position than under, or surreptitiously upon, a train.

He knew there was not a chance of getting away on the boats; knew there was no chance for him to be any place but in New York unless he had stolen a ride on the train, either "on the rods," blind baggage, or riding the fender. From there, in the same desultory fashion, he figured the only place where a fugitive from justice would go would be up in Canada, where he might make it troublesome to get him back. Therefore, Harrison started for Buffalo. He firmly believed that he had carefully figured it out, whereas, as a matter of fact, he was working a hunch.

In Buffalo he had pulled the wires so that he would have no difficulty in securing extradition papers when he laid hands upon his man, then trekked up to Toronto. It was only a matter of a

day's loafing about the King Edward Hotel to hear all the gossip of that part of Canada. And in the little balcony tea room of the hotel, while aimlessly leaning over the balustrade, watching the flurry of life below, he had caught certain words of a conversation which struck his ears, hammered at his attention. He had not looked around at the young chap in civilian clothes whose words were being followed with such eager interest and amusement by the crowd of red-coated officers, but not a word had gone past him. They were discussing the latest escapade of the reprobate son of O'Neill, the great railroad king of the Dominion. It appeared that he had taken it into his head to cut loose, and make a fortune up in the new gold fields or "bust," to appropriate the descriptive term of the speaker.

But what interested Harrison, what he eagerly gleaned from the chaff of gossip and recollections, was that this young O'Neill had evidently beaten it to Porcupine in a box car full of machinery, and the last seen of him he had been piling in the car with a giant tramp. That was all the detective could get out of the conversation, but he felt certain that the giant tramp could be none other than Bobbie van Fleet.

That night he took the Cobalt Express for North Bay, where he spent the long wait for the Temiscaming train into Golden City interrogating every one in the place about O'Neill. What he found out only served to increase his confidence. One thing that failed to annoy him, although he could see that his presence was considered intolerable, was that he had for fellow passengers Colonel Middleton and his daughter.

He learned enough in the trip to convince himself that he could count on the colonel to assist him in hunting Bobbie, and that he could count on Miss Middleton to put every possible obstacle in his way. And in Porcupine, when he scoured about, rendering assurance doubly sure with every person he questioned, he was quite positive of this. Bobbie van Fleet—by the time he had wired Toronto for requisition papers—had slipped through his fingers.

When he came to reach out and grasp his quarry, the quarry was not there. He had been alarmed, frightened away. Now, Harrison knew that Bobbie van Fleet had no money, and he had also discovered that O'Neill was hopelessly "broke" in finances, also when he came to make his preparations to follow he discovered that one does not make long trips in this North country without adequate supplies. He strongly suspected Miss Mildred Middleton, more especially when, in passing him, he caught a defiant twinkle in her eye.

She walked past him in the lobby of the hotel, then came quickly back, as if having changed her mind. "Mr. Harrison," she began steadily, "do you think that Mr. van Fleet is guilty of that theft? If you do I wish to assure you, as one who knows him perfectly well, that he is totally incapable of theft!"

Harrison shrugged his shoulders. "I never think, miss," he answered quietly and truthfully. "The word goes out to bring him in, and I bring him in—that's all."

She had vexatiously bitten her pretty lip at his answer, then the same quiet gleam of humor lighted her eyes. "I'm afraid you'll find him a rather hard one to handle, Mr. Harrison," she murmured demurely.

Without the slightest attempt at boasting, in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, Harrison had looked back at her. "He'll come!" he said shortly, then turned away.

Truly had it been said that he was a bloodhound. Like the bloodhound, he had also that animal's unerring scent. His conquests in the line of the

trail had been astounding. Many a criminal had taken advantage of the perfect safety which only New York affords, coming forth after weeks of captivity, to walk squarely into the arms of Harrison. With perfect confidence he started out with his Indian guide and provisions to bring in the giant athlete.

A man of few words, he pleased his Indian immensely by betraying no desire for conversation, apparently as conversant with the trail as the red man himself. On a dead line he set out, and to that dead line he held true, never deviating the slightest degree. Once a caribou fell to his rifle, and, cutting out the choicest steaks, they were calmly added to the already heavy load of the Indian. The guide would have protested, but something was written large upon the indomitable face of the detective which deterred him.

The last of the heavy snowfall had practically obliterated any tracks which the trio might have made. But not a broken twig, not a clearance of chips and shrubbery in a vicinity but fell under the examination of Indian and the central-office man. Harrison might have been patrolling a beat on some populous corner of Gotham for all the difference it made in his businesslike manner.

And then on the second day's tramp he was to see that he had read the signs absolutely correctly, for the snow was showing the scuffing sign of snowshoes, faint to any but such eyes as those of the man behind. He did not redouble his pace after this. He had been quite as certain of himself before this tangible proof of his infallibility. He merely traveled on, using up twenty miles a day systematically, pitching tent at night and then up in the morning to continue.

It might be a matter of a week, a month, a year, a number of years that he kept on that trail, but some day, some time, somehow the man wanted was bound to come within his clutches, and then he "would come back." And so he worried not his mind the slightest bit regarding details, bothered nothing at the irritating distance which held between them. Neither did the fact that he shortly lost the trail for good trouble him. He merely kept on.

It was all of two and a half days' traveling before it was again proved to him that he was on the right track. That was a peculiar thing about Jim Harrison—he never trusted his instinct, even when he followed it. Endowed with that wonderful sense of almost scent, he had the regular central-office man's mind, and did not believe in it, notwithstanding it had led him in the right direction so many times that he always followed it when it was especially strong. But his imagination could not extend to the limit of believing in it. He only believed his eyes, and, in a gambling game, did not entirely trust them.

But now that he had *seen,* he pressed on with greater vigor than before. He and the Indian had stood on a small hillock, and looked far off to the right, where they could see the three specks, which they felt sure were men. The Indian had waited behind till Harrison was a long way ahead of him, then he, too, followed. But that Indian was not half so cocky as Harrison over what he saw.

"It's the big fellow," Harrison had whispered exultantly to the guide. "It's the big fellow in the middle that I'm after."

At that precise instant, the big fellow in question had stumbled slightly, and the strong arm of the slender leader was outstretched, catching him in time to save him a nasty fall. There was something solicitous about the way Charlie Itchy had done the thing that impressed itself upon the savage mind. But, more than that, Harrison's guide

had recognized the face of the leader to be that of the breed. He knew Charlie Itchy, and wanted no medicine with him. Charlie Itchy was well known in those regions, and there was no one who cared to mix it up with the dark-skinned hermit of the North, who traveled once a year down to civilization, and spent the accumulations of his trapping in bad whisky.

Harrison was not quite ready to come to grips with the party. His whole thought up to seeing them had been to get to this position. There was no room in his brain for primary and secondary thoughts. A wonderful detective as far as he went, he did not go quite far enough for that. But that night he lay down to sleep in perfect contentment. He had sighted his quarry, and he never yet had been known to turn loose of a man once he got within reaching distance. He snored that night for the first time, snored lustily and heartily. And when a man snores it is because there is a vacancy in his mind which is undisturbed by dreams or thoughts. He slept well.

"Yes, he slept uncomfortably well," thought his guide, as he replenished the fire, and drew closer and closer to it against the chill night air. Winter was coming on, and there was a hint of snow about the steely glitter of the stars as they were slowly lighted for the evening's illumination. It grew light as day almost, as silently, motionlessly the Indian sat at that fire and looked at the detective.

Uncannily weird was the night. Just before a snowstorm, comes the werewolf and the bannock bee, and great is the tribulation that comes to him who hears the werewolf call. The Indian shivered, and drew closer to the fire, feeding it so that the flames were shooting sky-high, and the crackling, popping heat was so intense his face was almost blistered. But still he shivered as timorously he glanced out into the clear night, to that speck of light which glowed north of him. Charlie Itchy was there, and, as every one knew, Charlie Itchy had tamed the werewolf, and trained it to trap for him—which was the reason for the great bundle of pelts he never failed to bring out of the North with him every spring.

He wondered whether Charlie Itchy could not possibly be working on terms of partnership with the bannock bee. He had never seen a bannock bee himself, but his father had died from looking into the face of one. But he *had* seen the werewolf—had seen it prowling about a little, before his squaw, with the nursing papoose at her breast, had gone away—he had heard the crackling sound just as his squaw breathed her last, and then had looked out of his tent, and the werewolf was disappearing, with what looked like something in its mouth. It must have been the werewolf, because he had never managed to get another squaw. Yes, he had looked upon the werewolf. As he recalled that incident he looked at the heavy face of Harrison, holding his breath as though to listen for that cracking, snapping sound, and find the detective dead.

"Wo—o—ee—e—oiuho——"

The wailing, sobbing cry trailed off, and farther off, then ended in a choked, gurgling rasp. It seemed to come from the north, and yet the echoes were distinctly and decidedly from the south. The Indian drew his knees up under his chin, and rocked from side to side in a silent ecstasy of terror. Again and again was the cry repeated, but still he did not move. And at last the air was freed from the devilish echoes, and he opened his eyes and looked at the sleeping man once more. Disturbed in his slumber, although he knew it not, Harrison had flung out one arm and leg in a grotesque attitude, as though cramped in pain. The Indian stared at him silently, then stealthily edged to the bun-

dle of provisions directly behind the detective.

With unerring accuracy and care, he selected everything which he fancied would be best for his palate, then finished up by borrowing both revolvers and the rifle, leaving behind him a small-calibered Winchester. Laden down with this impedimenta, the guide silently jogged out of sight beyond the rise, and then took to his heels as if the devil was after him. He feared the white man, and he knew he might be killed for stealing these things, but obviously the werewolf had been set upon the man who pursued the big man whom Charlie Itchy protected.

It was enough. The detective of the rough voice and grim face would never live to shoot any one. Even now he might be dangling from the jaws of the werewolf, as the squaw had dangled. True, he had remained lying at the fire, but so had the squaw. The werewolf took nothing but the heart, and without the heart—— Poof!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE THE TRAIL LED.

AS the Indian fled through the luminous night, three men stared at the speck, and two of them rolled over and over in hilarious laughter, while the breed had an expression of frightened amusement in his dark eyes. Every night they had fortified themselves against attack by these howls, knowing that any Indian or most of the trappers would think many times before attacking the home of such sounds. But this was better than they had expected. They lay down then to a quiet sleep, from which they were awakened by Charlie, who already had a couple of thick steaks of caribou meat ready for them and some fluffy flapjacks and a tin of coffee.

Behind them a tiny speck was moving, and they looked curiously amused to see that the speck moved round and round in a circle, instead of coming directly on. Then Charlie gave the word, and again they set off at the swinging dogtrot to which they had finally become accustomed. The air bit at the lungs of the two white men, and they opened their throats, laving their entire insides with it. It seemed to answer every purpose, to fill them with an intoxicating vitality, a joy of health and living that they had never known before, even in their old collegiate days of training camp. That had been for a season, but this was for a purpose that was more real. They were alive, and radiantly glowing with tingling health because they could not help it. They had protested against the pace at first, but now they reveled in it.

Now and then, as they looked behind them, they could see that the speck was growing more distinct every instant. Charlie Itchy shook his head wonderingly at this, then struck a sharper pace. But still the speck hung on, with dogged tenacity. At noon, Charlie went over their stores carefully, then made a detour to the right of that in which they had been going. He offered no explanation, but they knew the speck behind had something to do with the change of plan. They had little rest now, nor did they want any. Charlie shot a moose, and quickly cut it up, dividing the meat between them, and smearing the entrails over what they were forced to leave behind so it would look like decayed meat to the casual passer-by. They needed the meat, but they saw that Charlie did not wish to leave any for the pursuer—as they now had no doubt the speck would turn out to be.

On—on—on they went, until gradually they lost the man behind to view, and then Charlie struck back into the old trail, meeting it within three miles. It was north—north—north they went now, and it was on—on—on clear into

the night, until every muscle in their tired bodies protested against the strain put upon them. But they made no remonstrance, for they had seen through Charlie's plan to throw the man behind offl the track. They did not wish the man behind to come up with them, either, more because of sympathy for the man behind than for any other reason. The spirit of the untamed Northland was in them, and they knew that no one man could take another in this country without the shedding of blood.

Morning broke and found them plodding forward. The new crisp air, as though the windows of the world had suddenly been opened on the sleeping room of this country, struck them smartly across the face, and roused their instinctive energies to fresh efforts. They were moving mechanically now, moving in a direct line. Looking back, they realized that Charlie had been making some kinky short cuts and detours, but they did not question.

They believed in him as they would in an infallible man. And he really did seem infallible. They could not doubt but that he knew and loved every foot they passed over. His certainty of muscular effort was becoming a natural thing to them, but occasionally he would lift his voice in an animal mating call before there was the slightest thing to indicate that any animal was about that made them gasp their admiration. He read the ground and he read the stars as though they were open books. He sang the livelong day, but spoke little. All sufficient to him seemed this wide, wild nature into which he was traveling. And they would join in with him, filling the air with such songs as it had probably never heard before.

Now the speck had long since been lost. But the breed seemed still to give it thought. Now and then he would make another of his detours, and travel miles out of the straight path. Day after day they traveled, Charlie forcing the march steadily, indefatigably. They detoured streams and lakes, they forded some, then felt the same sigh with which Charlie viewed the furry animals they were compelled to leave behind. And although it mattered little to either of them, in the consuming desire which possessed them to get farther north—farther away, they lost track of the days and even the weeks. It was on—on—on, with the days growing colder, too cold for snow. The same spirit doubtless that animated the north pole explorers, the inclination to see just how much farther things went, and just how much farther they could get accustomed to the changes in atmospheric conditions, led them on.

"Have you ever been up farther than this, Charlie?" questioned Bobbie one day, as they were cleaning up a mess of flaps and coffee.

Charlie smiled as he waved his hand largely in every direction.

"It is the only way for me to go," he answered.

"Well, how much farther do you plan to trek?"

"To-morrow," answered the breed shortly, rising and cleaning his tin plate with some dead grass which he plucked from a little knoll.

To-morrow! To-morrow seemed fraught with more possibilities than they had ever dreamed of before. To-morrow, all their lives, had meant going to bed and getting up for another day. Sometimes they had been thoughtful enough to take some medicine to insure safety from the "hang-over" of to-morrow, but that was the only forethought. And now their life, their hopes, everything seemed to hang upon the to-morrow of a half-breed. It might have been a slender peg to depend upon, but neither of them had the slightest doubt but that to-morrow would be a very wonderful day indeed.

It came upon them suddenly, out of a clear sky, like a thunderbolt, in fact.

It was late morning, and the sun was heavily overcast with dragging, gray clouds that Charlie eyed ominously. The country had suddenly grown rough and rocky, all the picturesqueness of the sweet-grass hills and hummocks being absolutely gone. Far as the eye could reach were piled-up masses of pink rock of a porphyry formation. It stretched out like waves from a pink sea, and even their untutored eyes could see the scratches of the glacial period on the smooth flow of rock which had come even before that. Now and then they could distinctly mark places before and behind them where it was perfectly obvious that erosion had played a mighty part in cutting down this rocky land even after the hundreds and thousands of years in which it had been covered with the ice.

Then abruptly, without the slightest warning, on surmounting the last hummock, and looking out and north once more upon the sweet-grass country they had feared was left behind, they found themselves immediately looking down into the placid, unruffled waters of a medium-sized lake. Their reflections stared back at them upside down, and the astonished expression upon their faces, as mirrored by the waters, made them laugh nervously. O'Neill cautiously tiptoed over the piled-up masses of jagged rocks that littered the beach, and dabbled his hand in the waters, then came slowly back to them.

In the most matter-of-fact way imaginable, Charlie Itchy had paid no attention to their surprise, but started laying out the pack burdens. Under his sharp commands, they had soon set up the tent, gathering stones from all about to bank it up. Nor did they have any rest the remainder of that day, for Charlie worked feverishly, untiringly, and compelled them to do likewise. Before they realized what he was up to, he had taken an ax, and, taking Bobbie with him, was off to the east, chopping down trees, making O'Neill collect the chips and brush and bring it to the camp. All that day and all through the night they worked, cutting and hauling, and then Charlie showed them a hole in the rocky cliffs, that rose behind them like fluted pipes of a giant organ, into which they crawled, carrying their provision with them. It was a monstrously large cave, and signs of habitation were still visible. Bobbie stared at Charlie, and Charlie smiled; O'Neill stared at Charlie, and still Charlie smiled. Then the breed carefully built a nice fire, although it was extremely hot in the cave, and, lighting it, stretched lazily out to rest after filling his pipe.

O'Neill threw aside his coat and glowered at the fire, but the breed smoked on.

"Pliantee col' for leetle boy, bymeby, ba gar," he muttered, with a grin.

"And is this the gold lake?" demanded Bobbie sharply.

Charlie motioned to the cave entrance with his free hand, and smoked placidly at the pipe he held in the other.

"More gold as Porcupine," he explained. "Look, *mes enfants*, for yourselves."

CHAPTER IX.

PURPOSE INDOMITABLE.

WITHOUT a word, they crawled outside, and wandered about the lake shore. They recognized, now that it was pointed out to them, the peculiar formations all about that showed almost conclusively the presence of gold. The entire structure of the rocks was granitic, while there was a profuse intrusion of granite magna, with a constant showing of pegmatite, that had a progressively increasing acidity that, at its last stage, went to make up a rich quartz, through which even their comparatively untutored eyes could detect the constituent parts—the gases, water, the tin stone, pyrites, the gold.

Yes, the gold was there in rich profusion. No need for stripping these veins; they lay before them plainly, as if the hand of man had already bared them. The gold was there, where they could see, handle it, pick it up. Even on the surface large areas of free gold would crop, free gold that they could chip off with a knife, fondle in their fingers, and know—know that it was gold.

They reveled in it like children. From vein to vein they rushed, crying out in wild abandonment of joy at each new discovery. Now and then they would chip off a chunk of the yellow stuff, and laugh and cry to see that the bottom was equally yellow with the top. It was gold, yellow, glistening, soft, beautiful gold; gold that could buy empires, anything, everything; gold enough to set millions of men mad with the rush to be participants. O'Neill knocked off chunks of the metal, and crouched on the ground, running it through his hands, tossing it childishly from one palm to the other, laughing, crying at the wonder of it.

Why, it would assay at anything they chose to put it. It was all there, with just enough quartz to hold it together. Here the mother lode of the whole country must have settled, now and then shooting off a niggardly child in some other direction. But the grass, the glaciers, the workings of the interior earth, in some cataclysm had made a huge fissure here, and drawn the gold to it from every direction as a magnet draws a steel filing. One hundred thousand dollars a ton, two hundred thousand dollars a ton, more than that—anything they chose to think—that was the value of the find.

Bobbie's voice brought O'Neill to his senses, and he blushed to realize that he had been regarding his companion of the long trail with rage and jealousy in his heart. He rose to his feet, with an effort tossing aside the golden chunks, and the two men shook hands.

"There's more than enough for all, Lang?" said Van Fleet.

O'Neill did not answer, save by a warm grip, then whirled upon his heel, by an effort walking steadily toward the cave where they had left the half-breed. It seemed that he must dig, revel, caress this wonderful horde of nature—that he could not leave it from sight. He forced the temptation back, out of his heart and mind, and kept steadfastly on.

Charlie was standing at the cave entrance, a worried expression about the corners of his mouth and eyes. He glanced searchingly at the two men as they approached, and instinctively they both felt that he was looking for the madness which had seized them at sight of the treasure to which he had brought them. Then a slow, grateful smile lightened his brooding face, and he looked up at the sky. But the pretense of indifference did not deceive either of them, and they blushed for the thoughts that had been in their minds, realizing that Charlie had been right in his estimate of the things which the sight of gold, as he knew gold, would put in the souls of men.

Something soft and wet and large caressed their faces, and suddenly the air was filled with a white blanket of snow, the flakes so large there appeared to be no appreciable distance between them; silently, in dignity, it fell at first, then in flurries that grew into zigzagging columns. But they paid no heed to it, for their minds were filled with the discovery.

O'Neill tapped Bobbie on the shoulder. "It will fix up things in New York, old man," he said sympathetically, touching on that thought which was uppermost in Van Fleet's mind.

"Just give me the time, the time!" cried the big fellow.

Even Charlie Itchy stared at him in

astonishment, for it was the first time any of them had ever seen him show any great feeling. It dawned upon O'Neill that here was a man, a fugitive from justice, who was just beginning to realize his status in the hour when everything appeared bright. He studied the large, handsome face, from which the long trail had wiped all taint of dissipation and indolence. It was a new Bobbie van Fleet, it was a man of determination, grim and unalterable, that he looked upon.

"Just give me the time to dig it out," said the big fellow. "It will buy the bank—buy and sell it; it will give me a chance to prove that I was not the thief. I can do anything with this if I only have time—time."

O'Neill laughed lightly. "I guess we'll have plenty of time," he said, glancing at the sky. "Looks like a blizzard, Bobbie—what, Charlie?"

The breed did not answer. A whistling wind was coming down from the North, where winds are born, searching their bones even through the cardigans with their oiled surfaces. Blow after blow of the boisterous wind struck them, buffeting and blinding them till they fairly reeled before its force and viciousness.

The eyes of the white men were fastened upon the place where the gold lay, and already the place was covered with the white fluff. Roaring, slapping, forward dashed the wind, but the strained attitude of Charlie Itchy held them where they were. Taut as a fiddle string his lithe body was strained forward, his eyes snapping with eager attention. And over and above the bestial howls of the wind came a faint, insistent call—the greater call than storms of nature; the call of man, weak, for help, assistance.

The wind blasts grew in intensity, struggling with the three men about their cave entrance, hammering at their chests, forcing them viciously against the rocky ledge and mauling them. But still they stood, listening for that which they could no longer hear. The distress signal had died completely away. They knew what it was, and knew that no man could live out in the direction from which the call came. Charlie Itchy retreated to the cave, but still the two stood silent, watchful, thinking.

There could be no doubt but that it was the detective, the man who had trailed Van Fleet to Porcupine, the man whom they had thought to force back by alarming his guide, the man who by some wonderful freak of luck and strange, indomitable will had held on. It could be no one else. And under the snow, almost within hand's reach, was the gold—the gold that, given time, would clear everything.

The Nemesis was out in that blizzard, in distress, calling for help, for his life, when to give him his life meant to take away that which had suddenly become of supernormal value to Bobbie van Fleet. He realized that he was gritting his teeth till his jaws ached, that he was disgusted with himself. Suddenly he turned to throw himself out into the storm, when Charlie came from the cave, about his waist a long coil of manila rope.

Without a word, passing one end of the rope to the pair, he lowered his head, and fought his way out into the blizzard. As though some suction of the rocks held him back, he could make no headway for a moment. The snow had turned into stinging icy particles, particles that lacerated and tore at the exposed skin. Bobbie lifted the half-breed in his mighty arms, and forced him away from him.

The storm abated temporarily, and Charlie lunged forward swiftly, then flung himself face downward upon the blanketed ground. Miscalculating, hurled back, still he gained forward in those sudden lulls of the wind, now a foot, and sometimes a rod. And then

the rope ceased to twist, and they hauled and hauled till the limp figure of the breed came into view, completely played out. Bobbie unfastened the rope, despite O'Neill's remonstrance, and lashed it about his own waist.

His huge bulk gave greater surface to the storm, but something kept him fighting, even though he had not the instinctive knack of the fight which Charlie possessed. And the toll of rope was the only sign back to the pair that he was still fighting. Then the rope tugged exasperatingly till they moved forward, giving more toll to the man at the end of it. His bull voice came to their ears but faintly, and they put forward the last ounce of their strength, hauling the heavy burden in. And finally two limp figures were scraped through the snow, their bodies locked together in tight embrace, for Bobbie van Fleet had his mighty arms about the form of the man who had pursued them up to the bitter end—the man from the central office of New York City.

First aid was swiftly applied in the cave, and Van Fleet regained consciousness swiftly. Harrison, from his condition, had evidently been starving a bit. His face was swollen with that swelling that follows emaciation. His chest was flat, and the bones stood out like the skeleton ribs of a ship.

With snow they rubbed him, roughly, eagerly, trying by the sheer force of their efforts to bring a ruddy glow back to his cheeks. And Charlie Itchy carefully, slowly forced drop after drop of caribou soup between the clenched teeth, till finally the mighty chest heaved spasmodically, and a low groan came from the man's throat. They redoubled their exertions, noting with delight the growing signs of consciousness, till finally wild eyes opened and glowered meaninglessly about the cave. Then Bobbie van Fleet went over to a corner, and smoked thoughtfully on his pipe.

For two days and nights, long after the passing of the blizzard, they nursed the man back to sanity and health—carefully, tenderly, zealously. And on the morning of the third day, the light of cold, calculating purpose was in the eyes as they opened and glanced into the faces bent over him. The fire was blazing high, making the miner's stove they had brought with them white hot. Harrison looked about searchingly, keenly, then a glad light lit up his still glassy eyes as they rested gloweringly upon Bobbie.

With an effort he staggered to his feet, and squatted feebly beside that young gentleman, reaching out a bony, pitifully weak hand, and gripping it upon the mighty forearm of the young giant. "Come along, Van Fleet," he muttered thickly. "It won't get you nothing fighting."

Then he collapsed, and stretched out quietly, his mouth open to emit loud, sonorous snores, the signs of a mind at rest and a body wrapped in that sleep which comes from the peaceful thought that everything had gone well. The three regarded the recumbent figure silently, then Bobbie rose and crossed to the cave entrance.

Snore though he would, be a sick man instead of a healthy one, yet Harrison dominated, ruled. He had found his prisoner, had given his ultimatum. O'Neill and Charlie smoked silently, watching the huge figure in the cave entrance as he studied the trail that led southward—the trail which would take him away from everything just as he grasped for it.

When he returned to them, no one spoke; no sound disturbed the silence save the snores of the ill man. But, in his sleeping bag, one of them remained awake, staring at the figure of the detective, the Nemesis.

CHAPTER X.

CONCERNING CONFIDENCE.

MILDRED MIDDLETON was not the sort of silent partner who sits down and holds her lap open to receive the profits of the firm. Possibly she had determined early in life to prove that her father was not an idle liar and braggart. She must, of a surety, have got her nerve from some one in the family, and, though the colonel was a joke with his reminiscences and the life he led which coincided so badly with it, her energy and spirit and dash went far toward creating a bit of a doubt in his favor.

Back in New York she plunged into the gay, winter whirl with all the famished delight of a starved man. Not an evening but there were two or three functions on her slate, and she seemed to be enjoying the strain. She had been watched carefully, for many people had thought that she was very much inclined to like Bobbie van Fleet, the absconding secretary of the Atlas Trust Company. But after a while the impression grew that Bobbie had merely been another incident in her life; that he had counted no more than any of the other dozen young gentlemen whose names had been bracketed with her own. As far as that was concerned, everybody liked Bobbie van Fleet, and everybody had always been nice to him except Bobbie van Fleet himself.

No one realized that Bobbie was even living—to society he was as good as dead, for the memory of society is very short. Only the Sunday editors of the sensational press bemoaned his absence. He could always be counted on for good copy. No one knew that he was being trailed; no one had the remotest idea that any one took any further interest in him. Now and then there would appear a speculative line in some newspaper regarding a dashing, mysterious gringo general down in the Mexican country. Many said that he was Bobbie van Fleet. But finally the dashing leader was killed, and then he was no longer useful for speculation. No one mourned, no one grieved the slightest bit.

Gossip was busying itself with the prospects for an engagement between Miss Middleton and that hopeless old bachelor—related to Midas!—Spencer Tuttle; and then gossip veered to Toby Blarcom. It was a fact that the three were often seen together, and that the girl showed a decided preference for their society. No one coupled this fact with the additional one that they were the only ones who had supported Bobbie van Fleet after his disappearance. They had proved a stanch trio—each and every one of them going out of the way to snub President Corwin. In fact, Tuttle had withdrawn his account, and Blarcom had done likewise. When Corwin ventured to ask a reason for the withdrawals of such heavy sums, Tuttle—whom everybody knew to be a bit of a headstrong, light-headed chap—had frankly stated that it was because he didn't think he would have so much confidence in the place since Van Fleet had left. That created a stir and talk of libel, which died out, as everything else connected with the suit did.

Only one person grew more hard and impossible of approach. Peter van Fleet grieved—after his own fashion, true, but he grieved much more deeply than any one ever guessed save a woman. Mildred Middleton was working all her strings to get close to the old gentleman, but it appeared a perfectly hopeless task. He had a routine as strict and regular as the celebrated ability to keep time of a much-advertised watch.

But no change of expression ever nestled in the deep wrinkles about his eyes, nothing showed that he had the slightest feeling outside of his money

and the piling up of it into even greater hoards.

The equally old treasurer of Van Fleet & Co., bankers, however, knew that the old gentleman had changed a great deal since that night when the newsboys hawked the false report of the murder of Corwin by Bobbie through the streets. He knew, but even he dared say nothing. Bobbie had been a great favorite with Mr. Barclay.

Mr. Barclay having early started in to give his life up to the accumulation of a living, and now finding himself the possessor of a fortune with no knowledge of how to get rid of it, had the most unbounded admiration for Bobbie, who could make a thousand dollars look like car fare, with perhaps lunch money added in. He had silently protested against the Van Fleet dictum that Bobbie was to be cut off without a penny. He did not believe in curtailing such a wonderful young man. In fact, Mr. Barclay had two grandchildren, and he took a morbid sort of pleasure in seeing them—in his mind's eye—scattering the Barclay fortune to the four winds, just as Bobbie van Fleet had done the money of his chief.

Day by day he had seen the old gentleman's step grow less positive, had noticed that the bold stroke of the pen under his signature lacked the dash of a year before; that Peter was often abstracted, and far away from the discussion at hand—no matter how important. He saw no change in the face, but he felt that Mr. Peter van Fleet was breaking something, which he had never suspected him of having before, and that was a heart. He would not let his suspicions get out, for that would have been sacrilege, but he really firmly believed that Peter van Fleet was breaking a heart into smithereens—and that the heart was the heart of Peter.

Barclay wondered at only one other thing, for he was very old, and had to have something to worry about, and that was the reason for the daily appearance of Miss Mildred Middleton at the offices, with a little bouquet of flowers, which she always left behind after she had been told that Mr. Peter van Fleet had not come downtown as yet or that Mr. Peter van Fleet begged to be excused, as he was in the midst of a very difficult banking problem. She was a most persistent young lady, and she persistently left behind a small bunch of flowers—absent-minded to a degree. Barclay called Peter van Fleet's attention to one of these bunches of flowers once, and the old gentleman told him if he did not like them that he would see there were more wastebaskets left handy to throw them in.

As he sat alone, immersed in reams of figures which littered the heaps of papers upon his desk, Peter van Fleet seemed a figure himself—a decimal figure. His long, skinny hands would skip with lightning rapidity from one task to another, never pausing, never hesitating. Rubber bands were snapped on bundle after bundle of documents which were carefully ticketed in his neat, old-fashioned handwriting, and placed away in his rusty old safe in the corner. He was spreading out like an octopus in the banking world. Not that he was gathering in companies. He was merely purchasing stock in companies, and being elected to boards of directors, upon which he made his dummies, sitting for him, report with the utmost fidelity to detail. It was all silently, secretly done, and only Mr. Barclay wondered whether possibly it might not be that he worked thus feverishly to take his mind from Bobbie. Mr. Barclay had two grandsons, whom he watched carefully, as has been stated.

And then one day trouble, that had been brewing for a long time over the heads of certain banking institutions,

broke. They did not crumble or fall away—they broke. Peter van Fleet was appealed to, to bolster up general confidence, to stop runs, but the old man only shook his head, and tapped his desk with a pencil, as if to emphasize his refusal.

He seemed to care nothing for general confidence, to care nothing for anything. He only waited till they had left him alone, and then he crossed to the rusty, old-fashioned safe, and took out the rubber-tied bundles of documents, and patted them tenderly in his withered hands, and then placed them back in the safe. He placed them back quickly, for the office boy was announcing Miss Mildred Middleton to call. But he shook his head silently, and closed the door of the safe with a vicious clatter that woke the echoes. Then he reseated himself at his desk, and thoughtfully nodded his head.

In a moment he poked his head out of the door, and called to Barclay, requesting him to come inside and wait for a private conference he was expecting. Mr. Barclay, still aghast at his chief's refusal to help out the general-confidence situation which was a fetish with him, came slowly into the room, hoping that he might prevail upon Peter to think better of it.

But Peter van Fleet gave him no time to open his mouth. "Barclay," he snapped, his thin lips biting off every syllable as though they had been steel particles, and his mouth an especially keen cleaver, "I have just received a telephone message from Corwin, of the Atlas Trust. He is in trouble."

"In trouble, too?" queried Mr. Barclay, wiping his glasses in surprise. "I understood that it was only the——"

"He is in trouble alone, Barclay," said old Peter van Fleet. "No one is in trouble but Corwin, of the Atlas, and he is a goner."

Mr. Barclay, lost between wonder at the satisfaction in the old man's tones and wonder at the solid Atlas' being in danger, sat silent till Corwin was announced. He entered the little office with a bland smile upon his florid features, an air of satisfaction spreading over his whole face. He glanced meaningly at Mr. Barclay, and Mr. Barclay rose and started to excuse himself, when Peter van Fleet snapped: "Sit down, Barclay. I want you as a witness."

The smile on Corwin's face underwent a subtle change. In fact, if a smile can be frozen, and look as unlike a smile as ice does look unlike water, then that was the process through which Corwin's smile went.

"You want money, Corwin?" questioned Peter.

"Slight temporary embarrassment," said the great banker, who had made his name a household word in Wall Street, "due to this silly loss of confidence. I can show you that the Atlas is in perfect condition at the present time. Of course, I could borrow the money at a number of banks——"

"You could not!" snapped Peter van Fleet. "I have carefully seen to it that you could not borrow the money at any one of a number of banks, sir. You could not and you cannot."

"I don't understand," began the man, rising in his astonishment, his florid face growing a deep purple, the veins in his neck standing out dangerously.

Peter van Fleet did not appear to have any blood to cause him apoplexy. He sat there and licked his chops, a grin of satisfaction on his face. "Of course, you don't understand," he said cuttingly. "That is why you are in the situation you now find yourself, sir. You are caught with your thieveries. You have the banking inspectors pretty well reassured, but that will do you no good. The banks you could rely on are the ones that are being attacked, and I am going to see that they do not suffer

just as soon as I attend to your case, carefully and neatly and with dispatch.

"I have been watching you a long time, sir," he continued, his voice soft and silky and caressingly cruel. "I have been watching and laying my plans." He rose and opened the door of the rusty old safe in the corner, taking therefrom the bundles for which he appeared to bear such affection.

"Mr. Corwin," he said quietly, cautiously preserving each rubber band as he unloosened them from the documents, "these are the bonds and securities which, through my agents, I have pledged with you this winter under the express condition that they were not to be used in any circumstances. I have taken them up when they appeared on the market—nothing has escaped me in that line. You have pledged those securities, and I have your signed agreement that they were not to be used when they were pledged with you. You were up to your old tricks; you were up to your old tricks, sir, and I will not rest until a full and complete investigation has been made into the concern called the Atlas Trust Company. That is the condition upon which I shall come to the assistance of the general confidence. That is all, sir."

Corwin's mouth seemed to be very loosely wired, for he stared and stared at the cool, bloodless figure on the other side of the desk from him. Peter van Fleet was cold as ice, and a bit colder. His long neck was stretched out, bare and thin, like a turkey's; his emaciated face, with its hard, close-set eyes, the narrow forehead straggling somehow up into the thin, colorless hair, the jutting promontory of a nose—everything was impersonally merciless and cruel.

Then Corwin gave a little groan, and sank back in the chair from which he had risen. For a moment he fought hard against the attack of apoplexy which threatened him, then mastered himself with an effort, and leaned persuasively across the desk. Only the rotary, crushing movement of his fist upon the table top testified to the strain under which he was dwelling. "That is customary, Mr. van Fleet," he said, smiling. "Surely——"

"I have done it myself," coldly admitted Peter van Fleet, his eyes glittering like a snake's.

"Then what—what can I do?" cried the banker desperately, his voice coming in a great sob.

Peter van Fleet seemed about to laugh, and old Mr. Barclay was horrified at the bare thought. The old gentleman's face was distorted and twisted into the most ludicrous expression, his neck more than ever resembling a turkey's. Suddenly something choked out from that long throat, and he half rose from his chair, his eyes blood red.

"You—you—thief!" he shrilled. "What can you do? What can you do? You can give me back my son; my Bobbie—that's what you can do. And if you can't give him back to me you——"

He did not finish the sentence, his arm flattened out upon the table, his head thumping heavily down upon the polished top, and Mr. Barclay telephoned hurriedly for a doctor.

When the doctor arrived he was surprised to note that Peter van Fleet was a flower lover. For, on the desk, in a little glass of water, was a bouquet of violets, which Mr. Barclay might have known something about, had any one had the capability of supposing Mr. Barclay could know anything about anything outside of figures.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRES WITHIN.

AT a late hour that evening Bobbie van Fleet was brought down to New York City and confined to the Tombs. Old Mr. Barclay, treasurer of Van Fleet & Co., bankers, found Toby

Blarcom, and fairly dragged him to Peter van Fleet's house.

It appeared that Peter van Fleet was strong for his runaway son, and wanted to get him out of jail immediately. Everything had been fixed and primed, and Blarcom was to go bail.

Exactly half an hour after Blarcom arrived at the warden's office Bobbie was consigned to him. Bobbie was looking fit for a tussle with Goliath and seemed to have the best of feelings for the detective who had trailed him, and whose name was blazoned across the tops of the newspapers in big type, black enough to knock one's eyes out. Blarcom and Bobbie promptly adjourned to Peter van Fleet's offices, and found quite a considerable party waiting there.

Not having a head for business, and having managed to do nothing conspicuously enough to appear to have done everything, Blarcom left and wandered uptown, keen on knowing what would happen in that meeting of the directors of the Atlas Trust Company and the clearing house committee.

Late that night Blarcom wandered into the United Club and sat down with Spencer Tuttle, friend and classmate of his and Bobbie's. Evidently Blarcom had gathered a lot of information during the evening. "The banking situation," he announced gravely, "is saved in the nick of time. I was afraid it would mean another panic."

"Hang the banking situation," Tuttle answered mildly. "That meeting in old Van Fleet's office had nothing to do with anything but Bobbie van Fleet, Toby. As for the banking situation, all my money is consigned to the cast-iron Shoe Bank, where you pirates of the Street will have to cut the laces to get it away from me. Now, what was all that fuss about? Has Peter paid up the million?"

Toby Blarcom looked pained and vexed. He always liked to tell a story in his own way, and was aggravated at Tuttle's direct questioning. However, he finally consented to give the news. "Bobbie didn't steal a million," he announced solemnly. "Corwin stole it."

"Ah!" said Tuttle. "I knew it must be one or the other."

"In return for immunity," Blarcom continued, with the utmost disgust, "Corwin confessed that he stole the million, and was ready to replace it. He made it all up, but the clearing house committee jumped on him at the wrong time, so he didn't dare put the money back in the vaults himself, because he had already laid it off on Bobbie."

"That's good—good!" said Tuttle. "And?"

"Well, that's just about all. Corwin is going to take a long vacation for his broken health. This near-panic was started by old Peter van Fleet. You remember after Bobbie hit the trail, Corwin was laid up, and, as president of the board of directors, Van Fleet was in complete charge. Well, the old gentleman went through the books of that Atlas Company with a fine-tooth comb. He found out enough to put two and two together, and he also discovered just where the strength and weakness of the Atlas was. Then he started out to put the screws on Corwin."

"But the public will still think him a thief," Tuttle protested.

"People won't be apt to think anything of the sort," serenely continued Blarcom, his eyes twinkling, "when they learn that Bobbie van Fleet is slated to succeed his father as chairman or president of the board of directors of the Atlas Trust Company."

Tuttle stared at him in astonishment. "Oh, I say," he protested, "that's foolish. Just because Bobbie doesn't happen to be a thief is no reason why he should get a job like that, Toby; Bobbie's a good chap, but he's still a fool."

Toby Blarcom wagged his head in

the negative. "You don't understand. Bobbie is not a fool—he is probably a very wealthy man. I don't mean from Peter. I mean in his own right. And I don't think you'll find Bobbie hitting the pace any more—he's off that for good. He has come back at the golden moment. Here's the situation that came out: Peter van Fleet was hard as nails—wouldn't do a blessed thing for Corwin; wanted to put him behind bars, and all that sort of thing. Up steps Bobbie, strutting like a turkey cock. *He* would save the bank; he would put up all the coin it wanted; he would take charge, and fix up everything nicely and in order—providing Corwin was out of the way."

"But how?"

"That's what old Peter van Fleet asked. But Bobbie had him hipped. He would do it with real money. I guess from what this detective fellow says, and from what Bobbie says, that he has struck a fabulously rich gold mine up around the north pole somewhere."

"But nobody's advancing millions on a gold mine," said Tuttle.

"Ah, but they are," Blarcom answered softly. "O'Neill, the railroad man of Canada, stands behind Bobbie van Fleet in this deal, and what O'Neill says is just about as important as what Van Fleet says. You see, Bobbie is partners with young O'Neill in this mine. That's the why-for of the thing. Bobbie forced them to let him take the job of chairman of the board of directors, and, after he had forced that through, the old gentleman was so tickled and so sore at the same time that he simply came over to Bobbie, bag and baggage. Mighty lucky for Corwin, though. And you should have seen old Middleton slobbering at Bobbie the instant he heard of this rich strike! The old he-wolf was trying to find out something about the location, and——"

"Sh—h!" Tuttle warned him fearfully, for just at that moment Bobbie came strutting into the club, his father on one side and Colonel Middleton on the other. He seemed popular, and he was popular; not because he was a millionaire in his own right, but because he had played a man's part. Outwardly he seemed the old, careless young chap, but inwardly the fires of a new strength were at work, forging character. He was smiling happily, for he had just come from a wonderful interview with Mildred Middleton.

Correct for Once

WELL, Pat"—from an inner room—"what are you doing? Are you sweeping out the shop?"

Pat: "No, Oi'm swaping out the dust and l'aving the shop."

His Biggest Achievement

THE old squire, who had been devoted to sport, was giving a dinner to his friends to mark his farewell to the chase.

Being well known for his "tales," voices on all sides asked for his biggest achievement.

As was usual he demurred for a moment, but the expectant assembly persisted.

"Well," he said. "I remember taking off the right ear and the hoof of one of the hind feet of a deer with one shot!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed his guests, with a laugh. "How could you do such a thing?"

For a moment the squire seemed to have forgotten himself, and he turned in his chair to his old butler, John, to whom he always appealed in cases of emergency: "John, do you remember how I did it?"

There was a moment's pause.

"Oh, yes, sir," said John, "perfectly well. Don't you remember the deer was scratching its ear with its hind foot when you fired?"

The Eagle or The Fox?

By Harold de Polo

THE serenity of the glorious spring morning was suddenly disrupted, as one of the innumerable little dramas of the wild sprang unexpectedly into being. A slim, red mother fox, peaceably following her two tiny whelps across a green and fragrant and sunbathed meadow, quickened her pace and madly urged her young to make for the shelter of their home with all the speed they possessed. Above her, against the robin-egg blue of the sky, was the reason for her haste—a mere dot that was rapidly becoming larger. Her old enemy, her inexorable enemy, the big bald eagle, monarch of the air for leagues and leagues about, who dwelt on the topmost crag of the rock that reared itself high above the water of the lake behind the mountain was approaching.

Her nerves strained so taut that the tension was agonizing, the mother guided her whelps across the meadow. Ahead of her loomed the woods, and through these for, perhaps, a hundred feet or more she must go before reaching her burrow. Alone, she would not have worried; she might even have essayed to play with the great bird and trick him with her sheer cunning. With the two youngsters, however, it was quite a different case. At their best, they were capable of but a pitiful pace. So with tender cries she begged them for more speed, pushing them on with her nose in her effort to save them from the fate that had already been meted out to the other two of the litter as well as to her mate.

The huge bird now was only a scant few hundred feet in the air, poising himself for that last, lightninglike swoop that would carry death with it should he strike. The fox, wild terror leaping still further into her heart as the sweep of those wings sang above her, literally hurled her offspring over the ground. Down rushed the monster bird; on fought the game little fox. The burrow yawned protectingly ahead, and, when the mother was not a score of feet from it, the eagle made his final dash.

But the fox, sending her young along

with two swift strokes of her paw, turned and snapped with an enraged snarl in the effort to attract his attention to herself alone. Fortunately, she succeeded. The huge bird slashed for her, missed her by no more than inches —and the whelps tumbled pell-mell into their den. The mother immediately followed them, while the great eagle soared away with a raucous cry, foiled for the moment.

II.

ONCE inside, the mother's strained nerves gave way and she trembled convulsively with relief, licking her tiny cubs with loving fierceness. They were all that she had left—all that was left from a family that but a few weeks earlier had numbered two other youngsters as well as her mate. And now these two, alas, had nearly been taken from her. Another second lost, in that mad rush, and she well knew that she could have done nothing. One of her cubs, at least, would surely have gone to positive doom. But now they were safe.

Grimly, bitterly, she ruminated against the hardness of her lot—against what seemed to her more than her fair share of disaster. It had, aside from all else, been a hard year—a year so lean that she could remember no other quite so bad in all her experience. Then, added to this grueling battle of sheer existence, there had loomed up on the horizon the pair of savage and merciless eagles. She had known of them before—known that they dwelt on that crag of rock by the lake behind the mountain, but that had been all. She had seen them in the air, had seen them occasionally making their kills on smaller things, but until that gruesome day they had never bothered either herself or mate.

Well did she remember the morning —well would she always remember it. The cubs had been out for their first walk of any distance—furry, frolicsome little balls that were just capable of toddling slowly and ludicrously along. Her mate, the pride of the father strong in him, had taken them out to see a bit of the world. She herself had not accompanied him, tired from her duties as she had felt, and had stretched comfortably out in the warm sunshine before the cave and watched them as they went their way. Down to the meadow her mate had led them, and through the sparse foliage of the woods she could see them as they had rolled over and over on the grass, biting and snapping and snarling in mock anger as they played about the form of their father.

Suddenly, coming down the mountain that reared up behind her den, she had heard the dreaded sweep of powerful wings. Then things had happened quickly—so quickly that it had been well-nigh impossible to follow them fully. Looking up, she had descried the pair of huge eagles, swooping down with death in their hearts for the little family out on the meadow. Her mate, too, had seen, but seen too late. He had tried to get his young back to safety, but before he had gone a meager twenty paces those vicious rulers of the air had struck. And each, when they struck, had grasped a little form in its talons and snapped out life on the instant.

She herself, of course, had immediately rushed forth to the fray. Before she had gone half the distance—and it must be remembered that she had traveled swiftly—further disaster had occurred. Her mate, with a demoniacal fury that had rendered him abnormally agile, had sprung into the air at one of the birds. And then the action had become still quicker.

His fangs had struck a wing and held on, and the bird had turned and fought as she dropped her burden. Her mate, instantly, had come to her assistance.

The struggle had been brief—exceedingly brief. There were sharp cries, maddened growls, an indistinguishable ball of fur and feathers flailing about on the earth. Then suddenly, the mother fox had seen a single bird, battered and with one wing slightly drooping, disentangle himself from the fray and sail hastily away, glad to escape before reënforcements arrived. But he left behind him, outside of his own dead mate, the dead mate of the mother fox as well as two dead cubs.

Since then her life had been a hard enough one indeed. It was no simple task to go about the business of securing food that was essential to herself and cubs—the daily, inevitable thing that faces all the creatures of the wild. Outside of this, however, she had to cope with a far more difficult and dangerous thing—the savage old eagle. Although he himself had started the battle and had already inflicted the most damage, he seemed bound to exact still further toll. Every single day since that harrowing one, he had paid one or more visits to the burrow, hovering about in the air and swooping down at every chance he got. So far she had managed to evade him, but it had not been easy. Too, it cramped her field of operations when on the hunt for food, making it necessary for her to stay close to her lair. Yes, life for the brave little mother was hard, very hard.

She paused abruptly in her bitter thoughts. The need of food was strong upon her and her young—their doleful whining told her that. She pondered wisely, her eyes drawn down to mere slits. The eagle, of late, had not been making two attempts in rapid succession, undoubtedly believing that she would be too frightened to emerge again until some time had gone by. To-day, also, she had seen him sail off over the mountain. He might come again—he probably would come again—but not until later in the day. Yes, now was her time to continue the hunt—now was the time when he would least expect her to be abroad.

III.

SLOWLY, cautiously, the mother fox went to the mouth of the burrow and peered out, scanning the sky and woods and fields with wary eyes. Convinced that her enemy was out of the way, she called her cubs and brought them forth. Even now, though, she was extremely careful. She made her way through the forest with deft, noiseless steps, deciding to try a runway where she deemed the chances for a rabbit were fairly good. It was not very far, either—not much more than a hundred yards. Presently, herself and young stretched silently out in a bend that hid them well, she breathed easier.

But it was not to be so for long. The cunning of the fox, for once, had been outmatched by the grim monarch of the air. Suddenly, in the air above her, she heard the dreaded swish of those powerful wings. Then, too late, she realized how she had been tricked.

Knowing it would be unexpected, the bird had appeared to fly away, but instead had secreted himself in some tree close by her den. She had no time to make for her home, and this she fully knew. Therefore, hurriedly thrusting her cubs into the comparative safety of a thorny batch of undergrowth, she turned and valiantly faced the marauder.

He came on like a veritable whirlwind; came so swiftly that she had no time to practice her wily method of fighting. Again the action was quick, tremendously quick. The great, winged creature struck and she herself shot up nobly to meet him, but her form was hurled easily aside from the rushing impetus of his swoop. Then, almost before she knew what had happened, she

felt those fearful claws sink firmly into her flesh as she was borne slowly but steadily off the ground.

She struggled bravely, wildly, with all the strength that was in her slim, sinewy form, but steadily and surely she found herself rising from the ground as those claws sank deeper and as that dangerous beak struck out for her eyes. Still she struggled, doing her mightiest to turn and send in her fangs, but still those relentless talons held her at their mercy and that beak came close to her eyes.

Then, when she was up to the top of the very tallest pine, her body suddenly went limp, her head sagged, and she was borne higher and more swiftly along like some dead, harmless burden. Nevertheless, now her brain was working—her deep-grained, wily, inherent cunning was hard at play.

The eagle, as his prey relaxed, stopped his dangerous pecking at the eyes. Her struggling ended—his quarry dead, as he firmly believed—he rose higher and higher into the air. Up along the mountain he soared, over it he went, sailing majestically along on a straight line for the crag of rock that held his lair. Slowly, easily, confidently, he went his way, until soon he was over the lake that stretched out below his nest. Victory, at last, was his; a victory for which he had fought hard and intrepidly, he told himself. His wile had triumphed over that of the creature whose kind was supposed to possess more of it than any other known to the earth or to the air.

Proudly, serenely, vainglorioously, he sailed along, increasing his speed as he neared his nest. Closer he went, ever closer and closer. Through it all, though, the crafty mother fox was inimitably playing her part of death and watching the course of the flight through narrowed lids. Then, as he sank down to a distance a couple of hundred feet from the lake and not much more than fifty from land, she herself played her final card—the stroke of cunning that would either save or ruin her. Suddenly, unexpectedly, she came to life. With a lightninglike movement her head flashed, her jaws opened, and she sank her sharp fangs into the feathery body of the huge eagle just under the left wing.

IV.

EMITTING a surprised and terror-stricken cry, the great bird madly flapped his wings in the effort to dislodge the fox that had somehow come to life. He sank a full twoscore feet through the air as he battled, and still those tenacious teeth held grimly on. Still he fought, now bringing his beak into play as he essayed to reach the vulnerable spot—the eyes. The game little mother fox, however, had buried her head close in under that big left wing and so kept out of danger. Bravely, without wincing, she received the blows on her head and neck. Through it all, though, she held on; held on and cautiously played the game of causing her enemy to drop, with her pressure, at just the speed she wished him to.

The eagle now completely and hopelessly lost his head. Madly and furiously he fought to break that grim hold; but just as determinedly, only with deadly coolness, the brave little mother held on. They were still a good fifty feet from the water, with the lake shore perhaps half that distance away. The fox did no more than hold the same pressure as they slowly sank. And then, when not much more than a score of feet was between them and the unruffled surface of the lake, the fox took the aggressive.

Suddenly loosening her hold, she slashed out for the neck. As usual, the action was quick. Her fangs darted and flashed in the sunshine, struck out

and sank in firmly at the neck. There was a mighty flailing of wings, a gruesomely raucous shriek, and together they turned over and over on their way to the water.

They struck with a mighty splash, an indistinguishable mass of fur and feathers. Immediately it was disentangled. It was the fox, though—the game mother who had at first been fooled, but who finally had had the last laugh—who this time freed herself and splashed out swiftly for the shore.

Once on it, she gave a single glance at the eagle, floating supinely on the surface, dead. Then, with what was really a sly and inordinately happy grin, she turned and started out on the journey back to her young. Things had looked black for her—very black—but even though she had been in alien territory her stout heart and wily brain had won out. Her merciless enemy had been eliminated and her mate and young avenged; and now, with the two little cubs that were left for her, life seemed to stretch out ahead in a pleasant and untroubled path.

YOUR OWN PATH

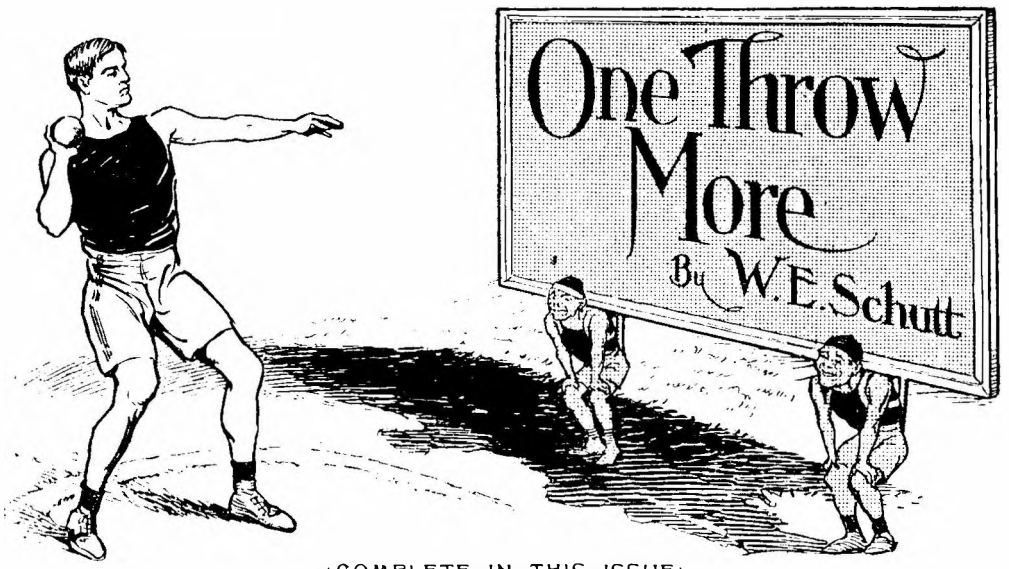
By Everett Earle Stanard

SOME get bliss from a maiden's kiss,
And joy in the very thought of it;
Some have rest when love is confessed,
And some think little or naught of it.

Some men tramp in the ways of the scamp,
Thinking they have the best of it;
Some with the hammer make wonderful clamor,
Happy in toil and blest of it.

Some men bide on the ocean tide,
Wed to the surge and swing of it;
Some in the city scorn your pity,
And swear by the clatter and ring of it.

Each man tries for his heart's set prize.
Fate? You can never unravel it!
Don't sit and ponder your neighbor yonder!
Choose your own path and travel it!



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

OPEN TO DOUBT.

THE try-outs for the make-up of the track team which was to represent Cornwall in the annual meet with the University of Pittsville had attracted more than the usual attention from the zestful fans this year; for each of them knew, by unimpeachable "dope," that there would be a hard fight for the victory, and undergraduate loyalty to the track team was unexcelled by that to any other spring sport.

The fans' chief interest was centered in the try-outs for the shot put. Not because they figured that Cornwall's victory in that event was ever in doubt, or that it would be the deciding event in the coming contest, for Cornwall had on her roster the intercollegiate champion, one "Butch" Parker, who could throw the iron sphere at least a foot farther than any man Pittsville could bring forth. No try-out, not even one put, was necessary to secure to that lumbering, uncouth giant the honor of representing Cornwall as first-string man.

But it was the struggle for the second-string position that attracted the deep circle of fans that now surrounded the shot putters, and their interest was based not so much upon a general college spirit, as in the case of the other events, as upon personal sympathy for "Pop" Russell, who deserved his C if ever a man did, who must now leave college without it if he did not get into second place for Cornwall. In spite of the popularity which his chief opponent, Jimmy Hamilton, had won for himself, there was not a man present—except Dan Coakley, whose position forced him to submerge his personal feelings in a close calculation of points—who would not have almost risked the success of the team to see Pop Russell win his letter.

Coach Dan Coakley, acting generally as referee and scorer and timekeeper for this informal meet, consulted the little card he held in his hand. "Hamilton up," he called out; "and this is your last put. Now, then, heave her out! Pop's given you a mark; beat it. You've been joshing us all the afternoon. Now show us whether a line of josh is all you've got, or whether you've got an arm, too."

A little murmur of comment ran through the crowd of close-gathered spectators as Hamilton picked up the sixteen-pound shot and toyed with it as an ordinary man might with a bean bag. Hamilton was fully as heavy as Butch Parker, but he was so lithely muscled, so well proportioned and agile, that he looked at least fifty pounds lighter. He was a sophomore who had already made himself an undergraduate idol by his consistent game the preceding fall as guard for the varsity, but who had not yet demonstrated his ability to represent the varsity in the weight events. He was unspoiled by his success at football, and for that reason all the more popular among his fellows; a big, blond, cheerful man, forever smiling, slow to wrath, whose chief fault was that he took neither himself nor anything that he did with enough seriousness.

Now he raised himself on tiptoe, shaded his eyes with his hand as if it strained his eyesight to look over a distance so remarkable, and looked across the turf to where the iron shots had gouged black holes. "Where did Pop put it to, Butch?" he called out.

Butch Parker, not having to compete in this, for him, slow company, was handling the far end of the measuring tape. At Hamilton's jocular request, he gravely denoted where Pop Russell's best put had last broken ground. Parker was quite unaware that this demand was only Hamilton's little joke; for, in spite of his athletic prowess, he was as slow of mind as he was ungainly of body. "Here y'are," he growled.

"A' right, Butch," said Hamilton, grinning. "You stand right there for a mark, and see if I can put it over your head." And, to the tune of an amused titter that ran around the crowd, Hamilton took his stance at the far side of the circle and poised himself.

Parker looked up at him in surprise, and grew surly when he saw that he had been made the butt of a joke for all to hear. "Aw, take your put and shut up!" he roared at Hamilton.

Dan Coakley concealed an involuntary smile by the simple method of frowning severely at the ebullient sophomore. "Get on the job, Hamilton," he said.

Hamilton took his put. The heavy ball shot out from his hand like a toy balloon from a child's. To most of the fans it seemed a marvelous put. But Dan Coakley grimaced before it was measured; in the first place, because Hamilton had so grievously misjudged his distance as to come down a full six inches inside the wooden barrier, with just that much lost distance, whereas Hamilton had usually been able to judge it within half an inch; and in the second place because Hamilton grinned when he had finished.

"Forty-three six," sang out Butch Parker, as he stretched the tape. "Tied with Pop Russell."

Coakley jotted it down as a mere matter of form, and glowered for a moment at Hamilton as if he were trying to see beneath the surface of his apparent carelessness. "Russell up!" he called out in a matter-of-fact tone. "Jimmy's tied you, Pop; you've got this last chance."

Grim-faced and tense, Pop Russell picked up a shot, took his stance without any waste motions or useless expense of energy, and, with the scrupulous care of the man who knows his game, assumed a perfect poise. This time there was no buzz of comment, no wordy play of wit or near wit. Absolute silence fell upon the spectators, a silence broken only by the slight, singing rattle of the steel tape as Butch Parker drew it out of the way. For every man in the crowd was "pulling" for Pop, pulling raised to the *n*th power, with such mental and nervous tension as comes seldom to mere spectators save

at the gravest crises of the hardest fought games. And this sympathy with Pop Russell must not be construed as lessening Jimmy Hamilton's popularity, but rather as emphasizing Russell's. Moreover, Hamilton already had his football C, and had two years more to win his track C; whereas Pop Russell had worked his very soul out both in football and in the weight events since his freshman year, and in each branch of athletics had been just nosed out from getting his insignia.

Pop Russell knew more about the technique of putting the shot than did any man at Cornwall, save Dan Coakley, of course. His form was as near perfect as any man's could be. It was he who had helped develop the ungainly Parker in odd moments when Coakley was busy with his sprinters and jumpers; it was Pop who had drilled into Jimmy Hamilton the rudiments of the game in his freshman year, when Coakley was too busy with his varsity men to give up his time to freshmen who were ineligible, anyway. Butch Parker owed his intercollegiate championship as much to Pop Russell as he did to himself, but he would never admit it; Jimmy Hamilton owed to Pop all he knew of the game, and admitted it almost too readily.

But for all his knowledge, in spite of his willingness and zest, Pop lacked the weight to put him in fast company; and in these days of record smashing, a man with only a hundred and sixty pounds to put behind the weight has not much chance against heavier men with only mediocre form. It was the knowledge of all these facts that had excited the crowd's deep sympathy for Russell. It was too bad that Jimmy Hamilton had to be beaten, but it would have been worse if Pop Russell had to leave the varsity without his C, especially since Butch Parker was certain to win the shot put for Cornwall.

Every man of the crowd stood with bated breath and flexed muscles as Russell skipped across the circle, made the turn without an instant's check on the momentum of the heavy weight, followed the shot so far across the barrier that it seemed as if he must lose his balance and foul, and dropped safely back inside the circle by a margin the width of a sheet of paper, regained his balance, and watched anxiously as the shot plumped into the soft turf forty-odd feet away. It was a beautiful put, such as one might figure out on paper, but never see oftener than once in ten times in practice. If Pop Russell had only twenty pounds more!

"Forty-three feet eight inches!" sang out Butch Parker; and the cheer that followed the announcement like an echo might have been made by five thousand in unison, instead of by merely a handful.

Jimmy Hamilton was the first to wring Pop's hand in congratulation, but that was only because he happened to be nearest Pop, for the others were crowding up. Yet, of the two, Hamilton's face looked happier than Pop's. Pop was gravely searching the depths of Jimmy's eyes. "Jimmy," Pop was saying, "I more than half believe you did——"

"Fine work, Pop!" cried Jimmy. "If there's anybody in this town more tickled than I am——"

But at that point even Hamilton's superior weight could not keep the crowd from Pop Russell, and he was forced away with his cordial speech unsaid.

Dan Coakley had turned away at once, now that mere business was done, and was walking slowly across the sunlit turf toward the clubhouse. Johnny Kent, the captain of the team, joined him. "I suppose Pop gets it," began Johnny, for Coakley was the absolute despot in such matters and could have given the place to Hamilton if he chose to do so.

"Yes, he does," said Dan thoughtfully. "But I'm not at all satisfied with this business, somehow."

"Pop deserves it. All the fellows are tickled——"

"Ticklin' the fellows won't win track meets," observed Dan. "Pop won his place right enough on form, and I'll let him have it. But I've got a hunch —I'd bet a month's salary that Jimmy Hamilton threw it his way a-purpose."

"Oh, hardly that," returned Johnny Kent. "No man is going to toss away his C. Besides, Hamilton hasn't shown himself much better than Pop any time this spring. They've been seesawing back and forth, first one and then the other ahead. If Hamilton had been putting forty-four or five regularly, and then had a sudden slump to-day——"

"Hamilton hasn't gained two inches since last year, when he ought to have gained two feet," Coakley reminded him. "Either he's been holding back for Pop's sake all through the season, or else—— Well, all there is to it, there a mystery about it somewhere."

"It doesn't seem to me that a man would, or could, hold back like that all through the season and never show even a flash of something better if he had it in him. I think it was on the square, Dan; I think Pop earned his place by beating Hamilton outright."

Coakley acted as if he had not heard Johnny's last speech. "You understand, Kent, I don't mean to say anything in particular against Hamilton. I know and you know, from the way he played guard last fall, that he would throw his old arm off and beat up his best friend for the varsity, if it was necessary. But he's young; a little harebrained, I guess. He's figured this shot put as safe, anyway, with Butch Parker on the job; and he's figured that it won't make any difference to Cornwall who goes in as second string to Butch."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" queried Captain Kent. "Pittsville is as sure of second place with their man Colson as we are of first place with Butch. The best Pop can do at the meet is a third, and a third counts only one point, which can't make any difference one way or the other in the final result. Nobody is going to blame Jimmy Hamilton if he did lay down for Pop."

"See, you all think the same thing!" returned Dan Coakley, with mild irritation. "No wonder Hamilton does! That one point might win the meet, and Hamilton, to my mind, is a lot surer of taking third than Pop Russell. But there's one little trick in this game you're all overlooking. You're all depending on Butch Parker. Butch is always open to question; his reputation isn't any too good, as you know. You never can tell when somebody's going to enter a protest against him for shady work. It's never been done yet, because, as far as I know, there's never been any searching investigation into the way he spends his summers, for instance."

"You mean," put in Kent, "about his amateur standing?"

"That, or anything. Butch may be dead by Saturday. You can never depend on a man to win until his put is measured. What if something happens to Butch, with Pop Russell in as our next best man, with Hamilton out of it entirely, when I think he actually is able to put eighteen inches farther than Pop? Where'd we come off at then?"

"Hamilton is entered, isn't he?"

"Yes; away back before we knew whether it would be him or Pop. But Hamilton won't go to Philadelphia with us. The management figures that, with their man Colson in the game, we could take only two places, anyway; and they're right, providing Butch comes through. It's expensive, sending an extra man who couldn't count in the result. So the management insists upon my sending our two best men for the

two open places, and doubling up Morley from the hammer for our third man."

"Well, then," counseled Johnny Kent, "throw Pop down and send Jimmy Hamilton along, if your judgment suggests that."

"I can't very well do that now," returned Coakley. "You know how popular Russell is, and how much everybody wants him to get his C. I'd get panned by the whole bunch if I sent Hamilton along after Pop had beaten him in the try-out. And not only that, but Hamilton might take it in his head to hold in his put so as not to give away his game of letting Pop through for his C. And when you come right down to facts, I'm not absolutely sure that Hamilton is as good as I figure him to be; I only say I've got a hunch about it. No, Pop'll have to satisfy us in the circumstances. All the same, I'd like to shut Butch Parker up in a safe from now till Saturday afternoon to be sure of him."

CHAPTER II.

IN A TRYING SITUATION.

NOBODY but Jimmy Hamilton knew how much he was in love with Helen Russell. Pop, her brother, had not the faintest hint of it. Helen herself might possibly have guessed it, but she certainly did not act as if she knew it. Perhaps she did not care. Hamilton feared that this latter was the true state of affairs, but after the shot-put try-out he had every reason to believe that she would not be so cold toward him.

The facts of this little affair are few and therefore briefly told. Pop had brought his sister up to Cornwall for the junior-week dances late in the winter. He introduced Hamilton to her, and she seemed to like him and allowed him practically to monopolize her society during the brief period she was at Cornwall.

Shortly after her return to Philadelphia, where the Russells lived, Jimmy had received a letter from her—a most friendly letter, containing her photograph and the request for a favor. Naturally it led Jimmy to believe that he had made an impression on her, and it was probably this belief more than anything else that made him fall in love with her after she had gone away. At any rate, he granted her favor and apprised her of the fact by a carefully written letter—one worded with just the proper degree of aloofness, yet with a delicately hinted expression of his desire to continue the correspondence. And there the matter ended. No further word came from her; she did not even thank him for the trouble he had taken to gratify her whim in part.

For weeks Jimmy hoped and watched the postman with an assumption of vast indifference that deceived nobody, until it was foolish to hope any longer. And then it occurred to him that she might be trying him out, merely waiting to see if he would grant her request in full as capably as he had granted the first part of it by letter. Well, he had; and now something must come of it, even if he had to use Pop as an intermediary, which he didn't want at all to do.

When he got back to the seclusion of his room after the shot-put try-out, he dug out the photograph and the letter from its hiding place under some papers in the back of one of his desk drawers, and enjoyed them for a full fifteen minutes in solitude. The two last paragraphs of the friendly little letter were as follows:

> There is one thing I meant to have done while I was at Cornwall, though I was prevented from doing it both by lack of opportunity and lack of time. I am crazy about athletes, which is quite natural, considering how much I hear of them from my brother; and I want to have the autographs of all intercollegiate champions. I wanted to meet

Mr. Parker, the shot putter, in order to ask him for his autograph. But my brother said that he was scarcely the sort of man I would care to know. I assume from that there is some kind of trouble between him and Mr. Parker, and so I did not then press my request upon him, and do not care to do so now. But I would be forever grateful to you if you could, quite in the strictest confidence, manage to get Mr. Parker's autograph for me on any blank sheet of paper, and send it to me. I would not trouble you with this favor if I were not sure that my brother would not care to do it for me.

I do so hope that Robert—that is Pop, of course—gets his C this year. It seems to me that it would not do any harm for the trainer to let him have it. Mr. Parker is sure to win first place for Cornwall, anyway, and Mr. Colson is sure to take second place for Pittsville, and what difference will it make about third place? I would consider it the greatest personal favor you could possibly do me, if you could in any way help Robert win his letter; and I should be forever obliged to you if you did help. Though, for all I know, it would be impossible for you to help in any way.

A postscript read:

Please don't say anything about this to Robert, as he would be very angry with me for suggesting any part of this letter to you. But, after all, a girl has a right to be independent of her brother in some things, hasn't she?

Hamilton had granted her every wish. Immediately upon receipt of the letter, he had gone to Butch Parker and asked for an autograph "to put into a little album," as Jimmy had explained his wish, without saying whose album. Butch was flattered at the request, scrawled his name on a sheet of paper, and gave it to Jimmy, and Jimmy forwarded it at once to Miss Russell.

And now Pop had won his C by Jimmy's help. In fact, Jimmy knew that Pop could never have won it if Jimmy had extended himself. But he had spent some anxious moments over this request of Pop's sister. He would as soon have stolen Pop's best suit as to jeopardize the varsity's chances to defeat Pittsville by holding himself in. Still, the truth of Miss Russell's letter could not be denied, however Jimmy twisted and turned the matter; in the circumstances, it really could make no difference to the varsity whether he or Pop Russell put the shot as second string. Since it could cost the varsity nothing, Jimmy did not mind sacrificing himself to grant Miss Russell's request. It was fortunate that the letter had come before the season started, for Jimmy could hold himself in from the very beginning, and thus make Pop's victory over him look all the more reasonable. This he did, with the result already seen.

But what was the use of it all, if Miss Russell didn't know the part he had played? And how was she to know it? He couldn't tell her indirectly through Pop, because Pop, if he knew the truth, would at once throw up his place in favor of the better man. And for some indefinite yet urgent reason he couldn't bring himself to write her a letter telling exactly what he had done. It began to look to Jimmy, as he sat there thinking things over, as if he wouldn't be able to gain what he wanted from his stratagem. Of course, it had been worth while to help Pop get the C which he deserved, and this reward alone repaid Jimmy for his sacrifice. But how much more gratifying it would be if Helen Russell could surmise the truth!

Pop Russell himself broke in upon his quandary. "I've been looking all over for you, Jimmy," he said.

Jimmy calmly swept letter and photograph into a desk drawer. "What's the good word, Pop?"

Pop walked over and sat upon the edge of Jimmy's desk. "I've got the best kind of a hunch that you deliberately threw the shot put my way this afternoon."

Jimmy swung back in his chair and met Pop's eyes directly. "Of course I did," he said. "I've been beating you

consistently all the spring by about two feet, and then to-day I let you trim me." Jimmy laughed.

"All joking aside, Jimmy, I've got a hunch."

"So you said before. Seems to me sort of a senseless hunch, without any kind of proof."

"Of course I can't prove it."

"Then why worry about it?"

"Because I want to know the truth."

"What difference would it make?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"I want to know whether I earned my letter or got it by charity. I want to know whether I can really wear it or not. Because if I didn't actually earn it I'll refuse to accept it." Pop's tone was menacing.

"Calm yourself, Pop. You needn't take my word for it; ask anybody who saw you put the shot to-day whether or not you earned it."

"It's plain I can't get anything out of you."

"It ought to be, by this time." Jimmy in reality was growing a little uneasy. He had scarcely expected this grueling cross-examination as the aftermath of his unselfish act. Pop was unusually stern and determined, even angry; he seemed to think there was more to this business than merely accepting his C, and considering himself lucky to get it.

"You may not understand it, Jimmy, but the fact is, if you deliberately laid down on me, you've just as deliberately made a monkey of me, and I'll never forget it as long as I live. If you want to come across with a confession before I accept my place on the team, well and good, and I'll overlook it. But if I go to Philly with the team——"

"Aw, forget it!" counseled Jimmy, who saw no reason at all in Pop's fuming about nothing. Besides, if he confessed to Pop now, Pop would not get his C, and Helen Russell would not have any reason to be grateful to him. Certainly he had done no harm; just as certainly Pop had no way of finding out what Jimmy had done.

"And it's a mighty rotten trick to play on the varsity, to plant any but the best men on the team that's going to Philly," Pop continued inexorably.

Jimmy, of course, couldn't see that it made any difference. "I'm the last man in the world to do the varsity dirt, and you ought to know it; and, what's more, if you don't believe it, you and I can quit right here."

Pop searched Jimmy's eyes for a long time in silence. "Well, I do believe you, Jimmy," he said, in a more kindly tone. "It isn't safe for a man to follow a hunch, but all the same I——"

"A hunch that's got some logic behind it is all right, but a hunch like that——" Jimmy's gesture was expressive.

"Then you tell me to go right ahead and take my place in the meet at Philly?"

"I certainly do."

Pop digested this. "Sorry you won't be going along with us," he said finally.

"I'll be on deck to watch you, anyway," returned Jimmy.

"You're going down?"

"I certainly am. And, say, Pop, I—I suppose—I suppose your folks will be there to see you perform." That was as near the direct question as Jimmy dared inquire.

"My sister will be; she and a friend of hers. I wired for seats just opposite to the shot-put circle. Why?"

From Pop's lack of interest Jimmy gathered that he had forgotten having made that introduction during junior week. And this being so, Jimmy could go no further along that line. "Oh, nothing much," he said; "only they'll be mighty pleased to see you showing for Cornwall."

"You're right there. My sister will be even more pleased than I when she knows I've earned my C at last."

Jimmy said nothing. Pop's word

"earned" made him a little uneasy again.

"Well, so long, Jimmy," Pop said presently. "Sorry to have run at you this way for nothing, but it was best to thrash it out now, wasn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Jimmy dispiritedly.

But after Pop had gone, Jimmy thought the matter over and recovered his spirits. He had done nothing wrong, and Pop would never know the truth; thus far he was satisfied. But at the same time, it would be dangerous to let Helen Russell into his secret, or Pop might get hold of it.

But he wanted to see her, and an opportunity was at hand. He called up the athletic manager, who had a diagram of the bleachers at the Pittsville field and could make reservations by wire. "Say, Carlin," he said confidentially, "any chance of my getting a seat for Saturday somewhere near Pop Russell's reservation?"

After a moment's delay the reply came back: "There's one vacant right next to it."

"Put me down for it," Jimmy requested, with a thrill of anticipated pleasure in his voice.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING TO BE SETTLED.

HAMILTON'S luck regarding the reserved seat was not as good as he expected. True, his seat was next to Miss Russell's, but it was next behind it instead of next beside it. Miss Russell was already in her seat when Jimmy arrived; she did not look round when he sat down, and had no way of knowing that he was so near. Moreover, that friend of hers of whom Pop had spoken was not a girl, as Jimmy had rather hopefully guessed, but a young man, with whom she appeared to be on friendly terms.

Jimmy's hopes were a little dashed. He did not feel like leaning forward and announcing his presence; it did not seem a nice thing to do. His little stratagem seemed to have been in vain. Moodily he tried to watch the meet, which started with the dashes soon after he arrived; but found his gaze wandering too readily to the plump white neck and the fluffy golden hair just in front of him. He resolved to stick it out on the chance of something turning up.

Cornwall lost the hundred to start with. True, Johnny Kent, Cornwall's captain, came through with a second, but that put Cornwall two points to the had when they had counted confidently upon two points to the good. It was an inauspicious beginning of what, it now appeared, would be a nip-and-tuck athletic meet, with every single point a telling factor. And when Kent got back to the dressing room, downcast over his defeat, he found the men in an uproar.

Dan Coakley and the Pittsville trainer held the center of this riotous stage. There was the Cornwall manager, the Pittsville captain and manager, and an elderly man in street clothes. Kent elbowed his way to the center.

"Where's Butch, anyway?" yelled Carlin, the Cornwall manager.

"He's out with Pop, warming up," said Coakley. "The shot put will be called any minute, too. Somebody go get him."

Some one started for the door. Captain Kent caught Carlin's arm. "What's all the fuss about?" he asked.

"Pittsville declares they've got proof of Butch being a pro, and won't let him appear."

"What's your proof, Murray?" Captain Kent asked the Pittsville captain, and his manner wasn't as confident as might have been expected, for every man on the team was a little suspicious of Butch Parker and the way he passed

his summers. Parker was not highly respected among his fellows, for he was uncouth to a degree, loud-mouthed, and boastful, with rather loose ways of living. Nothing had been said against him yet; nevertheless, he was scarcely one of those fortunate men of whom one could safely say, in answer to any such charge: "I wouldn't believe it on oath." Butch Parker certainly was open to suspicion, although no Cornwall man was minded to admit it to Pittsville except in the face of indisputable proof.

"We suspected Parker for the last two years," the Pittsville captain answered. "And at last we've got the goods on him. He played summer baseball last summer at a little resort up in Maine. This Mr. Duffy, here, is proprietor of the resort, took Butch on the team he got up to amuse his guests, and paid him money. Here's Parker's receipt. Duffy claims it's genuine; I don't know his signature, but some of you fellows must, and if you do, it's up to you to admit it."

Carlin, the manager, handed the receipt, which he had been studying carefully, over to Captain Kent. At first glance, Kent realized that it was either genuine or an expert forgery. No amateur penman could have copied that great, sprawling, childish signature so faithfully. "How does it happen that Mr. Duffy shows up now?" Kent asked, his keen eyes reading the seedy, gray-haired man, who looked more like a farm hand than a summer-resort proprietor.

"I don't see what difference that makes," returned the Pittsville captain. "But if you insist upon knowing, I'll tell you all I know. I never heard of him until ten minutes ago, when one of the gatekeepers brought him to me and said I ought to talk with him. And upon my word of honor, that's all any of us know about him. But notwithstanding that, I don't know what better proof you could want than that receipt signed by Parker. And if you're at all square——"

"We'll be square enough about it, Murray, but we're not going to give in till we know a little more about it. How did you happen to show up just now, Mr. Duffy?"

"I was in Philadelphia drummin' up trade for my place this summer," mumbled Mr. Duffy, "and I happened to see this big guy's picture in the paper, tellin' how he was sure to lick the Pittsville bunch to-day. I'm strong for Pittsville, always have been, and I didn't figure to let this guy Parker get away with any rough stuff against my friends. I spotted him in a minute from his picture; I knew he didn't have any right to show up against these Pittsville men if he was a pro. So I wired home for that receipt to show him up, and just got it on the noon mail. I spoke to the gatekeeper when I come in, and he took me to the Pittsville bunch."

None of the Cornwall men could find any flaw in Mr. Duffy's story, and Butch Parker's character made it all the easier to believe.

"Who wants me?" roared a mighty voice from near the door, and they all turned to see Parker's huge, awkward figure come striding into the room. He caught sight of Duffy and roared a "Hello, Duff! What you doin' here?"

Duffy replied more reservedly; and to Captain Kent's eyes, Duffy was the more guilty of the two, but perhaps that was because the captain didn't want to lose his best man. Kent lost no time in laying the charges against Parker, for the shot put would be called within a few minutes, and if Parker had any good defense they all wanted to know it. "Mr. Duffy charges you with having played professional baseball for him last summer."

There was a quick interchange of glances between Duffy and Parker, and Parker's eyes were venomous with sud-

den rage. "Duff, you lie, and you know it."

"I can prove by a dozen people that you played," Duffy replied, more calmly now.

"For fun, not for money. I admit I played, but you know as well as you're standing there that you never paid me a cent directly or indirectly."

"Mr. Duffy has a receipt, signed by you," put in Captain Kent, "for the sum of two hundred dollars, paid you on account of your services on his baseball team."

"Duff hasn't got any such thing," roared Parker.

"And here it is," remarked Kent, placing the slip of paper in Parker's hand.

Parker took it, glanced at it with a puzzled face, looked at Duffy, and back to the receipt. "Duff, you're a crook!" he cried; and then, to the unbounded amazement of all in the room, he went on: "But as a crook, you aren't one-two-three to Hamilton. How much did he give you for showing up like this?"

"Hamilton!" cried Dan Coakley and Kent in the same breath. "What Hamilton?"

"That fresh soph who thinks he can put the shot. He's a shrewd one, he is. He figured out that if he could bar me on a charge of being pro, he'd come in for his C this year. He's the man at the bottom of all this."

To say that the Cornwall men who heard this were incredulous is putting it mildly. At first thought, not one of them would have believed Jimmy Hamilton guilty if they had caught him in the act of forging the receipt; still, Jimmy hadn't come through in the shot put that spring as well as he should have done, when Pop Russell could beat him. Perhaps—it was just possible—that Jimmy felt he had a reputation to keep up, and wanted his track C in his first eligible year.

"Where does Hamilton come in on this?" asked Kent.

"He came to me early this spring," Parker growled, "and he said he wanted my autograph for an album. Of course I thought it was straight goods, though, when I come to think of it, it seems queer that a fellow like him should be keeping an album like a girl; but, anyway, I let him have it without asking any questions. Like a born fool, I let him have it on a blank sheet of paper, and that is the paper. Somebody's filled it in above my signature with all that receipt business."

"Are you sure that is the paper you gave to Jimmy?" asked Kent, astounded at this turn in affairs.

"Absolutely. I tore it out of one of my own notebooks, and I'd know it anywhere."

This positive assurance was followed by a dead silence. One of the Pittsville men prompted Kent to action with a word, and so did Pop Russell, standing, grim-faced, on the edge of the crowd. "Ask Jimmy about it, John," he urged Kent. "He's in the bleachers now. I saw him sitting right behind my sister when I was warming up."

"All right," agreed Kent dubiously. "We'll go ask him right now."

The Pittsville men fell in with the procession that started across the turf to call upon Jimmy, who, of course, all unconscious of the impending calamity, was studying the back of Helen Russell's neck and hoping for some opportunity to speak with her.

CHAPTER IV.

A CALL ON CHIVALRY.

THE main body of the deputation stopped upon the running track in front of the seat which Hamilton occupied, four rows back. Captain Kent, Pop Russell, and Parker stepped up close to the boarding in front of the bleachers and Kent called back to Ham-

ilton: "Hamilton! Come down here a minute; we want to see you."

At which Miss Russell turned her head for the first time, recognized Jimmy, and spoke: "Mr. Hamilton! You sitting there all this time and I didn't know it! Why didn't you speak to me?"

Jimmy flushed and grinned happily. Whatever the mysterious reason for which Kent demanded his presence, Hamilton could bless him for it, since it had won a word from Miss Russell. "I thought of speaking to you," he told her, "but I—I felt sure you would see me sooner or later, and I didn't——"

"Hamilton! We're in a hurry," Kent called sharply.

Jimmy turned unwillingly from Miss Russell. "I'll be back as soon as I see what Kent wants," he promised her lightly. "I shan't be a moment probably." He scrambled down the few steps to the boarding, vaulted it easily, and walked up to Kent with a smile.

"Do you know anything about this?" asked Kent, thrusting into Hamilton's hands the paper that might rob the varsity of Parker's victory in the shot put.

If Hamilton had been able to think of anything else than the fact that Miss Russell was cordiality itself, he would have guessed from Kent's strange manner of speech that something unusual was on foot, and thus been put on his guard. As it was, he examined the paper without any preconception of its importance, and of course recognized it at once.

"Why, yes," he said carelessly, "it's an autograph I got from Butch for ——" and there he stopped. For by this time he had read the writing above the signature, and his eyes started suddenly in horror. With the most natural impulse, he looked up and found Helen Russell's eyes fixed upon him. She was barely ten feet away and could overhear every word spoken.

"You admit you asked Butch for it, then?" persisted Kent, his voice rising with his wrath.

"Yes." All the same, Hamilton wished he hadn't admitted it. After all, this couldn't be the same paper as that one which he had sent to Helen Russell, containing nothing but the big fellow's signature. She couldn't have put it to such a use as this. The thing he held in his hand looked as if it might have been the same piece of paper, but now he felt sure that it must have been a different one. He had no use for Butch Parker, anyway; Butch probably was a professional, caught with the goods.

"You realize, of course," continued Johnny Kent, "that this makes Butch Parker out a professional."

"Thought you'd kick me out and get in yourself in my place, didn't you, Hamilton?" said Parker loudly.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jimmy, in perplexity.

"Leave this to me, Butch!" commanded Kent, in a tone of authority that silenced even Parker. "You say, Hamilton, that this is the autograph you got from Parker?"

"I said so at first. It did look like it. Now I'm not so sure; I'm rather inclined to believe it isn't."

"Well, Parker positively identifies this as the same piece of paper which he tore from his own notebook."

"There were many more loose pages in Parker's notebook," said Hamilton, who wanted to doubt, and yet somehow couldn't.

Kent went on ruthlessly, with no care to control his voice: "And Butch says you alleged you wanted this for an autograph album. For whose?"

Hamilton hesitated. Miss Russell surely must have heard everything and guessed that this was the sheet of paper which he had sent to her. He wanted to give her an opportunity to speak up and tell what she knew, for he could not drag her publicly into this unsavory

situation. He glanced up at her, hoping for some sign of explanation of this disastrous development, but, to his amazement, her face was as devoid of sympathy or understanding as a stone image's. "For—for a friend's album," Jimmy stammered finally, when the silence became awkward.

"What is the name of your friend?" Kent was inexorable.

Once more Jimmy sought Helen Russell's eyes, and grew desperate at her silence and aloofness. He turned away miserably from their stony, criticizing stare. Why couldn't she speak up and save him from his torment of uncertainty? He had sent the paper to her. If she were innocent, why couldn't she come to his assistance by telling these men voluntarily what she knew of the autograph Jimmy had sent her, and prove to his relief whether this damning evidence was the same or a different signature of Parker's? It seemed impossible that she could have been guilty of filling in the writing above it, or that she was a party to such a fraud. Yet, if she were innocent, why couldn't she speak up and help Jimmy? Was that proof, considered the other way about, that she was guilty? Jimmy's mind raced along this channel. It was possible that, in a misguided moment, she had relied upon this subterfuge to assure his C to her brother. If Butch Parker were shut out of the season's competition, Pop would certainly get in, if only as second string. What better way could she get Butch out of it than by proving his professionalism? And, further, by making Jimmy Hamilton the goat for it, in case investigations ensued. It all sounded reasonable; so reasonable that Jimmy's despair grew keener. He would give her one more chance. He would put the matter up to her by talking so loudly, so plainly, of the affair, that she must take the hint and speak up if she were innocent.

"All I can tell you is this, Kent," he said. "I got that autograph for a friend of mine—a friend here in Philadelphia. I sent it to her in a letter, and that is all I know about it. If she knows that the autograph is in her possession, this paper is not the same one. I can't tell you any more about it."

"Tell your friend's name," snapped Johnny Kent.

Hamilton looked once more at Helen Russell, and looked as quickly away. Her face was a stone wall. She had no mind to tell anything. She must have been guilty, directly or indirectly, or she would have spoken after that hint. If she would not speak—well, neither could Hamilton. She was a girl. "I have told you all I can," he told Kent decisively. "You may think what you want to."

"But listen, man!" cried Kent, in despair. "This is more than a personal matter. I don't care what your part in it is, if we can only clear Butch. Otherwise the varsity will lose the shot put and the whole meet, most likely, the way things are going."

Hamilton pondered upon this new phase of the matter. If confessing to personal guilt would have cleared Butch, Hamilton would have made the confession for sake of the varsity, but on the spur of the moment Jimmy could concoct no story that would uphold such a confession. "I'm sorry, Kent," he said, in a low voice. "I don't know how you can clear him. Later on, perhaps——"

The referee hurried up to the group. "The Pittsville men are ready for the shot put, Captain Kent," he said, "and it is long past schedule time for starting it. If your men are not on deck in another five minutes, I shall give the Pittsville men their puts unopposed; in other words, a forfeit."

Reduced to these straits, Kent and Dan Coakley went into a moment's private conference, and then Kent ad-

dressed the waiting referee: "Have you any objections, Mr. Kilgannon, to permitting our man Parker to put the shot under protest? Obviously we can't clear him now, since Hamilton refuses to tell what he knows. If later investigation proves the truth of these charges, Parker's put will be thrown out, of course, and we must be content with what our second-string man can do."

"No objection, if you care to take the chance," agreed the referee.

"I should scarcely think it wise, however," spoke up another official, an old Cornwall alumnus, who had made records in his undergraduate days. "With all due respect to Parker, these charges look pretty plausible. There might easily be a mistake in the identity of that autograph."

"No mistake whatever," growled Parker convincingly. "I'd know it anywhere."

Thus Jimmy found himself sinking lower and lower. Before this, he had not realized how deeply his honor was involved. Before, the issue was a personal one between himself and Helen Russell; now the varsity's victory was at stake. Now, if he had been absolutely sure of Miss Russell's guilt, he might have been impelled to speak out against her. But he was neither sure of that, nor sure that she could clear Butch in time for his event. To save the varsity, he must rely upon some other plan.

For both Pop Russell and Morley, who was to double up as third string in both hammer and shot, were hopelessly outclassed by Colson, the Pittsville first string. If Parker were declared ineligible, Colson must win; Pittsville might even sweep the field in the event and win the whole meet on points. Jimmy saw his duty plainly, even though it involved Pop Russell's disillusionment and aroused his just resentment against the man who had let him wear his C under false pretenses. But that was the penalty Jimmy must pay for not acting on the square with Pop.

Jimmy stepped up to Dan Coakley and spoke in a low voice, almost appealingly: "Say, Dan, I'm on the square in all this business, no matter how it looks. I've got a good reason for not telling all I know, but in spite of that I haven't deliberately thrown anything or anybody. Let me go in in place of Morley, will you?"

"You've got a nerve, you big crook!" roared Butch Parker.

However, Kent and the trainer conferred again, and Kent turned to Hamilton. "Got any clothes here? Or spikes?"

Once more Jimmy's hopes were dashed. "No," he said. "I never thought——"

"Then——"

"We can fix him out, I guess," spoke up Captain Murray, of the Pittsville team. "We want to give you men every possible show——"

"You're mighty good, Murray," responded Kent gratefully. "Now get a hustle on you, Hamilton. You'll probably lose a put or two as it is, if they call the shot put right away. But you might possibly come through toward the last to save us one place."

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE WEIGHT.

IT took an appreciable time for Murray to dig up, in the Pittsville quarters, an athletic suit large enough to fit Jimmy Hamilton, but Hamilton eclipsed all records for the quick change and got out to the ring again just as the last contestant had taken his second put. Butch Parker glowered at him and said nothing. Pop Russell nodded coldly, but even this advance was enough to lead Jimmy to speak with him. "How does everything stand, Pop?" he asked.

"Parker, forty-eight four; Colson, forty-six one; I'm at forty-three ten; and the other two Pittsville men just behind me by inches."

Hamilton grimaced and saw his hopes go glimmering. Colson had never put so far in his life. What did a forty-five-foot man mean by coming through with a forty-six-foot put? Jimmy might have given him a close race at his rumored forty-five, but what could he do at forty-six? If only he hadn't held himself in all the spring, to deceive Pop and the varsity, he might have had a chance with Colson, but in the circumstances—— Jimmy writhed with mental anguish.

Parker was lazy. He had set his mark and passed the put. Colson's next put fell short an inch, as did Pop Russell's. Jimmy was called after Pittsville's second-string man. It seemed to him, as he picked up the shot, that never in his life had he been so strong, so sure of himself. He followed the shot through perfectly, heard cries of admiration from the grand stand, fought for his balance as he came back to the ground again, fell across the circle, and fouled miserably. One put gone for nothing; only one put left to beat Colson's forty-six one. If only he had been a little more diligent in the spring's practice! If only he had been able to gauge that distance more exactly, as he would have been had he not been throwing dust into Pop Russell's eyes, Jimmy would have stood a chance—for that fouled put of his had shoved the shot straight into Colson's mark.

As the men began their last puts, Jimmy glanced furtively toward Helen Russell. Did she notice his efforts or not? Was she aware of the straits he was in? Could she realize how desperate he felt, or that she had put him into that position? But to his surprise and chagrin, she was not even noticing him. True, the quarter-milers were off on the other side of the track, and the crowd was on its feet watching this hard-fought race, and since her brother was not putting then, she was excusable for diverting her attention.

Once more Parker passed the put, for he was saving himself for the intercollegiates two weeks later and his mark was not endangered by Colson. Colson was up next, and on his last put added half an inch to his previous mark, so much more for Jimmy to reach. Pop failed to better his put, even though his sister's eyes, as Jimmy now saw, were upon him, even though his sister's hands, alone of all the spectators, were beating a tattoo of encouragement.

The second Pittsville man took his place. But Pop, instead of following Butch Parker off the field, drew Jimmy aside. Pop's face was white and grim; Jimmy knew that trouble was coming. "I know now," said Pop, "that you've been cheating me right along."

"Hardly cheating," said Hamilton nervously. "There's not one of the men in the varsity——"

"We won't discuss it. Helen realizes it, too, and there's nothing on earth that would make her more disgusted than to think you had been so dishonest to yourself, to the varsity, and to me as to give me my letter by trickery. That's what it amounts to."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, but I know her."

"Then you've got another think coming, Pop. She's done everything she could to help you get your C, and——"

"What do you mean, Hamilton?"

"Why, she wrote me a letter and said——"

"She wrote you a letter!" exclaimed Pop.

"Hamilton up!" called the official in charge of the shot put. "Your last put, Hamilton."

Hamilton, glad to get away, started for his shot, but Pop caught his arm and held him back for a second.

"There's only one condition on which I'll forgive you, Hamilton," he whispered, "and that is that you beat Colson; otherwise it's all off. Now go to it."

"But that letter——" cried Jimmy, his mind in a daze.

"She wrote no letter," Pop informed him coldly.

"Hamilton up!" the official prompted him.

Jimmy walked to the circle. Could Pop be right about that letter? If he were—and he talked as if he knew—then where was the outlet to this tangled mess? Had he, Jimmy Hamilton, been fooled like a gullible youth? Was there any way he could get out of this sorry business without leaving himself ashamed to face the Russells, brother and sister; or the varsity; or even his own reflection in the mirror? Where lay the clew that would solve the mystery? Or was there no mystery?

Jimmy's mind was thrashing this over as he skipped across the circle and put a mighty heave behind the weight. With a mind so distrait, so confused, so worried, how could he hope to do anything worth while? He went through the form of putting the shot, and dropped back into the circle by a close margin. But he wasn't conscious of having done more than his usual forty-three; which, of course, would be worth nothing; which would leave him without honor or respect for himself or from his fellows. He had sold the varsity by his own gullibility, betrayed Butch Parker, lost the shot put for the varsity when she had to have those points to win the meet—unless Pop Russell were mistaken when he declared that Helen had written no letter. There was a little hope.

"Forty-six feet two inches!" he heard some one shout in a deep, rolling voice; and before he realized what the announcement meant, Pop Russell was pumping his hand up and down in the giant clasp of both his own. "You've done it, you big kid!" cried Pop, whose usual regard for the defeated Colson's feelings were submerged in his relief and wild enthusiasm.

"What's that?" gasped Hamilton.

"You've beaten Pitt! You're second to Butch! We win even if they do kick him out."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Hamilton, looking down the field to where the shot lay.

Colson came up, and Pop gave way to him, with a smiling apology: "Sorry, Colson, to be so blamed bubbling about it, but——"

"I understand." Colson smiled back. "Congratulations, Hamilton!" he said, shaking Jimmy's hand. "I never thought you could do it."

Before Jimmy could frame a fitting answer, Colson had started toward the clubhouse, following Butch Parker, who had gone as soon as Jimmy's put was announced.

Jimmy turned at once to Pop Russell. "I suppose you are mighty sore with me, Pop," he said apprehensively.

"I shan't say any of the things I was going to say," Pop promised, his face grave once more. "Anybody can see, of course, that you threw my C at me in the try-outs, and any other way it would have been disastrous both for me and for the varsity. But as it is, we're sure of first place whatever happens, and I've shown myself third best man, so I've earned my letter fairly. I understand your motives, so we'll forget it. But—well, there won't be any buts." And again Pop wrung Jimmy's hand.

Still Jimmy was perplexed. "And about that letter which your sister wrote me——"

"She never wrote you any letter, or I'd have known it; and certainly no letter that had anything to do with shot putting."

"But she did, Pop. I've got it in my pocket in the dressing room."

Pop looked at Jimmy doubtfully. "We'll settle it right here and now. You go get the letter and come back here, and we'll ask her and have it settled."

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY POINT COVERED.

POP stepped up to the boarding of the bleachers and chatted with Helen, while Jimmy ran across the turf to return speedily with the letter he had received. Evidently Pop had not mentioned the letter before Jimmy came back, for Miss Russell was notably cool to Jimmy in spite of her formal congratulations. She introduced her escort, a pale-faced, foppish-looking youth named MacArthur, who was a student at Pittsville and looked as if he were better acquainted with cabarets than with athletic meets. He got up very civilly when the introduction was made, offered his seat to Jimmy, and disappeared.

Pop Russell lost no time in mentioning the letter, and immediately Jimmy was thrown into a tremor of apprehension. For it suddenly occurred to him that his was no easy position. No matter what the truth might be, he was forcing the girl into an awkward position. If she had sent him the letter, she would have to confess that fact to Pop now, before him. If she had not sent the letter, then Jimmy would have to confess to her his own gullibility, would have to admit that he thought her potentially guilty of all the unsavory events that came as consequences of that letter.

Helen Russell's frank eyes opened wide with surprise at Pop's first mention of the letter. "May I see it, please?" she asked Jimmy.

Hamilton gave it to her with a hand that trembled in spite of his will. He would scarcely have dared meet her glance if she had looked at him. But as it was, she merely smiled as she opened the sheets, and immediately referred it to Pop. "Is that my writing, Robert?" she asked.

"Of course not. I never saw that writing before. What does it say, anyway?" With Jimmy's faltering permission, they read it together, their faces and half-conscious comments running the gamut from indignation to amusement and back again. It was a trying ordeal for Jimmy.

"So that is why you threw things my way all the spring, from the very start," said Pop—"so no one would suspect how good you really were!"

"Yes," Jimmy said.

"But I can scarcely comprehend," remarked Miss Russell, "how you could believe that I wanted Robert to get his C in that way. I may as well tell you, Mr. Hamilton, when I realized the truth I was—well, to speak quite frankly, utterly disgusted. But of course that was after the affair of Mr. Parker was thrashed out down there."

Jimmy spoke earnestly: "I'm afraid I've not shown much sense, Miss Russell. It never occurred to me what I see now plainly enough—that you wouldn't want that kind of business done at all, and that you wouldn't write to me like that. All I realized was that I was—was tickled to death to hear from you, and—yes, crazy to do anything you wanted me to do; and so I just went ahead and did it without thinking of the unreasonableness of it."

Helen blushed and looked away. Pop scrutinized Jimmy keenly, with a new light of understanding in his eyes. Once started, Jimmy said what he wanted to, regardless of embarrassment or effect upon his hearers, and was glad he dared speak so openly. "You see," he raced on, "the letter said that I should not mention the matter to Pop, which sounded quite reasonable. I never had seen your handwriting, Miss Russell, so how was I to know that it was not yours? Besides, the photograph——"

"What photograph?" she broke in curiously. "I hadn't heard——"

"I was just going to tell you. There was a picture of you inclosed with the letter, and that had your signature on. The two signatures agreed perfectly, and therefore I concluded——"

"Foxy trick that, Helen," declared Pop. "Whoever sent this letter autographed your picture, which would certainly seem genuine, and, since the signatures correspond—well, we can't blame Jimmy overly much, after all."

"But the very idea, Robert! As if I would send my autographed photo to —well, to anybody, after such a short acquaintance."

"But how could I think of that when I was so crazy to help you out, Miss Russell?" asked Jimmy.

"H'm-m!" remarked Helen, looking away.

"But you'll let me keep the picture, won't you?" begged Jimmy. "And really autograph it?"

Helen laughed. "I can't very well take away what you've already got, and I certainly don't want a forged signature going about on my picture."

Pop Russell cut in on Jimmy's delight with a more serious subject. "We're getting away from the main point," he said. "We want to find out who sent the letter in the first place. And what became of your reply?"

"I'm sure I can't see," returned Jimmy, with a puzzled air. "Still—— What is your address?" he asked abruptly.

"No. 46 Elm Street," Pop told him.

"And there you are!" cried Jimmy. "This address, as you will see on the letter, was in Chestnut Street. I remember distinctly writing Miss Helen Russell, Chestnut Street."

"That, then, is where the archplotter lives," said Pop. "Can't you remember the number at all, Jimmy? If you could, we'd haul him over the coals right away."

"I've got it in an address book at home. The street number was on the envelope."

"I'm not so sure that the archplotter does live there," put in Helen thoughtfully. "Perhaps a friend of the archplotter's does—sort of an accessory, whose handwriting and address are not as well known to me as the archplotter's."

"How on earth do you know, Helen?" exclaimed Pop.

"It's too simple," she replied. "I was thinking to whom I had ever given an unautographed photo about that time. There was just one man who received one, a Pittsville man, to whom I had said a lot about having met Mr. Hamilton while I was at Cornwall for junior week, and who spent the summer at some little place in Maine, where he met Mr. Parker. There you have every clew you want."

"MacArthur!" cried Pop. "Ben MacArthur!"

"Who?" asked Jimmy, in astonishment.

"MacArthur, the chap who just left —sort of a second cousin of ours, always hanging round Helen, who fairly despises him."

"For shame, Robert! I didn't say that."

"I know, but it's the truth, just the same. Helen, we've got to hand it to you as a detective. She's covered every point, Jimmy. He's a Pittsville man, and either had a wad bet on his team or wanted them to win just out of natural spirit, though I prefer to think the first reason is better. He was in the Maine woods last summer, and met Butch Parker there, or knew he was there. He came back here, heard from Helen that she knew you, probably guessed from the way Helen talked that she was pretty keen on you——"

"Robert!" cried Helen, flushing crimson.

"Well, anyway, gathered that you

were keen on her, Jimmy, and so fixed up the plant to get Butch Parker kicked out so that Pittsville would win the shot. He probably got a friend of his to write the letter, because it isn't his handwriting, and stuck in the photo to make it seem more plausible to you, without thinking that the matter of the photo would ever crop up."

"And brought me here to-day," broke in Helen indignantly, "just to show me how much he knew about athletics. He was trying to bet all sorts of things with me, and constantly prophesying that neither you nor Parker would win the shot put; so you can imagine, Mr. Hamilton, how I felt when they drew you out into that disgusting fracas about Mr. Parker, right there under our noses."

"Wait until Mr. Ben MacArthur comes back," said Pop grimly. "He'll find something waiting for him."

"He won't be back," was Helen's calm forecast. "And if he does, he won't find a seat waiting for him. That is, if you'll hurry and change into street clothes, Mr. Hamilton, so they won't mob you in the street when you go home with me."

Jimmy, scarcely believing, sought to meet her eyes, but was baffled by a sidelong glance that seemed merely to tease him. "You mean—you are going to let me—I mean—you don't mind——"

"Do you want me to write you another letter about it?" she asked, laughing.

"I shan't be more than four minutes," Hamilton said, and straightway vaulted the railing and loped away toward the clubhouse.

Avoiding the Penalty

MOTHER: "The teacher complains you have not had a correct lesson for a month; why is it?"

Son: "She always kisses me when I get them right."

Too Soon

A COMPANY promoter once built a castle on the summit of a hill. When it was finished he was showing the gray, medieval-looking pile to a friend. "I don't know what to call it," he said. "What name do you suggest?"

"It looks like one of those castles in the Scottish Highlands," replied the friend. "Why not call it something like Dunrobin?"

"Dunrobin? Dunrobin? Yes, that would be a good name," said the company promoter, "but, you see, I have no intention of retiring yet!"

Animals that Live Long

WHALES seem, on the whole, to be particularly gifted with longevity. Those which supply us with whalebone are supposed to live for several centuries.

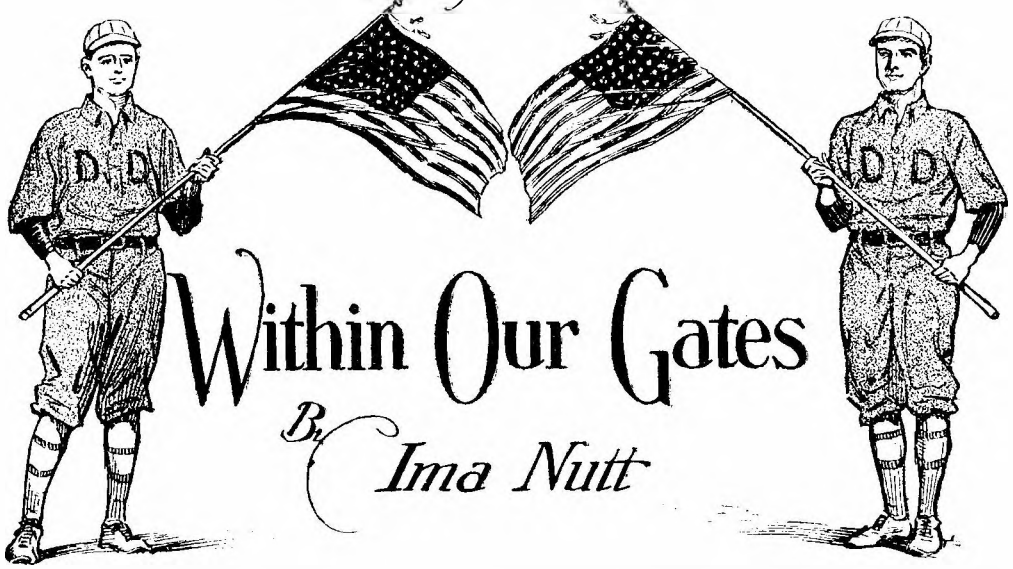
Elephants rank fairly high; in India they often attain the age of one hundred years. A large class, including horses, dogs, lions, tigers, cattle, and swine, have an age limit somewhere between twenty and thirty years. Below that we have domestic sheep, and lower still the smaller animals such as rats and mice.

Fish often attain a great age. For instance, salmon a hundred years, eels between sixty and a hundred, while pike have been known to reach two hundred. Crocodiles and tortoises live even longer.

Birds are not to be outdone. A parrot has died at the age of ninety. Cockatoos frequently live to be a hundred and twenty years old, and ravens over the century.

The domestic goose is a long-lived bird when it is allowed to enjoy its full span of years without being sacrificed for the table; it will often pass forty years of peaceful country life.

Fourth of July at Dawson's Dells.



Within Our Gates

By *Ima Nutt*

JULY FOURTH—warm, sultry. A date of some considerable note in the annals of United States history, and the tenth anniversary of a day which made some stir in the customary placid existence of the residents of Dawson's Dells, as well.

Yes, it was ten years ago to-day that the Downersville baseball team battled with our own picked nine—the Dawson's Dells Dare-devils; some game, some game!

There always had been considerable rivalry between the two towns, each claiming superiority in every issue which arose; every circumstance, condition, and respect. Naturally, then, when the challenge came down for a match game to be played between the two teams on the coming Fourth of July, our leading citizens looked into the matter carefully before accepting, much as a great nation sort of takes inventory of its own resources before knocking a chip, so to speak, off another country's shoulder; and not a bad idea, at that.

So a committee of our leading citizens, with Zeph Hawks, the barber, as spokesman, called upon George Rigdon, captain of the Dawson's Dells Dare-devils, to get a line on how things stood.

"Captain Rigdon," began Zeph Hawks, getting down to cases at once, "can you chaps put the fixin's to them bushers from Downersville, or can't you? We don't want 'em comin' down here an' showin' Dawson's Dells up. How does it look to you, Captain Rigdon?"

George had already thought the proposition over carefully and was ready with his come-back. "If Speck Boner is goin' good that day—say, there'll be nuthin' to it," he said, with the easy confidence of one who speaks out of the corner of his mouth. "Take 'em on, Zeph; an' if you have a few little ol' iron men aroun' loose, why stack 'em all up on the Dare-devils to win."

"You place your sole reliance, then," resumed Zeph, "upon your pitcher, Speck Boner?"

"Ab-solutely."

Well, this sounded pretty good to the committee; still, for the looks of the thing, they wanted to go a little further into the investigation before accepting the challenge from Downersville. So

Seph asked shrewdly: "Now, Captain Rigdon, you say that our pitcher Boner is as good as any playin' the game to-day?"

"Easily that."

"Well, what's he got?"

Remember, this was ten years ago, and just about the time that the spitball was creating some furor in the big leagues. George had just barely heard of it; so now, wishing to put up a front before the committee, he said mysteriously: "For one thing, men, he's got a spitball that is a pippin; say, if his 'spitter' is breakin' right, he'll have 'em breakin' their backs."

"Now, George," broke in one of the committee, "jes' what *is* a spitball, if ye don't mind telling us?"

Captain George Rigdon was stumped, but he never batted an eye. He knew about as much concerning a spitball as a dog knows about his grandmother's great-uncle.

He took the full count, and came back strong. "Huh! You want me to tell you what a spitter is?"

"If ye will, Cap'n Rigdon," replied the committeeman meekly.

"Well, men, a spitball is a sort of straightforward ball, thrown in a sort of underhanded way; get me?"

"Yes—yes."

"As it approaches the batsman—shoulder high—it makes a sudden dart, as if it was about to bite him upon the Adam's apple; instead, however, it makes a sharp break down over the plate, an' at the same instant it emits a hissin' sound, like steam comin' from a roarin' engine."

"No!"

"Fact! This quite naturally confuses the batsman; he steps on his own feet, swings wildly—and fans out."

"And Speck Boner throws this—er—spitball?" Zeph asked eagerly.

"Sure; it's the best thing he does."

"Enough," replied Zeph Hawks. "We'll take on the Downersville 'Nonpareils' this comin' Fourth of July."

II.

THE day of the big game arrived, together with the biggest, noisiest throng that ever gathered in Dawson's Dells. The Nonpareils came headed by a brass band, and accompanied by a vociferous legion of wild-eyed, leather-lunged fanatical fans; betting on the result of the game began at once, and became fast and furious.

The contest was to be played on a fifty-fifty split of the gate receipts; a neat little purse, no matter who won. To accommodate the great crowd that would soon be clamoring for admittance to the ball park, a downtown ticket office was opened, in charge of the editor of the Dawson's Dells *Weekly Clarion*, Mr. Ezra Wagstaff.

To Ezra's ticket window then, along about one o'clock, a brisk, assertive individual made his way. He was tall and slim, almost skinny. His face was long and thin, and he had little, sharp birdlike eyes and a hooked nose. He was a stranger within our gates.

"I want a ticket for to-day's game," he said to Ezra, during a brief lull in the sale; "a seat in one of the boxes will do."

"Very well," replied Ezra; "we sell 'em here."

The stranger drew himself up proudly. "I didn't exactly expect to buy," he said, as though surprised and hurt. Then he added: "Of course you recognize the profesh?"

Well, the stranger looked sort of important, and Ezra didn't want to appear green, so he says: "Oh, certainly; we recognize the profesh." But he didn't have much idea what the stranger was driving at until he went on: "I'm a center fielder. I hate to talk about myself, but I'm about the best center fielder I know of."

"Is that a fact?" queried Ezra, at a loss just what to say.

"Oh, yes indeed."

"What might your name be?"

"Well, it might be Bing Bodie, or Buck Wheat; but it ain't. It's plain Skinner."

"Well, Mr. Plainskinner——"

"*Skinner* is the name."

"Well, Mr. Skinner, where have you been playing?"

"Last season I was down South, in the Watermelon League."

"I see."

"Before that I was up in Alaska, in the Aurora Borealis Association."

"How did you get into Dawson's Dells?"

"I came in on a stock train, and I'm hungry and broke."

He smelled like his first statement was true, and he looked as though his last one was, too. Ezra Wagstaff handed him a free ticket and two bits for a square meal. "I hope you enjoy your day with us, Mr. Skinner," he says, which goes to show that a man may be an editor and still have a heart.

III.

THE game started at two o'clock. Now, as a general thing, a team prefers to go to the field first, reserving the advantage of being the last up to bat; but, for some reason, Captain George Rigdon chose his team to bat first in this match game with Downersville; and the first man up to bat was a Dawson's Dell Dare-devil, important and chesty in a spick-an'-span prune-colored uniform.

He fanned ingloriously, and trailed his big bat back to the bench again. The next man got a single, advanced on a neat sacrifice, stole third, and scored on a wild pitch. Then the visiting pitcher steadied, and fanned the next up, retiring the side.

Speck Boner, our spitball fiend, got away to a bad start. They began hammering him all over the lot, and the riotous rooters from Downersville set up a yell of delight. The Dare-devil fielders chased around the far corners till their tongues hung out. When the side was finally retired, the score was four to one against us.

It went along to the fourth inning with neither side getting another across; then, in the first of the fifth, we got two runs, and it looked as though we had them on the chutes, when bad luck came along. With two out, our center fielder, Jerry Madden, had a little run-in with the umpire. With three balls and one strike on the batter, the Downersville pitcher shot a hot one across that barely cut the outside corner.

"S-strike tuh!" yelled the umps.

Jerry threw down his big war club.

"'Strike!'" he hollered out fiercely; "say, yuh poor, blind fish, did yuh call that a strike?"

"Sure it was a strike," said the umpire.

Then Jerry began to ride him something awful. "Say, where'd they ever get yuh, huh? If yuh go on learnin' for the next ten years like yuh did the last twenty, yuh'd be half-witted by that time—mebbe! D'yuh think I'm goin' to stan' here an'——"

"*No!*" roared his umps; "you're not going to stand there; you're going to take a little walk."

"What d'yuh mean—walk?"

"You're benched; beat it!"

Well, there was nothing to it; old Jerry had to flit. He walked over to the bench, turning to say things to the umpire and looking as haughty as a man in a prune-colored uniform could well look; but it put us in an awful bad hole, we not having an extra man to put in his place. We tried to get the umpire to let Jerry finish it out, but he wouldn't listen. What could we do!

There was a big bunch of money up on the Dare-devils, and, just as we seemed about to pull it down, Jerry put a crimp in things.

Then Ezra Wagstaff thought of a player we could get to fill in—the stranger within our gates named Skinner.

IV.

WELL, to make it short, we got Skinner into a prune uniform, pinned up the slack in the back and seat, and sent him up to bat; but *not* until he'd been paid over six dollars for his afternoon's work. He knew we were up against it; he was a hold-out right, and wouldn't budge an inch until he got his salary right in his mitt.

With two out, then, and a man on second, Skinner went in to bat; and he landed on the second ball pitched for a homer over the left-field fence!

Say, you should have heard the home crowd yell! Skinner was a hero, believe me! Dawson's Dells had fallen for him strong; he could—at that moment—have had anything in town that he wanted. The next man up retired the side, but the score now was five to four, in favor of the Dare-devils of Dawson's Dells.

But the visiting Nonpareils weren't beat yet—not by considerable; they came in determined to sew 'er up; they lit on Speck Boner's offerings, and all but drove him off the mound; only the marvelous work of Skinner in center field saved him. Say, that skinny gent was a wonder; he was here, there, everywhere, pulling down drives, making circus catches that stood the home crowd on their toes. It was great, worth all the six dollars we were paying him—every cent! Each time Skinner came in from the field, he got a hand from the grand stand, and he had to doff his little, dinky prune-colored cap before they'd let up on him.

Well, the last half of the ninth came, and we of Dawson's Dells were happy as larks, and already counting the money we'd pried away from the Downersville betters. The score was still five to four; and though Speck Boner was beginning to wabble badly, we felt that our center-fielder phenom would hold the Nonpareils tight for just that one last attack of theirs.

The first up hit a long fly to center; it was like dropping it in a well. Then the next batter hit a sizzling drive over third base, and drew up on second base before the ball got back in the diamond. Then Speck braced, and fanned a man, making the second out. It was easy money for Dawson's Dells now.

Skinner was playing in rather deep center, for the next batter was something of a fence buster. He fouled off a couple, then landed square on a swift inshoot. Out toward center field, high in the air it soared! The runner on second broke for third and home, but what was the use—the ball was coming down straight into the mitts of the redoubtable Skinner!

Now, I don't know just what particular mental process obsessed this phenom of ours at that moment; perhaps he thought he hadn't fully earned his six bucks, and should throw in a thriller for good measure. Be that as it may, with the ball almost on him, he turned his back, to catch it with his hands behind him!

That stunt has been pulled, I'm told; but Skinner foozled somehow. Instead of striking his waiting glove, the ball hit him on the dome and caromed off toward center-field fence!

Of course, hitting him where it did, the ball didn't hurt Skinner, though it crushed flat the hopes of Dawson's Dells. He started running after the ball; then he stopped and gave a frightened look over his shoulder, as a strange, hoarse, menacing shout rang in his ears. The home crowd, maddened, infuriated, were after him!

V.

SKINNER reached the high fence about six jumps ahead of the mob; he leaped over, with those who thirsted for his blood almost close enough to clutch the slack of his prune-colored pants. On, on he raced for his very life, turning neither to the right nor left, but heading straight for the depot.

The fast mail—which had stopped for orders—was just pulling out. By the time Skinner reached the last coach the train had gained a high speed, but he made a wild, despairing jump, and landed upon the rear platform.

He was saved from the mob—saved by a few scant inches! The maddened throng, baffled and disgruntled at the turn of events, hurled threats and epitaphs after him; but he only laughed back at them mockingly.

"If you ever come back to Dawson's Dells," yelled Zeph Hawks fiercely, "we'll *give you poison!*"

Skinner's voice reached us faintly in reply: "If I ever come back to Dawson's Dells—*I'll take it!*"

July fifth—cloudy, occasional rain; not much doing.

Perfectly Qualified

IT was the final examination of the medical students, and there was much subdued excitement.

"Now, suppose a man came to you, evidently a well-to-do person," the examiner asked one bright young man, "and gave you a long list of symptoms. Say you sounded him, and found absolutely nothing the matter, what would you do?"

The bright young fellow dropped his left eyelid knowingly. "Tell him he was very bad, and send him straight home to bed, and then visit him every day for a month," he replied.

The examiner made a mark on the paper before him. "Passed with honors," he commented. "You're wasting your time here, my boy. Go away, and get your brass plate up as soon as possible!"

Not Too Rapid

MOTHER: "Professor, I know my boy is rather slow, but in the two years that you have had charge of his education he must have developed a tendency in some direction or other. What occupation would you suggest as a possible outlet for his energies, such as they are?"

The Professor: "Well, madam, I think he is admirably fitted for taking moving pictures of a tortoise."

It Worked Both Ways

PERKINS was feeling decidedly queer; he couldn't get on with his work; he couldn't do anything. So he decided to pay a visit to the doctor.

"I don't feel up to the mark at all," he said to the man of medicine. "Can you give me a good tonic?"

With pursed lips the doctor surveyed him for a moment, and, rising from his chair, remarked: "Has it ever occurred to you that there's a great deal in imagination, Mr. Perkins?"

"Certainly, doctor," answered Perkins.

"Then go out of this office and imagine that there's nothing the matter with you. Come back in a week and let me know how you feel."

The patient went, doctored himself, and returned to the physician at the appointed time.

"Ah, ah!" said the doctor. "You are feeling better now, I can see. Didn't I tell you there was a great deal in imagination?"

"That's true," said Perkins. "What is your charge?"

"Five dollars," replied the doctor.

"Well, imagine you've got it!" said Perkins, and he walked out of the door.

Little Stories from Top-Notch Readers

This is the second of these contributions—tales of actual experiences. Others will appear in due course. We shall be glad to receive contributions of this character, but they must be kept within six hundred words if the writers wish to see them in print.

THAT FIRST RIDE

By E. H. Presant, of Triller Avenue, Toronto, Canada

THE eventful day had arrived. For months father had deliberated about buying a car, and finally, influenced by the alluring advertisements and honeyed words of the salesman, and, incidentally, the fact that our neighbor, whom he cordially hated, was the proud possessor of one, he had purchased a flivver. At last our dreams had come true.

Having been initiated into the mysteries of the internal and external workings of this strange creature, via the service car, we felt quite competent to operate our own when the salesman brought it to the farm. After giving us some further advice, which we considered quite unnecessary, considering our experience, he departed. Little did we think how soon we would require his services.

II.

YOU may be sure we did not stand admiring its beauty, but prepared for a trial spin. Unfortunately, we did not consider the fact that the engine might not coincide with our wishes. Having settled mother and father in the back seat, we adjusted the controls, and turned the crank. Nothing happened. We gave it another turn. Still no response. We assumed a knowing look, muttered something about it being cold, and juggled the throttle.

After several more ineffectual attempts, father calmly observed that we had better switch on the electric current. We did so, and the engine immediately started. To cover our chagrin, we started quickly, and narrowly missed taking the gatepost with us. However, we were off at last, and so proceeded to enjoy ourselves.

For a few miles all was delightful, and we were beginning to congratulate ourselves on our good fortune, when suddenly we encountered a herd of cows. Any one who has had the delightful pleasure of meeting these creatures while touring will never forget it. Their one desire seems to be to cross the road just as you approach them. And no efforts on your part will hasten their steps or disturb the even tenor of their ways.

While politely waiting until they should determine which side they preferred, we stalled the engine, and were again experiencing the joys of cranking a new car, when our neighbor rolled by in a cloud of dust, which he generously shared with us. You may be assured that this did not increase our regard for him.

Before proceeding many miles, we had gained considerable experience and missed several heartbeats—having saved several chickens' lives by sundry weird and marvelous turns, incidentally calling forth many protests from the occupants of the back seat. We informed father that he should not expect an experienced chauffeur the first day, and he replied that if we did not soon show signs of improvement, there would be no second day. This seeming lack of confidence caused us great sorrow.

III.

THEN came the crowning misfortune. The engine, which had heretofore been running sweetly, commenced to cough and spit, as if, as father observed, it had the heaves. In spite of our efforts it finally stopped, and no amount of cranking could persuade it to resume its labors. We now appreciated to the full that helpless feeling which one experiences when burdened with an automobile which refuses to move.

As our efforts were fruitless, we hailed a passing motorist, and he obligingly took us to a near-by telephone, whence we sent forth a call for aid. After what seemed an interminable period the service car hove in sight, and was hailed with great delight by all concerned. After examination, it was found that there was a large hole in the gasoline line, and we had been sprinkling the road with this precious fluid all the morning. Of course, we had to be towed home, and naturally we met most of our friends on the way.

Since then we have had many an enjoyable ride, but never can we forget the joys and sorrows of that first one.

Sizing Him Up

TRADE was slack and the day very warm, as a loudly dressed individual stepped into a gentleman's outfitting establishment. The heat of the day and the stuffy atmosphere did not conduce to the amiability of the assistants.

The overdressed one approached the counter, and, in an imperious tone, uttered the one word: 'Neckties."

A tired-looking assistant immediately displayed the latest patterns, but the man, after gazing at them in a supercilious manner, laconically remarked: "More."

The snobbish air displayed nettled the assistant; but, winking at a colleague, he quietly brought forward other ties. "These," he said very politely, "are excellent quality at fifty cents."

"Fifty cents!" the customer snapped haughtily. "Do I look like a man who would wear a fifty-cent tie? Is there anything about me to indicate that?"

"I beg your pardon," meekly interposed the assistant, "the twenty-five cent ties are at the other end of the store."

Not Always

HE: "Have you noticed that long hair makes a man look intellectual?"

She: "Well, I've seen wives pick them off their husbands' coats when it made them look foolish."

Hitting Back

A WELL-KNOWN lawyer, who was cross-examining the wife of a notorious burglar, said: "You are the wife of this man?"

"Yes."

"You knew he was a burglar when you married him?"

"Yes."

"How came you to contract a marriage with such a man?"

"Well," the woman explained, "I was getting old, and I had to choose between him and a lawyer."

Something Better

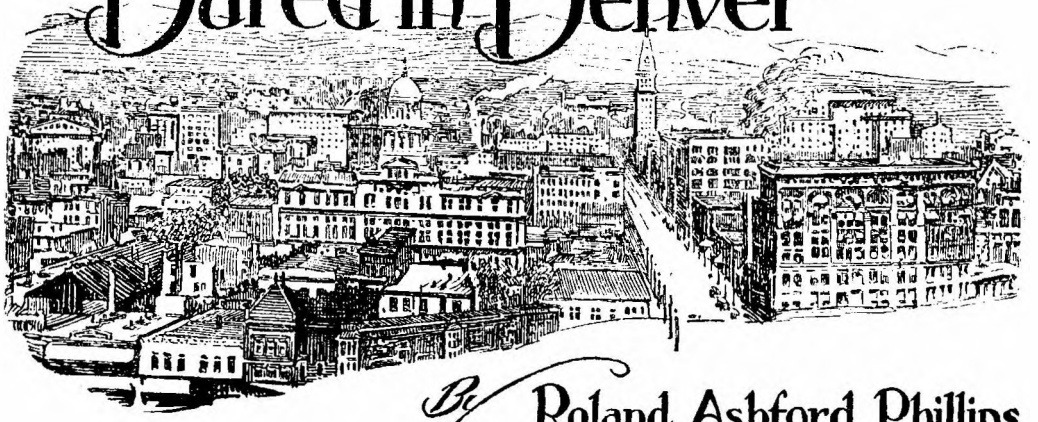
HOW is it that Rufus never takes you to the theater any more?" queried Marian.

"Well, you see," her friend replied, "one evening it rained and so we sat in the parlor."

"Yes?"

"Well, ever since that we—— Oh, I don't know; but don't you think that theaters are an awful bore?"

Dared in Denver



By Roland Ashford Phillips

CHAPTER I.

PROPOSED AND ACCEPTED.

THE adventure began most unexpectedly in the English room of The Club, that haven of exclusive refuge set apart for the men of affairs who, in one way or another, had helped to shape the destinies of the Queen City of the Rockies. At a table in the corner near a low, broad window that overlooked the lights of Glenarm Street and the row of darkened taxis snuggling the curb, four men were gathered. The quartet had attended the first-night performance at Elitch's, and had drifted back to the club for a midnight repast and chat.

Jerome Brandenburg, editor and owner of the *Digest*, was the host. Portly, genial, and apparently careless of his appearance, one looked twice at Brandenburg. If he seemed untidy, it was a careful untidiness. His loosely knotted tie, with its poetically flowing ends, matched his rumpled hair and shirt bosom,

In his own sphere he was a genius. He was a poseur, and clever enough to demand attention and flattery. Privately he was a snob, but withal his snobbishness was intellectual and not based upon any material possessions. Always seeming to make his paper stand for the rights of the people, he was at the same time pulling his own wires. He had no real love for the common herd because he did not respect them. While he believed the people neither capable of self-rule nor worthy of it, yet he held that as no argument why they should not have it. It was their privilege to go to the devil in their own way. A queer combination was Brandenburg.

On the editor's right sat Richard Walton, a quiet-mannered, soft-spoken young man in his middle thirties, who had won a cometlike recognition by his pen, mainly through the creation of one fiction character. To the reading public, the infallible Ryder, gentleman crook, was as likable, his adventures as amazing, and his schemes as daring as any hero of modern-day fiction. Ryder would have been an excellent foil for Sherlock. What a tale to unfold, once remarked an enthusiastic critic, if Conan Doyle and Walton would collaborate!

The third member of the midnight gathering was Talbot Steele, leading man with the aggregation of stars of more or less magnitude that formed the bright constellation at the Elitch Gar-

den Theater. He was considerably older than Walton, but looked younger. Youth, being a most precious asset for a popular leading man, had been carefully preserved and waited upon.

The fourth man at the table was Holbrook Duvell. He was a power in politics, a warm friend and supporter of Brandenburg. The opposition papers called him a dictator, but that was not so. The editor of the *Digest* permitted no one—Duvell least of all—to interfere with his decisions.

"A year ago, gentlemen," Brandenburg began, with his offering of cigars, "I could offer my guests something more satisfying than lemonade or ginger beer, but since the drys have carried our citadel——"

"Thanks to the *Digest!*" Duvell put in quickly.

Brandenburg nodded and smiled. "Quite right. The *Digest* was a factor, I admit. But, as I was saying, since we've surrendered, we must respect the terms of surrender. Order what you will, gentlemen. If it is soft, you'll get it."

A distant-eyed waiter stood respectfully at Brandenburg's right, pad and pencil poised expectantly. "Carl," the editor began, "if it isn't too much trouble, I wish you would bring me——" Brandenburg broke off and looked up with a frown. "Hello! What are you doing here? Where's Carl?"

The head waiter hurried over to the table, profuse in his apologies. He was very sorry, but Carl was ill. He had asked for a month's vacation.

"Ill?" repeated Brandenburg, in a tone that seemed to question the right of any man to be sick. "What's the trouble?"

The head waiter tapped his chest significantly. Brandenburg's brows lifted. "That so? Hump! Then he won't be back at all, eh? Give me his address. I'll look after him."

After the head waiter had departed and the editor had made a memorandum of the address, he turned to his guests. "Carl was a jewel. Knew just what to do and when to do it. A rare accomplishment in any man. He was as much of an artist in his profession as you, Walton, or you, Steele."

"'They also stand who only serve and wait,'" misquoted Steele jocularly. "I suppose when John Barleycorn closed his engagement in Denver, Carl lost heart. After all, a waiter's only a waiter, except when it comes to serving a drink that costs more than a dime."

"I'll miss him," said Brandenburg thoughtfully.

"There's a tip for you, Wally," Steele declared. "A waiter hero! A little out of the ordinary, isn't it?"

"Walton has but one hero," Brandenburg said. "The public wouldn't stand for any other."

"They will some day," remarked Walton. "Ryder will be married—or reform. Then he'll be finished. After that I'm going to write a story that pleases myself, if all the publishers in creation turn it down."

"Hear! Hear!" boomed Steele. "Prettily said, Wally. But how long must we wait? I've always been your best critic, haven't I? And ever since you created that impossible wisenheimer, Ryder, I've flayed you, haven't I? Machine-made trash, that's all. Ground out by the yard and sold for so much a word. Just printer's ink and white paper—and you are prostituting both. And at the price they're selling for these war times, it's criminal extravagance."

"I don't agree with you there," said Duvell. "Give me Ryder and I'll pass up the stuff you call literature."

"That seems to be the trend these days," remarked Brandenburg. "And crooks especially seem to be the favorite type of hero. I'm speaking of fiction, not real life."

"Ah, you said something then!" Steele observed. "Fiction and life—as far apart as the two poles."

"I've often wondered," Duvell spoke up presently, "how an author creates his plot and moves his characters. I suppose you've had that question put to you a hundred times, eh, Walton? Where do you begin, and how?"

"Works it out backward," said Steele, prompt with his information. "That's the way all stories and plays are written. In real life we have the cause, then the effect; but in fiction—and stagecraft, too—the author gets the effect and goes back to find the cause, or manufacture one. It's much simpler. A writer can explain almost anything. Just a matter of cut and fit."

Walton looked up with a smile. "You're fifty per cent correct," he admitted; "but so long as the reading of a story is interesting and its problems logical, why quibble about the mechanics?"

"Huh!" rejoined Steele. "That's a weak-kneed argument. You might as well say, if brass looks like gold and feels like gold, why not accept it as such. And by the bye," he went on, "so long as we're talking shop, what's in the wind? What's to be the next thrilling exploit of the infallible Ryder?"

"I've nothing on my mind as yet," replied Walton.

"You might use a Denver setting," suggested Brandenburg.

"Sure!" cried Steele. "Have Ryder get away with fifty million or so from the mint. That ought to be a simple matter to arrange—on paper."

Before Walton could respond to the good-natured sarcasm, Brandenburg turned in his chair, surveyed the members of a party behind him, and broke into an exclamation: "Hello! There's Simon McMullin! First time I have seen him in the club at this hour in months."

"Which is he?" inquired Walton.

"The old boy with the foliage on his cheeks," answered Duvell.

Walton studied the gray-whiskered, thin-faced old man with deep interest. There was a wealth of character in the beaklike nose, the shaggy brows, and aggressive chin. There was a dominant fighting spirit still in his thick-lidded eyes and in the tight line of his lips.

"I'll bet some one besides himself is paying for the dinner," remarked Duvell. "Old Simon would pay a hundred thousand for a battered bit of bronze or a dingy canvas, but he'd never offer his best friend a nickel cigar."

"Tight, eh?" queried Steele.

"Tight!" Duvell chuckled. "Say, if he owned the ocean he wouldn't give a clam a gargle."

Steele laughed. "He owns about everything worth while in town, doesn't he?"

"Hardly. But he controls every coal field within a two-hundred-mile radius of Denver, and that's the screw that makes it possible for him to enjoy a hobby. Talk about your monopolies! With coal right here in Denver's back yard, McMullin keeps his price a few cents below the Eastern product and rakes in a hundred per cent."

"I gathered that much from reading the *Digest*," said Walton, and smiled at Brandenburg.

But Brandenburg did not seem to hear. He turned slightly in his chair and leaned over the table toward Walton, his eyes sparkling. "Look here, Walton," he began, "I've an idea. Perhaps you don't want one, but I'll give it to you just the same. Steele's inclined to josh you about your marvelous Ryder and his exploits. Ridicules both by maintaining that they could never happen in real life. Perhaps they could not, but why not call his bluff and prove it? Why not pit your hero against a real-life project?"

"What are you after?" asked Steele.

"A story for your Sunday supplement?"

"Yes, and better," rejoined Brandenburg. "Here's the proposition in a nutshell: McMullin's a bug on art. His pride and joy, the *pièce de résistance* of his collection, is a Van Dyck. He paid something over a hundred and fifty thousand for it a few years ago. Built a special gallery off his house to shelter the canvas—a gallery built like a safe-deposit vault. It is his boast that nothing short of dynamite and an army can get away with his treasure. And so far as I'm concerned, he's right. To my way of thinking, a crook could as readily steal one of my presses without my knowledge as steal the Van Dyck. But"—Brandenburg paused impressively—"if the infallible Ryder were on the job, perhaps the canvas would be in danger. Get my drift now, do you?"

Walton nodded.

Steele uttered an exclamation: "Whew! Here's your chance, Wally. Let's see how smart Ryder really is."

Walton drank his coffee and made no reply. The proposition appealed to him more than he cared to admit. He needed a stimulus. Brandenburg had made an alluring suggestion.

Steele flashed an amused glance at the silent author. "A job, eh? You'll find it a task to make your puppet get away with something in a real-life story. You'll have to dispense with coincidences. You'll have to pull off a legitimate job, Wally—a thing that actually could happen, if the tale's to pass muster with us. And we'll be the judges. If you can demonstrate a possible way in which Ryder, or any one else, can lift the Van Dyck, we'll vote you a genius and award you the prize."

"But Walton doesn't even know McMullin," put in Duvell.

"All the better," declared Steele. "That will be following out the usual lines taken by Ryder. He didn't know any of the family in the red-diamond story, yet he got away with the jewel. Of course, in that instance he relied upon coincidence and a lot of other makeshifts to bring about the desired end. Here he'll have to tackle the job without their aid. Can it be done? I say it can't, simply because Wally has facts to deal with instead of fiction."

"When Ryder goes after anything, he usually gets it," remarked Walton quietly.

"Even the McMullin canvas?" inquired Steele.

"Even that," Walton replied.

"You'll have to show us. We're from the State named after a certain big river."

"How does my suggestion appeal to you?" queried Brandenburg, his eyes fastened upon the author.

"The more I consider it, the more it appeals to me," said Walton; "and mainly because, if I succeed, I'll put an end to Steele's crowing."

"Good! Then it's settled?"

"With a little of your help, yes."

"Of what help can I be?" asked Brandenburg.

"You can begin by introducing me to Simon McMullin. After that I'll go my own way."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN CROOK MEETS CROOK.

CURTIS STREET, Denver's Great White Way, with its string of motion-picture palaces and gay restaurants, its curb deeply lined with taxis, and its walks filled with a jostling, noisy, amusement-seeking crowd—and above which a myriad flashing, winking, and varicolored electric signs blazed their messages against the star-studded skies—did, for a space of four blocks, at least, remind one of Gotham's Forty-second Street.

Archibald Skeffingham—born plain

Henry Grant, and known internationally to the police and the underworld as "Dandy" Grant—had seen the lights of Gotham, and, treading Curtis Street, became filled with regret and reminiscences. The pocket edition of the original was not exactly satisfying. Like some actors, Grant considered any place outside of New York, Paris, and London as the rural districts, and only the stern necessities of business could prevail upon him to venture into the Western wilds of the American continent.

Grant's sobriquet had been fairly won and deserved. Always he was smartly dressed. His clothes were the product of the best tailors; more than that, he knew how to wear them. Immaculate in every detail of his appearance, well-mannered, and possessing a fair amount of education, Grant moved among his superiors with an ease and grace that won respect and confidence. He was as shrewd and quick-witted a denizen of the underworld as had ever outwitted the detective bureaus of a score of cities. He was no dealer in petty larceny. Anything less than ten thousand was of little consequence to him. He had never graced a jail for more than a few days at a stretch, lack of conclusive evidence always causing his speedy release.

The reason for that was that Grant invariably picked his victims from that class which, given time to cool down, decides it is better to put up with the loss of valuables than to admit to the world how easily it might be swindled. In that respect Grant demonstrated his shrewdness and a rare insight to the weakness of human nature.

He was catalogued as a suspicious character, and the police made every effort to keep informed of his movements; but, technically speaking, he had no criminal record. Point for point, Grant was the artful gentlemanly crook of fiction brought to real life.

For a very definite purpose, Grant had strolled into a motion-picture theater that night and watched the film unwind. The fact that it was of a "crook" variety and one in which the wrongdoer reformed and married the daughter of the man he had robbed, brought a sneer to Grant's lips. He might have furnished the plots for a dozen scenarios had he been so gifted, but because they were true to life they would no doubt have failed to pass the board of censors.

Later Grant established himself in the lobby of the theater as the audience began to dribble out. He took notice of a dainty gray electric brougham standing at the curb among a score of other cars, and surveyed the inch-high gold monogram on its door with an apparently indifferent glance.

The crowd began to thicken as all the theater exits were thrown open. The lobby resounded with the shuffle of feet and the babel of talk. Suddenly there echoed, shrill above the monotones, a woman's frightened cry. Grant sprang forward in a flash, saw a man wriggling away in the crowd, bore down upon him, caught him by the collar, and jerked him back.

The startled crowd of theatergoers opened a path as Grant returned, dragging the culprit, in whose hand was still clutched a gold mesh bag. A girl, one of a group of three, met Grant with a quick cry.

"This is your property?" Grant asked, holding out the purse.

"Yes, yes; oh, thank you!" the girl said. "That man snatched it from me. I—I tried to stop him, but——" She took the purse from Grant's hand, too excited to say more.

"Luckily you cried out in time," Grant said, and smiled, as the girl looked up at him and the color returned to her cheeks.

"Call the police!" some one shouted.

Grant retained a firm hold on the purse snatcher's collar. "Do you wish

to appear against this man?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"No, no, I'd rather not," she answered, newly frightened at the sight of the gathering crowd of onlookers. "If you will be so kind as to see me to my car——"

Grant elbowed a lane to the curb, indifferent to the remarks and suggestions of the crowd, opened the door of the brougham, and bowed the three passengers in.

"If you will give me your card," the girl spoke up quickly, "I shall see that you are rewarded——"

Grant drew back, his face changing. "I beg your pardon," he said, apparently offended at the request. "I am not seeking reward." And with that he closed the door of the car and watched as it moved away into the street.

Still surrounded by the crowd of curious onlookers, Grant gave his attention to the culprit he had captured. The prisoner was a stoop-shouldered, white-faced, undersized fellow. His hat was gone and he was trembling. His clothes were dirty, his skin begrimed. Grant surveyed him with apparent disgust and seemed loath even to soil his white fingers on the man's greasy collar.

"You're in luck this time, my fine young sneak," he declared. "I ought to hand you over to the police, but there seem to be none around, and as the young lady does not care to appear against you, I suppose you'll have to be released."

"I know who the lady is," a man near by spoke up. "It's Simon McMullin's daughter. He'll prosecute this man if the girl won't."

"I'm not asking for information," Grant replied curtly. "If the young lady desires to avoid unpleasant publicity, that is her affair."

"She ought to be made to appear against him," another bystander declared.

Grant ignored the remark and released his hold upon the prisoner's collar. "Get going, you rascal!" he commanded.

The man darted away without a word or look and was soon lost in the crowd. After wiping his fingers upon an immaculate handkerchief, Grant put a cigar in his mouth, lighted it, and strolled toward Seventeenth Street. At the corner, he turned and walked toward the Welcome Arch that blazed its message to the incoming and outgoing throngs at the graystone railroad station.

The noise of the city was left behind him. Seventeenth Street was dark and melancholy and grew more so as Grant turned off at Market and headed briskly toward the Twenties. Time was when Market Street, especially that district bounded by Nineteenth and Twenty-second Streets, was a zone frequented by the undesirables. Its name and character were bywords throughout the West, for it harked back to the time when Denver was a frontier town, and, strangely enough, it remained unchanged and flourishing until a commission form of government waged a determined and successful campaign and rang down the curtain upon the last scene of Denver as it was in the sixties.

Planted fairly in the midst of the canker was Chinatown—a Chinatown that still exists and is no mean rival for San Francisco's. The joss house and the temple, the gambling houses and the "joints," the shops and the theater still attract the tourists.

It was toward this district that Grant headed unerringly in the dimly lighted street. He paused at an alleyway as running footsteps sounded behind him, and smiled as he recognized the features of the approaching man—his late captive.

"Got away clean, did you, Babe?" he inquired.

"Say, you blamed near choked me, you did," the other growled.

"Lucky for us no gumshoe or bull appeared on the scene," said Grant. "We might have had trouble."

The two men threaded the dark streets and turned in at one of the black, ill-smelling doorways that loomed ominously before them. Once past the hallway, however, a door opened into a large, quaintly furnished room.

A tall, elderly Chinaman, neatly dressed in American clothes, appeared from behind a screen. "Back so soon?" he inquired in perfect English.

"Looks like it, Louie," Grant answered, tossing aside his hat and coat and making himself comfortable on one of the low wicker divans.

"Successful?"

"Certainly," responded Grant.

Babe discarded his "prop" clothes, washed himself, and came back to the room looking fairly respectable and completely transformed. It was doubtful if the young lady from whom he had snatched the purse would have recognized her assailant in his new garb. Some time in the dim past, Babe had been christened by another and more dignified name, but all traces of that formality had disappeared. His associates dubbed him Babe, and that appellation clung to him. Undersized, agile, and cunning, Grant found him to be a most useful accomplice.

Sing Loo, as he preferred to be called—but merely Louie to his companions—looked questioningly at the two men who had entered the room. Sing Loo had won renown—as renown goes in the underworld—as a master smuggler. Opium was his stock in trade. Where and how he procured the drug no one could say for certain, but he always had it on hand at the market price. He confined his operations to the West, with headquarters in San Francisco and Denver. And it was at the Market Street address that Grant and his accomplices had found lodgings.

"What plans were on foot to-night?" Sing Loo asked at length.

Grant chuckled. "We framed up a hero act for Miss McMullin's benefit—and ours as well—and got away with it," he said, and told of the adventure in front of the Curtis Street theater. "I wanted to establish myself in the good graces of Simon McMullin's daughter," he added, "and I believe I've succeeded."

"Why didn't you give the dame your card?" complained Babe. "She asked for it."

"That would have been a tactless thing to do," said Grant; "too crude. We have plenty of time to plot our game, and if we attempt to rush matters we're apt to get in wrong. We're after big stakes and we can't be too careful."

"You don't expect to call upon the lady, do you?" queried Babe, who was still in the dark as to the future of his chief's plan.

"Certainly not. But I shall make it a point to meet her again—quite by accident, of course. I shall be the modest hero, and later I hope to gain an introduction to her father. An introduction will probably mean an invitation to visit the McMullin home, and the invitation will probably include a visit to the gallery. Then I'll consider myself pretty well started. It takes but a small wedge to split a great log. If I'm to lift the Van Dyck, I must first get into the gallery and get the lay of the land. After that is done, I'll be able to work faster and with more assurance."

Babe's eyes sparkled with anticipation and he drew in a quick breath. "A big haul!" he said.

"The only kind worth going after," remarked Grant.

CHAPTER III.

WITH QUICK ACTION.

WHEN Walton announced his intention of accepting Brandenburg's suggestion and expressed a desire to make the acquaintance of Simon McMullin—the man who was to be the prospective victim of Ryder's fictional cleverness—the editor of the *Digest* sat back in his chair with a frown.

"That's not so easy as it sounds," Brandenburg remarked. "Simon and I are not what you would call bosom friends. Perhaps Duvell can be of more assistance to you."

"I can try," said Duvell. "But let me tip you off right now, Walton," he went on: "if you expect to retain the good graces of McMullin, never mention the *Digest*. It would be like waving a red flag in front of an angry bull."

"I'll remember that," Walton promised.

"There's no use in beating about the bush," Duvell went on, after a moment of reflection. "When I ask McMullin over—if he'll come—I'll say you want to see his canvas. The matter will be settled one way or another at the start."

Fifteen minutes later, when the group at the other table showed signs of breaking up, Duvell arose and approached McMullin. Then, with a smile, he escorted the collector over to the expectant trio.

McMullin nodded coolly to Brandenburg, who nodded coolly in return, shook hands with Steele, and looked steadily at Walton.

"I want you to meet a friend of mine—Mr. Richard Walton," Duvell began. "He is a summer sojourner in our city. No doubt you are familiar with Mr. Walton's literary efforts."

McMullin's face brightened perceptibly. "Is this the creator of the famous—or infamous—Ryder?" he asked quickly, extending his hand.

"I must plead guilty to that charge," replied Walton, smiling, as his hand gripped McMullin's.

"I am delighted," the collector said cordially, sinking into a chair that had been placed for him by the suddenly attentive waiter. "Your books have afforded me a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Walton."

"Thank you," Walton responded.

"We have been discussing art and affairs of art," Duvell put in promptly, eager to approach the main subject even at the risk of too much haste. "I've told Mr. Walton of your collection, and he has expressed a desire to view your Van Dyck."

"I shall consider it an honor to grant the request," McMullin said, without hesitation. "Do you know, Mr. Walton," he continued, "I have always nourished two ambitions. I have always wanted to write adventure stories and collect old masters. Of late years I have been able to gratify the latter ambition in a small way, but I have learned that, after all, it is much simpler to fill a gallery than to write."

"I find it quite the opposite," replied Walton. "But I imagine that the possession of a masterpiece would come nearer to gratifying the nobler of the twin ambitions."

McMullin nodded. "Perhaps. Still, possession would be far from gratification unless one had appreciation," he went on slowly. "I feel that, sincere as my appreciation is, and much that it means to be, it falls woefully short. I am not qualified to say that I have more than admiration."

The conversation drifted on and on, McMullin turning the subject into other channels, Walton resolutely bringing it back again and dispensing what little knowledge he had gained through reading and studying of art matters. It was the way in which Ryder would have taken advantage of the situation.

McMullin finally glanced at his watch and arose to his feet. "I must be

going," he said. "I am a poor night owl. Perhaps we shall find a better opportunity in the near future to continue our discussion."

"Mr. Walton will not remain long in the city," Duvell put in hurriedly, for fear the collector had forgotten his promise.

"I am yours to command, Mr. Walton," McMullin said. "If you will set the day and hour——"

"To-morrow afternoon?" Walton asked.

"That will do splendidly. Shall we say three o'clock? I usually golf in the morning."

"Then I may see you on the links," Walton suggested, quick to take advantage of the opening. "That has been my morning's diversion of late."

"Excellent, excellent!" McMullin replied warmly. "I may have the pleasure of winning ten out of eighteen holes from you."

When, a moment later, the collector had departed, Steele chirped up. "That was quick work, Wally," he declared. "You've made a promising start."

"You were fortunate in striking two of McMullin's weak spots," Brandenburg remarked. It was the first time he had spoken since Duvell had brought the art collector to their table. "If you can blurb on art and smash the gutta-percha, you'll get ahead quickly."

"I'm afraid I know more about golf than of art," Walton admitted. "And that's mighty little."

Steele pushed back his chair. "I'm off. It's one o'clock now and I've a rehearsal at ten to-morrow."

"You'll have to hurry to make that Berkeley owl car," said Duvell, with a glance at his watch.

Brandenburg called the waiter and paid his check. When the men moved toward the door, he spoke to Walton. "You must keep me informed of your progress," he said. "I'm interested, you know. And another thing—this affair is strictly between ourselves. If it gets to McMullin's ears——" He broke off with a shrug.

At Sixteenth Street the men parted company, Brandenburg and Duvell turning up to Capitol Hill. Walton decided to walk with Steele to the loop.

It was a still, cloudless night, filled with big stars that seemed so close that one could rake them down like so many silver coins. The soft, pine-tinted air from the mountains came like a tonic.

"Jove!" exclaimed Walton, drawing in a deep breath. "I'll be glad to get into the hills."

"Huh, you're lucky!" growled Steele. "I'm up against a ten-week grind, and from what I've heard regarding our pieces, there's a hundred-side part waiting for me every Monday morning."

Steele swung aboard his car and Walton retraced his steps toward the Brown Palace Hotel at the head of Seventeenth Street. His mind was suddenly filled with the thoughts of the story he had so strangely begun this night. Ryder was off on a new adventure. It was a novel way for Walton to begin a story without a suspicion of how it would end; but he was confident of success. More than that, he wanted to prove to Steele and the other scoffers that he was capable of evolving a plot from real-life fabric, and that, by comparison, Ryder was as human a crook as those who existed outside of book covers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT IDEA.

IN the servants' quarters of The Club, after the grill had closed and the lights were going out, Probert, waiter, hurriedly changed into a business suit, scuttled through the back door, and made his way to the street. Quickening his pace, he bore straight down toward the depot, reached Market Street, turned to his right, and passed through the shadows of the deserted thorough-

fare to the somber hallway above Twentieth Street.

Opening the door, he stood for a moment on the threshold to survey the three men in the richly furnished room. His eyes were glowing; he seemed bursting with important news.

"What's happened to you, Probert?" asked Grant, arousing himself quickly. "Have you seen some one you know? Or have you nibbed a couple of studs?"

"Neither," said Probert. "Something better than that."

"Spring it," urged Babe.

Probert, at present waiter at The Club, but known to the authorities in several large cities as "Doc," professional gem thief, tossed aside his hat and drew up a chair. "I knew I was playin' a hunch when I took up the grub-servin' job," he began excitedly. "I've played it before and always got next to a good thing. There's no place like a swell dump for gettin' an earful."

"Maybe you saw McMullin——" began Babe.

"Oh, I saw the old guy, all right enough," Probert cut in; "but that's of no importance. I tried to get his table, but couldn't land it. I was sore at first. I got a table of four. A newspaper chap was doin' the buyin'—Brandenburg's his name. He had three fellows with him—one of 'em an actor, the other I didn't know, but the fourth was Walton, the writin' chap."

"You mean the fellow who writes the crook stuff?" queried Grant.

"The same." Probert grinned as he surveyed the expectant faces of his companions. "I was sore, as I said, because I had to pass up McMullin's table, and I didn't pay no attention to the small talk goin' on at my station until Brandenburg started talkin' about McMullin's gallery. Then I opened my ears and stuck close. The actor was guyin' Walton and his stories, sayin' they were jokes and never could happen. Brandenburg said somethin' about the Van Dyck and tipped Walton off that it would be a great idea if he'd put Ryder on the job to lift it."

"Who's he?" Babe asked.

"Ryder's the big noise who pulls off all the fancy jobs in Walton's stories," Probert explained condescendingly. "You'd know that if you paid any attention to liter'toor."

"Oh, then he's only in stories?" Babe's interest diminished at once.

"Of course. Why, he'd be the kingpin of us all if he was a livin' bein'. Well, as I was sayin," Probert went on, "when Brandenburg came through with the tip, Walton fell for it right away. Brandenburg said the Van Dyck couldn't be stolen, and Walton came right back by sayin' he'd prove it could. And, more than that, he agreed to do it—in a story."

"What's the idea?" asked Babe. "I don't see how——"

"Nobody expects you to see anythin' unless it's right in front of your nose," scoffed Probert. "You ain't got the brain of a bug. But I guess the chief gets my drift, eh?" And Probert glanced at Grant with a significant smile.

"You mean to say that Walton's to write a story showing how it is possible for his hero to get away with the McMullin canvas?" Grant asked.

"That's it exactly. And he's promised to pull off the job in a perfectly legitimate way."

Grant's eyes gleamed. "Say, this is rich!" he broke out. "Walton's crook hero is a joke, but he's got a head on him for framing up ingenious schemes. I'll give him that much credit. We'll let Walton do the brain work, then we'll follow in Ryder's footprints and cop the prize."

"I figured it just that way," said Probert, "and I knew you'd do the same. You got to hand it to Walton for classy brain work. Why, if he'd join us, there's nothin' we'd balk at

tryin'. I can't just get the slant of a wise guy who'll use all his talents to help a fellow in a story when he could just as well be usin' 'em to pull off real jobs."

"Maybe he doesn't relish the idea of having his photograph hung in the rogues' gallery," Sing Loo volunteered placidly.

Probert shrugged. "I never lost any night's rest worryin' about that."

Grant, having left the divan, began to pace up and down the floor, his receptive mind intent upon the information Probert had divulged, and seeing in it a profitable aid to the furtherance of his own schemes.

"Where is Walton living?" he asked suddenly, turning to face Probert.

"At the Brown."

"Do you suppose he will start work on this story right away?"

"I suppose so. That is," Probert added, "after he has got a slant at the McMullin home and the layout of the gallery."

"That will mean a couple of days at least," Grant said meditatively. "We'll have to get into action before then."

"The quicker the better," agreed Probert.

"This new situation is going to alter our first plans," Grant went on. "I had decided to get in with McMullin through the aid of his daughter. Babe and I laid the foundation for that tonight, but we'll discard it. What I'll have to do now is to get in solid with Walton and keep an eye on the progress of his story."

"It's a bum steer," hazarded Babe. "You can't frame a deal like they do in stories. Things don't work right."

"Trust me to keep my eyes open," returned Grant, unperturbed by the other's remark. "Whether we follow Walton's suggestions depends on how they appeal to me. I may spot a flaw in the story and fight shy. Anyway," he added, "if I succeed in getting in right with Walton, it may lead to an introduction with McMullin. I'm already solid with the daughter. That ought to win me a chance to visit the gallery, and once I get the lay of the land——"

"Walton's to golf with McMullin in the mornin'," said Probert, "and expects to get a look at the Van Dyck in the afternoon."

"Golf!" echoed Grant, then he chuckled. "That's a good tip. I've swung a club myself and posted a good score. Where's the course?"

Probert shook his head. "Don't know. Nothin' was said about it that I heard. Is there more than one in town?"

"Three at least," said Grant.

"McMullin plays at the Country Club," Sing Loo spoke up quietly. "I know that much."

"Good!" Grant said approvingly. "I'll be out there in the morning. First, though, I'll have to change my living quarters. Must have a decent address. Then I'll have to get me an outfit. Babe," he instructed, "you sail out early to-morrow and pick up a bag and some clubs; the hockshops in Larimer Street ought to have a few. I'll take chances. Besides, old clubs will look more appropriate."

"Will you know Walton when you see him?" asked Babe.

"I've seen his photograph often enough."

"Just a minute, Grant!" Sing Loo ventured. "You'll have to get an introduction in order to play. The Country Club is the most exclusive course in the State."

"That so?" Grant frowned and rubbed his chin. "Well, can't you fix it for me?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm not eligible for membership in Denver's 'Thirty-six.'"

"Nor I for New York's 'Four Hundred,'" returned Grant. "Still, I recall the time when I did get in and

——" He stopped, and his frowning countenance cleared. "I have it!" he exclaimed. He took out a wallet and ran through a sheaf of papers, finally holding up a card with a triumphant grin. "There! This ought to pave my way. Here's a membership card I took out in England several years ago for the Holworth Links—quite *the* club, you know—or maybe you don't. It ought to be an 'open sesame' for me in this town."

"In your own name?" queried Probert.

"One of them," replied Grant, smiling. "The membership was taken out by Archibald Skeffingham."

"Red for danger!" Babe said warningly. "The New York headquarters is hep to that name."

"Oh, well, I've got to run the chance. They're not looking for me in this part of the Western desert, for the simple reason they do not think I would find my kind of pickings. I've thrown them off my trail by pulling out for Canada and doubling back by water to Baltimore. This card is my one best bet, and I'll have to play it to win."

"What's the dope for the rest of us?" asked Babe.

"Nothing definite yet," replied Grant. "You'll continue your hasher's job, Probert, and pick up what crumbs you can. Babe, you'll lie low and keep out of mischief. Louie—let's see, I wonder if you would condescend to be my valet for a few days? I'll need a bright assistant, and you'll fill the bill exactly. Agreed?"

Sing Loo inclined his head. "For a few days, yes."

"That's good of you, Louie. I'll be an English tourist with a chink serving man. Not bad, not bad! Now we'll make this address our headquarters. I want each of you to make a point of being here by twelve every night for a conflab. It's long after that hour now," Grant went on, with a glance at his watch, "so I'll turn in. I've a strenuous day ahead of me to-morrow."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE EIGHTEENTH.

IN one respect, the Brown Palace Hotel, built of reddish sandstone on a triangular plot of ground within a square of the capitol terraces, is unique. Its mammoth lobby has no roof save a skylight two hundred feet above the tiled floor; in other words, it extends up twelve floors to the roof, and each floor hall is in reality a balcony overlooking the lobby.

It was designed by a millionaire mining man who cared more for architectural beauty and fresh air than for the number of rooms he could crowd into a floor. So the hotel is actually one huge lobby surrounded by tiers of rooms, each one having windows on the street and a door opening upon the railed balcony. Since the early eighties, the massive, three-sided hostelry has been the gathering place for continental travelers, the home of the mining men, and the center of social life of the Queen City.

When Walton came down into the lobby that morning, after his midnight dinner at The Club, he found himself standing at the desk alongside a well-groomed, smart-looking chap who had just signed the register, and whose luggage, bearing many foreign labels, was guarded by a trim, placid-faced Oriental valet.

The clerk greeted Walton by name, and, with a cheery "Good morning," handed out a batch of mail. The newly arrived guest looked around quickly and took particular note of the pigeonhole wherein the author's mail had reposed.

"Something fairly high up, if you please," he said, in answer to the clerk's polite inquiry. "The eighth floor will do nicely." He aimed to be on the same

floor with Ryder's creator. "Yes, two adjoining rooms," he added, as the clerk looked toward the Celestial.

The clerk passed two keys to an alert bell boy; and the guest, who had signed the register as Archibald Skeffingham and valet, London, departed in the wake of his serving man and luggage.

"A nice specimen of a slacker," commented the clerk, in an undertone, to the telephone operator at his elbow. "And with a chink valet, too. Some dog, eh, what?"

Walton strolled away to the restaurant. He did not look up, save for a passing glance, when, a few minutes later, Skeffingham took an adjoining table. But when Walton had finished his breakfast and was making his way into the lobby, Grant, alias Skeffingham, was at his heels. Both met again at the desk, where Walton inquired of the clerk the proper car to take for the Country Club.

"You'll pardon my interrupting," Grant spoke up quickly, "but I'm bound for the links myself. I've ordered a car to be here at nine-thirty. There'll be room for a second passenger, I'm sure, and if you'll honor me by accepting a lift——" He paused and smiled.

"That's very kind of you," Walton replied, a bit surprised, but none the less pleased. "And if you are sure I shall not be intruding, I'll be most happy to accept the invitation."

Grant beamed and extended his hand. "My name is Skeffingham," he said. "Am I mistaken in believing you to be Richard Walton, the author?"

Walton accepted the outstretched hand. "Discovered!" he acknowledged, with a smile.

"I consider this a pleasure, indeed," Grant said later, when the golf paraphernalia had been deposited in the car and the men were speeding along Broadway. "I cannot begin to tell you how thoroughly I have enjoyed the escapades of that rascal Ryder. He is a genius."

"Thank you," said Walton; then, eager to change the subject, he continued: "You've played at the Country Club before?"

"No; this is my first visit to Denver," Grant answered; "but, like all devotees of the royal and ancient game, I'm willing to stop off anywhere I can find a course. The links at our destination have been highly spoken of, and I am eager to play them."

"I'm inclined the same way," remarked Walton. The topic of conversation remained on golf exclusively—for when two enthusiasts start on that subject, although they may be miles apart in social and business standards, there is always the kindred spirit of sportsmanship.

"I am not acquainted in Denver," Grant admitted presently, "but I have a membership card from my home links—Holworth Club, London—which no doubt will be honored here."

"I do not believe you will experience any difficulty," said Walton. "A card from there should be a sufficient introduction anywhere."

The car turned off Broadway to Logan, then bowled straight ahead through the exclusive residence section of the city to the imposing clubhouse.

Alighting, Walton and his newly found companion parted company; for the caddie master, upon learning Walton's name, informed the author that McMullin was waiting for him.

"Mr. McMullin has been here an hour," he said, "but had an appointment with the professional. You will doubtless find him on the practice tee."

Walton picked out a caddie and walked across the fairway to where McMullin, under the keen eye of a Scotch "pro," was swinging his driver.

"Just in time, Mr. Walton," McMullin greeted cordially. "I've put in sixty

minutes of drill. Now I'm prepared to demonstrate how the game is played."

Walton won the first five holes from his opponent without much effort. McMullin was inclined to get mad at every dubbed stroke of his own. Walton, who was tactful enough to realize how matters stood, and knowing it was policy to keep the collector in good humor, began to waste his own strokes and fall short on his approaches.

At the twelfth hole—a hundred-yard mashie pitch across a water hazard into a bowl green—Walton topped his ball and sent it into the pond. McMullin, taking heart, put his first drive into the green and holed out for a two. Walton evened matters by taking the next three holes. The sixteenth was halved, the seventeenth likewise. As they were preparing to drive off on the eighteenth tee, Grant came up behind them—having skipped three holes to gain that advantage. He spoke to Walton, who introduced him to McMullin.

"How's the score?" Grant inquired.

"This hole will decide the match," said Walton.

"Say, that's interesting. Mind if I play in with you?"

"Not at all. Come ahead."

McMullin lofted a beautiful drive that carried him well beyond the bunker. Walton duplicated the performance. Grant swung with an iron and bested them both. The collector looked at Grant sharply, but withheld comment.

McMullin's brassie put him across the sand trap, but with a slice that caused the ball to roll badly. Walton played his mid-iron, because of a bad lie, and rolled to within five yards of the green. Grant, to the amazement of the others, played his mashie and lofted a ball that dropped within six feet of the pin.

Once more McMullin surveyed the newcomer. "That's playing the game," he said admiringly. "If I could get that distance with a mashie I'd never use any other club."

Grant laughed. "Luck is with me," he said modestly.

On the way to their balls, McMullin asked to see Grant's mashie. He hefted it, swung it a few times, and looked at the face. "Pretty heavy, isn't it?"

"Yes. Sort of a mid-mashie," said Grant.

"Hum-m-m!" rejoined McMullin. "Wonder if I could do anything with it?"

"Go ahead and try," Grant encouraged him eagerly. "It may bring you luck."

McMullin's caddie finally located the ball in the rough, fully seventy yards from the green, between which goal a bunker intervened. In addition to its bad lie, McMullin had to assume an awkward stance in order to address the gutta-percha. Without the usual preliminary "waggling," the collector gripped his club and swung. With a snap, the sphere sailed up and off, cleared the bunker, dropped on the green, and rolled to within a foot of the cup.

"Bully!" shouted Grant.

McMullin beamed. "Where did you purchase this club?" he asked.

"I don't recall now," Grant replied, stumped by the sudden query.

"The head is so rusty it is difficult to make out the name of its forger," the collector remarked, after a critical inspection.

Walton was still one up on his opponent when he took his stance for a short pitch to the green. Lucklessly he played his niblick too hard, and the ball rolled merrily over the green into a trap.

"If you sink your one-foot putt you'll make a par on the hole," he declared, chagrined. "I'll have to drop a twenty-foot putt to even it."

"Unless you're a wizard, it can't be done," cried Grant jubilantly.

McMullin holed out easily. Walton lifted his ball out of the trap and sent it on a dead line for the cup. The sphere rolled to the lip of the cup and stopped.

"Tough luck," exclaimed Grant.

Walton laughed. "Well, it's your game, Mr. McMullin. That mashie shot you made was my undoing. Congratulations!"

McMullin smiled. "Well, better luck next time."

The men walked back to the locker room. Grant kept up a running fire of conversation, but McMullin seemed strangely preoccupied and noncommittal. Walton wondered at it, but did not seek to enlighten himself by asking questions.

When the trio had finished their cleaning-up process and stepped out upon the broad veranda, Grant said: "If you are going into town, Mr. McMullin, I'll be pleased to have you join us."

"Thank you. I cannot accept this time. I have a luncheon engagement with my daughter." McMullin looked around as a trim, gray brougham rolled up the smooth driveway. "Here is her car now."

Miss McMullin sprang lightly from her electric and bounded up the steps to her father's side. She was a slender, wholesome-looking bit of womanhood, with laughing blue eyes and olive skin—a girl of the West, as Walton instantly decided, who loved the out-of-doors, had a level head on her shoulders, and could talk sense.

"Permit me, gentlemen," McMullin spoke up. "My daughter—Mr. Walton, Mr. Skeffingham."

The girl bowed pleasantly to Walton, then started visibly when her eyes met Grant's.

"I believe I have had the honor of meeting Miss McMullin before," Grant said, smiling.

"I wasn't sure—at first," Miss McMullin returned. "How fortunate! Father, this is the gentleman who so kindly assisted me last evening."

McMullin's countenance changed. "This is a remarkable coincidence," he declared warmly. "My daughter told me of the unfortunate affair of last evening, and we both regretted very much that the identity of her rescuer remained undisclosed. Permit me to thank you, Mr. Skeffingham. I shall remember your kindness."

"You must think me ungrateful, I'm sure," the girl spoke up, favoring Grant with a smile. "I hardly know what I did say last night. I know I was terribly fussed and——"

"The honor is mine," Grant interrupted gallantly. "You would not have lacked for knights-errant, I assure you, Miss McMullin. I consider it my very good fortune to have been the one chosen."

Oddly enough—and it brought a quick frown to Grant's countenance, Walton detected—McMullin put an abrupt end to the discussion by looking at his watch, bidding the men a short "Good morning," and escorting his daughter down the steps to the waiting car. There was a sudden coolness in his behavior that seemed to perturb the girl, as well as the men left on the veranda; but, as if to make amends, she smiled back as the electric purred away. McMullin neither smiled nor looked back.

Grant, staring after them, broke into a laugh. "It looks very much as if the old gentleman was afraid we had designs upon his daughter," he remarked. "Well, I hardly blame him, do you? Miss McMullin is a prize worth guarding."

Walton agreed with him, but remained deep in thought all the way back to the hotel. There was an intangible something afoot, he decided; a something that needed explaining. But whether it had to do with himself or

the affable stranger he had met that morning, or neither, was a mystery yet to be solved.

CHAPTER VI.

A TASK COLOSSAL.

THE two hours that elapsed between his return to the hotel and the appointment with McMullin at the latter's home dragged interminably for Walton. The author had declined Grant's cordial invitation to luncheon, principally because he wished to be alone. After attending to some necessary correspondence and glancing over the early edition of the *Post* to review F. W. W.'s criticism of the opening of the season at the Elitch Garden Theater, Walton strolled from the hostelry to join the promenade of noonday shoppers in Sixteenth Street.

His mind was preoccupied, yet he was not oblivious of the many types and scenes that passed before him. The traffic officers at the street intersections, with their broad-brimmed slouch hats and canes, interested him, as did the clean-cut, smartly dressed pedestrians. The very noticeable preponderance of electric-driven vehicles handled by the fairer sex sent his thoughts back to the vision of his morning's experience. Miss McMullin's radiant charm had made a lasting impression upon Walton's hitherto unsusceptible mind.

A display of books in Kendrick's window suddenly recalled a most essential matter. Entering the store, Walton purchased several volumes, among them being a critical study of Van Dyck, "Famous Canvases," and "Mornings with Old Masters." The perusal of the printed pages was to furnish him with substance for a conversation with McMullin. He felt rather ashamed at the thought of how little he knew regarding affairs of art.

Leaving the store, Walton stopped a moment to exchange greetings with Judge Ben Lindsey, that indomitable little fighter whose juvenile-court ethics had made him a national figure. The judge invited Walton to visit the court, and the author was prompt to accept

Passing the Tabor Grand, Walton was brought up with a shock as a well-directed snowball struck him and sent his hat spinning to the sidewalk. A chorus of shouts greeted the performance. Regaining his headgear and looking around with a chagrined smile, Walton beheld a large truck passing along the street, piled high with a cargo of snow, and from which a group of laughing youngsters were bombarding the startled passers-by. A large banner on the truck proclaimed the fact that daily excursions were being run from the city to the snow line. The catch phrase was: "From Summer Flowers to Eternal Snow in Two Hours." The railroad company had a publicity man who delivered the goods.

In company with his books, Walton partook of a solitary luncheon in the lofty tea room of the smart department store on Lawrence Street, afterward ascending the tower to gaze upon the smiling city spread upon the emerald, lake-bejeweled slopes of the mighty Rockies.

Near by, where the soft-rounded foothills began at Golden, Lookout Mountain loomed up, a green-clad guardian, smiling down upon the rolling plains. There, Walton recalled, was to be Buffalo Bill's eloquent mausoleum, erected by a loving and reverent West.

Far to the south, and dwarfed in the distance, Pikes Peak was a mere white splotch. Walton's enchanted gaze shifted to where the nearer, snow-crowned summit of Mount Evans, cameo cut against the flawless sapphire sky, reared majestically aloft. In the shadow of that sublime monument his cabin stood, ready and waiting for him.

The sight thrilled him. The moun-

tains were calling; their pine-studded slopes inspired him. For a moment he regretted the new task he had undertaken and longed to seek the comfort of the hills and rest among their eternal silences. The hammering of fiction seemed puny, insignificant, and wasteful.

The striking of the great clock above him brought Walton down to earth again, figuratively and literally. Two-thirty! When the cage dropped him to the street level, he squared his shoulders and walked briskly toward Broadway, stopping at his hotel only long enough to leave his books.

At Colfax, on a triangular spot once occupied by a fire house, he paused to look at McMonnie's famous Pioneer Monument. It looked different from the pictures he had seen, then he remembered and smiled. The Indian figures in bronze, which once served as a base for the heroic pioneer statue, had been removed. At the unveiling, a storm of protest and criticism had been aroused. The pioneers themselves, having conceived the idea and paid for the monument, indignantly refused to have it "sullied" by the "pesky varmints," as they had occasion to know the redskin. In the eyes of the hardy pioneers who had blazed the Western trail, there was no halo surrounding the Indian—nothing but hatred and distrust. To a man they agreed, with Kit Carson, that the only good Indian was a dead one. So the noble First Americans, as a subject for immortality, were strictly tabooed.

Striking diagonally through the greensward terraces, under the shadow of the gold-crested capitol dome, where the myriad fountains were building rainbows in their spray, Walton reached Logan Street. There the palatial McMullin home became at once the center of absorbing interest for the author.

To gain a better impression of it, Walton walked slowly around the square, fixing the whole with a careful and appraising eye. The house and grounds occupied half the block. The gallery, built off the main edifice, was a low, unwindowed, marble structure, simple, massive, and unadorned as a mausoleum. Walton noted the narrow, heavily barred skylights in the roof and frowned. Here, indeed, was a task for Ryder—and a task worthy of him as well.

McMullin greeted his visitor on the wide, vine-sheltered veranda that served as an open-air living room. The first thing that Walton saw upon the reed table was the book the collector had been reading. That it was a volume of Walton's own writing brought a smile to his lips.

McMullen returned the smile with an understanding nod. "If you receive any more pleasure from the writing of these tales than I do from their reading," he said, his eyes twinkling, "I envy you, Mr. Walton. Popular fiction has its scoffers, of course. Yet I believe all the world loves to follow the adventures of an ingenious crook. In that respect, fiction is not true to life. But in spite of ourselves—perhaps because it is so foreign to our own existence, or because it is human nature to have sympathy for the one man pitted against overwhelming odds—we love a genial lawbreaker. We have Robin Hood, who plunders an abbot to feed a beggar; or an Alfred Jingle; a Scapin—or Ryder," he added, "to cite a modern example."

"I'm afraid you are placing my humble character in too high a sphere," Walton said. "I have made Ryder as likable as I dared, but he has yet to return good for evil."

"Ah, but Ryder is young yet; perhaps later he may reform."

"Perhaps," said Walton, and turned the subject of conversation into a different channel. "I did not suspect until last night that such a masterpiece as

you possess was anywhere outside of a world gallery."

"My purchases are known to few," McMullin replied quietly. "My meager collection was not brought together for the sake of publicity. The unthinking call it my hobby," he added bitterly, "and I have made no effort to change their belief. Why should I? That I paid a large sum for a Van Dyck might mean a good story for a Sunday supplement, but it serves no purpose save to enrage those who think in terms of dollars. They can never understand."

McMullin got to his feet. "Come, let us go inside. I'm afraid I am boring you, Mr. Walton."

Walton permitted his host to lead the way, at the same time covertly glancing about in hope of glimpsing, through some open doorway, the sight of a particular feminine member of the household, but in that quest he was unrewarded.

McMullin presently drew aside a portière at the end of a long hall and stepped aside to permit his guest to enter the gallery.

Walton stepped in eagerly and looked about him. The walls, draped with neutral hangings, served as a background for the scattered canvases. His alert eyes swept instantly toward the curtain-sheltered frame that occupied the far end of the gallery. McMullin stepped across the deep-carpeted floor, pulled the silk-tasseled cord, and, with the coming on of the concealed lights, disclosed his masterpiece.

Walton's breath quickened instinctively. The glory wrought by the brush of the dead master gripped him like a vise. He sank down upon the low divan beside his host and looked with rapturous, appreciative eyes upon the work of the great artist.

The canvas measured about six by eight feet, incased in a massive old-gold frame, and that in turn draped by blue-gray curtains. The subject—Charles the First, that unfortunate sovereign of Whitehall—was pictured, not as the monarch already succumbing under the weight of bad fortune, but as an elegant and accomplished cavalier, booted and spurred, carrying a gun and accompanied by his horse and hunting dog.

Van Dyck, court painter to the royal family, having rendered upon immense official canvases the pomp of royal majesty, seemed to have taken pleasure in finding the familiar, everyday attitude —the true portrayal of a gentleman surprised in the surrendering of himself to his chosen pastime.

"There are at least a dozen portraits of Charles the First scattered throughout the European museums," McMullin was saying; "all of them priceless, so to speak. Whether or not this is the canvas the Comtesse du Barry bought from De Guiche's collection I cannot say. Historians and authorities differ; but I am satisfied."

Walton stepped nearer to feast his eyes upon the crackled paint that still retained such marvelous values—the sheen of the silken jacket; the purity of the exquisite flesh tones; the mellow blending of the distant sea that formed the background.

Presently Walton's gaze shifted elsewhere. As a self-cast Ryder, he began to sense the material part of the scheme that was slowly taking root in his mind. He saw nothing that gave encouragement or opened a possible avenue by which the priceless canvas might be removed from its appointed resting place. The massive walls of the gallery, the solid concrete floor with its heavy rugs, the narrow, barred skylight that would not have permitted the entrance of a child, all combined to give Walton the sense of feeling, as Brandenburg had aptly expressed it, that the Van Dyck masterpiece was immured in a safe-deposit vault.

Finally Walton's roving eyes alighted upon a low, draped foundation that

stood at one side of the gallery. "What is that for?" he asked.

"My latest prize," McMullin explained—"a small bronze group. I purchased it this spring in Italy. I learned yesterday that it passed through the New York customhouse at last, after considerable dickering on the part of the appraisers, and was shipped to Denver. I expect it any day now."

"What is the subject?"

"I call it 'Nymphs At Play.' Strangely enough, neither the sculptor nor the title of the bronze can be discovered, but it is a masterpiece. It was found in the ruins of a temple near Rome."

"I shall be most eager to see it," said Walton. Once more his gaze traveled around the walls of the gallery. Perhaps McMullin, who was watching his guest with a great deal of interest, divined the author's thoughts, for he spoke.

"My treasures are well protected," he said. "I have looked to that most carefully. And perhaps you had something to do with my elaborate preparations, Mr. Walton," he added smilingly.

Walton turned quickly. "I?" he echoed. "In what way?"

"There was a time when I felt that all my treasures were secure," the collector replied, smiling a bit at the other's mystified countenance, "but since reading of the ingenious methods concocted by your hero, I began to have misgivings. If a fiction crook might accomplish these miracles, why not a flesh-and-blood one, thought I. Perhaps it does sound absurd and childish to entertain such fears, but when your whole heart is wrapped up in the ownership of a precious canvas, the thought that it might be taken from you is disturbing.

"I built my gallery, and built it upon a rock," McMullin went on. "It is as secure as a modern-day safe. It is wired with alarms that automatically set when the door is closed. Come with me."

Walton, interested, followed the collector outside the gallery into the connecting hall. As they stood there, McMullin must have touched a spring or a button—Walton was not quick enough to see where or how—and across the narrow, vaultlike opening back of the portières a great, sliding steel door closed—a door as massive and invulnerable as the one guarding the entrance to a subtreasury.

"It cannot be opened save by a combination known only to myself," McMullin announced proudly. "Moreover, that combination is changed weekly."

"But in case of your sudden death ——" began Walton.

"In that emergency my lawyers will know how to proceed," the collector said. "Also," he added, "the gallery and its contents are to become the property of the city."

Walton shook his head in deep and sincere admiration. "Apparently nothing short of nitro could force an entrance here."

"It might even balk a man of Ryder's ingenuity," observed McMullin, with a sharp glance at the fiction hero's creator.

"It would seem that way," Walton remarked, and he meant what he said. He was up against a tough proposition, yet the difficulties involved made the success of the venture all the more attractive. As in real life, unless a storybook hero surmounts the impossible to attain his ultimate desires, there is very little interest or glory attached to the quest.

CHAPTER VII.

STEPPING-STONES.

THE men went out upon the veranda again. A tall, placid-faced butler busied himself with the trays and humidor. After Walton had accepted and lighted a cigar, he eyed the butler re-

flectively. "I imagine," he began, "that you must have implicit trust in your servants, Mr. McMullin."

"I have—in Simpson," the collector replied, with a nod toward the butler, who at that moment was at the far end of the veranda. "He has been with me for twenty years. He is a bodyguard and a companion, well educated and accomplished. I pay him highly. I believe he would lay down his life for me rather than betray my confidence in any matter, however small."

"Outside of fiction, I did not think that a man of his type existed," Walton said.

"Outside of fiction," repeated McMullin, "I do not believe his equal is to be found."

The two smoked in silence for a time, each intent upon his own thoughts.

At length McMullin spoke, and in speaking proclaimed to Walton what undoubtedly had been the trend of his reflections: "The gentleman you introduced to me this morning—Skeffingham, I believe was the name—how long have you known him?"

Walton related the circumstances of their meeting.

"I'm glad to hear that," McMullin said. "While he appears to be a gentleman in every respect, and I owe him a great deal for the assistance he gave my daughter last evening, yet there is one point that must be cleared up before I invite him to my home. I might never have been confronted with this matter if Skeffingham had not made his excellent mashie shot on the eighteenth hole this morning."

"It was a beautiful approach," Walton remarked, interested but not seeking to be too inquisitive. "And you duplicated the performance," he added, with a smile at the collector.

"It was not at all surprising that I did so," McMullin returned quietly. "I have made the same approaches before, in the same way and with the same club."

Walton looked up in frank amazement. "I don't quite understand," he began. "The same club!"

"Yes; I identified the mid-mashie the moment Skeffingham handed it to me. My initials are stamped on the head."

Walton was more interested than ever now, and looked to his companion for an explanation.

"My bag and clubs were stolen from the locker room last month," McMullin continued. "We were never able to find trace of the thief. I prized that mid-mashie highly and was unable to find a duplicate with the same feel."

"Why didn't you confront Skeffingham with the facts?" asked Walton. "The initials on the head of the mashie would have proved your claim."

"I thought him a friend of yours and did not wish to make a scene," McMullin answered.

Walton's mind worked rapidly. "Skeffingham is undoubtedly a stranger here. He registered at the Brown this morning; but he was in town last night, that's certain. He must have changed his lodgings between midnight and eight o'clock this morning, and had an object in doing so."

McMullin nodded. He might have had his own solution to the problem, but seemed content to allow Walton to construct a theory.

"Either Skeffingham is the man who stole your clubs, which isn't at all likely," the author went on meditatively, "or he got them from some one who did, which is nearer the truth. And here is another possibility—he might have picked them up at a pawnshop."

"It does not seem likely, judging from his appearance, that a question of a few dollars' saving would lead him to tour the pawnshops," the collector observed dubiously.

"But he may have wanted used

clubs," persisted Walton, quick to find a motive that would uphold his theory. "Perhaps I am a trifle hasty in my conclusions," he added, noting the frown on the other's countenance, "but ferreting out motives has been my stock in trade—a necessity in the pursuit of my work.

"For instance," the author continued, "with what I have to work upon, my development runs thus: Skeffingham changed his address for a purpose. His desire to play golf was sudden. He preferred old clubs, not because they were cheaper, but because they lent him the appearance of being a constant devotee of the game. There are some people who rarely think of hockshops, because such establishments seldom figure in their lives. If we decide that Skeffingham purchased the clubs at such a place, then we are privileged in thinking he has had dealings at the sign of the three balls; possibly an association with the class who frequent those shops, not alone to pawn their own valuables, but the valuables of others."

"I must give you credit for a vivid imagination, Mr. Walton," the collector asserted, smiling and apparently unimpressed.

Walton did not seem to hear. He had become so completely absorbed in the handling of the new and interesting material, weaving in his own deductions and conjectures, that he was oblivious of all else.

"Why did Skeffingham skip three holes this morning in order to catch up with us?" he went on. "I wondered at that myself. Now I can supply a possible motive. The answer is the same as to the question of why he chose to play at the Country Club in preference to the other links—to gain an introduction to you, Mr. McMullin."

McMullin frowned again. "But these preparations, if you would call them such, seem most elaborate and unnecessary. He might have gained an introduction to me in a far simpler manner."

"Simpler, yes, but not nearly so effective," argued Walton. He would have continued with his surmises, for he felt full of the subject and the possible avenues it opened, but the sudden arrival of Miss McMullin upon the scene precipitated a change of thought. In the girl's presence, Walton found too much charm and interest to share one iota of it on mere workaday material.

It was after five o'clock when he left the house. He was prompt to accept McMullin's cordial invitation to call again—ostensibly to view the collector's bronze, but in reality to enjoy the companionship of Miss McMullin.

Walking back to the hotel through the capitol grounds, Walton's mind resembled a scrapbook, wherein situations, episodes, bits of dialogue, a wealth of incident, and even appropriate chapter captions were jumbled indiscriminately. Properly selected and assembled, this material was to become the framework of the new Ryder story. A plot, almost complete in detail, had flashed to him, born of a chance remark passed by the owner of the Van Dyck. The purloining of the master canvas was to be accomplished by a simple and ingenious plan quite befitting the talents of the infallible Ryder.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MANUSCRIPT READER.

IMMEDIATELY after dinner that evening, Walton went up to his room on the eighth floor, planted himself at his typewriter, and began the first rough draft of his proposed story. He wanted to get his characters in mind and start the interest moving.

As a rule, Walton seldom outlined a complete scenario. He found it impossible to visualize a story in its entirety. It was his custom to keep the "big" situation in mind and build up to

it. Starting with a few essential characters, he brought in others as they were needed or as they suggested themselves. Ofttimes the writing of a tenth chapter compelled the rewriting of the first, in order to establish some fact or plant a suspicion of a thing to come. New characters, unexpected situations, and novel twists usually kept his narrative moving along at top speed and fever heat.

During the evening he made a rough sketch of that portion of the McMullin home he had been privileged to view, and a more elaborate plan of the gallery, marking the location of the Van Dyck and the other lesser canvases so far as he remembered. About midnight he considered his three-hour task a good beginning and went down into the lobby.

Grant, lounging in an easy-chair, greeted him cordially. "Working, eh?" he said. "I heard the rattle of your fiction factory as I passed the door. I suppose the marvelous Ryder is planning another coup."

"It begins to look that way," Walton admitted.

Grant eyed the author with an admiring glance. "How you can think up these adventures is beyond me. Don't you ever run out of ideas?"

Walton admitted that he did—often. "Otherwise," he added, "the fiction market would be overloaded. I'm speaking of authors in general, of course."

"Every man to his line, I suppose," Grant said.

"What is your line?" Walton inquired bluntly, eager to get the other talking of himself.

"Mining," Grant lied readily. He had selected his presumed profession beforehand, and one that would seem to account most naturally for his appearance in Denver. "Came out here to look over the ground," he added.

"Any prospects?"

Grant smiled at his reply. "Yes, one very attractive prospect. If it pans out as well as I hope, I'll feel that my time hasn't been wasted."

"What section of the State?" Walton persisted. He was determined to get all the information attainable, even at the risk of being thought inquisitive.

"Not a thousand miles from Denver," Grant replied.

"Looks good, does it?"

"Couldn't look better—from surface indications."

"The resources of this State are boundless," Walton said. "There are millions yet to be unearthed. I suppose gold is what you are after?"

"That is the ultimate end, yes," Grant admitted. "But I hope to uncover a big coal field to bring about that return." Coal flashed into his mind almost subconsciously, possibly because at that moment his thoughts were of the Van Dyck owner.

"That so?" Walton was plainly surprised and made no effort to disguise the fact. "Well, you'll have McMullin to buck if you do. I understand he owns or controls all the black-diamond territory in the State."

Grant studied the end of his cigar. "Yes, I suppose I will get in bad with McMullin," he said at length. "Still, I'm not worried. Business is business. McMullin seems to have the coal proposition sewed up here at present—a coal-blood monopoly, if you'll excuse the pun—if one is to believe half what he reads in the *Digest*."

"If you expect to buck McMullin," ventured Walton, "you'll find a stanch supporter in Brandenburg."

"I've an inkling," said Grant, squinting through the smoke of his cigar, "that if my project goes through it will cause McMullin some uneasy nights. Too bad," he went on, smiling. "I'd like to play him a few rounds at golf before we dig up the hatchet."

"The next time I play him," Walton

put in quickly, "I hope you do not furnish him with a club to trim me. Your mashie did the trick this morning."

"It did look that way," Grant agreed. "And yet"—he looked up at Walton with an indulgent smile—"are you quite sure you played your best all the time this morning? No offense, I assure you," he hastened to add, "but it seemed to me that a good player like yourself should not have dubbed strokes at critical moments."

Surprised, yet too tactful to betray the fact, Walton was on the point of making a reply when a boy passed, calling his name. After being signaled, the page informed the author that he was wanted on the phone.

Walton slipped into the booth to learn from the operator at the Albany Hotel that a Mr. Steele wished Mr. Walton to join him in the grill on the Stout Street side immediately.

"Going out?" queried Grant, as Walton left the booth and passed him.

"Yes; a little party at the Albany. I'll see you later."

Grant waved his hand. "Have a good time," he called out.

When Walton had departed, Grant tossed aside his cigar and walked over to the news stand, bought a magazine, and idly cast his eyes aloft. On the eighth-floor balcony, Sing Loo, peering over the rail, caught the prearranged signal, took a look about the hall to assure himself that he was not observed, and boldly entered Walton's room with the aid of a key he had made that afternoon from the impression of a pass-key lent him by the maid, to whom he had represented that his master was out and had the key with him.

Grant strolled to the desk, inquired for his mail, and, finding none, walked on toward the elevators. "Now I'm a coal magnate," he mused, smiling at the thought. "Not a bad idea, if I don't have to carry it too far," he decided mentally.

A few minutes later he was upstairs in his room, his eager eyes skimming the sheaf of typewritten pages that Sing Loo had procured for him. The bare outline of the story, as Walton had sketched it, was enough to bring a sharp exclamation tumbling from Grant's lips.

"Great guns! What an idea! Almost too simple to be true!" he went on, addressing Sing Loo. "Well, we'll mighty soon verify certain points, and if they are O. K., the job's as good as done."

Grant studied the rough diagram of the McMullin home and gallery and nodded approvingly, then he bundled the loose sheets of manuscript together and passed them over to his companion. "Better take these back now, Louie," he said. "Walton's had time to discover that his phone call was a bluff, and he'll be hurrying back."

When Sing Loo had departed noiselessly, Grant poured himself a drink, lifted the glass, and offered a toast. "Here's to you, Walton," he said mockingly. "You've at last written something worth while." After he had tossed off the potion, he added: "I'll wager I get more out of the story than you do—a whole lot more."

CHAPTER IX.

PLEASING PROSPECTS.

ALL unawares, Grant, alias Skeffingham, by his conversation and the selection of a profession, let himself in for more than he banked upon. The lobby of a principal hotel, filled with its usual gathering of open-eared, vacant-minded chair warmers, is a bad place wherein to start a rumor, especially if that rumor should happen to touch upon a topic sensitive to matters of public interest.

In the present instance, however, the hint of Skeffingham's self-imposed purpose in the city did not fall upon the

ears of a garden-variety chair warmer. Far from it.

Eddie Elsner was an alert and keen-witted young man, who possessed an overabundance of inquisitiveness, a necessary amount of egotism, and a fair sprinkling of discretion. Until twenty-four hours previously, he had been a zealous and ambitious reporter on the staff of the *Digest*. He loved his work and hoped to get far enough up the ladder to be a special and sign his stories. But a misunderstanding intervened, and a few hot words passed between himself and the city editor, with the result that Elsner paid a hurried visit to the cashier, received the ten dollars due him, and temporarily marched out of the portals of the "fourth estate."

Sitting back in his chair that night in the Brown, berating his ill luck, and wondering how far twelve dollars and thirty-seven cents would last him if he did not get another job, his brain wandering ceased abruptly at a certain point in the conversation that ensued behind him.

Coal! McMullin! A prospective rival in the field! Elsner heard and stiffened in his chair. No one who had ever served the interests of the *Digest* could be deaf to those significant phrases.

Elsner got to his feet and sidled up to the clerk on duty at the desk. "Charley," he inquired, "who are the two chaps yonder?"

The clerk's eye followed in the direction of Elsner's cautious nod. "That's the author, Walton, just making for the phone," he said. "The other chap is Skeffingham. He registered this morning."

"What can you tell me about him?"

"Nothing, except that he seems to have money, sports a chink valet, and registers from London."

"London, eh? Know anything about his business in town?"

"Nope. But I'll try to find out if you're interested," the clerk volunteered.

"Don't do it," Elsner remarked. "Leave that to me. And, Charley," he added, "he's mine. Understand? Keep the other boys off."

"I get you, Eddie. But I thought you were out of the game? You told me so an hour ago."

"Oh, I'm in again. You can't keep a good man out."

Elsner remained in the lobby until Grant had called for his mail at the desk and passed on to the elevator; then, content to let matters rest for a while, he bade the clerk good night and sauntered out of the hotel. Things were looking decidedly brighter—so much so, in fact, that Elsner whistled merrily as he walked toward the bright lights of Curtis Street.

CHAPTER X.

BOUND TO SHARE.

IN the sanctum of his private office, next morning, Brandenburg, editor owner of the *Digest*, yellow journalist, and self-elected champion of the common people, looked over critically the copies of the morning papers. He found little of interest to engage his attention, save a small item tucked away on an inner page of the *News*. Its caption read: "McMullin Purchases Rare Bronze." Underneath followed a brief announcement that the collector had paid twenty thousand dollars for a bronze group by an unknown artist; that the masterpiece was on the way to Denver and would soon be added to the other gems in the McMullin gallery.

Brandenburg read and sneered; then he smiled. Here was a chance for another assault upon his enemy. He seldom neglected an opportunity to roast McMullin, especially when the subject of art was concerned. When the Van Dyck had come into McMullin's pos-

session, Brandenburg had greeted the event with a sizzling editorial and a back-page cartoon. The latter pictured McMullin clasping his arms about the Van Dyck, while beside him was shown a freezing family huddled about an empty stove. The caption, which the editor selected, ran: "Denver's Needy Buy a Hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar Canvas for the Coal King."

With that in mind, Brandenburg drew a pad toward him and began a new attack under the heading of: "How Much Longer?" Then he framed his opening paragraph: "The long-suffering coal consumers of this State, paying exorbitant profits to a greedy czar, have contributed another rare item to the McMullin chamber of horrors. Twenty thousand dollars of the needy's money has been squandered to gratify the whim of a soulless monopolist."

Just then, with a hundred fiery phrases burning in his mind and ready to be transcribed to the paper, Brandenburg was interrupted by the entrance of an office boy. "Will you see Elsner?" the boy inquired.

"What does he want?" Brandenburg asked, resenting the intrusion.

"Didn't say, 'cept was important," the boy replied.

"Well, tell him to come in." Brandenburg respected the men who gave him their brains and hearts, and he was not above giving an audience to the lowest-salaried employee.

Elsner came into the office like a breeze. "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Brandenburg," he began, "but I think you'll be interested in what I have to say. That's why I passed up the outer office."

"Well?" Brandenburg tilted back in his chair.

"There's a new coal baron in town," Elsner began. "He has acquired a field near Denver, intends to develop it at once, and will throw the hooks into old Simon McMullin." Newspaper experience had taught him to deliver the gist of a story in the opening paragraph.

The editor studied the man before him with searching eyes. Anything or any one that proposed to "throw the hooks into McMullin" was most welcome in Brandenburg's heart.

Elsner's opening gun had hit the mark, and, without being asked, he drew up a chair and sat down, facing the editor. "It's the truth," he declared, "and I knew you would be interested. So far as I know, there is but one other man who's wise, and it doesn't mean much to him."

Elsner promptly related the substance of the conversation he had overheard, neglecting, however, to mention names or localities.

"It looks like a sure-enough tip," said Brandenburg, and his hand went out toward a bell.

Elsner stopped him. "Just a minute, Mr. Brandenburg," he said, divining the other's purpose. "This is my story, and I want to get it all myself. Besides," he added, with emphasis, "I'm the only one who can get it."

"If you think you can handle it——" the editor began.

"I'll try mighty hard," Elsner declared grimly, "if you'll go over Ruff's head and see that I'm entitled to draw my usual weekly stipend. The city editor discharged me last night."

"He did!" Brandenburg seemed surprised. "I hadn't heard about it. What was the trouble?"

Elsner told him. Brandenburg's face cleared and he waved his hand. "Entirely uncalled for," he said. "Ruff must not allow personal grievances to interfere with business affairs. Consider yourself reinstated, Elsner. Go after this story and let me see personally what you get."

"Thank you," said Elsner, his face glowing. "Perhaps I can bring this

man in for a talk with you. He'll verify all I have said."

"Good! Now get busy. Stay on the trail until you get all you want, no matter how long or how far it takes you. If you need any money, see the cashier."

As Elsner passed jubilantly from the private office, Duvell came in for his usual weekly conference with the editor. Ruff, who was at his desk in the city room, looked up and glared at the sight of the reporter he had discharged. "What are you doing back here?" he demanded.

Elsner grinned. "See the boss. Maybe he'll tell you."

Ruff stalked indignantly into the presence of his chief, heedless of the fact that Brandenburg was engaged with Duvell.

"What did that discharged reporter have to say?" he asked.

Brandenburg was in a mood to overlook the uncalled-for intrusion and chuckled. "What did he tell me?" the editor repeated. "The thing I've hoped and prayed would come, that's all. Elsner's got wind of a big story, and if it pans out we'll throw a bombshell into the McMullin camp."

For Ruff's as well as Duvell's edification, Brandenburg related the substance of the reporter's tip.

"A trumped-up gag to get back on the paper," scoffed Ruff. "Elsner's a big bluff."

"We'll find out before night," said Brandenburg. "Meanwhile, unless you hear the contrary from me, Elsner's on the staff. Ye gods, Ruff!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see what this story will do for us? Working shoulder to shoulder with a man who has the means and the courage to buck McMullin, we'll make a ten-strike. We'll have Simon jumping the hurdles. Why, it'll be worth a fortune to me to get that much satisfaction out of his thick hide."

"McMullin will squash the thing—if it's true," Duvell spoke up, sharing none of the editor's growing enthusiasm. "He'll go the limit—and that's a long way—where he's so vitally concerned."

"All the better for us," returned Brandenburg. "We'll have the entire State aroused and on our side. And with two coal magnates at one another's throats, the people are bound to share in the spoils."

"The people!" There was an undisguised note of sarcasm in Duvell's utterance. "Since when, outside of your paper, have you been interested in their welfare?"

Brandenburg reached for a cigar and lighted it. Whatever his faults, he did not pose before his employees or his friends. "Maybe I'll get mine at that," he hinted, with a meaning glance at Duvell.

And Duvell, as if the full significance of what the editor meant to convey had suddenly dawned upon him, smiled in return.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter XI., following an interesting sketch of all that has gone before, introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out July 15th.

Served Him Right

BROWN: "Young Smart of the Grand Hotel has got the laugh turned against him in his little joke with the Blazes Fire Insurance Company."

Robinson: "How?"

Brown: "He insured five hundred cigars, smoked them, and then sent in a claim on the ground that they were destroyed by fire."

Robinson: "And they laughed at him, I suppose?"

Brown: "No; they had him arrested on a charge of setting fire to his own property."

Top-Notch Talk
By the Editor

WITHOUT A DOUBT.

SOMEBODY asked a well-known publisher not long ago what, in his opinion, was the type of story that could be counted upon to please readers of all sorts and conditions. Without hesitation, the publisher answered, "The good detective story." It was an answer that fitted in with editorial experience on this magazine, and upon that experience we have always acted. But when you say "the good detective story," you are covering a great deal. Nothing in the evolution of modern fiction is so remarkable as the growth of the detective story. Once upon a time it was quite likely to be a long-winded, dreary affair, consisting mainly of the narration of the details of some detective's tiresome unraveling of a crime. But to-day the best models show a cumulative drama that in time unfolds logically to a striking, probably a surprising, climax. It is not without heart interest, not without the human touch that stirs the reader's feeling. We think we have a detective story that you will say comes up to this standard in the next issue. It is called "Red Diamond," and the author is Bertram Lebhar. Of generous length, it will be the leading feature of the issue—our complete novel; the best thing of its kind Lebhar has written.

"WOLFHOUNDS OF THE STEPPE."

THIS is a tale of Russia, and a memorable one, by H. A. Lamb, whose work is known to TOP-NOTCH readers. It is one of the two novelettes in the next issue. The other novelette is a story with a strong track-running interest, by Hubert La Due, and is one of the several sport features. "Beyond the Cloud" is the title of the running tale. Whether you care a rap or not about cinder-track prowess, there is plenty in this story to entertain you.

OTHER SPORT ATTRACTIONS.

FRAMED on the Diamond" is a baseball story that will appear in the next issue; it is by that versatile producer of fiction, William Wallace Cook. You will find him at home on the diamond. Harold de Polo will contribute a tale of fishing which he calls "Pick the Winner." Annette Kellerman, the renowned swimmer, has not taken to writing fiction, but she has expressed herself about some matters of fact in regard to the practice of her art which everybody will find interesting. It all comes out in a talk which she has had with Jane Dixon, a representative of this magazine. If there are any points

about swimming that you need light on, Miss Kellerman is quite likely to supply the light in this article. A dash of quaintness and humor is given to it all with some pictures drawn by E. A. Furman.

"ALL IN SEASON."

HERE is a stirring tale of the game warden's life, by Burt L. Standish. It is laid in the Maine woods, a stage which this standard author often selects for the presentation of his dramas. Other tales in the same issue are: "Crossed Signals," an affair of the navy, by Captain Dingle; "With the Goods," by that peerless laugh maker, Ima Nutt; "Lazy Butterfly," a tale of the sunshine, by J. Allan Dunn; "Advanced Orders," the story of a lot of things, by Lyon Mearson. The two serial novels, by the Dorrances and Roland Ashford Phillips respectively, can be read and enjoyed by everybody, whether the first installments have been read or not. This is made possible by the TOP-NOTCH plan of presenting what has gone before. "Cloud Ranch," one of the serials, is by the Dorrances; "Dared in Denver," a swinging, actual-place tale, the other serial, is by Phillips.

Friends Everywhere.

FROM Toronto, Canada, this bouquet is tossed, the tosser being Mr. Kenneth M. Buchanan, of Ann Street, that city:

The last time I wrote to you I was down in Nova Scotia. I came to this city last spring, and as I am now quite familiar with its streets, et cetera, would be more than pleased to have an actual-place story of Toronto. I remember reading the last one—"Tagged in Toronto." But I never thought at the time that I would be living here some day.

I enjoyed that "Adroit in Detroit" immensely. After I have finished reading my copy of T.-N. I take it up to the Soldiers Home, and I think it helps to pass away the long hours for some of them.

I was over to Buffalo recently, and on the train met one of your readers, and had a dandy chat with him about the different stories. Good old T.-N. makes friends everywhere. The hockey stories were exceptionally good this year. Wish the editor and contributors of T.-N. every kind of success.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: You are certainly to be congratulated on your splendid spread of stories; but don't you think it is about time that Boltwood of Yale came back? I think Rod Hazzard also takes too long vacations. "Nesbit of the Mounted" is great, along with "Lego Lamb," "Brick King, Backstop," and "The Camera Chap." Keep these coming, and nobody will ever have a kick to deliver.

"The Golden Big Horn" was excellent, as was "Masters of Strategy." The Dorrances surely know their business.

I regret that you have taken out some of the serials to make room for short stories. I like a good short story, but I think two or three to the issue nearer right than seven or eight. Yours very respectfully,

Bancroft, Neb. FRANK CARSON.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have just finished reading "Right and Title," and think that it is one of the best stories of its kind I have ever read in your magazine.

I am not a subscriber, but get T.-N. at the news stands; I think it the best of the story magazines. My favorite authors are: Burt L. Standish, Ralph Boston, William W. Cook, Roland A. Phillips, Bertram Lebhar. Yours truly, ALFRED P. STERLING.

Morrisville, Pa.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: First I want to make a few kicks: TOP-NOTCH does not come often enough. It does not last long enough. You don't publish enough stories like "Mightier than the Pen." That was just simply *Jim Dandy!* The Mounted Police and Rod Hazzard stories are my favorites.

As for the gentleman who wants girls put out of the stories, why—why—tell him that he isn't the only huckleberry on the bush. Tell E. A. Clancy, author of the last Camera

Chap tale, that I would pat him on the head if it were possible. Your friend and reader,

Austin, Tex. CARLENE JOHNSON.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a constant reader of the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE for the last fifteen months, and would like to state that it is one of the best magazines I ever read. Because the materials to publish your magazine are going up in price, I wish to state that I would be satisfied if you changed the price from fifteen cents to twenty-five cents, and published a magazine every week. Yours truly, WILLIAM J. JONAS.

Oakland, Cal.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have not seen a letter from Canada for so long that I must say a word for our little burg. I have been a T.-N. reader for the last—well, I won't say how long, because it is so long ago I have forgotten. I think it is the best story magazine on the market to-day, barring none.

My favorite stories are the Mounted Police tales, and if the people of the United States understood them (the M. P.) they would know how very near the truth the tales are. They police the district I am in, and they always get the man they go after. "Fearless and brave" should be written over every one of them. I do not know of any one story in T.-N. I did not like.

If you are not right on the spot here when T.-N. comes in, you do not get it. Then you have to hunt around town and borrow one, and as I am twenty-six miles from town it is some time before I can get one. Respectfully yours, WESLEY G. ORCUTT.

Steelman, Sask.

The Day It Arrives.

RAILROAD men everywhere are readers of TOP-NOTCH, and that fact is borne in mind usually by the authors who turn out the railroad stories for us. Despite that fact, an author is caught napping now and then by some brass pounder or other attaché of a railroad. George A. Farquhar, of Spokane, Washington, adds his to the many tributes that have been written to Commodore Shinn's "Against the Red Board," which appeared some time ago:

I want to say a few words of appreciation for the railroad bunch here. We all look forward to the day when TOP-NOTCH comes out on the news stands, and, needless to say, we hunt for the railroad yarns first.

I liked particularly the story by George Commodore Shinn, "Against the Red Board," probably because I worked on the roads around Portland and Tacoma years ago; the story seemed very real, indeed. The writer is evidently an old-timer himself, because he shows a knowledge of conditions that used to exist that could only be acquired by experience. The bunch here think he is great, and would like to hear more from him.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I am not a regular subscriber, so I sometimes miss a number. The early bird catches the worm. Am strong for sport stories of all kinds, but in this order they look best to me: Baseball, basket ball, football, track, and rowing.

I think there is one thorn in this bouquet. We do not get many basket-ball stories. It is a very popular sport here. Think I read two basket-ball stories in T.-N. within the last six months.

You have a fine staff of authors, but don't let those lumberjack stories get away from you; they are great. Wishing you all the success in the world, I remain, yours truly,

Franklin, Pa. ROSS F. MCENTIRE.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: To-day I found time to read some of the stories in your magazine, and one tale in particular I want to compliment you upon. It is "Mother Blunderbus," by Herman H. Matteson. I consider it an unusually interesting story, true to life, and filled with human interest. To me it is a much more wholesome yarn than some silly, impossible love story without a moral. In Herman H. Matteson, whoever the gentleman may be, I believe you have a writer who is sure to get to the front. Very truly yours,

Wilkeson, Wash. LOUIS JACOBIN.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I think it has all other story magazines beat a mile. I don't see it when some one tells me he read a good magazine and it was not TOP-NOTCH. I am a traveling hotel employee. I go from one town to another and buy my T.-N. at the news stands. The March 15th number is a corker. There are some particularly good stories in it—for instance: "Right and Title," "Big Medicine Race," "Served on Ice," "That Pestiferous Monkey," and the Camera Chap story, "Mightier than the Pen." Let's have some more stories about traveling men. Best regards to the staff of T.-N. Yours truly,

Rochester, N. Y. ADAM KOBBI.

Sacks of mail and "Bull" Durham are in evidence in this photograph of the Regimental Post Office of the First Illinois Infantry, taken at Camp Landa, near New Braunfels, Texas. Dewitt G. Call, Regimental Postmaster, and Privates Max J. Wetter and Bert V. Keppler.

Army Postmasters "Roll Their Own"

Wherever you find an encampment of U. S. troops you'll find the "Makings". It's army tradition that Uncle Sam's soldiers shall always "*roll their own*" and "*hold their own*". Same way in the navy. For three generations "Bull" Durham has been the universal smoke of both arms of the Service.

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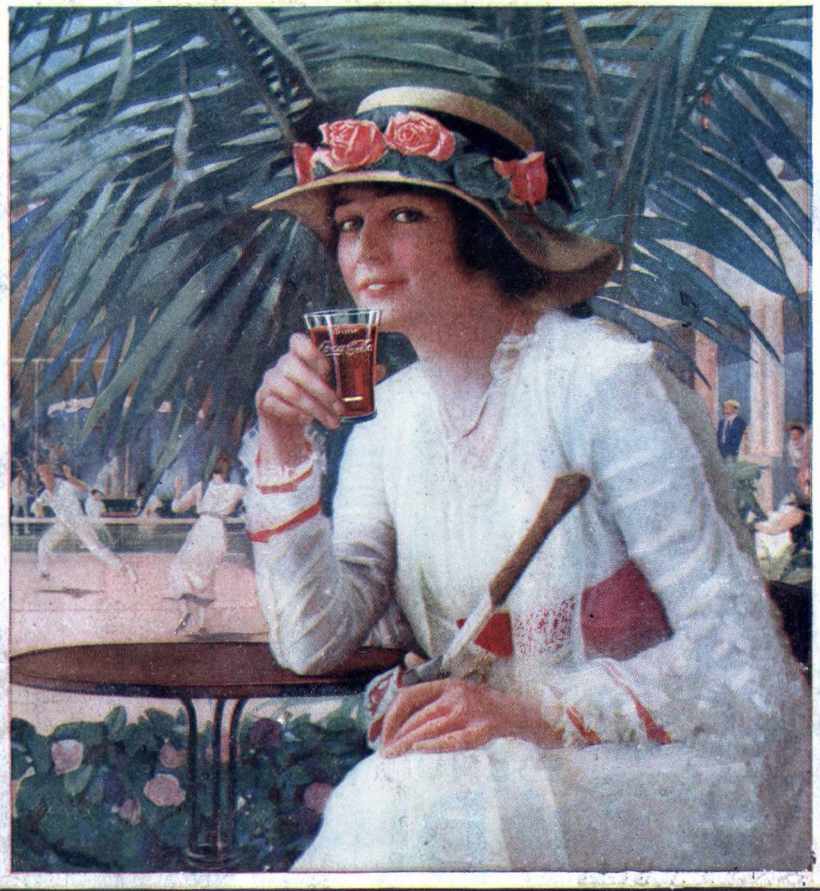

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