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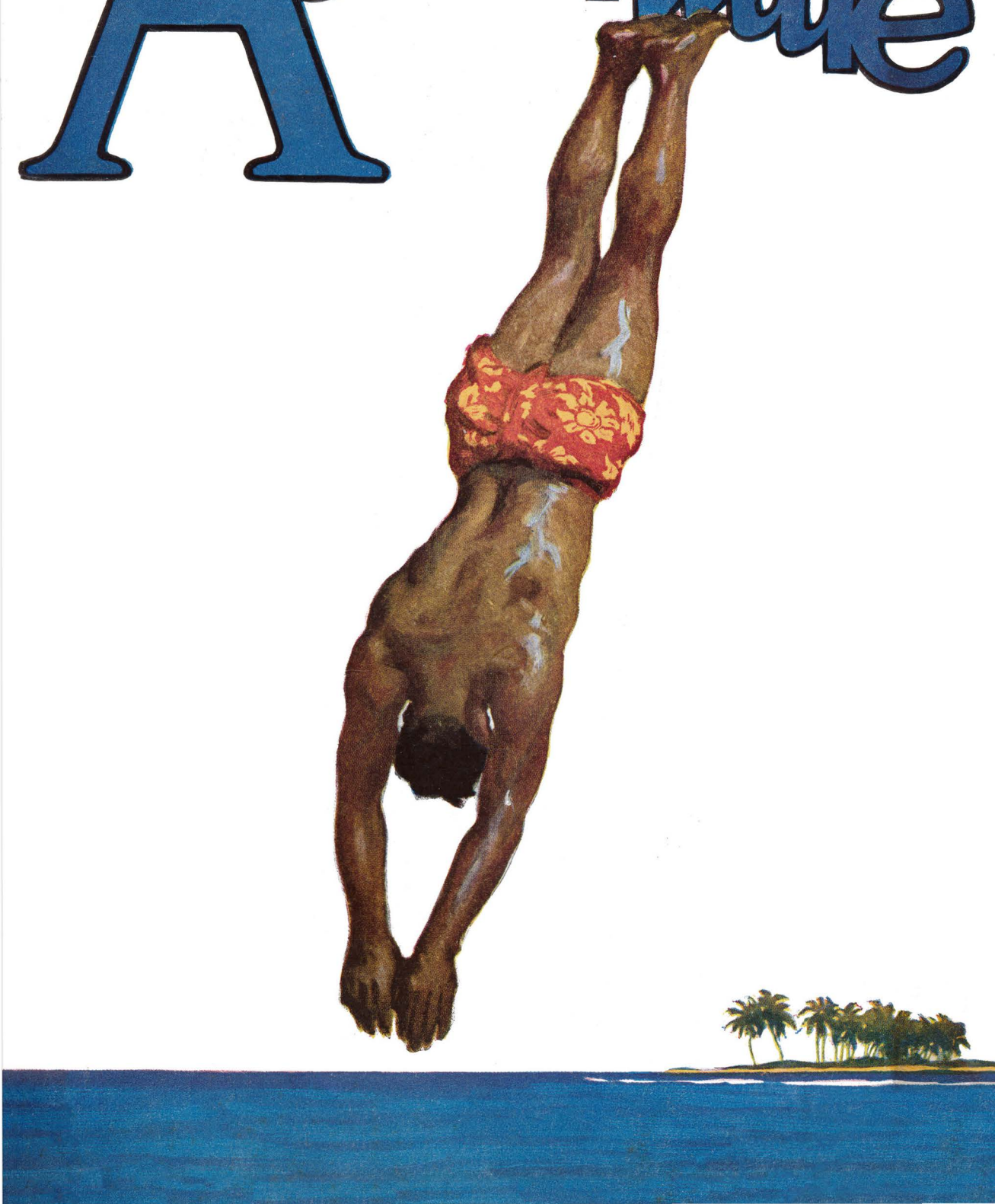

MID-SEPTEMBER ISSUE, 1917
VOL. XIV No. 6

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LONGHORNS

A Complete Novel - by WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "Paradise Bend," "That Which Is Written," etc.

CHAPTER I

CHUCK MORGAN

"SAY, who's got my pants?" demanded Chuck Morgan, surveying the roomful of rising and risen punchers.

"Pants? Pants? Who's got the pants?" shrilled Tim Page. "Gent wants his pants. Why don't yuh give 'em up, whoever's got 'em? I'd shore admire to see the sport who'd wear Chuck's pants."

"They're good pants, —— good pants!" defended the indignant Chuck. "I paid twelve dollars six bits for 'em over to Farewell only a year ago, an' they ain't more'n half wore out. Anyway, I want 'em. I ain't mad. I ain't mad a little bit. I can take a joke like the next feller, an' if it's a joke all right I'll laugh. Ha! Ha! Ha! There y'are. Now gimme my pants!"

"Yuh needn't look at me thataway!" cried Buff Warren. "*I* ain't got 'em. Maybe Sam took 'em."

"Maybe Sam didn't take 'em!" snarled that worthy. "You chunkers shore make me sick! If anythin's lost, yuh come an' ask me 'Did I borrow it.' Oh yeah, blame it on Sam *always*."

"Not always," Bill Holliday corrected placidly. "Sometimes it's nailed down, or we see yuh first or somethin'."

"Yuh can go plumb to the devil!" barked Sam the borrower. "Hey quit! Quit it, you idjits!"

Sam collapsed into his bunk beneath an avalanche of thrown chaps, boots, and the cook's war-bags.

"All this don't get me my pants!" reiterated Chuck Morgan.

"Now I know," the Kid said, holding up one finger, "now I know what made the coffee taste so funny last night. I'll bet Chuck's pants—say, where's my shirt?"

"My boots is gone!" Bill Holliday announced. "An' the spurs was on 'em!"

"An' my hat ain't here!" contributed Buff Warren.

Sam emerged from the pile of articles of attire that had been hurled upon him with the announcement that his chaps were among the missing. Simultaneously Dave Cantrell made the discovery that his six-shooter and belt had disappeared.

"My gun! My gun!" wailed Dave in the accents of a parent lamenting the loss of a favorite offspring. "I paid sixty-five wheels for that six-shooter. By ——, if I ever get a-hold of the sport who's made love to it, I'll kick his backbone through the top of his hat."

Chuck Morgan, his blue eyes gazing at nothing, gave his stiff black hair a lick and a promise. He was thinking. Whoever the thief might be, he was certainly a person of some discrimination. For the articles taken were individually the best of their kind in the outfit. In particular Sam's chaps and Dave's six-shooter were beautiful things: the chaps of softest leather faced with finest angora; the six-shooter pearl-handled, barrel and cylinder cunningly engraved with tiny figures of longhorned cattle. Still pondering, Chuck slid his legs into his other trousers and eased on his boots.

"Wonder what the 'Kid's Twin' lost?" speculated Bill Holliday.

But that was a question no one of them could answer. For the Kid's Twin had gone to Farewell for the mail the previous day. He was called the Kid's Twin, not because he was, for he was not, but because he rivaled the Kid in the perpetrating of mischievous acts calculated to render more motley than a Joseph's-coat the sober hue of life as it was lived at the Bar-S ranch.

"If the Twin had been here last night—" began Buff Warren, and paused meaningly.

"My idea exactly," said Tim Page, "but he wasn't."

"The Kid was!" cried Sam. "An' I never thought of it before!"

"Good reason why—yuh got nothin' to do it with," flashed the Kid, tranquilly snapping on his leather cuffs. "I s'pose yo're insinooatin' I took yore truck. Well, I didn't, old-timer. Not this trip. But I tell yuh flat if I'd only knowed how pleased yuh'd all be I'd 'a' done it, y' betcha. Say, when do we eat? Hey, cookie, what'sa matter with yuh? Got a lame arm, huh?"

"Kid, where's my boots?" demanded Bill Holliday.

"Yuh make me sick!" snapped the Kid. "H——, yuh'd make a cow sick! Didn'tcha hear me say I didn't do it? D'yuh think I'd rustle my own best shirt? What more do yuh want?"

"Well, yuh know, Kid, yuh ain't always over partic'lar what kind o' tricks yuh play on us long-sufferin' mortals," defended Holliday. "Yuh know y' ain't. Now——"

"He didn't do it," cut in Chuck Morgan.

"How do you know?" asked a dozen voices together.

"Because when we accuse him of anythin' he *has* done he always runs out the door an' we have to chase him a mile. Now he ain't runnin'. It's easy when yuh know how."

"Oh, is that so?" bawled the Kid, as the outfit jostled through the doorway into the dining-room. "Yuh talk like I was an innocent murderer or somethin.' Yuh gimme a pain, Chuck. I've a good mind to give yuh a bat on the snoozer."

"There's gratitude for a man," complained Chuck, sliding limberly into his seat at the table. "Do all yuh can for folks an' then they turn round an' talk to yuh somethin' brutal. Mister Warren, if I ain't askin' too much of yuh, would yuh skate the sugar this way?"

"I got it! I got it!" bawled Holliday.

"An' bad too," Chuck remarked with sarcasm, spading the sugar into his cup. "An' yuh'll shore have it a heap worse if yuh beller again in my ear thataway."

"I'll gamble it's Jimmy done rustled our stuff," Holliday continued, unheeding. "It ain't none o' the rest of us, so it's gotta be him."

"I told yuh cookie done boiled Chuck's pants with the coffee," said the Kid, spearing a boiled potato. "Why, say, I had to use a pound o' sugar before she'd taste like anythin'. Hey, Jimmy, what did yuh do with my shirt?"

The cook, in his innocence, scented a joke and informed the Kid he was using the shirt as a dish-cloth. This was too much. The Kid arose, vowing vengeance, and hit the cook in the ear with a potato. Immediately the amazed cook was pounced upon by an avalanche of punchers who, collectively and individually, demanded their possessions.

Jimmy the cook was not one of those that shall inherit the earth. He could fight, and he did to such good purpose that Buff Warren and Holliday were knocked flat. The outfit worried Jimmy down at last and as many as could find room sat upon him till he wheezed:

"Uncle!"

But the fracas did not restore the missing articles. For Jimmy, with such lurid oaths that they were constrained to believe him, asserted that he had not so much as looked at any of their possessions.

"Which I got more an' better o' my own," said Jimmy in conclusion, "but you can gamble an' go the limit the next chance I get I'll steal you fellers naked. Lemme get up."

BREAKFAST over, the outfit scooped up saddles and bridles and trooped noisily to the corral. While they were saddling came Tom Loudon the foreman. Close on his heels ambled his father-in-law, Mr. Saltoun, the owner of the Bar-S. The latter's face wore an expression of peevish annoyance.

"Yo're ridin' Soogan today, ain't yuh, Chuck?" inquired Loudon.

"Yep," replied Chuck, buckling the rear cinch.

"I hear they's nesters over there—the old C-Y shack at Moccasin Spring. Tell 'em they'd better travel."

"An' make it plain to 'em, Chuck," Mr. Saltoun added earnestly. "We don't want no trouble, but we don't want no nesters either, an' we don't aim to have 'em—not on the Bar-S range."

Chuck nodded shortly and swung into the saddle. His horse, an evil-tempered gray, went up like a shot. Chuck drove in the spurs and lashed him across the nose.

"Quit it, you four-legged devil!" he grunted. "I don't feel like foolin' this mornin'. You will, huh! All right, fly at it!"

He raked the horse's flanks with the spurs. The brute rocketed over the landscape for a space. Then, the jabbing spurs taking all the zest from the performance, he quieted. But Chuck would not have it so.

"No, no, Peppermint, no nice little easy lope for you?" he cried, and vigorously whanged the gray behind the saddle. 'Yuh wanted to pitch, well then, pitch!"

But pitching was now the last thing desired by the tormented gray. He ran as only a cow-pony can. When Chuck slowed him down three miles from the ranch-house, he was a very good horse.

Chuck rolled a cigaret one-handed, snapped a match into flame with his thumb-nail and lit the white roll. He inhaled without pleasure, blew the smoke at his horse's slanting ears, and swore quite heartily.

"I'd shore like to know who's —— rustled my pants!" he growled, when he had expended most of his vocabulary. "I—woo—oof!"

Which odd exclamation was called forth by a lightning-swift sidewise leap of his horse. Chuck stayed with him, but his head snapped on his neck with a force that made it ache. The cause of the shy, an Indian squatting in the shade of a great boulder, rose to his feet as Chuck wrenched his pony round to face him. Chuck's jaw muscles relaxed. He grinned and extended his hand.

"How, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law," was his greeting.

"How, Blue Eye," replied the Piegan, and stepped forward and gravely shook the proffered hand.

Which ceremony being concluded he squatted down again and pulled his blanket tightly about him. Chuck knew by the Piegan's manner that he had news of interest to impart. He also knew that nothing, not even an earthquake or other cataclysm of nature, could hasten the savage in the telling.

Chuck dismounted, sat down cross-legged in front of the Piegan and offered tobacco. Willie's Old Brother-in-Law accepted the gift, made his careful, unslurred acknowledgments, and with a thin brown forefinger rammed the tobacco into a wonderfully carved pipe of red pipestone. Chuck made himself another cigaret. White man and aborigine smoked in solemn silence for at least ten minutes. Then Willie's Old Brother-in-Law stoppered his pipe with a wooden plug and laid it across his knees.

"'Cutnose' Canter bad man," he announced without preliminary, in a harsh guttural monotone.

"He ain't a he-angel," agreed Chuck, wondering how Cutnose Canter, a gentleman of uncertain temper, habits, and means of livelihood, residing in Farewell, had merited even the passing attention of such a superior Indian as Willie's Old Brother-in-Law. "Has he been runnin' off any o' yore cayuses?" he cast at a venture.

The Piegan shook his head. He held up two fingers.

"Cutnose Canter have two frien'," he said. "Dey ridum 'roun' you' ranch—Soogan, Packsaddle 'way down yonner." Willie's Old Brother-in-Law swung his arm in a half-circle to the south. "Not ridum daytam 'tall," he continued. "Ridum nighttam. Moon show dem. Cutnose Canter go back Farewell. Frien' go sout'. Bimeby frien' come 'gain mabbeso. You watch Cutnose Canter. Goo'-by."

Willie's Old Brother-in-Law rose to his feet and stalked round the boulder. He appeared a moment later astride an ornamental pinto and rode off eastward. The cowpuncher flipped the dropped reins over his horse's head and mounted.

"Cutnose an' friends," he mused, spurring the pony into a lope, "ridin' our range *at night*. That's shore an odd number, especially when they ain't done no rustlin'. An' they ain't yet, or the Injun would 'a' said so. Friends went south. By-an'-by they'll come again. But maybe they won't go again. We'll see what the doctor says, huh, Peppermint? We ain't overlookin' any bets, are we, yuh graybacked lump o' sin? That's right, waggle yore ears. Yuh know what'll happen to yuh if yuh don't agree with me, y' betcha."

CHUCK loped steadily on his way to Moccasin Spring, the loss of his trousers completely forgotten in speculation concerning the actions of Cutnose Canter and his mysterious friends. The mental exercise of necessity sharpened his eyesight, and an hour later he perceived that which otherwise might well have escaped his attention. "That" was an exceedingly faint column of smoke spiring above a clump of red willows on the quarter-mile distant bank of Soogan Creek. Chuck immediately turned his horse's head toward the red willows.

Leaving his mount in a blind gully two hundred yards from the creek, Morgan "Injuned" forward on foot. In his hands his cocked rifle was held in readiness for a snapshot. For he had a vision of a rustler at work. That slim column of smoke could signify nothing but the nefarious heating of a cinch-ring or a running-iron.

"The —— fool," he breathed. "He just don't care where he does his brandin'."

He slid up to the willows, sidled noiselessly round the clump, and peered between the leaves of a sweeping branch at—the Kid's Twin placidly frying bacon over a tiny fire. Chuck's eyes widened, then narrowed. For, on the bank behind the Kid's Twin were most of the outfit's missing articles. And the Kid's Twin was wearing the others. Chuck swept aside the willow branch and stepped into view. The Kid's Twin, a yellow-haired youth with ingenuous baby-blue eyes, was a person of nerve. He did not start at Chuck's sudden appearance. He displayed no dismay.

"S'down an' rest yore hat," he invited, waving a hospitable hand. "Yo're just in time for dinner."

Chuck did not sit down. He spread his legs and stabbed an accusing finger at the Kid's Twin.

"I admire yore gall," he observed acridly. "Yo're wearin' my pants!"

"Shore," agreed the Kid's Twin, "but I dunno as I'll wear 'em again. They fit me kine o' too long an' too quick."

"That's shore a calamity," Chuck drawled with sarcasm. "I'm sorry y'ain't suited, but seein's yuh took 'em without any askin' I guess yuh'll have to stand it."

"I guess so," chuckled the Kid's Twin, "but don't let it happen again."

"You can bet I won't!" snarled Chuck, who was really very angry. "I know what I——"

"Aw, whatcha yowlin' about?" giggled the Kid's Twin. "You ain't the only jigger I borried from. Didn't I take Dave's six-shooter, an' Sam's chaps, an' Buff Warren's hat? An' here *you* gotta beller yore head off about a measly old pair o' pants. You act like they was really valuable. C'mon, be sociable. S'down an' have some coffee. I made plenty, an' you can have first whack at the cup. Was the gang mad about me glommin' their stuff?—Shore, I know yuh'll be damned. All punchers is, so yuh needn't

think yo're sayin' anythin' new. S'down, I tell yuh, 'fore the coffee gets cold."

In the face of this what else could a man do? Chuck leaned his rifle against a willow-bush and sat down. Nevertheless he glowered at the Kid's Twin, for they were his best pants. But he did not glower long. Strong, sweet coffee and the fact that the Kid's Twin was a friend gradually melted the anger in him.

"I thought you went to Farewell," Chuck said suddenly.

"Yuh thought right," the Twin assured him. "But yuh didn't think I was goin' to stay there forever, didja?"

"No, but why Soogan Creek, cowboy? An' why all the trimmin's? For why did yuh dress up all same Christmas Tree? Maybe for *who* might fit the case better. Yeah, I guess for *who* is right." Chuck leaned forward and tapped the Twin on the knee—"The lady, Reginald, the lady. Who's yore friend?"

"Lady? What lady? Whatcha talkin' about?"

"What am I talkin' about? I wonder now. Say, feller, whatcha gettin' red about, huh?"

"I ain't! I ain't!" cried the exasperated Twin, now pink to the ears.

"No, o' course y' ain't," pursued Chuck. "Love is shore a wonderful thing when it can make a gent like you blush. Who is she? Tell yore uncle, Algy. He won't tell nobody—that is, nobody but the outfit."

"You go to the devil!" barked the now thoroughly aroused Kid's Twin. "I always thought yuh was a idjit, an' now I know it!"

"'Cause I guessed its secret, huh? Is that what's makin' baby lose its little pink temper, an' bang its little tootsies on the ground? Naughty, naughty, fie, for shame."

The Kid's Twin suddenly calmed. He arose with great dignity and proceeded to make into a bundle the articles he had borrowed.

"I'm goin' away from here," he threw over his shoulder. "Yo're welcome to the fire."

Chuck Morgan grinned slyly, heaved himself upright, and walked along the bank of the creek for a distance of two hundred yards. He returned and planted himself beside the Twin where he stood tying the bundle into his slicker.

"Yore hoss-tracks show yuh rode in from down the creek," he observed casually. "They's nesters down the creek. Might those nesters have a girl?"

The Twin's shoulders gave an impatient jerk. The slow red flooded anew his cheeks, his jaws, and the back of his neck. He mumbled something between his teeth.

"Yuh think yo're —— smart," he said aloud.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," Chuck observed seriously, "but I've learned a thing or two in my ramblin's round this world o' wo, an' one thing is that they's more'n one way to make a man talk. It might interest yuh, Mister Man, to know that I'm ridin' down Soogan Creek to tell them nesters to pull their freight."

The Kid's Twin turned in a flash. His features were convulsed with rage, his fists were doubled.

"What's that?" he grated between clenched teeth.

"Yuh shore can wake up somethin' amazin'," said Chuck, nodding approval. "Yep, at times yo're almost human."

The Kid's Twin took a forward step.

"What was that yuh said about them nesters?" he persisted ominously.

"Why, this mornin' Tom Loudon told me to sorta ride over an' tell 'em to slope."

"You won't tell 'em to slope!"

"I thought so," drawled Chuck, and sat down on one heel. "Tell me why I won't."

"'Cause yuh just won't!" snapped the Twin. "That's why!"

"Shore, shore, I know," soothed Chuck, "but yuh gotta unravel the mystery. Aw, say, I ain't holdin' out nothin' on yuh. I ain't tryin' to run a blazer. Be reasonable, can't yuh?"

But the Twin was not to be so easily pacified. He continued to gaze loweringly upon his friend.

"Yuh don't tell 'em nothin', 'understand?" was his decisive pronouncement.

"It's a heap easier to lead than drive—sometimes," Chuck Morgan suggested meaningly.

The Twin's tense figure slowly relaxed. He squatted down in front of his friend.

"She's thisaway, Chuck," he said in a low voice, "them nesters ain't agoin' to be bothered. I don't care what Tom Loudon or Old Salt or any of 'em says. An' I'll plug the man that tries to drive 'em away."

"When are yuh figurin' on leavin' us?"

"Don't get funny. I ain't foolin,' not any. What I'm tellin' yuh goes as it lays, yuh can gamble yore last dollar on it. H——, Chuck, you know me! You know I don't like nesters no more'n you do, but these nesters is different. They ain't hurtin' nobody, they ain't agoin' to hurt nobody, an' they're agoin' to *stay*."

"They shore have put their spell on you, that's a cinch. Are yuh aimin' to play a lone hand in this deal?"

"Meanin'?"

"Do yuh want a helper?"

"Two's better'n one," the Twin said hesitatingly.

"Then I guess I'll trail along. What's good enough for you is good enough for me."

The Kid's Twin took fright at once.

"Well now, yuh don't want to go losin' yore job," he fenced. "I can manage by my lonesome. I guess maybe I'd better. You stay out of it, Chuck."

"Me stay out? Not for a minute. I'm with yuh, Twin, body, soul an' roll. Yessir, yuh may lose yore job, but yuh can't lose me. C'mon, le's go see 'em."

"It—it ain't necessary," the Twin demurred unhappily.

"Say, of all the hawgs I ever seen yo're *hawgest*," Chuck exclaimed indignantly. "Yuh take my pants, to say nothin' o' the rest o' the outfit's best duds, so's yuh can look pretty an' on top o' that yuh get me to help yuh out an' wrastle on yore side, an' then yuh won't introduce me to yore girl."

"I didn't ask yuh to help me out!" vigorously denied the Twin. "I wouldn't have yuh on a bet! I——"

"Yes yuh would, yuh poor fool. Yuh dunno what yo're talkin' about. Yuh need me, an' yo're agoin' to have me, y' betcha. Cinch the hull on yore cayuse, an' we'll scamper right along."

CHAPTER II

NESTERS

THE old shack on Soogan Creek was in reality an ancient four-room ranch-house. The last time Chuck had seen it it had looked as all long-deserted houses look, dead, dilapidated and forlorn. He remembered that part of the corral stockade had fallen down. Now, as they topped a slight rise and sighted the ranch-house he perceived that it was very much alive. Smoke wreathed from one of the two chimneys, flowers splashed the ground about the spring with color, there was the green-striped rectangle of a small truck-garden on the creek-bank, and on lines stretched between the kitchen and the repaired stockade of the corral the family wash whipped and fluttered in the breeze.

"Must be fairly healthy citizens to mend the corral so good," observed Chuck Morgan.

The Kid's Twin shot him a sulky glance.

"I mended it," said he.

The amazed Chuck stated that he would be eternally condemned. For it was a well-known fact that the Twin detested, and invariably put off on some one else, any work entailing the use of a shovel or the handling of timbers.

"Well?" growled the Twin.

"She's shore well," grinned Chuck. "I'm just a-praisin' yuh to myself. Can't a man admire yore good work?"

"Aw, shut up!"

Chuck laughed heartily. It was only too obvious that the Twin's temper became shorter and more ragged as the distance between the red willows and Moccasin Spring diminished.

A girl appeared in the doorway of the house. She stood at gaze a moment, then vanished within. The range was a short hundred yards, and Chuck noted the extreme grace in her swift movements and was glad.

"If she's as pretty as she walks," he whispered, "yo're a lucky jigger."

"I'd better be," the Twin grunted significantly.

Chuck winked one eye and stuck his tongue into his cheek. The Twin was becoming more amusing every minute. Verily, a man in love is the father of all fools. So reasoned Chuck Morgan, the hardy immune.

"Funny how them posies by the spring is two feet high," observed Chuck, as they drew nearer, "when the truck in the patch ain't more'n out o' the ground."

"Them posies is geeraniums," the Twin emphasized with hauteur, "an' they didn't grow here, none whatever. They done packed 'em in pots all the way from Kansas. They like flowers."

"They shore must," breathed Chuck.

When they checked their horses in front

of the ranch-house, a slim, patient-faced woman came to the door. Chuck thought that he had never seen such wistful, weary eyes.

"Mis' Dale, lemme make yuh acquainted with my friend Chuck—I mean Morgan," gabbled the Twin, red as a beet and bobbing desperately.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mister Morgan," said Mrs. Dale in a low, sweet voice, advancing and holding out her hand. "Won't you come in?"

Chuck gulped and shook hands mechanically.

"Much obliged to know yuh," was the acknowledgment he made shift to utter after a struggle that started the perspiration on his forehead. He realized that he was redder than the Twin and had dropped his hat and was standing on the brim.

It was not the fact of this woman's being totally different from what he had been led to expect that reduced Chuck to his present condition of semi-imbecility. Not at all. It was what—or rather who—he had glimpsed over her shoulder.

For there stood a goddess—a sure-enough, regular goddess with copper-colored hair, black eyes under curving black eyebrows, a red-lipped mouth, and a sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of her nose.

And now he was being introduced to the goddess, who, it seemed, was "My daughter, Jane." And the goddess was smiling at him and showing two rows of beautiful teeth. Followed then other introductions —two, or four, or it might be five, for all Chuck knew—to dream-people that dissolved in a fog. To all intents and purposes the only person in sight was "My daughter, Jane."

And then the fog cleared away with the realization that the goddess was, in a voice every whit as sweet as that of her mother, commenting upon the Mexican carving that adorned his saddle.

"I've always admired the double horseshoe and flower design," was her opening remark. "Visalia tree, isn't it?"

"Yuh shore know saddles, ma'am," said Chuck, now more than ever ready to fall down and worship. "It ain't every lady could tell first card out o' the box like that what tree a man rides."

"I ought to be able to," she laughed. "I've ridden the Visalia all my life."

"Then yuh like to ride 'em slick, don't yuh?"

"Surely do. The Billings swell fork never did appeal to me."—The black eyes wandered to his horse's head—"I'm afraid you're a lazy person, Mister Morgan."

"Who? Me? Me lazy? Why?"

"You're using the lazy man's bridle, the split ear. Give me one with a throat-latch and brow-band every time. That kind doesn't come off when you least expect it."

Chuck rose nobly to the bait and warmly defended his favorite, the split-ear bridle. Within ten minutes he felt that he had known Miss Jane Dale for a long time—years in fact.

Later they went together to the spring for a bucket of water, and spent some time admiring the geraniums. At least Chuck admired them and Miss Dale told him about their journey all the way from Macpherson, Kansas.

"I like it here," she said in conclusion. "And it's so good for father."

"Is yore father sick?" asked Chuck, suddenly recalling that one of the dream-people had been an elderly man.

"His lungs are weak. But this air will strengthen them, I'm sure. You see, we were going to Colorado, but the doctor said father's heart would never stand that altitude and he advised the Territory."

"I'd shore like to shake that doctor's hand. He couldn't 'a' recommended a better place'n right here on Soogan Creek."

"Oh, he didn't tell us to come here. I don't believe he'd ever heard of Soogan Creek. A man in Blossom suggested it."

"Blossom? Why?"

"Yes," she nodded, tucking in and patting down the loose-flowing hair over her ears. "Yes, we thought we'd settle in Marysville, but a man we met in Blossom gave us such glowing accounts of the country round Soogan Creek and this old deserted ranch-house that we traveled right on through."

"That's shore an odd number—tellin' yuh to come here when Marysville is every mite as high up in the air an' not havin' no big ranches they don't mind ne——"

Chuck, sweating his dismay, began to stammer. Jane looked at him levelly.

"Go on," she said. "Finish what you were saying."

"I was all done," Chuck hastened to assure her.

"No, you weren't. 'Not having any big ranches they don't mind nesters.' Wasn't that it? Yes, I thought so. You don't lie

very well. Tell me, do the outfits around here object to nesters?"

"Why, ma'am, of course not. Whatever made yuh think that, I'd like to know? Yo're twice as welcome as rain in the Summer, an' that's whatever."

"Mister Jason, the man in Marysville, said it was all free range here. This old house and the land we've begun to cultivate doesn't belong to anybody, does it?"

The brave black eyes carried more than a hint of worry.

"Belong to anybody!" Chuck laughed. "Which I should say not. Leastwise it belongs to you now. Why, nobody's lived here for years an' years. This used to be the C-Y ranch, but they sold out to us, an' since then——"

"Sold out to you!" she interrupted, her face paling.

"Shore, to the Bar-S."

"I thought you said this house didn't belong to anybody?"

"She don't, ma'am."

"But you said the C-Y was sold to the Bar-S. Then the Bar-S must own this house."

"No, ma'am, not for a minute. The Bar-S only bought the iron, see—only the cows an' hosses. It don't care nothin' about the house like I say. Why should it? What's a old shack? You got as much right here as the next feller an' don't let nobody tell yuh diff'rent."

"Are you sure?"

"Shore as yo're a foot high."

"We haven't any desire to trespass ——"

"Y'aint, so don't let it worry yuh. This here Lazy River country is all free range. If anybody comes prowlin' round yuh to drift, you just let me know, ma'am. I'll talk to 'em. But nobody'll come, yuh can gamble on it. This is shore a right nice spring, ma'am. Feelin' thirsty?"

CHAPTER III

THE AMBUSH

"WHY didn't yuh say they was two sisters?" demanded Chuck, turning in his saddle after waving the last of several goodbys to Jane Dale.

"Yuh didn't ask me," retorted the Twin. "Besides I'd no idea yuh'd cotton to that red-headed Jane girl. I thought yuh'd shore try to cut me out with the pretty li'l black-haired Molly."

"Oh, yeah, her name is Molly, ain't it. Kind o' good-lookin' too, in a way."

"Kind o'! In a way!" roared the incensed Twin. "Say——"

"Well, I never did like black hair a whole lot," defended Chuck. "But her sister Jane! Say, feller, that hair o' hers shines like a new copper ingot when yuh cut into it."

"I never seen no copper ingots, so I dunno. But I got eyes. Her hair's red, I tell yuh, an' for looks she don't stack deuce high 'longside o' Molly."

"You keep right on a-thinkin' so, yuh poor benighted fool, an' you an' me'll never quarrel. But I wouldn't go bellerin' my thoughts out too loud. Yuh might strain yore delicate throat or somethin'."

"Well, I won't say nothin' if it bothers yuh any, but I got my own opinion, y' betcha. Anyhow, they ain't nothin' the matter with the old folks. Them's a coupl' o' whizzers, both of 'em. Can't do enough for yuh, by gummy. Me, I'm out to see they stay where they've throwed down, if I lose my job for it."

"I'll take some more of the same. She's goin' to be a reg'lar job, too."

"Yo're shore whistlin'. 'Old Salt' 'll stand up on his hindlegs an' bite chunks out o' the ceiling. He's a good feller in some ways, but in others he's meaner'n a mean hoss."

"Tom won't like it, not any," Chuck observed soberly.

"Yeah, but Tom can be got around. He's human. Let him ride down an' see 'em once. He'd be for 'em same's we are."

"I guess yo're right. It's the old man we gotta look out for. An' we gotta do it quick—tonight."

"How?"

"I dunno. Hell's bells, I dunno."

"Yuh gotta know, so scratch yore head, old-timer. If she's gotta be fixed up tonight, an' I guess she has, yo're elected; 'cause I ain't pullin' in till tomorrow."

"An' why not?"

"This is why," said the Twin, tapping the bundle tied behind his cantle. "I gotta get them things into the bunk-house tonight, but I don't do any arrivin' till tomorrow. No, sir, 'li'l' innocence' comes strollin' in tomorrow mornin', long after the truck is all found. The outfit won't know that he's come an' went an' holed up for the

night in the big cottonwood grove on the Lazy. No, they won't know it, y' betcha, an' what they don't know won't hurt 'em."

"But what I know hurts me, an' that's whatever," groaned Chuck. "You got it easy. You run off an' leave me to do all the thinkin'. Oh, fine. 'Scratch yore head an' think, Chuck,' says you, an' that settles it. Whadda yuh think I am—Solomon?"

"I've been wonderin' what yuh was ever since I knowed yuh," chirped the Twin. "Sometimes I guess yo're one thing, sometimes another. Hey! lookout with that quirt! Quit, will yuh! Ugh—now yuh done it—ugh— He'll buck—ugh—till he's tired!"

"I almost busted the mainspring when I was talkin' to her," observed Chuck, when the Twin, on a now thoroughly chastened pony, ranged alongside.

"Meanin' how?"

"I told her the Bar-S had bought out the C-Y."

"Yuh —— fool!"

"I was all o' that. Bein' she was from the East I'd oughta knowed she wouldn't understand it only meant the cattle an' hosses. But I explained it to her all right. She understands now the ranch-house could be took by anybody. I told her the Lazy River country was all free range, an' so she is—free to any outfit strong enough to lock horns with the Bar-S an' the 88 an' the Cross-in-a-Box an' the Hawgpen an' the Double-Diamond-A. Well, I'm tellin' yuh, cowboy, this deal ain't a-goin' to be no cinch, not any, but it'll be a blame sight easier'n it would 'a' been two year ago when Sam Blakely was managin' the 88."

"An' that's whatever," agreed the Twin. "If Sam was alive he'd try to run 'em out quicker'n scat. An' then you an' me an' the 88 would go to war prompt an' proper. But the manager they got now, this here Lanpher jigger, I guess we can bluff him if he gets to jumpin' sidewise. If we can't I'll spit in his eye an' drownd him. He's small enough."

"Don't be too sure o' puttin' it all over him," advised Chuck, who had seen life on many ranges. "O' course I'm in on any play if this Lanpher picks up a hand, but if she's a war-jig don't go rampagin' round too careless."

"You watch my smoke!" boasted the Twin. "If I get on the prod with Lanpher I'll shore make him hard to find."

"Here's luck," said the dubious Chuck.

AN HOUR later the Twin left Chuck to ride his own trail. Chuck watched him go over the hill, and rolled a meticulous cigaret.

"The Twin is shore an idjit nine ways from the Jack," he observed thoughtfully. "Think o' rustlin' all them clo'es an' spurs an' Dave's gun just to shine in the eyes o' that li'l sawed-off Molly girl. Huh! Love is shore blind a lot, y' betcha. If it had been Jane now, I could 'a' understood him doin' what he done. She's worth doin' anythin' for. Myself I'd rustle hosses in a minute if she asked me. Jane. Ja-a-a-ane. Kind o' pretty name, ain't it, Peppermint? Huh? What's that? Yo're sayin' forty a month ain't yore idea o' somethin' to marry on. Is that whatjyuh think, old wet blanket? Why, hoss, I'd marry that girl an' her willin', if I didn't have nothin' besides my clo'es but a thin dime. An' that's the kind o' hairpin I am."

Steadily reflecting on feminine beauty as exemplified in the person of Jane Dale, Chuck Morgan pursued his homeward way. He gave barely a thought to the unpleasant subject of Mr. Saltoun and what the latter would undoubtedly say and in all probability do in the matter of the nesters. What was the use? It was a thing that must be faced, but there was no need of facing it till he stood before his employer. To be sure.

Why worry? For something might turn up to alter the ugly face of things. Not that Chuck resembled in the slightest degree the immortal *Micawber*, but he did believe in luck—his own particular luck. In all the more important events of his life luck had been with him. Why not then in this, the most important one of all?

His luck was due to stand him in good stead sooner than he expected. While riding through a draw some ten miles from the Bar-S ranch-house a rifle roared among some bushes fringing the left-hand bank of the draw and Chuck's hat jerked on his head. Chuck went after his gun and flung himself from the saddle simultaneously.

Holding his frightened and sidling horse by the bit and aiming across the saddle he fanned his six-shooter into the center of the gray smoke-cloud above him. Even as he did so he expected each shot to be his last. For the odds were all with the ambusher. But the latter did not fire again. Chuck, finding himself still alive, was snatching out his rifle prior to climbing the bank and

learning the result of his shooting, when he was startled by a laugh among the bushes.

" 'Tsall right, stranger," chuckled the unknown. "Put away yore hardware. I don't mean nothin' hostyle."

"If yuh don't mean nothin' hostyle, stand up an' show *yoreself!*" barked Chuck. "Hostyle, huh! An' you puttin' a double hole in my hat an inch over my head."

"Yo're lucky she ain't an inch lower," the unknown assured him. "We're both lucky, come to think of it. One o' yore bullets drills my shirt on one side o' my neck an' another drills the other side before I can get under cover. Yo're some good with a gun, stranger, an' I'd ought to know."

With this, six feet of lank humanity heaved himself up and sat down again in plain sight at the top of the bank. There he sat grinning and holding a rifle across his knees.

"You've shore got gall," observed Chuck. "Whyever did yuh cut down on me?"

"Which I thought I knowed yuh," the stranger answered. "You can gamble, stranger, she's when my finger is a-draggin' on the trigger that I sees I don't. There's no time hardly. Which the hammer's fallin' when I lifts the muzzle. Yo're lucky."

"That's twice you've said that," Chuck averred irritably. "You just miss me by a hair, an' 'Oh, yo're lucky,' says you. An' yore excuse is yuh think yuh know me. If yuh've had the habit long yuh'd oughta be some friendless by now."

The stranger threw back his head and laughed.

"Djuh know," he chuckled, "I'll betcha you an' me is goin' to be friends."

"Not much we ain't," Chuck disclaimed hastily. "I don't wanna know yuh, not any. Yo're a heap too sudden for even a noddin' acquaintance."

"But yuh looked just like a holdup who's out to down me first chance he gets. He'd bushwhack me as quick's he'd eat a flapjack. Yuh shore can't blame me for tryin' to get my own lead in first. Why, stranger, what else could I do? I'm crowded this way. My hand is forced. She's the only wagon-track out."

"That'll be about all. I dunno who y' are, stranger, an' I'm a heap willin' to let it go at that. Now, if yuh don't mind, I'll just back off till I'm out of range an' leave yuh to nurse yore little old feud to yore heart's content."

"I don't call that neighborly nohow," complained the lanky one.

"Call it anythin' yuh like," Chuck said doggedly. "I'm goin'."

"Hey, wait! How's chances for a job at the Bar-S?"

"Well—," hesitated Chuck.

" 'Tsall right, stranger," laughed the unknown. "I guess now that's somethin' I'd better find out for myself. So long."

CHAPTER IV

LAGUERRE ADVISES

"THERE'S only one play, 'Telescope'," said Chuck, "an' that is to just front up to Old Salt an' tell him to leave them nesters be. O' course it loses me my job, but I can get another easy, so that makes no differ."

Telescope Laguerre, who had ridden in from Packsaddle line-camp that afternoon, made no immediate comment. He was a dark-faced citizen, this Laguerre, a half-breed, and an exceptionally willing gun-fighter. Possessing the shrewd cunning of his Indian mother directed by the quick facile brain of his Gallic father he was an individual to reckon with. Because they were so utterly unlike he and Chuck were firm friends. Hence, immediately after supper, Chuck had led Laguerre to the comparative seclusion of the straddle-legged windmill and unfolded the true tale of the nesters at Moccasin Spring and his own intended action in the matter.

"Eef you go geet odder job," Laguerre said at last, "she weel be de long way from Soogan Creek mabbeso."

"It can't be helped none," mourned Chuck, lugubriously eying the glowing tip of his cigaret.

"You wan' for be near dem nestair'?" was the half-breed's softly delivered query.

"Naturally."

"Den, by gar, you must' not lose de job. Un eef you mus' not lose de job you mus' not say dem ting' you wan' for say to Ol' Salt or you weel lose eet dam' queeck. You mus' geet some one else for say eet."

"Oh, shore, then they'll lose their job. Whatcha talkin' about, Telescope? Yuh know I gotta do it my own self."

"Leesten, you mus' geet some one w'at

have not de job, den day can not lose eet."

"Aw, say——"

"Mees' Kate."

Mrs. Loudon, the wife of the Bar-S manager, Kate Saltoun that was! Why had he not thought of her at first? Obviously, she was the very person. For she could wind her father round her finger as easily as she could her husband.

"It shore takes you to think o' things," said Chuck. "But how'm I goin' to get hold of her, an' Old Salt not know it? He's always projeckin' round, the old coot."

"Mees Kate she ees een de keetchen not long w'ile ago," Laguerre remarked helpfully. "I see her w'en I come back from de leetle corral. She dere yet mebbeso."

Chuck Morgan departed in haste. On the porch of the ranch-house were the firefly tips of two cigarets.

"Tom an' Old Salt swappin' lies," muttered Chuck, and oozed round the house to where the lamplight shone through the windows of the kitchen. Reconnoitering, he first made sure that Mrs. Kate was the sole occupant of the room, then he boldly stepped into the open doorway and removed his hat.

"Good evening, Chuck," said Mrs. Kate, lifting sloe-black eyes from her task of dipping doughnuts. "I suppose you smelt 'em too. Tom and dad've been in here half-a-dozen times to-night. Help yourself. If they're not sweet enough sift more sugar over 'em."

"Evenin', M-m—Mis' Kate," stuttered Chuck, beginning to gently perspire. "Cuc-cuc-cuc-can y-y-yuh——"

He stopped in a panic.

Mrs. Kate stared at him in amazement.

"Are you sick?" she demanded, carefully depositing the last brown and snapping doughnut on the greased paper.

"No-o, ma'am," was the emphatic reply, "I—I—I——"

"Then what have you been doing? First you try to crow like a rooster. Then you say 'I' over and over. You aren't usually so backward. It must be something pretty bad. Have you been in a fight? Out with it."

"Yuh—yuh see, ma'am," began Chuck, in his desperation almost biting pieces from the edge of his hat, "it's them nesters on Soogan Creek, an'——"

The black eyes of the lady turned a trifle hard. After all, she was a cattleman's daughter, and cattle-folk are a clannish, stubborn breed.

"I know," she said, nodding her dark head. "Tom told me. Did you tell them to leave?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't."

"You didn't!"

"I couldn't."

"You couldn't. Why couldn't you? Did they hold a gun on you, or something?"

"I didn't see ary a gun, but they ain't like the run of nesters. They're poor, an'—"

"They're all poor," interrupted Mrs. Kate, "and they're all shiftless and utterly no-account. They'll rustle our cows and brand our calves at every opportunity, and they'll make opportunities. I know them. You can't tell me anything about nesters. As to these nesters being different from other nesters, it's impossible. They're all alike. And I'm surprised at you, a cowman, coming round and standing up for such people."

"Ma'am," Chuck cut in quietly, "one o' these nesters is ailin', an' they's two girls in the family an'—an'——"

"One of 'em's ailing," repeated Kate, her eyes promptly softening. "Is she very ill?"

"She ain't a she, ma'am. He's a he, an' he ain't right down sick. Only his daughter says he's got somethin' the matter with his lungs."

"T. B., I suppose. Came out here on account of the altitude. Did you say there were two girls in the family?"

"Two girls an' a ma."

"Two daughters. Well, I begin to see quite a few things. Are they pretty girls?"

"One of 'em is. Her name's Jane, an' she's shore a whizzer. I'm tellin' yuh, she's got the prettiest, shiniest hair! An' she don't talk like I do. She talks grammar like you do, ma'am. The whole family talk that way. I'll bet yuh'd enjoy talkin' to 'em a lot."

Mrs. Kate frankly laughed.

"They must be an unusual family," she said, after a space. "At any rate, if the father has incipient tuberculosis and there are two daughters, one of them with the prettiest, shiniest hair, running them out is not to be thought of. I'll speak to dad. But then dad'll know you've been talking to me and he may give you your time."

"I don't care about that. I'd rather lose my job than have them nesters move."

Kate reflected, her head on one side.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "I'll go upstairs and get Junior. He's asleep, but it won't hurt him to be waked up for once. I'll take him out on the porch where Tom and dad are, and I'll give him to his granddaddy to hold. Somehow, whenever he's holding that blessed child, dad is more amenable to reason. When I judge the moment to be propitious I'll begin to play 'Johnnie Cope' on my guitar. Then you come over and tell Tom and dad about the nesters. Don't say much. Merely mention the T. B. end of it, and the women, and say you thought they ought to have a few days before moving on. You leave the rest to me."

Chuck, crossing to the bunk-house, slapped his thighs in exultation.

"Now that's my idea of a reg'lar woman," he whispered ecstatically. "Yessir, they don't make 'em any better'n Mis' Kate."

IT SEEMED to Chuck that he waited an unconscionable time before the signaling guitar began to tink-tink-tinkle the old Scotch air. Chuck pinched out his cigaret, hitched up his chaps, and walked across to the ranch-house. Dimly, on the broad porch, he could discern three figures sitting. On the lap of one of them was a white bundle. Chuck halted beside the steps.

"I rode Soogan like yuh told me," he said, addressing Tom Loudon, "and I found the nesters all right."

He paused.

"Well?" Thus Loudon, with a rising inflection.

"Didja tell 'em to git?" demanded Mr. Saltoun, sensing that all was not as it should be.

"No, I didn't," replied the puncher. "One of 'em's——"

"What?" barked Mr. Saltoun. "Yuh mean to stand there, Chuck Morgan, an' tell me yuh didn't run them nesters off?"

"Wait till I get through," Chuck said coldly—the hair at the back of his neck was beginning to stiffen. "One of them nesters is a lunger an' they's three women in the family."

"I don't care—" yapped the angry Mr. Saltoun.

"Yes, you do, dad," interrupted his daughter's voice. "Yes, you do. You know you do. A man with tuberculosis and three women in the family! And you'd run them off! Why, you know perfectly well you wouldn't."

Her husband, Tom Loudon, kept a discreet silence. This was none of his battle, and besides, he knew his wife.

"You know yoreself, Kate," defended Mr. Saltoun, "that nesters are bad medicine. Their cows'll eat my grass, drink my water, an' they'll brand my calves. I know 'em, an' I won't have 'em on my range."

"It's a free range."

"She shore is—to me an' my friends. Not to nesters."

"Nevertheless, one little family of nesters isn't going to ruin you. They——"

"If one comes they'll all come. Let this outfit roost in peace, an' inside o' five years they'll be a hundred of 'em. No, sir, I say they ain't goin' to be no nesters at the Bar-S. Free range or no free range, out they go. I'll ride over there myself tomorrow."

Chuck immediately opened his mouth to demand his time and say in a few well-chosen words precisely what he thought of his employer and what he, Chuck Morgan, would do in case said employer ever attempted to evict the Dales. But Chuck had barely uttered the first word when Mrs. Kate, with great presence of mind, kicked over her chair with a crash, and sprang nimbly toward the steps, crying:

"My ring! My engagement ring! It slipped off my finger and rolled over the edge of the porch near you, Chuck!"

Chuck bewilderedly stooped to hunt. Loudon arose to his feet, but already Kate was off the porch and on her knees at the puncher's side, making a great pretense at searching in the grass.

"How didja come to drop it? Lordy, yore engagement ring! Cost three hundred dollars! What'sa matter with you, Kate?" Words tumbled out of Mr. Saltoun's mouth so swiftly that they almost fell over each other.

"If some people would only keep their mouths shut," Kate observed distinctly and kicked Chuck as hard as she could on the ankle, "I might find it. Talking too much and when it's far from necessary—" here she kicked the puncher again—"always makes trouble. Oh, here it is! I found it! I'll bet it'll keep its mouth shut now—I mean it'll stay on my finger all right after this."

"Ain't yuh feelin' well, Kate?" her husband asked in some alarm, for Kate's actions and words had struck him as odd.

"Don't yuh mind her," advised the older and denser man. "Kate's took this way frequent. Y' ain't lived with her as long's I have. Wait till yuh have. Pore li'l Junior. It's shore a good thing for him his granddaddy's livin' in the same house."

"From the wild eccentricities of his mother, good Lord deliver him," chanted Mrs. Kate. "If that blessed baby turns out badly it'll be his granddaddy's fault. If he wasn't such an angelic youngster he'd have been spoiled long ago. What were you people rowing about when I so clumsily lost my ring? Oh, yes, those nesters on Soogan. You were saying they could stay as long as they liked, didn't you, dad? Look at Junior hang on to your finger. Isn't he cute? Do you know, yesterday morning when I was dressing him he said 'Granda' plain as anything."

"An' yuh never told me," reproached Mr. Saltoun, delightedly hugging his grandson.

"I forgot," briskly pursued his daughter. "I believe he's growing to look like you more and more every day. Don't you think so, Tom?"

"Shore," agreed the pliable Tom, seeing through her little game and wondering hugely why she should so suddenly and strongly interest herself in nesters.

"About those nesters, dad," continued Kate, gently ruffling the top of her parent's head. "If they don't hurt anything or rustle your cows or run off your horses or otherwise commit crimes against the peace and dignity of the Territory and your property in particular, you won't mind, will you?"

"Lordy, Kate!" exclaimed her admiring father, "yuh can whirl words like I can a rope."

"The nesters, dad, the nesters."

"Oh, have it yore own way. Anythin' for a quiet life. Say, this here Junior child is gettin' another tooth. He just bit me, the li'l' fat rascal."

CHAPTER V

THE STRANGER

IN THE morning, wrapped in an old sack, the outfit's missing possessions were discovered on the bench beside the bunkhouse door. Tally was correct and nothing had been damaged. More mystified than ever, the punchers went to breakfast. Jimmy the cook hinted darkly at ghosts and nearly precipitated another riot.

Chuck was the first to finish and instead of going to the corral crossed to the ranchhouse to deliver the information supplied by Willie's Old Brother-in-Law. Mr. Saltoun was alone in the office when Chuck entered. The ranch-owner crossed one leg over the other and stared surlily at the puncher. The generous mood superinduced by his daughter and little Junior had worn thin at the edges. His "Well?" was more of a grunt than a word.

"Tom Loudon'll want to hear what I have to say," remarked Chuck, dispassionately eyeing his grouchy employer.

When the foreman came in obedience to Mr. Saltoun's loudly delivered summons the puncher hurriedly reported the words of the Indian. At the finish Mr. Saltoun was gazing out of the window with a very sober face and Loudon was scratching his head.

"This night-ridin' is shore a bad habit," observed Mr. Saltoun after a long minute's silence.

"She's all o' that," agreed Loudon, "but it ain't a hangin' matter—yet."

"No, but we don't want to lose any cows or hosses. An' we might lose quite a few before we could clamp our evidence an' paws on Cutnose an' his friends."

"Yuh can't hop out an' lynch Cutnose for nothin'. Yuh gotta let him rustle the beef first."

"An' that's just what I don't want to let him do. Lordy, Tom, beef's away up. I don't want to lose a single solitary calf. You wait, I'll scheme out somethin' to catch Cutnose an' not lose nothin'. Just you wait. Who put the hole in yore hat, Chuck?"

"He didn't say," grinned the puncher, "an' I was in too much of a hurry to ask. I've found askin' questions don't always pay."

Mr. Saltoun took the hint. Nettled, he sat back in his chair and reached for his tobacco.

"Have yuh told anybody 'bout what the Injun said, Chuck?" inquired Loudon.

"I told Telescope."

"Then don't to anybody else an' tell Telescope to keep his mouth shut. There's no sense in lettin' on to the boys till we've got more to go on than we have now."

"How's chances for a job?" queried a drawling voice from across the room.

All three turned with a jerk. Chuck's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. For, framed in the doorway, the top of his hat almost brushing the lintel, stood the lanky stranger who had come within an inch or two of killing him on the previous afternoon. Chuck wondered how much of their conversation the man had heard. The other's face revealed nothing. He brazenly winked at Chuck and repeated his inquiry.

"We're full up," replied Loudon, shaking his head.

"Now that's shore a calamity," declared the stranger. "I'd my mind all made up to work for yuh. I need a job—bad."

He did not appear to be in dire need of work. He was lean, but he looked well-nourished and as tough and strong as an eighty-dollar saddle. His face, stubbly with a week's beard, was not in the least haggard. He grinned engagingly, and turned to leave.

"Yuh can go over to the bunkhouse an' get yore breakfast if yuh like," suggested Loudon.

"Oh, I've done had my breakfast," said the stranger. "I reckon I'll just be wigglin' along."

Chuck followed him out. The stranger wheeled at the sound of footsteps. Chuck perceived that his right hand was at his gun and that his washed-out gray eyes had narrowed to slits. He was still smiling, but it was not a mirthful smile. Yet so swiftly did the eyes widen and the wolfish smile change to a cheerful grin that the first expression could hardly be said to have been quite an expression.

"No hard feelin's," said the stranger. "I wouldn't 'a' downed ye back there in that draw for a ranch in Texas—honest."

"I'm shore glad yuh feel that way about it," remarked Chuck, shaking hands. "I just thought I'd tell yuh to try the 88."

"Now that's right friendly o' yuh," beamed the stranger. "I've heard o' the 88. East o' here, ain't it?"

"Southwest," corrected Chuck. "But yuh better ride straight west till yuh strike the trail. She's about ten miles from here. See that saddlebacked hill over yonder? The trail to the 88 runs just the other side of it."

"I'm shore obliged to yuh," acknowledged the stranger, swinging into the saddle.

He rode off at a lope, his long-legged rangy buckskin fighting for its head. Chuck watched him go.

"Cross-T on the left hip," he mused. "There's a Cross-T in Lang County, but she's right hip for hosses an' left for cows, so that don't tell me nothin'. His buckskin shore wants to run, so he's been havin' a rest lately. Said he needed a job bad. Gents needin' jobs don't rest up their hosses much. 'East o' here, ain't it?' says he. Knew where the Bar-S was all right, but didn't know which side of us the 88 lay. Makin' out yo're a teetotal stranger, huh? Well, I dunno nothin' about yuh, Mister Man, but a chunker actin' an' talkin' the way you do will stand watchin'."

"Dat long feller she ees one of Cutnose' frien'," suggested Laguerre, when Chuck told him of the stranger's application for work.

"I thought o' that," said Chuck, "but I dunno. Why would Canter's friends want to work for the Bar-S, I'd like to know? My idea is he's a jigger who's wanted some'ers for a killin', or holdin' up a stage, or some such devilment, an' he's just romancin' round lookin' for a job an' seein' what little tricks he can turn on the side. That's why I told him to go to the 88. I know they're short a man, an' if he's a rustler he couldn't do better'n ride for the 88. That Lanpher is suspicious like he's mean. Let Mister Man go to friskin' round with a runnin' iron or driftin' stock into the hills, an' Lanpher'll get him. He's always ridin' the range, Lanpher is. He's shore afraid he'll miss somethin'. I don't like him, not any, the little rat, but I gotta give him credit for not overlookin' many bets."

"You have right," the half-breed nodded. "S'pose now you tell Willie's Ol' Brudder-een-Law go look at dees man—see eef she ees one o' Cutnose' frien'."

"I would if I knowed where his camp was. He moves round so, that Injun."

"I meet hees niece, de Rainbow, tree day ago w'en she was feesh een de Lazy, un she say dey was move camp up de rivière to de mout' o' Soogan Creek. Eef I see heem I tell heem. More better you do eet, too."

But neither Chuck nor the half-breed had opportunity that day, nor the next, nor the next, to seek out Willie's Old Brother-in-Law. For three days they remained at the range repairing the Bar-S freight wagon. After which Laguerre and another puncher

were dispatched to the most northerly of the Cow Creek line-camps, and Chuck was sent to Farewell with mail.

The Kid's Twin was much disgruntled at Chuck's good luck. His mind had been all set to go to Farewell. But it may be that Loudon felt that the Kid's Twin had consumed rather more time than was necessary on his last trip to town. Much to his disgust the Twin was given a team of mules and a wagon and orders to cut and pack firewood against the coming of cold weather.

Arrived in Farewell, Chuck first attended to the mail and some ranch errands and then went about on his occasions. Of Mike Flynn, the one-legged storekeeper, ancient ally of the Bar-S, he made it his business to inquire concerning the comings and goings of Cutnose Canter. The red-headed Irishman could tell him nothing further than that Cutnose had been consistently following his custom of absenting himself from Farewell's midst for weeks at a time, but that at the present moment he could be found playing draw with a few of his friends in the Happy Heart saloon.

Chuck, on his way to Bill Lainey's hotel, stopped at the Happy Heart. Standing at the bar, his hand cupped round his glass of whisky, he unobtrusively watched Cutnose Canter where he sat dealing at a table in a corner of the room.

As behooved a man whose habits are not conservative, Cutnose faced the door; he wore two guns, tied down; in bearing he was as alert as a weasel. But there the resemblance to that intelligent animal vanished. For Cutnose was short, thickset, and his arms were of extraordinary length. In common with the anthropoid and other apes, he possessed projecting and lobeless ears. His head was prognathous, his nose depressed in the middle as by a blow, and from beneath black eyebrows that met, a pair of dark eyes gazed upon the wicked world with a regard as cold and fixed and baleful as that of a snake.

The casual observer would have considered Cutnose a man of violent passions. The student of criminal physiognomy and characteristics would have gone further and said that his abnormalities were those of the robber and murderer. The sheriff of Fort Creek County went further yet and hoped some day to hang Cutnose by the neck till he was dead.

Cutnose riding the range was a person of prominent interest, but Cutnose playing poker was not even amusing. Chuck drank off his whisky and departed bedward.

Leaving Farewell at dawn he headed in the direction of Soogan Creek. To go by way of Moccasin Spring would not lengthen his ride by more than twenty miles. What were twenty extra miles to Peppermint?

Two hours out he overtook Willie's Old Brother-in-Law, a pronghorn buck across his pony's rump, bound for his camp at the mouth of Soogan Creek. Greetings having been exchanged with all ceremony, Chuck broached the subject of the long stranger and the probability of his being taken on at the 88. Would Willie's Old Brother-in-Law find it convenient to inspect the stranger at close range?

"I go," said the red-skinned altruist. "I no see Cutnose un hees frien' —— close. I try for tell. I no tell mabbeso. Las' time I smoke you' tobacco, now you smoke mine."

So, wrapped in a perfect understanding as befitted old friends, talking in fits and starts, they rode down the long sleepy miles and came at last to Moccasin Spring.

CHAPTER VI

BEEF

A DEEP and all-pervading peace had hung over the old C-Y ranch-house when Chuck rode away with the Kid's Twin. But now there was no peace. Down by the corral a man's voice was raised in acrimonious utterance. With the impassioned remarks mingled the sobs of a woman.

The high stockade of the corral concealed whatever was transpiring and Chuck Morgan, his mouth a straight line, spurred Peppermint to a run. He swung the horse round the corner of the corral. Hard-held, Peppermint slid to a halt on the edge of what appeared to be a dramatic situation.

Mr. Dale, supported by the arms of his wife, sat on the ground and coughed long retching coughs that shook him from his white head to his run-over heels. The handkerchief Mrs. Dale held to her husband's lips was stained bright red. At her mother's side little black-haired Molly crouched, sobbing her heart out.

In front of the forlorn group, her hands clenched till the knuckles showed white, her

face pale under the tan, Jane Dale stood facing the slim, little rat of a man who had been making the loud conversation. Beyond the little man a puncher sat one horse and held the bridle of another. At the little man's back, on a post of the corral stockade, hung a hind-quarter of beef. The little man was Lanpher, manager of the 88 ranch. The puncher was Racey Dawson, one of his men. Racey looked very much ashamed of himself.

"Howdy, ma'am," said Chuck, dismounting without haste, his eye on Mr. Dale. "Do yuh want a doctor? The nearest one's at Piegan City," he added. "But I can ride south to Blossom on the railroad an' telegraph for him."

"A doctor couldn't possibly help, thank you just the same. We know just what to do for father. But you can help us, if you will." Jane turned unflinching eyes on Chuck.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he inquired.

"These men—" began Jane.

"They killed one o' my cows," interrupted Lanpher, "and——"

"The lady was speakin'," cut in Chuck, staring with disconcerting directness straight into the angry red-rimmed eyes of the 88 manager. "I'd wait till she was all through, if I was you."

Lanpher, mightily enraged, had much ado to refrain from voicing his sentiments. But he remembered that Chuck bore the reputation of being uncertain in both temper and temperament. One must walk warily with such folk. Lanpher almost swallowed his Adam's apple.

"You go right on talkin', ma'am," Chuck urged briskly, without removing his eyes from Lanpher's convulsed features. "Don't mind this feller a-tall. He ain't responsible just now."

"This man accused father of killing and butchering one of his cows," explained Jane, her tone a bit shaky. "He says that quarter on the stockade came from a dead cow he found on his range, and he wouldn't believe me when I told him that we bought it from a man who rode by yesterday afternoon."

"Did he say he didn't believe yuh?"

"Yes, he did."

Lanpher saw the blue eyes turn even frostier. The mean spirit of the man quailed within him. Yet he strove to appear at ease, to preserve a bold front.

"Well, I found that cow, skun, an' the off hind-quarter missin', not half a mile away across the creek," he blustered loudly to cover his confusion. "I found the hide with my brand on to it, under a bush on the bank o' the creek opposite this shack. An' hangin' up on the corral fence I found the off hind-quarter. What more do yuh want than that? I tell yuh, that old jigger a-snortin' away there on the ground is a cow-thief."

"Yo're a liar," Chuck observed simply, his gun out and covering the pit of Lanpher's stomach. "'N'ds up!"

With exemplary promptness the arms of the manager rubbed his hatbrim. His complexion was livid. Chuck circled round him, possessed himself of his six-shooter, and thoughtfully felt about his person for possible hidden weapons. Finding none he returned to his post facing Lanpher.

"Racey, I hope yuh won't think o' doin' nothin' rash," he cautioned. "We don't really want a fraycas, an' besides yuh'll notice Willie's Old Brother-in-Law is watchin' yuh with a rifle."

"Don't yuh worry none about me," Dawson urged warmly. "I ain't out to jump invalids an' women-folks. She's the boss's funeral."

"It may be yet," smiled Chuck. "I hope yuh'll excuse me, ma'am, for swingin' into yore affairs thisaway, but I know this feller an' you don't, an' knowin' him, maybe I can sort o' manage him better."

"D-don't apologize," cried Jane, with an hysterical little laugh. "I—we're very much obliged."

She stepped back beside Molly, who had stopped weeping and was watching Chuck and Lanpher with fascinated frightened eyes. Mrs. Dale paid no attention to any one save her husband. He was still coughing, but the paroxysm had greatly lessened in violence.

"Lanpher you an' me are goin' to take a li'l' ride," announced Chuck. "I've told yuh yo're a liar, an' now I'm goin' to do yuh a favor I don't usually do when I call a man a liar—I'm goin' to prove it to yuh. An' Willie's Old Brother-in-Law is a-goin' to help me. Yuh can put yore hands down now an' climb on yore hoss. But don't make no sudden moves. It's just possible I mightn't understand."

Without a word Lanpher went to his

horse and climbed slowly into the saddle. Chuck contrived to mount the fractious Peppermint without losing for an instant the magic of the drop.

"Yuh'd better trail along, Racey," suggested Chuck. "I'd kind o' like to have yuh for a witness to what I think is goin' to happen."

Nothing loath, the 88 puncher fell in between Chuck and the Indian. In obedience to Chuck's orders, Lanpher led the way across the creek to where, on the top of a knoll, lay the skinned body of a cow with the hind-quarter missing.

"I hope yo're satisfied," snarled Lanpher. "Yuh can see for yoreself——"

"Willie's Old Brother-in-Law can see more'n any of us," interrupted Chuck, and requested the Indian to read sign.

The latter immediately dismounted and set about the business with placid ease.

"Man shootum cow from pony," he began.

"How do yuh know?" Racey questioned curiously.

"Bullet go een back de ear, come out w'ere 'ead un neck go togedder," explained Willie's Old Brother-in-Law, courteous as always. "Cow fall, man stop pony over yonner," he continued, "geet off, un come skeen cow. She skeen cow —— quick, cut off hin' leg, ride pony dees way."

Stolidly the Indian mounted his horse and headed back toward the creek. On the way Chuck inquired of Racey whether the 88 had hired any new men lately. The latter said that a new hand had been hired three days previous. His name, Henderson, meant nothing to Chuck, but his description, which Chuck casually wormed out of Racey, tallied precisely with that of the tall stranger.

Behind a small clump of red willows directly opposite the old ranch-house the Indian checked his mount. He pointed at an irregularly shaped space where the grass was bent down and dabbled here and there with dried gouts of blood and bits of stringy flesh.

"Hide spread out dere," he said.

"Was the hide spread out when yuh found it, Lanpher?" Chuck asked.

Lanpher nodded, his eyes piggily sullen.

"O' course, if that old man had killed yore cow he'd leave the body on top of a knoll where she'd be seen half a mile off an' the hide all spread out across the creek from his house, wouldn't he?" Chuck spoke with biting sarcasm.

Lanpher made no comment.

"S'pose you'd killed that beef," theorized Chuck, "an' wanted to put the blame on Dale, yuh'd do just what that cowkiller done, y'betcha. An' like him yuh'd take extra good care to sell or give the Dales a quarter. Shore yuh would. Yuh needn't bite yore lip at me neither. I'm just s'posin'. Nothin' fairer'n that, is they? I didn't say yuh done it. Tell yuh the truth, I don't think yuh did. But yuh made a plumb bad mistake in tryin' to fasten the cowkillin' on the Dales. Yuh shore did, feller. 'Bout what time was that cow killed, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law?"

"Yesserday," replied the Indian. "I no know exact. Affernoon, mabbeso."

"Was he a big or li'l man?"

"She mak strong sign. She more beeger dan you."

"An' I weigh a hundred an' seventy in my stockin' feet, an' if that peaked li'l Dale man weighs a hundred an' twenty with all his cloe's an' a buffler coat I'm Dutch. Yuh see how it is, Lanpher? Yo're gettin' more an' more mistaken every minute. Don't say anythin' if yuh don't feel like it. I wanted yuh to hear what the Injun had to say about the cowkiller's size. Now we'll ride over an' I'll ask Miss Dale to tell us how big the gent who sold 'em the beef was. After we've heard her answer yo're goin' to beg her pardon, an' say how sorry yuh are for makin' trouble for her."

"I'll see you in hell first!" the overwrought Lanpher gasped thickly.

"Not first," Chuck corrected gently. "Yuh'll either do what I tell yuh or have a lickin'. An' when I say 'lickin' I don't mean I'll take my hands or feet to yuh. No sir, I wouldn't think o' such a thing, not for a minute. But I'll wear out my quirt on yuh, that's what I'll do, an' do yuh know, feller, I kind o' hope yuh'll refuse to say yo're sorry."

OF THE Dale family only Jane was visible when the little cavalcade returned across the creek. She was standing near the stockade where hung the hind-quarter of beef. As they rode up she put her hands behind her back and faced them. Her face was expressionless.

At Chuck's request she described the man who had sold her the beef. He was a very

tall man, with a short, brown, curly beard, and rode a buckskin pony. The man's weight she put at a hundred and eighty.

"I told yuh so," whispered Chuck in Lanpher's ear. "Was he kind o' skinny, ma'am?" he added.

"He wasn't very fat," said the girl.

"But he had a beard, yuh say?"

"A short, curly, brown beard, and—and—Oh, yes, he smiled all the time he was talking to me."

"Djuh notice his eyes, miss?"

"Why yes, it seems to me, now I think of it, that he had light blue or gray eyes."

"Light blue or gray. Um-m-m. 'Member the brand on his hoss?"

"Cross-T on the left hip."

"Cross-T on the left hip," repeated Chuck staring hard at Dawson.

"I know what yo're thinkin', Chuck," Racey remarked tactlessly, "but it wasn't Henderson. Him an' Dan Lukens have been mendin' the windmill ever since he was hired, an' they only finished the job last night. Besides he's done shaved, Henderson has."

"Tryin' to blame it on one of my men, huh?" explained Lanpher, not in the least loath to jump at a conclusion. "Now, by ——, Morgan, I——"

Chuck and Lanpher had both dismounted and were standing not more than a yard apart. Which was unfortunate for Lanpher. He never finished the sentence in which he had called upon his Maker. The animated delivery ceased with a gasp. For Chuck's hand had gripped his elbow and something hard and round was poking into his short-ribs.

"Excuse us a while, ma'am," Chuck said easily. "Mister Lanpher is just a-goin' to take me over back o' the corral to tell me how sorry he is he cussed in front o' yuh. He'd do it here, only he's bashful, Lanpher is, an' a lady bein' present sort o' bluffs him like. We'll be back."

Lanpher, with that hard and round something prodding his side, made no bones of accompanying Chuck. Jane watched them go with inscrutable eyes. Racey smiled a pleased smile. The Indian sat his horse stolidly. He looked half asleep.

Arrived at the rear of the corral, Chuck whirled Lanpher about and sent him spinning backward. The manager had much ado to keep his balance.

"I'll kill you first chance I get!" he exclaimed in a voice shaking with emotion.

"I know," said Chuck, brushing aside the assertion with a wave of his hand. "Just help yoreself, old-timer. But there's somethin' I want to tell yuh. I'd 'a' told yuh while we was ridin' round together, but she slipped my mind. I'm awful forgetful. Why, say, yuh'd never believe the things I forget. Yo're madder'n a bull on the prod, ain't yuh? Dunno as I blame yuh. Dunno as I do, bein' what you are—little an' mean an' a rat. Don't get impatient, feller, I'll get at what I have to say quick an' right away.

"It's only this: I can't be hangin' round here always ready to rope yuh when yuh get yore leg over the traces. Yuh know yoreself I can't. I got my job to look after. Well, seein' how things are, it kind o' struck me that maybe yuh'd try to run these folks out while I'm away. It'd be like yuh, from what I've heard. Now, here's the burr under the saddle. Don't yuh try it. If yuh do I'll just naturally have to hunt yuh out an' have a li'l talk with yuh. An' I don't want to have to talk rough to yuh. I don't. Not me. I'm the best-natured feller so long's I can have my own way. But I gotta have it. I gotta, an' there's no two ways about that."

Chuck paused. Lanpher, by this time, had gotten his feelings under partial control. Further than a smothered expletive he made no sound.

"Now," continued Chuck, "what I want yuh to know is, yuh gotta be decent an' let these folks alone, or I'll make yuh hard to find."

"You will, huh?" Lanpher did his best to achieve a scornful sneer, but made a poor mouth of it. His self-esteem had, of a truth, been shaken to its bottommost brick, and readjustment came hard.

Chuck smiled. But his eyes did not relax their watchfulness for an instant.

"Yes," he observed without heat. "I will. Li'l ol' me will do that."

"I s'pose yuh know just how popular nesters are 'round here." The manager's tone fairly dripped venom.

"Oh, yeah, I guess so. But I wasn't talkin' about that. It don't signify, none whatever."

"Don't it? We'll see."

"You will. Yessir, you'll see, y'betcha, if anythin' at all happens to the Dale family. It won't be necessary for you personal to do

anythin' to 'em. This goes for any o' yore men, or just anybody yuh happen to give the job to. Don't think I won't find it out. I will, trust yore Uncle Dudley, son. He's the best li'l finder-out in the territory. An' he's a-holdin' you responsible. Y-O-U, you. Now ain't yuh sorry yuh cussed in front of the lady?"

"You go to ——!"

"My, my, how peevish the li'l feller is this mornin'. Bless its darlin' heart. It shall have its bottle in a little while, so it shall. You listen. Now that we understand each other, you an' me'll wander back to the other side of the corral, an' when we get there yo're a-goin' to say how sorry yuh are yuh cussed in front of Miss Dale. Then yo're a-goin' to beg her pardon for causin' her so much trouble an' for makin' her pa sick. Then yo're a-goin' away from here."

"An' s'pose I don't feel like doin' all these things?"

"Then I'll just naturally give yuh that lickin' an' kick the pants off yuh besides."

Lanpher, like the shrewd little animal he really was, squinted his eyes and debated the matter.

"Glad to see yo're all over yore mad," Chuck commented. "I always said yuh was a bright li'l feller an' could be good-natured if yuh tried. Think hard now. Scratch yore head if it helps any. Remember, I'll shore put my whole heart an' foot into doin' a good job if I have to kick yuh. An' it'll be right in front o' the lady—an' Racey too. Don't forget that."

"I'll do it," Lanpher said suddenly, a sinister gleam in his little black eyes.

"If yo're aimin' to gamble with me," observed Chuck, noting the gleam, "don't do it. I'll still be watchin' yuh, even if yuh have reformed."

"There's plenty o' time for what I'm aimin' to do," countered Lanpher. "I ain't in no hurry."

"Now that's the talk I like to hear," came Chuck's hearty endorsement. "I shore do hate to hustle myself. C'mon, let's wiggle back an' you can speak yore li'l piece."

Thus adjured Lanpher wiggled.

To Miss Dale he, holding his hat, apologized for everything. His manner was intensely sullen, but it was respectful. Chuck could find no fault. His task completed, Lanpher turned to mount his horse.

"Wait," ordered Miss Dale coldly, then to Chuck: "Is it really his beef Mister Morgan?"

"I guess it is," nodded Chuck, "but that's all right. You bought it. He's only too glad to let yuh keep it, Lanpher is."

"You don't understand. If it is his beef, we have no right to it. I should like him to take it with him."

Chuck recognized the futility of argument. He had heard that tone before. Mrs. Kate employed it at times.

"You hear, Lanpher," said he softly. "The quarter goes with you."

"Take it down, Racey," snapped Lanpher without turning his head, and reaching for his horse's bridle.

"Who? Me?" Dawson cried surprisedly. "Unhook it yoreself."

"Yo're fired!"

"Fired myself 'bout half an hour ago. I wouldn't work for such a hawg as you, nohow."

"Let the beef stay! I don't want it!" Lanpher's voice was a snarl as he stuck foot in stirrup.

"Wait a shake," cried Chuck. "You've been told to take that beef along with yuh. Now do it."

For the fraction of a second the harassed manager hesitated. Then his foot fell away from the stirrup, and he turned back to the corral stockade.

The hind-quarter had been hung high, and Lanpher was a small man. It was not soothing to know that four people were observing him with interest as he stood on tiptoe and lifted and strained and tugged at that hind-leg which perversely clung and clung and refused to be separated from its peg. He shook it free at last and carried it to his horse. While he was making it fast behind the cantle with the saddle-strings, he happened to glance in Chuck's direction. To his amazed chagrin that gentleman was stuffing cartridges into the cylinder of a six-shooter.

"Yuh see," drawled Chuck, grinning at him, "I done emptied her at a jack-rabbit when I was ridin' this way, an' I didn't bother to reload just then. An' after meetin' you I was so busy I didn't have time to reload till now. Funny, ain't it? I s'pose yuh thought it was loaded all the time, didn't yuh?"

Lanpher was speechless. He tied the last knot and mounted.

"Here's yore gun," said Chuck, tossing

him his six-shooter. "I unloaded her. 'F I was you I wouldn't go for to slip in any cartridges till I was good an' out o' sight."

Lanpher dropped the gun into his holster without comment. He wheeled his horse and rode down into the creek, followed by Racey Dawson. The three at the corral silently watched the two riders as they squattered and splashed across, nipped through the bushes on the bank, and loped off southwestward.

"I thought that man said he quit." Miss Dale's eyebrows were drawn together in a puzzled frown.

"Who? Racey? He did. He's just trailin' along with Lanpher to get his time. What? Why, shore, miss, safe as a church. Lanpher won't do nothin' to Racey. An' anyway, Racey Dawson is a cold proposition himself—Me? Why, say, ma'am, don't yuh think o' that for a minute. Lanpher won't do nothin' to me. He won't even try. Don't yuh fret about that, not any."

But in his heart Chuck knew that he lied. He knew that the manager of the 88 would do a great deal—would in short not rest or be contented till he had come even with the man who had humiliated him. But he did not know that Miss Jane knew that he lied. Her black eyes studied him.

"Do you know," she said, after a space, "I think you are a very gallant gentleman."

"Huh!" gasped Chuck, turning brick-red. No one had ever before called him a gentleman, gallant or otherwise. It was a painful moment. He did not know what to say. But Willie's Old Brother-in-Law saved the day for him.

"Cutnose Canter come," said the Indian, who, since returning from across the creek, had not moved from where he sat on his horse at the corner of the corral.

Chuck's delight at the interruption was not unmixed. What business had Cutnose Canter coming here? What did it mean?

"Who is Cutnose Canter?" was Miss Dale's query.

"He's a-a-a man." The reply came haltingly.

"Oh," said Miss Dale, as though she understood perfectly.

CHUCK faced about as the hoofbeats of a single-footing pony became audible. The horseman slid into view beyond the cottonwoods at the spring. Cutnose Canter rode up to Chuck and brought his pinto to a halt with a most unnecessary jerk.

"Howdy, Chuck," he said easily, essaying a thick-lipped grin. "'Scuse me, ma'am," he continued, taking off his hat to the girl, "but I'm all out o' matches, so I rode over thinkin' I could borry some."

And as he spoke his bold black eyes roved over Miss Dale's face and figure in a way that made Chuck itch to lash him across the face with his quirt. Without a word the girl turned to enter the house. Chuck reached upward to his hat-band.

"Here y'are," he said harshly, handing Cutnose a few matches.

Cutnose took the matches and returned Chuck's unwelcoming stare with interest.

"'F I ain't intrudin', might I get a drink?" The thick lips were twisted into a sneer.

"There's the creek." Chuck flicked a thumb over his shoulder.

"Now I shore don't care nothin' 'bout drinkin' outen a creek," declared Cutnose, "not when I can have a dipper or somethin' like that. Perhaps the lady—" He paused meaningly.

"If yo're so particular, there's the spring right back of yuh a ways."

"Oh, I guess I won't bother 'bout no spring, thank yuh just the same. Here comes the lady with a dipper. I guess now she must o' heard me."

Jane walked unhurriedly forward and handed up the dipper to Cutnose without looking at him. She was gazing at the distant hills with impersonal eyes. Not for an instant, as he drank, did Cutnose Canter cease to stare at Jane. Chuck's face was a blank. But his mind wasn't.

Cutnose slowly and noisily drank the dipper dry and held it out to Jane.

"Thanks," said he. "I'm shore obliged to yuh."

"You're welcome."

She took the dipper and went back to the house.

Cutnose Canter followed her with his eyes till the kitchen door closed behind her. He looked down at Chuck and his eyes narrowed.

"I'm glad I run out o' matches," he remarked, picking up the reins. "An' that I was thirsty," he added.

"If yo're goin' anywhere," observed Chuck, "don't lemme keep yuh."

"Oh, you ain't. Huh! You! Which I should say not. But yuh needn't look at me so hard an' abrupt. I ain't done a thing to yuh, not a thing, so let's all be happy. Say, I seen Lanpher an' Racey Dawson a while back. Lanpher didn't look like his chuck agreed with him."

"Maybe it didn't. Yuh can't tell. Don't lemme hurry yuh, but hadn't yuh better be strollin' along?"

"She's a free country, an' I dunno but what I like the scenery round these parts pretty well. What do you guess?"

Chuck made no reply. His blue eyes became slits. Cutnose Canter opened his mouth to finish what he had started. It was a tense moment. But Canter's sneer suddenly became the thick-lipped grin, and his words when he spoke were pacific.

"If yuh feel that way about it, maybe I will be weavin' along. See yuh later."

Cutnose wheeled his horse on its hind-legs and loped away.

"I wonder what made him change his mind," mused Chuck. "He was a-figurin' to say somethin' to start a gun-play, that's a cinch, when he got a new idea. An' it must 'a' been a good one."

He was still pondering the question when Jane came out of the house. She looked very tired. He went toward her quickly.

"How's yore dad now?" he asked.

"Easier—he's in bed," she replied tonelessly.

"Shore yuh don't want me to go after that doctor?"

"Positive. A doctor can do no good. The only thing to do is to keep father from having those hemorrhages. Every one he has lessens by so much his chance of recovery. He hadn't had one for several months, and we had such hopes—and now, to have this happen. Oh, it is so hard!"

Her voice broke on the last word, and she unaffectedly dabbed at her eyes with the corner of her apron. Chuck longed to take her in his arms and comfort her properly. But he did not dare. So far as any demonstration of affection was concerned she was to him the goddess still.

"I—I'm shore sorry," he stammered in his embarrassment. "Yuh—yuh know, ma'am, if yuh want anythin', all yuh gotta do is call on me. I'd ride the little horse down to his fetlocks to get just anythin' at all for yuh, an' that's whatever."

Even in her trouble she almost smiled at the warmth of his offer.

"I know," she said. "You're a great help. You're awfully good. If it hadn't been for you I don't know what would have happened today. I——"

"That's all right," he hastened to assure her, in a panic lest she thank him again. "I don't guess yuh'll be bothered for a while."

"I'm not so sure. The man who wanted a drink has been here several times."

"You mean Cutnose Canter!" Chuck's surprise was patent.

She nodded.

"You said that was his name. He didn't tell us."

"What's he said, or done?" The words snapped out like a whiplash.

"Oh, he just hangs around. He hardly ever says anything, just sits and follows you with his eyes. It makes me mad, but it gives poor Molly and mother the creeps."

"You never said nothin' about this before!" Severely.

"I didn't think of it, and anyway, you must remember this is only the second time in my life I've seen you."

"I ain't aimin' to pry into yore affairs, ma'am, but would yuh mind tellin' me how many times an' when Cutnose has been here? I know it's none o' my business, but I got a good reason for askin'."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you. He was here twice before you came the first time. He didn't stay long then—just stopped for matches or a drink, I forget which. But this week he's been here three times. Day before yesterday, yesterday morning and today. With the exception of today, he stopped about an hour each time."

"He did—the pup!" But the way Chuck said it, the last word sounded like a heartfelt curse. "Yesterday mornin' yuh say," he added, "an' yesterday afternoon was when that cowkiller sold yuh the beef, wasn't it?"

"You don't think there can be any connection, do you?"

"I dunno. I want to find out. I'm goin' to find out. An' if there is, I'll guarantee Cutnose won't come canterin' round here no more. An' anyway, next time I see him I'll just tell him he ain't wanted here."

"You mustn't do that, you——"

"Ma'am, Cutnose ain't fit to look at the ground yuh walk on," he declared firmly.

"He's just a plain wolf, an' I don't mind tellin' yuh—" He stopped abruptly, suddenly mindful of Loudon's order to keep his mouth shut in respect to Cutnose Canter.

"Go on," she noded.

"Can't. Yuh'll know it all some day. But tellin' yuh now might spoil it."

"As though I couldn't keep a secret! Why are you so mysterious all of a sudden?" She was persistent, all her natural curiosity aroused to the full.

But Chuck was not to be cajoled into disobeying orders.

"Ma'am, I can't tell yuh what I'm only guessin' at. I gotta go now. But maybe yuh'll see me again before a great while."

In which statement Chuck spoke more truly than he knew.

CHAPTER VII

MACHIAVELLI

RIDING eastward with Willie's Old Brother-in-Law Chuck halted his horse where Rattlesnake Draw opens out beyond Two Kettle Hill. Which hill is three short miles from Moccasin Spring. A horseman, a tiny bead on an invisible thread, was dropping down the bare shoulder of a ridge at the other end of Rattlesnake Draw.

"Ain't that a paint pony yonder?" asked Chuck, mindful that the amiable Cutnose had ridden a pinto.

Willie's Old Brother-in-Law nodded. "Cutnose Canter."

"He rode away north, an' now he's ridin' south again. If he keeps on, an' angles west some, he'd ought to be at Moccasin Spring in fifteen or twenty minutes. I just knowed he had somethin' in his mind when he stopped tryin' to pick a fight with me a while back yonder, an' this is it. I'm goin' to trail him. C'mon. He's out o' sight now."

The Indian followed Chuck without demur. As has been said Willie's Old Brother-in-Law was a most superior Indian.

The two, the white man and the red, passed through Rattlesnake Draw at a gallop. Beyond the draw the Indian, as the better qualified for the work in hand, took the lead. He led the way quartering across level ground to the ridge. He turned south along the base of the ridge, heading toward a low hill where pines and cedars grew sparsely. They quirted their panting mounts up the slope of the hill, charged in among the trees and dismounted near the top.

Flinging the reins over the ponies' heads they went forward on foot. Lying stomach-flat on the brown needles between two young pines, they looked across country to where, in the middle distance, a line of bushes and cottonwoods marked the course of Soogan Creek. Against the yellowy-green of the flats around it the gray-brown C-Y ranch-house and corral stood out distinctly. In the windless air of that Summer day the thin smoke from the chimney ribboned straight up.

At first Chuck saw no sign of Cutnose. But the Indian, pointing, showed where Cutnose had ridden into the cottonwoods on the creek-bank not more than a quarter-mile from the ranch-house. Within five minutes Cutnose came into view at the top of the bank. He was leading his horse. He led the animal to and fro a few times, stopping now and then for some purpose that Chuck could not determine. Which was not remarkable. For the creek was nearly a mile distant. Cutnose finally disappeared among the cottonwoods. He was still leading his mount.

"Cayuse not lame w'en she ride' way," vouchsafed Willie's Old Brother-in-Law. "She lame now een foreleg. Cutnose lameum."

"Cutnose lamed him? What yuh talkin' about?"

In silence the Indian walked back to the horses. From the tail of his pony he pulled a long hair. Which hair he passed twice round the pony's off foreleg an inch above the fetlock, pulled it tight and tied it tighter. He then picked up the reins and led the little horse to and fro even as Cutnose Canter had done. Almost at once the animal began to limp slightly in the off foreleg.

"Him now lame," observed Willie's Old Brother-in-Law, directing a swift glance at the amazed puncher. "No can see what lameum."

This was quite true. The hair of the leg effectively concealed the ligature. The Indian stooped, broke the knotted horse-hair with a quick snick of his thumb-nail, and straightened. He moved forward. The pony followed. It was no longer lame.

"See," the Indian said calmly.

"I see that all right," affrmed Chuck,

"but what I don't see is why Cutnose wants to make his cayuse lame. Unless"—a slight chin-rubbing pause—"unless he wants an excuse to stay there all night."

"Dat eet," nodded the Indian, and climbed into the saddle.

Chuck swung up, and they rode off. Straight down the hillside they galloped without any attempt at concealment, and headed across the flat toward the ranch-house.

Cutnose Canter was exhibiting and expatiating upon the lameness of his mount to Jane Dale when Chuck and the Indian came round the corner of the house.

"Well, well, here we are again," cried Cutnose, displaying his yellow teeth in the familiar twisted grin. "I shore didn't expect to see yuh again so soon, Chuck. I'm just sayin' to the lady I got one lame hoss here, an' I gotta wait till he's better 'fore I can hit the trail. I'd ask to borry a pony o' yuh, ma'am, only I'd kind o' like to stay an' rub the li'l hoss's leg, an' see if I can't cure him up. If it's all the same to you, ma'am."

"Lemme look at this lame hoss," cut in Chuck, before Jane could speak. "Didn't know I was somethin' of a hoss-doctor, didja, Cutnose? Well, I am. I can cure most anythin' thataway but a broken leg."

He dismounted and approached Canter's animal. He reached for the bridle. Cutnose made as though to jerk it away, but thought better of the impulse and allowed Chuck to do as he wished. The latter led the pony forward a few steps.

"It's the near fore," went on Chuck, in loud, cheerful tones, "an' from the way he's holdin' that hoof it's below the knee. Lessee, feller, what a li'l rubbin'll do. Huh? What's this here? Well, if it ain't a hoss-hair 'at's got all tangled up round the leg over the fetlock! Why, she's wound round three times an' tied in a good old hard knot. Now that's what I call remarkable. It shore beats all what a pony'll do with his feet, don't it, Cutnose?"

Cutnose Canter made no reply. But his eyes were murderous. Chuck, watching the other for a hostile movement, led the pony round in a circle.

"See, he don't limp none now," he observed brightly. "Not a smidgin o' lameness. I told yuh I was a hoss-doctor, Cutnose. Here he is, yore hoss, fit to carry yuh anywhere. Did I hear yuh say yuh was ridin' to Marysville—or Farewell maybe? Not that it makes any real difference, just so it's somewhere prompt an' right away."

With his left hand Chuck tossed the reins to Cutnose. The latter let them fall. While a man might draw three breaths he stared steadily at Chuck. The puncher smiled back—with his mouth. There was no mirth in his eyes. Jane caught her breath. She tried to speak, but she found difficulty in moving her stiff lips. She did not know what she was trying to say, but she did know that her knees were shaking and she could not stir from the spot where she stood.

Then Cutnose stooped suddenly for his reins, flipped them round his pony's neck, seized the horn and vaulted into the saddle without touching the stirrup. Jane found herself whispering, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" over and over as Cutnose Canter vanished behind the cottonwoods at the spring. The thudding drum of the galloping hoofs dwindled and died away in the distance. Jane looked at Chuck with a very pale face. Her hands crept upward to her breast. She sighed deeply, and gradually her color returned.

"I thu-thu-thought he was going to shoot," stuttered Jane.

"So did I," concurred Chuck. "But he didn't and I didn't, an' everythin's saloobrious, 'ceptin' I don't guess Cutnose'll like me any more."

LATE in the afternoon Chuck rode in among the buildings of the Bar-S. From the bunkhouse kitchen floated the sprightly lilt of "The Zebra Dun."

"Dried apple pies!" exclaimed Chuck, and smacked ecstatic lips at the recollection of previous pies.

Jimmy the cook was a methodical person in some ways. He always bawled "The Zebra Dun" when baking pies, kneaded dough to the tune of "The Mormon Bishop's Lament," and washed dishes with the help of "Dan Taylor."

Chuck stuck his head into the kitchen on his way to the ranch-house from the corral.

"I knowed it!" he cried, sniffing loudly. "Got one to spare?"

"Got h——!" barked Jimmy, who was swiftly peeling potatoes. "Whadda yuh think this is—a restaurow? Huh? Well, it ain't! I'll tell yuh those! You lazy jiggers think I got nothin' to do but fill yore old

haybellies forty times a day. You'll get yore pie at supper—maybe.

"Say, the old man's in a sweat for yuh. He come driftin' in here, he did, the good-natured old cuss, an' 'Ain't Chuck got back yet?' says he. Yuh might think I kept yuh in the oven or somethin'. Clumb up on the corral stockade then, he did, an' kept a-lookin' an' a-lookin' down the trail for yuh. After a while he give her up an' trotted back to the house cussin' an' cussin'. I learned four new words just listenin'. Yuh'd better go up to the house."

"I will when I've had a drink," said Chuck, knowing that Jimmy kept, for his own use, a bucket of cool water behind the door. "Give us a pie, yuh miser," he went on, between gulps. "Anybody'd think they belonged to yuh, by the way yuh hang on to 'em."

"Anybody'd think that water belonged to yuh by the way yo're sloppin' it all over the floor!" roared James. "Why don't yuh get a drink at the windmill?"

" 'Cause I'd rather have you pack it for me, dearie," replied Chuck, and flirted half a dipperful down the cook's neck. "I do believe yuh forgot to wash yore face this mornin'."

He dodged through the doorway, followed by two sticks of stove-wood and the lid-lifter. At a safe distance he paused, stuck his thumbs in his ears, and twiddled his fingers antler-wise at the incensed cook, who stood in the doorway shaking his fists and promising to get even if it took him a million years.

Laughing, Chuck proceeded with the mail to the ranch-house. Looking through the office window he saw Mr. Saltoun sitting hunched over the desk, his chin supported on his two fists. When Chuck entered he did not look up. Chuck, recognizing the signs of deep thought, laid the few letters on the corner of the table, then sat down and rolled a cigaret. Suddenly Mr. Saltoun smote the table a severe blow with his fist.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I knowed I'd get it if I thought long enough. Why didn't yuh come home sooner, Chuck?" he added, sliding round in his chair. "I'd have got it a sight quicker if I'd had somebody to talk it over with. What kept yuh, anyway?"

"I had business," was Chuck's answer.

"Oh, I suppose so! Business! Lally-gaggin' at Moccasin Spring I'll bet!"

"Well, if that ain't business, what is?"

"Don't yuh sit there grinnin' at me thataway! I ain't a-goin' to have my boys takin' up with no nesters. Yuh'll be herdin' sheep next."

"Yuh was talkin' about somethin' yuh got just now," suggested Chuck, anxious to change the subject, although he was aware that Mr. Saltoun, by the totally unexpected twinkle in his eyes, was taking a lenient view of his offense. Surprised and grateful, for Mr. Saltoun was not one to condone a fault, Chuck grinned engagingly and leaned forward to hear better.

Mr. Saltoun placed his hands on his knees and smiled after the fashion of the cat who contemplates a meal of fine, fat canary.

"I got a scheme for foxin' Cutnose Canter," said he.

"Yeah?"

"Yuh know the Buffler Flats?"

Chuck nodded. He knew the Buffalo Flats, that great expanse of rolling country lying between Soogan Creek and the big bend of the Lazy. There was the finest grazing on the Bar-S range.

"There ain't so many cows on the Flats," continued Mr. Saltoun. "We've been kind o' savin' it for Winter. But before the week's up there'll be a likely herd grazin' there. Mister Cutnose'll hear of it an' come pouncin' down, him an' his friends, all spraddled out with their mouths open, an' then we'll grab 'em."

Mr. Saltoun leaned back in his chair. His expansive smile expressed faith and hope, but not charity. One could see that he was mentally hugging himself.

Chuck looked at the floor.

Mr. Saltoun's eyebrows drew together. "What's the matter with that scheme?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothin'," said Chuck, with an elaborate yawn, "but Cutnose may be wantin' to take his cows from the northern part o' the range, nearer Farewell, yuh know."

"Aw——!" barked Mr. Saltoun, with the irritation of one who sees his pet plan decried. "Yuh don't know what yo're talkin' about, Chuck Morgan! Do yuh s'pose for one minute that I'd 'a' gone an' wrastled my brains around an' thought up that scheme if it wasn't a good one? Huh? Now don't go pilin' on no wet blankets. Them cows are goin' to be drifted down there to the Buffler Flats an' yo're a-goin' to drift em."

"All by my lonesome?"

"You an' some other feller."

"Then gimme Telescope."

"He's up on Cow Creek. Yuh can't——"

"Yeah, I know, but Telescope he knows about this little deal an' he won't have to be told nothin'. Somebody else will. An' you was sayin' how yuh didn't want anybody else to get on to what was happenin'."

"We-ell, all right. I'll send Buff Warren up there to take his place tonight. Now looky here, Chuck, don't yuh see how easy she all is? There's the cows, like pullets in a chicken-house, all ready an' waitin' to be glommed onto. Why, she's the easiest place in the world to get at, an' no trouble at all to get to Marysville."

"That's where they're goin' to sell 'em, huh?"

"That's where I'm gamblin' they're goin' to sell 'em," Mr. Saltoun made the assertion with dignity.

"All right, you know."

"Say, you got somethin' up yore sleeve. What is it? Don't say 'Nothin' at me thataway. If yo're so smart tell me what you think—if yo're able."

"Me? Oh, I'm able, an' don't yuh forget it. Cutnose ain't figurin' on deliverin' his cattle in Marysville or nowhere near it. F. O. B. Farewell an' vicinity is the hoss I'm bettin' on. Hoss? Hoss? Didja hear me say hoss? It makes me think o' somethin'. S'pose now she was hosses an' not cows that Canter's li'l ol' heart is a-cravin' for?"

"S'pose now yo're crazy! Why, say, yuh make me plumb weary. Hosses? Cows! Yuh hear me! Cows!"

"What'll yuh gimme if she is hosses, an' I catch Cutnose?"

"I'll give you all the hosses." Contemptuously.

"Yuh mean to say that if Cutnose an' his friends run off a herd, an' I dump him an' the deal, yuh'll gimme the horse-band."

"Shore." Not with quite so much confidence.

"All right, I'll go yuh. Here's where you lose."

"I ain't lost yet. In the mean time, you an' Telescope drift five or six hundred head down on Buffler Flats. When yuh got that many there come to me."

"Do I get any chance to ride the range an' watch Cutnose? I want to win that horse-band."

"Yuh'll have plenty o' chance for all o' that. Yuh can stay round the ranch till Telescope rides in. I want yuh to fix the buckboard harness tomorrow, anyway. Them —— mules run away again yesterday. I guess that's all."

Chuck rose and departed, whistling.

"I dunno if she is hosses," he said aloud, halting on his way to the bunkhouse to execute a *pas seul*. "But I'm gamblin' she is, 'cause Old Salt's so —— shore she ain't. I never knowed him to figure anythin' out right yet."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORDS OF A TALE-BEARER

CHUCK MORGAN, straddling the home-made stitching horse, and working two needles, finished repairing the first trace, and removed his foot from the treadle.

"—— them mules," he muttered, wiggling his stiffened fingers. "They must think I like to mend harness." He looked at the shortened shadow of the bunkhouse. "Ten o'clock. Me for a smoke."

As he inhaled the first puff came Jimmy the cook with a dishpan of potatoes and sat down on the bench beside the kitchen-door.

"C'mon an' sit closer, sweetness," invited Chuck, indicating the bench at the bunkhouse door. "Then I can talk to yuh without straining my voice."

"Nemmind 'bout strainin' yore voice," said the cook, with a glare of suspicion. "Yuh might think you'd have to go me one better for that smokin' tobacker I put in yore coffee this mornin'."

" 'Tsall right," grinned Chuck. "We're even for that bath I give yuh yest'day. Besides, I ain't got no more makin's, an' I want another smoke."

"Oh, o' course," Jimmy observed with weary scorn. "Play tricks on me day in, day out, but when yuh want a smoke come to me first card out o' the box. That's you pirates all over. If it wasn't for me I dunno what you lazy chunkers'd do."

"I dunno myself," Chuck agreed amiably. "That's it. Now get yoreself settled. When yo're happy yuh can gimme the makin's. I'm almost through this one."

"I always did admire gall," observed Jimmy, dropping a well-filled tobacco-bag into Chuck's outstretched hand. "An' you got it. I'll betcha yud'h assay eleven ounces to the pound, Troy weight."

"Most likely, most likely. Yuh needn't bother 'bout matches. I got some."

"I s'pose yuh'll be able to smoke it too without my help. Hey! I don't mind yore rollin' a reg'lar cigaret, but yuh needn't go tearin' no pieces offen a newspaper an' rollin' a cigar. *Hey:* I want a smoke, too!"

"Well, yuh got it. Here y'are. Catch."

"Yeah, I got it all right. There's only one smoke left in the bag! Yuh-yuh-yuh—" Jimmy, searching desperately through his vocabulary for a word to properly exemplify Chuck's perfidy, finally wound up with—"vampire!"

What would have eventuated from these small beginnings one may not say, for the sudden appearance of Racey Dawson effectually calmed the squabbling pair.

"Howdy, Chuck. Howdy, Jimmy." Racey made easy salutation, pushed his hat back from his perspiring forehead, and hooked a knee round his saddle-horn, woman-fashion. "Don'tcha do nothin' but peel 'taters, Jimmy?"

" 'F'you was feedin' a gang o' hawgs you'd peel 'taters, too," chuckled Jimmy. "Light an' rest yore hat. Most dinner-time, anyway."

"That shore listens well. I could eat some reg'lar shore'nough food. Our cook said he used to cook in a restauraw in Kansas City, an' I don't wonder he had to come out here. Them Kansas citizens chased him most o' the way, likely. Which I've often felt like it myself. But praise Heaven an' all the little angels, I won't have to eat that grub no more. Yessir, I'm foot-free an' fancy-loose, a-huntin' me a new job."

"Why don't yuh see the old man?" was Chuck's suggestion.

"Not me. I'm bound for the Cross-in-a-Box. Seen Johnny Ramsay last month in Farewell, an' he said then Jack Richie was lookin' for two more riders. He may have got 'em by now, but if he ain't, one of 'em's a-goin' to be me, y'betcha."

Followed then the casual gossip of cowland. Racey, obeying the dictum of Western etiquette when any one or all of the principals in an affair are present in company with another, made no reference to the events at Moccasin Spring. The conversational ball was tossed about among the three while Chuck stitched and Racey smoked and Jimmy peeled, till the latter reluctantly tore himself away to return to his stove.

"Lanpher still got his back up?" queried Chuck when stove-lids began to rattle in the kitchen.

"Hotter'n a wet wolf," replied Racey. "Yuh want to sort o' keep to the low ground for a while, Chuck, till yuh can ventilate him. I'm tellin' yuh, the li'l old bobcat is a-layin' for yuh one way or another, an' seein's he ain't none partic'lar about the way, he'll get yuh if yuh don't get him first. Why, say, I hadn't done nothin' to him really 'cept call him a hawg an' all the way to the 88 he kept a-lookin' at me like he wanted to plug me. I watched him almighty sharp."

"We-ell," drawled Chuck, waxing his thread, "I'll kind o' have to look out for myself like you say. An' I will. I've done it a matter o' twenty-eight years, an' I'm still here, an' I'm aimin' to be here another twenty-eight or so. I ain't got no fault to find with Fort Creek County. Climate, country, an' job suit me forty ways from the Jack, an' that's whatever."

"Yore health," smiled Racey, and tilted an elbow in the manner of one who drinks. I shore would like to know the ins an' outs o' that dead cow deal. It's shore funny."

"It's worse'n that."

"Yeah, an' when that stranger stopped at the ranch late in the aft'noon day before yest'day an' told Lanpher 'bout the skinned cow an' all, I says to myself 'Now that's almightyful neighborly o' yuh to come out o' yore way to——' "

"Did you say some stranger told yuh about the cow?" interrupted Chuck, his brain busily dovetailing and joining fragmentary facts.

"Shore," nodded Racey, intent on the telling of his story. "Goin' to Farewell, he said he was. An' he couldn't no more'n just stop he was in such a tearin' hurry, an' I didn't think nothin' of it, till this mornin' when I run up on the same jigger camped over by Little Slue on the Lazy. In camp, mind yuh, an' by the looks o' the ashes he'd been there two nights. An' him in a blazin' hurry to get to Farewell. He didn't know me neither, so I didn't try for to rake up the acquaintance, though 'twas me he asked when he come to the 88 huntin' for the manager. I sifted right along, but I says to myself, 'Maybe now, old-timer, yuh know more 'bout that dead cow than yo're tellin'.' What do you guess?"

"I got it," Chuck observed with emphasis.

"I got it. I got it. I knowed it. I knowed it. She all just goes to show—one thing leadin' to another—simple, y'betcha."

"If yuh know what yo're chatterin' 'bout, which I doubt, yuh might tell a feller," was Racey's sarcastic comment.

"Shore, shore," said the abstracted Chuck. "What was yuh sayin' Racey, 'bout him bein' there two nights?"

"Why don'tcha listen. I was a mile past that. I'll bet you've been a-settin' in the sun with yore hat off, Chuck. Yuh act a heap strange to me. Here I go askin' yore opinion on what looks like the beginnin's o' rustlin', an' yuh shout 'I got it!' at me. 'I got it!' I'd shore admire to know whatcha got."

"Nothin'. Nothin' a-tall. I was talkin' in my sleep. Don't mind me. But look here, Racey, you shore think too much. Don't do it. She's bad medicine, an' likely to overstrain yore intellect. Then where'll yuh be, huh?"

"I'll be in the kitchen in less'n half a minute," declared Racey, rising hastily. "I dunno what's the matter with yuh, but yo're shore too many for me this mornin'."

But Chuck Morgan merely laughed and went on with his stitching.

After dinner Chuck removed his work to the eastern side of the bunkhouse that he might have the benefit of the afternoon shade. And here Laguerre found him when he rode in from Cow Creek in the middle of the afternoon. It was too late to start for the Buffalo Flats that day, so Laguerre set himself to oiling and overhauling his saddle. Chuck, having made sure that Jimmy was busy in the kitchen, spoke of Lanpher and the dead cow and what he had learned from Racey Dawson.

"Don't yuh see?" he said, summing up. "Here's the cow—dead an' skinned. Here's the stranger hotfoots for the 88 before the cow's cold. Or, even before the cow's killed, for the matter o' that. Well then, after that he don't go to Farewell, the stranger don't, like he says he has to, but camps on the Lazy. He's waitin'—waitin' till Lanpher runs them nesters out. Why? 'Cause he has a use for the old C-Y ranch an' he don't want them nesters there. Why does Cutnose happen along so careless an' free not a long while after Lanpher's been there?

"Why, to see what's happened. Yessir, Cutnose wants the old C-Y ranch for somethin'. Yuh can't explain his scratchin' round there any other way. An' it's a cinch him an' that stranger who goes to the 88 an' the tall feller with the brown beard an' the Cross-T cayuse who sells the beef to the Dales are all friends, y'betcha. Them last two are the chunkers from south Willie's Old Brother-in-Law seen ridin' round our range with Cutnose, yuh can gamble on that."

"But w'y do dey wan' de ol' C-Y shack?" puzzled Laguerre. "I cannot see w'y, me. Eef dey are on de rustle, w'at good de —— ranch?"

"I dunno, but they think she's some good. All we gotta do is find out what that is, an' we got 'em."

"Yeah." It was obvious that the half-breed was doubtful of the outcome. But Chuck Morgan was not doubtful. He had a hunch, and he meant to follow that hunch for all he and the hunch were worth.

"Look!" suddenly said Laguerre. "Look w'ere he come, dat Lanphair."

SURE enough, the 88 manager was riding up at a sharp trot. He did not see the two men beside the bunkhouse, for they were quickly hidden by a corner of the corral as he rode on. Lanpher's eyes roved furtively hither and yon after the fashion of one who seeks. Whether he found that which he sought it is difficult to speak with certainty, but at any rate he approached the porch of the ranch-house with a countenance less troubled than it was when he was passing the corral. At no time had he seen Chuck Morgan in the lee of the bunkhouse.

Mr. Saltoun was sitting on the porch of the ranch-house. His eyes narrowed at sight of the visitor. He did not like Lanpher. He had never cared much for the 88 since the days of Blakely, the one-time manager, who was a notable rustler, and was finally killed in recondite fashion by Telescope Laguerre. Incidentally every man of the old 88 outfit had necessarily been shot, lynched, or had departed elsewhere. The present 88 outfit, from the manager down, were a new lot, and reckoned honest. Yet Mr. Saltoun did not like them, and would not, while he lived. He had lost cattle because of Blakely, and the memory rankled.

"H'ar'yuh," he said with chill politeness. as Lanpher stepped up on the porch. "Yuh'll find that chair right comfortable."

"Howdy, Mister Saltoun." It was noticeable that Lanpher's eyes did not meet squarely those of the other. They rested rather upon the point of Mr. Saltoun's chin.

Lanpher sat down and rolled a nervous cigaret. He got it going, blew out a great puff of smoke, and snatched a sidewise glance at the hard-cut profile of Mr. Saltoun.

"D'juh know they's nesters on yore land?" was the manager's opening question.

Mr. Saltoun did not even turn his head. He was watching the ponies in the corral. He continued to watch them for a full minute before he spoke.

"Why, yes, seems to me I did hear somethin' about nesters in that old C-Y shack. I dunno as it's my land. She's free range."

"They killed a cow o' mine yest'day."

"They did?"

"Shore did. An' bein' as they're on yore land I'd like 'em run out."

"You would?"

"I would."

"Hum-m-m." Mr. Saltoun ran slow fingers through his gray hair. "How d'juh know they killed yore cow?" He shot the question at Lanpher.

Lanpher told him how he knew.

"Well," remarked Mr. Saltoun when he had heard it all. " 'F you was there at the C-Y why didn't yuh run 'em out yoreself. They's only women-folks an' a invalid feller. Yuh'd ought to be able to handle them."

Lanpher flushed red at the contempt in the careless tone. He flung caution entirely to the afternoon breeze.

"Yore man Chuck Morgan an' that Injun, Willie's Ol' Brother-in-Law was there. They held me up, got the drop on me. What could I do. I had to let the deal go. So I'm come to you. They're on yore side o' the creek, anyway. What are yuh goin' to do about it?"

Mr. Saltoun appeared to ponder for a space.

"Why, nothin'," he said at last. "It wasn't my cow."

"But looky here—" began the outraged Lanpher.

"Yuh hadn't ought to let Chuck hold yuh up thataway," interrupted Mr. Saltoun. "It's dangerous. Yuh might 'a' got yoreself plugged."

"Say——"

"Wait a shake. We'll get right to the bottom of this. Not that I ain't takin' yore word, Mister Lanpher. I'm believin' yuh. But yuh've had yore little say, so she's only fair to let Chuck Morgan have his. I'll call him. He's right down there behind the bunkhouse. *Hey! Chuck!* C'mon up here!"

Lanpher wet his dry lips. He cared nothing for meeting Chuck. It was decidedly more than he had bargained for. Observing the man's evident distress, Mr. Saltoun smiled a pleasant smile and settled back to enjoy what was coming.

Chuck issued from behind the bunkhouse. He was walking fast. Lanpher shifted a trifle in his chair. He hitched his holster forward. Observing which, Mr. Saltoun leaned toward him and whispered:

"Don't count on no gunplay, Mister Lanpher. My grandson's asleep in the house, an' shootin' round promiscuous always wakes him up. An' it's bad for young ones to be waked up out of a sound sleep. Y'understand me, I hope."

There was a certain menace in Mr. Saltoun's tone. Lanpher understood perfectly. He nodded.

By this time Chuck was within a few feet of the porch. The puncher stared impersonally at the 88 manager. Lanpher strove to return the stare, but there was not real man enough behind his close-set little eyes to beat down the steady gaze of those clear blue ones. The close-set eyes wavered, the eyelids blinked a time or two, and then the eyes fixed themselves on their usual refuge, the chin of the man confronting them.

"Chuck," said Mr. Saltoun, "if yuh feel like goin' after yore hardware at any time in the followin' conversation, don't do it. Mister Lanpher won't. I'll answer for him. An' I'm tellin' yuh flat I'll drill the first man who gets smoky. There'll be no shootin' on this ranch, with Junior asleep, not if I can help it. Now that we understand each other, the dance can go on. Chuck, Mister Lanpher has just told me a mighty interestin' tale. Mister Lanpher, s'pose yuh tell Chuck about the skinned cow over near Moccasin Spring."

"I didn't come here to be bull-baited!"

"No? What did yuh come here for?"

Mr. Saltoun was smiling broadly. Chuck was not smiling. His features were set, and his mouth was a straight, white line. Suddenly his face cleared, and he grinned cheerfully. He hooked his thumbs in his belt and teetered on his heels.

"I asked yuh," persisted Mr. Saltoun, "what yuh did come here for?"

"All I want is justice," was the somewhat lame and exceedingly snappish reply.

"Yuh've come to the right place for that," observed Mr. Saltoun, "but I dunno whether yo're so hot for justice as yuh say. Now, Lanpher, now!"

Mr. Saltoun's gun was out and pointing in the direction of Lanpher's side. Lanpher's hand slowly slid away from his gun butt.

"What d' I tell yuh, Lanpher?" queried Mr. Saltoun. "Yuh'd ought to knowed better'n that, specially after me tellin' yuh what would happen if yuh did."

"Morgan went after his gun!" defended Lanpher.

"Yo're a liar!" said Chuck calmly.

Lanpher made a convulsive movement of one shoulder, but refrained from touching his gun butt.

"Yes," remarked Mr. Saltoun, "I expect yuh are a liar, Lanpher. 'Cause, honest, if Morgan ever went after his gun yuh'd 'a' been dead. Shore would. Chuck ain't so slow with a gun. Now unbuckle yore gun-belt, usin' yore right hand only—That's right. Now get up, leavin' the gun-belt on the chair, an' come an' set down on the other side o' me where yuh'll be good an' safe from temptation."

For an instant Lanpher hesitated. But Mr. Saltoun's gray eyes were steely. And Lanpher greatly desired to continue living. Lanpher did as he was ordered.

"We're all settled now, I guess," continued Mr. Saltoun. "Chuck, let's hear yore story o' what happened at Moccasin Spring."

The puncher told the tale simply, and Lanpher squirmed. During the telling Mr. Saltoun's face grew more and more serious. At the finish he looked as solemn as a judge on the point of passing sentence.

"This is shore serious," he said slowly. "Chuck, it seems to me yuh've done failed in yore duty."

At these totally unexpected words Chuck's frame stiffened, and he stared in some wonderment at his employer.

"Yes," continued Mr. Saltoun, "yuh shore didn't do what was right, Chuck. Yuh hadn't ought to let a little feller like Lanpher take down a big heavy quarter o' beef all by himself. Yuh'd ought to helped him."

And Mr. Saltoun slapped his knees and roared with laughter at his own joke. Not so Lanpher. His lips drew up and away from the gums, and he spat on the floor of the porch. He leaped to his feet and shook his fist at Mr. Saltoun.

"—— you!" he shrieked in a high voice that almost cracked in its intensity. "—— you! I tell yuh them nesters at Moccasin Spring must go!"

NOW none of them, so absorbed were they in their conversation, had heard the creaking of wheels foretelling the approach of a wagon. Which wagon was the wood-wagon driven by the Kid's Twin. The Twin drove past the house at the precise moment that Lanpher uttered his vehement pronouncement.

The Twin did not even halt his mules. He sprang from the seat, landed on all fours, scrambled, up, and dashed for the porch, dragging at his gun.

Chuck Morgan, at the thud of running feet behind him, turned, took in the situation, and dived at the onrushing Kid's Twin. But the Kid's Twin was coming like a missile shot from a catapult. He struck Chuck with the full force of his hurtling body. Both went down in a tangle of arms and legs, Chuck, even in the shock of the meeting, snatching at the Twin's gun. He wrenched the weapon from the other's grasp and flung it away. He grabbed a leg, but the Twin, nothing daunted by the loss of his artillery, gained his feet, and pelted onward, leaving in Chuck's grip a bootstrap.

All this had taken but a few seconds. Lanpher, raging at Mr. Saltoun, was still facing his tormentor with clenched fists, when the Twin hopped up on the porch and struck Lanpher full swing on the nose. The 88 manager reeled backward. The Twin kept at him, flailing away with both hands. Lanpher had started to topple at the first blow, but before he fell, the Twin, willing worker that he was, had hit him six times on the stomach.

When Lanpher's length thumped the porch, the Twin promptly sprang on top of him and proceeded to beat his features to pulp.

"Grab him, Chuck!" bawled Mr. Saltoun, who felt that Lanpher was in some measure his guest and as such must be protected.

Mr. Saltoun seized the Twin by the neck and Chuck fell on a whirling arm. But the Twin was not to be so easily separated from his personal prey. What though Mr. Saltoun tugged at his neck and Chuck had pinioned his left arm, he continued to make play with his right. In response to the frenzied outcries of Mr. Saltoun, Telescope, from the bunkhouse, and Jimmy, from the bunkhouse kitchen, came running.

The four of them, not without much pain and damage to themselves, finally tore the Kid's Twin from the unconscious body of Lanpher. Chuck, holding to an elbow and wrist of the Twin, looked over his shoulder at the man on the floor.

"——!" he exclaimed in admiration. "I shore never knowed the Twin could fight like that!"

Awful indeed was the wreck of Lanpher. His nose was mashed and appeared to be broken. His lips and chin were cut. A cheek-bone was bleeding, and the flesh round both eyes was bruised and swelling rapidly.

Appeared then Mrs. Kate in the doorway. She glanced at the senseless Lanpher, at the little knot of men holding the now passive Kid's Twin, and stepped out on the porch.

"Dad, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she declared severely. "The idea of allowing all this hullabaloo just when I've succeeded in getting Junior to sleep. No, you needn't trouble yourself to explain. I don't want to hear any excuses. Carry him round to the kitchen, and I'll fix him up—No, no, not through the house. He'll spoil the carpet. Carry him round outdoors. That's it.

"Twin, you trot right back to your mules this instant. This instant, do you hear?—Easy now, don't drop him on the floor. There, beyond the oilcloth. Tina, fill the big dish-pan with hot water, and then go into my room and bring me all the rags in the lower left-hand drawer of the bureau. Lower left-hand bureau drawer. Now jump."

Tina, the half-breed ranch-house cook and maid-of-all-work, ran to do her mistress's bidding. Mrs. Kate shoved out her father and the others and set to work on Lanpher.

Outdoors Mr. Saltoun scratched his head and looked disgustedly at Chuck and Telescope.

"—— that Twin!" he said. "I s'pose *he's* interested down at Moccasin Spring, too, huh? Oh, yuh needn't say yuh don't know. I can tell. I got eyes, I have. —— his soul, why'n —— couldn't he leave well enough alone? I've a good mind to raise his wages, the fightin' li'l' rooster."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAVALRYMEN

THE buckboard had been made ready for Lanpher's use and comfort. For it was discovered, after he had been brought to by Mrs. Kate, that he was much too battered to sit a horse. Hence the buckboard and Laguerre to drive.

Lanpher, bandaged and malevolent, was in his place beside Laguerre, the Kid's Twin was at the head of the fractious team, and Chuck was tying Lanpher's horse to the rear of the buckboard, when, from a draw a quarter mile away, trotted a handful of horsemen.

"Cavalry," muttered Mr. Saltoun. "Wonder if the Injuns have jumped the reservation again. Better wait, Telescope, till we see what's happened."

The cavalrymen, sixteen in number, under command of a lieutenant, swept up with a brave jingle of curb-chains and creak of saddle-leather.

"Howmp!" barked the lieutenant, flinging up a hand.

Beyond the buckboard the detachment halted in a cloud of dust. The lieutenant, a young man with old eyes, pushed back his hat and mopped his sweating face. He was dust-covered and grimy, as were all his men. Their mounts from fetlock to forelock were caked with sweat and dirt.

"Howdy, Lieutenant," was Mr. Saltoun's greeting. "What's up—Injuns?"

"No, we're after two murderers," the lieutenant replied wearily. "They killed three of our privates and a cowboy in a poker game in Seymour City."

"Then yo're the Twentieth Cavalry from Fort Seymour, huh?"

"Yes," nodded the lieutenant and, seeing Mrs. Kate on the porch, removed his hat and bowed. "I'd like to camp here for the night, if you have no objection. And if you could sell us—Hands up, you!"

The lieutenant, as he talked to Mr. Saltoun, had happened to glance at Chuck Morgan. The lieutenant had gone into

instant action. The bewildered Chuck, taken by surprise, with an army revolver trained on his abdomen, put up his hands forthwith.

"Sergeant, dismount with two men and arrest that man," commanded the lieutenant briskly.

"Say, looky here!" shouted Mr. Saltoun, advancing on the lieutenant. "That's one o' my boys yo're arrestin'. He never killed none o' yo're swaddies."

"Now you look here! I'm sorry this man on whom the sergeant is putting handcuffs is one of your punchers, but that does not alter the fact that his characteristics tally with those of one of the murderers. Blue eyes, black hair—Take his hat off, sergeant—Yes, I thought so. Stiff black hair. Precisely like that of the murderer. About five feet eleven or six feet, lean, sunburned, straight nose, square chin, and a bold expression. You must admit your man fulfils these qualifications."

"When were all these killin's?" demanded Chuck.

"On the ninth day of last month," was the officer's reply.

"They were, huh? Well, I'm tellin' yuh, on the ninth day o' last month, an' every other day o' the month, I was right here punchin' cows on the Bar-S ranch. An' I can prove it."

"It will be an excellent thing if you can," the lieutenant observed dryly. "Otherwise you will hang, I think."

"I know he was on the ranch every single day last month!" Mr. Saltoun asserted.

"And I know so, too!" Mrs. Kate exclaimed warmly. "Especially on the ninth, because that was the day Junior fell into the watering-trough and Chuck Morgan, the man you've arrested, was the one to pull him out."

"I'm truly sorry, madam," declared the lieutenant, "but what else can I do? I have my orders. I've no doubt but that your testimony and that of the others on the ranch will clear him at the trial. It may even be that the saloonkeeper and the gambler and the two other privates who were in the game with these murderers fail to identify this man. If they do fail he will be freed at once. I'd like to search this ranch, if you don't mind."

"Oh, shore," Mr. Saltoun growled bitterly. "Perhaps yuh'd like to look under all the beds an' in the baby's cradle. If yuh do, help yoreself. Anythin' to oblige."

"You see," the lieutenant went on, unheeding, "we haven't a very good description of the other man. All we know is that he was young, two or three inches shorter than his comrade, wore white angora chaps and a pearl-handled revolver and a brand-new hat with a black and gold Mexican hatband. But I've an idea that the witnesses can identify him once he's brought in."

"Did yuh say white angora chaps, a pearl-handled gun an' a hat with a black and gold hatband?" It was the voice of Lanpher speaking.

"I did," said the lieutenant, turning toward the bandaged figure on the buckboard. "Why?"

"Oh, nothin'," Lanpher snarled, "but it was only last week I seen a young feller wearin' clo'es just like you say. He was ridin' north along Soogan Creek, an' there he is now."

Lanpher stretched out an arm and pointed at the Kid's Twin where he stood at the heads of the horses.

"Why, he don't own no such clo'es as that!" protested Mr. Saltoun, watching with anger and gloom the arrest and searching of the Twin by the military.

"It was last week when somebody stole the boys' clo'es," blurted Jimmy the cook, and could have bitten off his tongue the next instant.

"Do the boys' clothes happen to include angora chaps, a pearl-handled revolver and a hat with a black and gold hatband?" shrewdly questioned the lieutenant.

"I dunno nothin' about 'em," sullenly replied Jimmy.

"S'pose they did," chimed in Chuck. "It was last week Lanpher seen the Twin—this man over on Soogan, an' that was near three weeks after the killin's."

"Even so, he'll go to the fort with us," the lieutenant said smoothly. "You can see for yourself that he's young and that he appears to be about an inch shorter than the man you call Morgan."

"An I'll swear to seein' him in them clo'es!" Lanpher vowed with joyful vindictiveness.

"An' just as soon as yo're able to hold a gun, I'll make yuh wish yuh'd never learned to swear, Lanpher." Thus grimly Mr. Saltoun.

"I feex you!" whispered Laguerre in Lanpher's ear, accompanying his statement with a look calculated to chill the blood of a braver man.

"——his soul!" muttered Jimmy, and then cursed himself for what he considered his betrayal of the Kid's Twin.

"Oh, he seen me in the clo'es all right," the Kid's Twin exclaimed recklessly. "They was Sam's chaps, an' Dave's gun, an' Buff Warren's hat, his new one with the black an' gold band, an' Chuck's pants an' Holliday's boots. I took 'em all for a joke that day I went to Farewell an' I went to see a—a friend in 'em, an'—an' that's what took me so long."

"Them nesters again!" lamented Mr. Saltoun. "I knowed they was bad luck! You went to see one of 'em, Twin! Don't yuh deny it! When will yuh learn sense? An' me needin' yuh-all on the ranch! Telescope, drag it now with yore dirty squealin' freight! Quick! 'fore I get any madder an' finish what the Twin left!"

"Don't you worry, Twin," Mrs. Kate cried heartily. "The week of the ninth of last month you were at Packsaddle line camp, a long two hundred and fifty miles north of Seymour City. So that's all right. Any number of us can swear to your alibi as well as Chuck's."

The lieutenant, having arrested two of the Bar-S men, felt a certain delicacy about spending the night at the ranch. It may be that he even believed that a camping-place removed to some little distance might prove the safer.

"You see," said the lieutenant, "I don't wish any trouble, and I certainly don't care to shoot any of your boys, and I'm afraid I'll have to if they should attempt a rescue."

"They won't," Mr. Saltoun promptly assured him. "I'll see to that. You stay, 'cause I want to ride with yuh an' take two o' my boys along to swear to the alibi in case them saloonkeepers an' gamblers down at Seymour City don't remember well. An' as my boys won't be ridin' in till after dark, I'd take it as a favor if you'd stay."

So Chuck and the Twin were locked up in the blacksmith shop with an armed guard and a lantern to keep them company. Outside the door another sentry was posted. The lieutenant was taking no chances.

The two punchers, wakeful by reason of the handcuffs on their wrists, spent most of the night in verbally plaguing their guards, who were relieved every four hours. But the guards, two dish-faced Swedes and a chill-ridden Arkansan, would not rise to their baitings. Toward dawn the prisoners fell into an uneasy sleep.

But their comrades in the bunkhouse did not sleep. They enthusiastically occupied themselves in vilifying the United States army and formulating wild plans for a rescue. As it was, only the arguments and armed presence of Loudon and Mr. Saltoun prevented them from potting the sentries, jumping the soldiers' camp and otherwise complicating a situation that was already sufficiently difficult.

IN THE morning the detachment and its prisoners started south. Mr. Saltoun and two punchers who were prepared to swear to the alibi rode with it.

With the actual departure from the ranch Chuck's heart slipped quietly down into the toes of his boots and remained there. For now what, or rather who, was to keep watch on Cutnose Canter? True, Mr. Saltoun had given Loudon his orders. The foreman was an efficient person, remarkably so. He was prepared for any eventuality.

But what mortal man, where *she* is concerned, has faith in another? Chuck was miserably positive that Cutnose Canter would frequent the C-Y vicinity unchecked and consequently annoy Jane. Anything might happen. Anything. And all because of a stupid mistake on the part of an order-bound army officer.

"Are you sick?" queried the lieutenant, struck by Chuck's expression.

"No, I ain't sick!" retorted Chuck, glad of the opportunity to vent his pent emotion. "But if I look at you much longer I will be sick, you poor, drivelin' Johnny-fall-off-his-hoss shavetail! I don't s'pose yuh can help bein' a fool. I've noticed that comes natural to army off'cers. But yuh'll wish yuh had helped it when we're all lined up in front o' the colonel, an' the witnesses say they don't know either of us. Say, don't yuh ever think, or do yuh use yore head just to hold yore collar on?"

The lieutenant, with a very red face, returned to the head of the little column. Mr. Saltoun, the Kid's Twin, and the two punchers guffawed heartily. The cavalrymen would have been pleased to join in the merriment, but the regulations prevented.

"Yessir," Chuck continued in loud tones, for he had suddenly bethought him of a certain misfortune that had befallen the Twentieth when that regiment was stationed at Fort Daley.

"Yessir, I'll gamble my last chip you was off'cer o' the day that time four men o' K troop deserted an' took with 'em twenty-five good hosses. Own up, now. Wasn't yuh?"

But this was a matter of which the rank and file were not proud. The soldier on Chuck's right fiercely commanded him to close his face. But the puncher, strong in the knowledge that his handcuffed condition gave him unlimited license of speech, turned promptly on the soldier and criticised him scorchingly.

The wrathy lieutenant wheeled his horse.

"If you don't keep quiet," he exclaimed, "I'll have you gagged!"

"You will, hey!" bawled Mr. Saltoun. "I don't think you will! You've got handcuffs on him 'cause sixteen men ain't able otherwise to keep him from gettin' away on yuh, but yuh ain't a-goin' to gag him. An' if you try it, me an' yore colonel will have one little talk after we reach the fort an' ——"

"An how'll it sound," cut in Chuck, "when he hears yuh got so riled up over what a prisoner said to yuh that yuh had to gag him."

"Yuh know yuh oughtn't to lose yore temper," chided the Kid's Twin, who hitherto had taken no part in the discussion. "Y'ain't pretty when yuh lose yore temper."

"That's right," Chuck commented. "Yore face gets all red, an' yore neck swells up an' yore jaw-muscles work in an' out. Look out, yuh'll bite yore wagglin' tongue in a minute an' then where'll yuh be? Yuh couldn't chaw tobacker or eat or nothin'."

"Yuh gotta treat prisoners with kindness," contributed the Kid's Twin. "No two ways about it, yuh gotta. It'd shore be a fine note if yuh couldn't manage 'em without gaggin' 'em. I guess it's a free country."

The lieutenant hesitated. He had been thinking things over. Perhaps he had made a mistake. It was more than possible.

And this ranch-owner and his people were so confoundedly ready to swear to alibis. Yet—the lieutenant shrugged exasperated shoulders and trotted forward beyond earshot.

ON the sixth day out from the Bar-S the handful of horsemen rode up to the squat guard-house of Fort Seymour. Chuck and the Twin were thrust within, and Mr. Saltoun posted off to interview the colonel.

The latter was a human being and possessed an open mind. He did not belong to that red-taped and hidebound class which believes that justice cannot move swiftly. On Mr. Saltoun's stating his case he sent for the saloonkeeper, the gambler and the two privates. The prisoners were paraded and the witnesses were requested to identify them.

"This feller," said the saloonkeeper, indicating Chuck, "is about the right size, an' he's got the same kind o' stiff black hair an' blue eyes, but that's as far as he goes. It ain't the feller no more'n I am."

In this the gambler and the two privates concurred. As to the Kid's Twin, the witnesses swore that he resembled not at all the other murderer.

"Which that killer was nigh on to three or four inches taller'n this sport," declared the gambler, "an'——"

"Why—why, I thought he was two or three inches shorter than his black-haired companion!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "And a man at the Bar-S ranch swore that he saw this fellow wearing exactly the same clothes that the murderer wore, white chaps, pearl-handled gun, hat with black and gold band. It doesn't seem possible that I could have made such a mistake."

"It seems that you have," said the colonel softly. "It is unfortunate all round, and I'm more than sorry that these gentleman have been put to such inconvenience. Sergeant, unlock the handcuffs. Gentlemen, you are free. I am sorry. Unfortunately, I am not empowered to go further than that. However, if you should happen to run across these men, why—there is a reward of five hundred dollars for each of them, dead or alive."

"Five hundred apiece!" cried Chuck, tenderly feeling his chafed wrists.

The colonel nodded. The Kid's Twin whistled.

"No wonder that lieut'nant was anxious to glom onto my two boys," Mr. Saltoun grunted vindictively.

CHAPTER X

WHAT RATTLES SAID

"FIVE hundred dollars," mused Chuck, as he rode out of Fort Seymour with his comrades. "Twice five hundred is a thousand. One thousand big round silver wheels. Could I ask a certain party a certain question if I had that much *dinero* in my pants' pocket? Could I, I wonder? Yeah, an' would she, huh? Would she, I'd like to know? Her talkin' grammar like a book an' ten times sweeter'n sugar. Chuck, yo're a —— fool. She wouldn't look at yuh for a husband. Husband! Yessir, yo're shore a —— fool."

Chuck was experiencing all the pangs of a lover who sees himself flouted. Not that Jane had ever performed a single solitary flout. But she might as well have. Chuck's vivid imagination was doing the job for her.

The puncher took some small comfort in the knowledge that he could at least protect her from Cutnose Canter and all his works. Yes, he could do that. And the sooner the better.

"What's yore hurry, Chuck?" Mr. Saltoun inquired peevishly. "We got more'n a ten-mile ride ahead of us, so slow down, slow down."

Mindful of the fact that the three other punchers knew nothing of the activities of Cutnose Canter and his friends and were to be kept in ignorance thereof, Chuck forbore to argue, and slowed his horse's gait as requested.

"I seen yuh talkin' to that tinhorn last night," Mr. Saltoun said later. "D'he tell yuh anythin' more'n we know 'bout them killin's?"

"No, I guess not," drawled Chuck, shaking his head.

In which Chuck did not strictly adhere to the truth. For the gambler had told him, among other details, of one point in particular which seemed important. But Chuck had no intention of imparting this information to Mr. Saltoun. No indeed. For the present he would tell Laguerre and no one else.

On their way north the five men spent a night at Marysville. Which town is the county-seat of Fort Creek County, and the place of residence of that lively jurist, Henry B. Allison, Judge of the Federal Court.

The judge was well known to all the Bar-S boys, and he and Mr. Saltoun were old cronies. They found him breasting the bar of the Sunrise Hotel. Promptly they all foregathered. Later they adjourned to the judge's house for a game of poker. Toward midnight when Judge Allison went out to walk round the house for the purpose of changing his luck, Chuck followed him.

"Judge, I got several things to ask you," said the puncher, overhauling the jurist at the corner of the wood-pile.

"Why certainly," smiled the judge, plunging his hand into a trouser-pocket that clinked. "How much?"

"Nothin' like that, Judge," protested Chuck. "I ain't broke by a mile yet. But I wanted to ask yuh about this feller Jason. Do yuh know anythin' about him besides him ownin' the Sunrise?"

"I know little further than that he dispenses most excellent whisky. So far as I know he has never been in jail. At least he has never been tried before me."

"Never does anythin' suspicious, does he?"

"Not that I know of."

"Is he in town do yuh know, Judge? I didn't see him flutt'rin' round any when I was at the hotel."

"I don't suppose you did, and in the nature of things you probably won't for some little time. Mister Jason received a terrific beating last week at the hands of Cutnose Canter of Farewell."

"Cutnose Canter!"

"Cutnose Canter."

"I didn't know them two fellers was friends."

"They weren't, if the fight they had is any criterion." Dryly.

"I mean I didn't know they knowed each other even. I've talked with Bun Jason, an' he told me once he never knowed anybody in Farewell. Went sort o' out of his way to tell me, I remember. I guess I'll sit out here an' think. Tell 'em I gotta go see a man, will yuh, Judge, when yuh go back."

The mystified judge pursued his luck-changing course and Chuck sat down on the chopping-block. He rolled a cigaret, lit it, and inhaled deeply.

"This here detective business is shore hard on the head," reflected Chuck, watching a smoke-cloud shred away in the moonlight. "There's a whole lot o' stuff in this deal I don't understand a-tall. Why should Cutnose Canter who's supposed to

have plenty to do up round the Lazy come down here an' lick Bun Jason? That's what I'd like to know. Guess I'll just wander over to the hotel an' look round."

Chuck wandered over to the hotel, draped himself against the bar, and invited the bartender to drink with him. But customers were plentiful, and the bartender was busy. He had time for the drink, but none to employ in conversation. Chuck's eyes, gazing about the smoky barroom, fell upon an individual known as "Rattles", short for Rattlehead Bill. By which nomenclature one may perceive that the person was not renowned for mentality.

Rattles was the hotel porter, woodchopper and hostler. When Chuck saw him he was sitting on the floor, his back against the wall, sleeping soundly. His mouth was open, and in one hand he clutched an empty bottle. Chuck knew that it must be an empty bottle because Rattles was asleep.

The puncher bought a quart bottle of Old Jordan and crossed the floor to Rattles. He uncorked the bottle, stooped, and held it under Rattles's reddened nose. When the fragrant bouquet of the whisky smote his olfactory nerves, Rattles awoke with a jerk, dropped his empty and clasped the new arrival. But Chuck dragged it from the reluctant fingers and drove in the cork with a slap of his palm.

"Yuh gotta earn this, Rattles," he said. "I want yuh to load a wagon for me. Then yuh can have it."

"Aw right," agreed Rattles, and followed Chuck to the corral, his upper lip twitching like a rabbit's.

"Where's the wagon?" he demanded, seeing none in the vicinity of the corral.

"Never mind the wagon," said Chuck, presenting the bottle. "Licker up."

Rattles did not have to be invited twice. He downed a stiff one.

"Have another," urged Chuck.

Rattles sucked in another gill or two.

"C'mon an' sit down," invited Chuck, and squatted on his heels.

"Shore," said Rattles. "Have one yoreself."

Chuck took the bottle, made a pretense of drinking, and handed it back.

"D'juh know Cutnose Canter, Rattles?" he asked casually.

Rattles made the bottle gurgle before replying:

"Shore I know Cutnose. Him an' Bun is thicker'n thieves. Yuh'd think they was brothers."

"How long they been friendly?"

"About a year, two year, I dunno. Long's I been here."

Chuck knew that Rattles had infested the Sunrise Hotel for at least three years.

"Are they still friends?"

"Shore."

"I hear Cutnose gave Bun a lickin'."

"Shore he did, but Bun's friendly. He's gotta be. He's afraid o' Cutnose. He thinks I do' know. Thinks ol' Rattles is a —— fool, but Rattles ain't such a —— fool. Rattles sees, you bet. 'Yuh —— fool!' says Cutnose just like that, an' he pastes one right on Bun's eye. Then he knocks him down an' kicks him, an' hits him all over again. Right in Bun's own room too. I seen it all through the winda. 'Yuh —— fool!' says Cutnose. Pow! right on the ear. Blam! on the nose. 'Wha'djuh tell 'em that for! Didn'tcha know we needed that corral!' Blam! blam! blam! an' he throws pore ol' Bun on top o' the bed an' busts the bed. Gee, I laughed."

"Was that all he said?" queried Chuck.

"Was'n' that enough? Here, you drink. Don' wan' to be selfish. Won' be selfish. Go to it."

"I ain't thirsty. Finish her up. Did Bun say anythin' a-tall?"

"Nothin' 'cept 'I didn't mean no harm!' an' 'I told 'em to go up there 'cause—'cause—'cause'—gee, I can't remember. 'Nother drink help me 'member."

"Yeah, go on!" urged Chuck, breathless with interest.

"Wait till I have 'nother drink," the disgraceful Rattles requested. "Jus' one more li'l drink—Here! Gimme my bottle!"

"Not another drop till you've done told me everythin' Bun said," Chuck insisted, putting the bottle behind him.

"I can't 'member somehow," wailed Rattles, and began to weep.

"You've gotta remember," persisted the inexorable Chuck. "No remember, no drink."

Thus adjured Rattles strove to marshal his poor befogged wits. He thought as deeply as he could.

"I 'member! I 'member!" he cried happily. "Bun said, 'I sent 'em up there 'cause I knowed you like pretty gals, an' I knowed after you got through with 'em they'd be

glad enough to work for me in the dance-hall. I knowed I couldn't get 'em any other way, an' I wanted 'em. That kind brings trade.' "

"Did Cutnose say anythin' to that?" Chuck's tone was like ice.

" 'Yo're too —— kind,' says Cutnose, an' he lights into Bun with his quirt. I come 'way then. I was afraid he might see me an' get mad at me. Ol' Rattles didn' wan' no lickin', he didn', you bet. Gimme my bottle."

Chuck gave him his bottle and returned to Judge Allison's house. Entering by way of the kitchen he found Black Sam, the judge's servant, reading his Bible by candle-light.

"Yo're just the feller I'm lookin' for, Sam," said Chuck. "Gimme a piece of paper an' a pencil."

Please come out to the kitchen at once. Important. CHUCK.

Thus ran the message written on half an old envelope that Black Sam carried in to Judge Allison. It brought the latter immediately, and all the more willingly for that he was still losing.

"Judge, I want to borrow one o' yore hosses," Chuck said. "I gotta go 'way from here quick.

"What have you done now?" Judge Allison demanded severely. "You must know, Chuck, if you have snuffed out the life of one of our estimable citizens, that it will look better if you escape on your own horse rather than on one of mine."

"I ain't done a thing, Judge," Chuck stated hastily. "But I got business up north, an' I gotta get there quick."

"In that case, of course you may have a horse," the judge remarked with relief. "I'll go out to the corral with you myself. Perhaps walking round the corral may change my luck. Lord, the hands I've held tonight would ruin the temper of a saint. The roan, Chuck, is the horse for you. He can go forever and ask for more. I never have seen him actually tired yet. He's bridle-broke. You won't have to rope him. Just walk up to him and put the bridle on. Have you your saddle and bridle?"

"They're at the hotel. I'll lead the roan down there. Don't tell Old Salt an' the rest nothin' about me goin' till I'm good an' gone an hour. Then yuh can tell 'em I was called north in a hurry. Will yuh keep my hoss till I can send yores back?"

"Certainly. You needn't worry your head about your horse. I'll send Black Sam to the hotel corral for him in the morning—That's the roan—in the far corner—Good-by, Chuck, and the best of luck to you."

"I'd like to know what Chuck is up to," pondered the judge, watching Chuck go up the street, leading the roan. "Something interesting, of course. Youth! Youth! and I'm getting to be an old man."

With a half sigh the judge started to walk round the corral in the persistent endeavor to change his luck.

Once the roan was between his legs Chuck pushed north at a good, swinging road-gait. None but a horse of excellent bottom could have stood that pace for a journey of many miles. But the rawboned roan bore out his owner's statement. He trotted on and on, and never faltered.

"God!" breathed Chuck, when Marysville lay twenty miles behind his horse's tail. "God! That devil Jason! I never knowed he owned the dance-hall!"

Again and again he called upon his Maker. He was not a pious person, this Bar-S puncher, but there and then he took off his hat, lifted his face toward the stars and breathed a heartfelt prayer that he be spared a sufficient length of time to rid the world of Bun Jason. Only the low state of the latter's health had prevented Chuck from performing the above duty before he left Marysville.

THE following day before noon the roan slid down the southern bank of the Lazy River a quarter-mile below the mouth of Soogan Creek. There is no ford there, but the roan was as strong a swimmer as he was a goer. The long legs of him propelled himself and his rider across without difficulty, yet not without a thorough wetting. Chuck was soaked to the shoulders when the great horse heaved himself up the northern bank.

While he was strapping on the rifle-scabbard—he had held his weapons and their holsters over his head during the passage of the stream—he heard the faraway thud of a rifle-shot, followed almost instantly by two more.

The sound came from the east. He knew that the camp of Willie's Old Brother-in-Law lay in that direction. With the shot came the realization that he was exceedingly hungry.

"Guess I'll stop at the Injun's camp an' get a string o' jerky," said Chuck, and swung up.

The camp of Willie's Old Brother-in-Law consisted of three lodges. For he was an Indian of family and substance. The family consisted of one wife, her two grandmothers, his two grandmothers, five miscellaneous aunts, and his half-breed niece, the Rainbow. The substance was made up of a horse-band of eighty or a hundred ponies, many dressed skins, and two dozen dogs. The latter could not be termed an asset.

There were no women in sight when the roan, desperately nervous by reason of the furiously yapping curs, tittupped in among the teepees at the mouth of Soogan Creek. The only individual in sight was Willie's Old Brother-in-Law, and he was lying on his back in front of his lodge entrance. As Chuck stared one knee was suddenly drawn up and as suddenly lowered. The lips writhed apart, displaying the clenched white teeth. The Indian's hand tore feebly at his buckskin-clad chest. Then suddenly Chuck saw that there was blood on the buckskin and blood on the Indian's hands.

Chuck dismounted, kicked the dogs out of the way, and knelt beside the Indian. The latter had been shot twice—low in the shoulder and at the base of the neck. Even as Chuck bent over him the Indian lapsed into unconsciousness. The puncher tore off his neckerchief, made a compress and fastened it on the wound in the neck with a strap. He tore off the right sleeve of his shirt and served the shoulder wound front and back the same way. In the business he was greatly hampered by the circle of snarling and barking dogs that surrounded him and the senseless redskin.

"Who did this, Chuck?" asked a voice at his elbow.

He turned his head. Beside him knelt the Rainbow, the Indian's half-breed niece. Slung across one shoulder, bandolier fashion, was a string of fish. So quietly had she come up that he had heard no sound. She repeated her question, her good-looking face hard with anger.

"I dunno," he replied. "I heard three shots up this way after I'd just forded the Lazy, an' I come here for some jerky an' found him this way. Could he 'a' shot himself?" he added, doubtfully. "I don't see no gun."

"There are no powder-marks on his clothing," said the Rainbow impatiently. "Help me carry him inside."

They carried him inside and laid him on a soft heap of bearskins two feet high. Then the Rainbow got to work. She took off Chuck's compresses, washed the wounds, and put on fresh compresses made of her best dress-up petticoat and liberally daubed with a sweet-smelling sticky salve.

"He'll do, now," she said, settling back on her heels, and regarding her handiwork with professional pride. "Now I'll get you your jerky, Chuck."

A sunbeam, shining through a small hole in the sloping skin side of the lodge, made a round spot on the Indian's forehead. Chuck perceived that the hole was not more than four feet from the ground. Unconsciously his eye traveled across the lodge. There, directly opposite the first hole, was a second, also small and round. Chuck touched the Rainbow on the shoulder.

"Look," he mumbled, with his mouth full of jerked beef, indicating the two holes.

The Rainbow looked. "—— it all!" she exclaimed heartily. "Why didn't I think of that? Three shots! Of course one of 'em missed!"

The Rainbow was a handsome girl with a complexion no darker than that of the average brunette, her figure was very good, and she had spent six years in a convent, but in her language she was as unrestrained as in her life. She never acted like a true Indian. Her stoicism, among other aboriginal attributes, had almost completely vanished.

Now she seized Chuck by the wrist and dragged him outside. "Here!" she cried, whipping up her fishing-pole and thrusting it into his hands. "Hold this in front of the bullet-hole, and I'll go round to the back and look through the two holes and line up the pole."

The puncher did as he was told. The Rainbow, squinting through the two holes called to him to move the pole this way and that till holes and pole were in line. Then she ran into the lodge and looked through the second hole and past the fishing-pole.

"He was in those box-elders on Soogan," Chuck heard her say in muffled tones.

Chuck looked over his shoulder. The box-elders were not more than five hundred yards distant. The Rainbow ran out of the lodge, a rifle in the crook of her arm. She

was stuffing cartridges into the pockets of her buckskin shirt.

"I'm going after that man," called the Rainbow, and she stuck two fingers between her pretty lips and whistled shrilly.

From the cottonwoods on the other side of Soogan Creek came an answering whinny. There was a trample of hoofs and a splash as a rangy red horse burst through the fringe of trees and leaped off the bank into the water. The red horse crossed in a wild flurry of spray, scrambled up on the level ground and galloped to the Rainbow.

"How about yore uncle?" suggested Chuck, as the Rainbow knotted a long rawhide thong round her mount's lower jaw.

"I can't do any more for him than I have done," said she. "Staying with him won't help him at all. Besides, here comes Aunty Little Deer."

True, an extremely fat squaw was waddling rapidly toward them. She carried a bucket. The Rainbow, cupping her hands round her mouth, shouted a string of Piegan at the fat squaw. Aunty Little Deer shrilled something in return and speeded up her waddle by several revolutions.

Chuck was already in the saddle and galloping hard for the box-elder bushes. He knew perfectly that there would be no one there now, and hadn't been fifteen seconds after the third shot had been fired, but he had a man-like and human desire to do something ahead of the Rainbow. She had taken the initiative so far.

When the Rainbow, riding bareback, reached the box-elders she found the puncher leaning from his saddle and looking down at the ground.

"Somebody's been a-layin' there," he remarked. "Yuh can see where the grass's been pushed down an' where he's busted off a couple o' the box-elder branches to get a clear range. There's a spent shell, too."

"And there are two more," said the quicker-eyed Rainbow.

She forced her horse through the bushes to a depression in their midst.

"Here's where he tied his pony," she declared. "He rode off across Soogan."

The Rainbow led the way across the creek on to the open stretches of the Buffalo Flats. Here the Rainbow lost the trail, but picked it up twenty minutes later and two hundred yards up-stream behind the scattered cotton-woods on the bank.

"I thought he was heading east," explained the Rainbow. "That's what threw me off. But he's riding due north—right up the creek."

"Got any idea who the gent is?" asked Chuck, who had his own opinion in the matter.

"Lanpher, maybe," replied the girl, her eyes on the ground. "Maybe Cutnose Canter. Neither of them like uncle, as probably you know. Oh, the devil! I felt a drop of rain!"

Chuck looked skyward. So intent had both been on the trailing that neither had remarked the gathering of the thunderheads. Now the heavens were half-obscured by the rolling storm-clouds.

Swiftly the sunlight was blotted out. Within fifteen minutes the rain was pouring down, lightning was flashing, and thunder crashed and volleyed incessantly. It was a lively little Summer thunderstorm, and when it blew away eastward half an hour later, and the sun came out, the Rainbow looked hopelessly at Chuck.

"No use following the confounded trail now," she mourned. "I suppose I'd have lost it on the hard ground though," she added philosophically.

"Whoever he is," said Chuck, "he's goin' up the creek, an' the Dales live at Moccasin Spring. He may be goin' there, yuh can't tell. Anyway, that's where I was headin' when I stopped at yore camp."

"I'll go with you," cried the Rainbow.

"If yuh do, lemme do the talkin'," begged Chuck. "Yo're all right, but yuh do things too prompt an' vigorous. It's just possible yuh might shoot the wrong man."

"Don't you fret about me shooting the wrong man, old-timer," the Rainbow said, with a flash of her white teeth, turning her bold black eyes on the puncher. "I never have gone off half-cocked yet, and I sha'n't begin now. However, if the right man turns up I'll get him so quick it'll curl his hair."

The words were civilized, but the Rainbow's expression as she uttered them was not, decidedly not. Chuck could almost see the scalping-knife.

CHAPTER XI

THE 88 HORSES

"I DON'T guess it can be Lanpher," Chuck stated, when they were not more than a mile from Moccasin Spring.

"If it had been he'd never 'a' headed north in the first place."

"You never can tell what a man'll do," said the Rainbow sententiously. "Especially a killer. He's liable to do anything, just anything, no matter what. To tell you the truth I hope it's Cutnose. There's one man I never have liked. He tried to kiss me once over at our camp when uncle and the rest were all away, but I bit him in the neck and he let me go quick enough, the dirty beast. I'd have drilled him then and there, but before I could find a shell for the shotgun he'd left."

"I should think he might." There was open admiration in Chuck's voice and in his eyes.

The Rainbow winked at him and smiled engagingly. She was not averse to a flirtation provided the man pleased her, and Chuck did.

But Chuck did not play up. He was too engrossed with the danger that his goddess and her family stood in to indulge in dalliance. The Rainbow's face fell. As a pretty girl, she rather fancied herself. She did not turn sullen however. From her white father she had inherited a wide streak of healthy philosophy.

"I hear there are two pretty girls in the Dale family," she hazarded shrewdly when the C-Y ranch-house was in sight.

"There are—one anyhow," said Chuck.

The Rainbow stuck her tongue into an olive cheek and made a face at the landscape.

"So that's how the crows are flying," she observed with studied carelessness.

"Crows? Crows? Where? I don't see no crows."

"You wouldn't, old-timer. Looks as if the whole family was at the corral, doesn't it?"

Chuck saw that Jane and Molly and their mother, all three apparently in the best of health, were standing by the stockade. They were looking through the bars of the gate at the horses within. They turned as Chuck and the Rainbow trotted up. The puncher slid from the saddle and went straight to Jane.

"Are y' all right?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Of course I am," replied the puzzled Jane. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Yo're shore?" persisted Chuck. "Nobody—nothin's happened, has they? Cutnose Canter ain't been here, has he?"

"Of course I'm sure, and nothing's happened, and Cutnose Canter hasn't been here," replied Jane patiently. "What's the matter?"

But Chuck could only stare at her helplessly, so great was his joy and relief.

"You mus'n't mind him," laughed the Rainbow, tactfully coming to Chuck's rescue. "He doesn't mean anything by it. When he comes out of it he'll introduce me."

Thus awakened to his duty Chuck made the Rainbow known to the Dales. Turning, his eye fell on the horses in the corral. He perceived that the Dales' original three had increased to five, and that the two newcomers bore on their right hips the 88 iron.

"What are they doing here?" he asked abruptly.

"That's just what we'd like to know," replied Jane. "We found them in the corral this morning. How on earth they managed to get in, I don't know."

"You found them in the corral this morning," repeated Chuck. "Were the bars down?"

"No, they were up," was Jane's answer. "What's the matter?"

For Chuck had suddenly run to the gate and was throwing down the bars one after another.

"Can't stop to tell yuh now!" he cried, hopping into his saddle. "Rainbow, turn 'em when I drive 'em out! We gotta get 'em across the creek quick! Look out, you folks, so yuh don't get trampled."

The Dales moved to one side as the two 88 horses, driven by Chuck, scurried out of the corral, and were expertly turned toward the creek by the Rainbow. Whooping and yelling Chuck and the Rainbow chased them across the stream.

"My Lord!" exclaimed the Rainbow. "What a dirty trick to play!"

"It's worse'n that," agreed Chuck, "an' why Lanpher ain't here yet is beyond me. Tell yuh what, le's drive these cayuses north a ways so there'll be no danger o' Lanpher findin' 'em before he comes to the C-Y. Maybe we can get somethin' out of him."

For a distance of three miles northward they drove the two 88 animals. Then they returned to the C-Y, and Chuck explained to the mystified Dales that the presence of Lanpher's horses in the corral could mean but one thing.

"Yuh see," said Chuck, "Lanpher don't

want yuh here. If he finds two 88 hosses in yore corral that's enough. The jury might not convict, but yuh'd have to leave the country. Yuh can gamble that Lanpher or one o' his men put them two hosses in the corral last night when yuh was all asleep. An' Lanpher'll come driftin' in today to find out about it, y'betcha."

"Why—why," gasped Jane, "nobody would do such a despicable act!"

"Lanpher would," was the Rainbow's grim pronouncement. "You don't know that jigger, Miss Dale. Give me some tobacco, will you please, Chuck. I lost my bag fording the creek."

"We should never have come here," Mrs. Dale said worriedly, holding poor frightened little Molly to her side.

"Mother! we have as much right here as any one! And father's so much better! He'll be up and around next week! I won't give up! I won't!" Jane faced her mother with flashing eyes.

"Don't yuh let 'em drive yuh out," urged Chuck. "You've got good friends, ma'am."

"Of whom I am one," contributed the Rainbow, flashing a dazzling smile at Jane. "Don't worry, Miss Dale. If Lanpher or anybody else gets gay, it'll be the worse for them."

So the Dales took heart of grace and went into the house and made coffee and flapjacks for their visitors.

JANE DALE, Chuck, and the Rainbow were sitting on the bars of the corral gate when, an hour or two later, twelve or fourteen horsemen appeared on the opposite bank of the creek.

"You two girls go on in the house," suggested Chuck, "an' lemme manage this thing."

"Not on your life," demurred the Rainbow. "You forget that I may have a little business with Lanpher myself."

So they compromised on the door-sill where the efficient Rainbow, her rifle across her knees, ensconced herself with Jane.

The riders forded the creek and rode in between the corral and the ranch-house. They proved to be the sheriff of Fort Creek County, two of his deputies, Lanpher, whose face was still bruised and swollen, and ten of the 88 punchers. Judging by their expressions most of the posse did not appear to like the job in hand. But Lanpher looked rabidly vindictive as he, riding beside the sheriff, approached the placid Chuck sitting on his bar.

"Yuh'll have to get off that bar!' called Lanpher, his eyes wide with amazement at sight of Chuck, a free man. "There's somethin' in that corral we want."

"Yore friends don't seem to want it as bad as you do, Lanpher," Chuck commented with unction. "Kind o' surprised to see me, ain't yuh? Thought I was in jail, didn't yuh? Yo're thinkin' wrong quite a lot lately. Must be gettin' old. Well, well, if yuh haven't been in a fight. Who painted yore eyes for yuh?"

Lanpher merely grunted, rode up to the rails and looked into the corral.

"By——!" he cried wildly. "They ain't here!"

"Don't yuh cuss again, Lanpher," Chuck advised coldly. "What ain't here, huh? Was yuh lookin' for somethin'? It must 'a' been somethin' big, judgin' by the size o' the army. Why didn't yuh call out the troops? Where's the rest o' the ranch, huh?"

Chuck placed his hands on his knees and laughed in Lanpher's face. The posse fidgeted.

"I thought you said they was two o' yore hosses in this corral," said the sheriff, turning angrily on Lanpher.

"I did! They was!" Lanpher was frankly upset.

"Oh, they was two o' yore plugs here, was they?" drawled Chuck. "An' how d'juh know they was here?"

"None o' yore business!" was the heated reply.

"Oh, yes, it is my business, feller, 'cause I've done gone an' made it my business. Lanpher, what did I tell yuh about friskin' round here an' trying' to run blazers on Mister Dale an' his family? What did I tell yuh, yuh little rat? Don't tell me yuh forgot. Don't tell me. I might not believe yuh."

Chuck's voice was softly chiding. At the last word his long right arm lashed out with the speed of a snake striking and his brown fingers hooked into Lanpher's collar. His left hand seized Lanpher's hand before the 88 manager could do more than touch his gun-butt. Without stirring from his seat on the rail, Chuck wrenched the 88 manager from the saddle and flung him face downward across his knees.

"Hold still, young un," grinned Chuck, "while I take away yore six-shooter. Yuh might go an' hurt yoreself with it, an' that would never do, never in the world. An' take my advice, Lanpher. Don't try to pull a gun on me when yo're so close. It can't be done. There! now yuh'll do while I try an' bring back the happy days o' childhood to yuh."

Chuck lifted his hand and began to spank Lanpher with all the force of a remarkably strong arm, while the sheriff and the posse looked on in amazed pleasure. For such a jape they had never seen before.

Lanpher wriggled and squirmed and swore and endeavored to childishly gnaw the leg of his chastiser, but Chuck stopped that maneuver by twisting Lanpher's collar till the 88 manager nearly strangled, and continued to thwack with unabated vigor. When he considered that he had done a good job, he simply loosed his hold, tilted his knees and dropped Lanpher on the ground.

Lanpher, out of his head with fury, scrambled to his feet and snatched at the revolver in the sheriff's holster. But if Lanpher was quick, Chuck was quicker. He leaped from his seat on the bar and knocked Lanpher down before the latter could jerk the gun free. When Lanpher, shaken by his smashing fall, slowly dragged himself erect, he faced Chuck's six-shooter.

"No more foolin'," cautioned Chuck. "I want to ask yuh a few questions in front o' the sheriff an' yore men."

"Riley, I'm watching you!" came in the Rainbow's sharp, incisive tones from the doorsill of the ranch-house.

Riley, one of the 88 punchers, sheepishly removed his hand from his gun-butt. He was the one man besides the manager in all the 88 outfit whom no one liked.

"I kind o' overlooked you, Riley," said Chuck. "But I'll try not to from now on, I'll try not to."

"You needn't pay any attention to Riley," the Rainbow assured him. "I'm watching the gentleman."

"Now, Chuck, I don't take this kindly o' you a-tall," the sheriff protested injuredly. "Can't yuh see I'm here?"

"Shore," agreed Chuck. "We're both here. What about it?"

"Yo're sort o' indicatin' round with yore gun too much. I wish yuh wouldn't. Sort o' slip it in yore holster nice an' easy, an' we'll all be happy. There won't be no shootin'. If they is any, I'll do it. That goes for you too, Riley."

"Well, make that there Injun quit holdin' her rifle on me," grumbled Riley.

"Rainbow, put up yore rifle," ordered the sheriff.

"I won't!" the Rainbow cried rebelliously. "My rifle is doing very well where it is. If that Riley horse-thief is afraid of a girl why don't he go off somewhere and hide? There are no ropes on him that I can see."

The sheriff shrugged helpless shoulders. What could a man do with a girl like the Rainbow? Chuck eased the tension by sliding his six-shooter into his holster.

"There y'are, sheriff," he said. "Now we can all be happy. Don'tcha move, Lanpher. My questions ain't answered yet. First, I'd like to know how yuh knowed yore hosses was in the C-Y corral?"

"None o' yore business," buzzed Lanpher.

"Yuh might answer, Lanpher," the sheriff said gently. "I'd like to know myself. Yuh forgot to tell me."

"Somebody told me," grunted Lanpher.

"When?" snapped Chuck, letting it go at that.

"Yesterday afternoon."

"It took yuh a long time to get here."

"I wanted to get the sheriff first. I wanted him to see just what kind o' folks these nesters is. Yuh foxed me on that dead cow, Morgan, an' I believe yuh foxed me on these hosses somehow."

"Yuh can believe anythin' yuh like. She's a free country. What was the name of the gent who told yuh about the hosses?"

"I can't tell yuh," was Lanpher's stubborn answer.

"Better tell." Thus the sheriff.

But Lanpher stubbornly refused to tell. The Rainbow walked silently forward and stood beside Chuck.

"Lanpher, where were you this morning between eleven o'clock and noon?" she demanded.

He regarded her spitefully. His thin lips curled.

"You see, Lanpher," she said, the veneer of civilization dropping from features and voice, "my uncle was shot this morning about noon, and I'd like to know where you were."

There was a chorus of exclamations from the officers of the law and the punchers,

for Willie's Old Brother-in-Law was well thought of in the community.

"No, he isn't dead," continued the Rainbow, replying to questions, "and the chances are he'll recover. But he was shot from ambush, and I want to know where Lanpher was this morning."

"I was with the boys all mornin'," Lanpher made haste to say, realizing the seriousness of the situation. "Ask any of 'em. Ask the sheriff."

"That's right, Rainbow," corroborated the sheriff. "He's been with me since nine o'clock this mornin'. He didn't shoot yore uncle."

"It's a healthy thing for him he had you to prove his word," observed the Rainbow, malevolently eying the unfortunate Lanpher. "I wouldn't believe him on oath."

She abruptly turned her back and returned to the door-sill.

"Well, I guess everythin's all right now," announced the sheriff, with a sigh of relief. "No harm done anywhere. I guess yore info'mant was mistaken, Lanpher."

"I guess—maybe—he was," Lanpher sneered churlishly.

"Lanpher," said Chuck, "yuh seem to have forgotten what I said about treatin' the Dales white. I get kind o' tired o' bein' good-natured after a while. Seems to me I've been pretty easy on yuh. Yessir, pretty nice an' easy, an' yuh don't act like yuh appreciated it, not any. Yuh'd ought to try to, anyway, even if it hurts. Yuh can drag it now, if yuh like," he added, apparently as an afterthought.

"Thanks," snarled Lanpher, "I'm shore obliged to yuh. Sheriff, I tell yuh flat if yuh'd been in town when I first got there an' we could 'a' started at once, instead o' me havin' to wait an' wait till yuh got in, we'd 'a' found them 88 hosses in this corral."

"I don't believe it," replied the sheriff, "an' I tell you, Lanpher, the next time you pull me an' my two boys out on a fool deal like this, yuh'll know it, y'betcha."

"Here's yore gun, Lanpher," cried Chuck, tossing him the weapon.

Lanpher holstered the weapon and turned to mount his horse.

"I didn't unload her," Chuck declared significantly.

But Lanpher made no sign that he heard this rather open invitation to combat and rode off without a word. All of his men, save one, followed him. This one, Tom Dowling, had dismounted to tighten cinches. His sidling horse, urged to activity by a jabbing thumb, took him close to Chuck.

"Cutnose Canter was at the ranch late las' night," said the 88 boy, out of the corner of his mouth, and without looking at Chuck. "Stand still, yuh cock-eyed accordeen!" he bawled to his horse. "D'juh think I want to trail yuh a mile 'fore I can get this hull tight."

CHAPTER XII

LAGUERRE DISAGREES

CUTNOSE CANTER had visited the 88 ranch late the night before! This fact coupled with that of Lanpher's arrival with the sheriff was fairly strong circumstantial evidence that Cutnose knew a great deal about the presence of the 88 horses in the Dale corral, if indeed, he had not himself fathered the business. Had Lanpher actually allied himself with Cutnose? It did not seem possible, for Lanpher had never been known to overstep the line of honesty. But a seeker after revenge will go to great lengths to attain his object.

"She's shore one puzzle," Chuck said aloud, looking after Tom Dowling.

"What's a puzzle?" queried Jane.

"What little girls don't know," he grinned back.

"Smack him," advised the Rainbow judicially. "Aren't men the freshest things?"

"They are," agreed Jane. "Just for that, Mister Morgan, you may split me some kindling. There's the ax, there's the wood, and there you are. If you think of anything else you need, ask for it."

"I will," said Chuck, picking up the ax. "I'll ask yuh what for clo'es the jigger wore who sold you that hind-quarter o' beef—No, I ain't foolin'. I want to know. I gotta know."

Jane puckered her handsome brows and tucked up stray strands of copper-colored hair.

"I can't seem to remember anything but a hat," she said at last. "Of course he had on more than that," she added hastily, with a very red face.

"Shore," said Chuck, wondering what the Rainbow found to giggle at. "What for a hat was she?"

"Gray, with a black and gold hatband."

"Now that's right interestin'. Yuh can't remember nothin' else?"

"I can't, but perhaps Molly can. Molly! Oh, there you are."

"He wore white angora chaps," declared Molly, who had been listening from the doorway.

"Didja get a look at his gun?—No, not his rifle, his six-shooter?"

"I remember it was a pearl-handled gun."

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" Chuck exclaimed gleefully. "I knowed there was a nigger in it somewhere. An' he rode a Cross-T buckskin, didn't he, ma'am?"

"Nigger! Cross-T buckskin?" repeated Jane. "I don't understand."

"Oh, it's just some more of what little girls don't know," flashed the Rainbow. "Trust a man to be as mysterious as possible. Lord, they make me so mad I could shake them!"

"It don't matter, ma'am," said Chuck, disregarding the Rainbow's outburst. "Yuh'll know all about it some day."

"That's cheering, I'm sure," Jane observed with some stiffness.

"Ain't it?" remarked Chuck brightly. "I guess now I'll just go in an' see yore mother after I split up another armful."

When Chuck entered the kitchen he found Mrs. Dale kneading the dough for biscuits. Having first maneuvered Molly out of the room, he told Mrs. Dale, with as much delicacy as possible, enough of Rattles' story to frighten her stiff.

"My God!" she breathed, facing him across the kneading-board, her face as white as the flour on her bare arms. "Wha-what shall we do?"

"Nothin', ma'am, but watch out. It won't be for long. Jason an' Cutnose are pretty near through, but till they do cash, yuh gotta look——"

"Sh-sh! not so loud!" cautioned Mrs. Dale. "My husband mus'n't know anything about this. It—it might aggravate his condition. We do have to be so careful."

"Yuh gotta be twice as careful from now on," Chuck continued in a lower tone. "An' if I was you I'd keep a gun handy. Yuh got a rifle, I s'pose."

"Two and a six-shooter."

"Then be ready to use 'em, an' don't let the girls out o' yore sight."

Twenty minutes later Chuck was on his way to the Bar-S. He had left the Rainbow at the C-Y. She had expressed her intention of "looking round" a little before returning to the lodges on the Lazy.

Three miles or more from the C-Y, a horseman rode out of a neighboring wash. The horseman was Telescope Laguerre. Chuck waved an arm and checked the roan. The half-breed rode up, grinning.

"By gar!" he cried, "I see dees roan hoss un I not know heem, so I come for see, un eet ees you."

"Nothin's happened, then—yet?"

"Not one t'ing. Un' we have scout plenty, me un' Buff. You have de luck at Fort Seymour, mabbeso?"

"Oh, we had luck. All we got from the colonel was, 'She's a mistake,' an' 'I'm sorry.' But I haven't any hard feelin's, not me. 'Cause by bein' arrested an' drug off to Seymour I learned a heap. One thing is that they's a reward o' five hundred dollars apiece for them two killers."

"We are not de deputy," demurred Laguerre. "We have not time for chasse dem."

"I kind o' think trailin' 'em'll be part of our reg'lar job. What would yuh say if I told yuh one of 'em got away on the hoss of the puncher he shot, a Cross-T buckskin pony?"

"I see w'at you see—Henderson. Well, I do not t'ink eet ees heem, un' anyway, Chuck, she ees not our beezness. —— de five hunder dollair! W'y we arres' man for fight wit' de soldats! Eet ees not our beezness, I say, me."

Laguerre frowned his disapproval.

"I understand all that," said Chuck equably. "If she'd been a fair fight, all right. I wouldn't raise a finger against 'em. But the two swaddies an' the puncher was shot in the back and robbed. I got it all straight from a tinhorn at Seymour. Now whadda yuh say?"

"Dat ees deeff'rent," declared Laguerre, his dark face clearing. "Dat ees bad, shoot man een de back."

"You bet it's bad—bad for Henderson."

"Aw, Henderson! I tell you Chuck——"

"Look here, wasn't these jiggers shot in the back? Didn't Henderson bushwhack me for an enemy? Ain't that the same kind of a trick? Don't it show he's got the habit? An' he rides a Cross-T buckskin just like one o' them killers. What more do yuh want?" triumphantly.

"I wan' more dan dat," dissented Laguerre stubbornly. "Dere ees anudder wan

ride de Cross-T buckskin, un she ees de wan w'at sell de beef to Mees Dale. You forgeet heem, huh?"

"No, I ain't forgot him. He's in it, too. I just found out today from the Dales that he was wearin' white angora chaps, a pearl-handled gun and a hat with a black an' gold hatband when he sold 'em the beef."

"Dat ees all fine, but now you have two buckskin cayuse'. Dere was only one w'at de man geet away on."

"How djuh know they is two cayuses? Yuh dunno but what Henderson might 'a' lent his hoss to this other jigger. I forgot to ask Racey whether Henderson's hoss was at the ranch that day. Anyhow, she don't matter much. Yuh can gamble him an' Henderson are in cahoots."

"Well den, by gar, I dunno, me. She ees all one —— tangle o' dees t'ing un dat t'ing. But I know dees: I know Henderson have lef' de 88."

"What?"

"Shore. W'en I drive Lanphair dere we was pass dees Henderson on de trail, un' she say she was queet. Un' w'en Lanphair say 'Don't she wan' hees money?' Henderson was say: '—— de money,' un' ride off. But leesten, Chuck, w'en I tell you. I have been de scout, I have leeve wit' Enjun, un' I have learn for read de face. By gar, eef I have not, I be dead man plenty tam. Un' I say Henderson ees not de bad man."

"He's bad enough to just miss killin' me by one li'l black hair, but if he's quit the 88 there's no use goin' over there after him. Yuh needn't laugh. I'd 'a' done it. I need that five hundred. I may get it yet. If the jigger's left the 88 that means Cutnose Canter is about ready to turn his li'l trick."

"But you say before Henderson was not friend' wit' Cutnose."

"I said I didn't think he was. An' I didn't then. But I ain't thinkin' that way quite so strong now. Yessir, when she comes to the show-down I'm bettin' yuh'll find Angora Chaps an' Henderson an' Cutnose an' the busy li'l stranger who rid out o' his way to tell Lanpher about the dead cow, all know each other by their first names. Listen to what happened at the C-Y today——"

Laguerre listened with interest.

"She shore wan' for have dat ranch-house empty," was his comment when he had heard it all. "W'y, I can not tell. By gar, I can not. Dem nestair bes' look varree sharp w'at dey do."

"I told 'em that, an' it's we, you an' I, who've gotta look sharp some, too. What with Old Salt all wrapped up in his six hundred head on the Buffler Flats an' not willin' to take any advice we got a reg'lar job on our hands. That C-Y ranch bein' the joker thisaway we gotta keep an eye on it, an' how we're gonna do it an' keep Old Salt happy I dunno. We can't get any help from Willie's Old Brother-in-Law —Why? He was nicked in the neck an' drilled through the shoulder today. Somebody, an' I'm bettin' on Cutnose, cut down on him from them box-elders north o' his camp."

"You have right," nodded Laguerre. "Cutnose she have never lak' dat Piegan, un she know, by gar, dat Enjun ees bes' man for read sign sout' o' de Canaday line. Un she know dat Enjun ees friend' wit' us. She shoot heem, *bien sure*."

"There! What'v' I been tryin' to tell yuh? Don't every little thing show the deal's comin' off soon? If Old Salt sends me down on the Buffler Flats, I don't stay long, orders or no orders."

CHAPTER XIII

BUSHWHACKERS

"WHICH I'd shore admire to know where yuh been?" demanded the irate Mr. Saltoun.

"Didn't the judge tell yuh?" said Chuck demurely.

"He said yuh was called north on business or some such fool thing. Business! I know better. Yuh can't tell me, Chuck Morgan."

"I ain't tryin' to," grinned Chuck.

"Humph," grunted Mr. Saltoun, prepared to say more.

But he reflected that there really was no harm done. And Chuck was one of his best punchers. Still, one must show that one is boss. Mr. Saltoun coughed austerely and fished out his tobacco-pouch.

"Well, it's all right this time, Chuck," said he, "but don't let it happen again. Tomorrow I wish yuh'd take the mules an' the buckboard an' drive to Farewell. I've got a letter to go over, an' Kate wants a lot o' airtights an' fixin's. But these here ain't the main thing. I want you to sort o' get it

round to Cutnose that I'm grazin' my best cows down on the Buffler Flats. My best cows, y'understand. Maybe that'll wake up the chunker an' his friends."

"Ain't they started in to help 'emselves yet?" queried Chuck with well-simulated innocence.

"No," grumbled Mr. Saltoun irritably. "Yuh'd 'a' heard of it if they had, wouldn't yuh? It makes me sick! Here I've went to the trouble o' drivin' six hundred cows onto the Buffler Flats, an' Cutnose holds off. An' them cows eatin' up the Winter feedin' just as fast as they can. You talk up strong about them cattle, Chuck. I wanta get this business over with quick an' sudden."

That evening Chuck asked the Kid's Twin to lend him one of his two six-shooters.

"I always knowed yuh'd come round to usin' a real six-shooter some day," said the Twin. "What'sa matter with yore atomizer?"

"My gun's all right," retorted Chuck, "an' she's better today than yores ever thought o' bein' when she was new. Do I get the gun?"

"If yores is so good whatcha want one o' mine for?"

"To pick my teeth with. What do yuh guess?"

"Yuh might tell a man."

"I might tell a man."

"Well, you frazzled end of a misspent life!" Indignantly.

"Do I get the gun?"

"Shore. Take anythin' I've got. D'juh want cartridges? Yo're gettin' as bad as Sam."

"Is that so?" cut in Sam the borrower. "I wouldn't talk if I was you. Yo're the jigger swiped all our clo'es."

"I shore forgot about that," chuckled the unabashed Twin. "Here's the gun, Chuck. Hey, fellers, Chuck's turned a two-gun man. Betcha he's goin' to hold up the Marysville stage."

"Massacree Lanpher more likely," said Dave Contrell. "But whatcha want two guns for with that little runt, Chuck? Goin' to shoot him all to li'l pieces."

"Don't yuh fret none about what I'm a-goin' to do," advised Chuck, making sure that the hammer of the borrowed gun rested on an empty cylinder. "I'm a-goin' to bed right now an' that's all you gents need to know."

In the morning Chuck drove away in the buckboard. Under the seat, wedged between the nosebags and his left heel, lay his rifle. Stuffed into the waistband of his trousers, the butt hidden beneath his vest, the Twin's gun rubbed his abdomen. The weapon was in precisely the position where a hovering hand ostensibly fingering a vest-pocket for cigaret papers could draw it with ease and dispatch. With a gentleman of Canter's kidney an honest man must take every precaution and be prepared to deal death at half a split second's notice. Chuck realized perfectly that a meeting with Cutnose meant a fight, and he did not purpose to be the loser.

The prospect did not depress him nor did it elate him. It was simply something that had to be done—a pitcher to be ridden, a calf to be thrown, a task pertaining to his job, as it were. Chuck had known ever since his meeting with Cutnose at the C-Y that he must shoot it out with the man. In view both of what Rattles had said and the incident of the two 88 horses the sooner matters reached a climax the better.

Mr. Saltoun of course was unaware of the true state of affairs, else he would have sent a comrade with Chuck. Naturally the puncher had not mentioned it, for that would have implied a certain reluctance to face the issue. A contingency to be avoided, if a man is to maintain his standing in a censorious world.

Indian Ridge was in sight when the buckboard, rounding a bend, swayed up out of a hollow, struck a rock with the off front wheel and tossed Chuck to the near side of the seat at the instant that a rifle cracked somewhere in the rear. Hence it was that the bullet whisped past Chuck's body with six inches to spare and bored the off mule between the ears.

The mule dropped to his knees and rolled over on his side without even a grunt. His mate promptly lost his head and incidentally his life. For, rearing and pawing the air with his fore feet, he stopped the three bullets which had nicked the back and scored the cushion of the seat on the side where Chuck had been flung.

The puncher had gone over the doubletree as the front mule dropped, and nearly had his brains kicked out by the hysterical remainder of the team. *Zing-g-g!* a bullet splintered a wheel-spoke. *Whang!* another glanced from a tire. Two more

scored the floor-boards, and one of these grazed Chuck's cheek-bone as he was reaching for his rifle. He seized the weapon and tumbled backward behind the fallen mules, while the questing bullets sighed close above his head, tucked into the wagon and the mules or threw up spurts of dust on either hand.

"This is shore some picnic," growled Chuck, who had touched his cheek and got blood in his eye. "I'll bet they's three of 'em if they's one. Ow-w! there goes my foot."

He rolled over and pulled up his leg. Every nerve in the foot tingled madly. But he found on examination that the flesh had not been touched. Merely a bit of the boot-toe and the sole had been shot away. Much relieved he snuggled down for a shot at his bushwhackers.

He saw where the gray smoke curled and eddied above an outcrop beyond a cutbank a hundred yards away. The road paralleled the cutbank till it reached the hollow where it turned from it at a right angle.

"She was just past the bend when they had a fine sight o' the broad o' my back an' they cut loose," said Chuck. "Nothin' mean about 'em a-tall. Cutnose? I wonder."

He fired into the thick of the smoke-puffs and then crawled round to the shoulder of the mule. He placed his hat on the animal's hip. Two bullets promptly perforated the hat and the hip, spattering his face with blood and hair.

"Yessir, this is shore real," he grumbled. "This has got beyond bein' a joke—a mile beyond. Them fellers won't be satisfied till they kill somebody, an' me with only half a beltful for the rifle. I knowed I should 'a' brought more. I knowed it, an' now I'm shore of it. I can stand 'em off all right if"— He turned his head, his eyes sweeping the landscape between him and Indian Ridge ten miles away—"if they don't take it into their fool heads to work round behind me to that old pine a-standin' at the head o' that draw.

"The range ain't more'n seventy or eighty yards, an' they'd be shootin' down-hill at that. This here is one reg'lar squeak, if it ain't nothin' else. That was close! I near went shy an ear that time. Seems like I'd ought to get one o' them jiggers. Only one ain't many. There goes another spoke. Hell's bells, won't Old Salt cuss. He only had that buckboard painted two months ago. An' two mules! Oh, he'll blister the grass."

At this juncture, from a little knoll three or four hundred yards to the right of Chuck, came the staccato drumming of a furiously worked rifle. But no bullets sang above Chuck's head or drilled into the bodies of the dead mules. Instead the fire from the outcrop above the cutbank immediately ceased.

Chuck, suspicious of a trick, remained below and behind his breastwork. He watched alternately the outcrop and the top of the knoll. But nothing moved in the vicinity of the former and there was only drifting smoke to be seen among the low bushes that crowned the latter.

The firing from the knoll ceased. Ensued then a grateful silence. Chuck held up his hat on the blade of his knife. Nothing happened. He moved the hat slowly to and fro. Still not a shot was fired.

Chuck arose slowly and looked about him warily. Presently, from the direction of the knoll where the opportune rifle had cracked its message, rode a lanky man on a buckskin pony. Chuck sat down on a mule and stared at the approaching rider.

"It shore is Henderson," he muttered perplexedly.

"Well, stranger," grinned the lanky one, checking his horse in front of Chuck, "yuh look kind o' afoot."

"I am—kind o'," admitted Chuck ruefully. "Myself, I'm a heap obliged to yuh. Yore happenin' in thisaway was almighty providential. Them fellers was gettin' pretty close."

"D'juh know who they was?" The question came sharply, Henderson's washed-out gray eyes bright with eagerness. But the light faded as Chuck shook his head.

"I'd shore admire to know," said the puncher.

"I think I know," observed Henderson. "But thinkin' an' knowin' ain't even on the same team. I couldn't see nothin' through that smoke, an' I didn't see nothin' till after they'd done cut stick an' rid outen a draw three miles over yonder on their way some'ers else. An' I wouldn't 'a' seen that li'l 'bit only I got one fine pair o' field-glasses. Yeah"— nodding—"that's how I made out you was one o' the Bar-S boys an' no rustler like I thought at first."

And this man was one of the murderers for

whom five hundred dollars apiece were offered! This man who had just saved Chuck's life! It did not seem possible that he could be what he was.

"Climb up behind me, an' I'll take yuh part way to Farewell," offered Henderson.

"Say," said Chuck, crossing one knee over the other, "don't yuh know no better'n go near Farewell?"

"Why not? What'sa matter with Farewell?"

"Nothin's the matter with Farewell that I know of. It's you, stranger."

"Me?"

"Down at Seymour they've offered five hundred apiece for you an' yore side-kicker."

"That's good," Henderson said with a peculiar smile. "But it don't hardly seem like enough, does it?"

"It's enough for most any o' them tarrapins in Farewell to have a stab at earnin' it," Chuck averred, blissfully forgetful of the fact that he had himself been of a mind to earn that five hundred. "I dunno if they's any notices posted in Farewell, but I wouldn't take chances if I was you. I'd drag it prompt and soon, that's what I'd do."

"Oh, yuh would, huh?"

"Shore would."

"S'pose now I don't feel like draggin' it. S'pose I ain't got no quar'l with this country an' I aim to stay awhile?"

"Well, s'posin' all that, yuh can gamble yuh'll find the answer, stranger. I tell yuh they're after yuh—cavalry from Fort Seymour. They arrested me an' the Kid's Twin—he's one o' our boys—an' drug us off to the fort 'cause we looked a mite like you an' yore friend. It's a good thing for you yuh got rid o' yore angora chaps an' that black an' gold hatband an' pearl-handled gun. Whatcha laughin' at, huh?"

"Me? Oh, nothin', nothin' a-tall."

"Yuh seem to think it's almighty funny, but if yuh let that —— shavetail an' his swaddies get a sight o' yuh, yuh won't think so. Now lookit here, yuh shore saved my life just now, an' anythin' I got is yores. If yuh need a stake, yuh can have it, y'betcha."

"That's shore friendly of yuh," declared Henderson, "but I'm plenty strong on coin myself. So them long knives roped on to yuh, huh? Might 'a' knowed they'd make a mistake if they was any chance o' makin one. They ain't good for nothin' 'cept fight Injuns."

"Y'ain't leavin' us, then?" queried Chuck sharply.

"Not yet," Henderson shook his lean head.

"All right. Now mind yuh, I ain't sayin' a word about who yore friends may be, but I'm tellin' yuh this: Keep away from the C-Y."

"Anythin' else?" Again that peculiar smile.

"Nothin' that yuh'd listen to."

"All right. You've spoke yore li'l piece. Yuh needn't worry about me visitin' the C-Y. Here's what I'm askin' of you: Don't say nothin' about today—about seein' me, I mean. I got reasons for not wantin' folks to know where I am."

"Nary a word," agreed Chuck. "But here comes somebody now."

He had that moment glimpsed a dust-cloud far away on the back trail. The washed-out gray eyes, following his glance, became keen on the instant.

"Then I'll be weavin' along back to my li'l old knoll. I'll stay there till I see whether the gent who's makin' all that trail is a friend o' yores or not. Them bush-whackers might take it into their heads to come back. So long. I guess you an' I won't ride Farewell way after all."

"I guess maybe we won't," said Chuck dryly.

The cause of the dust-cloud proved to be Tom Dowling of the 88. He rode up agog with excitement at sight of the dead mules and other signs of battle.

"Who done it?" he demanded. "Injuns? Road-agents?"

"I dunno," replied Chuck. "They didn't tell me."

"That was shore careless of 'em," grinned Dowling. "Want a ride to town, or was yuh figgerin' on hoofin' it?"

CHAPTER XIV

A WISE WOMAN

CHUCK and Dowling, riding double, did not reach Farewell till the late afternoon. Chuck went at once to Bill Lainey's hotel where he blandished Mrs. Lainey into feeding him in advance of the regular supper-hour and arranged with the fat and lethargic Bill to provide a wagon and team in the morning.

"The hosses ain't real harness-broke," warned Bill. "I only got 'em in a trade las' week, an' I ain't had time to take the bronc out of 'em yet."

"That's all right," Chuck cheerfully assured him. "It's yore wagon. Seen Cutnose round lately"

"I seen him ridin' out o' town a coupla days ago. Ain't seen him since. He may be here. Yuh can't tell."

"I'll sort o' look."

Chuck, his eyes on the lookout for his enemy, walked down the street to the Happy Heart Saloon. Here he found Tom Dowling in a fair way to become plastered. While drinking with Dowling and two citizens whom he knew to be on friendly if not intimate terms with Cutnose Canter, he contrived to casually mention the subject of the Buffalo Flats and the cattle grazing thereon.

Having dropped the seed he went forth to sow elsewhere, in which business he was aided by Dowling who, with maudlin pertinacity, insisted upon accompanying him whithersoever he went. Being drunk, Dowling perceived nothing strange in the repeated allusions to the Buffalo Flats.

Likewise, Dowling's curiosity—the persistent curiosity of the intoxicated that is gratified only to promptly forget that it has been—was a card Chuck played to the limit. Even that cranky person, Mr. Saltoun, could have found no fault with the manner in which Chuck spread it abroad that there were on the Flats many cows, unguarded, practically waiting to be rustled.

From the last of the Farewell saloons the hard-working Chuck escorted the reeling and vociferous Dowling to the hotel. The evening was not a complete success for Chuck had not encountered Cutnose Canter. Nor had Chuck been able to make a party of it for himself. He had been much too busy, and although he had bought many drinks, his adroit shifting of glasses had caused a majority of them to be gulped down by the thirsty Dowling.

Chuck, driving out of town in the morning, immediately found that Lainey had told the truth concerning the horses. They were excessively bronco. When they weren't snapping at each other and kicking the doubletree they were trying to jump through their collars. Luckily, the wagon and harness were both new and strong.

When Indian Ridge was passed Chuck left the trail. For it might be that his enemies had prepared a fresh ambush. In which event following the trail would be suicide. They would not botch their work a second time.

Chuck, sticking religiously to the lowest ground he could find, drove through one draw after another. He experienced no difficulty in keeping the ponies up to their work. They had lost none of their enthusiastic energy. The wagon bounded at their heels like a frisky rabbit. It was not equipped with springs and Chuck suffered.

Ten miles from the Bar-S he slowed the team to a walk. The ponies were willing. So was Chuck. He could not have endured the bouncing and jarring another ten minutes.

"Ooh!" he groaned, tenderly moving his legs and his shoulder-blades. "I'll bet every one o' my teeth are loose, an' I know my neck's broke. —— them bushwhackers! H—— of a note when a feller can't drive peaceable an' free along the trail without gettin' shot up."

A sudden scurry of hoofs in the rear caused him to simultaneously hang his chin on his shoulder and reach for his rifle. But it was only the Rainbow galloping toward him. Chuck sheepishly let the rifle slide down on the floor-boards and straightened. The Rainbow drew alongside and flashed him a quizzical smile.

"Why so suspicious?" she asked with twinkling eyes. "Whom are you afraid of?"

"There was no tellin' who yuh might be," defended Chuck. "I'm only a young feller, an' my nerves ain't growed out yet. Yuh'll have to excuse me. How's yore uncle?"

"Madder than a bee-stung bear. He vows he'll have somebody's hair for drilling him."

"Then he's all right."

"He'll pull through. Uncle's tough. All our family are. I see your razor slipped this morning."

"She did, for a fact." He fingered the courtplaster covering the graze on his cheek-bone.

"Or else somebody's done some ragged shooting— Oh, you needn't begin to whistle, old-timer. Tell sister about it— Oh, they did, and you did, and then they ran away, huh? A likely story. A likely story. But I suppose it's as true as any of your lies. Here, pull up, Chuck, and let me

tie Windigo to the tailboard. I think I'll be sociable for once and ride with you."

"Shore, hop right in," invited Chuck, and stopped his team.

"You probably don't want me," continued the Rainbow blithely, making fast the bridle of the red horse. "But I'm used to that. It doesn't bother me one little bit— You needn't move clear out on the wheel, Chuck. You're perfectly safe with me. I sha'n't make love to you, really."

"Huh!" In spite of himself the reddening Chuck moved uneasily on the seat.

The Rainbow laughed heartily, calmly pulled the tobacco bag out of his upper vest-pocket and constructed a cigaret.

"Much obliged," said she, stuffing the bag back into the pocket. "—— handy having a man round once in a while. I was just wondering how on earth I was going to get a smoke before I saw you."

She pulled a match from his hatband and adroitly lighted the slim white roll.

"I believe the boy thinks I'm trying to flirt with him," she observed, with a sidelong glance. "Don't you flatter yourself, you conceited thing!"

"I don't! I ain't! I—" incoherently began the badgered Chuck.

"Don't mention it, old-timer, or you'll choke. When's it coming off?"

"When's what coming off?"

"The wedding, Mister Innocence, the wedding."

"What wedding?" Chuck was red to the ears.

"Yes, I wonder what wedding. I do indeed. You don't mean to tell me, Chuck Morgan, that you haven't asked her yet?" The Rainbow's expression radiated unbelief.

"I dunno what yo're talkin' about." Huffily.

"Then I'll explain," said the Rainbow, and began.

"Now look here," Chuck cut in at the end of her second sentence, "there ain't nothin' a-tall between that young lady an' me. Why, Rainbow, I'm shore surprised at yuh even thinkin' such a thing."

"Yes? Then of course you won't mind Bill Holliday's going to see Jane."

"Has he been to see her?" demanded Chuck fiercely, sitting erect with a jerk.

"Not that I know of. I merely wished to make you give yourself away. But indeed you did that the day uncle was shot and you and I rode to the C-Y and you rushed up to Jane and asked her if she was all right. Remember, old-timer?— Yes, well, if I were you I'd declare my intentions pretty soon. A young man like yourself, strong, willing, not warranted to stand without hitching, is an article that's badly needed at the C-Y. The father isn't much of a protection, Chuck."

"I know, but——"

"But what?"

"Maybe now she wouldn't have me." Chuck had determined to take the Rainbow into his confidence. Which was just as well. She had broken in anyhow.

"Ask her and find out."

"Bub-but she—she's different an'— maybe I'd sort o' better let her get used to havin' me round a li'l more 'fore I ask her. Why, she don't even know I lul-lul-like her."

"Don't fret yourself. She knows. Why, Chuck, even I could tell the instant you opened your mouth and spoke of her. Of course she knows. And it isn't lul-lul-like. It's lul-lul-love, and you needn't boggle at it either."

"Djuh think she'd look at me, Rainbow?" Anxiously.

"Be a sport and take a chance. Good Lord, do you have to know everything in advance?"

"I'm only pullin' down forty-five a month."

"A good manager can do a whole lot on forty-five a month. You'll get enough to eat, and there'll be plenty left over for tobacco, if that's what you're thinking of. She's a regular cook, that Jane Dale. I spent the night there, and say! Hashed brown potatoes with little young onions chopped up fine, steak, and coffee that would put your eye out. She's an awfully sensible girl too. We became quite well acquainted in the evening, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her now. She's a dear, and I just love her."

CHAPTER XV

RIDERS OF THE NIGHT

"CUT down on yuh an' killed my mules!" bawled Mr. Saltoun, red-faced with wrath. "An' yuh couldn't get no sight of 'em!"

"Nary a flicker," declared Chuck.

"D'juh ventilate any?"

"I dunno. 'Course I didn't stick there idle none, but she's kind o' hard to hit what yuh can't see."

"Shore, shore, but —— —— ——! If it ain't a fine note when a gent can't go peaceful an' free to Farewell without he's held up an' his team beefed! Them mules cost me a hundred an' fifty apiece, too, an' they didn't run away only so often. I s'pose the buckboard's busted some, ain't it?"

"Kind o' scraped round the edges. Most o' their lead went through it."

"O' course! Bad luck, nothin' but bad luck all the time! How'n ——'s a man to make a dollar in this country I'd like to know."

"D'juh see Cutnose?" put in Tom Loudon.

"He was out o' town," was Chuck's reply.

"How many boys are down on the Flats, Tom?" asked Mr. Saltoun.

"Six."

"Send six more down there right away. Tell 'em report to Telescope. By ——! I've a good mind to go with 'em."

"I was goin'," said Loudon meaningly.

"Oh, was you?" snapped Mr. Saltoun. "Well, if you think yo're goin' to have all the fun, yo're mistaken. I'll go 'cause I want to see them fellers caught. Betcha they'll be fiddlin' round there tonight or tomorrow night, if they wasn't last night. She's just the right time o' the month for that kind o' work—a late moon. Betcha when we get 'em we'll get the same jiggers that tried to massacre Chuck. You tell the boys, Tom. Chuck, yo're comin' with me."

"The old man's shore six kinds of a fool," muttered Chuck on his way to the bunkhouse.

"Where yuh goin', Chuck?" hailed the Rainbow from the porch of the ranch-house as, after supper, Chuck led up Peppermint and Mr. Saltoun's black.

"I dunno," lied Chuck.

"Yes, you do," she insisted. "You're going after the men that shot you up this morning. Don't try to tell me you're not. Didn't I see six of the boys start off fifteen minutes ago?"

"Maybe yuh did."

"I guess I did, and I guess I'll go with you, too."

"Oh, stay with me, Rainbow," urged Mrs. Kate. "You haven't been here an hour."

"Can't. I'm still on the lookout for the man who shot uncle, and there may be some connection between him and Chuck's ambushers. You never can tell."

When Mr. Saltoun emerged from the office he found the Rainbow astride her red horse waiting with Chuck.

"Where you goin'?" he demanded pointedly.

"With you," she replied sweetly. "I think you need a woman's guiding hand."

"Now look here, Rainbow: this ain't goin' to be no picnic, maybe, an'——"

"Now, look here, Mister Man: I may come in handy. I'm a much better trailer than Telescope, you know. Climb on your pony."

"S'pose yuh get plugged."

"Lord help the man who does it. Come on."

"Yeah, an' Lord help me from yore relatives . They'll hold me responsible."

"We are waiting," sighed the Rainbow, rolling up her eyes.

With a helpless shake of the head Mr. Saltoun mounted his horse.

"This really ain't none o' yore affair, Rainbow," suggested Chuck who, knowing the lady, should have known better.

"Thank you for putting me right," she flashed, wheeling her horse in a wild skitter of pebbles. "But it's barely possible that you may be glad I went."

He was destined to thank Heaven that she went, but at that precise moment he felt like shaking her, slamming her hard into a chair and bidding her stay there. He did not want any girl riding with him and disturbing his thoughts. He wanted to gloom and grouch in peace and comfort over his troubles. Which troubles consisted mainly of the fact that he was accompanying his employer on what he regarded as a wild-goose chase, when the desire of his heart was to be at Moccasin Spring with Jane Dale. Then, too, he had an uneasy feeling, as of impending evil or disaster. He had had the feeling for an hour or two, and it was becoming stronger.

"Are they worth a penny?" hazarded the Rainbow.

There! She was starting already. Why couldn't she leave a fellow alone? Did she think he wanted to talk to her? Well, he didn't, and he would show her. He tried to, and there was an animated quarrel lasting over several miles. But the honors remained with the Rainbow.

Topping a ridge at dusk, they heard the

creaking of a wagon in the shadowy valley beneath them.

"We'll just ride down an' see who's travelin' the old C-Y trail," observed Mr. Saltoun, and headed diagonally down the slope.

But it was Chuck who reached the wagon first. As he cut across in front of the team the driver uttered a frightened "Whoa!" and pulled up. Some one else on the seat gave a little, suppressed shriek.

"Mrs. Dale!" cried Chuck.

"Mrs. Dale and Molly," said that lady in a relieved tone. "My! How you scared me. And here's Miss Rainbow. How do you do, my dear?"

She ceased speaking as Mr. Saltoun's bulk appeared in the wake of the Rainbow.

"Ma'am," said Chuck, "have yuh been away from home long?"

"Since day before yesterday."

"Day before yesterday!"

"Why, yes. We had to have supplies, and I preferred going myself to sending Jane, after what you told me, and——"

"An' this'll make the third night she's been alone with her dad!"

"You don't think——"

"I don't think nothin', but I know I'm goin' to the C-Y right now quick."

Without a word to Mr. Saltoun Chuck jerked round Peppermint and galloped off in the direction of Moccasin Spring.

"Three nights!" he muttered. "Just the chance they was lookin' for! My Gawd! My Gawd!"

He slowed Peppermint a turn, for there was a long thirty-mile ride in front of the horse's nose.

There was a sharp drumming of hoofs in the rear, and the Rainbow drew alongside.

"Guess I'll trail with you, Chuck," was all she said.

"I'm glad," he told her simply.

Up and down long treeless slopes, across flats where cottonwoods grew beside tiny creeks and wild things bounced up under their horses' feet and fled into the darkness, through long wide draws and short narrow washes, galloped the puncher and the half-breed girl. Neither spoke till nearly half the distance lay behind them, then the Rainbow said—

"Windigo's tiring."

"He sounds all right to me," returned Chuck, cocking an ear to the regular drumming of the hoofs. "He ain't stumbled yet."

"He never stumbles, no matter how tired he is. But I can feel his shoulder-muscles. They're not playing so smoothly. I don't wonder. He's been on the go all day—forty miles if an inch, and this thirty on top of it. Oh, you can't blame him. Still, I don't believe I'll reach the C-Y very far behind you. Pull over, Chuck. We go west of this grove of pines. It's shorter."

They passed so near the singing pines that Chuck could hear the deep diapason of the west wind in the branches. The eery, mournful soughing intensified the grim foreboding in his mind. Suppose he should come too late? And too late for what? The terrible uncertainty of it all was what stretched his very soul on the rack.

A mile or two beyond the pine-grove, Peppermint began to pull away from Windigo. The red horse was doing his best, but he had already done too much. His great heart could not respond. The Rainbow, all but weeping with rage at being beaten by Chuck, although she controlled her voice well enough, did not take her quirt from the saddle-horn.

"I sha'n't urge him, Chuck," she called. "He'll make it if I go easy, so I'll slow down. Keep a-going. See you later."

Almost in an instant the free-striding gray carried Chuck out of hearing of the Rainbow. The puncher was an excellent rider. He knew how to get the most out of a horse. But that night he rode as he had never ridden in all his life. And Peppermint, that bundle of steel nerves and rawhide muscles, galloped as he had never galloped in all his life.

Chuck, as he rode, made no sound. But inside he turned alternately from fire to ice. One moment fairly seething with the boiler-pressure of his rage against the men who would so much as lift a finger against his goddess, and the next cold with the fear of what might happen or perhaps had already happened to her, Chuck learned the meaning of hell on earth during the wild rush of that long ride to the C-Y.

Toward the last Chuck began to employ spurs and quirt. Peppermint was game as a badger, but he was staggering in his stride when Chuck sighted a spark of light ahead and knew that it was the C-Y.

Hoarsely panting, his lungs well-nigh bursting under the strain, the gray contrived to keep his feet till the ranch-house was a scant quarter-mile distant. Then he

stumbled — slightly. Stumbled again — heavily. Stumbled a third time, and went down smash on his nose, catapulting Chuck over his head. The puncher landed on the flat of his stomach, and for several minutes could do nothing but gasp like a hooked fish.

WHEN he had his breath back he scrambled to his feet, snatched the rifle from the saddle of the wheezing gray, and scuttled forward on foot with all the speed his high-heeled boots would allow. Among the cottonwoods surrounding the spring he halted, peering past a slim bole at the lighted windows of the kitchen. The door was open, and the light lay on the ground in a fan of yellow radiance.

With the scent of the geraniums that She loved heavy in his nostrils and the ranch-house so near that he could actually look into the kitchen and see the stove and the clock hanging on the wall beyond, reaction set in. He tingled all over. Suppose nothing had happened. But it was past midnight, he knew, long past the hour when folk in the longhorn country are abed and asleep, and the kitchen was lighted as for a wedding. Perhaps Mr. Dale was worse. In that case there would be a light in the other part of the house. He could see no one moving in the kitchen.

He suddenly became fully aware of that which he had at first merely sensed subconsciously—a shuffling, stampering murmur from the direction of the corral. There were a large number of horses in that corral!

"Hosses! He muttered. "She's a reg'lar hoss-band."

At that instant a man stepped into the fan of light in front of the doorway and entered the kitchen. Chuck recognized him immediately. He was a certain Rime Tolliver, a Farewell citizen, well and unfavorably known as a friend of Cutnose Canter.

Chuck's boiling rage and every single one of his fears for Jane's safety returned with a rush. On tiptoe he made straight for the window flanking the doorway. Which window gave him a view into a hitherto invisible corner of the kitchen. In this corner Jane, white and defiant, was sitting in a chair. Her ankles were lashed to the chair-legs, her arms to the spreading back. Rime Tolliver was loosening the lariat that bound her.

"I want some coffee," he was telling her, "an' I want it now."

It was then that Chuck leaped through the doorway and clipped Rime on the neck and jaw with his rifle-barrel and all his strength. The Farewell citizen collapsed with a guggle. Chuck stooped to drag the body out of the way and was seized from the rear.

A thick wrist and fist were under his chin. Another hand gripped the butt of his six-shooter when his own hand flashed downward. With a catlike twist of neck and shoulders Chuck contrived to free his chin and fasten his teeth in the flesh of the wrist. At the same time he bowed his body forward and heaved with all his strength. The man behind flew over his head and thudded back downward on the floor. The sudden jerk wrenched loose the wrist from Chuck's locked jaws and likewise flipped Chuck's six-shooter under the table.

Chuck saw that his assailant was Cutnose Canter and that Canter's holster and gun were under his body. The puncher whirled his rifle up to finish Cutnose once for all. But the stock catching and splitting on a ceiling-beam the rifle was almost torn out of his hands. In that one saving instant of time the agile Cutnose, lithe as a panther in spite of his squat build, gained his feet.

His gun fired from the hip, spat flame and smoke with a roar. Unhappily for Cutnose, his nervous system had been severely shocked by the heavy fall. The bullet whirred harmlessly between Chuck's arm and his side and sped out through the doorway. And through the acrid smoke cloud dashed Chuck Morgan. He was weaponless, for he had dropped his now useless rifle.

Again the six-shooter crashed, but Chuck's hand was on Canter's hand even as Canter's had been on his at the beginning, and the lead splintered a window-casing. Cutnose, his yellow teeth bared to the gum, struck wildly at Chuck with his free arm, but the puncher jammed his face into Canter's neck and the blow fell harmlessly on his shoulders.

Then the long fingers of the hand that had struck wound themselves in the back of the puncher's collar and twisted cruelly. Chuck, his left hand clenched in a desperate grip on Canter's gun-hand, his right arm round the man's wrist, angled a leg back of Canter's legs and strove to trip him.

But Cutnose was as lively as a wildcat and a great deal stronger. He cleverly

evaded or nullified all his adversary's efforts and more than once narrowly missed putting down the puncher.

Both men were dripping with sweat. They panted through clenched teeth. The muscles in their necks stood out taut and hard as stretched ropes. This way and that they wrestled and reeled. They banged into the table. This useful article of furniture promptly capsized on top of the senseless Rime Tolliver. Two dozen assorted dishes and a greatly prized milk-pitcher were shivered to bits. Rime's nose was also broken, but the fact was not apparent till later.

Chuck flung a leg sidewise. A kitchen chair skittered across the floor and boomed into a dishpan, which, in falling from the wall, overset a bucket of water. Incidentally Chuck's shin received a healthy crack from the corner of the chair. The sharp pain spurring him to greater striving, he propelled Cutnose clear across the kitchen and against the stove. Cutnose, the oven-ledge catching him below and behind the knees, inadvertently sat down where the stove was hottest.

Then Cutnose went berserk. He tripped Chuck and went to the floor with him and they wallowed in the water from the upset bucket.

Cutnose was a man of exceptional strength, and that strength was augmented by his fury, but Chuck matched every move. He had to. Almost any man can perform miracles when he is fighting for his life.

Over and over rolled the fighting pair. Now one was on top, now the other. They bit, clawed, struck, pulled hair and ears, and kicked in precisely the fashion of men of the Stone Age. They were fast in the grip of primeval passions. The reversion to type was but natural.

It must not be supposed that Jane was idle during the progress of the combat. Not at all. Rime Tolliver had not been able to free her before Chuck struck him, but he had loosed the lariat sufficiently to permit of her completing the operation. This she did in panting haste.

Once free this girl who had never in her whole life struck a blow in anger, wrenched off a table-leg and dodged round the outskirts of the fight, her earnest purpose being to club Cutnose. But so rapid were the movements of the two men that she could not strike a blow without endangering Chuck.

It was after the conflict had descended to the level of the floor that Jane suddenly crouched, her blazing eyes on the doorway. Then with equal suddenness she fled behind the door.

It was at this juncture that Chuck, momentarily on top, glimpsed his six-shooter not a foot from Canter's writhing shoulder. His clutching fingers swept it up, and he struck downward savagely, again, and yet again.

Cutnose Canter went limp as a wet towel.

Chuck, sitting humped above Canter's beaten body, turned his bruised face toward the door just in time to see a brown-bearded man in white Angora chaps, pushing two six-shooters ahead of him, spring through the doorway and receive a smashing blow on his black and gold-banded hat from the table-leg in Jane's hands.

The man crumpled down in a huddle. *Bang!* A gun cracked outside, and Chuck, forgetting his hurts, flung forward to interpose his body between Jane and possible danger.

" 'T's all right," Henderson's calm voice declared from the darkness. "I got the other one."

Chuck turned bewilderedly to Jane.

She dropped the table-leg and took an unsteady step toward him. She swayed on her feet, her hands groping in front of her.

"I—I think," she said with a pitiful attempt at a smile, "I think I'm gug-going to faint."

With a little sigh she fell forward into his arms.

"IT'S all right to kiss her, Chuck," said the Rainbow, who had arrived ten minutes after the close of activities, "it's all right to kiss her, but how am I to bathe her face while you're taking up all the room?"

Yet after all the bathing of Jane's face did not matter a great deal. For at that moment she opened her eyes. An instant she stared in dismayed bewilderment at the battered countenance so near her own. Then with an adorable little smile and quite as if it were the most natural thing in the world, she slipped an arm round Chuck's neck and put up her face to be kissed by the bruised and swollen lips.

"Gosh!" breathed Henderson, and tactfully withdrew into outer darkness. "Her pretty as a basket o' peaches an' twice as sweet," he added to himself, "an' him with a face yuh wouldn't believe was true if yuh hadn't 'a' saw it. Which that Cutnose must 'a' used his feet."

CHAPTER XVI

AN EXPENSIVE PROPOSITION

HENDERSON held the lantern so that the light fell on the face of the dead man. Chuck stared. The stiffening features bore a slight resemblance to his own. Stiff black hair grew low on a forehead centered by a round and red-rimmed hole. The eyes, open, glazed, were blue.

"He's about yore size," said Henderson, "an' on hossback an' a li'l ways off you an' him might be twins. That's what throwed me off that day I cut down on yuh." He nodded with satisfaction, gazing down at the quiet body. "An' say, wha'djuh know? A coupla days later this here very same chunker come to the 88 where I was workin' to tell Lanpher about a dead cow he'd found some'eres near here, an' I never knowed it. No sir, there I was within fifty yards o' the gent, an' didn't see him. Wouldn't 'a' knowed nothin' about him a-tall only I heard Racey say somethin' the next day, an' he described the sport. I was shore hot."

"It's none o' my business, mister, but who are you, anyway?" inquired the everdirect Rainbow, who had joined them.

"Me?" cried Henderson heartily. "Which my name's Bill Derr, an' the Cross-T sort o' hired me to get the men that rubbed out their puncher— Shore, the Cross-T outfit south o' Seymour."

"An' I thought yuh was one o' them same murderers all the time," said the disgusted Chuck.

"I know yuh did," grinned Henderson, "an' I'd 'a' told yuh who I was the day I run up on you an' yore dead mules over near Injun Ridge, only yuh know how she is yoreself, the fewer folks knows o' things like that the better. But I don't blame yuh for thinkin' the way yuh did, not a bit I don't. That buckskin was shore hard to swallow.

"If I'd had any sense I'd 'a' took one o' my own hosses, but when the Cross-T foreman rid over to my place to tell me he wanted them two killers got, he was leadin' this here spit an' image o' the buckskin his puncher had rode to Seymour an' sayin' how it's the best hoss in the Territory an' for me to take it. An' say, she's been one job trailin' these gents.

"I'll bet there ain't a outfit in Fort Creek County I ain't worked three-four days for. Oh, I been all over, an' I didn't come up on 'em complete till tonight on the 88 range. There they was, ramblin' along with a hoss-band free an' easy as yuh please."

"That reminds me," said Chuck. "Let's go to the corral with that lantern."

They went across to the corral and Chuck hung the lantern over the bars. Through a fog of yellow dust a sea of dark backs heaved restlessly.

"Must be four hundred head in there," observed Chuck with puckered brows.

"Easy. An' that ain't all of 'em. They was that other band the two killers was holdin' on the other side the creek all ready to throw across when you busted in an' had yore li'l riot with Cutnose Canter. That hoss-band shore made me nervous, 'cause I could hear them two killers a-argufyin' an' a-argufyin' should they or shouldn't they help out Cutnose—Hear the fight? Well, I guess yes. Yuh'd a thought the shack was comin' down. I shore was in a cold sweat for thinkin' them two chatterin' killers would stay where they was an' not gimme a chance to down 'em——

"Me? Oh, I was hidin' out in them willer-bushes across the creek with li'l bugs crawlin' down my neck an' a sharp rock stickin' into my stummick. Final, they decided to let the hosses go, an' help Cutnose. After that it was pie for baby. I just followed 'em across. Say, that there Miss Dale lady is shore one whizzer. Didja see her come down with that table-leg? If that feller hadn't had a head built like a kag she'd 'a' busted him wide open, y'betcha. S'pose we might's well pack this stiff down back o' the corral, huh?"

"Shore. Take his feet. How's Mister Dale restin' now, Rainbow?"

"We-ell, seeing that he's been tied to his bed all day and night, you couldn't expect him to be as chipper as a flock of little birds. But anyway he hasn't had another of those hemorrhages, although he's coughing a little. Jane's with him. C'mon in the house when the funeral's over."

The Rainbow turned back and the two

men proceeded with their burden and deposited it behind a clump of bushes beyond the corral.

"I dunno where the shovel is," said Chuck.

"I don't need one—yet," observed Bill Derr. "I gotta take his clo'es off. They're all I've gotta show, an' they're worth five hundred dollars. I'd shore like to take him, but he'd never keep till I reached Seymour—not in this weather. So the clo'es'll have to do."

Bill Derr sighed and knelt. Chuck did not remain to help. When he entered the kitchen the Rainbow was pushing Jane through the doorway giving into the other part of the house.

"I'll stay with your father," the Rainbow was saying. "He's asleep anyway, so it doesn't make a mite of difference."

The Rainbow gave Jane a parting push and closed the door. Jane went straight to Chuck and unaffectedly put her arms round his neck.

"Hold me tight," she whispered, her cheek against his flannel shirt. "Hold me tight."

And he held her so tightly that it hurt and she found difficulty in breathing. But, oddly enough, the pain was very sweet.

"Why, honey," he said, after he had kissed the top of her head several times, "what's the matter? Yo're tremblin' all over."

"He—he said he was gug-going to take me away with him," she breathed.

"Who?"

"Canter."

"He won't now," he told her. "Him an' Rime an' the other feller are tied feet, neck, an' arms to the corral, an' there they'll stay till they're lynched. So don't you worry, not any. Why, I forgot to tell yuh! Yo're in five hundred dollars. That's the reward for the jigger you hit on the head."

"Blood money!" she shuddered. "I don't want it. It would never bring us any luck." Her mood changed swiftly. She seized him by the shoulders and looked up into his face. "Tell me that you love me!" she commanded, almost fiercely. "I want to hear!"

"I SHORE oughta guessed the reason for them wantin' the C-Y corral without bein' told," said Chuck to the Rainbow, as he washed a cut on Peppermint's off fore. "Which she's as plain as the W-G-R brand, an' that takes up the whole side of a cow."

"Oh, Lord, Chuck, tell sister. Hurry up."

"I was just goin' to say that they couldn't rustle more'n two hundred or so head at a clatter, so they needed this corral to put each hoss-band in as they got it. They began yest'day about noon. Two bunches o' two hundred apiece they drove in by sundown, got another in the night which stampeded when the two rustlers who was wranglin' it come bustin' across the creek to help Cutnose, an' they was figurin' on two more bunches today. Near a thousand head they'd 'a' got if they hadn't been dumped."

"Who told yuh all this?"

"Rime Tolliver, the li'l snitch. Oh, there wasn't nothin' he didn't tell. Told how Cutnose had planted that dead cow for throwin' suspicion on the Dales, and how when that didn't work he'd throwed the two 88 hosses in the corral at night an' then passed the word to Lanpher. Rime said Cutnose would 'a' burnt the house final only Mis' Dale an' Molly drove off for supplies an' give him his chance.

"I thought Cutnose and Angora Chaps would go crazy while Rime was tellin' me his li'l tale. They called Rime everything they could think of. Angora did special when Rime told how Angora'd sold the Dales that hind-quarter o' beef. It all made Rime a heap mad an' he told all he knowed about Cutnose an' Angora an' Bun Jason. 'Cordin' to Rime the three of 'em shore need hangin'."

"Did Rime say anything about my uncle?"

"Now look here, Rainbow, Cutnose is a-goin' to hang. So don't——"

"Oh, I sha'n't do anything to Cutnose now. But I want to know. Did he?"

"He did. Cutnose was the one who drilled yore uncle. Seems how he blamed yore uncle for trailin' round an' spoilin' his plans. Looks like bushwhackin' is Canter's right an' lef' bower. Him an' Angora an' the dead jigger bushwhacked me over by Injun Ridge, but couldn't go through with it, thanks to Bill Derr. Rime says he himself wasn't in that deal personal, but it don't make much differ. Rime'll get stretched like the rest."

"Did Rime say Lanpher was in cahoots with Cutnose?"

"He said he wasn't, an' I s'pose he's tellin' the truth."

"Perhaps. When did Bill Derr start?"

"Between two an' three in the mornin'. He'd ought to be back with Old Salt sometime this afternoon."

"It's nearly six now. There! I knew I heard horses."

A few minutes later Mr. Saltoun, Telescope Laguerre, and Bill Derr trotted into view beyond the cottonwoods at the spring. Mr. Saltoun rode up and dismounted beside Chuck. His eyes were wide with eagerness.

"I see yuh got Mister Angora Chaps among others," he remarked, catching sight of the three prisoners tied to the corral. "Did he have a pearl-handled gun, too?—. Yeah, I thought so. Just as if the only Angora chaps an' black an' gold hatband an' pearl-handled gun in the world was at the Bar-S. Huh! Which that shavetail was shorely a fool! Lessee these hosses o' mine."

"My hosses," corrected Chuck gently.

But Mr. Saltoun did not hear him. He was staring with dropped jaw at the horses in the corral.

"They're branded 88!" cried Mr. Saltoun, when he could speak. "They ain't my hosses a-tall!"

"They shore ain't," Chuck drawled with deep meaning. "Didn't Bill Derr tell yuh? I guess maybe he forgot. An' every last one of 'em is branded 88, too. I made shore o' that this mornin'. There's about four hundred an' twelve head. Call it four hundred flat."

"I don't wanta call 'em nothin'," snapped the disgusted Mr. Saltoun. "They ain't my hosses."

"Ain't it lucky? Yessir, she's shore providential. Yuh kind o' thought Cutnose was goin' to rustle yore cows, didn't yuh, what with them ramblin' round the Bar-S range an' all? But that was just to figure out the best route to drive when they had the 88 hosses safe across Soogan. Seems like the drinks are on you."

"They are," said Mr. Saltoun handsomely, "but there's no saloon handy."

"That is a calamity," grinned Chuck. "When are yuh goin' to buy these hosses from Lanpher?"

"Buy 'em from Lanpher!"

"Shore. Didn't you say if what Cutnose Canter rustled turned out to be hosses, yuh'd give 'em to me?"

Then and not till then did Mr. Saltoun remember the hasty promise he had made Chuck in the office of the Bar-S. Four hundred-odd head of horses! Good Lord! Mr. Saltoun groaned in spirit.

"Yuh didn't say whose hosses or what hosses," continued the unrelenting Chuck. "Yuh said hosses."

"I wouldn't buy half a hoss-shoe from that Lanpher!" barked Mr. Saltoun.

"Gimme the money then," suggested Chuck helpfully.

"At five a head." Resignedly.

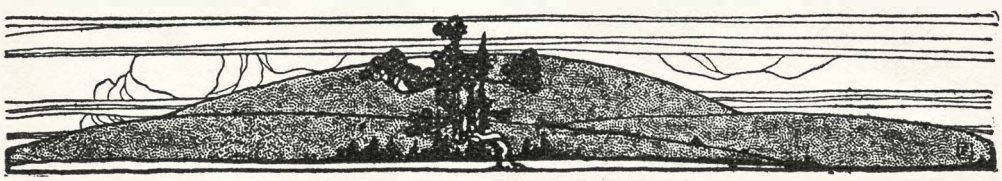
"Ten. A good many are broke."

"Split the difference. Seven an' four bits."

"I'll go yuh. Three thousand dollars. That'll shore be a great help. I might as well tell yuh, I'm thinkin' o' quittin'."

"An' I might as well tell you, Chuck, that I ain't sorry. I'd never feel easy again with you at the ranch. As a puncher yo're all right, but as a payin' investment yo're one expensive proposition."

WHEN the hard-riding Chuck and a posse reached Marysville the following day they were grieved to discover that Bun Jason was not in town. He had, although scarcely able to move from the effects of Canter's beating, fled Marysville on his swiftest horse the previous night. The posse waited hopefully a few days. But Mr. Jason did not return. He never returned.



The NINTH MAN

by EDGAR YOUNG

Author of "The Yardstick," "The Long-Haired Jane," etc.

THERE never should have been an odd man in the party, nor would there have been had not Paul Jessee received word by cable from his wife that required him to put back to the States from Colon. That is how there came to be a ninth man.

Before the boat left Balboa for Guayaquil each of the party, except the odd man himself, knew there would be friction after they got down to the hard routine of trail hitting. That was because the four pairs of partners had learned by experience the psychology of men under the third degree test of long trails. One man can travel alone very well, so long as he is only going a short way, otherwise the solitude may cause strange thoughts to stray through his brain and make him lie awake at nights when sleep should be resting both brain and body.

Two men make the ideal combination for trail-hiking. Not that they always get along together. Sometimes they do not speak for hours or even days over the most trivial detail. But this is only the peevishness of strong men under punishment. Men who have "mushed" dogs in the North, punched burros across deserts in the Southwest, or packed a blanket roll in the tropics know when to speak to a pal and when to keep silent.

Otherwise, who knows how many murders might have been committed over such matters as a broken trace, a knot in a dog-whip, a cracked gee-pole, the cutting of a night's supply of firewood, a lame burro or the pitching of a camp.

Every man praises his pal as the greatest among men, but often over the glowing coals of a lonely camp-fire they scan each others' faces for the expression that would cause them to draw and fire to kill. Thus it is with men who are the best friends in the world and who would fight for each other at the drop of a hat. It is a rank impossibility for three men to get very far on a trail. The third man is always suspicious and jealous. No matter which two drop behind or move ahead together, the third man watches cunningly and speculates that they are speaking of him or perhaps plotting against him. Soon there is a fight or a split-up and one man rolls his bed and takes the trail alone.

Pairs of men who have palled together can get along outwardly better than one pair as they are ashamed of the childishness of sulking and hide their peevishness better, but there is many a look passed by one that is read clearly by the other.

Books of psychology that young men study in college keep strangely silent on this point. This would lead one to believe that the writers of such books are men not given to moving from place to place by means of trails or dog-sleds. However, these facts as set forth are indisputable and are well known to prospectors, hunters, trappers, tropical tramps and adventurers.

AND this ninth man had never been on a trail. He had been raised, as it were, within sound of his mother's dinner bell. He was a boyhood friend of Jessee's.

Paul Jessee, himself, was an interloper. He had conceived the idea of accompanying the party and taking photos to sell to the papers and illustrated weeklies. He dug up and donated what ready cash he had, fifteen hundred dollars, for the privilege of traveling with them and besides stood his part of outfitting the expedition. They had used the extra money for buying more guns, better equipment and a vast supply of ammunition for the thirty-thirties and small "table" guns.

When Jessee had to put back he took things philosophically and told this boyhood friend of his, Hughie Gibbs, to go ahead and do the best he could with the pictures. To this Gibbs consented with a great show of bravado. This is how there came to be four pairs of experienced pals and the ninth man who did not fit in but was endured with gritting teeth by the rest.

In Panama he had prattled with childish delight of the palms and fruits and the immensity of the canal work and pointed out with glee the naked negro and "Spiggotty" children wallowing in the streets. The others had been in the tropics before and these things were an old story to them. Hughie Gibbs could not see that he was annoying and boring but on the other hand thought he had become the life of the party.

Before the *Imperial* steamed up the river and dropped anchor opposite the slaughter house at Guayaquil each and every one wished that Gibbs was back home in New Orleans and that Paul Jessee had his fifteen hundred dollars back in his pocket. But of this they said nothing. They had agreed beforehand when they foregathered in response to a "want ad" in a New Orleans paper that a majority ruled. They had agreed unanimously on accepting Jessee's money and now there was nothing to do but endure Hughie Gibbs as well as possible.

The eight men were: Tom Harte and Lon James, raised in Arizona, who had hunted gold from Alaska to Colombia; Jack Brewer and Harold Bibb, also experienced prospectors and trail hitters who could construct a small stone smelter, it was claimed, and smelt the gold from quartz wherever they found a high grade; Charley Orender and John Carnes from Northern California and James Willis and Dan Murdock from Nevada.

None of these men were over thirty-five. They were big, husky, red-blooded fellows with a heritage of wanderlust and adventurelust that had caused them to put in many years of their lives along the outposts of civilization looking for the Big Stake at the rainbow's end and scorning to wear out soul and body at regular labor. Always on the alert for the small straw that adventure wafts to her lovers the other six had seen the ad. for companions, inserted by Harte and James in the *Picayune*, and in this manner the party had been recruited. Gibbs, also, was about the same age as the others but he was a product of a different class of environment.

II

IT TOOK them the better part of a day to get their gear through the custom house at Guayaquil and it was night before they got across the river Guayas to Duran which is the terminal of the G. & Q. Railroad. The train left for Quito at six o'clock in the morning so they arranged to stop at Pedro's "Hotel Ferrocarril," opposite the station, that night.

Gibbs was surprised when he saw the others making arrangements to retire at eight o'clock although the temperature was toying with the high muggy nineties. He volunteered the information that he was going out to see the sights of Duran and possibly would cross over and see how Guayaquil looked by lamplight. But when one of the party made it plain to him that they were retiring to dodge the yellow jack mosquitos he hastily changed his mind and was the first one under the *pavillon* of a bed. He spent the greater part of the night thrashing around and now and again called to one of the others that he thought he heard mosquitos under his net and was being bitten by them.

It was always like that. He was ever the thorn in the side of the others. He was shy something in his make-up. Not only did he lack the ability to fit in but also he did not have the common sense to adjust himself to the moods of others. He was always the jangling note. When the others sat moodily silent he slopped over at the mouth with the prattle of a schoolboy and when they felt inclined to converse and horse-play he shut up like an oyster. He unbalanced the party. Doubtless if Jessee had not had to turn back he and Gibbs

would have paired and the presence of the two men would not have been so annoying as the presence of the one.

The next morning the party boarded the narrow gage passenger train and they were soon under way. They had tickets to Rio Bamba station, over and across the Eastern slope and the end of a railroad division. It is a day's ride from Duran to Rio Bamba. The train lays up here for the night and the next day proceeds to Quito. But they were not going as far as Quito. Rio Bamba was their destination by rail.

From Duran the G. & Q. makes its way through a swamp for the first hour or so and then rapidly begins to climb. Hughie Gibbs spent his time pointing out native huts perched on poles, alligators lying open-mouthed in the sun, strange colored birds, moss-festooned trees and other sights that were strange to him. After they had passed through the swamp and gained the solid mountainside the others began to take more notice from the windows. They scanned the contour of the country, the lay of the creeks and high bars and the formations of strata.

No doubt there were many things that these men should have known that they did not know. No doubt the fund of information that Gibbs had stored away in his head was of more general value than that of any single member of the party, but these men were "gold-wise" and "trail-wise" from experience.

As it was a gold-hunting expedition their knowledge was everything and whatever wisdom Gibbs had of other things was as valueless for the matters in hand as if he had never possessed it. However, he persisted in jabbering of things that were of small interest to the others and made as much of a nuisance of himself on the train as he had on the boat from Panama.

They passed Huigra and it began to grow colder as they climbed into the higher altitude. They had made arrangement for this and donned sweaters and overcoats. The *Nariz del Diablo* (Devil's Nose) jammed squarely in the middle of the cañon and over the bridge of which the train had to pass by means of switchbacks proved of great interest. Soon they gained the high wind-swept plateau covered with drifting horn-shaped sand dunes as far as the eye could reach.

Along in the early afternoon Chimborazo lifted its ice-coated crest in the east. The sand began to disappear and the soil changed to a volcanic ash with the small creeks and rivers running in deep-cut gorges. Although many thousand feet above the sea, every acre was being farmed. And the farms, cut into squares just large enough for one peon to cultivate, appeared like huge mantles of checked-cloth spread over the earth.

At about eight o'clock that night they arrived in Rio Bamba. This is where the G. & Q. crosses the Rio Bamba or Bamba River, one of the most far-reaching tributaries of the Amazon, or Maranon as it is called in the high country. The Bamba is a fair-sized stream at this point and with caution canoes and small boats may be guided down its current. And of course it gradually grows in volume as it receives the contents of other small creeks and streams.

The next morning found the party at the river's bank studying the best method of navigating down it. They had brought no boats and they discussed what was the best type of boat for their purpose. After many diagrams had been sketched by one or the other it was at last decided what shape the craft would take. They secured lumber from a native and with the aid of a couple of carpenters at the end of the fourth day they had four boats that were water-tight and would answer the purpose.

Another day was spent in sealing up the perishable supplies and ammunition in empty gasoline cans, leaving enough air in each can to float the contents, should the boat upset. The guns each had a block of wood attached to them by a short line so that in case of mishap it would be easy to recover them. With everything in shape to start they pitched camp for the night on the bank of the Bamba and the next morning the start was made down the stream.

The bed of the river was very rocky and in places it was not more than ten feet across and the water was swift as a mill-race. It was hard work to guide the boats and several times one or another sprang into the icy water to keep from upsetting. There were four boats and nine men. This compelled three men to ride in one of the boats.

Gibbs had looked them over and decided he would ride with Harte and James. At

noon a landing was made and dinner cooked. When the boats were being put back into the stream Gibbs picked out the boat of Brewer and Bibb in which to ride for the afternoon.

The plan was to drift down the Bamba for a few days until the climate was fairly temperate, abandon the boats and set out on foot for the southeast, crossing all the tributaries of the Amazon, panning their sands for free gold and searching the cañon walls for gold-bearing ledges of quartz and, if nothing had been found, bearing east and crossing at right angles the tributaries of the Paraguay and the Parana and making the Atlantic coast somewhere between Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo.

If no gold was found in large quantities it was to be a long and cruel trip. But at any time they found what they thought existed somewhere on the eastern slopes of the Andes they would construct dugouts or rafts and after loading them with the yellow metal start down-stream to some river port and get passage to Para.

They knew the western slope of the Andes had been searched and gold found in places in such quantities that a man could make wages with a sluice box. But nothing greater than this had been found. Hundreds of expeditions had been formed to search for the spots from which the Incas had obtained gold in such quantities. Most of these had hunted the western slopes and in this fashion the Pacific slope had been scoured from Panama to Cape Horn.

One or two of the expeditions had crossed over and taken some one river or stream and followed it down to the Amazon. But these had usually found nothing more than trouble with some of the ferocious tribes of Indians that inhabit the low country. The idea of crossing all of the tributaries of the main rivers of South America was unique and seemed certain of success.

Had not the conqueror Pizarro sent back gold to Spain by the galleon load? He had found rooms full of it in Cuzco and immense globes of it in the temples made in the imitation of the Sun God and held in reverence by these Incas. Somewhere in the Andes, these adventurers figured, there must be a river whose bottom was paved with pure golden nuggets. There *must* be.

To these Indians it had had no intrinsic value. They had picked it up as a likeness of the Sun God placed on the earth for them to worship. Small chance that they had panned out such immense quantities from the sands and saved it in tiny specks. No, there must be some spot in the Andes where gold existed in excess of the wildest dreams of any prospector. The western slopes had been searched. These men were going to search the eastern slopes and failing were going to try the headwaters of the Paraguay and the Parana.

III

DURING the first few days they passed small settlements of half-civilized Quichuas. These consisted of several mud huts cluttered around a rude stone church, several score of mangy barking dogs, a few llamas which lay on their bellies with their feet curled under them and chewed their cuds with a swift rotary motion of the under jaw, dirty-faced women who squatted on the ground hiding their bare feet under their eight or ten thick skirts of llama wool as they spun llama wool into yarn with a small hand loom the size of a saucer, filthy children who sprawled in the doorways of the mud huts and dirty-faced dwarfed men who came and went always with a heavy pack of something or other on their backs.

It is said that these Quichuas wash themselves once a year and that there is a great feast held upon the occasion. They have taken over the white man's religion but not his habits as regards soap and water. And always when starting on a journey the Quichua carries his little roll of coca leaves and a quantity of unslacked lime. With a small cud of these leaves in his jaw, wrapped about a lump of lime, to free the cocaine, he can travel for days without food. They are very unfriendly to white men as they regard them all as the hated Spaniards and treat them with scant courtesy.

Have they food to sell? *Nu hay-i.*

How far is it to such and such a place? *Ouien sabe?*

They are sulky and sullen and do what they can to inconvenience a white man but they are not fighters. Pizarro and his few followers whipped thousands of their ancestors, the Incas, and killed them like sheep. These men have inherited the tame spirit of their ancestors but not their kind dispositions. And no wonder after centuries of sufferings.

SOMEWHERE down below was the country of the head-hunting Jíveros, the most cruel and savage of the hundreds of different tribes of South American Indians. These Jíveros had the knack of shrinking the head of a full-grown man down to the size of a small orange and yet retaining the features in perfect condition. It was said that they softened the bones of the head by soaking it in a concoction of herbs and then drying it in a heap of sand around which a fire was kept burning for months.

But this was merely a matter of hearsay as the priests and missionaries let the Jíveros strictly alone and travelers gave them as wide a berth as possible. It was an established fact, however, that they did dry and shrink heads in this fashion for many of these heads found their way to the Pacific coast cities in some way or other, and strings of them were for sale in most of the curio shops of Guayaquil, Callao and Lima.

The head of a full-grown man, in good condition, was worth sixty *sucres* or *soles*, women and children's heads were to be had for about half this price while the heads of babies, dried down to the size of marbles, were to be had much cheaper. The only marks left on any of these heads were a couple of small holes in both lips where they had been sewed or tied together.

THE boats made slower progress than they had calculated and they were only able to travel in daytime, so it was fourteen days down the Bamba before they decided to abandon them. They had traveled down the river between three and five hundred miles.

Gibbs had changed from one boat to the other at least twice and sometimes three or four times daily. He gave advice freely about the handling of any boat in which he happened to be a passenger although he did not have the least idea of the handling of one. Usually his overtures in this direction were met with silent disapproval but some of the men were beginning to hand out hints that he was getting on their nerves.

It would have been better had they told him at the outset. It would have been the proper thing for some one to have called him aside in Panama and told him as they would have told a small boy how he should conduct himself. But the last thing in the world one of these men wished to do was to hurt the feelings of another—especially if it happened to be one of their own party.

The words "companion" and "one of our crowd" meant a lot to these men. To intentionally hurt the feelings of Hughie Gibbs would have been going against the ethics they had been raised up by. And a lot had been stood for before the first hint had been given. However, these hints rolled off the thick skin of Gibbs like water from a bayman's "southwester."

The boats were dragged ashore at the point it was decided to abandon them late one afternoon. This was one of the epochs of the trip. A small feast was prepared. Bibb had smuggled along a quart of Balboa rum and before supper he brought this out and passed it around. It was the happiest night of the trip. After supper, songs were sung. Gibbs was a good singer and he sang many songs in a clear tenor that caused a catch in the throats of the others. This was something in his line and he did himself proud. Which goes to prove that it was the environment as much as anything else that made a misfit of him.

It was only when camp was being pitched that his general uselessness began to loom up. He stood silently watching the others as they dragged the four boats together in the form of a square and arranged the supplies within, for safety and protection. Usually they slept eight hours each and stood guard an hour, making nine hours that the entire party was sleeping.

Gibbs had been standing his hour each night but he usually thumped around and coughed and made enough noise so that he was sure that at least one of the party was not sleeping. He seemed to be afraid of everything. This fact had become patent to all.

The heart of no man is absolutely without fear. There is a dread or fear that is peculiar to each and every one of us. Courage is a matter of conquering these fears. No man could be brave were he not afraid. But Gibbs was a coward and a prey to every fear that man is heir to.

In the morning the boats were piled together and set fire to. This was an indication that there was to be no turning back and there was no dissenting voice except that of Hughie Gibbs who said it would be a good thing to save the boats provided they did have to turn back for some reason or other. The gasoline cans were

unsoldered and the contents emptied on the ground. A division was made and each man's share was carefully hefted to see that the weights were equal, for the packs were to be heavy—for with the guns and revolvers and heavy belts each man would have about a hundred pounds. Then each one began to make up his blanket-roll after the fashion he had learned in the past.

Gibbs's cameras and photographic supplies were distributed around and he was given his part of the supplies and ammunition. There were ten twenty-five pound shot-bags of thirty-thirty cartridges and ten half-bags of twenty-twos. The contents of the tenth bag and a half was counted and a strict division made. Jack Brewer rolled Hughie Gibbs's bundle for him and made a packing rig for him out of a pair of old overalls.

He placed the rolled and tied blanket-bundle, which was about the size of a man's body, in the top of the overalls as a man would put them on. Then he buckled a belt tightly around them at the middle. The legs were of course empty and he doubled these back to the opposite end of the roll and tied them there. This formed a bundle that a man could put on as he would a vest, giving the bearer the broad flat legs of the overalls as pack straps.

Harte and James made a harness for themselves from rawhide which they had brought along for the purpose. Murdock and Willis slung their packs high on their backs with ropes and over their foreheads slipped broad head straps after the fashion of some Indian packers. Bibb rolled an overalls pack and when Brewer had Gibbs's pack ready he rolled one for himself.

The sun had not yet peeped over the crest of the Andes when they were under way. Gibbs quickly trotted to the front and set off in the lead. The others grinned and strung out behind.

On the outside of each pack hung a small sheet iron pan for testing the sands and gravel of the creeks and valleys and a diminutive short-handled miner's pick. Each man had his thirty-thirty carbine slung from his neck by its strap and in the crook of one arm carried the cut-down twenty-two ready at any moment to fire on whatever small game or bird looked good for eating. In addition in an open holster at the front of each man's belt hung a single action frontier-model forty-four Colt pistol and to the rear either a small ax or machete as the personal taste of the bearer dictated.

In the pockets safely wrapped in neat packages were hooks and lines, flints, magnifying-glasses, watertight match-safes and small vials of medicine for fevers and snake-bites. They had everything they needed for the trip down to the last detail from salt to needles and thread. Each man had extra shoes, besides the heavy hob-nailed ones he wore and a bundle of half-soles cut to the right size to be nailed on.

They were thoroughly outfitted. The heads of the eight had been bent together for several weeks in New Orleans making a list. Other times each of them had gone into the wilds of some place or other short some small article that had caused undue hardship and they had combined to see that this did not happen on this trip.

IV

BEFORE noon Hughie Gibbs was complaining about the weight of his pack and dropped behind the last man. This caused many wary winks and grins to be passed around. At last he claimed that he was packing more weight than any one else. Harte quickly threw off his pack and offered to trade with him. Harte's shoulders were hard and calloused so that the rawhide straps did not bother him, and his back was like a piece of sole leather but he secretly admired Brewer's way of throwing a pack together and was curious to see how it set upon the back.

Gibbs and Harte made the exchange. Hughie gave Brewer a bitter look. It seemed as if Harte's pack were lighter. This was caused by the shifting of the center of gravity. The pack sat high on his shoulders and rested him for the first half-hour but soon the rawhide thongs began to bite into the flesh of his breast and shoulders and he begged Harte to trade with him again. They had traveled all morning at a swinging pace, first one and then the other to the fore and by noon they had left the Bamba twenty miles to the rear.

They came to a small stream and stopped for lunch. They had killed no game so they made a meal of dried beef, flapjacks, warmed-over beans and coffee. Dinner over they looked to the care of their feet. They wore the heaviest of yarn socks and after soaking their feet in the cold water

they dried them thoroughly and turned their socks inside out before putting them on again. That is, all did this except Hughie Gibbs. He said his feet were all right and lay with his head on his blanket-roll watching the others.

His face carried the expression of one who was about to burst into tears at any moment. All the bravado he had shown in Colon when he had assured Paul Jessee that "if everything was left to little Hughie it would be all right" was missing. He was a wobegone creature and upon the suggestion of one of the crowd they divided all of his pack except fifteen or twenty pounds among themselves and told him he could carry full weight when he had become more hardened to the trail. Each of them remembered when they themselves had been new to the trail the raw shoulders and "saddle sores" from packing.

Some tyros would have died under the punishment rather than see others carrying their part. But Gibbs was not of this stamp. The yellow streak was his heritage. In the dim and distant past his ancestors had perpetuated their race by cowardice. Others had fought for them and borne their burdens. They had handed down this yellow streak to Hughie Gibbs.

That night he moaned and cried in his sleep and the names of his mother and sisters were on his lips. His turn to mount guard was after Bibb but Bibb did not call him but watched the two hours through. The next day he limped along and the party accommodated their pace to that of his so as not to leave him behind.

The others were hardened, it is true, but they were carrying heavy weight and they often sprang aside to scoop up a panful of earth and wash it in some stream for colors. Besides, they were doing all the camp work and the cooking and the skinning of game. Doubtless most of them were dog-tired when night came but if they were, no man spoke of it. That was a secret they kept to themselves as they did when they were feeling sick or blue.

But with Gibbs it was different. His every word was a whine of complaint or a bitter oath against having consented to come. Daily he cursed and raved at Paul Jessee who was safe in the States and did not hear him. He was tired and feverish, his feet hurt him, he was a sick man and could not sleep at night—although he snored like an ox—his stomach could not digest the rough food. He had sprained joints from always walking on the sloping mountainside and every manner of ailment that could be conceived of. Yet he ate like a horse and his color was fine.

A month passed and then another. By this time he should have been as tough as a pine knot. In fact, if the truth were known, he was as tough. But he did not ask for his part of the load. And no one of the others would say anything. This had to do with their pride. If one had spoken it would have looked as if he were feeling the extra weight. At least this is the way they felt about it. These few pounds did make a great difference to them.

So much and no more makes a load for any man. A llama will pack only four *arrobas* (a hundred pounds) and will lie down and refuse to budge with a couple of extra pounds. But these men were not llamas. They had will-powers and prides that forced them ahead smilingly when they would much rather have lain down beside the trail for a nap.

They found "colors" in many of the streams and, in a place or two, fine rough gold that had not "traveled" very far. In the States this would have been considered good placer ground and with hydraulic power could have been made to pay. They tested pans of earth that ran four or five cents to the pan but after looking at the shining specks in the bottom of the pans they tossed them away and struck out.

They were not looking for a place to make wages. They were not searching for small quantities of gold. It was to be the "big stake" or nothing. All their lives they had rainbow-chased and they were deadly in earnest this time. They were keyed to the sticking point and the neck of each man was bowed.

Gibbs made trouble continually. He came to feel by intuition the feelings between these pairs of pals. He watched for the slightest show of ill-feeling and then tried to rub the raw spots sore. If something was said by one, usually thoughtlessly, that caused a shadow to show on the face of another or a look to creep into an eye that brooded trouble he usually found a chance to make a comment that made matters worse.

He was a cross, as cruel as Calvary, for each one of them to bear. Yet the lips of

each one were sealed. No man wanted to be the first to speak. A good thrashing would have helped Gibbs as nothing else would have done but down in the heart of each one was a kind of pity for him. It would have been like striking the old and feeble or the crippled to hit him, they felt.

THEY struck the small settlements less and less often. A time or two they had trouble with the priests. Beyond the reach of the roads and the telegraph lines the priests have taken unto themselves all the authority of both church and government and reign supreme. This is stated here for its worth and not from any malice against any church or religion. It has always been thus when one man or set of men have absolute power over others. It is human nature that they grow haughty and exacting and jealous of whatever power they may have.

No man can deny that these priests have worked wonders in civilizing these peoples and among them were many whose hearts had not been affected by the power they held over the people and who sent slaves with these strangers to point out the road. But there were others who curtly bade them return whence they came and only consented for them to proceed when they saw that it was an order which would take the best of their fighting men to enforce, if it were enforced at all. For these men did not start out to be turned back.

As they proceeded southeast these missions grew fewer and fewer and at last they saw no more of them. The country grew wilder and wilder. Dense forests of *Pinheiro* and *Imbuha* and *Canela* began to appear. Game grew so plentiful that they killed more than enough to eat without any effort. They came upon tribes of Indians of some nose, lip and ear piercing tribes.

They marched through these with the thirty-thirties held ready for action and fingers upon triggers. But although it raised a commotion in the camps and the fighting men came out with bows and spears and immense, rawhide-wrapped blow-guns twice as long as a man, they did not attack when they saw that these strange creatures meant no harm.

These Indians were absolutely naked and were more black than red. Their hair was straight and blue black. Their faces were horribly disfigured. The lobes of some of their ears were stretched over round pieces of wood as large as saucers and the lower lips of some were stretched over pieces of equal size. It was noticed that the blocks in the lower lips had a small hole in the center and through this hole the wearer made strange whistling sounds. All of them wore sharp sticks through their noses some of which were as large around as the wrist and over a foot in length.

Hughie Gibbs was in mortal fear of these Indians. He walked to the offside of the party when any were about to be encountered and scanned them from behind the others. He had never stood guard since the first night that Bibb had failed to call him and the others had divided the time among themselves.

At night he always spread his blanket in between those of two of the others and during the night he shuddered and spoke in his sleep of these Indians. He had not taken one photograph. These Indians would have been good material. When one of the party spoke to him about it he said he did not think he would trouble to take any pictures on the trip.

The next morning the cameras and photographic supplies, which weighed considerably, were left out of the packs and Gibbs hacked them to pieces with his machete. These men had packed the materials for many a weary mile. They had tried to carry out the contract with Jessee. Yet no one of them had complained at Gibbs' failure to do his duty. Had one of them been capable of taking the pictures he would have done so. But they knew nothing of these things and each man regarded Gibbs solemnly as he slashed them to bits.

They passed out of the country of the disfigured Indians and into a country yet more wild and rugged. They were high on the mountain-sides yet the forests were so dense that it was almost twilight at noon.

Great cat-like beasts slipped into the jungles just ahead of them and many fell in answer to the roar of a thirty-thirty. They were skinned, the hair removed and at night were tanned by rubbing with the brains of some animal for hours. After cleaning each skin was given a coat of arsenic and alum dust.

Before long each man, including Gibbs, owned one of the skins. But it was one of the others who killed and tanned it for him. Dan Murdock laughingly commented that

they would be good for packing the gold from the river bed when they found it. At this sally each laughed heartily although the thoughts of each had been on just this use for them.

Hughie Gibbs grew more and more afraid as he saw the caution of the others increase. He saw them scan the jungles as they proceeded, no word spoken but each man alert to whatever danger threatened and Gibbs' eyes roved with an ecstasy of fear. At night when he saw them drag a barrier of stones together for a camp and watched them tramp the fire out before rolling in, he shivered with dread and tried to pick the safest spot to spread his blanket.

The guard usually crept away for a few paces and lay prone upon the ground so that he could detect danger before it actually approached the camp. There was danger from prowling animals when the fire, which was put out so as not to attract the Indians, was not burning. But each man slept soundly knowing that the guard would do his duty and arouse them all at the signs of danger. That is, all but Hughie Gibbs did. He tossed and moaned and often lay awake for hours shivering with dread.

The antennæ of his fear reached far out into the jungles and he sensed danger to which the others were oblivious. Or perhaps he felt an intuition, a foreboding, a premonition of red-handed danger which was to come. God only knows.

V

THREE months had passed. The pedometer of James Willis registered over twelve hundred miles. He had been careful to lay it aside when pottering around the camps but a hundred miles could safely be subtracted for side moves and short-steps. This left about eleven hundred miles they had walked in a southerly direction.

They were somewhere in Eastern Bolivia —just where no one of them had any idea— but possibly about due east of Lake Titicaca. They were fast approaching the watershed which turns the water north into the Amazonas or south into the Rio de la Plata. The forests were yet very dense. Down below, the first and wildest state of the Republic of Brazil was called Matto Grosso or Great Forest. There was still hope in the faces of all. They were living on hope and traveling on hope.

All but Gibbs. He had given up. He had become a pariah among them. He was part; yet not a part of the crowd. They had found him rotten to the core and had gradually left off saying anything to him. They had done him favors and he had returned evil upon evil.

He was like an ungrateful dog that snapped the hands that ministered to him. He had shirked and whined and made trouble until one by one they had left him strictly alone. He was selfish to the marrow. The others co-operated to the last detail but Gibbs was for self and self only.

He was strong, stronger than many of the party, but yet he allowed himself to be a parasite that grafted itself upon them and impeded their progress. He sat with them at the camp-fires, and ate what they cooked, he walked with them, and slept with them yet he allowed them to fetch and carry for him as if he were an invalid.

He was in the shape of a man but he was not a man. Had he only tried and failed it would have been different. They would have moved heaven and hell for him—or if he had really been weak or sick. He could not fool these men. They knew by experience, by the stride of a man, how he picked up and set down his feet and the way he carried his head and body just how he was feeling inwardly. They did not hate him. He was beneath that. They despised him as unworthy of being a man. Gibbs must have felt this. He could not have helped doing so. But he showed no resentment so long as he traveled light and ate and slept with less effort than they.

Back home in the States these shortcomings would perhaps never have become apparent. He might have died of old age without any one suspecting him of being yellow. But on the trail, the proving ground of men, where each man reads plainly the soul of another, it could not remain covered. It must out and show itself.

They stopped one day on the brow of a cliff for lunch. The forest was thinner here and they could look far below into the valley where a small stream curved and twisted its way downward. After the meal they sat smoking. Harte walked out on the lip of the cliff and stood, shading his eyes with his hand as he studied the lay of the creek intently. His eyes puckered at the corners

and he perused the stream as a student coins a book. At last he called to the others. They came out and stood with him.

"Boys," he said slowly, "this country is not the same as it is back yonder where we came from. The sands and rocks and strata are different. But gold is gold. There are rules and laws that apply to it that hold good here as well as in the States."

"What y' giving us, a lecture on geology?" queried James, his partner, winking slyly at the others.

Harte's face flushed but he smiled.

"Don't crowd me, Lon, I'm coming to it. Look down yonder." He pointed far below. "Do you see how that creek wrings and twists but always keeps going down until it butts up against that spur? Then it turns right straight back for several hundred feet before turning down the mountain again."

Brewer slapped his leg excitedly.

"I get you. If any gold ever traveled down that creek it's right there at that turn now. You couldn't build anything better for catching gold. The only thing is, did any ever travel down it? Has that creek ever unearthed any pockets of gold or broke down any rotten gold-bearing quartz? If it ever has, we can find out at that turn."

The whole party began to talk excitedly. They shouldered their packs and began to pick a way down the face of the cliff.

Nearing the bend, Dan Murdock began to run. The others hastened also and were close at his heels when he dashed down the bank and into the waters to his knees. He grappled on the bottom with his hands and came up with a double handful of great yellow nuggets. Tears were in his eyes and he was choking with sobs as he stood facing the others.

Gibbs was the next to spring in beside him. His eyes were dancing wildly with the gold lust that had fired his brain.

"Gold! Yellow gold!" he shouted. "A whole river of it. We've been through hell boys but we've struck it rich at last."

He began to scoop up double handfuls of gold and pile it on the rawhide which he had spread on the bank. The others waded in and soon the entire party was busy as ants. The bottom of the stream was actually paved with gold. It was, in truth, the end of the rainbow.

A stick snapped sharply on the bank above. Gibbs jumped as if shot and scarcely glancing upward he sprang out of the creek upon the opposite bank. He snatched the rawhide with a swoop of his arm as he passed and dived over and behind a huge boulder where he lay sprawling with his heart pounding like a trip-hammer in his throat.

The others made a stand. They had found the gold and it was theirs. They dropped the carbines into position and faced toward the danger from which Gibbs had fled. In an instant the air was full of arrows and blow-gun darts. The great heavy bone and stone-barbed arrows thudded into their flesh with a sickening sound while the darts struck and hung like porcupine quills from faces and clothing.

To live, to survive, must have been as strong within each of them as it was within Hughie Gibbs, yet each man stood his ground. And no man voiced an outcry. An arrow had punctured Harte's neck from throat to spine and the blood was gurgling from both sides. He seized the barbed end and pulled it through. Then he sprang for the top of the bank. The others were at his side. He was bristling with arrows as he gained the top.

At the top of the bank they met a semicircle of several hundred Indians. From the faces of these savages the marks of every human feeling except ferocity and cruelty had been eradicated. They were human wolves seeking their prey. The bow thongs whined as they sped the great *flechas* into the bodies of the eight white men. The blow guns were *putt-putt-putting* like the exhaust of speed boats.

Then the thirty-thirties began to bark. The eight men stood shoulder to shoulder. Each one was mortally wounded but no one flinched back. They were shooting with deadly intent. They felt that they must die but were trying to even the score as much as possible. They piled the Indians in windrows.

When the guns were empty they snatched the revolvers from their belts and fired them left-handed as they slipped a fresh supply of shells into the carbines with their right hands. The Indians wavered. Never had they met with creatures who fought as these did. Then they surged forward. They were met with a volley that piled another row behind the others.

Each man was spurting blood from a hundred different wounds but Tom Harte

had lost more than the others from the jagged wound in his neck which had punctured the jugular. He fell upon his face. Yet he arose again and again.

"One more, one more," he kept gurgling as his hazy eyes peeped through the sights and he fanned the trigger of the carbine.

The poison of the darts began to affect them. It was made from putrid liver kept months for the purpose. Its infection was quicker and more deadly than arsenic. They began to fall upon their faces. The guns slipped from their grasp. But as the Indians surged forward with a yell they arose by a great concentration of will and fired volley after volley from the red-hot carbines.

The white man is absolute. The will to live is strong within him. He dies harder than any other animal in the world. There were not more than a dozen Indians left alive, when the last of the eight Americans fell upon their faces and did not arise again.

These few watched stealthily for movement for a few minutes and seeing that they were dead came forward and removed the heads with quick, deft strokes of their fire-blackened wooden knives that bespoke long practise.

This is how Tom Harte, Lon James, Jack Brewer, Harold Bibb, Charley Orender, John Carnes, James Willis and Dan Murdock went to their deaths at the hands of the Jíveros in Eastern Bolivia near the Brazilian frontier. They died fighting like true men with their faces toward the enemies. No man can do more. They were white men and they were absolute. But they were overwhelmed by numbers. They were Americans of the type that built up the country of their birth. They lived gloriously. They died gloriously. God rest their souls in peace.

VI

IT WAS a long time afterward—to be exact it was two years and nine months—that a strange creature crept around the base of Mount Corcovado and peered down into the city of Rio de Janeiro. It was nude except for a strip of ragged blanket wound about the waist and loins. A great mat of gray hair covered its head and shoulders and its face was hidden behind a mass of gray beard that covered it entirely and matted and twisted upon its breast.

Its feet and legs were swollen with *beri-beri* until they resembled the feet and legs of an elephant as the leg was swollen out even with the ends of the toes. Its arms and the parts of the body that were visible were covered with jagged white scars where jaws had eaten deep into the flesh which then had healed. It was a nightmare of a creature. It was something like the shapes that fever patients see in their delirium. Yet it was real. It was human. It was a white man and its name was Hughie Gibbs.

He had lain behind the boulder and seen his comrades killed. He had peeped forth as the Jíveros were bending over them to behead them. He had his carbine and could have potted the entire crowd of them without exposing himself to danger. He could have saved these brave men from the indignity of having their heads hung in the lodges of savages to become yellow and smoke-blackened.

He owed it to these men to avenge their deaths after what they had done for him on the trail. Yet he lay there cringing with fear until the Jíveros had borne away the dripping heads of the men who fought with weapons of noise and fire. They had gone back to tell the women and children of the great battle and soon they would return with them to help carry home the bodies of their men for the funeral ceremony.

And when they had gone and Gibbs was quite sure, he started crawling away belly-wise inch by inch and foot by foot. When he had placed a hundred paces between himself and the scene of the tragedy, he arose and began to run. Fear gave him the strength and wind of many men. He ran as no man had ever run before. He dashed away his guns and his revolver. He knew he would have no use for them as he would be afraid to fire lest he attract the attention of the savages.

He flung away the contents of his blanket roll but carried the blanket over his shoulder. But he was carrying weight. In the rawhide skin wrapped as an orange is wrapped in paper, was a bulk of gold as large as a water bucket. This he had slung across his shoulder and he ran stooping with the weight but sprinting like a Marathon runner on the stretch.

For days and nights he ran. He did not know in which direction he was going nor did he care. He only wanted to get further

and further away from the place where this horrible thing had happened. The great affair was to go—and go swiftly. He seemed never to tire. He scarcely felt the weight of gold upon his shoulders although he bent beneath it. He was indifferent to pain of any kind. His cupidity was almost as great as his fear and he hung to the sack of gold with a grip of steel.

It was weeks before he took account of the direction in which he was traveling. He was going toward the east. He had slackened his pace now to a dog-trot. He had been grasping buds and berries and filling his stomach with them as he passed. He was growing weaker and he wondered why he had not died of hunger, although he had felt scarcely any hunger.

His fear had not diminished. There were many other things in the forests to fear besides the Indians. But his caution grew more pronounced.

He became as stealthy as a tiger. He slipped through the jungles like a shadow. And this burden of gold made great saddle sores upon his shoulders and back. These sores scabbed and cracked and rotted with infection yet he bore the weight grimly.

HE HAD traveled for several months. He was a creature of fear. Strange instincts that he did not know were within him became alive. These were the instincts of his ape ancestors. He knew the poison fruits and berries at a glance and he knew which plants had edible roots and bulbs. He was a civilized man yet a subconscious part of him had thrown back centuries into the past. There was nothing that linked him to civilization except the bag of gold he carried and suffered under. At night he climbed into the tree tops and hung there shivering until morning. There were weeks in succession during which he did not sleep for an instant.

He was making good time and would have made the coast in the course of six months, for it was only about three thousand miles as the crow travels had he not had to cross a great swamp or marsh. This marsh was several hundred miles across. It was dotted with hummocks and its waters were inky black. It was warmer in the marsh than in the mountains and its waters were alive with strange reptiles.

He started across this swamp, springing from hummock to hummock and from tree to tree. Often he traveled for weeks and coming to some place which was impassable on account of the depth of the water and the absence of hummocks and trees, had to retrace his steps. In this fashion he lost track of direction and was lost for months at a time. But at last after what seemed like ages and his hair and beard had grown gray from disappointment he won his way through the marsh and into the level plains.

He hastened toward the coast. His clothing had worn out and rotted upon his body. He wrapped the blanket about him as a protection from sharp briers and gradually it was worn down to a small threadbare piece no larger than a towel.

In the low country mosquitoes and flies swarmed upon him and gave him high fevers. The *beri-beri* was numbing his limbs. Strange thoughts came into his head, yet he concentrated his mind and fought them away. He was a craven but the will to live was strong in him. He concentrated on making the coast. If he could only get to the coast where he could get a ship for home! This was what held him together.

He began to strike small towns. These people were half-civilized *Caboclos* and would not have harmed him. They would have helped him. But he feared them on account of the gold he carried. In New Orleans he had once heard of a man killing another for a few dollars. So he slunk around the small settlements and traveled by night to keep from being seen.

He stumbled upon a railroad and he shouted with joy for the first time since the day he had dashed into the stream to gather the gold. He hid himself in a thicket beside the track until night and he set out on a trot following the road east. This was near São José dos Campos. It was about four hundred and thirty miles to Rio de Janeiro. He made it in less than ten nights. He would have made it sooner had he not had to dodge the track guards who are stationed every few miles and whom he kept watch of by their big lanterns.

A few miles out from the city he had left the watch and slunk around through the hills to the back of the city. Here he waited until morning and stood picking out a route through the city to the water-front.

FROM where he was he could see the entire city lying below. He knew his appearance on the streets would attract attention and he was trying to figure out a way to get to the wharves without passing through the city. This he saw was impossible. Several times he started forward and stopped. He had not seen any of his own kind for so long he was afraid. Yet he must pass through the city to get to the steamship office.

At last he set off down the mountainside. He hobbled horribly with the *beri-beri*. His back was bent almost double. He looked more beast than man. He came in at the head of Rua Dom Pedro Segundo. A woman standing in the doorway called upon all the saints and dashed within. Then she came out again and gaped after this strange being. Other women were doing likewise. Dogs were barking. Men and boys began to follow behind. The curiosity of the women got the better of their fears and they also joined the procession. By the time Gibbs had reached Rua Lapa a huge mob was strung out behind him.

He crossed over into Avenida Central (now Rio Branco) and hundreds more stopped to gape and fell in behind. He saw a policeman ahead and he left the Avenida and turned sharply toward the bay. He passed the post-office and swung down along the water-front. His eyes searched the signs on the buildings. He saw one bearing the sign "Lamport & Holt S. S. Co." A painted hand pointed upstairs.

He was panting as he entered the office. Several American and English clerks were behind the counters. One of them dropped a large bottle of ink he was opening to the floor and gave vent to his amazement with an oath. Gibbs stood blinking across the counter at them. Each left his work and they formed a line across the counter in front of him. The roar of the mob that had followed Gibbs, came up from the street.

The thought came into his head that he was safe at last. He tried to speak. It had been two years and nine months since he had uttered a word. His Adam's apple trembled. He sat the huge pouch of gold on the counter in front of him and took out a nugget the size of an orange. The words came with great effort. It was as if he had to tear them from his larynx. Several times he made a sound as of some one trying the reed of a clarinet before he could speak.

"Please — let — me — have — a — ticket —to—New—York."

The rawhide sack had worn thin as paper in spots. The impact of setting it on the counter had torn a small hole. The weight from within forced a small nugget out slowly through the aperture. It balanced precariously for an instant, then dropped to the counter and clattered to the floor.

Gibbs swooped for the bag of gold with both hands and clutched it to his breast in the meanwhile muttering sounds the like of which his hearers had never heard before—something but not exactly like the growling of a mother ape when her young are menaced. Other nuggets crept forth and tumbled to the floor. He stopped the hole with one hand and hugged the sack closer but the rawhide began to give in other places and the gold poured forth in streams.

He hastily replaced the sack upon the counter and began feverishly scooping up the nuggets and pouring them back into it. But as fast as he put them in they rolled out onto the floor again. Something snapped inside his head and the mental part of him went wrong but he kept right on gathering the nuggets and pouring them into the sack. Soon he ceased gathering the real gold and began gathering imaginary gold by the handfuls and piling it upon an imaginary rawhide.

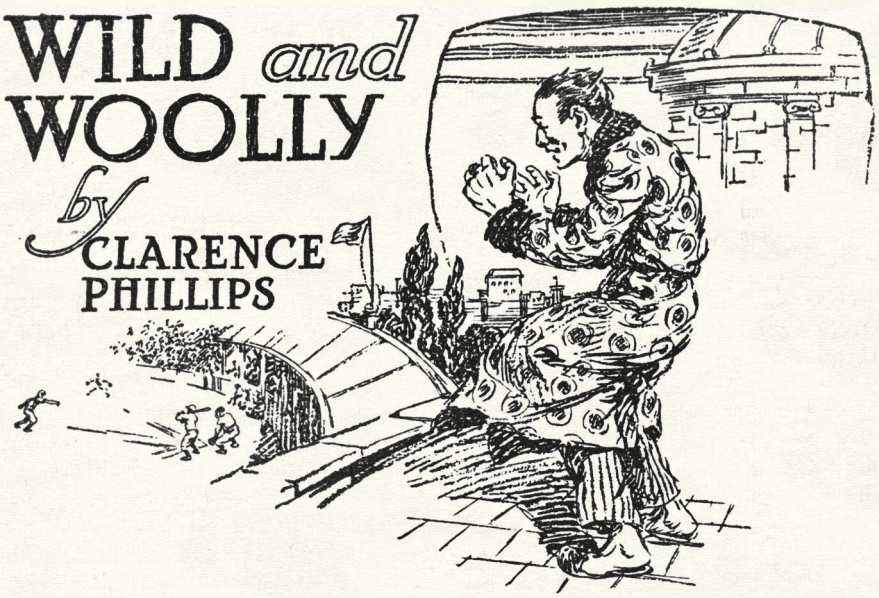
"Gold! Yellow gold!" he shouted. "A whole river full of it. We've been through hell, boys, but we've struck it rich at last."

Now and again he paused and his teeth chattered with the fear of some menacing danger that he thought was creeping upon him and his eyes dilated as he saw again a battle that was fought on the eastern frontier of Bolivia by a few Americans and many Jíveros. But soon he went back to scooping the imaginary gold from the floor and piling it upon the imaginary rawhide, mumbling incoherently the while.

Men came and bound him into a straitjacket and carried him away to a waiting ambulance. His body could no longer coordinate with his shattered mind but mentally he scooped double handfuls of gold and piled it upon a rawhide. It was a task he would never finish as long as life existed in his body.

WILD and WOOLLY

by CLARENCE PHILLIPS



Author of "Stolen in Transit."

IF YOU should happen to see a defendant sneak out of the court-room for a street-car immediately after the jury solemnly retires to decide a murder case . . . If you should see a man rush after the same car with a barber's towel under his chin, one side of his face shaved and a collar in his hand . . . If you should hear desks slamming in office buildings about this time, see bosses bolt suddenly for elevators and office boys for fire-escapes . . . .

There would be but one answer. You would be in Liveburg on a sunny Summer afternoon and it would be nearly time for the ball game to begin at Sportsman's Park. Liveburg is baseball crazy and its citizenry is composed of a unique assortment of rabid fans.

There was just such confusion as above described when Robert Jocelyn Jones, popularly known as "Jonesy", tried to struggle from his bed at Linden Hospital. Miss Powell, the student-nurse at his elbow, gently pressed him back upon his pillow and distress swept across her face.

"Lie down, Mr. Jones," she endeavored to say commandingly. "You must control yourself if you wish to get well."

Jonesy fell back heavily, more from sheer weakness than from the weight of her hands, and turned over on his side with a despairing groan. Through the window he could see the trolley-poles of street-cars on their way to Sportsman's Park.

And for the first time in more than seven years he would miss a game at home.

In fact Jonesy had seen not only every home game in that length of time but he had seen many of the games on the road. He was what you could safely call a wild and woolly fan, one of the wildest and woolliest, in all wild and woolly Liveburg—one of the kind who thinks, talks, eats and sleeps baseball from January to December.

He knew the record of every team and player of importance in the country and spent many hours in his room at night making up freak statistics for the different sporting editors.

But now, with the ball park only a block away, he was stretched out on a bed at Linden Hospital, bunged up generally as the result of a chauffeur's carelessness.

"Why can't you move me over by the window so I can see the park?" he asked Miss Powell, hopefully.

"It's against Dr. Hansen's orders," the girl replied, compressing her lips tightly.

"Orders? Who's payin' for this, Doc Hansen or me?" growled the patient. "You know it won't hurt to——"

"But that's what he instructed and that's what I shall do," said the nurse.

"Then give me the sporting pages out of today's papers."

She shook her head and again that distressed look, crossed her face.

"You must forget baseball. Oh, my goodness, won't you forget baseball for a while?" she begged in a tone considerably louder than she had used hitherto in this sick-room. "You are in no condition to think about anything but getting well."

Jonesy frowned like a spoiled child, settled back on the bed more comfortably and closed his eyes. Presently he began to babble wildly and the nurse, plainly alarmed, started across the room toward a row of electric buttons.

"Hey, don't ring," she heard a voice beg weakly behind her—and looking around she saw Jonesy grinning from the depths of his pillows.

"I was just havin' a little fun, Miss Powell," he said, grinning yet more generously. "You see you won't let me do anything to amuse myself and I have to make my own amusements. But I didn't mean any harm. You—well, you're such a kid and you're so green at this nurse business."

He contemplated her a moment.

"Say, I wonder how the Sam Patch they happened to put you on my case, anyhow. When a fellow's bad off as I am I'd think they'd give him an experienced nurse."

She flushed and turned her face. Jonesy thought he could see a shimmering film overspreading her eyes.

"They did put an experienced nurse on this case at first," she replied with chin aquiver, "but you didn't want her. Dr. Hansen said you—you asked them to give it to me."

There was long silence.

"Yes, I did," said Jonesy slowly and with seeming effort. "I didn't like the looks of that old auk they sent in here and—aruh—I told the doc that you looked human anyhow. So he had 'em make the change."

Miss Powell shrugged as if offended.

"Human! Well, I'm glad at least that I look human, Mr. Jones."

There was a chorus of yells from the ball park. Jonesy's neck straightened, his head cocked and he went up on his elbow.

"McGinnis did that," he said excitedly. "That's the way they always yell when he lands on it."

The yelling had barely died down before the great chorus broke forth again.

"Butler hit it, too," he said in a louder voice; and as the cheering continued Jonesy tried to get up in bed. "Oh, you Butler! Oh, you McGinnis!" his weak voice husked.

SHE FELL back upon the bed as the door-knob wabbled and when Miss Evans, the head nurse, stood over him he was babbling a rare mixture of gibberish and English with both eyes closed.

"How long has he been this way? Why didn't you report?" demanded the head nurse, as she turned and faced Miss Powell.

"I have noted no change. The record has been kept up. This talking," said Miss Powell, "is all put on."

"Put on, nothing," snapped Miss Evans. "Haven't I seen enough delirium to be able to recognize it. And as she applied the arts of her profession for Jonesy's relief he continued to jabber, raving especially about the hospital, the poor broth they served and fragments of hospital scandal.

The head nurse was more worried about what he was saying than about his condition. She sat at the side of the bed unnecessarily long, listening—trying to piece together bits of terrible information this man seemed to possess and frowning when Jonesy's seemingly unguided tongue roamed over roads that she herself had traveled.

He rolled his head under her arm, opened his eyes and slyly winked at Miss Powell. Then he rolled his head back to its former resting-place and stared into the head nurse's face.

"There, young lady, what did I tell you," exclaimed Miss Evans triumphantly. She turned to Jonesy. "How do you feel?" she asked.

"Like what was left," he replied in a half whisper as if he were right then hallooing on Jordan's ferry-docks.

She addressed Miss Powell.

"His doctor will be here in an hour. Meantime watch him closely. We really should have a graduate in this room. I've a mind to send up Miss Simpson——"

Jonesy turned his back on the pearly gates and wallowed to a sitting position.

"Say you—don't you think of sending that pelican up here again. I'm payin' for this, I keep tellin' you, an' I paid in advance for this nurse an' this room. Now, if you want to start somethin' I'll sue the bloomin' hospital. Besides, I know a few things to blab about that'd make some

parties I know feel mighty uncomfortable, and said parties ain't a mile away either. Get out. You worry me. Get——"

It was unnecessary for him to insist. There was panic in her face and she seemed only too anxious to move on.

"I am going to hold you to strict accountability," she said to Miss Powell as she left the room.

"You're tryin' to cry, ain't you?" Jonesy said sympathetically when the head nurse had departed. "No use in that, child, just because you've got to—what was that she said? Oh, yes, she's goin' to hold you to strict accountability. I don't like her a little bit but when she puts it like that I'm goin' to back her up. Gimme my medicine."

"Now, please lie down," the student-nurse begged after giving him the bitter dose. He obeyed at once and as he lay back on the bed seized her hand and forced her to sit at his elbow. Jonesy looked up and saw that her tears were flowing freely.

"There, there, child," he said comfortingly, patting the back of her hand. "I guess I ought to be killed for the way I've treated you. You've been mighty good to me since I've been in this rotten place and just see how I've returned it. Now, don't blubber, I keep tellin' you. Lord knows you're a hundred times better-looking twistin' your face up just like that than Miss Simpson is when she tries to look pleasant. But it doesn't pay, little girl; it lowers your average, don't you see."

It seemed the more he talked the more copious were her tears. Desperately he raised himself on his elbow and said.

"Now cut out the weepin'."

Jonesy thumped her on the nose several times like a grocer testing a watermelon. With each thump there was a command.

"Cut it out. Cut it out. Cut it out. Cut it out."

And at last she cut it out. Miss Powell smiled through her tears and then laughed.

"Of all the rogues I've ever seen in my life you are the worst," she said, putting Jonesy on his back once more by a motion of the hand. "Now let's keep right still so you can get well. I want you to be out of this place in time for the pennant series."

His face lit up with joyous anticipation and she instantly regretted her remark.

"You reckon there's a chance? Do you suppose the doc will let me off by that time?" he asked eagerly.

She looked very serious.

"Not if you allow yourself to get worked up like that," Miss Powell replied. "There is a chance if you will keep right still and try to get ready for it. But if you don't look out you may be here much longer. First of all—forget baseball."

With a struggle Jonesy calmed down and forced his mind from the ball lot to a skiff at Five Lakes where he pictured himself in the act of reeling in a monster bass. So vivid was his imagination excitement began to rake his system and he voluntarily permitted the bass to get back in so he could dream of something less injurious. Jonesy's gaze wandered to Miss Powell who was rocking in front of a window. She was pretty.

It was not the first time he had rendered this decision, but it was the first time that he had been impressed exactly as he was now. What a perfect little wife she would make for—somebody; what a sweet little—mother. His own thoughts caused him to bury his face in his pillows and close his eyes. They had been closed but a moment before he felt the cover pulled gently to the vicinity of his chin and he was aware of a presence sublime and allaying. He heard the shades unrolling stealthily, the room grew dark and through half-closed eyes he saw Miss Powell resume her seat.

"She's an angel, God bless her," said Jonesy to himself. "I've been too hard on her. When I get out of this I'll—I'll have to buy her something nice."

He went off to sleep.

SUCCESSFULLY for several days did Jonesy fight down his impatience to be out of the hospital. He heard the crowds yelling at Sportsman's Park when the windows were up but did not allow the racket to seriously bother him. The team went on the road for four days and before it returned he had profited immensely through the peace and quiet. Then one day the yelling at the park was so continuous he grew restless.

"Who are we playing?" he asked, as Miss Powell began lowering the windows.

"I did hear this morning but I have forgotten," she replied, hoping this would settle him. However, Jonesy was not satisfied and he fought a hard mental battle to back-trail the schedule.

"This is the eighth, isn't it?" he asked, hazily.

"It is the sixteenth," replied Miss Powell.

Jonesy whistled and tried to remember who played Liveburg on the sixteenth. Ordinarily he could rattle off all itineraries in the league without an error. Now—his head hurt. He couldn't make things line up. He strained his ears to catch sounds from the ball game and watched the tops of trolley-poles as they passed the hospital. They were always strangely fascinating, but at this moment they were more than that. They lured. They taunted.

"I've just got to find out something," Jonesy murmured grimly after bearing the strain as long as it could be endured.

Ten minutes after Miss Powell had left the room to answer a telephone call in the office Jonesy was sitting on the edge of the bed with his bathrobe over his shoulders. He put his arms into the sleeves, shoved his feet into some grass bedroom slippers and swayed drunkenly upon his feet.

His head whirled terribly and he could barely hold up his weight. When the dizziness had passed Jonesy followed the wall to the door and in another moment was in the hall. There was no one in sight.

Straight for the stairway back of the elevator he reeled, resting when he was out of sight at a turn and after a while reaching the attic. It was harder work to climb the ladder to the roof but he finally made it, sinking exhausted against the dome.

Jonesy was at the game.

From where he lay he could obtain an excellent view of Sportsman's Park. He knew the teams by their uniforms and knew all players by the way they ran, threw or by other peculiarities. Jonesy saw the reason for the continuous rooting. Liveburg was eating up Oakland, simply chewing the visitors to pieces. It was impossible to see the score-board but he himself counted five men across the plate for the Liveburg team.

McGinnis went to the bat. There was a man on first and one on third. There were two outs. One strike was called on McGinnis. Two balls the great batter let go by. Then—oh, such a beauty! McGinnis slugged a hard liner to the left of second. The man on third loped home. The man on first crossed second, then third and then tried to make it home. The ball was thrown to the catcher; he dropped it and McGinnis was tearing toward third.

Jonesy gasped a couple times, and then did just what he had been trying to keep from doing. He yelled. He yelled as long as the crowd yelled in the grandstand and bleachers. He was on his feet, his scarlet bathrobe whipping sensationally about in the wind and his bandaged head making him appear quaint and ghastly upon his high observatory.

All at once his brain began to buzz. Everything grew dark. He was aware that he was being carried and later felt pillows under his head. Again blackness. When he came around this time his mind was clear but his head ached. An ice-cap rested over the bandages around his brow and over it was a towel, the end of which fell to the tip of his nose.

Looking under the towel he saw the white skirt of a nurse. She was sitting in a chair at his elbow and had a finger on his pulse. Jonesy's soul began to stir with throbbing paroxysms of sentiment. His fingers sneaked about her wrist and slipped down, a tenth of an inch at a time, until they closed gently about her hand. She made no effort to free herself so he closed his eyes and patted the back of her hand contentedly, arguing with an impulse that wanted him to execute something yet more daring.

Some time elapsed. The nurse removed the towel and he looked up into her face.

"My Lord!" gasped Jonesy.

It was Miss Simpson.

Miss Simpson, who seemed very hard to satisfy on the question of pulsations, pulled her chair closer and again closed her fingers about the patient's wrist. He jerked away his hand and rolled over on his side with his back to her. He was mad all over.

"What they puttin' that old curio in here with me for?" he muttered. "What's become of Miss Powell? Huh! I got 'em," Jonesy whispered against the pillows. "It's a frameup. Well, watch me show a sortie."

He smiled upon Miss Simpson's long nose and beneath its ample shadow saw an ivoried rift open in her face.

"I know a friend of yours who tells me lots about you," said Jonesy in a tone of congeniality.

"You do?" exclaimed Miss Simpson, abruptly excited. "Who is that? What did he—she say?"

"It's a he all right and he's one of your best friends," went on Jonesy. "He's—a

doctor. Say, we're just like brothers. Two awful confidential guys, you know. He tells me just everything——"

Miss Simpson's excitement bounded higher. She grew restless and acted as if she wanted to rise and flee from the room. She also looked hard into Jonesy's face as if she would have given much to draw out information without asking for it.

"Why, I can not imagine whom you mean," floundered Miss Simpson. "I couldn't imagine who——"

"Don't bother the imagination," said Jonesy. "He's comin' up to see me—just to call, you know—and you can see then with your own little eyes. Say, I'm goin' to kid the life out of him. You just keep still an' we'll have some fun. I'll spring it all—all the stuff that he told me—an' with you standin' right there——"

"Oh, you wouldn't—I mean—I don't know what you are talking about, Mr. Jones. I have no gentlemen admirers."

"No admirers? Now, Miss Simpson, you can't tell me that any young woman with a face like yours has no admirers. That is impossible."

"Impossible nothing. Don't I know. I detest men so naturally my very presence seems to make them all mad."

"Aw, go on," snorted Jonesy. "I am not given to flattery, Miss Simpson, but I'll say this: there is a certain strange element about you which should put every mad man in a good humor. You see I've been around a bit myself."

"When did you say he was coming—that doctor friend?" Miss Simpson asked as if she had almost forgotten something very important.

"Oh, any time," replied Jonesy. "I rather look for him today or tomorrow. He will be coming frequently, however."

Miss Evans was passing down the hall. Miss Simpson called to her and they held a low conversation just outside the door.

"No, ma'am! You stay right here until I give you further instructions," Jonesy heard Miss Evans say.

He groaned and turned over on his other side. Miss Simpson came back into the room looking much worried. Repeatedly she questioned him about the mutual friend he had mentioned but he refused to divulge further facts. He pretended to sleep. It was necessary to keep her still so he could plan his next move.

AT ONE o'clock Miss Simpson poured some medicine into a glass. Jonesy saw his chance.

"Got to have a pitcher of fresh water 'fore I down that," he said sleepily.

As soon as she had left the room with the pitcher Jonesy dragged himself from the bed. Deliberately he poured out the medicine she had carefully measured into the glass and in its place he put a like amount of carbolic acid from a bottle on the dresser. He had barely settled in bed again before he heard Miss Simpson coming down the hall. Wrinkling her nose she looked around the room quizzically. Then she poured a little water into his medicine-glass and handed the dose to the patient.

"Golly Ned, what's this?" yelped Jonesy, sniffing furiously at the mixture. "*Carbolic acid*—that's what it is. What you tryin' to do, you old hen—tryin' to poison me?"

"It's a mistake—it's——"

"Don't make any difference what it is. Ring the bell now, quick. I want an explanation from a different authority. No, you don't get it away from me either. This is my evidence."

It was not necessary to ring the bell. Miss Evans who was in the next room heard his complaints and hurried to his bed.

"You're in on this, too, woman. I'm goin' to sue the hospital. You framed it up together. You're tryin' to murder me."

He allowed Miss Evans to take the glass. She smelled it and looked horrified at Miss Simpson. Wrath hardened in her features but Jonesy's voice cut off a tirade against the subordinate.

"Now, don't go bawlin' her out just to get off yourself," grated Jonesy. "I can prove you had animosity and simply framed up on me. Just wait 'till the doc comes in—just wait 'till he comes in. And in the meantime, clear out. I'll watch out for myself until I get moved to a hospital where I don't need to keep a cordon of cops on guard."

Miss Evans beckoned to Miss Simpson and with no more to say they left the room. Five minutes later Miss Powell walked in and Jonesy grinned victoriously. She explained that she had been taken off the case because of his trip to the roof.

"They told me what happened just now," she whispered, "and Miss Evans said she'd give me a clean slate if I'd come up here and convince you that the little episode involving the acid was unintentional. She said

it would give the hospital such a hard name if you would sue. She asks as a special favor that you say nothing of the matter even to Dr. Hansen."

Jonesy reflected.

"Well, it all depends," he said. "All I want is to be treated decently. You can tell 'em that."

She left the room and soon returned.

"Miss Evans said you are to be given extraordinary attention. If you want anything at all just ask for it." Miss Powell hesitated as if undecided about what she had planned to say next. "Oh, yes, Mr. Jones," she continued finally, "if it's just the same to you Miss Simpson requests especially that you make absolutely no mention of those little private matters concerning her—whatever they are."

"It's all right about that. You say I get everything I want from now on—huh?"

She nodded.

"Everything in our power to let you have."

"All right then, what about puttin' my bed over by the window so I can see the ball park."

"O-o-o-oh! Mis—ter Jones! The doctor said pos——"

"Aw, intern the doc an' anything he said. Besides I can be pushed back every day before he comes to see me."

Miss Powell left the room. When she returned it was with a negro porter who pushed Jonesy's bed across the room.

"Now, what about some sporting pages?" Jonesy asked.

The student-nurse frowned.

"Oh, you terrible thing," she complained.

But the sporting pages were placed before him in a short time, and, propped up in bed, Jonesy pored over them intently. He slapped his thigh when he saw that Liveburg had come from the bottom to third by sensational playing since he had been laid up. Most of their work had been done in the past two weeks, in this time ten successive wins being placed to Liveburg's credit.

"Gosh, ain't that baseball!" he beamed upon Miss Powell.

He was surprised to see marked concern in her face.

"What—what's got you now, child?" he asked, letting the papers fall from his grasp.

"Oh, please, please don't allow yourself to get so excited. You are not going to get well—nearly so fast."

There was something in this appeal which did not sound at all coldly professional. There was something which again made him think that she belonged more in a cozy home than in a hospital.

"Come here," he commanded.

She took a seat at the side of the bed and Jonesy picked up both of her hands. Her lips were trembling, tears came to her eyes and she turned her head in an effort to conceal them. A lock of soft brown hair fell from her forehead. Twisting the hair about his finger Jonesy gave a yank. Her face turned toward him. For a long while he looked into her eyes. Then he tugged several times on the lock of hair with the result that her cheek was very soon resting against Jonesy's, he was kissing her with abandon and she was sobbing on his shoulder.

"Jerusalem, but my shoulder's gettin' soaked," exclaimed Jonesy after five minutes of this ecstasy.

He pulled on her ear until she was looking into his eyes. She had to smile.

"We're not goin' to be able to live in any upstairs flat if you expect to stage this April business very much."

Again Miss Powell's face dropped to Jonesy's shoulder. This time her color was crimson. She clung to him until he thumped her on the chin.

"Hey, come out of it, quick. Here comes somebody," he warned.

IT WAS Miss Simpson. She picked up a spectacle-case on the dresser and retired without a word.

"Darn that pelican," he growled. "Always interrupting meetin's of the board. If a fly'd light on the end of her nose she'd have to throw the swatter to get him."

"Shame on you," chided Miss Powell, lifting up his head so she could straighten around his pillow. Jonesy submissively permitted her to also rearrange the covers and brush his hair. He closed his eyes so he could throw his whole mind into the enjoyment of her ministrations.

She had taken hold of him as if she were his boss; and he liked it.

It was almost time for the game.

Car after car, packed with fans, passed down the street on their way to Sportsman's Park. Several times Jonesy tried to sit up in bed to get a better look, but each time he was pushed firmly back upon the mattress where he met Miss Powell's play-scorn look

with an expression of childish shame, of which many a sick man might be guilty under similar circumstances.

Jonesy did not even voice complaint when Miss Powell summoned a porter and had the bed moved back to its original place. He picked up the sporting pages but she took them out of his hand and told the porter to carry them to the basement.

"I am going to get you well," Miss Powell remarked quietly. "You've been thinking baseball ever since you've been here and it's retarded your recovery. I'd think you'd forget that old game—for me."

"How long do you really think it will be before I'm out," Jonesy asked, stroking her hair with great industry.

"If you forget all about baseball—absolutely evict it from your mind—it should be but a few days. That is," she amended, "you will be able to leave the hospital. I know you want to get out of here and I'll do my best to hurry things along."

"It's not that I want to get out—just for the gettin'," replied Jonesy coiling an arm around her neck. "It's—poke your face a little closer—it's because I want you, little girl, and I want you as quick as I can get you. The very first day that I get my landlegs we'll shoot somebody over to the courthouse for the passports and then drop in on Dr. Smalley."

He pondered for a moment, presently blurting:

"Golly Ned, I don't like that preacher a little bit. But you know he's the only one of his trade in town who doesn't go to the ball game. Somethin' tells me we are goin' to stage this stunt on a day when we're playin' at home.

"But it's all right with you that way, isn't it, girlie?" he whispered into her ear.

He knew by the way her hair tickled him on the jaw that she was nodding, and Jonesy felt that he had cornered everything on the globe worth having.

It was amazing how rapidly he improved and before long Jonesy and Miss Powell left the hospital to exercise the privileges granted in their State under a writ to wed.

As they were passing a confectionery he pulled her by the arm and stopped in front of a crowd collected at the edge of the sidewalk. Before them was a blackboard carrying baseball scores as the games of the day progressed.

Jonesy's face sparkled with surprise and pleasure.

"What you think of that?" he said excitedly. "Liveburg and Oakland have already played ten innings, nothing to nothing. Man a-live!

"Brown and Griffin for Liveburg—Jordon and Daly for Oakland," he read.

There were some team standings and other statistics pasted to the window. Seeming to have forgotten Miss Powell, Jonesy began bolting down these into his baseball-hungry system. He noted that Brown and Jordon were tied for the best pitching in the league and he let out another exclamation.

A man came out and gave another cipher to Oakland for the first of the eleventh. The little crowd at the edge of the sidewalk yelled. Jonesy yelled with them.

In the middle of the celebration he felt a mighty pull at his sleeve. Miss Powell looked up at him, a picture of despondency. He knew well enough what she wanted and squeezed her arm apologetically as they resumed their journey down the street. She said nothing until he turned around and walked backward to see if another mark had been made upon the blackboard.

"Well!" Miss Powell almost choked. She stiffened into indignation.

They were about to enter the minister's door before Jonesy succeeded in getting her back to her normal humor.

"YOUNG woman," said the minister half an hour later, "let me be the first to wish you immeasurable happiness. And to you, young man, allow me to extend my sincerest congratulations. May your associations together ever be as wholesome as they are now and may they redound to the good of your fellowmen."

The minister followed them to the door. Jonesy pressed a bill into his hand and started to pass out. Then he stopped.

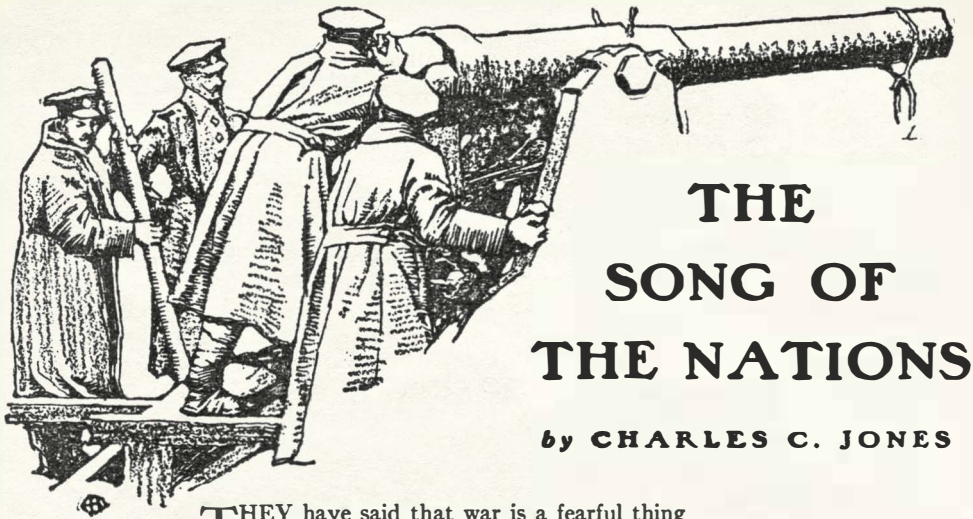
"May I use your phone?" he asked.

Dr. Smalley pointed to a corner.

"The book is hanging there," he said.

But Jonesy didn't need a book. The number he wanted he remembered very well. In a scant minute he was given a connection. Tiptoeing stealthily to his side his former student-nurse bent close to the receiver and listened with all of the gall of one who knew she had that right.

"What's the score?" she heard Jonesy ask.



THE SONG OF THE NATIONS

by CHARLES C. JONES

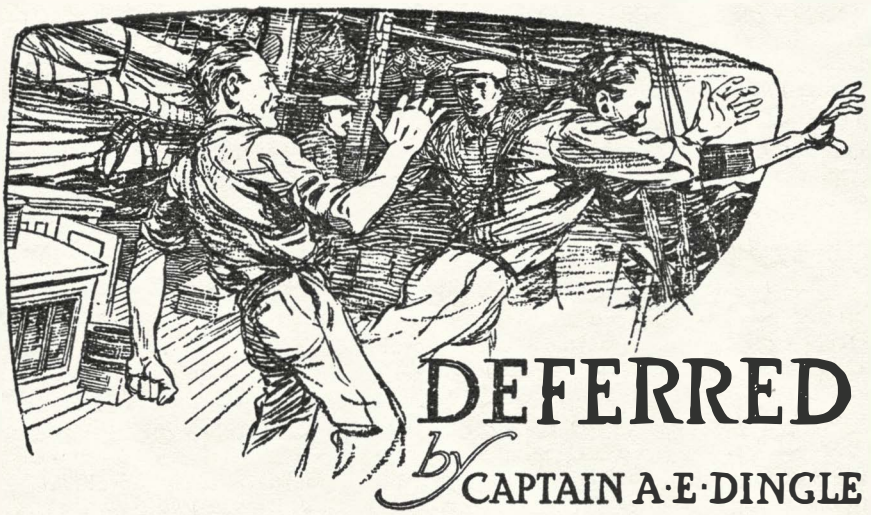
THEY have said that war is a fearful thing
And the mark of the savage strain,
That we shall not live by the primitive;
But the world, to the world's good gain,
Shall forget old scores in the clear, new dawn,
In the dawn of a world-wide peace;
That the day shall come when the guns are dumb,
As the strife of the nations cease.

They have said that life is a precious boon—
Yea, lose life, lose all, is the cry!
But it does not hold with the heart grown bold
When a man in his strength shall die.
It is not man's stay when the ranks roar down,
Or the ships sweep in from the sea,
And the shells' black breath, like the wings of death,
Is afloat where the sun should be.

Oh, it does not hold when the hot blood starts
As a lash to a crouching fear,
When the bugles play in the old, wild way,
And the soul leaps up but to hear!
There is no white peace in the soul of man
When the smoke in his nostrils stings,
And the old desire is a new-born fire,
And the call of his honor rings.

There are some things left in this world of ours
That are born of an older day,
And they shall not die while the free winds fly
Or the warrior seas know spray.
There are insults yet in the word or deed
That are black as the smirch of mud,
And they shall not yield from a nation's shield
Till it reeks with the cleanser—blood.

They have said that war is a fearful thing,
And lose life, lose all, is the cry;
But so long as life in the vein runs rife
Shall a man for his honor die.
And so long as yellow and brown and white
Are the men of the nations bred,
They shall mix not long, who are both grown strong,
Till they prove that their blood is red!



DEFERRED

by CAPTAIN A·E·DINGLE

Author of "Blind Luck on St. Paul," "The Harpooner," etc.

TAKEN by-and-large, that last China voyage of the full-rigged ship *Foochow* beat most sea fiction by fathoms to feet. A queer outward passage, occupying five months of all too fine weather, succeeded by a homeward trip of a hundred-and-eighty days from Hankow Bay to the Breakwater, would have been enough to give windjammer sailors a topic to add to the interminable hank of yarns about "last ships."

The fact that we had, as bo'sun, Big Jim Chivers aboard of us, added a touch of color of its own, for Chivers had long been the talk of forecastles and after-guards alike. He had commanded big passenger steamers fifteen years before, and the story of his come-down wasn't pretty. But it was Ben Corbet, A. S., who injected the ginger into the voyage that made it memorable: Ben, and the bo'sun's final drop.

We slopped lazily out past Chusan into the Eastern Sea, homeward bound, and Ben Corbet had the wheel. His remaining on the *Foochow* puzzled everybody, from the skipper down, for he had spent most of the time in Hankow lying in hospital, and could easily have been discharged and sent home in comfort.

The old man told him as much while visiting him; for Captain Raikes was nearer human than most ship-masters. But it seemed as if the mere suggestion had hastened his recovery; for he took up his old bunk in the forecastle the next day. The skipper stepped to the binnacle, and after a peep at the compass, asked Ben:

"Feel all right now, Corbet? Don't feel weak at all?"

"I'm feeling fit, sir, thank you," responded the seaman, smiling at the old man. "Never felt better, or stronger, sir."

Forward a knot of men were putting a long splice into a big wire, and the bo'sun superintended the difficult job. His surly, growling voice could be heard all through the ship, and men had acquired the habit of jumping when he spoke.

Ben Corbet heard it, and when he had answered the skipper his eyes glinted coldly, in vivid contrast to the warm smile that had accompanied his answer; his body stiffened, and his chest heaved under his thin cotton jumper; his face lost its ruddy glow and went dead white. The skipper glanced at him doubtfully, and then came over to where the mates were standing, shaking his head.

"That fellow ought to have gone home by steam," he remarked. "He says he's fine and fit, but I know better. Look at him!"

"It's either weakness or something he's boiling up for the bo'sun, sir," replied the mate, with a grin. "I've seen men look that kind of white just before something happened to a man they had it in for."

"Perhaps it's that," returned Captain Raikes, thoughtfully. "I don't think he's fool enough to try to get even with Chivers,

though. Corbet's too intelligent, far different from the run of deep-water seamen. Anyway, keep your eyes open.

"I don't want a repetition of the outward passage; and I'll see that I don't ship another broken-down liner-skipper in my ship again. Who could have ever known that that big husky, shipped spifflicated drunk by a shipping-master, could be the Big Jim Chivers who lost the *Ultonia?* Gosh!"

A repetition of the outward passage was desired by nobody. Chivers was a man of forty-five, with an ingrained wickedness that must have run back centuries. Whatever the cause that led to his initial tumble, his incumbency of the boatswain's berth in the old *Foochow* was a thing to remember.

Aside from his five-feet-eleven of height, and two hundred pounds' weight of sheer brawn and springy sinew, the fellow harbored a sort of inner-man that was four parts devil and one part devil's twin.

As a seaman he bowed to no man, and with good reason. He had not risen to command in big liners without full qualifications. He was better than an extra mate in the ship; if there was any part of a ship not at his finger-ends, it was some newfangled patent, such as automatic brace-winches, that he had not yet seen. Even such things were an open book to Chivers after one comprehensive examination.

But in every deep-water ship there is at least one man forward who thinks himself as good as the next man, and this fact had some bearing on Big Jim Chivers's inability to stay longer than one voyage in any ship and claw his way back to the top again.

It was not that the bo'sun ever met his match; it was the other way about; for no skipper cares to carry a bo'sun whose sole notion of conquering an assertive able seaman is to kill him outright.

Such killings might be in outwardly fair fight: they always were. But there were many of them against Chivers's record, and various yarns concerning him all agreed on one point. Let the man who opposed him be as big and able as he might; let him possess the fighting quality of a whole watch of game-cocks; he must either knuckle under to the bo'sun's mallet fists early in the voyage, or his strength and spirit would surely be sapped and broken by subtly contrived accidents until he became as putty in Big Jim's hands.

Then the climax usually came in a cunningly picked rough and tumble. The early days of the *Foochow's* outward passage had witnessed such a case, which, however, stopped short of a man-killing simply because the huskiest seaman speedily conceded the bo'sun's superiority.

There was no other man in the forecastle capable of giving the hard case an argument, and Captain Raikes, who had looked glum on learning just who his bo'sun was, sighed his relief at the prospect of a quiet voyage.

THEN had come the great surprise. Ben Corbet, a youth of twenty, little more than half the bo'sun's weight, and outwardly at least unused to hardship or hard work, had joined the ship at the dock just before she pulled out, and after the boarding master had delivered the balance of the crew.

Obviously of a different class from the other forecastle denizens, precise and cultured of speech, pink of face and hands, and scrupulously neat in dress, Corbet was shunned at first by his fellows who regarded him as an interloper. He, however, knew his work and they left him alone because of it.

During the taming of the single refractory seaman, the youth had looked on with a curious expression of countenance, and an utter absence of fear or awe for the terrible Chivers, that soon brought upon himself unpleasant notice. His watch mates warned him in whispers that he'd better look subdued when the bo'sun spoke to him; but the warning served only to bring a queer smile to his lips, and a glinting light to his eyes.

The inevitable result was swift to arrive. Chivers pounced upon him joyfully and from then onward Corbet's life was a nightmare. Yet he refused to take warning. It seemed as if he deliberately sought conflict with the bo'sun, and thrived on his cruel batterings.

As the weeks drew out into months, and the ship dragged out her wearisome passage, the slight frame filled out visibly, the pink skin took on a healthy tan, and Corbet's encounters with the roaring, snorting Chivers began to assume an appearance of advancing equality. And with the physical improvement came a change of expression—in Chivers as well as his young tormentor.

The glint in Ben's eyes took on a steely, yet contemptuous quality, the smile on his lips became a sarcastic grin that the severest

beating failed to dispel; and, in ratio, the bo'sun's scowling visage lost its expression of cruel enjoyment at the punishment he inflicted, and gave place to savage exasperation that could only bring one result.

The fight that he intended was to be Corbet's last, came off during a spell of squalls and calms in the China Sea, and the end was as sudden as the squall that caused it. Men stood amazed while the fight raged; amazed to see Ben Corbet holding his own, and to see fleeting but unmistakable uneasiness in the bo'sun's eyes.

Then came the squall, and a scurrying to clew up and furl. In the first excitement Ben Corbet relaxed his attention to the job in hand, and Chivers seized his chance. Wrapping his ape-like arms around the youngster, he bore him furiously across the deck and hurled him at the half-open galley door.

The sharp edge of the door broke some of Corbet's ribs and split his scalp from ear to crown. Chivers left him where he lay and sprang to drive the men to their stations for shortening sail without a thought for the man he had apparently killed.

The strange part about it was Corbet's remark as he was hoisted out to go ashore to hospital.

"I can whip that man any time now!" he said, and a smile lighted his pain-drawn face as he said it. "Save him for me, won't you sir?" he seemed to beg of the second mate, who was superintending his removal.

LIGHT, irritating airs fanned the *Foochow* into the Indian Ocean, and apparently Chivers had turned over a new leaf, for the ship was as free from trouble as the weather. Day by day Ben Corbet regained strength, and instead of courting conflict with the bo'sun he appeared to have taken a saner method of completing his bodily powers of resistance.

In the wearisome and all but endless trimming of yards to the fickle zephyrs, he was as near ubiquitous as a seaman can be. Braces and sheets came in like magic when he bent his lithe back to the pull; in squalls that invariably punctuated the calm spells, no man ever beat Corbet to the job when furling or loosing sail was called for.

And the manner in which he swarmed aloft or came down by way of backstays, by a deliberate hand-over-hand motion that proved the temper of his rippling muscles, made even the oldest shellback blink. The change from the continual fighting of the outward passage was agreeably noted in the cabin.

"I think Chivers got a scare over Corbet," remarked Captain Raikes, one evening at supper. "If he behaves like this all the rest of the voyage, I'll be able to understand why he's still in demand. The ship's business runs like clockwork."

"I never saw work done better, sir," replied the mate. "But I'm not sure that we'll make the Cape without a recurrence of the trouble. Have you noticed young Corbet's development, and his expression whenever he passes Chivers?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen something of it, but I don't fear any more trouble between those two. Corbet got enough in that last turn-up, and Chivers got a scare that'll last him, I think."

"I hope so, sir," returned the mate, dubiously.

He was closer in touch with the men than the skipper was, and had seen signs not so obvious to the other

"Chivers is a queer fish, anyway," he went on, thoughtfully. "I never heard the truth about his history, sir. What put the mean streak into him? He's the best seaman I ever sailed with, and I don't quite *savvee* why he can't watch himself better and get back into a better berth."

"He can never do that!" exclaimed the skipper, decisively. "It was no ordinary loss of a steamer that made his name stink in the nostrils of every clean seaman. As I recall it now, he was a handsome, fascinating dog in uniform, and absolutely unscrupulous where women were concerned.

"He had plenty of opportunities in the line that employed him, for it is one of such a captain's duties to act as a sort of male chaperon to unattached young ladies sailing in his ship. Most skippers are proud of the trust, and not often will you find one to abuse it. But by all accounts, Chivers made more than one bad break, and just after he got the *Ultonia* he was called up on the carpet and warned by his owners. There was some talk of a big scandal, but it was hushed up.

"Then he lost the steamer in a fog on the Islay coast. All hands got clear in the boats before she settled, and she was supposed to have sunk. But when the fog cleared, some fishermen found her with her upper-decks

above water, and they found a woman locked in the captain's stateroom. She was half-crazy then, as she would be, and nothing much could be got out of her; but enough was gathered to absolutely damn Chivers in the eyes of everybody who heard of the case.

"He had a clever lawyer to defend him, and got off without criminal prosecution; but his career was finished. He disappeared for a time, and when next he turned up he was much as you see him now: a drunken swab ashore, and a devil incarnate at sea to the men under him. But he is a first-rate seaman—a better bo'sun in a ship can't be found—and that's why he still finds employment. But he dare not aim higher. He's finished."

The second mate's voice volleyed down the skylight in a roar, and the pattering of feet on the poop echoed sharply in the cabin, bringing Captain Raikes and the mate up the companionway with a run. Then Chivers's hoarse bellow resounded, and was redoubled as Ben Corbet replied to it with a sneering laugh.

"What's this! Stop that at once, Chivers!" snapped the skipper, and his face flushed angrily at the desecration of the sacredness of the poop. The two mates ran around the skylight, intent upon intercepting the bo'sun who charged furiously at the sneering Corbet.

The rush was not stopped. Neither did it reach its mark. When the frothing bo'sun reached within six feet of Corbet, the young seaman stepped nimbly aside and brushed Chivers's face with his fingers, as if to show that he might as easily plant a punch as a flip.

Then the unforeseen happened. The bo'sun's rush carried him headlong into the rail on the lee side; the top pipe-rail took him at mid-height, and with a clumsy, grappling tumble he shot overboard and disappeared into the sea.

"Down, down helm!" shouted the skipper, motioning to the wheel. "Easy! Don't get her aback! Hold her just shaking! That'll do—meet her!"

The cry "Man overboard!" rang out, and the second mate flung over a ring-buoy.

"Get the dingey overboard!" Captain Raikes told the mate, and then turned to watch for Chivers's reappearance. The second mate stood at his elbow, and volunteered the reason for the fuss.

"Corbet just came from the wheel, sir," he said. "The bo'sun was replacing some buckets in the rack that had been fitted with new beckets, and the two of 'em just looked at each other as they passed. I didn't catch any words, but Corbet whispered something to Chivers that sent all the blood out of the bo'sun's face and made him froth at the mouth. He tried to hit Corbet a swipe, but missed, and the youngster just stepped aside and laughed. That made the bo'sun madder, and you saw the rest, sir. This ought to——"

"There he is!" shouted Corbet, forgetting for the moment where he was.—He was standing on the rail, holding on by the mizzen-shrouds, looking out anxiously for his enemy.—Then—"By God! He can't swim!" he shouted, and in a flash had dived in a long, clean plunge that cut the water without a splash.

"Hurry up the boat!" cried Captain Raikes, then, watching the ship's drift as she hung in the wind, he bawled—

"Mainclew-garnet! Haul up both clews of the mains'l! Main-braces here!" and ran to set the example himself. The main-yards were backed, and now the *Foochow* lay hove-to, sagging very slowly to leeward and making no headway.

THE dingey was overboard now, and with the inexpertness of deep-water sailors was being laboriously pulled clear of the ship's side. A quarter of a mile away two black heads bobbed close together on the glassy sea, and then only one showed. Where the other had been a long, frantic arm waved for an instant, then disappeared.

It was justifiable for Corbet to give up then, and make for the boat and his own safety. But to the amazement of every man who had witnessed Chivers's treatment of the lad, he trod water for a breath, rose half his length from the water, and then sank after the bo'sun.

"By heavens, the lad's a goner!" gasped the skipper. "He can never handle Chivers half drowned!"

So it seemed, as the dingey blundered clumsily toward the spot. Then Corbet broke water again, and from the ship it was plain that Chivers had wrapped his great arms about the smaller man and was strangling him from sheer panic. The mate in the boat drove his men to greater

efforts that only made the progress less sure, and men who had liked Ben Corbet began to figure what they would buy when his sea-chest was put up at auction.

"He's mastering him, sir!" whooped the second mate.

"Yes, I'm afraid Chivers is too strong for him. He'll drown the pair of them."

"No, no! Corbet's got him free! Gee! See that!"

Corbet had got a knee up against the bo'sun's chest, and in that position they both sank again. When they reappeared, Corbet was clear, floating on his back, with a hand sunk into the tangled hair of the bo'sun, whose face streamed blood.

The dingey picked them up, and brought them on board. While the ship was put on her course again, Captain Raikes had rescued and rescuer placed side by side on the skylight-settee, and administered first aid to the bo'sun. Corbet, after he had coughed the salt water out of his lungs, declined assistance with a grin, and went forward to change into dry clothes.

It was dark by the time Chivers was able to get into his own bunk, and the night-watches went by without reference to the occurrence. But early in the forenoon watch, immediately after he had taken his A.M. observation for longitude, Captain Raikes told the mate to muster all hands at the break of the poop, and to bring the bo'sun and Corbet up to him.

When all were clustered at the foot of the poop ladders, and Corbet and the bo'sun stood beside the skipper, Captain Raikes held up his hand for silence and said:

"Men, yesterday you saw Corbet perform an act that only a man could do. All the earlier part of the voyage there was trouble forward between the bo'sun and this brave lad. Now, whatever the trouble was about, yesterday's deed wipes it out, and before you all I want these men to shake hands and put an end to trouble in the ship for all time. Come bo'sun, give Corbet your hand."

The bo'sun had fully recovered from his immersion, and his powerful frame was once more under full control. But his face, as he looked at Corbet, was ghastly with the ghastliness of a terror that went deeper than physical fear. The skipper and the mates saw it; all hands saw it; and their glances went swiftly to Corbet's face to find the reason.

There indeed was a different expression. The young seaman's eyes blazed, while his lips smiled, and the muscles of his neck and chest worked and rippled under the skin in a way that indicated a tremendous effort at control.

"Come, Corbet," urged Captain Raikes, staring astounded from one to the other. "Why, what the devil is the matter, man!"

Corbet stepped back a pace, and half turned so that he presented a side face to the officers without taking his eyes from the bo'sun. At the same time—later on it was recalled—he assumed a position in which he had Chivers between himself and the forward rail.

"Gentlemen," he said, and nodded to Captain Raikes and the mates as to equals rather than to his superior officers, "for the moment please hear me as man to man. In a few minutes you'll have to judge what you'll do with me. I'm a sailor merely for a purpose, and after this voyage it won't matter what happens to me."

Corbet fixed his eyes on the bo'sun's face, and the sneer at his lips intensified at what he saw there. The captain, mates, and crew stared at the seaman at first, startled at the unusual temerity evinced in addressing a skipper on his own poop. But there was that quality in Ben's tones and words that compelled attention, and he was allowed to go on.

"Fifteen years ago," he said, "that man commanded the steamship *Ultonia*. He cast her away in a fog, and in his cabin was found a woman half frantic with terror and disgrace. That woman was my mother!"

The skipper and mates gasped. The bo'sun's face was livid; his lips parted, and the veins stood out on his neck like cords.

"This steamship captain was noted even then for the homes he had wrecked," Corbet continued, evenly, "and my father's home went to swell the total. He stole my mother from him while he was away on a long sailing-ship voyage: stole her by lying protestations of friendship for my father; persuaded her to break the monotony of her lonely life by taking a trip across the Atlantic in his fine ship. Only a friendly invitation, of course! Nothing wrong about it, for he was my father's friend.

"My mother went. Once, twice, then many times, leaving me at home with a nurse after the first time. And she

succumbed to this beast's wiles. He tired of her, as he had tired of others who had been too weak to resist his blandishments.

"But she had, God help her, learned to care for him to the exclusion of my father. Then came the disaster to the steamer. This man saw a way to be rid of her then, and that is why she was found in his cabin, locked up, when everybody expected the ship had gone down!"

Chivers stood rooted to the deck, and Corbet stepped a half-pace nearer to him as he continued:

"In short, my father received her back to his home in full forgiveness, but the disgrace killed her. She died in his arms. Ever since I was big enough, I have followed the sea in the hope of one day sailing with this man. In this ship I found him, and carried out my intent.

"In all the fighting that has occurred between us, one object has been in view, that of finding his strength and matching it with my own. Yesterday I satisfied myself that I am at last able to handle him. I saved him from drowning, simply because I could not let him escape by that easy way. Captain Raikes, I have sworn to kill that man with my hands, and——"

"Look out!" roared the second mate.

Chivers uttered a bellow of sheer blind terror, and broke for the rail. The mate and Captain Raikes hurled themselves at the flying figure, but the maddened bo'sun burst through them like a charging bull. He was within three feet of the lee rail when Corbet plunged after him in a flying tackle, and brought him with a crash to the deck.

THEN ensued a silent, awful conflict that kept would-be interrupters standing open-mouthed. With the grip of his implacable foe upon him, Chivers called up all his fighting instincts and put out all his tremendous strength. With fists and feet he hammered and pounded at the clinging Nemesis; but Corbet's slim, sinewy hands fastened in a steely grip on his brawny throat and squeezed like Fate.

The young fellow's face and chest were pounded raw, his mouth and ear poured blood, one eye was closed and the other all but blinded. Still the knuckles of his hands shone white through the taut skin; still his fingers sank deeper and deeper into the great neck of his adversary.

Suddenly Corbet uttered the first sound since the conflict began, and it was a grim laugh of triumph. The bo'sun's blows were missing now; the great fists hammered at deck and waterways; the ape-like arms moved jerkily and fell slower as his suffused face was overshadowed with the blackness of strangulation.

"By God! Stop them!" barked the skipper, stepping forward as he emerged from his stupefaction. "Pull him off, men!"

"Never mind, sir," panted Corbet, rising and gulping in great breaths of revivifying air. "I've finished with him. Now do what you like with me." He held out both hands. "I suppose you'll turn me over to the police, sir?"

Captain Raikes walked the deck apart for several minutes, while the two mates ranged themselves on either side of Corbet, and a deep muttering growl of approbation went up from the seamen who had thrown discipline to the four winds during the fight and were now mobbed about the ladders.

"If I was the old man, Corbet, I'd recommend you for a Carnegie medal!" said the mate, gruffly.

"Same here," rejoined the second mate, who was yet thrilling with the excitement.

The skipper stopped at last, and said, shortly:

"You can go forward, Corbet. I'll deal with you later on. Some of you men get this body down on the fore-hatch and let Sails sew it up."

And when the poop was clear again, save for the helmsman and his officers, Captain Raikes told the mates:

"There's only one thing to do in this matter, gentlemen. It's no business of the police, or anybody else ashore. If you're agreed, I'll enter the affair in the log and have you witness it, and I think we can ring down the curtain on the final act of the *Ultonia* case."

"If it clears Ben Corbet, sir, I'll sign anything!" said the mate.

"Same here, sir," agreed the second mate emphatically.

And this is the entry that appeared in the *Foochow's* official log, duly witnessed, all shipshape and Bristol fashion:

Latitude 8 degs. 40 mins. South; Longitude 72 degs. 04 mins. East, James Chivers, boatswain, fell overboard. He was saved with great gallantry by Benjamin Corbet, Able Seaman. Chivers was in bad shape when brought on board, and died the next day of deferred strangulation.

GASTON OLAF *and* BIG BUSINESS

A Four-Part Story—Part II

by HENRY OYEN

Author of "Gaston Olaf," "Little Marie," etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form

"THAT'S the good old Snow Country," exulted Gaston Olaf Thorson. He turned to the river-boat captain. "It's a man's country!"

"It was," returned the captain, "but things have been happening some swift around Wolverene since you left. Now it's going to be a 'business' country. You know the Universal Mines Syndicate—they're on the job. When those slick desk fellers and their lawyers move in, us old wood-ticks move on."

"But Tom Pine and myself have quit mining and are going to make lumber," said Gaston.

"I'll say this, Big Feller," the captain remarked, "I've only seen one other gent go up this river who's as well built and seasoned as you. That's Bradley, head business man for the Universal Syndicate."

"Fine!" snapped Gaston. "The best news I've heard since Tom and I got our timber rights."

Ralph Drake, the young business manager of the syndicate, his sister Ethel, and Loomis, the engineer, all three obviously of the city, had gone up the river the day before. Gaston came upon them at the Landing, as they were about to set out for Wolverene. His arrival was fortunate. With his partner, Tom Pine, he succeeded in routing a number of thugs who had just rushed the city people.

The girl from the city smiled her appreciation upon Gaston. Through the French half of his blood, Gaston was supersensitive to feminine charms. Of the other two in the party, Gaston liked Loomis and instinctively distrusted Drake.

Gaston and his partner met Bradley for the first time on the trail to Wolverene. Bradley rode up, much disturbed that his friends had not arrived. He dashed off when Gaston pointed to the rear.

"He's got a bad eye," muttered Gaston. What's he so impatient to see—the girl?"

The thought shocked him. But what affair was it of his? He reached Wolverene and kept on to his millsite beyond. The buildings and booms were ready, the machinery was on the way up.

"We're ready to saw logs as soon as a saw is spinning," said MacLean, his foreman.

"Heard anything about Bradley that might concern us?" asked Gaston. "I heard the syndicate was out to gobble up the whole camp."

MacLean remembered that Bradley and two syndicate cruisers had been looking around.

In town Thorson hunted up Bradley.

"Are you after our timber?" he asked bluntly.

"When you get it sawed and are ready to sell me some," answered Bradley good-humoredly. "We need lumber and lots of it in a hurry. You can make it for us better than we can do it. Glad you dropped in. Good day."

The attraction at the Empire Music Hall was Ada Adair. She was no ordinary singer. The town buzzed with tales of her voice, beauty and superior qualities.

"Bought a couple of prospects that didn't prove up. She's singing now to get another stake to try again," said one old-timer.

Gaston and Tom were in front of the Empire, undecided about going in.

"I swore I'd cut out women—quit thinking about them—till the job's done," said Gaston. But they went in—and saw that Ada Adair's charms had not been underestimated.

A few tables away sat Bradley, Loomis, Drake and his sister. Gaston was invited to join the party. The eyes of Ethel Drake rested upon Gaston in admiration. Bradley saw the look and scowled.

"I wanted to see you, Thorson, about a rush order of lumber," broke in Bradley.

"Business?" laughed Gaston. "Dear man, business for the present does not exist. But stay. Yes, the business of life exists, which is to enjoy, to relax, to forget care; be thrilled and soothed by music, amused by song, uplifted by woman's beauty—in short to live. Lumber? Man, dear, you wouldn't shatter the pleasant spell by anything so ordinary as—lumber?"

Loomis' eyes glittered his appreciation; young Drake's expression was one of hostility. Bradley

saw that the look in Ethel Drake's eyes that *he* had hoped to awaken there was for Gaston Olaf.

Loomis and Gaston remained behind when the others left. Gaston looked in the direction Ethel had gone and remarked:

"This is one —— of a place for a girl like that."

"I know it," replied Loomis. "That's why I came along."

"Why did her brother bring her North?"

"Drake is ambitious for himself and for Ethel."

"How about you?" blurted Gaston.

"I've got eight hundred dollars in the bank, my job with Bradley and a sense of humor. I had to come North—when I heard Ethel was going with Ray to where Bradley is."

"Hm, bad as that, eh," muttered Gaston Olaf. Then when Loomis had gone: "You fool, why didn't you win her before she came North!"

Gaston had promised to make the syndicate's order the first to go through the mill. Crowley, the store keeper, had extended him credit for provisions and tools to run the camp through the Winter. Success was an apparent certainty.

One day a bad log jam occurred in the river. Gaston would not allow his men to tackle it—it was too risky. But he himself ran to the center of the lock and began chopping. The mass trembled.

"Take a run, boss, she's busting!" came from the shore.

Gaston smiled and drove the ax home. With a sudden roar the great mass tipped forward. Gaston leaped up the face of the jam, reaching the top before the falling logs could hurl him into the water. He triúmphantly rode the top logs ashore. A cheer greeted him. Ethel Drake was in the crowd.

"Splendid! Splendid!" she called.

Gaston looked from her to Bradley. The mining man's face was pale and as hard as stone. His eyes were cold with hatred.

"And it was just play for him," came another woman's voice—Ada Adair's.

She nodded and smiled as Gaston's eyes met hers. He did not say a word but sprang upon the moving logs and went out of sight down the river.

VII

"IT'S coming now, Tom Pine," Gaston said when he reached the mill landing. "The old fighting devils are beginning to sing inside me, and that's always a sign that trouble's coming. I feel it, like a fellow feels a storm coming by the stillness in the bush. It's still now, and something's going to break out soon."

"Something's happened, Gaston Olaf?"

"Something's happened. When a man like Bradley goes white to look at you—well, what do you think?"

"When'd he do this?"

The young man described the scene at the rapids and old Tom scratched his grizzled head.

"Gaston Olaf, d'you know what? I think that if Bradley didn't suspect that you had a soft spot for that girl we wouldn't have any trouble with him at all."

Gaston shook his head, grinning.

"Bradley and I are just natural born competitors. Not for the girl particularly, but for everything. The girl's nothing to me; nothing counts with me now except this job. But Bradley, he's a lot to me; he's my best little enemy." He stamped up and down the landing, shaking the water from his soaked clothes. "My natural born enemy, Tom, and a darn fine piece of a he-man he is, too. Bradley and I are running at each other head on. We've been doing it ever since we met. A smash is coming, and Heaven help the loser!"

"He's a business man," growled Tom.

"So am I. I'll go soft and foxy. He's got to make the first move. And I make a guess, Bradley being the man he is, and acting like he's done today, we won't have to wait long before some move comes."

The accuracy of this prophecy was soon demonstrated. Shortly after noon the next day there came to the mill a messenger bearing a note from Bradley. Gaston's lips stiffened as he read:

My dear Mr. Thorson:

I have a business proposition to make to you. It will be to your profit. Can you step over to my office today? Am busy, or I would wait on you.

BRADLEY.

"Wants you to come to him, eh?" snapped Tom. "Well, I guess your time is worth as much to you as his is to him. Tell him to come see you or take a jump in the lake for himself."

"Nay, nay, Tom. Try to be a business man, no matter how painful. Can't you see how nice and polite Bradley's note is? That's business—speak polite and hide the knife up your sleeve. Seeing that we're business men now we follow suit and I'm going over and be just as nice and polite to him as if I was a lumber company robbing a settler of his land. And, besides, if I didn't go he might get the notion that I was afraid."

"That being the case, of course you've got to go?"

"Of course," laughed Gaston, and sauntered after the messenger.

He whistled as he walked along, and when

he entered Bradley's office he was outwardly in a high state of boyish good humor.

"Hello, Bradley; what's the good word?" he greeted.

The magnate motioned invitingly to a chair.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Thorson?"

"Come on," said Gaston, seating himself, "what's the proposition?"

Bradley leaned back in his chair, playing with a pencil.

"Well, it's this, Mr. Thorson—the timber game here is going to be a bigger proposition than I suspected. We're going to need millions of feet, and I don't like the idea of buying when we should be making it ourselves. Have you boys ever thought of selling out?"

"Never," said Gaston.

"I calculated that you hadn't," continued Bradley blandly.

He studied the young man before him as impersonally as if he had been a sample of quartz. His strong face was expressionless; he had not decided how this particular quartz was to be milled.

"I understand you're one of the pioneers of the camp, Mr. Thorson?"

"No," replied Gaston, wondering whither this tack was to lead, "I wouldn't say that. The first rush came up in early Summer; we didn't get here until late last Winter. But of all the gang that came first only a few of us have stuck. The few lucky ones who made strikes sold their claims and went out; the rest, which was most of them, didn't make strikes and soon found this wasn't a poor man's camp and drifted away.

"Tom and I saw it, too; but we stuck, even after we saw our luck wasn't going to hand us a strike. We're logging men, and everybody else was too crazy about gold to see that the bush around here could be made into lumber. So we got a lot of good timber leases cheap. No, we aren't exactly pioneers, but we're among the few old-timers who stuck."

"Yes. So I understood. I've wondered just why you did stick, Mr. Thorson, seeing that you realized it was not a poor man's camp?"

Gaston looked out of the window at the black, untamed forest that stretched northward from the Syndicate office. A wind was bending the tops of the jack-pine, and the sun was bright in the heavens. He appeared to be dreaming, but in reality he was trying in vain to fathom the purpose of Bradley's conversation.

"Because," said he, smiting his knee, "it's a man's job to make a go of it here."

"Yes." The other's nod indicated that he understood, though he did not sympathize with the young man's outburst. "And besides that, you expect to make a lot of money out of it."

"Considerable, anyhow. Folks are hollering for whip-sawed stuff at any price right now, and that ain't a marker to what it will be when the district really develops. There'll be half a dozen towns built around this lake, and sawing the lumber to build 'em will be a big job."

"Yes. How much do you call your prospects worth?"

"Prospects? We're past prospecting, Mr. Bradley; the rock is proved up and we're milling now. And we've got timber enough to keep the saws running for two years."

"If you ever get it to the saws."

"Eh?"

"You don't own the land this timber is on, I understand?"

"No. We've got the timber rights."

"And the owners have perfect titles to the property?"

"We paid George Hollenbeck, our lawyer, to make sure of that."

Bradley noted the lawyer's name on a pad.

"And your water-rights, for driving the logs to the mill, are all clear?"

"Come," said the young man curtly, "let's have it—what are you trying to get at."

"I am merely pointing out the difficulties that might lie in the way of your becoming the lumber barons of Wolverene."

"Difficulties are breakfast food for me and my partner. That's one reason we like our job so. We nearly froze to death up in Shuniah Valley when we were cruising it; so we're naturally set on seeing the thing through."

"Something might stop you from seeing it through."

"For instance?"

"Money." Bradley tapped the open check book on his desk. "I want your timber. How much?"

The logger stared at Bradley, at the check-book; and then again he looked out of the window.

"I wonder! I wonder if money would pay

us for that week we put in up in the Valley," he said softly. "It was touch and go up there. Money doesn't seem to connect with that, somehow. We swore we were going to see her through if we lived to get out. No, I don't believe money—just a bunch of money, and nothing more to do with that timber—is what we're after. You see——"

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars." Bradley reached for a pen.

Thorson smiled.

"Multiply that by ten and you'd be nearer a reasonable figure."

"Ten thousand. Or nothing."

"Nothing," said Gaston quietly.

"All right. You'll get it." Bradley had dropped the mask now; he was frankly threatening. "We want that timber. We won't be held up by an outsider. Take ten thousand and leave camp. Otherwise you'll be leaving one of these days with nothing."

Gaston Olaf sat quite still. Within, all was pleasant with him. As always when man-to-man trouble threatened a sense of peace and comfort had descended upon him. He measured Bradley's eye, body and jaw, and his contentment grew, for he saw that his past battles had been boy's play to what this man would offer.

"It isn't so much the timber, is it, Bradley? What you really want is to see me leave camp."

"You!" The start which Bradley gave told how true the shot had been. "You? What do you suppose I care about *you*?"

"Bradley," said the young man, "after that, there is only one chance for you to see me leaving this camp, and that is to send me out in a wooden box."

Bradley picked up a blue print and studied it.

"The Syndicate doesn't use wooden-boxes—if it can help it. They aren't businesslike. That's all, Thorson. Good day."

"Good hell!" laughed the woodsman. "Cut out the politeness. You've started something good, Bradley. And next time you can come and see me."

HE STOOD outside the office for a while, undecided on his course of action. He hummed as he blinked lazily against the warm sun. Bradley had declared war, and though he ascribed it to business, the true reason was Ethel Drake. Why wait, thought Gaston; why not force the issue at once? He looked toward the hotel where the Drakes were living. Why not?—The jack-pines behind the town groaned in the wind, and Gaston was recalled to himself.

"Nothing doing! You cut 'em out, all of 'em, and get on the job," he muttered and set his face toward the mill. And he continued to repeat these self-commandments at intervals until his destination was reached.

"Tom's got comp'ny," volunteered the top-sawyer as Gaston entered the saw-mill. "Wish I could have a girl like that come to visit me. Oh, a peach! Jest slip up and peek into the office."

Gaston tiptoed up to the office door and promptly drew back. Ethel Drake was sitting in the large chair before the desk, Walter Loomis was leaning against the wall, and Tom Pine, squatting on his heels, was talking:

"Well, now, sir—I mean, miss—as far's the laws of civilization is concerned, I don't come out any too strong for civilization my black self. I ain't had any great amount of it in mine, I admit you that, miss, but I've had a lot of the other things, and sometimes I ain't quite convinced that civilization is any better. I remember once, 'way back in the old days, when I was young, and before I'd met up with Gaston Olaf, I shipped as hunter on a sealing vessel out of San Francisco.

"I was one of those young fools then, miss, who want to go everywhere and see everything without knowing why. Well, sir—miss, to make it short, we got caught in the ice 'way up beyond Point Barrow, and there was a lot of splintering and cussing, and then the ice opened up and there we were, forty of us, sitting on a little rock of an island with just food enough to last till come open water, if we keep our belts pulled in.

"Well, I was young then and wiry, miss, so me and an Eskimo make a kayak and try for the main-land. We were lucky, and made it, and pretty soon we found an Eskimo snow-house, and they gave us fish, though they didn't have any more'n the law allowed themselves, and one of 'em goes with us, and after a while we find an Indian village where they've got dogs. They give us a team and driver, and we travel and travel, and finally we get to

Nome just as the ice is breaking up; and there's a passenger steamer all ready to sail for Portland.

"I couldn't talk any too well on account of being froze, so I had to write for the captain about the thirty-eight lads sitting up there on the island waiting for help, and it's up to him to go get 'em before starvation does. 'Sure,' says he, and draws up a paper. 'Sign here.' The paper calls for a hundred dollars a head for every man he saved, and a guarantee of two thousand dollars, and he wouldn't stir till I'd signed it. By cripes, miss," concluded the old wanderer, "then I knew I was back in civilization!"

Gaston retreated noiselessly out of sight and hearing.

"Find Tom?" queried the sawyer.

"Yes. And when he asks for me, tell him I've gone out to camp to stay."

VIII

IT WAS the middle of a perfect Autumn afternoon as Gaston left the mill and struck out upon the tote-road for the camp. Autumn was dying hard that year, hard and brilliantly. Far up toward the northern horizon the black, greasy snow-clouds paraded their gloomy presence, rolling from east to west, ever threatening to turn southward and fling Winter upon the district. But at Wolverene there was the mildness and glow of Indian Summer. In the clear, breezeless air the sun's rays lay warm and soothing. Men pecked at their prospect ledges stripped to the beltline and the snow-loving lumberjack-birds gathered in excited convention over the great change of weather presaged by the undue warmth.

It was such an afternoon as Gaston Olaf would have reveled in had he been free to turn himself loose in the woods and enjoy it all. Now he scarcely noticed the day, scarcely noticed whither he went. His feet kept to the tote-road, his long legs carried him swiftly on, his eyes were upon the ground and his thoughts were far away.

What would Bradley do? How would he begin the battle? These were the thoughts that occupied Gaston's mind to the exclusion of all else.

It was not to be a trial of violence. Nothing so simple as that, and Gaston was glad of it. He would have deplored anything simple in a man of Bradley's caliber; his respect for him would have been diminished. The respect which he held for the mining man was of the highest: "he's almost as much man as myself," thought Gaston; and he had no higher compliment to pay. Bradley would fight, and the fight would be one of wits. What would he do?

Thorson had all of the woodsman's distrust of the combination represented by the law and a rich corporation. The crimes he had seen perpetrated against small loggers under the guise of law enforcement were many, and he and Tom had expended considerable money for investigation of titles before they had felled a log. Blocked there, what would Bradley's first move be?

The young man mentally reversed the situation and placed himself in Bradley's position. What would he do if he were Bradley and wished to ruin a couple of loggers?

He stopped abruptly as his thoughts flew naturally to the most obvious and fatal move he would make in such a situation.

"By the eternal pines!" he said aloud, "I never thought of that before. Bradley will think of it, that's a cinch. Well, we've got to try to stop that, too."

He hurried more as he went on now, hurried as if above all things he wished to reach camp as soon as possible. He did not even look up when the sun dropped down behind the timber and the chill of evening came on. But when at last he came forth into the clearing where the camp was situated he was walking with his head up and upon his lips was a faint smile of boyish mischief, a smile that persisted in breaking forth now and then in spite of his business responsibilities.

It was night now. The men had supped prodigiously and were in the bunk-house. Sandy MacLean, who had refused to quit the job, was stamping about his little office on a crutch, and Gaston chuckled to himself as he went past to the cook-shack for his meal. At the door of the shack, however, his expression changed, and the cookee who served him opined to the cook that the boss was worried about something because he sat there and ate without saying a word, which wasn't like him at all.

"Tell MacLean I'm in the bunk-house," growled Gaston when the meal was done.

At his entrance in the latter building the men looked up from their cards or pipes to greet him cheerily, but he only nodded

curtly and drew two chairs to a corner and sat down. When MacLean came limping in his superior was smoking furiously and scowling blackly at the floor.

"Sit down." It was a curt command.

The foreman obeyed, easing himself painfully into the chair by the boss's side and silently awaiting the discharge he felt sure was coming.

Gaston continued to smoke in silence. With a sigh MacLean produced his own pipe and lighted up. Together the two puffed away then, each waiting for the other to begin.

"It's a darn shame," blurted Gaston finally. The men at the nearest card-table had stopped their game and were listening.

MacLean nodded mournfully.

"It is. I knew you'd change your mind, boss. Well, gimme my walking papers and let's have it over with."

Thorson stopped smoking and looked at his foreman in apparent surprise.

"Walking papers? What are you talking about?"

MacLean became confused.

"Why, I suppose——"

"Huh! If it was only a little thing like the jam!"

They resumed their smoking. The men behind them were craning forward to listen. Foreman and employer smoked on.

"It's the laugh the miners are giving our gang in town," exploded Gaston and was silent again.

Sandy MacLean slowly took his pipe from his mouth, swallowed something, and drew his thick brows down over his eyes.

"The laugh?" he said, faintly. "Did I hear you aright, boss?"

The boss nodded.

"The miners—in town—are giving us the laugh?" MacLean's voice was trembling.

Another nod.

"The gang that works for the Syndicate."

There was a long, long silence. The foreman essayed to speak several times but desisted.

"Hmph!" said he at last, and bit his pipe.

"They asked me—" Gaston leaned over to speak confidentially, but the men behind him heard—"if I didn't want to hire some *men!*"

He heard a man at the card-table suck in his breath.

"They're going to make us the jokes of the district, Mac. The boys won't be able to show their faces in town. They'll laugh 'em out of camp. The crew will be quitting us and going out to get away from the laugh."

Foreman MacLean tamped his pipe shrewdly. At last he spoke, softly—

"I don't think they will, boss."

"They'll be joining the other gang then. They'll turn miners so they can't be laughed at for belonging to our crew."

Again Sandy spoke, more softly this time—

"I don't think they will."

"It isn't the jam that I care about. Accidents will happen. But it gave those Syndicate miners a chance——"

"A lot of sniveling cousin-jacks!"

"To ask if we couldn't ride a little raft down the river, and were we afraid of getting our feet wet. You know——"

"I know them. They aren't men; they're moles. They'd rather work down in the dirt than face the sun. Do I know them? A-ah!"

"You know how they talk. The shift bosses will be offering the boys jobs wheeling rock—so they won't fall in the river."

MacLean spat carefully.

"I'd like," he said slowly, "even bunged up as I am, I'd like to have just one psalm-singing cousin-jack or Welsh shift-boss offer me such words."

Gaston checked his recital.

"Hold on, Mac. We don't want any trouble."

"Of course we don't."

"We've got to make the best of it."

"Meek and humble," agreed MacLean. "Meek and humble."

"If the boys will only stay in camp Saturday nights, and stay away from town, there won't be any chance for them to get the laugh. Of course I leave all that to you."

"Leave it to me, boss, leave it to me. Meek and humble is the word."

SO ON Saturday night it came about that the camp of Thorson & Pine was deserted, save for the cookee, the chore-boy and the stableman. The rest of the men were in Wolverene. They came by threes and fours, soberly, inconspicuously, some going to the eating-houses for a variation from camp cookery; others apparently bent on shopping at clothiers and furnishers; some dissipating mildly in the tent saloons. They mingled unnoticed in the crowd of miners that flooded the town.

As the evening wore on it became apparent that the trend of the miners was to the Empire Music Hall. When this fact had been established the movements of the lumberjacks began to center upon the same place, and presently the hall was filled, the logging men scattered among the miners.

Gaston and Tom Pine stood watching the crowd.

"The boys are all going up to hear Miss Adair sing," said Tom. "Shall we go over?"

Gaston looked at his watch.

"Let's wait a little; she won't be on for twenty minutes yet. I'd rather have the fresh air until then."

"Well, I'll go over and save a seat for you," said Tom, but his partner caught him by the arm.

"Don't."

"Eh?"

"Not just yet. Fact is, I've got a little story to tell you. Did you ever hear how old Ikhoot, the good medicine-man, put the kibosh on Atabi, the wicked chieftain? Of course not; neither did anybody else. Old Ikhoot was a good old soul who kept his people straight and wouldn't let the gods or devils hurt 'em; and Atabi was a rascal who sold his women and gave his people hooch, and wanted to grab old Ikhoot's tribe and add it to his own. So Ikhoot got wise, and one day he said to his people: 'The Atabi bunch has got the laugh on us.' His people wanted to know why. 'Because they say we fear them and are afraid to go near their teepees.'

So that night, of course, the young Ikhoot bucks go over to visit Atabi's people, and Atabi's bunch speak 'em fair. But the Ikhoots know what they came for. 'You're a fine gang to give us the laugh,' says an Ikhoot buck. 'Who gave you the laugh?' says an Atabi man. 'You did, you scut,' says the Ikhoot fellow, 'and here's a clout on the ear for trying to lie out of it.' Well, when the mêlée is over the Ikhoots and the Atabis are sworn enemies forever and ever, and old Ikhoot, the medicine-man, sits in his teepee and smokes the best pipe and won't let the gods—or Mr. Atabi—hurt his people."

"Yes?" said Tom Pine, studying Gaston patiently. "And when did you first feel this coming on; and have you any pain behind the ears?"

"Old Ikhoot was a wise old coot," hummed Gaston. "Wait, watch, and listen."

"Watch what?"

"That!" cried Gaston, triumphantly, pointing at the Empire. "Go to it, shanty-boys!"

Across the street in the music-hall the music suddenly ceased. Instead of the rattle of the drum, the plunk of the piano, there exuded from its doors a low, rumbling sound, not unlike the surge of wind among pines. The sound lifted a note in tone and doubled in volume. A white-faced musician catapulted into the street. A pair of waiters followed him. And then through the wide doors of the Empire came tumbling a weaving, howling body of men, inextricably interwoven, who stumbled forth into the street in dazed fashion. Behind this body came a smaller, but more compact crowd, not at all dazed, which cheered as it came and drove the other before it.

"Eh, sonny-me-lad!" cried Gaston Olaf to a damaged shift-boss who came staggering free of the press. "What's all the bother about?"

"They's crazy men; crazy, not droonk!" gasped the Cornishman. "I do but say to one, 'Laddie, dost thee not want work in a dry, covered pit at three the day, 'stead o' thirty the month in the wet snow?' and what do he do but bash me atween the eyes 'fore I could lift me maulies."

"Ah, ha!" cried Gaston, taking him by the shoulders. "I guessed his hand right: Bradley told you to hire my men, didn't he? Speak, Jack, or what the crazy man gave you won't be a marker——"

"In course 'twas the Super gave orders for more hands," said the man, wresting himself free. "I'm naught but shift-boss masel'. "

"And he said Saturday night would be a likely time to get 'em, the lumberjacks being in town?"

"He did so. And what of it?"

" 'Naught,' as you say, Jack. Tom, do you begin to savvee the yarn of the wise old coot, Ikhoot? Look at that bunch out there! I've stopped Bradley's first play. If anybody says 'miner' to 'em for six months to come he'll have to fight!"

As he stood chortling boyishly a lithe, well-rounded figure came hurrying down the street toward the music-hall and halted at the sight of the struggling men. Gaston sprang forward, and in the light of a tent lamp Ada Adair turned her face toward him and laughed.

"You!" she murmured. "Why, I thought you'd buried yourself deep in the bush away from the temptations of the giddy metropolis." She gathered her coat collar carefully about her white, round throat. "So you do come to town occasionally, Mr. Jam-Breaker?"

"Occasionally. And on business only."

"Yes." Her black eyebrows were raised quizzically. "And tonight—business only?"

"Business only." Gaston's smile began to match hers. "Particular business tonight; I came to hear you sing."

Her smile assumed a touch of calm skepticism as she studied him.

"Yes? Big man makee soft talk for li'l' gal, eh? Well, it doesn't look as if anybody would hear me sing tonight unless that bunch of Indians get through with their favorite outdoor sport so I can cross."

"Ah, ha!" laughed Thorson. "My first business tonight, of course, is to see you safely through said bunch of Indians. Will you come?"

A gap in the crowd presented itself, and with her hand on his arm they started to cross. But Indians engaged in such favorite outdoor sport are quick to shift their formations, and in the middle of the street there was a sudden rush and the pair found themselves in the center of a stern mêlée. She did not cry out, but crept close to him, and he threw his long arms about her for protection. The rest was confusion. He thrust men aside right and left, picked her up against his breast and went through the mob like a charging bear. Presently they were standing in the stage-entrance of the Empire, and her arms were clasped tightly around his neck.

"Ah!" she murmured and looked up at him without moving. She closed her eyes and their lips met and clung to one another, and with a cry he tore her loose and set her down.

"I shouldn't have picked you up," he stammered abjectly. "But I was afraid you might get hurt; it seemed the safest way——"

"Safe? Safe?" She laughed unpleasantly. "Oh, you mean you thought it safe because I sing——"

She became silent.

"You can forget it—you can forgive it, can't you?"

"Forget it?" Her poise was coming back. "Suppose I don't want to forget it? As for forgiving"—she was her own self now—"you do it too well to need that, and you know it."

He took a step forward, but she was gone, a door slammed in his face, and he found himself staring at a small sign—

"Keep Out!"

IX

HE WENT swiftly down the street out of sight and hearing of the music-hall. He wanted a cigar, a good cigar, the kind that a man falls back on in times of need, and the hotel stand was the one place in town where that commodity could surely be secured. He entered the crowded lobby with a sense of relief. In the essentially masculine press he felt strong again, and he plunged into the heart of it, shouldering and being shouldered, striving to efface the sense of weakness that rode like the scent of perfume upon him.

It was a crowd to his liking, lean faces with the hawk nose and the hard jaw predominating. There were young men with these facial characteristics, just beginning to play the rough game of adventure who looked at their neighbors with open eyes, smiling in trusting comradeship; there were older men whose eyes narrowed to slits when meeting strangers, whose hard faces were uninclined to smile, hard-bitten men who had played the rough man-game and had grown hard and wary at its playing.

As Gaston plowed his way through them to the cigar counter he noticed that it was a remarkably well-dressed throng for the time and place, but not until he reached the cigars, where a New York broker, with the Broadway puff under his eyes, struck the eye in full evening apparel, did he pause to consider.

"A dance?" he questioned the clerk.

"A ball," corrected the slick youth. "Big bunch of investors in camp, and Mr. Bradley's giving a ball in honor of Miss Drake."

Dance music thrummed in the dining-room. Thorson drifted thither without knowing whither he went. The room had been cleared, the floor polished; a new orchestra rendered the music from behind a platform hidden in tiny firs.

"Some style!" commented a new millionaire in mackinaw and sweater. "Sassiety's the word, boys, and us old sourdoughs can hunt our holes."

Gaston joined in the laugh, but in his heart there was no laughter. Bradley was out on the floor dancing with Ethel. The smile on his face as he looked down at the little head near his shoulder was not nice to see; and Ethel was looking away, and tried to smile, and she was very young and unhappy.

"Gad! It isn't right, by ——! It isn't right."

The woodsman's lips moved as the words formed themselves in his thoughts.

"She's too young, she's too fine, she's too sweet."

The couple whirled past, Bradley's clasp unnecessarily firm.

"And he's too wrong. Yes, by ——! It ain't right."

"Speaking to me?"

Gaston turned and found Walter Loomis at his side. The two young men looked at one another and each knew what the other thought.

"Why aren't you in there, dancing?" Thorson's question was almost a demand.

"Oh, Bradley's doing most of the dancing tonight," was the reply. "He likes to dance—with young girls."

"Do young girls like to dance with him?"

"I think there's one that doesn't care particularly about it."

"Why does she do it?"

Loomis shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do young girls, in certain positions, do certain things? Too deep for me. It's Bradley's doings; Ethel's the guest of honor, and Bradley's keeping the honor pretty close to himself. I've got the fifth dance, though, a waltz."

Gaston ran his eyes over the few women present.

"Introduce me to somebody, will you, Loomis? Anybody. I just want to get out there on the floor."

"Well"—Loomis grinned good-naturedly—"the ladies are in very great demand this evening but I've got the next dance with old Mrs. Davis, who runs the tea-room and—come along, you can have my dance."

There was a flutter as Loomis led Gaston across the floor at the end of the first waltz. His size, his youth, and the eagle look of him were enough to attract attention anywhere, but here he was in possession of a certain amount of fame. Mrs. Davis was delighted. She was a widow of twenty years' standing; she had been beautiful in her youth, and she was not to be blamed at feeling pride in having for her partner the most striking man, and the best dancer in the room.

For Gaston danced with a grace and finish that might have delighted masters. The sense of rhythm was in his blood, handed down by his French mother, and his movements, always graceful, rose as if by inspiration under the spell of music and pretty women. He whirled old Mrs. Davis around with the care and grace that might have been the due of a belle; he smiled and he chatted; and when they passed Bradley and Ethel he smiled most broadly and nearly laughed at the look of surprise that came upon Bradley's face.

"Let's see, Thorson," whispered Bradley, coming over at the end of the dance, "have you an invitation to this affair?"

"No," whispered the young man, and looked him full in the eyes.

"Invitations were issued, you know."

"No; I didn't know."

"You know now."

"Yes."

The mining man looked significantly toward the door.

"Is anything more necessary to be said?"

"Nothing," replied Gaston.

Bradley bowed and moved away. Gaston bowed, and—got a dance with Mrs. Davis's neighbor.

"I thought you understood?" whispered Bradley coldly when that dance was over.

"I do," said Gaston. "I understand that you won't make a row on the floor here, Bradley. It would be a whale of a row, too, if you started it. But you won't. You don't want your party spoiled. That's what I understand, and that's why I'm here."

Bradley smiled coldly but appreciatively.

"I didn't think you had the nerve, Thorson. I didn't think you were so foolish."

"Foolish?"

"You had enough load to carry, my boy; you didn't need to handicap yourself by doing this." He turned away. "You're done for now."

"Maybe," laughed Gaston, and wandered over to a seat half hidden by the orchestra.

The music struck up again; the dancers moved out upon the floor, and Gaston looked in vain for either Bradley or Ethel. Presently he saw the former near the door occupied in his duties as host. A moment later there was a swish of dainty skirts past

the orchestra, and Ethel Drake was standing at Thorson's side.

"Oh!" she cried. "Why did you do this, Mr. Thorson? Mr. Bradley says you have forced your way in without an invitation—that you insist on remaining, though you've been invited to go. It isn't true, is it?"

"Yes; quite true."

"But, oh! why?"

"Because it was my only chance of getting a dance with you."

"You——"

"And I don't want to dance it with you. You're not dancing this time? Then we will sit it out. Won't you sit down?"

"It isn't right," she said, but she sat, nevertheless. "I've been hoping to see you; to have you tell me more about your beloved snow country."

"I do talk a lot when I get started, don't I?" he chuckled. "But you saw the jam up the river, and the men fighting the logs and the rapids. That's the North in epitome; you don't need any of my talk to understand it after that."

"I see," she said thoughtfully, after pondering over this a moment. "So that is your snow country—man struggling against Nature. And you men like it, don't you? But why?"

"Some don't like it. Some just come here and go through the struggle in order to get money to go back to cities and live soft."

"Yes; I can understand that." She looked at him. "But that isn't you, is it? Why do you do it?"

"It's my home, the North is," he said simply.

"And you struggle with Nature—for what?"

"For the fun of the struggle."

"Is that so much fun?" She looked up at him playfully. The beauty of her held him as it never had before and he forgot everything else that had happened that evening. "To live such a rough life, without a comfortable home, or pretty things, or —or anything? Don't you ever yearn for something else—something better?"

"Yes," he said, "I do—sometimes. Every white man does. But I haven't found anything better—up to now."

"Up to now?"

"Yes."

"And have you found it—now?" She rose before he could reply. "I must go back. They will be looking for me."

"Would you stay, if they wouldn't be looking for you?"

"Ah, but they are," she said, and left him.

He hid himself behind the orchestra and watched Loomis go to Ethel and claim the fifth dance.

"Lucky boy!" he muttered. "But," he added grimly, "he never should have let her come North."

He rose and wandered toward the refreshment room. A group of men was gathered in the doorway, their backs toward the dance floor, and from within came Bradley's voice—

"I tell you, Smith, old fellow, you're not in shape to dance."

"Am sh-shape to dance." The puffy-faced broker in the full-dress suit, was leaning heavily on Bradley's arm. "Perf'c' sh-shape to dance. Bes' li'l' fox-trott'r on Bro'way, I am. Lem' go, Bradley. Got sixth dance with the li'l' peach—Miss Drake, ain' I? Lem' go."

"Take him out," said another man. "Don't let the ladies see him."

They pressed forward, helping Bradley push his charge toward the exit, as the music stopped, and Gaston turned and hurried to find Ethel.

"Give me this dance, please," he said. "You have it vacant."

She looked at her card.

"Why, no; it's given to a Mr. Smith."

"He isn't coming. But if you don't want to dance with me, I'll go. Just one."

"If you're sure Mr. Smith isn't coming?"

"He isn't."

The music struck up again. Ray Drake came hurrying up.

"Mr. Smith isn't coming for his dance, Ethel; been detained by some business." He scowled at Gaston. "Come; we'll find a partner for you, sis."

"I have one," said Ethel, and placed her hand upon Gaston's arm.

As they moved out on to the floor Bradley came hurrying from the refreshment room.

"A handsome couple, don't you think, Mr. Bradley?" said Mrs. Davis, innocently, nodding toward Gaston and Ethel.

"Very," said Bradley, his face white with rage as he followed the movements of the young pair.

Gaston saw him, saw the cold hate in his eyes, but he did not care.

"There is something better—much better—than the struggle with the North," he murmured as they moved along in perfect unison. "Shall I tell you what it is?"

"Not now," she whispered.

ONCE, as they passed the door leading out into the lobby, Gaston was conscious of a white face looking in at him, but he paid no attention to it. It was only after the dance was over, after he had bidden Ethel good night, and was leaving the floor that he understood. Ada Adair met him squarely face to face in the lobby.

"It's just one girl after another with you, is it?" She spoke scarcely moving her lips, but her eyes were blazing. "You didn't come to hear me sing because you had a date to dance with that silly husband-hunting kid in there. Did you try to kiss her, too? She looks as if she'd let you."

"Don't talk that way about Miss Drake, please," protested Gaston.

"Ho! Too good, eh? But it's all right to play with me, is it? Good ——! I thought you were a wise guy. Can't you see what she is—one of those grafting baby dolls who look up at a man and say, 'Oh, how strong you are!' and marry him, and graft on him for the rest of his natural life. Can't you see she's a helpless pet, looking for something soft and rich to marry? And you left me and came straight here, did you? That was play, up there at the stage-door, was it? Take a good look at me, boy—do I look like a woman who's safe to play with?"

He looked at the flaming eyes, the hardly controlled mouth, the quivering nostrils, and replied honestly:

"No, you don't. And now take a look at me—do I look like a man who plays with women?"

"Pooh! You're a man. Don't talk baby to me. And I saw you dancing with her. Now do you know what you're going to do? You're going to take me in there and dance with me."

The challenge, the note of command in her voice, aroused and irritated him.

"Am I?" he said softly. "I don't think so."

"No, you won't do that. It was all right for me to see you dancing with her, but you don't want to let that helpless doll see you dancing with me. All right, Mr. Thorson. Do you know that you've got a few good, strong enemies around this man's camp?"

"Yes; I know it; but who told you?"

"Ray Drake told me, if you must know. Good, strong enemies who are out to get you. Well, you've got another now. Don't forget that, boy. And if you—if you hadn't gone straight from me to that silly kid who's going to make a fool out of you—well, it might have been different. And you think you're going to win her, do you? Ho, ho! Say, boy, when they've smashed you and cleaned you and sent you out of camp talking to yourself she—why, she won't look at you. And then you can look me up—and get the big laugh from me, too!"

She threw back her head and laughed softly, her mood changing in the wink of an eyelid.

"What! Going?"

He flung himself away, too stirred to reply. At the door of the hotel the dapper, tight-lipped cigar clerk was lying in wait, speaking softly out of one corner of his mouth.

"Too slow for you in there, eh, big fellow? Looking for some action?"

"Yes," growled Gaston. "Where is it?"

"Out at Manchester Jimmy's. The game's running high, West and crooked tonight."

Manchester Jimmy's was, officially, a road-house, two miles or so out of town. Mostly it lived faithfully up to its official nature, but on occasions, when the authorities were absent or lax for any reason, or when big money was in town looking for quick action, Manchester Jimmy's blossomed quietly and surreptitiously out in its true form, which was that of a gambling-house where play might be had for any sum at any game known.

"I could tell you were looking for action," went on the glib youth, "and I got a load waiting back of the hotel now. Room for just one more. Go out and take a plunge, big fellow?"

"That's me," replied Gaston. He was ready for anything now, and gambling promised an outlet to his aroused emotions. In the darkness he stepped on some one's foot as he entered the rig waiting silently behind the hotel, and laughed as the man swore furiously.

"Ssh-ssh, boys!" cautioned the driver. "No noise till we get out of town, please."

Silently the horses started, and silently the load sat until the jack-pine hid them

from sight of town. Then Gaston struck a match and looked at the man on the seat beside him.

"Hello," he said, recognizing the bibulous broker. "Sorry I stepped on your foot."

" 'Sall right, pal, 'sall right," was the reply. "You didn't do me anything; but somebody did do me dirt t'night, and somebody's goin' t' get paid for't, too. Can't an'body do me dirt and ge' 'way with it. N'sir. Ask an'body 'long Bro'way 'f ol' Smitty don' get 'em when they do'm dirt. I'm sore, I am."

"Well, shut up about it now," protested one of his companions. "We're going out to have a little game. Leave your trouble behind you."

"All right." The drive in the cold night air was sobering the man a little. "I'll leave 'em. But I don't forget. N'sir; never, never forget."

Manchester Jimmy, a thick short man, with a crooked and withered left arm, who was an ex-middleweight and model of the loudest fashions that money could buy, slicked his well-oiled hair down tighter upon his round little head, and smiled a welcome as the new arrivals entered. He received them in the front room of his establishment and looked them over carefully before admitting them into the gambling-room.

"It's running for your pleasure, gentlemen," he said blandly as his little eyes appraised each newcomer. "Mr. Thorson, delighted to see you. Mr. Smith, wouldn't you like a room to lie down awhile?"

"No," said Smith, steadying himself.

"Very well, gentlemen." Manchester Jimmy ushered them into the inner room, and, following, closed the door. "Take your pick, gentlemen; the menagerie's complete—stud, tiger, and the busy bee."

Gaston purchased a stack of chips and went straight to the wheel. He lost the stack in five plunging plays and promptly bought another.

"Play 'em easier," cautioned a player who was systematically playing the colors and odd or even. "The numbers don't like you tonight."

"Playing easy isn't action," snapped Gaston, and plunged the second stack away in a hurry.

The croupier winked at the cashier as Gaston went for a third stack.

"Oh, just hand your money over to the house and be done," he said, as the young man continued to plunge. "See," as he raked in two small bets in succession. "You're only making me work for it."

"Roll it," snapped Gaston putting the remainder of his stack on a single number.

"Around and around the little ball goes, boys," droned the dealer, spinning. "It's easy to beat, if you only guess right. Around, and around, and she's slowing down."

The croupier with a bored expression reached toward Gaston's bet ere the wheel had stopped whirling.

"Ah!" he drew his stick back. "He caught it, by George!"

Laughingly Gaston scooped the chips into his pocket.

"That's fifty ahead on the total play," he said. "I wanted a little stake for stud, that's all."

Three games of stud-poker were running, and Gaston sat down at one of them and began to play savagely. He subscribed to the saying: "The wheel is a cyclone, but stud is war," and set himself grimly to the battle.

"Take it away from 'em, big feller," came a sleepy voice from the corner where Smith had subsided. "You stepped on m'foot, but you ain't the fellow I'm sore at 'tall."

"Go to sleep, Smitty," laughed his companions.

"'Sall right; go sleep, but I never, never forget."

"That's right," and the game went on.

Gaston played with variable luck at first, but he got what he sought, excitement, for the hands ran high and the other players were skilled and determined. Gradually, however, luck turned toward him and he forged ahead. Manchester Jimmy slipped about, watching the rake-off, slicking his hair, smiling.

"Order refreshments when you want them, gentlemen," he invited the stud players. "They are on the house."

"Go 'way; don't bother us."

They drove him away from Gaston's table with good-natured badinage. At the next table the order was given for a bottle of champagne. When the wine had been poured the bottle was dropped on the floor and forgotten. Smith snored, with his head thrown back, a few steps away.

At three in the morning, which Gaston had announced as his quitting-time, he was six hundred dollars ahead.

"I'll play one more hand," he announced.

Outside was heard the creak and rattle of another rig arriving, and presently the door opened and Manchester Jimmy was ushering a new group into the smoke-filled room. Thorson was conscious of the stir occasioned by the new arrivals, but he did not trouble to look up. It was not until he heard some one say: "How do, Mr. Bradley?" that he lifted his eyes from the cards.

Bradley was standing facing him, the table between them. He was chewing a cigar, and for several seconds the two men looked at one another without a word.

"I'll stay," said Gaston, tossing in a chip and following the play.

"You like taking chances, don't you, Thorson," said Bradley.

The woodsman made a bet and drew another card before replying.

"Always did, Bradley."

The rough, careless banter about the table died down; it became so still that the clink of a chip rang loudly; and in that silence the forgotten, but unforgetting, Smith awoke. The first thing that his sight fell upon was Bradley's broad back. His eyes roamed higher, and a savage light of recognition gleamed in his bloodshot orbs. His toe kicked against the empty champagne bottle. Slowly and craftily he bent forward and grasped the tin-foiled neck in his pudgy hands. With a twisted grin on his face the maddened fool rose to his feet behind Bradley. Gaston was the first to see him, and in the same instant Smith heaved the big bottle high over the mining man's head.

"Look out, Bradley!" cried Gaston, but the latter, suspecting a trick, stood like a rock, never even moving his eyes from Gaston's, until the bottle crashed viciously upon the crown of his head. Then he sagged forward as a great tree falls, caught at the edge of the table, held himself from the floor by the tips of his fingers, while his brain wrestled to clear itself from the stunning effects of the blow, and slowly, painfully, but steadily, opened his eyes and fought back upon his feet.

"Got 'im!" gloated Smith fiendishly. "Got th' man I was looking for. Led me off the floor and locked me 'n a room. Cheated me out of dance with peach. Did me dirt, and I got——"

The words died in his throat with a gurgle, and his face went the color of new tallow as Bradley, his senses clearing, turned slowly around. For an instant Bradley was weakly swaying on his legs. The next he threw himself upon Smith. One hand caught the broker's throat, the other grasped his middle.

With a heave Bradley plucked his victim free of the floor, and slammed him shoulder high against the wall, so hard that the lamps in the ceiling danced, and pinned him against the logs. He held him there for several seconds, then released his hold and stepped back. Smith dropped to the floor and lay still. Without looking at the man again Bradley put his hand to his head and calmly explored his wound.

"Call the rig back if it's gone, Jimmy," he commanded, stalking toward the door. "The poor fool's made me need a doctor in a hurry."

X

"THORSON, I want to give you some sound advice," said Crowley on Monday. Gaston had come to his office to apply the poker winnings of Saturday night on account. "Sell out. You have powerful enemies in camp. Soon you will find, if you continue to log, that you are up against a stone wall. Your business dealings with me have shown me that your word is as good as gold, and I like you. That's why I tell you this; take the best price you can get, and sell."

"Why do you say that, Crowley?" asked Gaston. "What do you know?"

"I can't tell you specifically, Thorson, without violating a business confidence, which I won't do. But as a good business man, if I were in your position and knew what I know, I tell you plainly I would sell out and be glad of the opportunity."

"Bradley's been talking to you, eh?"

"Not one word. But I happen to know the Universal Syndicate's plans. I have been told that I might inform you that your business is included in them."

"Have you been told," said Gaston, "that Bradley offered me ten thousand dollars, and when I refused told me that I was done for in this camp?"

"I knew that an offer had been made you. That isn't a fair price, of course, but Mr. Bradley, holding the position that he does, naturally will not come to you with an increased offer, after—well, after certain things that have happened. But I have inside and positive information that

the Syndicate would be willing to pay a much fairer price if your property was in some one else's hands. Now you and Tom Pine are equal partners in your business, I understand? Yes. Well, I am in a position to offer you ten thousand dollars each for your rights and the mill."

"Oh. I see. You've become Bradley's agent, have you?"

"Not at all. I assure you that I have not spoken one word concerning this with Mr. Bradley. I merely know that the Syndicate will pay twenty thousand dollars for your proposition. And another thing, Thorson—leave camp."

Gaston rose in irritation.

"Crowley, you're an old-timer in the bush and I thought you still had the bones of a man. I see you haven't, or you'd know how that talk would hit me. Listen, man: Bradley gave me the same talk days ago. Have you seen me leaving camp? Have you seen any signs of our quitting logging? Wake up, Crowley; Tom Pine and I don't savvee good business if it means splitting the pot before the draw."

"You are young and headstrong," continued Crowley evenly. "You don't realize the power of a big organization. You know of that broker, Smith, who crossed Mr. Bradley? He is rich, a member of an influential New York family, and yet Bradley had power enough to make him sell options on two dandy claims at a loss and leave camp like a whipped dog."

"Smith was a soak with his nerve rotted out by whisky."

"It isn't the man that counts against a big organization, it's money. The Syndicate has the money, and the man."

"They've got a man, all right," agreed Gaston heartily. "But I just naturally can't see him or his money sending Tom Pine and me out of camp like whipped dogs. Can you?"

"I can see a business proposition when it's presented to me," evaded Crowley, "and that's all this is. They're too big for you. They'll crush you. They'll make you glad to leave camp any way you can."

"How can they? We've got our timber rights, water rights, and mill. Short of killing us off, how can they put us out of business?"

"The Syndicate hires first-class brains to discover ways to do such things. They will find a way."

"Is it a fair question to ask if you've got any hint of any move they're making against us?"

Crowley debated with himself a moment.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Well, answer this: Are you going to play fair with us?"

"Yes sir. I am playing fair with you in giving you this advice."

"All right. I appreciate it. You've given it, and I've turned it down. Now, how about our Winter supplies? We'll be needing some soon."

"They have been ordered. The whole shipment will be coming in as soon as we get some sleighing."

Gaston picked off points on his fingers.

"Plenty of labor, plenty of grub in camp, timber all safe, and the mill running. No, I can't see myself or Tom weakening, Crowley, but much obliged just the same."

On his way back to the mill, however, his determination wavered a trifle. There was Tom Pine to consider, and Tom was getting old. Was it fair to risk his share of a competence in a fight which the cold, but fair Crowley already had decided would inevitably go against them?

If they sold to Crowley they would have twenty thousand dollars to put in that farm with a good trout stream and near a first-class bass lake, upon which Tom Pine averred he intended to spend his days when he grew too old for the trail. It would mean that Tom was taken care of for life; to go on with the fight meant, in Crowley's judgment, that they would lose all; and Crowley was a good business man.

These phases of the situation Gaston Olaf dispassionately put to Tom Pine that evening as they sat in the doorway of their shanty near the mill.

"I don't know but what we ought to take him up, Tom," he concluded. "It may not be fair to you to buck you up against this tough game."

Tom Pine heard him out patiently, puffing his corn-cob in infinite content.

"Reminds me," said he softly, when Gaston had done, "reminds me of old Ole Torkelson and his boy, Gunder, down on the old Wiscons' 'way back in the old days. Now, Ole he was an old guy, and he was getting shorter and more bow-legged every year, like them old settlers who've worked hard do, and Gunder he was about twenty-five, and one of the best men along the

river. They was in to mill one day with some logs, and they'd unloaded and was starting home, and a new bully in town grabs the team by the head and says to Gunder:

" 'Understand you're pretty good man?'

"Now he was a big feller and ugly looking, and Gunder he was young and green, so Gunder just laughs and says he never pretended to be very good.

" 'Never had any idea you wanted to be cock o' the river, did you?' says the fighter.

" 'No,' says Gunder, and the bully let go of the team, and they jogged out of town. Now old Ole he was sitting hunched up on the seat all the while, and he kept thinking, and didn't say anything until they'd got into the timber, and then he says:

" 'Whoa,' and the team stopped. 'Get off', says he, and Gunder gets off. Then old Ole he gets off, too, and throws his coat. 'Go back to town and fight that feller', says Ole, but Gunder he started to climb on the sleigh again, and then Ole grabbed and pulled him off.

" 'You keep your hands off me', says Gunder, getting mad just like Ole knew he would. So they have words back and forth, until Gunder goes wild and throws his coat, too, and they come together.

" 'Dad', says Gunder purty soon, 'I don't think it's right for father and son to fight. I'll go back and try that other fellow.' "

Old Tom leaped into the air and clicked his heels twice before coming down.

"Feel of that, boy!" he cried, thrusting his mallet-like fist against Gaston's chin. "Who says Tom's ready to quit? The old man's still got bone in his spine, and don't you come around with any more talk like that, or by the great pike pole, I'll waltz into Bradley's office and kick over his desk just to let him know how we feel."

"You won't have to do anything like that; Bradley will bring the fight to us when he gets ready."

"All right," said Tom, "we'll just saw logs until he gets ready."

A FEW evenings later, in Ethel's room in the hotel at Wolverene, Ray Drake was saying:

"Ethel, I forbid you to speak to this outcast, Thorson, again."

"Oh, Ray; you 'forbid'?" laughed the girl. "And you call him an outcast? Why, it seems to me he's anything but that."

"Yes; you're nothing but a kid. Girls haven't got any judgment of men, anyhow. Thorson is an outcast, I tell you, and I forbid you to speak to him."

"If he is an outcast you seem to be the only person around here who knows about it. I've noticed that everybody around here seems to respect and like him."

"Well, they won't much longer. They'll all know soon that he's a bum—down and out. He'll be shown up. And I don't want you to mention his name any more, or be associated any way with the bum."

"Ray, I don't believe that." A flush had flamed in her cheeks. "That is terrible talk."

"Is it? All right; now you just listen, Miss Ethel—Thorson is more than a bum, he's a criminal. There; I've told more than I intended. You forget that I said that, do you hear, sis'. But don't you forget that I said you're not to know him any more. You'll have to forget him, and the sooner you start to do it the better."

"You've got to tell me why I must forget," she said with a stiffening of her lips. "You've gone too far to stop."

"I can't tell you, but you'll know soon. Now do be sensible, sis'; you have been a little foolish, you know. But—well, he won't trouble you much longer, and you're going to be sensible and forget you ever saw him."

Ethel Drake stood still in the center of the room for many seconds after her brother had left her. There had been a note of assurance and triumph in Ray's tones that disturbed her even more than did his accusations. She knew that tone. Ray used it whenever he got an advance. What did he know? How could he speak so confidently in calling Thorson an outcast, a criminal?

She sat down to think it over calmly. She knew her brother for the cautious chap he was; he would not have used that tone unless he had good reason to do so. He would not have broached the subject of Thorson at all unless he was certain that circumstances justified such a denouncement. What could these circumstances be? She pictured the accused man as she had seen him leaving Crowley's store, striking along with long, free strides, Indian-straight chin up, every part of his being proclaiming that there was no reason

why he should not look the whole world in the face. He an outcast, a criminal! Ethel laughed as her woman's intuition replied to these charges—she *knew* they were not true.

Having arrived at this knowledge she placed her elbows upon her knees, dropped her firm little chin into her hands, and wrinkled her forehead as she sought to penetrate further into the situation.

It wasn't true, of course, for the simple reason that it *couldn't* be, but—Ray knew something. What was it he had said? 'He won't trouble you much longer.' He had dropped that remark with a cold carelessness which he had adopted from Bradley. Ethel sat up straight. Just like Bradley. Her mind flew in a whirl. Bradley, Bradley, Bradley! What was he going to do? Something wrong, something unfair. It must be, if Thorson was to be made to appear as a criminal. What was it to be? Who was responsible?

She rose and moved to the window, gazing out at the wonderful Northern stars which filled the sky. Intuition whispered insistently that treachery of some sinister sort was rushing upon Thorson and Pine, and there was no one to warn them.

"Walter would do it if he knew," she mused, thinking kindly of Loomis.

But Loomis was away inspecting a string of claims. Then the firmness of resolution came suddenly to her mouth and she caught up her mackinaw and cap and went forth. The sleepy half-breed stable-boy in charge of the livery-stable where her pony, Bradley's gift, was sheltered, finding a banknote thrust into his hand agreed to forget that she had come for a night ride. He saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. Ethel mounted and rode away from the lighted street until she found the lake road, then with a cut of the whip she sent the pony flying through the night, bound for the mill.

Gaston heard her coming from afar, the sound of galloping hoofs on a frosty road. With the woodsman's caution he stepped behind a tree and waited. Ethel pulled up to a walk as she neared the mill, and speaking softly so the pony might not shy, the young man stepped out into the road.

"Miss Drake!" he gasped when he recognized her. "You—out here alone!"

"I had to come; there was no one else. I had to see you."

"Wait, wait!"

He looked around. Men might pass along the road, and men in the bush have simple notions concerning night meetings between a woman and a man.

"Come this way."

He caught the pony's head and led it to an open space in the timber out of sight and hearing from the road.

"Now what is it, Miss Drake? What's the matter?"

"It's you!" she whispered. "I can't tell you—but you're in danger."

"I know that, in a general way," he said gravely. "I have known for some time."

Ethel Drake recalled her brother's words, and for an instant she grew chill with fear.

"You knew? Then there is—some reason?"

She could go no further. In agony she sat waiting for his reply, the throb of her heart and the pony's breathing loud in the night silence. Gaston stood rubbing the pony's nose with exasperating deliberation.

"Yes, there is a reason."

"Not—not something you have done?"

"Yes. Something I've done."

"Oh!" She threw herself from the pony. "Tell me—am I wrong about you? Tell me what it is."

He looked down wonderingly at her pale, troubled face.

"Don't you know what it is, Miss Drake?"

"I? No!"

"Then I can not tell you."

"Can not? Can not tell me? You don't mean that you are—guilty—No, no; you aren't."

"Guilty? Why did you say that?"

"Ah!" she cried clasping her hands. "I knew it wasn't true; you wouldn't look like that if it were true."

Gaston stared in bewilderment.

"Let me try to understand this, Miss Drake. Evidently you've heard something about me. Can you tell me what it is?"

"No. No, I can't tell you. I don't need to know, because now I know it isn't true."

"You'd better tell me," he insisted.

"I'd rather not, much rather. Well, if you demand it; a—a man—I can't tell you who—said that you were a—a criminal, and that everybody soon was going to know it, and that you wouldn't be here much longer to—trouble anybody. So I came

to warn you—you and Mr. Pine, of course."

"You came to warn me—alone, at night—in the woods? Why do you do this—for us?"

She turned away from him, toying with her riding crop.

"Oh, I don't know. You—you and Mr. Pine—and the woods, and everything about both of you seemed so clean, and decent, and honest, and this other thing somehow seems so dark and creeping and underhanded, though I don't know what it is, that—there you are," she ended lamely. "But you say you've known for some time, so my warning wasn't necessary after all, was it?"

"We knew that we were in danger in a business sense because we—I—have made powerful enemies. That is what I have done—my crime, Miss Drake. I assure you that I am not a criminal. But I have enemies, here in Wolverene, and now you have put us on our guard against them."

"Do you know what it all means, then?"

"No; but thanks to you we know that they're going after me personally and, knowing that, everything is fine and dandy."

"Oh!" She started as he laughed lightly. "That sounds reckless, Mr. Thorson. You don't like trouble, do you? What nonsense I'm talking; of course you don't, nobody does. Help me mount; I must be going back."

He lifted her lightly into the saddle and led the pony back to the road.

"You have placed me under deep——"

"Don't, please." She held out her hand. "Good night."

He bent over her fingers as he took them in his. But he did not touch them with his lips, for in that instant he thought of the lips of Ada Adair.

"Good night; ride fast," he whispered, hot with shame, and slapping the pony, he stood watching and listening until the sound of the pony's hoofs had died out.

Tom Pine took the news calmly.

"Well, well. So you're going to be branded for a criminal, eh? How come you by this information, boy?"

"A little fairy whispered it to me," said Gaston, and Tom knew by his tone that no further questions were to be asked. "And they've promised to show me up soon, and that I sha'n't bother these diggings much longer."

"Well, well. But I can't see their play with that scant information," growled Tom. "They aren't fools; they know you stand too well to try the old game of putting some dirty work on you. Their nigger in the wood-pile is too dark for me to see. Can you figger him?"

"No, except we know now that he's in my end of the pile, so from now on I naturally play fox with the hounds and keep a good piece of trail between myself and anything that looks like trouble. What!" Pine had coughed skeptically. "You don't believe it, eh, you old fire-eater! Well, you watch, Tom Pine. I'm a business man now, and if I see any man coming toward me who looks like he had trouble stored around his jeans, I run."

"At him."

"Away from him, you old wood-tick! Into the bush. Yessir. I'll allow no man living to drag me near trouble—at present."

"Hm," said Tom to himself later, "he may be right about letting any *man* drag him into trouble, but——!"

XI

GASTON now proceeded to alter his hours, his comings and goings, his paths, his complete mode of existence.

"When an ol' buck senses the wolves after him," mused Tom, "he changes his stamping ground, side-steps the old runways and moves up against the wind."

This was his characterization of Gaston Olaf's erratic movements. Not even Tom knew where the young man might be found at any given hour, day or night. In a general way he knew that Gaston spent most of the day up at the camp, but even there his movements were systematically irregular. MacLean who had strict orders to report at once to his employer the presence of any stranger would have been puzzled to fulfill this order had the occasion risen.

"He tells me he's going up to take a look at the dam," puzzled the Scot, "and that night I hear he was off in the timber helping the brush-monkeys swamping. He tells me he's going out to cruise some jack-pine, and I find he's been working as top-loader at the skidways."

At night Gaston returned to the mill, but he came by a circuitous trail far from the tote-road. After a brief conference

with Tom Pine in their shanty, he would leave. He slept in a bunk which he had secretly rigged up near the engine-room.

"Boss," chuckled MacLean as Gaston was leaving the camp one night, "I never expected to see you hiding your tracks, but I will say that when you do it you certainly make yourself scarce and hard to find."

"Got to do it, Mac," said Gaston. "I don't like it, but business is business."

This twisting and turning and hiding was foreign and distasteful to his nature; but he had set out to play this game in a way to win, and it was all in the game.

"They won't figure me to do anything of the sort," he had reasoned, "so it will throw them considerably off the track."

He was well satisfied. Days had passed, and there had been no hint of the danger of which Ethel Drake had warned him. The log-piles were growing along the skidways, waiting for snow on which to be hauled to the river; the mill was running night and day. If this could continue he would win the game, and to win it he was willing for the time being to run and hide. Afterward, he promised himself grimly, there would be a settlement.

Half way between camp and mill his private trail made a detour around a knoll to avoid a French trapper's abandoned cabin. At the foot of the knoll Gaston stopped dead in his tracks. He peered ahead, trying to pierce the darkness. Some faint sound had come to his keen ears. He leaned forward, listening eagerly. The sound was repeated, a low moan dead ahead on the trail. He waited until he heard it again; then, recognizing it as the voice of a woman in pain, he rushed recklessly ahead.

A dark form lay in the trail beneath an out-jutting ledge of rock. Gaston struck a match and bent over.

"Good God!" he whispered.

The match went out. The woman at his feet moaned again. He lighted another match and stood looking dumfounded at the crumpled form and white face of Ada Adair.

His exclamation and the light from the match seemed to rouse her, and she opened her eyes painfully.

"I fell," she moaned. "From that rock. Oh, my back!"

"Miss Adair! Are you hurt badly?" He stooped and placed an arm tenderly beneath her. "Does that hurt?"

She shook her head languidly.

"Carry me to the Frenchman's shanty," she groaned. "I was prospecting that ledge. Got caught in the dark and was going to stay for the night."

That mysterious sixth sense which men develop who live much in the woods whispered to him a warning, a chilling whisper that danger lurked near, and he threw up his head and listened.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she muttered, as if first recognizing him. "All right—leave me—go along to your doll."

She dropped back apparently helpless against his arm, and at that all thought of danger fled. He lifted her up slowly and carefully.

"Am I hurting you?"

She shuddered, then appeared to gather herself together.

"Carry me to the shanty," she said in a hard voice. "That's all you have to do."

She lay still in his arms as he bore her up the knoll, so still and so cold that he feared she had fainted. The door of the shanty was open. Feeling with shuffling feet in the darkness he found the inevitable bunk in the corner and carefully laid her down.

"Lantern—on peg—near door," she said. He heard the tremor in her voice, but judged it to be from pain.

Hurriedly he struck another match, found the lantern, and lighted it. It was a large wall-lantern, fastened to the logs, which illuminated the room brilliantly. He swung back to the bunk and stopped. She was looking at him with a smile which had no pain in it, no weakness, only rage gratified. Gaston sprang back to smash the light, but it was too late.

"Don't stir," came a voice from the doorway. "Hands up."

A squat heavy-set man with a soft hat pulled far over his eyes, a police star on his coat, was covering him with a six-shooter. Three other men were at the first man's back, similarly armed. Gaston looked at the heavy jaw, the lipless mouth, and the small, cold eyes of the leader, and understood. The man was there to kill him if the slightest excuse offered itself. He was a killer; the mark of Cain was all over him; all traits of humanity were gone from his face; he was that pervert type of bad man who loves to kill. Gaston looked at him

steadily, and the hatred and loathing of the fist-fighting woodsman for the killing gun-fighter showed in his face.

"We've got to take him, boys," snarled the leader. "He's too yellow to give us an excuse to bump him off. Put the irons on him. Don't stir, you," he continued with a baring of teeth. "If you do I'll leave you cold on the floor here."

"He means it," cried Ada Adair, springing to her feet. "Don't fight; he'd like to kill you."

Gaston did not take his eyes from the bad man's.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"Want you to come back to the States with me," the man tapped his star. "Got a warrant for you."

"So that's what they meant," cried Gaston bitterly. "And you did a good job for them, Miss Adair, a very good job."

"A warrant charging you with train robbery," continued the leader. "Dead or alive. How do you want to go?"

Gaston started defiantly as one of the men advanced with the hand-cuffs, and an insane gleam of blood-hunger lighted the gunman's cold eyes.

"I'll cheat you," said Gaston, and held out his hands.

"There, Carns," cried Ada as the hand-cuffs clicked home, "he's given up. Now you obey your orders and take him away and keep him safe."

"Eh?" the gunman lurched across the room and leered at her. "Getting cold feet?"

She shrank as he touched her arm.

"Say, you're some woman! How'd yah like to travel with me, eh, pretty? Come on, now; you'd do to take along. Give us a kiss, will yah?"

"You obey your orders and take him away," she retorted, moving away. "You know what you've got to do, and there is no time for fooling. You've got to have him safe in the shanty before daylight and you'll have to drive hard to make it."

"Yep. That's right. But I think I'll come back and look you up when this job's done. Yep. I certainly want to get better acquainted."

"Go!" she cried. "Do you want to be seen on the road?"

"That's right, Carns," growled one of the others. "There'll be —— to pay when they miss him. If anybody sees us on the road it'll get out. He's got friends ——"

"Shut up!" The man wilted as Carns swung around on him. "Mebbe I'll beef somebody yet before this night's over if they go shooting off their mouth. I'm running this. Take the mutt down the hill and load him in the wagon."

He pressed his six-shooter against Gaston's neck.

"Hike, you!"

In the doorway Gaston turned around and looked at the woman who had trapped him.

"I didn't think it of you," he said and went out.

XII

TOM PINE'S rheumatism troubled him that night. In the shanty near the saw-mill he sat growling and rubbing his old limbs, cursing the days of his youth when as a crack river-driver he had exposed himself day after day to icy water, slept night after night on the frozen ground, and won as a reward the bane of the old river-hog, rheumatism.

"It means something, I don't know what it is, but it means something," he growled, stamping restlessly around the shanty. He stepped outdoors and noted the haze that showed about the largest stars. "Snow coming all right in the next twenty-four hours," he muttered. "I guess that must be it."

He wandered about the mill, snapping at the night-shift, and returned to the shanty. As the hours passed without Gaston's usual appearance he grew more restless.

"I got the old Indian feeling," he said with a shudder. "Something ain't right, that's all there are to it."

He made no attempt to sleep. Hour after hour he paced the room. He took down his rifle from the wall, oiled it, wiped it out, ran the cartridges through the magazine, and put it back, muttering to himself in troubled fashion.

Midnight came and passed.

It was well after three in the morning when Tom's straining ears caught the sound of a footstep outside the door. He flung open the door and staggered back in amazement as Ada Adair, running at full speed, flashed into the light.

He caught her as she stumbled on the doorstep and led her to a chair. She was

panting, her face was white and distraught, and her wild eyes roamed about uneasily, avoiding his.

"They've got him!" she gasped. "Come —get a gun—we'll save him."

"Got him!" stammered Tom. "Got—the boy?"

"Yes!"

She sprang to her feet, defiance on her tongue, but the mad words would not come. Slowly she sank back in the chair, her hands covering her eyes.

"I can't do it; I can't see it through! I fooled him, I roped him, I drew him into their hands for revenge, but I can't—I can't go through with it."

"Girl! Are you talking about Gaston Olaf?"

" 'Girl'! I'm no girl; I'm a woman. It's the other one who's the girl, that kid; that's why I did it, because her kind always have the best of it, and I was mad, crazy, insane!"

"Tell it quick: Have they got the boy?"

"Yes. They've got him. They pretend they're detectives, but they're nothing but a lot of hired thugs, killers."

"And you did it?"

"I"—she shrank at the devil that flared in those old blue eyes—"don't, for God's sake, don't look at me that way! I'm trying to square it now; I came to get your help. Don't look at me like that, or as God is my judge I won't tell you another word, but I'll go after 'em and try to save him alone."

"You fooled him into the hands of hired killers?" Tom Pine was whispering.

"And I'm going to save him! That's what I'm here for."

"And you've got the nerve to come and tell me so!"

"Because I've come to my senses now. I see now; they're a lot of snakes compared to him. I helped them wind their coils around him, but if you'll get hold of yourself and listen we'll get the rattles before they strike. If you won't——"

"Tell me, quick, how it happened."

"He was coming from camp. I'd watched and I knew his side-path. I pretended to be hurt. He picked me up and carried me to the Frenchman's shack. They were laying out in the brush, waiting for my signal. They came when the lamp was lit; four of 'em. They took him."

"Without a fight?"

"Yes. He was too smart for that, mad as he was. He saw they were looking for a chance to kill him—in self-defense—and the four of them had him covered. They pretend to be detectives from the States with a warrant charging him with train robbery; and they pretend they're going to take him back to the States for trial. They're not. They're only going to take him out of the way for awhile."

"Where?"

She stopped abruptly in her impassioned narrative.

"You're going after him?"

"I'm going to get him—and get them. Where is it?"

She looked him squarely in the eye.

"I won't tell you."

"By ——! you will."

"I won't; because you'd start off alone. I'm going to be in this, too. I'm going to help. I—I've got to make up for the trick I played him, and let him see me doing it."

"You—you—well, I will be darned. You got to—what? Good glory! Woman —well, what's your idea?"

"I'm going to guide you. I can go as fast as any man—faster tonight. I'll take you to where they're planning to keep him, and——"

"By the Lord Harry, girl! Will you do that? Will you play white with me?"

"I swear it. All I want is the chance to make up for the other thing. Oh, you may think that I'm only trying to rope you, too. I don't blame you. I deserve it. But give me a chance—let me square up."

She leaned against the door-jamb, and old Tom took her rounded chin in his hand and looked in her eyes.

"I believe you," he said gruffly. He flung his old rifle into the hollow of his arm and filled his pocket with shells. "All right. Lead the way."

She pointed at Gaston's rifle hanging on the wall.

"No," he said, slapping his own weapon affectionately, "they're only four and old Betsy'll take care of 'em. This won't be woman's work. Come on. How big a start have they got?"

"Two hours. They've got a wagon. They gagged him and loaded him like a log. They're going around the lower end of the lake."

"Taking him to the landing?"

"No. They're taking him to a shanty in the woods. We aren't going to follow

him. We're going to head them off."

"How?"

"By paddling across the lake while they're driving around."

XII

SHE led the way down to the lake where her canoe lay and Tom was pleased to see that the craft was long and broad, stanchly built and decked over fore and aft. The paddles were not the light cedar playthings of vacation-land, but good, tough hickory, too heavy for the unmuscled to wield, but just the material for a woodsman to swing his weight against with confidence. Like most short, broad-shouldered men Tom was a better man in the stern of a canoe than many a taller and larger man with the same experience. As in chopping, where the small man of good chest is the equal of the giant, so in the test of a long canoe race, length of leg and frame are no advantage.

Tom took his course from the stars and, catching time with the stroke of the woman in the bow, began to ply his paddle with the smooth, steady swing which lifted the canoe forward with the finishing flirt. He was surprised to find that he needed to give but an occasional twist to his wrist to hold the craft dead to her course, and for an experiment he eased up the drive in his stroke. When he found that her stroke swung the nose of the canoe toward his side he settled down to paddle at his top speed, for then he knew that for the start, at least, she was paddling as strongly as he.

They passed the town, and the few lights still burning were put behind with remarkable rapidity. Only the stars now lighted a world of blackness in which water and shore-line blended in a formless void. Tom Pine, old and tender-hearted Ulysses that he was, paddled on without a word of further query, too sensitive to the pain in the troubled woman-heart before him to torture it with demands for explanations. He was no student of books that consider and explain woman as a phenomenon; he was not versed in the lore of those who dissect and analyze the emotions of her kind.

He was only an old man who had lived out in the open all his life, and had kept his heart clean and simple, and who therefore perhaps understood more of what moved in the heart of Ada Adair than many wiser men. And because he understood he kept silence, letting the night and the stars and God's peace of outdoors work their miracle of balm. He sighed silently, for in his old-fashioned code, woman was a being to revere and shelter, and it distressed him to know that one of them was unhappy. When the nervousness of her efforts diminished and ceased, and he sensed—in the darkness he could not see—that the night was soothing her, he felt better.

"I was insane," she said presently without turning her head. She was calm now, was herself again. "It doesn't seem possible—it's like a nightmare."

"Yep; I know how 'tis," chirped Tom promptly. "When I was a young feller, helling around with the boys I used to fight my best friend sometimes, and when I'd come to I couldn't believe it had happened. Yessir, miss, I know just how 'tis. Not that I mean to connect you in any way, shape or manner with hitting the hooch, miss, you know that, and if I talk rough you've got to consider, as the feller says. It takes all sorts of experiences to make up a life, miss, and I guess most of us have woke up to things that seemed like a nightmare or worse."

"They aren't fit to tie his boot-laces," she went on, "but I was crazy to get even, and they gave me the chance to do it."

" 'They'? Now if it ain't asking too much, miss, could you tell an old feller who 'they' happen to be?"

"The killer, the thugs who posed as detectives."

"Hm. Well, who got 'em to make the play?"

She did not reply at once.

"The only one I talked with about it at all was this thug, Carns, the bad man," she said. "He came to me and tried to make me believe he was a detective. I told him to quit acting. Then he told me the truth—that he had a job to put Thorson out of the way for a while. I didn't ask him who gave him the job; I didn't want to know. I wish now that I'd exposed him and the deal before you and the whole camp."

"Yes, but you see you didn't, miss, and seeing that you didn't you're doing the next best thing right now. Now this feller, Carns, miss, is he a real hard one?"

"He's a bad man, yes. A Western killer

who's had to travel, I suspect. He's looking for a chance to shoot. He's a dog—no, I wouldn't put a dog so low. But he's real bad. The other three don't come to much; Carns is the man to get."

"Exactly. And d'you happen to have any idea 'bout how we'll go to work to get him? They'll be sticking pretty close to that shanty when they get there, I reckon. They won't be waltzing out in the woods where some of Gaston's friends like us, for instance might see them. 'Specially not this Carns if he's experienced."

By the vicious fashion in which she dug her paddle into the water Tom sensed the struggle she was undergoing.

"He'll come out—this Carns, all right," she said hoarsely. "Then what?"

"Then," he replied, "I'll know what to do."

Daylight came after an age of apparently fruitless paddling, the raw, cheerless daybreak of Northern Autumn, when the first rays of the sun are sickly yellow instead of warm red, and no bird rejoices in its matin song. Dead ahead in the slowly lifting gloom loomed an inchoate mass which they knew to be timber on the shore, and despite their long journey they plied the paddles at racing speed to reach the shadow of the forest ere the lifting daylight revealed them upon the lake to any chance eye.

"We've landed a little to the east," she said, when they had drawn the canoe out of sight and taken bearings. "About a mile to the east."

"Better rest a while."

"Rest!" In the sickly dawn she was pale and trembling. "I can rest afterward—maybe. Come along."

For half an hour they threaded their way through brush and jack-pine, keeping within easy reach of the lake.

"Their wagon-trail ought to be near here," she whispered, halting. "Do you see anything like it?"

"Right there, ahead," replied Tom whose keen eyes had caught sight of an opening in the brush. "Yep; that's swamped out for a road all right." He bent down and laid his hand on the broken surface. "A team's gone along here about an hour ago."

"Away from the lake?"

"Yes."

"That's their wagon. The road ends in a little hollow in the brush half a mile from here. The shanty is in a ravine just beyond the hollow."

She started off up the road but Tom caught her arm and drew her into the brush.

"That ain't the way to do it, miss. We can't walk up their front path and knock. Come with me."

They circled to the east, swinging away from the road, then toward it. Presently Tom called a halt as they stood face to face with a low rocky ridge.

"Now, miss, if I ain't lost all my senses, and if your description was right, that ravine with the shanty in it ought to be just the other side of that hogback. It is? I thought so. Now could you remember, miss, which way the door faces? This way? That's fine. Now you just set right down on that rock, miss, and hold my cap while I Indian-crawl up this slope and have a look."

He moved with exasperating slowness and caution in his ascent of the ridge, for it was broad daylight now, the sun was bringing out all objects in the woods with painful distinctness, and Tom was too good a hunter to risk failure by hurry or carelessness. He lay for a long time just below the brow of the ridge, listening and selecting a place to look over. When finally he did lift his head above the ridge-line it was beneath the sheltering branches of a balsam bush, which hid him as effectively as it might have hidden a partridge.

He saw before him a tiny valley, bare of trees and ending in a cleft in a great rock ledge. In the cleft was a small log cabin, its roof lower than the walls of rock which shut it in on three sides, and which a man might pass within a rod of without seeing. No smoke came from the little chimney, and the door, which faced Tom's position, was tightly closed. There was no sign of life about the place, but Tom, after many minutes of concentrated scrutiny, made out the signs of heavy tracks leading to the door. He watched for a long while, but no one appeared, and finally he wormed his way back to the woman.

"The skunks are in their den sure enough," he whispered, "but how we're going to smoke 'em out without hurting the boy is more than I can figger."

"That's my job," she said rising, with a reckless swing of her superb body. "We want Carns. I can get him out."

There was flaming color in her cheeks, and a smile of bitterness upon her full lips. Old

Tom looked at her with sober questioning, and she threw back her head, a hand to her hip, and laughed.

"Don't worry, old-timer. I won't be in danger. I'm going to bring Carns to you right here, and you'll be hidden in the brush with your thirty-thirty."

She looked at the rifle, balanced with the true hunter's touch in the hollow of his arm. "I guess I won't be in any danger."

From the top of the ridge Tom saw her as she stepped, timid yet smiling, out into the little valley before the cabin. Her sweater was well open about the throat, a sprig of balsam was between her lips, and the lure of the eternal Eve in her brightened eyes, in the sway of her body, the hang of her open hands.

She crossed the open space stepping daintily. She paused, touched her back hair with both hands, and went on. Then she knocked timidly at the door, and skipped mischievously to one side. The promptness with which Carns opened the door proved that he had seen her and had been waiting. He stood in the doorway with a smile of bestial triumph distorting his bleak features, and Tom, studying him, muttered—

"Yes, the boy was right in not giving that man an excuse to shoot."

The cabin was too far away from the ridge for Tom to hear what was being said, but he saw the balsam twig bob up and down between Ada's lips as she looked at Carns with her head on one side. With a wink over his shoulder into the room the bad man stepped out and closed the door.

He reached out a hand to take her arm, but she eluded him, moving playfully toward the ridge. Carns followed. She kept out of his reach; and Tom, waiting as long as he dared, slipped back down the slope, burrowed himself far back into the brush, and with his rifle cocked and pushed to the front, lay down to wait.

He saw her head as it appeared over the ridge, then Carns. She sprang over the top of the hogback and down the slope toward the brush where the old hunter lay.

"Yah came to me, after all, didn't yah?" growled Carns, lurching after her. "Yah came; an' I'm strong fer yah, kid, strong enough to take you along."

"How strong?" she said with a laugh, stopping in the open.

His reply was a bestial laugh. He reached for her.

"Duck, miss," said Tom Pine, "I got him."

XIII

CARNS whirled at the first word, whipping a six-shooter from an inside belt holster.

"Drop it," said Tom Pine. "On the ground with it."

Carns looked into the muzzle of the rifle covering his heart, looked at the blue eye squinting in businesslike fashion down the barrel, at the finger crooked over the trigger, and gave up. The revolver dropped to the ground, whence Ada Adair snatched it up, and the bad man's hands went hopelessly into the air.

"Just in time," said Tom Pine, stepping into the open. "I was counting three, and would have let you have it. I'd got to two. There's another gun under his left arm. Get it, miss; that's right. Now, Mr. Carns, you've got just one chance of living another half-hour. Turn my partner, Gaston Olaf François Thorson, over to me, safe, sound and undamaged and do it quick, because so help me God! I'd blow you to pieces like a dog with hydraphoby. Is he all right?"

Carns's fear-dried tongue and throat struggled for seconds before the word came.

"Yes."

"Are you the boss man of your crew?"

"Yes."

"Will they do what you tell them?"

"Yes."

"Sure? Be awful sure, because your life is going to depend on whether they will or not. They'll obey you, prompt?"

"Yes."

"Then turn around."

The muzzle of his rifle plunked firmly against the bad man's spine.

"March."

Up the ridge they went, the woman following a few steps behind, over the top, down the other side; and not once did the wicked little barrel lose touch with Carns' back. Across the open they went, Carns with his hands up, his large body almost hiding Tom Pine.

"Halt!" They stopped ten paces from the door. "Call 'em out; tell 'em the play's gone wrong; tell 'em to come with their hands in the air; 'cause if they don't a soft-

nosed bullet will play hell with your backbone."

"The stuff's off, boys," growled Carns hoarsely. "Come out with your hands up."

There was no reply; no sound or sign that the cabin was inhabited.

"The rifle's cocked," said Tom.

"Come out!" Fear lent command to Carns' tones. "D'yahhear me? Come out!"

The door opened slowly and a white face appeared in the crack.

"Come out!" The man looked at the steadily held six-shooter in Ada Adair's hand and quickly obeyed. When the other men had followed suit Ada slipped into the cabin.

Tom Pine, lining his four victims up against the cabin wall at the point of his rifle, waited long and patiently. Presently she came out alone. Her face was flushed, and her eyes wet.

"The keys for the handcuffs," she said. "Who has them?"

"In my vest pocket," growled Carns.

She secured the keys and hastened inside again. Once more Tom waited long, but this time impatiently. And then Gaston came lurching out, an awestricken, puzzled expression upon his countenance such as Tom had never seen there before, and then the woman came. Her tears were dried and she was bravely trying to smile.

"All right, boy?" said Tom.

"Yes." Thorson turned toward the men against the wall. At the sight of Carns, the man who had mastered him, his face went white with shame and rage.

"God!" he said hoarsely. "To think that a dirty cur like you handled me! And I can't even bust you with my bare hands because you're licked now. Tom, Tom, why did you line 'em up with the gun? Why didn't you leave him loose so I could jump him?"

"Easy, boy, easy," muttered the old man. "What's done is done; you can't hit him now."

"No, I can't touch him. And if the tables were turned he'd like to have somebody hold me up with a gun while he slapped my face." He took a sudden step forward, his hands working, and thrust his face close to the killer's. "Are you a man? Will you go off into the woods with me alone?"

Carns looked at him, looked at the ground, and shrank tightly against the wall.

"You can't afford to do it, Gaston Olaf," said Tom. "You'd kill him if you felt your hands on him. Come away; you'll be hitting him soon if you stand so close. Come away."

Reluctantly the young man fell back.

"Yes, you're right, Tom; this is only the dog; what I want is the owner. No need to ask him who that is; we know. But you're going to travel, you dog, you and your pack. Do you hear; you're going to leave this man's country and you're going to leave it as you stand. Then come back if you want to; but if you do I'll know, and I'll go hunting for you like I would a pack of wolves."

They drove the cowed men through the timber till they struck the main road running to Frost Bite Landing.

"Hike!" commanded Gaston. "Get a boat at the landing, and go down river as fast as the Lord will let you."

At five hundred yards Tom Pine drove a bullet over the heads of the departing ones, so close that they ducked at the whine, and he and Gaston turned back to find Ada Adair.

She had dragged the canoe down to the water and was entering it as they came up.

"You don't figger to paddle across alone, miss?" queried Tom.

She paid no attention; only she looked searchingly at Gaston Olaf's face.

"It's all right," he said, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "It's more than square."

"You don't feel hard toward me?" she said softly. "Are you sure? That's all I want to know."

"Can't you see?" he laughed, and, looking at him, she laughed, too, and took his proffered hand.

"So long," she said with a little flutter of laughter, and springing in, shot the canoe out into the water.

She looked back once when she was out a good distance, and then she paddled on.

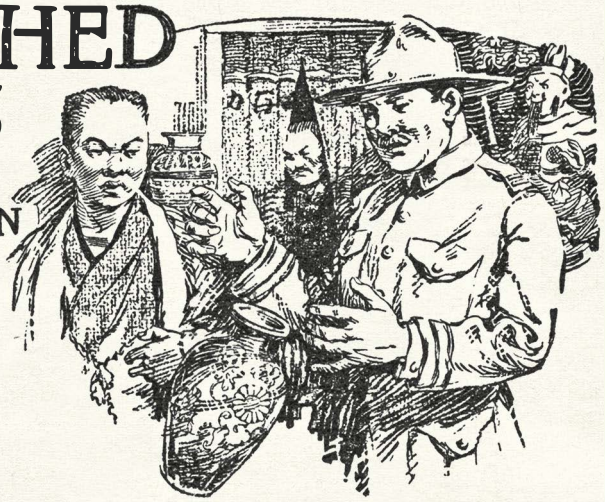
The two men stood on the shore looking after her with wondering eyes.

"Women!" faltered Tom Pine, as they watched her with wondering eyes. "Women——!"

TO BE CONTINUED

The VANISHED PLANS

by M·S·WIGHTMAN



Author of "Unofficial," "The Higher Law," etc.

THE events which follow antedate the European war. They precede the little known crisis in the relations of the two nations ambitious for the mastery of the Pacific which led to the hurried moblization of the army in the Philippines behind the guns of Corregidor. They go back to the time when those guns were being put in place, and when for the man who could not explain his business there a pass to Heaven was easier to obtain than a pass to the island lying at the mouth of Manila Bay and commanding the channels which lead to the harbor.

However, an occasional reporter was given permission to take a launch from Manila to the island to go over certain carefully circumscribed parts of it with a guide, who was really a guard in the guise of an officer, and to write a description from what he was told of the Asiatic naval base the United States was constructing. For this permission he went to Fort Santiago, the group of time-stained stone buildings set in the angle of the city walls, where before the Luneta Extension was completed, the Pasig River emptied into the bay. Fort Santiago is Army Headquarters.

And sometimes such a reporter noticed a smallish, round-faced man, who wore on his collar the eagle-crested star of the General Staff and occupied an inconspicuous desk, nor far from the commanding general's office in the main building. More often he did not, and when he did pause before this desk, it was invariably to ask directions. Captain Thomas Brock did not look like a man in authority.

Few habitues of the Army and Navy Club, where he lived, saw in Brock more than a pleasant, if at times abstracted, acquaintance, who looked like a well-fed, good-natured boy and possessed a passion for chess.

Even Carter, the *Times* man, who knows more about Army personnel than nine-tenths of the officers in the service, noticing the star on Brock's collar as the night after his arrival in the Islands he passed our table in the dining-room, looked up with a puzzled expression.

"The new member of the General Staff, eh? How in the devil do you suppose a chap like that made the staff?"

"By having the brains," said Colonel Levin, whose collar bore a similar star. "He is neither as young nor as simple as he looks. He is old enough to have made his captaincy in the Field Artillery, and he has written a splendid book on military tactics."

Carter continued to stare, while the colonel going back to his eating, began to grope on the floor under his chair.

"Where has my napkin gone? Extraordinary thing, I had it a moment ago," he

muttered to himself, his bent back level with the table.

"It happens to be lying in your lap, Colonel," said Judkins, his right-hand neighbor; and as the colonel, with an embarrassed laugh, picked up the square of linen and began nervously to use a corner of it for polishing his thick, heavy spectacles, Brock's appearance was superseded by good-natured raillery at Colonel Levin. He was as short-sighted and absent-minded as an owl, but he would no more admit it than a man will admit snoring.

Some months had passed since that evening but Carter's first estimate of Brock still prevailed. I believe that only three people had singled him out of the ruck of officers. One was General Sneed, the real as well as titular head of the troops in the Philippines —the two being by no means invariably the same—and another Sugundo, the thin, brown-faced *cochero*, who stuck the toes of his bare feet into flapping, red *chinelas*, and wore the tail of his shirt outside his loose pantaloons in comfortable, Oriental fashion.

No man served long under the occupant of the big, corner room overlooking the Pasig without being known for what he was, while to Segundo the man he drove was little less than a sandy-haired god. For one thing, Brock, having mastered the knack of the gutteral singsong, now spoke a fair brand of Tagalog; for another he generally recognized a plausible lie from the uninspired truth.

But the chief reason for his deification was the deference shown him by strange people who came to see him at odd times and in unexpected places—hard-mouthed Americans, who spoke little and in short, biting sentences, but whose manner indicated an ability and willingness to hit quickly, and occasionally a native who whispered sibilantly, and accompanied his words with mysterious, portentous gestures. A *cochero* is known by the wheels of his *carromata*; those of Segundo's shone more brilliantly than his master's riding-boots.

I count myself the third—my duties as correspondent for a New York newspaper syndicate taking me daily to Fort Santiago. The circumstances which led to our intimacy form a story in themselves, touching this one only in that I had been brought on a gusty September morning to Brock's desk at headquarters, and we were deep in conversation when Colonel Levin burst in upon us.

"CAPTAIN," he cried in a voice which showed signs of ending in a high-pitched squeak, "the plans showing the battery positions are gone. I had them——"

He caught sight of me, halted abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and whipping off his glasses began agitatedly to polish them with his bare fingers.

Brock rose unhurriedly.

"Sit down, Colonel," he said, and taking from his desk a Moro betel box which contained cigarets, he lighted one after offering them to us. "Never mind Peel," he went on. "He is all right. And you had better change your mind about smoking—tobacco is a great steadier."

Colonel Levin seemed to resent Brock's coolness, for he sat down abruptly, and, leaning across the desk, took and lighted a cigaret, at which for a moment he puffed savagely. Then laying the cigaret on the edge of the desk, he began to tell us what had happened. As he spoke he wiped the finger smudges from his glasses, occasionally breathing upon them.

"I took the plans from the safe this morning," he said. "I had to add to them certain details about the woods which conceal the gun positions—you know Lieutenant Clarkson's map?" Brock nodded.

"I finished the entries, refolded the plans and laid them on my desk, intending to return them when I left the room. In that of course I was wrong; the orders are explicit. The plans must be kept in the safe when not actually in use. But who would have thought that they could disappear under my very eyes like that?"

He put on his glasses, and gazed inquiringly at Brock through their heavy lenses.

Brock leaned over and dropped into an ash-tray the colonel's cigaret which had begun to burn a black line in the varnish of the desk.

"Of course that was only a technical violation," he said. "What happened?"

"Some minutes later Rawlins called me to the door of my room. He wanted my opinion on the new shoe bid. We discussed the matter briefly, standing in my doorway. Then I returned to my desk. I thought that before beginning anything

else I would put the plans away. Remember, Captain, I had not been out of the room, and yet when I looked for them—they were not there. Yes, it sounds incredible, but the plans had disappeared."

He made the statement slowly, a look of mingled wonder and determination on his face, as though he himself could hardly believe that the thing had happened, and yet he was challenging any one else to deny it.

But no outburst came from Brock; instead he drew meditatively on his cigaret.

"Your memory is not at fault, Colonel? You had not left the papers inside instead of on the top of your desk?"

Colonel Levin shook his head positively.

"I realize that I am absent-minded," he said, reddening with embarrassment, "but in this case I was certain. None the less I examined the desk with the utmost care. I did not find them. Then I rang for my clerk, Mr. Maxwell, and we made a further search. It was useless. That was only a moment ago. I left him on guard in the room, while I started to report the matter to the general. But on the way it occurred to me that you—perhaps you might—if you have any suggestions——"

He broke off confusedly; and I could not repress an involuntary smile. I knew the general; and I did not wonder that Colonel Levin was grasping at any desperate straws before reporting the loss to him.

Brock rose briskly.

"No harm in taking another look," he said. "Of course we must find those papers, the security of Corregidor depends on them."

Colonel Levin, as ranking officer on the staff, occupied a private office, a small room which opened upon the main corridor running the length of the building. Opposite the doorway a long, narrow window, with sliding, shell sashes took up most of the wall. It overlooked the Pasig, and with the door formed the only openings in the room.

The sashes were partially pushed back, admitting the damp, heavy air; and as we entered, Maxwell, who had been sitting in the window, slipped to his feet. A rubber poncho was thrown over his arm, and in his right hand he held a soft, felt hat.

"Are you going out, Mr. Maxwell?" asked Brock by way of greeting.

"Yes, sir," returned the clerk. "I have been feeling sick this morning, and I had gotten my things to come and ask the colonel to excuse me when his buzzer rang."

He certainly looked ill. He was a square, heavily-built man, whose large head habitually drooped forward, so that his eyes were partly concealed by a heavy, unbroken line of black eyebrows. It gave him a rather sinister appearance. His complexion was usually muddy; now it was grayish-white, shading into green at the corners of his mouth and in the little hollows beside his nose. And the beads of perspiration on his forehead foretold the coming of nausea.

"How do you account for the loss of the papers, Mr. Maxwell?" asked Brock.

"It beats me, Captain, I don't see where they could have gone."

A SUDDEN gust through the window swept an envelope which had been lying on the desk to Brock's feet. Maxwell leaned over and picked it up.

"You know him, Captain," he whispered, as he straightened up. "I believe he took 'em somewhere and forgot 'em. You'll see those papers will turn up yet."

Without replying, Brock let his eyes rest on the clerk as he replaced the envelope on the desk. Then as he turned toward Colonel Levin, he slipped his hands in his pockets, evidently searching for a cigaret.

"Confound it," he said, "I left my case in my desk. I'll be back in a moment."

He returned after a brief absence, smoking a cigaret.

"I suppose you will excuse Mr. Maxwell, Colonel?" he said. "And I think we had better close the door; it creates a draft across the room."

"By all means go home, Maxwell," said the colonel, and it was evident from his tone that he felt genuine solicitude for his clerk. "Go to bed, and don't report tomorrow unless you are feeling thoroughly well."

"An invaluable man, with a quick, brilliant mind," he continued as the door closed behind Maxwell. "I should feel quite lost if anything happened to him."

"He knows everything which takes place in the office, doesn't he?" asked Brock, staring thoughtfully at the door.

"Naturally, and he has my implicit confidence."

Brock turned back to the desk.

"Let's see, those papers had a peculiar

blue jacket, did they not?" he asked in a brisker tone. "Just where did you say you had left them?"

For the next ten minutes we examined the office almost inch by inch. At last, flicking the dust from his knees, Brock crossed to the window. Thirty feet below the Pasig swept by, a yellow, muddy stream, up and down which launches, cascoes, bancas and even the big inter-island steamers made their noisy way.

"An intruder could hardly have scaled the wall and entered through here while your back was turned," he said.

Colonel Levin turned on him a startled look.

"An intruder? You don't think the plans have been stolen?"

Brock settled himself comfortably on the window ledge, and lighted a cigaret.

"Well," he said without replying directly to the question, "a thief would certainly have a great incentive. You know to what lengths our neighbors have gone in trying to obtain a plan of the Corregidor fortifications.

"You haven't forgotten the Filipino laborer who turned out to be a Japanese on the inside of whose trousers a map of the island had been sketched, or the fishing boat which was driven ashore there by a typhoon into which it had no business to venture. The sale of those papers would make the man who had them independent for life.

"Now they have disappeared, and we can find no explanation for the disappearance. Granting that an outsider knew you had the plans this morning and could have scaled the river wall unnoticed, how could he have told just what moment your back would be turned? or how could he have entered the door while you and Rawlins were standing in it?

"Nor could the papers have been blown through the window into the river. As you see the draft is through, not out of it. No, Colonel, when you come to look at it, you find that the papers could not have been taken by an outsider nor could they have been lost. Yet they are gone. An impossible situation, isn't it?"

And he smiled up at the colonel with his bland, guileless smile. The older man returned the look with interest. But he was not smiling; instead his face had gone a fiery, burning red, and the veins in his forehead were swelling like rubber under pressure. After a moment he burst out indignantly—

"It looks to me, Captain Brock, as though you were insinuating that I stole the plans."

"I am not insinuating anything, Colonel," returned Brock, in a calm, undisturbed voice. "I merely want you to understand the circumstances, before you go to the general." And as the colonel continued to glare, he added in a less impersonal tone.

"Of course there is an explanation, and I believe we are going to find it. If I were you I shouldn't worry too much. Things will come out right. By the way, would you mind telling the general I should like to see him when you finish."

Suddenly Colonel Levin rose from the chair where he had been sitting, and stood with his hands resting on the desk before him. For a moment I had a wild idea that he was about to attack Brock. But he did not. Instead he wheeled about and stalked from the room without a word.

"What do you think he did with them?" I asked, as the sound of the slamming door died away.

"So you think he stole them, do you, Peel? Well I don't wonder. And of course I need not warn you to say nothing of the loss of the plans." Beyond that statement, he would not discuss the case.

THAT night, having lighted an after-dinner *Reina Victoria*, I strolled out into the *patio* of the club. It was then occupying the old, picturesque building on Calle Palacio in the walled city, in which it had its origin. Under a vine-covered arbor in a retired corner, I found Brock sitting alone, an empty coffee-cup on the small table before him, the tip of his cigaret a dot of glowing red in the semi-darkness.

"I was looking for you, but I didn't see you in the dining-room," I said.

"No, I had dinner with the general. His boy makes wretched coffee. Anything special?"

"I learned a piece of inside news today. It may interest you, I don't know. I got it by cable from our man in Japan. The Japanese cruiser *Isachi* is to pay us a visit next week. She left Nagasaki unexpectedly this afternoon. The Jap consul seemed annoyed at my knowing it. He doesn't want it announced until Friday."

Brock flicked the ash from his cigaret into his saucer.

"So?" he said. And after a moment he added as though thinking aloud, "Yes there would be time. I wonder——"

"Any more dope about the plans?" I asked, when he had lapsed into another period of musing.

He leaned toward me, and the earnestness in his tone was unmistakable.

"Don't ever, here or anywhere else, mention those papers, Peel. There is big game afoot, and you can never tell what walls have ears."

"No," he went on in answer to my inquiry of what had happened. "Colonel Levin is not under arrest, though it is understood he will only visit the club and his office. Between ourselves the general has a man shadowing him, and I suspect the colonel knows it.

"Maxwell, by the way, is at the division hospital with a bad case of ptomaine. The general insisted on the hospital, because the clerk knows of the loss, although Maxwell did not want to go. I myself may take a few days leave, I am not sure yet, and if I do, keep your eyes open. You journalist fellows tumble on to things occasionally. And now, Peel, promise me that unless something transpires, or I give you leave, you will forget this whole matter."

I promised readily enough, but it proved to be a promise I could not carry out.

I turned in about eleven, and shortly afterwards I became conscious that Colonel Levin, whose room at the club adjoined my own, was methodically pacing the floor. From the window to the door and back again, the steps were so regular that I found myself counting the number it took to measure the distance. Occasionally there came a pause at one end or the other; and then, as I was on the point of falling asleep, the pacing would recommence.

Whether he continued his march all night I do not know. He was at it when I awoke at three o'clock—I looked at my watch out of curiosity—but I dropped to sleep again, and when my boy called me for breakfast, the steps had ceased.

As I entered the dining-room the next morning, the first man I saw was Colonel Levin. He was sitting at a small table in the furthest corner of the room. A *Cable-news*, on which he kept his eyes rigidly fixed, was propped up by a glass in front of him; but although I lingered over my coffee long enough to read mine through, he did not turn the pages of his own.

I did not see Brock again until afternoon, when, as I was leaving the club, I found him waiting in the doorway for his *carromata.*

"I haven't seen you around much lately," I said.

"No, I'm pretty busy," he answered.

He leaned down to adjust the strap of his boot, and I caught a look of speculation in his eyes as he glanced up at me. The big, American horse with its heavy, two-wheeled vehicle, came lumbering around the corner and drew up at the curb. He straightened up and in that brisk manner which later I came to recognize as a sign that he had made a decision and was acting on it, said:

"Are you interested in birds, Peel? I am on my way to the Botanical Gardens to see a new species of cockatoo, from the Celebes I think. Want to join me?"

I admitted a keen interest in cockatoos, and climbed into the *carromata.* A strange boy was in the driver's seat.

"Where is Segundo?" I asked, as we jolted over the cobblestones toward Bagumbayan.

"Off for a few days—one of those periodic visits to their *parientes* which these boys like to make," he returned. And with the obvious purpose of changing the conversation, he asked, "Are you entering the chess tournament this week?"

I had no desire to discuss the chess tournament. I wanted to know whether the papers had been found, or any further evidence against Colonel Levin. The pacing of the floor had continued the preceding night. It was getting on my nerves. But something in Brock's manner warned me not to put the questions.

The *carromata* halted at the entrance to the gardens and, still talking chess, we made our way along graveled walks bordered with the brilliant scarlet and green of tropical shrubbery, to the big wire cages where the birds and animals are kept. The cockatoo was there, a large, white bird, with a yellow crest, and bandy legs too short for its body. To me he did not differ from other cockatoos, and after a moment, I turned to watch the visitors instead.

But it was three o'clock and the gardens were fairly deserted. One man attracted my notice, an American, wearing a somewhat soiled khaki coat, with its military

collar unbuttoned at the throat, who lounged up the path and paused beside the captain. He was one of those nondescript white men whom one sees everywhere along the China coast and in the Philippines.

He might have been a seaman from some tramp steamer at anchor behind the breakwater, or a quartermaster employee, or a discharged soidier who picked up a precarious living by occasionally tending bar in an intramuros saloon, or perhaps a hanger-on of the boxing club at Palomar Park. Apparently he was idling away an afternoon, and the menagerie had for the moment caught his interest; but presently I discovered that, while his eyes were fixed on the birds, he was speaking in a low tone to Brock.

"He leaves tonight—they are still there—nobody's come yet——"

Without consciously trying I caught such fragments of what he was saying.

At length Brock lifted his cap and passed his handkerchief slowly across his forehead.

"All right, don't lose him," he said in a low voice.

It was evidently a signal for the American lounged on, while Brock continued his inspection of the menagerie.

That the man was in some way connected with the missing plans I did not doubt, but who was the "he" to whom he referred and where was he going? Could this be the man who, Brock had said, was shadowing Colonel Levin? I did not think so, for while such a man would pass unnoticed in the crowd on the Escolta or any other of the principal streets, at Fort Santiago or the club he would at once be spotted as an intruder and asked his business.

Evidently some one else was concerned in the theft, but who? I could not determine, but I began to see what Brock had meant when he said that big game was afoot, and why he had refused to talk of what was happening. He must be surrounded by a network of spies, if, to avert suspicion from himself, he went to the gardens to confer with his agents, and even made a pretext for his visits.

He must have read what was passing in my mind, for presently as we were retracing our steps, he turned to me, his eyes twinkling:

"Make your conjectures, Peel, but keep them to yourself," he said, and during the drive back he was silent, sitting relaxed against the cushions, his eyes fixed in front of him, while a lighted cigaret slowly consumed itself between the fingers of the broad, sinewy hand, which rested on his knee.

The next day his desk at Fort Santiago was unoccupied; and on inquiry of Major Rawlins I learned that the night before Brock had started on an inspection trip which would keep him away for some time. As to where he had gone Rawlins was a bit indefinite.

"Somewhere up north," he thought; and remembering what Brock had said about the possibility of his leaving, I did not press my questions.

It was several days later before I heard anything more of him, and then in the last way I should have suspected.

ONE morning I had left Clarke's, and paused on the Escolta corner, awaiting an Intramuros car. In front of me was Plaza Moraga, the small square, where the big American trading-houses have their offices, where the International Bank is situated, and where a few of the small native and Chinese shops have overflowed from Calle Rosario. Occupying an inconspicuous building among them was one of the few Japanese stores in Manila, the "Bazaar of the Rising Sun."

I had visited it a number of times in search of Japanese prints, and perhaps I should not have noticed its modest, gilt sign, but for a beggar who was squatting near its entrance. Unlike most Oriental cities Manila possesses few beggars, and I wondered how this one had escaped the sharp eyes of the police, for while he was not begging, "mendicant" was plainly stamped him.

As I watched him, he turned his head in my direction; and, a moment later, rose and began to pick his way toward me through the maze of traffic which congests the Escolta at this hour. I followed his progress without difficulty, for he wore a broad, stiff, bamboo hat, shaped like a panier, which the natives of the Ilocos provinces call *salecots*. I took him to be a decrepit *tao* who was too old to work.

"*Por madre de Dios, señor,*" he mumbled, as he paused in front of me, holding out his hand. The lower part of his face was covered by a long, soiled bandage, wound about his neck as though to protect a sore, and he

kept his eyes humbly fixed on the bare, brown feet which protruded from the legs of his white pantaloons.

His appearance was pathetic, and I slipped my hand into my pocket in search of loose change. As I did so, he suddenly raised his eyes and let them rest on mine. He dropped them again a moment later, but not before I had received a shock which drove me backward in amazement. The eyes were a light, guileless blue; I recognized them instantly.

He moved a step nearer, and apparently repeated his supplication. But he actually said:

"For Heaven's sake, don't stare so!"

I dropped a copper piece into his hand and with a murmured "Wait for me here" the beggar disappeared in the crowd on the sidewalk.

I returned to Clarke's, and sat down, ordering a soda which I did not want. So this was Brock's inspection trip! I had seen other Americans wearing the native dress; but never one whose skin was the dull, dry brown of an old *tao*, or who so faithfully reproduced not only the manner but the spirit of passive resignation which one invariably finds in them.

It was nearly noon when Brock reappeared. His skin was as fair and ruddy as though it had never known the feel of grease paint; and his loose pantaloons and coarse *camisa* had been replaced by a trim khaki uniform and neatly polished military boots.

As he paused in the doorway glancing about him, he looked to be simply one of the dozens of officers who strolled in and out of the shop, some alone, some in gaily chatting groups, but all with that air of irresponsible good-nature characteristic of the younger Army when off duty.

He caught sight of me, came over and, greeting me casually, dropped into a chair. Until the ice which he ordered had come, he studied the men in the room. If he was looking for some one, however, he did not find him, for there was a shade of disappointment in his face as he picked up his spoon.

"I am glad I ran into you, Peel," he said, dipping into the ice, "I have been looking at a Satsuma vase in that shop over there, and before buying I should like to have your opinion. Can you spare a few minutes?"

I said that I could, and a few minutes later we left the shop.

That the Satsuma vase was a blind I did not doubt; and suddenly I realized that it was to be a dangerous one, for as we passed an empty doorway, Brock seized my arm, and drew me into it, and slipped a small, automatic revolver into my hand.

"Put this in your pocket," he said in a sharp, incisive whisper, his lips close to my ear.

As we stepped outside and crossed the square to the Bazaar of the Rising Sun, I caught a glimpse of the American who had delivered the message in the Botanical Gardens. He was leaning against a telephone pole on the opposite side of the Plaza, paring his nails with his knife.

The Satsuma vase was larger than such vases usually are. It stood on a separate pedestal near the doorway, anditsyellowish-white surface, covered with as many highly colored heads as there are grains in a handful of sand, caught one's eye immediately on entering the bazaar. I saw that it had been the subject of preceding negotiations, for as soon as we came in, the salesman, a small Japanese wearing a kimono of heavy, striped silk approached the vase and in a tone of deferential politeness began to speak of its value as a work of art.

Had the captain decided to buy? If so, he would make no mistake, for while the vase was new, it was an exceptionally fine specimen of Nagasaki pottery. Only rarely could such a perfect glaze be obtained in the firing. Three hundred pesos were but a fraction of the vase's worth—a price given to the captain because he appreicated beautiful workmanship.

Brock lifted the vase from its stand and carried it to the door as though seeking a better light.

"Might I compare it with that box up there?" he asked; and as the Japanese turned to get the box the captain had indicated, there came a crash. The vase had slipped through Brock's fingers and lay in fragments on the tile floor.

At the sound of breaking china and Brock's cry of dismay, a heavy red curtain which concealed a doorway at the rear of the shop was partially lifted and the figure of a man appeared in the opening. For an instant I took it to be the proprietor; and then I caught sight of his yellow face and heavy black mustache.

It was not; it was Haichi Kamura, the agent for a group of Japanese capitalists,

who for months had been carrying on casual negotiations for the purchase of a sugar plantation in northern Luzon. At the same moment he saw me staring at him; and without speaking, somewhat hastily I thought, dropped the curtain.

The salesman swept the fragments into a pile, and nonchalantly dumped them into a box which he procured from under the counter. Brock drew a roll of bills from his pocket; but the Japanese, anticipating his purpose, shook his head in vigorous protest. The vase was nothing, in three weeks he would have another which the captain might buy if he felt so inclined. Meantime there were prints or perhaps a lacquered box.

But Brock desired neither prints nor lacquer ware; and after a further offer to pay, we left the shop.

Brock's look was guileless, but my own thoughts were in confusion. He had deliberately dropped the vase. And why had Haichi Kamura neither come into the room nor spoken? I knew him well; usually he was the acme of cordiality.

But I received no enlightenment from Brock. Instead, as we paused on the sidewalk, he said:

"Now, Peel, for the test. There may be danger, are you game?"

From the expression of his face, he might have been proposing a game of chess.

"All right," I said, trying to match his tone of casualness.

THE American had finished his manicuring, and now, a big, black cigar in his mouth, was admiring the dexterity with which a barefooted street-sweeper always retrieved his cart just as a passing team was about to demolish it. If he saw us, his manner did not show it.

At the corner of the square a narrow footpath leads to an alley running behind the buildings on the right-hand side. Brock led the way to a low, badly lighted warehouse, midway of this alley. We stopped in the shadow of its doorway. The air, heavy with the sweetish, rancid smell of raw sugar and dried copra, and the damp, broken flagging of the alley gave me a momentary sense of depression.

Evidently the surroundings were familiar to Brock, for after a brief scrutiny of the big room behind us, he loosed the lower part of his blouse, and taking from a strap about his waist a similar revolver to the one he had given me, slipped it into his breeches pocket. My own I placed conveniently in the side pocket of my coat.

Five minutes passed in silence, then ten; and my nervous excitement gave way to a fear that whomsoever we awaited might not come.

"Who is it, Tommy? Could he have gone another way?" I whispered.

He shook his head; but before he could reply, there came the sound of steps from the direction of the Bazaar of the Rising Sun. Brock drew back more deeply into the shadow, and I sensed the tightening of his muscles.

"If it is Haichi," he breathed as the steps drew nearer.

But it was not Haichi Kamura; it was Maxwell, Colonel Levin's clerk, and he passed within two feet of us, his big head bent forward, as though holding it erect were too great an effort for his neck.

"He should come in a minute now," whispered Brock, as Maxwell turned the corner into the footpath, and disappeared.

A *tao* passed leading a carabao, followed by a Chinese coolie at his shuffling trot, a heavy bucket swinging from either end of a long *pingue* stick balanced across his shoulders. Then a door down the alley closed, and we heard Haichi. There was no mistaking the quick, light click of his heels upon the flagging.

"Luck is with us, he's alone." I barely caught the words as Brock flattened himself against the doorjamb.

A moment more and the man for whom we had been waiting drew abreast of us. He was unconcernedly reading a card which he held close before his face. Without a word Brock slipped in front of him while I grasped him about the waist.

Haichi Kamura was a full head shorter than I, and he had been taken entirely off his guard. For an instant I felt his figure relax as I strained to pin his elbows to his sides; then, before I realized his purpose, his muscles grew taut and he dropped forward to his knee.

There came a cry of warning from Brock, followed by the thud of a blow; but I was already spinning through the air. A pile of hemp sacks, providentially left in front of the adjoining doorway, no doubt saved me some broken bones. As it was the impact of the fall stretched me out for fully a minute.

When, still breathless, I got back to the doorway, Haichi Kamura was lying on a pile of sugar his eyes closed, his arms dangling inertly over the bags, while Brock was bending down over him. As I entered, he straightened up, and slipped a package into the inside pocket of his blouse.

"The vanished plans, Peel," he said, coolly wiping his hands on his handkerchief.

"And he?" I asked, pointing to the prostrate figure.

"Only knocked out temporarily. You ought to learn jiu-jitsu, Peel. I tried to warn you."

Brock disappeared behind the sugar pile, returning a moment later with a water-bucket on which was painted in large red letters the word "Fire."

After the second sprinkling Haichi Kamura opened his eyes.

Our attack had been so sudden and unexpected, and the blow which stretched him out so swift, that the Oriental could only have had a confused impression of what was happening. Now as the full realization came to him, I watched to see whether his face would show either disappointment or chagrin. It did not.

He slipped to his feet with the same polite, ingratiating smile with which he had a few nights before met me at one of the governor-general's receptions at Malachan. But as he brushed the front of his coat with his small but well-modeled hand, I noticed that his fingers pressed for a moment against the pocket in which he had carried the papers.

Brock was the first to speak, and what he said took me as much by surprise as it evidently did Haichi Kamura.

"I am sorry to learn, Mr. Kamura, that your health is impaired and you are leaving the Islands," said the captain in an even voice which contained none of the regret his words expressed.

For a moment I did not catch his meaning, and then, as Haichi Kamura flashed a swift, appraising glance at the man who had defeated his plans, I saw it. Brock was both warning him that his machinations had been discovered and giving him an opportunity of saving his face. Being a true Oriental, Haichi accepted it.

"Yes, Captain," he answered in a friendly, smiling manner, "the climate of Manila, it is hot, and there has been much work. I must change. I go to take vacation on the *Chiyo* next week."

"But Maxwell—will he not get away?" I asked, as we came out onto the Plaza, Haichi Kamura, after a cordial leave taking, having returned to the Bazaar of the Rising Sun.

Brock smiled.

"Maxwell is safe," he said. "There was a man waiting for him here." And he added with a sigh of relaxation. "I'll meet you at the club in half an hour. I feel as if I could eat a horse."

"A GLORIOUS evening, Mr. Peel. You can't beat the tropics at night, can you?"

It was Colonel Levin coming from Brock's room. At the heartiness of his tone I smiled. As a matter of fact it was a wretched night, for during the late afternoon one of those dismal, persistent rains of September had set in. But he swung his cane, walking with his shoulders squared back and his head erect as though daring the world.

I had not seen Brock since morning. He had not kept his appointment for lunch, and a servant had only a short while before come from him with word that he was in his room. He was writing when in answer to a "Come in," I entered and closed the door. On the table before him was a thick pile of bank-notes.

"Sorry I couldn't do the lunch, but the general insisted on keeping me," he said, picking up and addressing a large envelope. Then dropping his pen, he swung around and faced me quizzically. "Well, where shall I begin?" he asked.

"First off, where's Maxwell?"

"Packing his things. He has been dismissed from the service and goes home on the transport to-morrow. This was his price—twenty thousand pesos. He had it on him when arrested." He pointed to the pile of bank-notes before him.

"And he is not to be tried for stealing the plans?"

At my tone Brock shrugged his shoulders.

"No. The whole thing was put up to Washington by cable, and they replied to let it drop. The story would come out if Maxwell were tried, you know, and that might cause some embarrassing comment at home. Some day——"

He did not finish his sentence, and I did

not pursue the subject. Instead I asked,

"But how did Maxwell get the plans, and when did you first suspect him?"

According to Colonel Levin's statement, Maxwell had not entered the office until after the plans had been lost.

Brock lit a cigaret and crossed his hands behind his head.

"Well, Peel, I knew that some one had taken the plans; obviously they couldn't disappear of themselves. Circumstances pointed to the colonel, but somehow I suspected Maxwell. He has naturally a dishonest face, and his sickness, which I thought might be assumed, made him look more like a thief than ever. But I could think of no means by which he could have obtained the papers.

"Then, you remember an envelope blew off the desk, and the clerk picked it up with the hand over whose arm the poncho was thrown. In a flash the answer came to me. While the colonel was talking to Rawlins the wind blew the papers into a corner, and when he returned to look for them naturally they were gone. You know how short-sighted and excitable Levin is. When he didn't see the papers, he no doubt began to wonder whether he had actually left them on the desk.

"The more he searched, the more excited and confused he became until, by the time he had finished the desk, he was completely in the air. I am certain he thought he had examined every nook and corner of that room, and equally certain that he could almost have stepped on the papers without seeing them. The idea that he had lost them would take possession of his mind and completely dominate it.

"Then he did the worst thing he could have done. He called in Maxwell and told him the papers were gone. Of course, the clerk, who knew their value, found them immediately. Now comes the curious feature—Maxwell's sickness. It was real and he had, as he said, come in with his hat and raincoat to ask permission to go home. But for that circumstance he would to-day be actually, if not potentially, an honest man. Those are the things which make cases of this kind baffling.

"Without doubt Maxwell's first impulse was to return the papers. Instead of doing so, he simply dropped his coat over them and said nothing. He was committed to the crime. During the colonel's absence from the room, he hid them as he thought securely in his poncho, and seized the first opportunity of carrying them off.

"His plan might have worked, and I might never have been lucky enough to discover it but for one thing—his picking up that envelope. As he did so I saw that he had something under his coat, something wrapped in blue paper."

"But why did you let him go, instead of exposing him then?" I asked somewhat puzzled, for it came back to me that Brock had suggested to the colonel that he excuse Maxwell. "He might have gotten away with the papers, and certainly the colonel would have been saved a peck of worry."

Brock smiled grimly.

"Well the colonel may have had some of the worry coming to him, the way he has been messing up things, and then getting as mad as a hornet if you suggest that he is not the most alert man in the Army. At any rate, it was for the good of the service.

"As for Maxwell, he never had a chance to get away. You remember I left the room, ostensibly to get my cigarets. In reality I went to put Malden, one of my men, on Maxwell's track. Both he and the plans which he hid in the bed at his house, have been watched every moment since he left the building. For months we have been trying to get at the bottom of the espionage which we knew was going on, and when I found that the clerk had stolen such important plans, I knew it was my chance. I knew that either he was a member of the gang, or he must get in touch with it to dispose of them. Through him I might reach the man I had been after.

"The general at first suspected Colonel Levin also and had him watched, while I sent Segundo out to chum with Maxwell's boy. Apparently he was not one of the gang, but shortly after leaving the hospital he got in touch with the Bazaar of the Rising Sun crowd. Then I became a *tao*, both for the purpose of watching the place and of keeping in touch with my agents. Nobody ever suspects one of these old Filipinos.

"Matters simply came to a head sooner than I had expected—and luckily I found you at Clarke's. I broke the vase to learn whether Haichi Kamura was still in the shop. Unconsciously anybody in the back room would look out on hearing a crash like that. There is a secret entrance to another store opening on the Escolta. It was being

watched, but he might have been in either place. And, by the way, the visit of the *Isachi* was only a coincidence; I thought at first she might have been cabled for to get the plans—that shows how important they are. And that, Peel, is the whole story."

He rose, tossed his cigaret into the ash-tray, and stretched out his arms like a man trying to get the soreness out of his muscles. For all his cheerfulness I saw that he was tired, and for the first time I realized what a strain the whole thing must have been. Then my glance fell on the pile of money.

"How do you come to have that?" I asked.

He laughed.

"That stuff caused almost more trouble than the loss of the plans. It doesn't belong to us, and, of course, it doesn't belong to Maxwell. I suggested turning it over to the Army Relief, but the general wouldn't agree. Finally he told me to return it unofficially to Haichi. I have just written a note to go with it. Here it is."

He handed me a sheet of note-paper on which in a small, precise, legible hand was written:

DEAR MR. KAMURA:

I am sending you herewith twenty thousand pesos to pay for the Satsuma vase whose loss destroyed the usefulness of your bazaar. Pray do not trouble with a receipt, your name upon the envelope will assure me that the money has come into the proper hands.

Wishing you a pleasant voyage,

Truly yours,

T. BROCK.

PORTS OF CALL

BY LEO HAYS

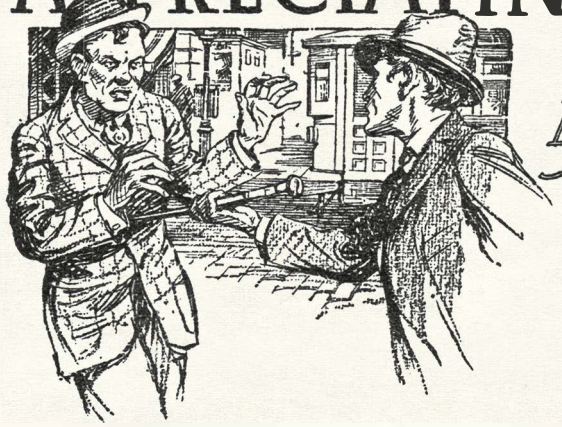
ALL AROUND the world they lie,
On all the forty seas,
And the chorus of their call goes by
On every vagrant breeze:
Sleepy little beach towns,
Asprawl for miles and miles,
Or dirty river-reach towns,
On delta mud and piles.

Barrios and Santos,
Sydney, Loango,
Nagasaki, Saigon,
Colon and Callao—
Their names are siren music
To make you want to go.

Oh, they'll never let a man be good,
They whisper in his ear,
Until the fever heats his blood
To see the big ships clear.
They call to the rover,
They sing of steam and sail:
"Come out and look us over;
"Get up and hit the trail!"

Constant and Aleck,
Smyrna, Tripoli,
Sandakan, Shanghai,
Cadiz-by-the-sea—
Oh, the finest hymn-book printed
Is an old geography!

APPRECIATING PETER



by HAROLD TITUS

Author of "An Event," "A Yavapai Yarn," etc.

PETER HOWARD was one of those rare individuals who are always helping somebody. Not a philanthropist, understand, for most philanthropists are bound by an uneasy conscience or ambition to self service; but he had been so busy helping other people for so long that it had come to be his mission, his first purpose. And, even with a desire to avoid an intimation of cynicism, it must be recorded that his labor, tangible as were its results, was seldom approved. He was appreciated, though. Once.

Wolf didn't appreciate Peter. He was chief shipping-clerk at Wolf's and had devised a system of checking which saved the concern a surprising amount, but that didn't matter when they found some one else who could do the work and whose chances of futurity on the job seemed more abundant. Merle Grinnell didn't appreciate what Peter did for him; that is as certain as daylight.

Mrs. Brandt, who had never expected to come to it and complainingly conducted the boarding-house where Peter lived did not realize that he stood between her and her boarders, turning the edge of her contentiousness until the place was made habitable for those who slept in her lumpy beds and sat regularly about her monotonous table.

Neither did the group that paid its stipend for food and shelter under the steep slate roof give Peter credit for making the place brighter, more pleasant, because its majority were young people, impatiently ambitious, and they had no time for a man whose hair was white, whose shoulders were stooped, who was looking backward or about him instead of ahead to Saturday night or next month or next year, and who was so kindly that he was quite out of date.

Maybe Peter's brother's widow appreciated him, but she was continually off-stage and it is hard to tell. Mamie appreciated Peter, though. You bet she did! But even here the manner in which she demonstrated her esteem would have hurt him badly had he known. He never knew.

The house where Peter lived was in the heart of a row of such houses; door beneath the flight of steep brown steps, meaningless iron railings, three stories, woodwork theoretically white, impotent gas-lights in the dark halls, smells. From its black front door with the wobbly brass knob, Peter Howard emerged each morning at seven, paused on the top step to look up and down and smiled. He always smiled.

When the day was fine and clear he smiled with the joy of good weather; when the heat threatened to be excessive he smiled his apprehension and shrugged his shoulders, and when rain or wind or snow or any combination of the three prevailed he would button his collar closely about his throat and smile with an adventurous twinkle in his eye, because occasional rough weather was good for a man, he believed; tempered him, made him appreciate the fair days, too.

His return at evening was not so regular, for he did not work by the gong at Wolf's, but he was never late for dinner and

invariably before all the clocks had tolled eight he appeared on the steps again, cane over his arm and raincoat or ulster on if necessary. Then he would practise that art of strolling which, in this pell-mell manner of life is rapidly falling out of fashion.

He strolled in many directions. Sometimes it was up Fifth Avenue; generally on rainy nights, because he liked the lights on the jet pavement, and the way the cathedral spires lost themselves in the dun murk and the many-eyed Plaza. Once in six months perhaps he moved along heedless Broadway with the theater crowd, but he did not care much for that; Broadway never strolls.

Often he went to Washington Square and traversed its four sides many times in the evening, seeing the buses come and go, watching the children play. He knew a fruit-stand man down in Sullivan Street whom he visited occasionally. Other times would find him over by the East River, poking around the dark wharves, watching the smudgy little boats swim up and down.

Always he was talking to people, strangers. When they saw his thin, shaven, kindly lips and looked into his sincere gray eyes they usually replied to his questions; and turned to look at him a last time as he moved away from them. It was not a rare thing for some of them—a policeman or a derelict on the docks or a liveried hotel footman—to call him back and add something to what they had answered. He was that sort.

Then, usually between nine and ten, he would ascend Mrs. Brandt's steps once more, close the door carefully to be certain that he disturbed no one, and tread softly to his room. His light generally burned until well after eleven. He had some books there, in a precise row on the one shelf.

IT WAS during one of these evening strolls that Peter Howard came on Mamie. He moved up Third Avenue, homeward bound, stepped down from the curb to cross one of the lower Twenties and stopped, for a tableau enacted under a lamp-post not a hundred paces away caught his attention like a pair of steel nippers.

A man and a girl—Mamie—were there on the sidewalk. She was a slight figure and the wind, whipping her light skirt about her slim legs, made her seem more reed-like, more frail. He was taller and the menacing manner in which he leaned forward and over her made the difference in their physiques seem still greater.

Mamie was backing from him, one hand, clasping something, behind her, the other arm raised, more in protest than defense! Her face was averted. She was trying to go away from the fellow but he followed closely, wanting not so much contact as obedience; that was evident from his imperative gestures, the emphatic, side-to-side movements of his head as he talked. Trains were passing and their roar drowned voices but Peter Howard could not fail to know that the girl was in extreme trouble.

He did not need to see the man grasp her by the wrist and give it a wrench that sent her half to her knees to stir him to action, for he was already moving toward the two. That sent him into a run, though; not a fast run, for shipping-clerks with silvery hair do not sprint. He trotted on, cane upraised and cried:

"Here, here! Young man, stop that!"

The roar of the trains had died to a growl and the fellow, hearing the shout, looked up quickly, still keeping his clutch on Mamie's wrist, fingers of the other hand fastened on the purse the girl was holding from him.

"Young man, don't do that!" cried Peter.

He was close enough then for them to see that his throat was thin, his hair silvered, and the overdressed lout snarled:

"Keep out, you old stiff; this ain't your business!"

He wrenched Mamie again so viciously that she cried out and went to one knee on the walk, looking swiftly at Peter, helpless anxiety on her tight-drawn, white face.

"Give it up, you——!" the man demanded, using a word that no man should use. "I'll beat you till you——"

When his cane came down on the fellow's forearm it made such a queer crunching that Peter stopped, frightened in spite of his righteous wrath.

"I had to do it," he said, somewhat apologetically in spite of his severity, as the man, holding the injured limb close against his chest, staggered against the building, faint with the agony of it.

The girl turned and fled a few paces to put herself out of reach for the moment. Then she halted and looked back.

The man came through his first spasm of

pain and faced Peter with much vile language. He advanced on the older man menacingly.

"Stand back!" Peter warned.

"Get out! She's mine. I'll take care of my business. She's mi——"

"Not yours to beat!" cried Peter valiantly and as the other rushed at him, threatening destruction, he grasped his cane-handle firmly, lifted the tip as a dueling gentleman would balance his rapier, swayed forward on well planted feet and with a hiss of breath through his teeth thrust mightily.

The other man's breath came out, too, with a gulp—as the cane rammed into his stomach, and he stopped and doubled and groaned, leaning against the lamp-post.

Peter lowered his stick slowly, not quite certain that the affair had ended, glared in swift-breathing indignation at his vanquished foe, gave his head a severe, twisting nod and, wheeling with a squaring of his stooped shoulders, moved toward the girl.

"My dear young lady," he said, some of the tensity going from his voice with each word, "you'll walk with me."

He offered his arm and Mamie, searching his face with her great black eyes, half timidly rested her trembling hand in its crook and moved beside him. The fire left Peter's eyes; the fixity of the lines about his mouth dissolved and the expression again became complacent, tranquil, a hint of amusement replacing the sternness of a moment before and the only indication of disturbance whatever was evidenced in the ringing blows of his cane as it smote the pavement with the unconscious vigor of resentment.

The girl said nothing for a time. Her breath caught in repeated sobs and each time Peter squeezed her hand against his side and said: "There, there!" until her breathing was normal. With a ball of a handkerchief she dried her tears and giving a sorry little laugh said:

"Mister, you get my vote! If you hadn't come along I'd be without nothin'." She held out the purse ruefully. "As 'tis I lost my home,"—bitterness in the voice—"but I hung to my nine dollars."

Peter eyed her speculatively.

"Your—husband?"—dryly.

Mamie looked up at him and away and sniffed.

"That's what some thought."

Peter still looked at her; not speculatively; neither with pity. Sympathy reflected in his face. Peter never presumed to lash another with pity. He just tried to understand.

"Well, nine dollars will go quite a ways, used judiciously," he said, optimistically. "If I can be of any service—advice or anything— Let's walk up this street; it's quieter; we can talk this thing over."

They turned and their pace slowed, the tapping of the cane became less vigorous and finally ceased altogether as Peter Howard listened, dropping his head lower and lower, leaning a bit toward the girl, as if in conscious attitude of the protector.

People always were eager to talk to him, it seemed. Mamie, in spite of a past that, though not unusual, is abnormal, was very much of a person, a human being. Opening her miserable, sick, frightened heart to Peter Howard that night opened a way to a way of living that was more usual, nearer normal.

PETER was among the first to answer the unglad tintinnabulations of the breakfast-bell at Mrs. Brandt's the next morning. That lady herself sounded the call, her tinfoil curlers subdued but not concealed by a boudoir cap designed with no sense of the emphasis of repression, her temper at the indisposition of her second girl finding spiteful vent in the clanging summons.

Peter Howard rubbed a palm calculatingly across his chin after looking into his landlady's forbidding face. Then he ventured:

"Mrs. Brandt, I had no opportunity to tell you last night, but I rented your second floor back. A young lady— She came to the door when you were out, it seems. No one else answered the bell. I knew you were anxious to have the room taken, so in your absence I showed it to her and——"

"Absence! I wasn't out of this house! You let her in without——"

"Oh, no; indeed, no. She was quite business-like about it; she had so little luggage with her that she,"—a step sounded on the stair and Peter turned guiltily to see Mamie standing at the head of the flight—"that she insisted on paying a week in advance. Here——"

The feel of crisp bills in her hand placated Mrs. Brandt. She had not been away the evening before. She was quite sure she

had heard Peter Howard's entrance very late in the night She resented this usurpation of her duties. But she was glad to have the room filled; the crinkly currency was satisfying.

"Well, that's funny," she said petulantly as she went out into the kitchen, checking her first count of the money.

When the door had slammed behind her Mamie came downstairs with a rush.

"You mustn't!" she said, shaking Peter's arm. "I ain't broke. You——"

"Next thing to it, my dear. Only a loan; a loan. Mrs. Brandt is peculiar about these trifles. A fine woman; great heart. Peculiar, though, on first acquaintance."

Before she could protest again Peter had passed into the dining-room where further discussion of the subject was inadvisable.

The meal was as usual except for a detail; Peter Howard read only the classified advertising in his morning paper and now and then he checked an item with his pencil. As he passed out he bowed to the new boarder and said in his mild, half-hesitant manner:

"Do you care about the newspaper?"

He handed the folded pages to her in such a way that she could not overlook his pencil markings.

That was the manner in which Mamie came to Mrs. Brandt's. Within a day or two the table came to know that she was employed with a mimeographing concern. In about the same length of time the women set her down as chilly and unapproachable while toward the young men of the house she assumed a most forbiddingly contemptuous attitude.

Only with Peter Howard was she on terms beyond those of casual speech. She often walked with him nights. He talked to her of the city he knew, pointing out the things which interested him, and because he was the first man of her experience who had interested himself in her in that manner Mamie discovered a growing interest in those streets and buildings and people, too. He never preached. He never mentioned the girl's past. Unknowingly he allowed his fine sympathy, his matchless understanding to work the miracle of rebirth.

In turn, Mamie unwittingly offered a vent for some of the confidences that had been in his heart for years, waiting for some one to stop rushing to stroll and listen. For one thing, he talked to her of his brother's widow and her girls and of how he divided his meager salary with them, something that no other person knew.

Because of this intimacy with a white-haired man, Mamie was snickered at and generally depreciated at the Brandt house. Perhaps the change in the girl had something to do with this disfavor, because she ceased to be so thin and took on better color. Though she lost none of her alert self-sufficiency, the hardness of her lip and eye gave way to a charming simplicity, making the women more critical and the young men more disgusted because she would choose Peter above them.

Not so long after Mamie was an established character at the house Merle Grinnell came to the city. He was an Ohio boy with light hair and dark eyes and a manner of dressing that caused him to approximate the lithograph lures of manufacturers of smart clothing; bandy legs, narrow shoulders and in between an abdomen so negligible that it was a marvel how it contained essential organs.

People would judge Merle in just one of two ways, either with envy or contempt; that is, all people except Peter Howard.

Young Grinnell went to work at Wolf's, toiling in the shipping department under Peter. You might have detested the youth but, after watching him, you would have been forced to admit his mental agility. It was a ferret-like intelligence, looking ahead, prying, hard and cunning.

The job did not satisfy the youth and before he had been there a week his eyes lingered often on Peter Howard as he sat behind his wire wicket, green eye-shade on his pale forehead, checking and counter-checking the factory's product by the system he had devised after years of experience.

The new boy began his overtures by falling in beside Peter at lunch-time. He assumed an earnest, respectful attitude and before the meal was over he had reached out a tentacle of flattery, telling Peter with evident shyness that he must be of inestimable value to a place like Wolf's. It was human of Peter to respond.

A day or two afterward the youth, again at lunch, broached the future, talking of ambition that was truly lusty but in terms that were wholly counterfeit. Peter Howard, watching the eagerness in the young face, overlooked the craft lurking behind it.

And so the lad manipulated himself into

Howard's confidence. A half-laughing, cunningly designed complaint about the place in which he lived and he was recommended to and installed at Mrs. Brandt's, where the rides to and from Wolf's, the meals, the occasional walks together, brought him still closer to the man under whom he worked.

THE people at Mrs. Brandt's represented the two opinions of Grinnell. With one exception they considered him the life of the house, for he was dressy and glib and stirred them to frequent laughter.

The one exception was Mamie. She regarded Grinnell skeptically the first time he sat across from her; she listened to his chatter and a faint suggestion of a curl showed on her lip. Her surprise was evident when Peter Howard appeared to be mildly amused at the boy's bragging.

The newcomer talked much of himself from the first, boasting of his home-town importance even while he ridiculed the life of the hinterlands, predicting lavishly his immediate future in the city. His wit was cheap and hard, largely coarse, and his anecdotes were chiefly concerned with the so-called gay life, of drinks—mostly mixed—and capacities for them, of cafés and dancing-places and all the rest that went with the style of clothing he wore.

"Oh, he's only a boy; that will all wear off," Peter laughed when Mamie ventured a criticism of the youth as they walked along the reservoir in Central Park one Sunday morning. "He's in earnest about his work. This dissipation talk is only talk."

"It don't take a mind-reader to tell that," said Mamie significantly, grimly; for Mamie had suffered to know what she knew of excesses.

"Only a boy," Peter repeated. "He's all right."

But Mamie, old in experience, knew that Grinnell was not all right long before he approached her—as she knew he would approach her. He had tried without success to draw her into suggestive conversation at the table and once or twice made a joke of her unresponsiveness. Mamie, though, stood pat until, meeting her in a darkened hallway one evening Grinnell grasped her hand and said:

"Listen, little sister, what's th——"

"Don't little-sister me, you jay-town false alarm!" Mamie snapped and jerked her hand from him in a fury that was quite startling.

"Why, I didn't mean an——"

But the slam of the front door cut off his apology and the youth from Ohio walked slowly upstairs, face flushed, pride wounded. He hated the taint of a small town; like all pretenders he cringed from the accusation of pretense.

He felt that Mamie was a menace to his prestige, knew, with a savage sort of hopelessness, that she was quicker, brighter than he; longed for a chance to show her that he was truly sophisticated, that he could live as largely as he talked. Also, she was so desirable—and persistently unattainable.

At Wolf's the intimacy between Peter and Grinnell grew until, realizing that the lad actually wanted to know, Peter called him behind the wicket and patiently, in great detail, elaborated on the system he had evolved for his work.

"It isn't simple, is it?" he chuckled when he had finished the first lesson and Grinnell, brow wrinkled, was making certain that he remembered all he had been told. "You see, we really do the work of two men in here, but it isn't so difficult—not when your mind travels in this sort of groove. Once or twice we've tried to break in some one else to be ready if anything happened to me, but none of the boys we've tried have made a go of it."

"It must be hard to learn. It's a beaut, though!" said Merle, and Peter's cheeks flushed with the inventor's pride.

The tutoring continued at intervals for weeks and when he was well on his way toward the mastery of the system the cunning of the boy unearthed another fact. Wolf himself regularly returned from lunch during the middle of the noon hour and passed through the shipping department on the way to his office.

Consequently, as the head of the establishment walked hurriedly toward the stairway while the place was emptied for the midday rest, he heard a rustle of papers behind the chief shipping-clerk's wicket. He looked up quickly through the dark glasses which he invariably wore and saw the newest member of that department scanning the long narrow sheets which were spread before Peter all day long.

Wolf said gruffly:

"Well, ain't you got lunch money?"

Grinnell looked up, feigning surprise, and smiled at the jest.

"I ate in a hurry to get back and study these sheets. Great system!"

The other looked at him speculatively but because of the dark glasses Merle could not determine that quality. Wolf grunted assent. Then asked skeptically—

"You make head or tail of it?"

The boy smiled again—with designed modesty—and tilted his head.

"Well, it took me quite a while, but I guess I've got it now."

This industry touched Wolf's business sense. No one in that department had ever demonstrated a like interest—except Peter Howard.

"Did Howard show you?" he asked.

"Oh yes—something about it,"—with a laugh which artfully suggested difficulties. "He—well, he isn't very full of pep anyhow. We live at the same house and I can see that he's about all in every night. Quite a strain, I guess."

"Whump," said Wolf, under his breath and passed on to the stairway.

After he had left, young Mr. Grinnell grinned to himself. He had gone a long way toward setting himself in Wolf's favor; also, he had planted two varieties of the seeds of suspicion in the boss's mind regarding Peter Howard.

The shipping department was but a detail; however, in efficient method detail is supremely important. Wolf was, that afternoon, at once worried and relieved. He had thought from time to time that with the going of Peter changes must be made; he would be unable to find a man at Peter's price who could do Peter's work.

But now came a youth out of the West who was at once intelligent, ambitious and unafraid of extra hours, bearing an intimation of Howard's aversion to training another for his task, the task which was taxing his failing health. Hence the manufacturer's mingled feeling of concern and assurance.

AT MRS. BRANDT'S young Merle easily managed to retain the center of the stage. Life was almost wholly good with him. The attention he commanded gratified his avid ego; his progress at the delicate task of undermining Peter Howard was more lively than he could have hoped for.

The one jarring note in the whole was the fact that Mamie's attitude was such that he felt the others must be aware of the contempt with which she held him; and for Mamie's good will he would have bartered that of all the rest. Never a spoken word indicated the girl's condition of mind; neither did Mamie give the usual outward indications of disdain.

She seldom seemed aware of Grinnell's presence in spite of the fact that she took no obvious pains to avoid him, that circumstance being evidence of a true sense of superiority. But now and then when he reverted to his favorite theme of life under the white lights, of luxurious drinking-places, of smart debauchery, of women and sleek automobiles, the very names of which signify speed in both its highly proper and colloquial uses, he felt Mamie's disgusted eyes on him.

He could never stop the flush that crept over his pallid face; for he knew, with the keen intuition which the counterfeit acquire for the real, that, compared to this girl, he was a babe in the worldly experience of which he boasted.

Thrice again Wolf saw Grinnell hard at the task of learning things behind Peter's wicket and he asked:

"How's he getting on?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Peter in a lowered tone. "He's the brightest young chap we've ever had here. Why, I believe he could take my place tomorrow!"

Later in the day he could not help telling Merle that Wolf was pleased with his industry. Such was his way and thereby he gave the boy the cue for his last move.

And at the next opportunity Grinnell played his high trump with Wolf. Yes, he was sorry, but he felt that for his own good he'd better quit. There seemed to be nothing better ahead of him there—right away, anyhow. He had two or three other places on the string; so he guessed as soon as they could get somebody else to take his place he'd. . . .

Wolf, pinching his nose, stared at the floor through his dark glasses and opined that perhaps in a week or so something might happen; in fact, he advised young Merle to stay on at least a week. Thereupon Grinnell understood and rendered the impression that he did not understand, was very respectful and would be grateful for anything that. . . .

A few days later when Wolf said, "Oh, Howard, come up to the office, will you?" he was exceedingly glad that the condition of his sight demanded dark glasses.

He was not appreciative of what Peter had done, yet he did not like to have the man see his eyes when he explained that, in view ot increasing duties it seemed advisable for younger men to bear the burden. The house was not ungrateful and that while they could scarcely afford to continue his present salary they might, in another department . . . .

Peter bore up like the noble he was. He was sorry that he'd been slowing up; hadn't noticed it himself—with a brave smile—and, of course, he'd be glad to do anything toward breaking in the new man. He was thankful for the offer of work, too, and would think it over.

That night the clocks had finished their cycle before Mamie and Peter mounted the steps.

"We've walked four hours!" he said, in an attempt to be gay. "Think of that!"

Mamie didn't. She was thinking only of Peter's predicament. The whole tragic little story had come out, bit by bit, philosophically, blaming no one, even glad that young Grinnell was to be advanced, growing almost impatient when Mamie tried to speak her mind. His only admitted concern was over the temporary cessation of the draft to his brother's widow; he was sure that he would have something in a week or so at the outside, but he hated to think of them stinting themselves.

Mamie bit her lips for she knew that when a man is stooped and has been a shipping-clerk until his hair is scant and silver he is not overly popular with many employers in Greater New York. She was not so sure that his brother's widow would not be without that draft many, many weeks.

Then her agile little mind had commenced to pry and the things she found out about the ambition and industry of Merle Grinnell, abetted by her propensity for cataloging character, satisfied her as to the method by which Peter had been displaced.

GRINNELL knew of his fortune the next afternoon and at dinner he quite surpassed himself, specifying nothing in rendering the news, suggesting anything.

"A wine supper for us all my first payday!" he cried.

Mamie, cheeks hot, looked up to see the pain in Peter's eyes as he tried to smile with the rest and be glad for the youngster. And she saw the nastiness in Grinnell's leer as he turned to the older man and asked—

"You'll be glad to come, won't you?"

"Indeed, I will!" Peter said with mild graciousness, though Mamie felt the knife in her own heart.

"And will I be invited?" she asked quickly showing her teeth in a smile.

Grinnell's heart leaped.

"You bet you will, kiddo!" he cried and held his eyes on her with an unpleasant glitter while his heart pumped with surprised exultation. He had banked much on his improved economic importance but he had not dared believe it would bring such immediate favor from Mamie.

The week which followed brought a marked change in the attitude of young Grinnell toward Peter Howard. In the past he had been respectful, gently flattering, but now he was eager to make sport of the other, creating tawdry fun at his expense, sneering at his kindliness; and all this stabbed Peter cruelly, though he made no protest, attempting only to see the fun and laugh with the others.

Those who were most observant noticed another change in relationships. Mamie's silence was broken. Her steadfast refusal to respond to Grinnell's banalities had been overcome. Much of his conversation was now directed at her and she responded freely, smiling at him with a provoking light in her eyes.

"Say sister, I never knew what a queen you were!" he said once when they met on the steps, her cheeks rosy from the wind, eyes glowing in a manner that he did not understand and that roused him mightily.

"Some kid, ain't I?" she laughed.

He pinched her arm familiarly as she passed into the house and she did not protest.

Another time he said:

"Wouldn't you go out with me tonight? I'll show you a party!"

"That's swell of you, but this night life's not for a working girl. Some other time, though. You—you eat lunch alone always?"

"Not always,"—leaping at the opening.

"If you'll let me take you to lunch I'll open a cold one!"

"I'll think it over," she said.

The first day of the second week went down and Peter had five more days before him. He had been looking about a bit, he confessed to Mamie, and although he was certain of something equally as good at once he hadn't managed to get trace of it yet—with a sigh which he could not quite smother.

The second day passed, and the third. That night he brought home a book that he had kept at the office and Mamie, from the hallway, saw him pat it fondly as he put it on his dresser; and she heard his "Oh-h-h-dear!" as he hung up his coat.

Grinnell's spirits mounted meanwhile and never had he been in better feather than when he left the breakfast table the following morning. Next week he would go behind the wicket, with a better chance, more money, more prestige.

"Oh-ho—hello, chicken!" he said in surprise as he slammed the door behind him and saw Mamie standing on the steps.

"I waited for you," she confessed. "Have you forgotten that lunch and that cold one?"—archly.

"Have I forgot? My —— no!"—stepping close and taking her hands in his.

"Well can't it be this noon?"

"If it can't come any sooner it'll be all right; five hours is a long time to wait, though!"

"Don't try to kid the teacher," she warned with a responsive squeeze. "And—can't you beat the clock a little? An hour's hardly long enough to put over a real party."

"You bet I can! I'm solid as rock with Wolf and the old mutt here wouldn't say anything anyhow. Twelve, that— Where? Th' Fashion Grill?"

"That's good. Until then— Well, be as careful as you can!"

She ran from him and he stood looking after her, lips parted.

"Some baby!" he muttered excitedly.

EVENING came, and the Brandt boarders. Mrs. Brandt's fluster was complete, her complaining incessant and at concert pitch.

"Without a word! Moved out without a word. Banged his trunk down-stairs an' scratched that walnut newel post all up. Look at it! Can it be beat! Can it be beat?" she reiterated.

Mamie came in, a trifle tense, possibly a little pale.

"What's the row?" she asked Peter as she heard the landlady's voluble lament from the kitchen. "Has she mislaid her jooles or has her husband come back?"

"Come in," he said agitatedly and drew her into his room.

He was white and shaken, and wet his lips nervously.

"Such a time!" he said under his breath. "That boy—young Grinnell—he was away almost three hours at lunch this noon and he came back terribly drunk! My! We all tried to stop him but he went right up to Mr. Wolf and talked so! By the Lord Harry, it was a trying experience!

"They had to throw him out; wanted to fight and everything—and then he came here and made a terrible disturbance taking his things away——"

"Well for the love of Mike!" said Mamie, something of the old brittle quality in her manner. "Then he won't—you won't——"

"Oh, no! I'll stay on, now. He won't do at all. They even gave me a raise, and said so many nice things and—I hate to think that it was because of that young man's misfortune, though——"

And later in the evening as they stood looking up at grim, suffering-saturated Bellevue, Peter shook his head and said:

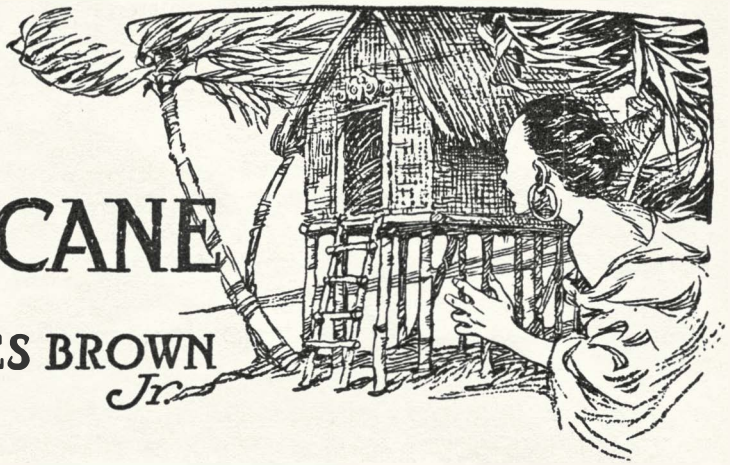
"I can't think what got into that boy, drinking so! I thought all the time it was all talk."

"It was," said Mamie. "Believe me, Peter, it was."

He did not see the cynical little smile of triumph that fired her face, but he gave her small hand a fond patting as she squeezed his arm affectionately.

The HURRICANE

by CHARLES BROWN Jr.



Author of "Red Flannel"

CROUCHED miserably in the long grass, Kalputa, the Melanesian woman, loosened her blue wrapper at the throat and removed it carefully back over her shoulder. The blood had stopped running from the deep wound above the armpit, and her shoulder was beginning to swell.

Hurriedly she broke leaves from the yellow bush beside her, squeezed them into a thick pad and laid it on the wound, tying it with long strips of cloth torn from the hem of her skirt. Then she let her young head fall on her knees, moaning in a cold, frightened way.

Her big melancholy eyes did not look at the sun as it rose over the tall green coconut-palms above the beach nor at the smoke which curled thin and blue from under the deep thatched roofs beyond the canefields; but she went on moaning and wailing, her voice full of terror. It was not until the bronze sea-hawks, hovering and veering above the calm blue sea in front of her, noisily resumed their fishing that she lifted her head and looked back at the place she was fleeing.

On the outer edge of the canefields and but a short distance above the surf-beaten beach she saw the trading station. It was a tiny bungalow with stilty legs and a low white oblong roof. Through the paw-paw trees behind the station she saw the long-legged houses of the Fijians, and the villagers moving about their daily tasks.

When she again turned her eyes to the trading station, Kalputa saw Captain Barker, the only American trader on Flenga Island, crash across the palm-thatched veranda and around to the grove of paw-paw trees, brandishing a long knife. He was over six feet, and wide across the chest. Kalputa knew that he was looking for her, and she sprang to her feet and fled toward the gray-green forest on the far end of the island.

Because of the pain in her shoulder she had found the way difficult the minute she left the station. Many times during the long chill hour that comes just before dawn she had crouched among the thick tufts of cane-grass or beneath a yam bush, her head falling on her knees, too full of pain to go on.

Always, as she crouched in a small blue heap, a vague sort of fear came over her. For she could not help wondering what her people, to whom she was fleeing, would say and do to her when she told them that after enduring Captain Barker's abuse for two years she had at last revolted and run away.

Of all the people in her home village she feared most Old Lu the sorcerer. It was he who, for five sticks of traders' tobacco, had brought about her marriage with Captain Barker the day the captain walked down the white coral gravel of the village street, looking for a wife. Never did a Flenga Island woman revolt and run away when a white man abused her; always she submitted to her fate and said nothing. But not so with Kalputa.

At one time she had been happy with Captain Barker. That was after he had

sold his schooner and stocked a trading station on the island, with her as his wife and go-between or agent among the natives.

She watched the business grow in its fair way; wore blood-red hibiscus blossoms in her black hair, and a pearl-shell necklace to delight him; and gleefully clapped her tiny bronze hands when, at night on the veranda in the silver moonlight, he talked of taking her to Sydney some time and from there up to the States "to show her the world."

Her man-child came toward the end of that period. He lived only four weeks. They buried the thin little brown baby in the grove of paw-paw trees in the rear of the station.

One night before the rainy season set in, Captain Barker came through the lone grove and found Kalputa there, crying in the blue-gray twilight. He had been drinking, and immediately he broke into a paroxysm of rage, striking her in the face with his iron-hard fist. Then all her love for him went out like a candle in the wind.

After that life in the trading station changed. More than once Kalputa thought of running away—of going back either to the mission house at Suva, where she had studied for seven months, or to her people who lived in the village around by the forest. But she had endured Captain Barker until the night before.

When he insisted upon her drinking French rum with him, she said that rum made her sick and she wanted no more of it. Then he grew ugly and, in the struggle that followed, slashed her above the armpit with his Canario knife. She lay on the floor in the store-room until just before dawn.

And now, no matter what the consequences might be, she would not go back to him—not even if he came after her. She was positive of that.

The hush of noon was on all the village when Kalputa limped into the main street which lay beneath the burning sun like a wide river of white fire. On the edge of the village she stopped in front of a thatched-roof house built high in the air on long thin piles and looked about her.

It was the lonely hour of Flenga Island. There was not a sign of life. The villagers were either asleep in their brown houses or at rest in the shade of the forest. In the giant coconut-palms on either side of the street the leaves hung motionless. The native dogs slept in the dark shadows beneath the house; and the tame parrots and cockatoos had ceased their screaming in the windows and disappeared to drowse under the eaves.

No sounds came from the forest, while beneath the implacable sky the sea dazzled like a mirror. And in the tall white sails of the three schooners lying far out in the lagoon there was not a breath of wind.

AS KALPUTA turned to the verandaless house of her people, her face was all eyes and fear. She entered the glaring sandy yard and stopped at the foot of the bamboo ladder which reached to the low doorway of the house.

The next instant, afraid of what her people might say and do to her, she moved away, then stopped suddenly as she saw almost at the end of the street one house that was higher than any of the others. Above its door were carved birds and sharks, and on the very top of the roof was a skull whiter than the belly of a fish.

Kalputa knew that this was the house in which Old Lu the sorcerer lived, and it frightened her so, that she hastily turned back to the house of her people. She climbed the ladder and crawled in through the low doorway.

There was light enough in the house for Kalputa to look about her. At the first glance she saw that her people were not there. As she crawled across the flimsy flooring of palm-sheath and sat with her slender back to the wall, she told herself that they were, in all probability, at rest with the other villagers in the cool shade of the forest. She turned the pad on the wound above the armpit. Then she looked slowly about the lonely room.

The place was high and almost empty. Behind her was a window partly covered with overhanging thatch through which a soft light filtered. There was also a window beside the door. On the floor lay mats and big wooden sleeping pillows, and on the walls hung war spears and shields of a far-away time. A white cockatoo, looking ghostly in the dim light, drowsed on a beam above Kalputa.

Kalputa fastened her eyes on it for a minute or more, then lowered them to the doorway and saw hanging above the arch a tightly netted white string bag. It was half full and almost bursting.

Her brown bosom heaving, she crawled

across the floor and looked at the bag scrutinizingly. She touched it lightly with the tip of her tiny finger. Instantly something leaped in the bag, violently twisting itself over and over. Kalputa's eyes rounded with horror, and she sucked her lips against her teeth.

She dragged herself back to the wall. With her face pressed in her thin arms, she lay on the floor, sobbing piteously and shivering in every limb, like a fallen palm-leaf. She knew now that she was doomed—that, try as hard as she might, she could not run away from the "touch of death" in the bag as she had from Captain Barker. For the bag was a sorcerer's, and there was in the village but one person to whom it belonged.

Kalputa wished that she had hidden in the canefields or among the mangrove trees on the edge of the swamp until night. Then she could have crept down to the jetty and paddled across the lagoon to one of the trading schooners. She knew that she would not have found it difficult to hide among the copra and the bundles of sugar-cane until the schooner reached Suva.

Presently she began to wonder if she could run away from the "touch of death" in the bag. Maybe she had been wrong in thinking that she could not, she told herself. The next moment she asked a question: Why couldn't some sort of harm befall the "touch of death" and the one to whom it belonged?

But she remembered with a start that when noon came with its scorching white heat Old Lu the sorcerer carefully hung the charm-bag in the house he was nearest and went to bathe in the tar-black bottomless pool in the forest. She felt that Old Lu would be returning for the bag at any minute.

As she crawled to her feet and parted the overhanging thatch on the window, Kalputa heard the island waken from its midday nap. On the edge of the forest a cockatoo screeched, screeched, screeched. The men, women and little children returning from the bush chattered in a faint chorus. A dog stirring out from shelter somewhere down the village street barked. The leaves in the palm-tree heads rustled dryly. And. . . .

Kalputa héard a sound different from all the others. It made her drop to her hands and knees, afraid and shivering all over. Some one was scuttling up the ladder.

The next second Old Lu the sorcerer bolted in through the low door, like a rat. He was a small wiry old man with skin as brown and tough as leather and all shining with coconut-oil. His mouth was long and deep like a frog's and his sparse black hair was twisted into a mat on the very top of his head. Except for a scarlet loin-cloth, he wore no clothes. Crushed tightly in one long black-nailed claw was some betel-nut he had brought from the forest.

Kalputa, trembling with fear, watched him reach for the charm-bag. He squatted on a mat and opened the bag, tumbling the contents on to the floor.

Instantly the "touch of death" sprang almost to the ceiling and buried its mouth hungrily in the white breast of the sleeping cockatoo. The bird gave a wild screech and fluttered dizzily in a circle. Then it fell to the floor, breathing through its bill. In another minute it was dead.

With white jaws open, the "touch of death" came down among the quartz crystals, bits of carved wood, lizards' tails and odd-shaped stones, then leaped again. It was a thick black snake with yellow rings extending half-way up its back.

Kalputa screamed.

"Ooo!" exclaimed Old Lu the sorcerer, snatching up the reptile and dropping it into the bag. "Ooo! Ooo!"

He turned his black sparks of eyes and saw Kalputa crouching fearfully beneath the window. He recognized her immediately and broke into an ugly grin.

"Kalputa 'ere?" he asked in pidgin English, his voice growing loud and brassy. "What Kalputa wantum? Cap'n Barker 'ere?"

He frowned at her from under his sullen brow and slipped a clawful of betel-nut into his frog-mouth.

Kalputa made no answer, but watched Old Lu spit big mouthfuls of gory juice at a crack in the floor. Then she lowered her eyes to the charm-bag and saw a way of procuring his help.

"Kalputa go Suva tonight," she said, as she stared into the face of the sorcerer, rapidly constructing her daring scheme. "Capt'in Barker him have things at Suva. Him 'fraid boat capt'in no come bac' wi' things. Him say Kalputa, 'Kalputa, go Suva tonight. Bling bac' flenty things.' Him say things to bling.

"Then him say, 'Kalputa, find Old Lu. Him give Kalputa two charm-stone out bag. Maybe all time water big an' boat turn down. Maybe shark behin' boat when boat turn down. Shark him eat Kalputa. Boat no turn down when Kalputa have two charm-stone.'"

She watched Old Lu cram another chew of betel-nut into his cheek, and heard him rattle the stones in the bag.

"Old Lu savvy? Two stone!" Kalputa was certain that she would succeed in getting the charm-stones. "Capt'in Barker him give Old Lu flenty salt an' tobac'o. Savvy? Two stone, flenty salt an' tobac'o!"

For a minute or more Old Lu did not reply. He remembered painfully that while trying one morning at the station to get two more handfuls of salt before he would enter into a certain deal Captain Barker had kicked him off the veranda.

He was more than doubtful about the proposition now before him, and wanted to say "No savvee," but the thought of salt and tobacco was too good to relinquish from his mind for even a minute, especially when Captain Barker's wife assured him that they were his for two charm-stones.

"Old Lu savvee," he said at last, working two small white stones out of the bag. Then he scuttled across the floor.

"Two stone, flenty salt an' tobac'o!"

With a piece of burned wood he drew a dark circle on the floor, and laid the stones in the center of it. He crawled to the opposite side of the circle, whispering mysteriously in Melanesian. Then he erased the circle, picked up the stones he had charmed and turned to hand them to Kalputa who had watched the weird performance breathlessly.

SUDDENLY his face grew very dark, and he shot such a look of hate at Kalputa that she drew into the corner and crouched very low. He dropped the stones back into the bag, then turned his head to listen. Some one was treading heavily through the tinkling gravel of the village street. The next moment Old Lu was down the ladder into the yard.

When Kalputa crawled to the window beside the doorway and looked over the edge of it, she saw Captain Barker standing in the center of the white street with Old Lu the sorcerer. At the sight of Captain Barker she felt repulsion and fear, and wanted to turn away—to drag herself back into the corner and hide in the deep shadow. But she continued to watch him.

His shirt and wrinkled white ducks were covered with dust, and his leather-tanned face was perspiring. As he looked angrily first at the house and then at the forest behind the village, his eyes glittered like polished dark blue marbles.

His arms were not folded across his wide chest as was his habit of standing when talking to any one, but they hung at the sides of his huge body, their heavy fists doubled to strike Old Lu at any instant. He looked menacingly at the sorcerer, his lower lip dropping until it exposed teeth as white as a dog's.

Kalputa saw Old Lu gesticulating wildly. He waved his hands in a queer sort of a way and pointed momentarily to the farther end of the forest. His voice was loud enough for Kalputa to hear it.

"Kalputa no com' 'ere in mornin'. Kalputa go 'way to forest." Old Lu moved to one side of the street. "Old Lu savvee place Kalputa hide in forest. Cap'n Barker, give Old Lu ten stick tobac'o an' flenty salt. Then Old Lu show Cap'n Barker place Kalputa hide."

Kalputa listened for Captain Barker's reply. It was a quick glance at the houses on either side of the street, she saw. The next instant, as though determined to search every house, Captain Barker walked into the yard and stopped at the foot of the ladder.

Breathing heavily, Kalputa saw Captain Barker begin climbing the ladder. She now knew that she was doomed—that there was no way of escape. And, like an animal at bay, she was prepared to fight against going back to the trading station.

Suddenly she heard a fearful crash. She looked hurriedly and saw Captain Barker's heavy bulk spilling across the sand. The lower portion of the frail ladder had given away with him.

Captain Barker did not attempt to climb the ladder again, but hurried into the street, swearing in the language of a salt-water captain. He surveyed the houses once more, and noted leaning against each one a ladder as flimsy as the one which had just broken with him.

Kalputa heard Old Lu the sorcerer interrupt Captain Barker.

"Kalputa hide in forest," said Old Lu.

"Old Lu show Cap'n Barker place Kalputa hide. First give Old Lu ten stick tobac'o an' flenty salt."

Captain Barker regarded the sorcerer for a moment, and looked again at the houses with their frail ladders. Then he motioned Old Lu to follow him back to the trading station.

Her brown bosom heaving with relief, Kalputa watched them pass out of the village and strike across the canefields. She kept her eyes on them until they disappeared. Then she climbed down the ladder and hid in the deep-shadow pool beneath the house.

When sundown came to the island, with the smoke of the pleasant supper fires curling thin and blue above the deep thatched roofs of the village, Kalputa was still hiding beneath the house, waiting for night to come when all the island would be scarcely visible. It was very warm beneath the lonely house, and the wound above Kalputa's armpit pained again.

Her people had not yet returned to the house. Neither had Old Lu the sorcerer nor Captain Barker. As she looked across the lagoon at a trading schooner which would sail early the next morning, Kalputa told herself that Old Lu was either demanding more salt and tobacco or was leading Captain Barker cunningly about the forest before bringing him back to the village.

Suddenly she gave a low shocked cry.

A puff of wind, black and ominous, was hurling itself in from the wide expanse of the open sea. It drove straight across the lagoon into the village. Other puffs of wind followed, each one being stronger than the preceding. The sky turned lead-colored, then storm-black. The sea broke into a sickening swell, its spiteful waves snapping and biting at the lip of the beach.

In the lagoon the three schooners took off their light sails and shortened down to storm canvas. Suddenly, with a hiss like the "touch of death," the rain came, blotting out the canefields and the lagoon until they were a dark smear.

"Squall!" cried Kalputa.

She groped under the house, listening to the crash of the rain on the roof. She heard it beat down the big leaves of the palm-trees in front of the houses and, with the wind continuing to grow harder, fling the drinking-coconuts angrily to the ground.

"Squall all night maybe!" Kalputa exclaimed, groping farther under the house.

Within half an hour the squall was a monstrous screaming thing. It was impossible for Kalputa to hear the roar of the menacing surf; but between the lightning sheets which illuminated the island she saw the tremendous insane waves pounding upon the beach.

The wind frightened her most. She never dreamed that it could blow so hard. It blew from all parts of the island at the same time, she thought. It shook and tore on the long-legged house of her people, appalling her until she threw her thin arms about one of the house piles and clung in the dark, shivering in every limb. It screamed through the palm-tree heads and on across the fields, beating the long stalks of sugar-cane to the ground. There was nothing she could compare this wind with.

No longer was it a squall. It was a hurricane.

Kalputa now knew that Captain Barker had refused to give the salt and tobacco to Old Lu the sorcerer and that Old Lu in his anger had let loose the "touch of death." She also knew that the "touch of death" had called to the hurricane god.

Kalputa tried hard to think what to do, but the wind nearly maddened her.

Suddenly the house gave a wild lurch. The next moment the roof went crashing through the wet air. Kalputa sprang to her feet and ran staggering into the street.

The village was illuminated with lightning and the villagers were tumbling fearfully out of their houses. The wind caught some of them and whirled them away like tufts of cane-grass. Those who were quick enough climbed into the palm-trees. They tied themselves securely among the big leaves with long pieces of rope.

Many of the villagers were on the ground, holding to the bases of the trees and panting for breath. On either side of the street several houses had been torn from their foundations and whirled away.

Kalputa could snatch only one look with her wide-open frightened eyes. The next instant some one crashed into her, knocking her down. With great effort she buried her hands deeply in the coral gravel, and clung with her face close to the ground, fighting to hold her own.

Her eyes smarted and the wind almost strangled her. Her ears drummed so that she did not hear the crash of the trees and

the wails of human despair about her.

Suddenly she lost her hold. When she again tried to bury her hands in the gravel, she felt a native writhing and squirming beside her. In one of his hands were several pieces of rope.

Kalputa snatched the ropes and sprawled across the street toward the base of a coconut-tree. She clung there until the wind went down for several minutes. Then she clasped the trunk of the tree with her hands, pressed the soles of her feet against the bark and, being a Melanesian woman, perilously began to walk up the tree. At the top she tied herself securely among the windage.

When the wind again hit her tree, the tree did not sway or bend backward and forward, but stood almost stationary, vibrating like a piece of wire. The vibration made Kalputa dizzy, then sick. She expected the tree to snap at any moment. A tree across the street had just gone that way, throwing its occupants, two men and a woman, to the ground like ripe coconuts. Few trees could stand the strain of that hurricane very long.

Late that night the wind was unbelievable. It was a screaming fury. Kalputa's tree was loosening at the roots. There was no telling how much longer it could stand the strain.

When the rain again struck the village, Kalputa thought that the wind had dipped up all the water in the lagoon and hurled it across the canefields. The rain hit her back and shoulders like leaden pellets.

The tree swayed perilously as one of the roots tore loose. Kalputa doubled her body at the waist and clung tighter to the beaten-down leaves, sobbing. Again she wished something terrible would happen to the "touch of death" and Old Lu the sorcerer.

For she was weakening like the tree. Her strength was running from her faster than she had ever imagined it could.

It was the wind that was exhausting her. She could not endure its unceasing impact much longer.

And the rain . . . It would be a night-long tumbling wall of water. It would sink to the very roots of the tree and tear them to pieces. Surely her tree would fall in a few minutes.

But the tree did not fall. By midnight the hurricane lay with its backbone broken. Only a stiff breeze was blowing. The water wall lay crumbled in the village and the canefields. Except for the harsh animal-like groans of the villagers and the low crying of the sea, all was quiet.

Kalputa stirred uneasily among the leaves. She was weak and weary. Both body and brain ached. She began to cry, then stopped suddenly to see if she was hurt.

Her arm and shoulder were swollen considerably from the wound above the armpit.

As she listened to the sounds of grief about her, she felt very lonely. Once she thought of Captain Barker, wondering what the hurricane had done to him and the trading station and the village in the rear of it. She quickly dismissed him from her mind.

Presently she began to think of some one else. It was not about the "touch of death" or Old Lu the sorcerer. She was thinking of her thin little brown baby all alone in the grove of paw-paw trees in the rear of the station. She wished she could go to him. Again she started to cry.

Soon the breeze went down. Everything became dead calm. The stars came out. They looked like big pearls pinned to a piece of blue cloth. Somewhere down the street a dog splashed in the water, howling mournfully. Kalputa dropped her head to her arms until the first shimmer of dawn crept up over the island.

When she climbed down from the tree, she looked about her bewildered. The rain-filled street was cluttered with corpses. Some of the bodies lay half in the water and half out, battered and broken. Not a house was standing. Even the house of Old Lu, with all of its sorcery, was gone.

Some of the house piles remained upright, with natives clinging to them, wet and miserable. There was but little wreckage of the houses. The fingers of the wind had hurled practically all of it into the canefields or down upon the beach where it was sucked into the lagoon by the undertow. But one palm-tree out of every ten was spared. Two of these were wrecks, their windage shorn and their long trunks split half-way down.

THE sun was not yet up over the island when Kalputa found herself on the edge of a flooded field, looking for a way down to the jetty. The field was draining slowly. It would be several hours, maybe evening, before the field would be passable.

She remembered suddenly that there was another way. There was one big obstacle in it, however; it would take her too close to the trading station.

Back by the forest a path ran around to the other side of the island. She could follow this until she was almost directly behind the trading station. Then by walking along the dry edges of the field which lay perpendicular to the path she would reach the jetty.

Her chances of getting there were one out of a hundred. If Captain Barker or even any of the natives were to see her it would be absurd for her to think of reaching the mission house at Suva. After a short hesitation, she decided to take the risk.

It was while she was running along the dank weedy path that she suddenly screamed and jumped into the low shrubbery of the forest. As her fear was dispelled, she parted the rain-wet leaves and looked at the native lying in the path.

His ugly brown body was battered into formless flesh, and his face was laid open to the bone.

For the first time since running away from Captain Barker Kalputa laughed. She laughed because the dead native, after digging and clawing with his raw bleeding hands to keep from being whirled away, had lost in his struggle against the "touch of death" and the hurricane. Then she fled with swallow-swiftness, laughing at Old Lu the sorcerer lying in the path behind her.

Presently she stopped laughing. She began wondering what had happened to Captain Barker. Did he, like Old Lu, also lie on the edge of the wind-torn forest? She desired to know definitely. Why she wanted to know she could not have explained if she had tried.

When she left the path, stepping warily along the dry edges of the field, the sun was climbing up over the leaves of the paw-paw trees, shooting green and gold lights through them. She looked toward the grove and saw that the hurricane had demolished the trading station.

All that remained of it was a section of a wall and a portion of the veranda. Almost nothing was left of the village which had stood in the rear of the station, and only a few natives were alive. Most of the paw-paw trees had been blown away.

As Kalputa was turning to go, she saw Captain Barker's huge body lying in the grove.

Intuitively she knew that Captain Barker had been injured. How badly hurt he was she had no idea, but immediately wanted to know. If he was injured badly she need have no more fear of not succeeding in running away from Flenga Island that day, she assured herself. It was because of her desire to know definitely the extent of his injuries that she stood several minutes later looking at him.

Captain Barker lay on an improvised mat of palm leaves close to the grave of their little man-child, with a shattered bone protruding above the elbow of his left arm. The blood was running from a gash on the side of his thick neck. His puffed slits of eyes were closed and his lips were partly open. He was breathing with the greatest difficulty.

Kalputa studied him uneasily, then shifted her eyes to the little grave. When she again looked at him, his eyes were wide open, staring up at her piteously. He could not speak.

Kalputa looked at the lagoon, scanning it hurriedly. Out where the cream-white spray was leaping on the circling rim of coral four masts of a submerged schooner projected above the water. She saw nothing of the other vessels.

The next instant she did something which she did not wholly understand. She leaned over her husband and, with tears on her face, tenderly laid his broken arm across his chest. With a strip of her wind-torn skirt she bandaged his neck. Then she lowered her face until it was on his and kissed him. A moment later she gave a high metallic scream and fled down to the beach.

At the coral stone jetty she found a tiny outrigger canoe flung high up on the sand. She dragged it into the water, its outrigger keeping it upright. Then she looked about her for a paddle. She finally found one, a makeshift paddle, half buried in the sand. A few minutes later she began paddling toward the wide expanse of the open sea.

Crossing the lagoon was difficult. The water persisted in flinging the wreckage and corpses against the outrigger of the canoe. With the makeshift paddle she pushed away the wreckage. The blood sharks frightened her. They tore and devoured the corpses, causing her to breathe long

prayers to her shark god. The handle of the paddle became loose several times. Each time she was compelled to stop and rewrap the cord.

Then the white blaze of noon came. The heat was horrible. It scorched her back and shoulders. Her arm pained so badly that she had to change the pad on the wound. It was a long while before she finally shot out into the sea and drove the canoe toward Suva.

The sun was slipping behind the dark hill ranges when Kalputa climbed up on the damp green wharf at Suva and sped toward the tiny mission house standing in a clump of lemon bushes. On the cool palm-shaded verandas on either side of the long street Government officials and their families sat in loose white duck at little tables, eating their evening meal and laughing in low voices.

Kalputa ran swiftly, her breath coming in short broken gasps. She reached the mission house just as the vesper prayers were being said.

NIGHT had come again to Flenga Island. Except for the humming water on the coral reefs and the homeless wind beating in from the lonely sea, a dead calm was on all the island lying low and black like a whale asleep with its back out of the water. The yellow moon came up. It looked like a lamp in the hand of the hurricane god who was coming back to see all the damage he and the "touch of death" had done.

Suddenly the island calm was broken. Two long white objects shot into the lagoon and half-way across to the jetty. When they came to a stop, small boats began to skim shoreward.

A few minutes later the beach was a-swarm with people. Some of the men lugged big bundles of burying mats, while others carried boxes and clothing. They followed a woman who ran swiftly ahead of them.

"Capt'in Barker! Me here!" cried Kalputa, rushing into the grove of paw-paw trees. "Me here!"

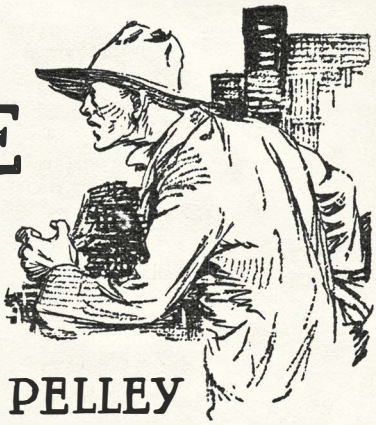
At the sound of her old watchword, "*Me here!*"—the watchword she had used in the trading station during the period theywere so happy—Captain Barker opened his eyes and stared vaguely at her.

She leaned over him in the yellow moonlight and slipped her thin arm beneath his head, raising it until it rested on her breast.

The missionaries and the Government officials entered the grove.

"Capt'in Barker!" Kalputa's arm tightened about his huge back as a look of understanding came into his eyes. "Capt'in Barker, Kalputa bling two boat an' flenty help from Suva."

A CASE at LAW



by WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "The World Next Door," "The Measure of a Man," etc.

THE young man, his slenderness accentuated by ravages of alcohol, sank upon a chair. Hoarsely, terrifiedly he whispered:

"I've killed her! I've killed her!"

"You haven't killed her," retorted the bronze-faced doctor, "but it won't be healthy for you to run away. They'll have you swingin' from a Montana telegraph-pole by sunset."

"It was booze did it!" wept the thoroughly sobered, thoroughly miserable young man.

"Booze! Where did you get booze? You're posted in every saloon in the county."

"Art give it to me. Art said I'd kept away from it so long, it was all right for me to have one little drink. Then I had to have another."

"He let you have them?"

"He let me have them! I went mad. I came home. I broke down the door. I struck her——"

The old doctor paused in his desperate work of keeping the pathetically damaged little wife in a world which had proved very dreary, very hard, very disappointing.

"Instead of running from this," advised the doctor, "steer your pony for Sago City and see Lawyer Sanders. He can help you because he can sympathize. He came out here five years ago, a drunken sot. Where you were weak, he was strong. He cured himself. For five years Art has sworn to 'get' him. Not enough of Sanders' family fortune has been dribbling into Art's till. This is a case at law. Go quick before it is lynch law. Meanwhile I'll do what I can for the wife!"

UP AND down the floor of a very modern lawyer's office in a very modern Montana, the handsome Henry Sanders strode with a chiseled frown.

"Did any one see Art give you this drink?"

"I guess not," the boy replied.

"Thought so," grunted Sanders. "That's Art's business—pulling down men who are trying to straighten up and be rid of the stuff."

"I've tried to straighten up," wailed the boy. "I've tried and I've tried."

Sanders forebore to lecture. Having been in Jimmy Baggs' place he knew that lecturing did no good. Instead, he took from his hip a beautiful gun. He crossed over and sat on the edge of the plateau desk.

"See this gun?" he asked. "It's the most wonderful gun in the world, boy. Why? It cured me of drink. Once back East I took too much. My friends called me the Human Sponge—not because I absorbed such quantities of the stuff, but because I submerged myself in it. They had to tear me off the bottom with a hook. I'm not joking, son. I was in a bad way.

"Finally I nearly killed a man. I had to disappear. My folks sent me West. Coming out I thought the thing over. I wanted something to take my mind off booze. I got it. On the train was a man who told me about the old days of the West. His tales put some ambition into me. I

would be the best shot in Montana. I bought this gun.

"When I felt the longing for a spree coming on I rode over the foot-hills and practised shooting with this gun. It took me out in the open—away from the chance to get the stuff — for shooting in town is popular no more in the sagebrush country. The thing was: it took my mind off booze and put it on something else till the fever passed. So I cured myself from the inside, instead of hearing lectures on Francis Willard. That's the way every man must cure himself, Jimmy—from the inside."

Sanders fondled the gun.

"I know you're the best shot in Montana," acknowledged the lad.

"When I'd controlled myself, I took up law, built up this practice. But Art still swears the day will come when he'll get me. Drink drives me mad the same as it does you, Jimmy, so I'll take your case because indirectly it's my own."

AT TWENTY minutes past eleven of the same Montana forenoon, a hatless, breathless, white-faced youth banged into the office of Sheriff Cole. He cried:

"All hell's broke loose down to Art's! There's a gun-fight on and it's a walloper!"

A dull, sullen roar came on the droning sunshine, punctuated by three sharp cracks. For the first time the grizzled old sheriff noted the street without, deserted.

"All Sago's down there. That roar is the crowd, excited!"

The sheriff lifted two ugly revolvers from a drawer of his desk. They were the guns of the Western yesteryear. It had been a long time since their wicked muzzles were aimed at men.

The side street connecting Main with the depot was sardined with humanity. Through it plowed the man of law, profanity and devastation behind him.

Midway of this street some one in the crowd shouted and the words struck the kindly old sheriff harder than a knotted fist crashed against his forehead:

"*Art's got Sanders!*"

From the open square at the end of the street, across the tracks to the one-storied saloon, was a bullet-swept area of destruction where a sizzling noon sun beat down.

The plate-glass front of this saloon had been shattered. Out of the low-studded door drifted smoke of exploded cartridges. Even as the sheriff paused, a man staggered out, clutched at the door-casing and fell on his face. Two more shots banged in the dark interior. Came a long, agonized cry, a plea for mercy, the tinkle of glass, another shot, the whole trailing off into inarticulate blubber.

"Sanders went to see Art about a case at law," cried a breathless barber. "One of my men was gettin' a drink and saw the whole thing. Art doped the soft drinks, little at a time. Sanders tumbled off the wagon without knowing it. Thought he was fixin' up the matter all sociable with Art and every drink was makin' him worse. Art got a good stiff whisky down him and the man's gone mad. He's shootin' Art into little pieces!"

SAGO CITY was in an uproar. Stores had been locked. Proprietors had bolted for the depot. A mob surged dangerously near the limit of the buildings' protection. Above the bedlam came the steady paragraphing of shots from the depths of the depot saloon.

One of these hit an arc lamp. The globe crashed in a thousand slivers on the asphalt. Another struck the window in a block on the far side the square and bored within to do what damage might later be discovered.

Something like a sob escaped the sheriff. He knew the heroic fight that Sanders had made to keep clear of the hellish saloonman's machinations. There was but one redeeming feature. Art might have made good his threat. But within those dark depths was being enacted a frightful retribution.

With a juggernaut of emotion, the old sheriff saw and understood. But there was his duty. The glint of the old fighting West leaped in his eye. He faced the danger of the situation with the battle-light on his features that will ever enshrine the land of the copper sage in song and story.

As he made the depot tracks in safety and headed for the door, an ashen-faced young man stumbled out. One arm hung useless. The hand of the other was held up tragically to keep the sheriff away.

"You ain't goin' in!" declared Jimmy Baggs in a terrible whisper.

"I'm an officer of the law," swore the sheriff. "I'm in office to stop murder—and I'll do it!"

One look at Jimmy Baggs told the sheriff the boy was hysterical.

"Of the law of Montana," mouthed the boy, "but not of the retribution bein' carried out in there. Art fed him 'fixed' drinks—same as he fed me—and he's brought his punishment on himself. Let him suffer!"

The sheriff paused, thinking dynamically.

The spectator who had been in the saloon when the shooting started, who had been hit and stumbled from the building, had drawn a gun in his flight. Dragging a damaged limb as he pulled himself out of danger, he left the weapon behind him on the sidewalk cinders. The boy saw it. In an instant it was in his twitching fingers.

As the sheriff debated, the boy aimed the gun. Only the sheriff's guardian angel held Jimmy's finger from tightening on the trigger.

"You're not goin' in!" the boy declared in a white whisper.

"Anybody else in there but Sanders and Art?"

"No."

The sheriff turned abruptly and walked back across the tracks.

It was not because he feared the gun the youngster aimed in his hand.

THE crowd saw a strange thing. Sheriff King Cole, bravest man left from a West which has gone, deliberately turned and struck a Sago City police officer who had summoned courage to charge where he saw the sheriff leading. Maybe it was a remark the officer made as he saw the sheriff returning.

But before explanations were in order, a white-clothed, bloody figure stumbled from the fatal door.

Before he could gain the safety of the corner, another flash belched in the dimness. A leg doubled under the punished barkeeper. He lurched and fell against the boy. The sheriff started back.

"Save me!" pleaded the man, his features purple with pain and terror.

"I will not!" retorted the sheriff. "He was pullin' himself from the gutter and you deliberately kicked him back in for his money!"

"I'm goin' to die!" moaned the liquor man in agony.

"You won't die," snarled the sheriff. "You're too dirty to die! Poor Sanders!"

Sanders had appeared at the door. The panic-stricken crowd left coverts and fled in terror at sight of him. He was reloading the big weapon with pink cylinders of destruction. He turned it, brought it to his hip, tightened on the trigger. The scarlet semaphore fell with a crash.

"I'm besh shot in Montana!" he sang. "Dirty shkunk—where ish he? Sherved poshted—Jimmy drinks!"

Came a blubber of abject terror from the man at the sheriff's feet.

"Oh, there you ish!" Sanders declared. "Wash me kill you!"

Then, paradoxical to relate, it was none other than Jimmy Baggs who shrieked:

"Gad—you mustn't! It's murder!" And Jimmy Baggs threw himself upon the wounded and helpless barkeeper's assailant.

AS A wonderful twilight descended on the Montana foothills that evening, Jimmy Baggs was sobbing by the bed of his living wife. In many pauses he told her the story.

He ended the tale by drawing forth Sanders' gun.

"He gave it to me. He said he liked the spirit I showed in keepin' him from perhaps killin' the barkeep. He was our worst enemy, Art was! But, oh Mayme, I simply couldn't see him shoot at a man that was down!"

They were alone in the room. The boy was on his knees.

"He gave it to me and told me to use it as he had done—to cure myself. When the fever for drink comes on I'm goin' over the foot-hills, far away, and do revolver practise till the hunger's worn off."

"Would poor Mr. Sanders really have shot the barkeeper?" asked the frail and broken woman, toying with the boy's hair.

"Mayme," he whispered, "swear by all that's holy you'll never tell. He shot the legs off Art in punishment. He wouldn't have gone further, anyhow. He dumped all those doped drinks in the sawdust. The spree was to blind Sago City from punishing him for takin' the law into his own hands. There wasn't any other law to 'get' Art for draggin' weak fellers down. The minute I stopped him from what I thought was goin' to be Art's murder, I saw it was all a brilliant piece of actin'—for you and me and the little stranger that's comin'!"

The TENT in the MALLEE

by HUGH S MILLER

A SOLITARY tree, with crooked trunk and limbs twisted and warped grotesquely as by pain, stood revealed in the breaking dawn. In the softer moonlight it had been a fantastic, silvered figure, solemnly brandishing ghostly arms and unobtrusively affecting the simple airs it could assume only when its deformities were mercifully veiled.

Beneath it stood a man. He was good to look upon, with cleanly molded face, hard, brown forearms, and broad chest crowding a gray shirt. Belted riding breeches hung loosely from a flat waist, and a bulging holster reposed snugly against his thigh. He paid no attention to the shifting colors in the east, the scampering blue haze, or the chorus of chattering birds in the mallee scrub behind—all heralds of the new day—but kept his eyes on a camp in the clearing at his feet.

The lifting light revealed no sign of life there—just the tent, almost new, but powdered with the fine dust of the Western Australian bush; at one side a shelter framework of poles and branches roofed with grass; a few articles of clothing on the tent's sloping side; and, hanging on a pole, a tin dish-pan which, as day came on, flashed mirror-like in the Summer breeze.

Higher rose the sun, and harder it pumped its heat in the man's face, but he made no movement other than to pull down his hat to shade his eyes. A long time he waited.

At last the flap of the tent was throw back and a young woman emerged. She had on something blue and silky, soft, fluttering and dainty, and because it was so much out of place, so hungry for the sunbeams and so scintillant and palpitating, it reminded the watcher of a jewel pulsing and glowing with life. In all that great flat monotony it was the only spot of color.

She moved timidly. Once when a rat scurried away before her and rustled through the scrub with a noise that sounded in the stillness like the crashing of trees, her hands went to her throat and she was on the point of going back to the tent.

She gathered a few twigs, laid them on the ashes of a dead fire, and made a half-hearted search for matches among the supplies under the grass shelter. Failing to find them, she took out a tin of meat—the man could see the gaudy red label—and looked at it with evident misgivings.

She was so like a child, so little like a grown woman, so much in need of help. The man swore gently under his breath.

But in that vast silence sound travels easily. She heard it, looked up, and turned to run, but the bush frowned on her and repelled her. In an agony of fear she shrank back against the tent and watched him.

So he came forward.

"Marian!" he said.

She stared at him incredulously.

"It's all right!" he protested. "Don't you know me?"

"Max! Is it really you? I—" Her voice broke and she began to laugh excitedly between wholesome sobs of relief. "I thought

you were in New York," she added, when she could speak coherently.

He smiled.

"I'm an old-timer here. I came—after—I came two years ago," he finished with a trace of embarrassment in his tone.

She gave him her hand warmly.

"This is a surprise. Oh, it is good to see you," she added fervently. "I can hardly believe it."

Her hair was done up carelessly with silken strands loose here and there like spun gold shimmering in the sunlight. The fear had gone out of her eyes and its place was taken by something which made them radiant and bewildering. He held her hand and stared at her in silence until a faint rosy blush crept up the graceful column of her neck and diffused over her face, deepening as gently as a flower unfolds, and her eyes fell shyly. Then he came to himself.

"You haven't eaten lately?"

"Yesterday morning." She made a rueful attempt to smile.

He built a fire and began at once to prepare a snack of food, and while he worked they chatted discreetly about impersonal things, such as the country, the natives, and the heat, but she forgot her discretion for a moment and said how much she wished she were back in New York, and he blundered on and said he cared little where he was, because he no longer had a place he called home.

"Don't let the tea stand all day," she said, pretending the tea was the most important thing in the world.

She put out her hand and touched him. It was just the faintest sort of touch on the arm, but the very gentleness of it stirred him. His heart beat wildly and he spilled the tea when he tried to pour it into a tin cup for her. She took it from him carefully, appearing not to notice his shaking hand, but she could not help the color mounting in her cheeks when he sat opposite and stared at her again without saying a word. At length she put the cup down and smiled brightly.

"You look better now," he said.

Four words, only, but they made him conscious again of how beautiful she was, and took him back through the years. Memories he thought were buried flashed before him. The mere effort of speaking took his attention from the dam that stemmed his feelings; a wave surged against a weak spot, broke through, widened the breach, and swept away his self-control as a Spring flood sweeps whatever is in its path. He sprang to his feet, trembling.

"You look—Oh, my God, Marian! I've tried to forget you. For two years. I can't forget you! Do you hear? I can't! I can't!"

She had been watching him with strange eyes. Now she came to him.

"Oh, Max!" she said reproachfully.

"I—I—" he said chokingly, miserably. "You don't know."

He stopped helplessly.

"Yes," she said dismally.

They were both silent a moment, as if they felt they had opened a gate which long had been sealed, and were entering a field where they must needs tread warily. When she spoke again it was in the manner of one who had decided that the time has come to cease dissembling.

"I know what you mean, Max," she went on. "I know what it means to be desperately unhappy, even to pray God to let me die, to give me peace. A year after I married him, we left home. We had to leave—no, don't stop me, please—and we came out here. I believe he thought this was the farthest corner of the earth. I thought he wanted to start all over again, so I came with him. It was not a matter of love with me, by that time; it was just pride. I think if a woman has pride—the silly, selfish kind—it will lead her to do almost anything. So we came and hid ourselves, but it couldn't have been worse. Gambling, drinking, everything that was evil, common, low, or disgusting."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"There was something at Wild Horse Rocks, and we fled. We came to this spot, and he left me. Think of it! Left me in the bush. He took the only horse we had." Her voice trailed away. "I don't even know where I am," she added bitterly.

She looked up at him, but surprised at his expression, her eyes fell again and the old look of fear returned.

"What is that?"

She pointed to a mark on the grip of his revolver, where it projected from the holster. Burned in the wood was a sinister broad arrow.

He turned away, unwilling to answer.

"You—a trooper!" she cried. "You want him—you!"

"There was that thing at Wild Horse Rocks," he said dully.

"Yes—yes!" she murmured breathlessly, "but why *you*?"

"I didn't know. Believe me, Marian, I didn't know who he was until I made Mason's, forty miles above here."

She walked away a few steps and stood leaning against a stunted tree, looking out into the bush. For what seemed a long time she neither spoke nor moved. High in the air a solitary crow cawed dejectedly.

The silence became oppressive, and the trooper nervously mopped his brow. Without turning, she said—

"Suppose you find him?"

"Yes?"

"What will you do?"

"Bring him in."

"But," she said slowly, "he will fight."

"Perhaps."

"You may—kill him?"

He made no answer.

When she came back to him her face was calm.

"Max," she said, putting her hands on his shoulders and looking up into his eyes, "take me away. Take me home."

"I—I—when I—" the trooper stammered painfully.

"No, Max, now!"

"I can't." He made a gesture of helplessness.

"Please!"

"Marian!"

"Take me out of this. I am a young woman. I want happiness. I haven't had it."

"I'll take you safely."

"I know—when you come back. But you may never come back. There is death out there."

The slight quiver of her hands, which still were on his shoulders, made his blood leap. Then, without warning, her head dropped on her outstretched arms and she shook with sobs. The trooper, his face white and strained, petted her with hungry hands and drew her to him so that her head rested on his shoulder.

"All my life," she said softly, "I felt I needed only to call you and you would come. And I called, I prayed, Max, and you came. Are you going to leave me, now?"

But the man said nothing.

"Max," she said, and hesitated, "you love me, don't you?" Her voice was steady, but a deep red flooded her cheeks.

He made a sound, and his big hands tightened until they hurt her.

"I can't say any more. But if you—" she struggled hard to say it—"if you go out there and—and if you kill him—you can hardly come back to me." She waited in fear for his answer.

"No," he said hoarsely.

"Please!" she cried piteously, and clung to him.

The trooper looked down into her face, at her eyes wet with tears, at her soft lips slightly parted, and resolutely, almost roughly, released her.

"God help me, if I should kiss you now."

He turned from her and walked up and down deep in thought.

"Back there," he said, pointing over his shoulder, "you will find Bluey, my camel. If I don't get back inside of three weeks, take all the water you can pack and head straight for the sunrise. You will come to a wagon trail. Turn on it and go south."

He took her hands and kissed them, and smiled. She stood where he left her, a slender, weary little figure in the ridiculous blue robe, and watched him go.

II

THE SUN rolled slowly over the great arch above, pouring its white fire down on the mallee scrub; this in turn beat it back until the air quivered. The flat plain swam uncertainly in the heat haze, and the distant line of the horizon reeled and tilted drunkenly.

Small black lizards darted from side to side or rested in the scanty shade of the low bushes, mouths open and sides beating as they panted; spiders, some of them four inches from toe to toe, slid noiselessly across the path, leaving behind curious markings like the trail of a child's toy; ants everywhere scrambled unwearyingly over scorching pebbles and parched twigs; and flies, fiercely hungry, attacked like hornets.

In all the plain, it seemed, the only sound was the soft tread of the trooper's feet in the red soil, varied by an occasional cough as the penetrating dust, kicked up by his shoes, eddied into his throat and choked him.

On into the night he went, the big southern moon paling the silent wastes and seeming to note with quiet surprise the single

figure plodding mile after mile through the tangled wilderness. It was late, very late, when he came to what he sought—the remains of the camp the other had made the night before. This, being the distance traveled when horse and man were fresh, told to a nicety the number of miles the other could make in a day. It would not be so far the second day, less the third, and much less the fourth. The horse would give out before the man. This was the way in the bush.

Nearby he made a fire and boiled the water for tea, then put more wood on the flames and moved away to eat his meal, watching idly for the scorpions the light would attract. They came, with awkward tails curled over their shining black bodies, scuttling across the ground with serious intentness. Supper over, he again added wood to the fire, moved back into the darkness, and went to sleep.

The next day about noon the country began to change, and by mid-afternoon he was fairly in the sandy desert.

A curious sense of unreality possessed him as he plowed through the flat sand or clambered up the sides of the dunes, or forced a passage through the greedy buck spinifex which caught and clung to his clothing with needle fingers, reluctant to let him go. Except for the painful actuality of weariness and the sting of the spinifex, he might, he thought, be but a figure in a painting hanging cozily on the wall of a Fifth Avenue gallery. The plaster of dust on his face cracked and little flakes fell when he smiled at the thought of a title for it—"A Study in One Color."

For one color and only one it was—a dry grayish-white which covered even the desert gums and low, scattered acacia bushes. It was only when he stumbled against a tussock of spinifex and shook it, so the thin curtain of dust slipped off, that the green of the plant showed through.

Always ahead were the footprints he followed—less plain here than in the soil of the mallee scrub—but still easily to be seen. Occasionally he saw that the man's steps had been strangely unsteady, and once his quick eye was caught by a glint a few yards away which led him to a discarded whisky flask. It was freshly emptied.

Early that evening he passed the place where the other had spent the second night, and pressed on three miles farther. At dawn he was on his way again, and all day forged ahead through deserts broken only by a salt expanse half a mile wide which stretched to right and left as far as the eye could reach. The salt crust carried his weight easily, but he saw that the horse had broken through at every step, brine spurting yards to each side, and, three-quarters of the way across, where it had floundered through a bog that must have taken nearly all its strength. The marks in the sand on the far side of the salt showed that both man and horse had rested.

The sun was still well up when he passed the spot where the other had made his third camp. He was beginning to feel the pace, and his tired limbs were clamoring for a halt, but he dared not tarry. The problem of finding water was of the utmost importance, and as he swung ceaselessly over the sand his aching eyes roved faithfully for some sign of an outcropping of rock which might mean a water-hole.

The man he was pursuing, having a horse to pack his supply, had a great advantage. The trooper had foreseen all this when he left his camel behind at the camp in the clearing, but he had no regrets, even when he reflected that in giving up Bluey he had imposed on himself a handicap that might cost his life. The only thing which caused him concern, despite his best efforts to take it philosophically, was his failure to pick up some trace of a hole or soak where he could replenish his store. When night came, and he found but a scant pint in his water bag, he sat and pondered gravely.

The next morning he drank very sparingly and during the day moistened his throat with a mouthful at a time. He reeled a little in the heat of the afternoon, and at night was in a state approaching collapse. Some of the water had gone by evaporation, with the result that there were but a few spoonfuls left, which he put away untouched.

After a fitful sleep he dragged himself to his feet, nibbled a bite of food and took a sip from the bag, and as soon as the light was strong enough to show the trail, struck out again across the desert.

The going now was terribly hard. His breath came through cracked lips with an audible hiss, and to keep his mind off his burning thirst he hit upon the plan of timing his steps to the sound. Frequently his head swam, or a haze came before his eyes and he had to stop, even to put a hand in

the print of the horse's hoof. These were the times when there seemed to be trails running in every direction.

At one of these stops, as he was kneeling in the sand, he became dimly conscious of a presence, and tried wearily to convince his exhausted brain it was not good for him to be light-headed. He argued it out patiently, but his brain refused to be convinced and with a sigh he raised his head preparatory to getting up.

Directly in his path was a grinning native, a typical aborigine, attired in a piece of string from which hung several dead lizards, and holding a long, spear-like stick. The trooper had seen many such. He gazed at the black stupidly, and, becoming satisfied that it was not a vision, opened his lips to speak. After several attempts he uttered the one word—

"Water."

The black stared blankly, so the trooper drew on his native vocabulary.

"*Nappa*," he said.

At this the black moved, and pointed with his right arm off into the desert.

"*Gilli nappa*—creek water—" he replied.

The trooper staggered to his feet.

"How far?" he asked, and then, realizing that the black could not understand, racked his brain for a native word. In this he failed, so he tried to convey his meaning by moving two fingers in the manner of a man walking, and looking at the native questioningly.

"*Yungun*," said the latter, pointing at the sky.

The trooper remembered this as the word for moon, and interpreted the gesture to mean he could make it by the time the moon rose. With a wave of the hand he started off. The black, still grinning, spoke again. The trooper caught one word, "*waaldi*," and nodded. He was to watch for the gum trees which grew along the watercourse and marked the channel where at times, perhaps thrice a year, the stream flowed. The rest of the year it was under the sand, to be obtained only by the simple process known as soak-sucking.

The knowledge that he was soon to have water raised his spirits and supported him for the first few miles, but after that the very real physical weariness obtruded, and not even the vision he conjured up of water to drink, water to bathe in, and water to throw away, could conquer it.

He turned his thoughts back to the woman he had left at the tent in the mallee scrub. He put out of his mind, as he had done persistently, the thought of what would happen to both of them if he should succeed in the mission he was bound by his service oath to perform—to bring back the man who had done "that thing at Wild Horse Rocks," which was the shooting of an inoffensive teamster in an argument over a little matter of freight rates. The teamster was recovering. It was not murder. And the penalty was only jail for a year or two. So he thought of her as he had last seen her in the blue robe, standing by the tent alone, helpless, a pitiful stranger in that uncharitable wilderness.

There came also the thought that inasmuch as it was on him she had placed all her hopes—for the present, at least, if not for the future—she probably was praying for his safety, and such being the way of things when a man is in the bush in the grip of thirst, he thought he saw her ahead waiting with hands outstretched. There would be water there. With eyes always on that speck of blue, he drove his numbed legs through the sand and the spinifex until they threatened to crumple at every step.

The sun had slipped unwillingly below the western rim when the blue robe faded away and he tottered beneath a stately white gum, its silvery bark hanging in streamers from its lofty trunk, and fell full length in the dry sand of the creek channel. Feverishly he tore at it with his fingers; then, a glimmer of sense returning, drew forth his sheath-knife and dug, scooping the sand away with both hands.

A foot and a half, and the sand taken out was slightly moist. Two feet, and water slowly welled into the bottom of the hole. He wet his lips, took a mouthful from the palm of his hand and swallowed it, and was momentarily delirious with joy. A little later he rolled aside and slept.

He awoke just as dawn was breaking, filled the water-bag, bathed and breakfasted. Two hours after sun-up he was back on the trail at the spot where he had left it the day before, pushing on through the same dismal country, in the same baking heat.

At noon of the next day he came on a horse lying in his path. It was not quite dead, so he mercifully put an end to its suffering. In the saddle-bags were some papers which he glanced through and tossed away.

A letter signed "Marian" he tore up without reading.

From this point it was man against man. He moved forward again on the long chase, reflecting ironically that unless Fate should intervene, the probabilities were that he would shortly be mentioned at headquarters for running down and bringing back from certain death a much-wanted prisoner—the one man in the world, if they only knew, who stood between him and complete happiness. It would be a bitter triumph.

Even as the thought took form, a twinge of memory reminded him how nearly Fate had settled it the other way when only the chance arrival of a roaming black had saved him. It brought a keen realization of the difficulties that still lay before him.

FOUR days later the white-hot sun stared curiously down on a brownish plain, hideous with gaunt skeletons of dead trees, seared here and there with deep dry fissures where the earth's skin had cracked, and spotted with eruptions of black rock, once molten, but now dry and scaly. Across it a haggard being, brittle lips drawn back and pasted tightly against lantern-like jaws, eyes rimmed with red, hands caked with blood and dust, was staggering painfully—stumbling, falling, crawling, rising again. From time to time he turned and looked back the way he had come. Behind him, a bare hundred yards, was another man. He, also, was staggering, but always he came on.

The first man caught at the scarred trunk of a dead tree and held himself up; then with strange guttural sounds of anger drew a revolver and aimed it along the side of the tree. His hand shook so violently he could hardly pull the trigger.

The bullet kicked up the dust under a small yellowish-green plant half way between him and the figure that peered at him over a low bush. He fired again. The bullet lost itself in the distance.

The other man drew his revolver from its holster, raised it and took aim, but did not fire. Instead, he lowered it uncertainly and returned it to its place. He stepped out from the bush and moved forward again, unsteadily, but as inexorable as the day of doom.

The man behind the tree watched him advance a few steps, and, as he came into plain view, fired a third time. He saw the spurt of dust twenty feet to the right, and in a panic of fear turned to run. For perhaps three paces he kept his balance. The revolver slipped from his hand as he crashed headlong in the dirt between a patch of pigweed and another small, yellowish-green plant, one of a number which had found footing there.

The second man, the trooper, knelt beside him and turned him over. He saw no gleam of recognition in the failing eyes, only the last embers of defiance.

"Come!" he said, but the other seemed not to hear.

The trooper raised him to his feet with difficulty and, still supporting him, turned and headed back along the trail. Foot by foot he struggled on. At every step the limp figure, shuffling at his side, became heavier. His head ached fearfully and a deadening pain grew in his lungs.

Presently he faltered. He fought desperately to regain his balance, but failed, and together they sank to the ground where the trooper lay for some time and rested.

By and by he stirred and again endeavored to lift the other man, but without success. He tried to rouse him, and, failing in this, grasped him by the shoulders and dragged him a few yards. His heel caught in something and he sat down, the heavy body falling across his foot. It was necessary for him to push the weight aside. He put out his hands to do this, and his eyes fell on a plant between his knees. It was the plant which had tripped him. It was small and yellowish-green in color.

Hesitatingly, like a man who reaches for something he fears is unreal, he felt of it. His fingers closed and came away with part of it. This he broke in his lap, revealing an interior dripping with watery juice.

He lifted it eagerly to his lips—and put it down untasted. He knew the plant. Once it had saved him when he was nearly gone, as it had saved other men who knew the secrets of the bush. That was when he went out from Gundockerta for a giant Cornishman who had killed his mate. It was a life-giving plant. Give it to a camel every other night, and the camel would need no water.

His first impulse was to thrust a piece between the lips of the man who lay before him, but something in his brain—an insistent voice that would not be silenced—stayed his hand. It told him he would be

a fool to use his bushcraft to save a wretch without whom the world would be much better off. It reminded him that he was supposed to only see the man brought to justice, and having established the truth of this observation it went on to suggest, that his prisoner would be more likely to meet a full measure of justice if he were permitted to die painlessly where he lay.

It is hard for a man to reason clearly when the ground he is sitting on persists in oscillating rhythmically and numerous intangible black spots of odd shapes and sizes, floating before his eyes, perform the most astonishing evolutions. The trooper tried hazily to weight the subject, while he choked back the craving in his throat. A drop of sweat, forming on his brow, trickled slowly down his cheek, leaving a channel in the coating of dust. A sharp-faced lizard darted to cover, but a flapping crow, settling on the top limb of a tree, watched him with patient interest.

He was still groping vaguely for assurance when a peculiar, strangling sound came to his ears. He glanced at the figure before him and saw a bubble on the dust-caked lips. The sight galvanized him into action, put an end to his indecision.

He jerked his foot free and reached with sure fingers for a piece of the moist plant, held it up and squeezed a few drops into the other's mouth. With a groan of dismay he watched a little stream run down the parched cheek and make a wet spot on the ground. Then with one hand he pried the teeth apart and with the other gripped the piece of plant until the drops fell fairly on the swollen tongue.

Time after time he did this, working frantically, until he had torn to pieces every plant within reach, but to no avail. Another bubble appeared on the lips and blew out faintly once—twice—and collapsed.

He put his hand on the breast of the figure, held it there a moment, and started to get up, but stopped and sank back in sudden distress. The sickening thought had come to him that if he had not delayed, if he had not wasted so many precious moments, he might have saved the other's life.

When he arose, he had in his hand a belt-buckle, a metal device of distinctive design. He swayed uncertainly and trod on some shreds of the yellowish-green plant, wet and glistening in the sun. He stared at them and fumbled with the collar of his shirt as if it choked him, then looked at the lifeless form outstretched before him.

"I didn't mean to do it," he said slowly. "I'm sorry it happened that way. I meant to give you an even break. The best I can do is give it to you now." With abrupt violence he ground the shreds of plant to a pulp beneath his heel, and, with eyes neither to right nor left, but always on the footprints in the dirt, turned and hobbled back along the trail.

Once he changed his course. This was after a halt, during which he leaned against a wreck of a tree and tried to think. When he resumed his journey he bore away to the right with the idea that somewhere in that direction he might cut into the water-bed he had visited so many days before.

The face of the country changed slightly as he toiled slowly on. There was more salt bush, an occasional pinnacled ant-hill, and once in a while a low, bedraggled ti-tree. There were also—and he winced with pain as he recognized them—a few small, yellowish-green plants. As time wore on there were more of them. They beckoned to him, danced, sparkled, called, and tripped him. He fell before one of them and reached out to it, tore it to pieces in a frenzy, and wet his hands and arms with the juice; but, as he raised it toward his lips, from somewhere back in his muddled brain came a picture of a shell of a man lying at his feet.

Cursing horribly, he rose again and limped ahead. He did not stop for food, for rest, or for thought. So far as his mind operated rationally it established and maintained but one idea—that the nearest known water was in the sandy channel of the dry creek, and he must reach it.

As he slouched along in the terrible heat, in the dust and the glare, his fancy brought back to him the lofty white gum and beneath it the hole he had burrowed in the sand; the first blessed sensation of moisture on his eager fingers; the ecstasy with which he watched the drops ooze out and collect in a cloudy little pool; the glorious relief as it dribbled down his throat; the thrill in his veins as he splashed it and swabbed it on his arms and face. The recollection held him up when he should have fallen, raised him when he stumbled, kept him alive when he should have perished.

The sun went down and the darkness that preceded the moon's coming up settled

on the plain. The crows and other birds ceased their petulant clamor, the lizards their rustling through the bushes. And a great silence fell around him.

His mind now was in a stupor, his imagination stilled, and his eyes unseeing. Only the inner, unconscious something that lives when all else is dead drove his numbed and tottering legs. Perhaps it sensed what he could not see and bent his steps accordingly; perhaps it was mere chance. For, just as the moon's glowing edge lifted above a hummock of rock, and while it was still so dark that everything ahead was an indistinguishable mass of black, he ricocheted off a twisted tree trunk and bumped into a mound that was soft and hairy.

THE MOUND moved, and from somewhere within it came an ear-splitting, discordant roar of protest that rent the peaceful night. But it was a sweet sound. Even in the sleep of exhaustion that was settling over him, he knew it for what it was—the bellow of a cow camel awakened rudely from well-earned slumber. He had stumbled on the camp of an Afghan camel train, one of those silent caravans which alone had regular routes through the bush.

From somewhere a man came running, sputtering profanely in a strange language which changed to a grunt of surprise as he tripped over the prone figure of the trooper and brought up against the tree. His cry brought others. They carried the trooper through a little group of the soft and hairy mounds which now were elevated on spider-like props and loomed weirdly in the slowly lifting light, and deposited him by the smoldering white embers of a mulga fire. They gave him water, a few drops at a time.

After a while he opened his eyes and by the light of the fire, now replenished, took in the details of the swarthy faces, topped by turbans, which bent over him. One of the men, his dark features bordered with a scanty white beard and sparse white temples, showed his teeth in a friendly grin.

"Pretty close, hey?" he said.

A gleam in the trooper's face answered him.

They let him sleep where he lay. It was a heavy, death-like sleep without a quiver, which lasted until the camp was astir in the freshness of the early morning. When he raised himself on his elbow, dirty, stiff and sore, but strong again, the men of the train were at their prayers, heads to the sun. They gave him food—hot, tough, but sustaining damper, jam and tea. Then he bathed, Afghan style, squatting on his haunches and pouring the water on his body from a tin cup.

The camels were packed and up in line for the start when the leader of the train thought of something. He pointed to a small, yellowish-green plant and with his finger indicated others growing everywhere, stretching away into the distance.

"Parakeelia," he said. "See?" He stooped and broke off a part of it, showing the trooper the fresh interior dripping with moisture. "You not long here, hey? Nex' time—no die. Eat him. It is not good for po-leece not to know thees, hey?"

The trooper, his face expressionless, made no answer. Amid a chorus of hoarse cries they moved off, and for hours there was no sound but the soft *pad pad* of the spongy-footed camels, their humps rocking and swaying above the dust-curtained shrubs. Several days later the trooper left the train and with springy tread cut across a salt bush flat into the mallee scrub.

SHE WAS waiting.

As the crackling and rustling of his approach sounded in the still air from the bush that encircled her, she backed slowly against the tent, palms flat on its canvas and body tense, like a woman at bay.

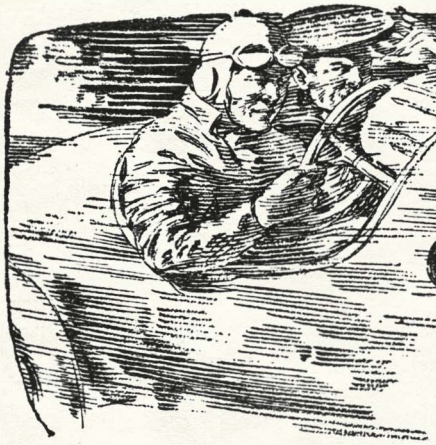
His head appeared, and a little sob escaped her. Her eyes played about him, ahead, beside, behind; her breath came in jerks; her heart pounded. When he broke through into the clearing—alone—her body relaxed and she leaned against the tent. She watched him stride across to her.

He stopped and dropped his pack and water-bag on the ground, then reached in his pocket and offered her a piece of metal—a belt buckle. She took it, gazed at it a moment, then let it fall.

"Out there," he said, pointing with his thumb. "Thirst."

She looked in his eyes and appeared to be satisfied with what she saw there.

"Dear," she said simply, "let us go home."



SALT WATER *and* GASOLINE

by

ROY P. CHURCHILL

Author of "Another Cup Winner," "The Hunch," etc.

MOST men's hobbies run as wide of their daily business as a patent medicine ad. does of the truth, but on the battle-boat *Boston*, "Bud" Cantril's pet diversion took first prize even over "Speed" Murphy, the starboard coxswain, who could guess a man's weight from his looks, and "Grinder" Kelly, the chief quartermaster, who had a ditty box full of lodge buttons, for Bud was sprung toward automobiles, and if there is one thing a sailor in the good old U. S. N. is far removed from, it is that.

Old Danny Wallace, pacing the spotlessly scrubbed deck of a Saturday afternoon, after the smoking lamp was lighted, and the ship had settled down for its half-holiday, paused a moment to look over Bud's shoulder at his collection of automobile catalogs. Old Danny had a hobby, too, and strange to say, it was the Service itself. He looked with little favor upon things which took other men's fancies too far away, for old Danny loved the sea and the fighting ships, and in the strength of his hale sixty years refused to have the retirement on pension which could be his for the asking.

Bud stroked one of the skeleton frames marked "chassis" with his finger, and pulled up a ditty box with the other hand for Danny to sit by him.

"Look at the lines of that, Danny," he said enthusiastically.

Danny sighed and sat down.

"She's too light for a gun carriage," he said, "too many fixin's to go wrong."

"That car," said Bud impulsively, "can do anything. Why, one like it has just busted the world's record for speed."

"Speed!" said Danny disgustedly. "Far as that goes, what's the matter with a torpedo boat for speed? Or a twelve-inch shell, flyin' like a big black star through the center of a target?"

"That does give you a little thrill," said Bud, "but listen to me, Danny. To drive a big car like this in a race would be like riding that shell!"

"Maybe it would," said Danny, "but give me a good race-boat's crew, with backs bendin' and muscles swellin', instead of any wood-and-iron contraption that sounds like somebody had lifted off the lid of the hot place, and smells like a mixture of the sick bay and the bilges."

"Did you ever ride in one?" asked Bud suddenly.

"No," said Danny, "I'd ruther walk. Besides that, what's the use? I might get to likin' it same as you do, and walkin' would come harder."

"All right," said Bud. "Some of these days I'm going to have one of these things for myself, and I'll take you for your first ride."

"I'll go with you," said Danny, "but I tell you, Bud, I hope we don't get the chance, for your thoughts are far enough out of the Service, as it is."

"Well, I like the Service," said Bud defensively, "but a fellow's got to have a little excitement, something to take his mind off the drills and the scrub-and-wash clothes. There goes the bugle for setting-up exercises now, and the messenger to strike two bells. If I was ashore for a week's blow

and somebody struck two bells, I'd commence flapping my arms."

"It's good for you," said Danny soberly.

"It certainly is," said Bud, once more running his hand over the picture of the automobile before he stowed it away in his ditty box.

Although Danny Wallace did not know it, his advice to Bud Cantril was well timed, for Bud was soon to attain that milestone of adolescence and inexperience, his twenty-first birthday, and with it would come an inheritance of five thousand dollars and a month's furlough.

The morning Bud started away, Danny was the last to shake hands with him at the port gangway.

"Look out for yourself," he said, "and don't go breakin' your neck in any landsman's rig on wheels."

Bud smiled happily. "I'm going to get one, Danny."

"To be *sure*," said the other sagely. "Go on and have your fling at it, but we'll be needin' you to point the twelves again for the fall practise."

"To the discard with the big sulky brutes," he said. "I want something with more pep to it."

Danny squeezed his hand a little harder, slapped him on the back with his free hand, and shoved him toward the gangway.

"Go and get it out of your system," he growled. "It'll do you good."

DURING the month that followed, Danny had a single post-card from Bud Cantril. The picture was of a low-hung skeleton-framed automobile, and underneath in Bud's scrawl were the words, "This is some boat, and she's mine." Danny countered with a picture of the new double-turreted *Montana* taking a green sea over the bow on her trial trip, and there the correspondence ended, while Bud's furlough ran to the last week and then to the last day without his reporting aboard. Two days later the captain sent for Danny and asked him about his friend.

"Cantril is two days overtime," he said. "How do you account for it, Danny? The boy has a clean record, and I don't want to see him go wrong. Besides that, he is the best gun-pointer in the forward division, and we are out for the fleet trophy this year. If you know where he is, take a week off and go after him."

Danny Wallace nodded briskly and ran his long sinewy hand through his short, slightly curling gray hair.

"I'll be ready by eight bells," he said.

"Good," said the captain. "Use any means you think best."

"What that boy needs," said Danny to himself as he went forward to prepare for the trip, "is a little seawater mixed with his gasoline. I've heard it's like pitchin' a marlin'-spike into the gears."

Danny Wallace had neither the time nor the inclination to change his uniform for civilian clothes, and when he stepped off the train a day later, he was far enough away from a seaport town for his uniform to be conspicuous. Without asking for it the information that he wanted was volunteered by the hotel clerk who gave him a room.

"Down for the race, huh?" chattered the obliging young man, as he took a sizable chunk out of the gold piece Danny tendered in payment, since the only baggage the sailor carried was a tooth-brush in the lining of his flat cap, and a handful of gold pieces strapped around his leg. "Guess you've brought a little chunk of money from the old ship?"

Danny smiled cautiously, that kind of a smile which can be turned into either yes or no, and the young man went glibly on.

"Well, it's going to be some race. The talent pick Jack Hewitt to win. He's driving that Sunbeam freak, but some of the boys say he's afraid to let her out on a circular track like ours. If anything does happen to him, there's Bobby Dutro in the Merz, and Harding in the Harmon. That sailor friend of yours has a new pea-green bus which he calls the Crackler. Some say it's the speediest proposition that ever rolled over a track. Take it all round, it's going to be a mad little whirl, and for somebody with the price, I know where there's a pass good for the course, the pits and the grand-stand."

"I guess you needn't go no further," said Danny, producing another gold piece. "When do they break the flag?"

"Two-thirty," said the other, "but I'd get there early. Here's your pasteboard."

Danny found Bud Cantril sitting on a bench near where half a dozen men in oil-splashed overalls were crawling over and under and around a gaunt high-wheeled machine painted a pea-green war color with

an enormous figure eight on its radiator. The boy's glad start of surprise and welcome, as he caught sight of Danny's familiar figure, warmed the older man's heart.

"What are you doing here, you old spirit of the briny deep?" he said delightedly.

"I had a week off, and I thought I'd like to look you up," said Danny. "They've been raisin' your rate pretty regular, haven't they? A month or two ago you was alookin' at one of these things in a book, and now they tell me, Bud, that you're agoin' to give these old heads a run for the money."

"I'm goin' to try," said Bud. "These old-timers say that I caught the feel of these big race cars naturally without much practise, and being young at the game with no smash-ups yet my nerve is good."

"Go on and win for the Navy," urged Danny heartily. "Everybody is callin' you the 'Sailor,' and it'd be a new kind of trophy for the old ship to pull down."

"Which reminds me," said Bud, "that my furlough is up. Maybe that's why you came down?"

"That can wait," said Danny. "What you want to do now is to win this race. After that's over we can see about the other."

"It's worried me," said Bud, "for I knew I was overdue a couple of days, but with you here representing the question and laying it aside for the day, I can go at this race with a free mind. How's it to take you for that promised little spin around the track? The car is all ready, and I'd like to get the feel of her again."

"We're sailors in a strange land," said Danny, "and I'm here to help, and not hinder."

"Climb aboard, then," said Bud. "I want you to tell me how it appeals to you."

Danny sat tight and watched Bud, as several very unusual things happened. First the big car at the spin of a crank began to explode like an automatic one-pounder almost directly under him. Then Bud pressed down a pedal, pulled a lever into place, and they began to roll slowly out upon the white, smooth course. Half a minute more and the engine had settled into a muffled roar, and the trees and telegraph-poles along the course became a blurred, indistinct line. Danny took his flat cap off and secured it between his knees, and Bud nodded toward the speed indicator.

Danny set his teeth and held on. The figure "sixty" wiggled and jumped on the dial, and as he watched it, it climbed up to seventy. His companion leaned forward a little over the wheel. Then Danny caught the thrill of it, and smiled at Bud as the figure became seventy-five, and the big car throbbed and swayed, and the wind tore at him like clutching fingers. Then the speed slacked to sixty, to fifty, and Danny shouted questioningly—

"What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing," said Bud. "We're back. Want another round?"

Danny shook his head.

"Save it for the race," he said, and as the boy continued to look at him he added, "I don't blame you, it's got anything I know beat a cable's length for makin' old blood over!"

"I knew you'd like it," said Bud. "Come on over and meet the mechanician. He's a wonder, and taught me all I know about racing."

"I don't know the rate," said Danny. "What does he do?"

"Everything," said Bud. "He's the chief engineer of the boat. He rides with me, and keeps her oiled, and all the cylinders working."

A moment later Danny had accepted unhesitatingly the oil-streaked hand of a wiry little man with gray hair, and was looking steadily into a pair of big brown eyes as alert and all-seeing as his own.

"This is 'Pop' Hurley," said Bud, "and if we get in the money, it will be because of him."

Hurley waved the remark aside courteously, and continued looking at Danny Wallace.

"I'm glad you came down," he said. "A fellow likes to have his friends around him in a time like this."

"I wish more of the boys were here," said Danny. "As it is, I'll do my best to represent the old ship. Just remember that there's one old sailor up there on the benches who'll do all the rootin' he's able."

BY THE time Danny was seated, the big green car with Bud and Pop Hurley rolled out upon the track and sped away for a final tryout. Danny watched for its return, and waving frantically, was rewarded by an answering wave from Bud as the car returned. As he sat

down a bright green parasol flipped his flat cap from his head and sent it spinning to the seats below where it was retrieved by a popcorn vender.

"Please excuse me," said a pleasant girlish voice, "but I was so afraid they wouldn't see me, and the handle slipped."

Danny, slightly flushed with so much notice, turned to meet a trim young lady with a pair of smiling dark eyes which reminded him of Pop Hurley's.

"Do you want Number 8 to win?" asked the girl.

"By all means," said Danny, heartily. "The driver is a sailor off my own ship."

"And my dad is the mechanician," added the girl.

"Then you must know Bud," said Danny, "and I've just met your father. My name's Danny Wallace. If you're goin' to sit near me, won't you tell me about the race when it starts? It's all so new to an old-timer like me."

"I'd love to," agreed the girl, smiling at Danny so friendly that it made him feel less like a stranger in a strange land. "There they go lining up now. Number 8 is the third from the outside. They're waiting for Hinckle, who is coming up on the inside into position, and as soon as he gets into line, they'll go."

"They're off!" shouted Danny half a minute later, as with a rasp of gears and a roar from the unmuffled engines the big cars leaped forward like so many great, springing beasts.

"Good work," exclaimed Ruth rising from the seat in her excitement, and following the cars with her eyes.

Danny shook his head.

"The other fellows all got the start on 'em."

"What of it?" challenged the girl, turning again to Danny. "It breaks things loose to start so fast. This is going to be a long grind, and our car didn't run the chance of springing anything on the start."

Danny merely nodded in reply. The girl was so flushed and pretty in her excitement that it did him good to look at her.

Closely bunched, the cars sped up the stretch, slued around the curve out of sight, and the noise of their exhaust became lost in the enveloping clamor of the watching thousands.

"I'm a lubber at this kind of racin'," apologized Danny Wallace. "I don't even know how many times they go round. If it was a boat race now——"

"Then I'll be the instructor," laughed Ruth. "The track is three miles long, and they make fifty rounds. The game is to keep the cars going as fast as possible without accident. Here comes Harding now in Number 4. He's a spurter, and usually leads at first. He drives with everything he has all the time, burns up tires, skids on the turns, and keeps going as near like that as he can during the whole race."

"He ought to win, then," decided Danny.

Ruth shook her head disapprovingly.

"It's too dangerous," she explained. "And besides, he loses a lot of time changing tires and replacing broken parts. Bud wants to drive like that, but dad won't let him, and holds him back all the time. Most of the winning drivers stay just inside the danger limit and keep their cars going instead of having them in the pits."

"That must be why Bud called your father 'the chief engineer.' He knows all about what the car is doin', and tells Bud when to speed up and when to slow down?"

"Dad's a fine old dad," praised Ruth. "They work together better all the time and everybody says they are due to win a lot of races."

"They certainly have a champion in you," said Danny.

But this leading question was ignored by the girl, who only let Danny see one of her dimples as she smiled and bowed to an acquaintance in the stand.

On the tenth round Harding had gained almost a lap and came up behind the other cars in the stretch before the grand stand at a terrific pace.

"He's goin' to pass 'em," exclaimed Danny, and as he spoke the racing car shot like a gray streak around the others and made the turn fifty yards in front. "It may be bad seamanship, Miss Ruth, but it certainly is racin'," said the old sailor, settling back into his seat. "Why don't some of that other bunch get out and go after him?"

Ruth smiled at Danny's impatience.

"Just you wait," she said. "One lap ahead at this stage of the race gets nothing but applause from the grand-stand."

Several more laps passed with Harding steadily gaining before any of the drivers took notice. Hewitt in the Sunbeam and Number 6 opened up and drew away at top

speed after the leader. Old Danny fidgeted on the rough board seat and looked at the girl questioningly, for Bud and Pop Hurley were with the last four cars.

Ruth shook her head at Danny disapprovingly.

"Plenty of time yet," she smiled at him. "They have started too early. By all the rules of the game the winner is in that last four. They are speeding up gradually, and will be in at the finish fast enough to make you love them."

"It sounds all right," said Danny, a little doubtfully, "and I guess you know. But in a boat race a length at the start is a length on the end, just the same."

"You'll see," encouraged the girl. "Here comes Number 6 now with a cylinder missing. Look how she is dropping back."

"Put on too much sail and sprung something," muttered Danny. "Yet I kinder like it."

"They are due for the pit, and will lose all they have gained. Here comes Harding! It does thrill you to see him go. But look at the tatters on his rear tires. He will loose one or both of them pretty soon."

Almost as she spoke one of the tires blew up, and the big racing car slued from side to side in a frantic endeavor to crash into the curb on one side or the other. Danny realized that the girl's strong fingers were gripping into his arm and that her face had suddenly turned white.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said, "but if that had happened while he was passing the others it might have meant trouble. As it is, everything is safe, and he will lose half a lap changing tires. I'm always a little nervous at the first blowout."

"I'm beginnin' to get the fine points of this thing," asserted Danny more cheerfully. "Here comes Bud and your dad, still pluggin' along, a little faster every round, which reminds me that I lost a boat race once on account of a big Swede usin' too much muscle and bustin' an oar in the middle of a race."

In the next few minutes, Number 6 who had spurted too early dropped out with engine trouble, and one of the cars which had played a waiting game could stand the excitement no longer, or else thought the time was right, and spurted ahead for two laps, only to crack a cylinder and withdraw; Harding burned up another tire but still led by more than a lap, while Bud and Pop Hurley had drawn very slightly ahead of the trailers.

"They will race from now on," announced the girl, her cheeks glowing and her eyes alight with excitement. "Bud and dad will go after the leaders. Not all at once, but little by little, a few hundred yards each lap."

VERY carefully under the guidance of Pop Hurley, Bud commenced to speed up his car. Dutro in the Merz who so far had been content to play back with the trailers, took up the challenge and followed. Hewitt in the Sunbeam was half a lap ahead of them when they started, and Harding a full lap ahead of him. Up to this time Hewitt had driven a careful race with his long-bodied Sunbeam, except for the one spurt which put him half a lap ahead, easing her up on the turns and crowding on everything in the straightaways.

When Dutro and Bud started after him and began to gain, he realized that to hold his position he must give his car more speed all the time. For two rounds he made the turns safely at top speed, then as he came roaring up the stretch and began to turn, his long-bodied car skidded across the course, struck the curb and smashed the right rear wheel.

Hewitt and his mechanician were thrown clear and struck the drooping branches of a small tree, but the car turned over and over and went out of the race for good. The girl turned her face away as the smash came, and her hand caught Danny's arm again.

"I think it's all right now," he said reassuringly. "They're signalling something."

"'Nobody hurt,'" read Ruth from the racing code signals. "But that was a close one, wasn't it? Dad says that big car is built too long except for a straight course."

"If the race was a little longer," said Danny, "there wouldn't be anybody left. I wonder who's due next?"

"Nobody knows," answered Ruth, tucking up a wisp of hair under her small hat and trying to steady her voice, "but Harding has been driving the most recklessly. With him out the race would lie between our car and Dutro in the Merz, who is hanging to their wheels like a shadow."

With five more laps to go the two pursuing cars had cut down Harding's lead half a lap, and as Bud and Pop Hurley shot by

the grand-stand the girl turned to Danny Wallace with eyes sparkling.

"Listen at her go!" she cried. "Not a single false note."

"She is runnin' good," agreed Danny, "but you ought to see a torpedo boat hittin' the high places with a white crest at the bow and a whirlpool at the stern. These make a noise like a dozen pneumatic riveters on our old ship's sides when she's in dry dock."

"I love it," defended the girl. "What you call noise is the music of a perfect machine."

"Oh, I feel it too," admitted Dan, "and here they come again, gainin' on every round. This is the part of a race that gets under my old skin. I want to get up and shout or blow a horn. I knew a feller once that used to pull out his hair one at a time and recite poetry. But not me. I like to tie down the whistle cord and let her rip."

By this time Ruth had fully regained her composure.

"They are asking for tires," she explained as Pop Hurley extended his arms in signals as they sped by the pits. "The ones they have are twenty rounds old and Dad is afraid of a blowout near the end of the race."

The delay in changing tires cost Bud and Pop Hurley their position in the race, and when they rode out on the course again they were barely in front of the other two, and almost a lap behind. But on the next round the wisdom of Pop Hurley's change of tires became apparent, for both the leaders lost theirs and had to stop for a change. Then with only two more laps to go the three cars were almost abreast.

Bud and Pop Hurley gained a slight lead in the beginning because their car was already going at full speed, while Dutro and Harding could not at once get their cars going. This gave them a fifty-yard advantage.

"It will be speed from now on," said Ruth. "Everything the car can make, and all of the nerve that the drivers have. I'd rather a race would not end this way. The whirlwind finishes are always dangerous."

Speeding up the stretch, desperately determined to keep the fifty-yard lead, and if possible to improve it, Bud and Pop Hurley came up behind the last two cars in the race, both plugging along and having a little race of their own for fourth place. Just as they were ready to pass on the outside, the inside car threw a tire and swerved toward the other which dodged outward toward the curb and closed the course on that side.

Bud put the wheel over a little and attempted to dart by on the other side, but the dodging car in front of them wavered back again to the center of the track, and to avoid a collision Bud had to shut off the gas and use the brake. Before Bud and Pop Hurley could get out of the pocket, Dutro and Harding coming up behind at unchecked speed picked an open space at the outside and passed them.

"It looks bad," deplored the girl. "If that car had only stayed out of the way!"

"Things happen mighty fast in this game," comforted Danny Wallace, "and if I know anything about Bud Cantril this is agoin' to make him a hard boy to beat. This is goin' to be a fightin' finish to the very end," he continued wistfully. "I wonder if I could make it to the other side in time to see 'em come down the back-stretch on the last round."

"You'd have to hurry," answered Ruth. "I'm afraid I can't get through the crowd myself, so you go on and I'll stay here."

The truth of the matter was that Danny Wallace could not sit still any longer. The race held so much excitement that he had to be up and doing. Working and pushing himself through the crowd he ran quickly to the opposite side of the course in the middle of the back-stretch, just as the three contending cars came hurtling past in a cloud of dust and a roar of laboring engines which was almost, but not quite, lost in the shouts of the watching people who waved and yelled from trees and telegraph-poles, and surged and fought for every inch of the way around the oil-splotched track.

It is true of most racing cars that are in perfect order and warmed up, that they will go faster than their drivers have the nerve to send them. Dutro and Harding were seasoned drivers with years of experience behind them, and did not lack in nerve. Also they were out to win the race, but they slowed a little on the curves for safety's sake, while the young sailor refused to shut down, and took the risk of a spill for the sake of more speed. When they passed the grand-stand on the last round he was only a few feet behind, and still crowding the car to its maximum speed.

"HE'S going to pass them," breathed Ruth joyously, and wished that Danny were with her to see Number 8 creep slowly up abreast of the other two and start to nose out to the front. This challenge both drivers took up at once, always willing to sacrifice safety if necessary to win. But Dutro's car was slower. Her best was not as good as what Bud and Pop Hurley were getting from theirs. Very slowly he began to lose ground.

Harding's car was speedier. As Dutro dropped back, he kept abreast of Number 8 almost to the turn, but the terrific strain at the beginning of the race told now in this supreme test. The tires held, but a cylinder missed, and then another, as he crowded her on. This cost speed, while Bud and Pop Hurley came on terrifically toward the curve with their engine working perfectly. Bud would have taken it again at prohibitive speed, just for the sake of passing Harding, but Pop Hurley kicked his foot from the gas throttle in time for the needed slow-up.

"We've got 'em," he shouted with his lips to Bud's ear. "Wait until we make the turn, then give her the gun!"

A few seconds later they headed into the stretch abreast of Harding and with Dutro a few lengths behind.

"Step on her," ordered Pop Hurley, and Bud Cantril, who had never had a spill, and whose nerve had never been shaken, did as he was told.

Almost over Danny's head half a dozen boys clung to the arms of a small electric-light pole, and in their excitement did not notice how it plunged and cracked at each movement of their bodies. As Danny watched, a hastily put up guy wire snapped.

"Lay down from aloft!" he shouted in warning, but the boys did not hear him in the noise, and a moment afterward the pole broke off at the ground and fell across the tops of some parked automobiles. The fall was not a long one, and the wires from the other side of the track eased the fall so that the boys were able to jump down to safety in the crowd.

There was a moment's flurry of excitement as the pole fell, which turned to a good-natured laugh as all escaped injury. Then suddenly the crowd grew still as an impending disaster greater than they had dreamed of made them catch their breath in horror. The three heavy copper wires which the pole had held were stretched taut across the track, only a few feet from the ground, straight in the path of the oncoming cars, which had made the turn and were opening up into the back-stretch.

"Pull 'em down!" yelled some one. "They can't see 'em for the dust. It'll cut 'em in two!"

And twenty men tried to push and pull the pole to earth, but the springing wires resisted all the strength they could bring to bear on it, and the tangle of machines and the fence around the course helped to thwart their efforts.

"Cut 'em," yelled a voice.

"Keep away, they're live wires," cautioned another.

And then DannyWallace, running cat-like up the slanting, swaying pole as he would over a boat boom on his own ship, reached the cross arm at the end, took hold of a glass insulator for safety, and with a wicked looking jack-knife which had a wire-cutting attachment, snipped the three wires clean, and waved to the frantic crowd on the other side to pull them clear.

An instant later the racing cars whizzed past, all unaware of their danger, and the treacherous pole, freed of its support, swung giddily to the ground, flinging Danny Wallace on the top of an automobile, where he landed right side up just in time to see Bud Cantril and Pop Hurley, in a last superb burst of reckless speed, pass Harding and win the race.

A HAPPY party of four celebrated the victory that night with a supper at the Crown Hotel. Pop Hurley and Danny Wallace each had a string of race stories, one of the sea and the other of the road, to which Ruth and Bud were glad to listen, Ruth because she was interested and happy, and Bud because of a decision he must make at the close of the evening, one that had been haunting him for a good many days.

"It's getting late," announced Pop Hurley finally. And Bud took the plunge.

"When are you going back?" he asked Danny Wallace.

"I'll be startin' in the mornin'," answered Danny cheerily. "What about it, Bud?"

"I'm not," blurted out Bud defiantly. "Pop Hurley says I can make good in auto racing, and I'm going to stick to it. Tell him, Pop. Don't you think I'm right?"

"In my judgment there is a big future before you," answered Hurley, challenging Danny Wallace with his eyes.

"I hate the Navy," went on Bud. "I don't like the grind and the monotony of it. This is the thing I want to do, and I'm going to do it, Danny, right or wrong. I can't let a little thing like this stand in the way of a life's success."

"No, you can't," said Danny Wallace, soberly, but with a meaning which the other did not at once catch.

"You think he is doing right, don't you, Mr. Wallace?" asked Ruth.

"Of course I'm right," put in Bud. "It isn't fair to Pop Hurley, either, who has trained me and taught me all I know, to go back to the old life."

The three sat silent and waited for an expression from Danny Wallace. In their suspense it seemed a long time coming, and when Danny spoke the words came quietly but with forceful calmness.

"You can do it, Bud," he said, "if you really want to. Outside of myself there's nobody that knows where you are. I'll go back and report that I didn't find you."

"I don't want you to lie about it, Danny."

"I won't be lying," said Danny. "There won't be any Bud Cantril any more. The manly young sailor by that name whose good word was his fortune, and whose honor did not have a tarnished mark on it, will be gone, and the deserter that takes his place on the record books will be mighty soon forgotten. The ship will forget you.

"But the feller who was Bud Cantril and who used to come up with the watch for his mornin's coffee and stand at attention while the band played and the colors went up, he won't ever forget. Every time he wins a race he'll remember it. Every time he loses a race he'll remember it. Listen to an older man, Bud. I've seen deserters before, and none of 'em ever forget."

"Here's one that will," said Bud with forced lightness. "If you think I'm going to let a little thing like that stand for anything, you are mistaken."

"You're thinkin' about the wrong little thing," said Danny Wallace, with intense earnestness. "The little thing is to go ahead as you have planned, but the big thing, Bud, is to finish out your enlistment with honor, then as a free man, unpledged, do what you think best. You've got a year and a butt to do, and I wouldn't stain every minute and every hour of the long years before you for that. And if I had a son, Bud Cantril, I'd tell him just like I'm tellin' you, that I'd ruther that wire across the track had cut him in two than to have him branded as a deserter—a man who wouldn't keep his word."

"But you don't get the view-point," argued the boy, and turned quickly to Pop Hurley and Ruth for help.

But the girl was looking at Danny Wallace with shining eyes, and Pop Hurley evaded him. Left to fight it out alone he faced Danny Wallace again, but the excuses he had so carefully formulated had become a jumble of trifles which he could not voice.

"I've promised Pop Hurley," he finally blurted out helplessly while his face reddened before the accusing eyes of Danny Wallace.

"I release you," said the mechanician gamely. "Do as you think best, Bud."

"I'm not going back," decided Bud defiantly. "I've said I wouldn't, and I won't."

Then Danny Wallace made his last play. Groping around in the inside pocket of his blouse he took out an official-looking blank, scraped his chair back from the table, and tearing the paper into strips as he went, tossed it into the open fireplace. Bud Cantril knew what the paper was. As Danny rose he had read the heading across the table. It gave Danny Wallace the power to arrest him wherever he found him. Coming back to the table he said good night to Ruth and her father and started to go.

"If you think as you've been saying," said Bud, still trying to justify himself, "why didn't you arrest me?"

"Well," said Danny, "I'm a poor hand at saving people. All I can do is to give 'em the chance, and now that you've had yours and won't take it, I'll be sayin' good-by."

The other two offered their hands, and Danny Wallace took them warmly enough but Bud's he barely touched, and stalked out of the door with his quick, alert step without looking back.

THE BIG Overland train which left the next morning for the coast had a nervous passenger in Danny Wallace. He moved from one chair to another in the observation car and could not get settled comfortably. Even the people in the train who had interested him

so much on the trip inland failed to excite any curiosity now. Only when an automobile raced with the train for a few moments along the perfect roadway which paralleled the track, and then gradually fell back out of sight, did he seem to be interested.

As he continued to look out of the window another car turned into the main road from a side highway and refused to be shaken off. Persistently it kept up and held its place about midway of the train. There were two figures in the machine, both in long enveloping coats and huge goggles, and from the observation car their backs were to Danny. Nevertheless his eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and he settled himself on that side of the train to watch the race.

Just then the train came to a long stretch of straight track, and its speed increased, while the road wound and turned through several small villages. The automobile began to lose ground, and Danny grew nervous again. Moving to the back platform of the observation car he caught a last glimpse of the machine and its occupants as it slued around a corner and vanished in a cloud of dust behind an orange grove.

"How far is it to the next stop?" he asked the brakeman.

"Ten miles," answered the man in uniform, consulting his watch.

"And how long do we stay there?"

"Five minutes."

The next few minutes were long ones to Danny Wallace, and as the road beside the railroad track became straight and smooth again, he looked hopefully back along its shimmering surface for the pursuing car. Not until the train whistled and began to check its speed for the station ahead did he catch sight of it, leaping and swaying and dodging around slower cars, as it sped toward the slowing train. As the train stopped, despite the protests of the brakeman, Danny Wallace climbed over the rail of the observation platform and leaped to the ground.

"You'll get left, boss," yelled the porter after him, as he ran half a block to where the road came into town.

Two minutes later the dust-covered, smoking machine stopped with a shrill cry of grinding brakes, and throwing off the coat and goggles, Bud Cantril put an arm around his companion and kissed her, then jumped over the wheel to the ground and came running to Danny Wallace. He was dressed in a neat-fitting Navy uniform.

"Good-by, Danny," called Ruth Hurley and Danny Wallace took time to wave his flat cap before he and Bud made a sprint for the train.

"I knew last night after you left I was going to do it," said Bud, when they were settled on the train. "I'm going to finish up with an honorable discharge, and come back to them."

Danny patted the boy affectionately on the shoulder.

"I knew you had it in you, Bud," he said thankfully, "but I was a little afraid your stubbornness would make you hold out too long."

Bud looked out of the window a while before he answered.

"Danny," he said finally, "I guess you know what has happened, from what you saw in the car, but I want to tell you something else. This morning I told Ruth what I had decided to do—go back, you know—and then I asked her to marry me. She said 'Yes,' Danny, and then she told me, too, that if I had not decided to go back, her answer would have been 'No.' She knows, as well as you do, that salt water and gasoline won't mix, and we've got to keep them separate."

"Whose idea was it, Bud," asked Danny, "to take the car and overhaul us?"

"Hers," answered the boy happily. "I was going to take a later train, but she suggested this better way. We busted every speed law in the State."

"Well," chuckled, Danny Wallace, "I guess it's true that salt water and gasoline won't mix, but they certainly are stirrin' things when you take 'em separately."

Author of "Beyond the Rim," "Rotorua Rex," etc.

CHAPTER I

OLD PROVIDENCE ISLAND

CAPTAIN BANE, gentleman of fortune, commander of the *Swift Return*, pushed the black bottle across the table to the little wizened man who faced him. The cabin overflowed with swaggering figures, their tarnished sea-togs enlivened with gaudy sashes and head-kerchiefs. Reckless faces peered down through the open skylight, backed by the starred sky of the tropic July night. The swinging lamp shone full on the rapacious, eager face of Bane.

It was weather-tanned to leather, save where the black beard that covered half his chest had protected it. His gaze held the fixed glare of lenses, deep lines showed between his brows, his curving nose twitched at the flanging nostrils, the bone of it pressing gray through the skin, flattened at the bridge; a fitting beak for a preying seabird.

"Come, Sawney, come Governor, down with four fingers of the stuff and out with your news! Rogers is off the bar, you say. Drink, man, and talk quickly!"

The trembling Sawney, derisively dubbed "Governor" by the pirates who had assembled upon the Island of Providence to await the king's proclamation and pardon for all freebooters surrendering their ships and arms by the last day of August, 1718, gulped down the fiery *schnapps*, choked till the tears ran from his red eyerims and told his news.

"Mr. Woods Rogers, Governor and Vice-Admiral of the Bahamas," he began and, warned by the blaze that shone in the captain's eyes, broke into less ceremonious speech. "The fleet came at sunset," he went on. "Richard Turnley is pilot and on his advice they lie by till morning."

"Ah!" Bane's tense features relaxed. "How know you this?"

"The Lings put off to the fleet from Harbor Island with vegetables. They came aboard the *Rose* man-of-war and saw the Governor and one Captain Whitney."

"The canting, favor-currying rogues. What said they?"

"They told the governor that Ben Hornygold, with Davis, Burgess, Carter, yourself and others were on shore upon Providence, in all nigh to a thousand pi—" he checked himself with a gulp of fear—"a thousand gentlemen of fortune——"

Bane smashed his fist upon the table and guffawed.

"Nay, out with it, man. Pirates! 'Tis a brave word for those that fit it. So Dick Ling told that a thousand were waiting to cringe before Rogers and kiss the king's foot and beg to be his men again. Told also, doubtless, that they were assembled about Nassau where the fort is tumbling for repair with but one nine-pounder. And the fleet lies off until tomorrow.

"Thanks, Sawney, I will remember this.

Another drink and off you go. Not a word ashore that you have visited me. —— you, drink, when I offer it."

The little man swallowed perforce the tumbler that was poured out for him and stumbled up the companionway where rough hands set him into his dingey and saw him sculling drunkenly shorewards.

"A thousand pirates! A thousand lick-spittles! A thousand mice-hearted cravens! exclaimed Bane. "Blood and bones! What say you, men? Are you for kissing the king's foot and going softly with sixpence in your pockets and calved in cotton, or are you for silk hose and gold guineas?"

"I was with Kidd."

The man who spoke had a face the color of a ripe mulberry, seamed like a walnut-shell. One eye was sightless, like a bruised grape, the other gleamed between lids scarlet-hawed as those of a dog. On one cheek powder had tattooed the badge of his calling. The end of his bulbous nose had been sliced and indifferently patched.

"Hanged he was," he went on. "Strung up at Execution Dock seventeen years ago come last month. He swings in chains down the river yet with Churchill, How, Mullins, Parrot and the rest of the brave lads. Yet would I rather hang than go halting all my days at sight of a constable. A murrain on the Governor, say I."

"Kidd was a canting coward," said Bane. "What said he on the gallows? 'For my part I am the most innocent of them all, only I have been sworn against by perjured persons.' We want no Kidds nor his kind of cattle aboard, prating of chains. Silence, you dog!"

The old buccaneer was on his feet, his drink-palsied hand fumbling at his belt.

"Blood and wounds!" he cried. "No man calls me coward!"

But Bane had caught the uneasy shifting of his followers' eyes at the talk of gallows and chains. He flung the black bottle and it smashed upon the other's skull. He collapsed, blood streaming from a strip of scalp, mingling with the reek of the liquor.

"Put him in the peak!" ordered Bane, and watched while his words were obeyed, his fierce eyes challenging his men. "Hurley! Long! Take your watches and guard the boats. No man leaves this ship save on my orders."

"If they cannot cross the bar neither can we," muttered a pirate and his opinion found echoing "ayes" from many of the rest.

"Then we go in the sloop," said Bane. "What, my bullies, because Rogers has come a month too soon, are we to stay like rats in a trap and give up our freedom with our booty? Are you men or mice? Will you be governed like sneaking puppies by those who tamely submit to laws which rich men have made for their own security; for the cowardly whelps have not the courage otherwise to defend what they get with their knavery, —— them for a parcel of hen-hearted numskulls!

"They vilify us, the scoundrels, when there is only this difference, they rob the poor under cover of law, forsooth, and we plunder the rich under the protection of our own courage. I am a free prince and I have as much authority to make war on the whole world as he who has a hundred ships at sea and an army of a hundred thousand men in the field.

"Shall I submit to be kicked about a deck at the pleasure of one who fancies himself my superior? Shall I, and you, free men all, give up our delights, the chink of guineas and the clink of glasses, the kisses of women and our fellowhip, because, forsooth, Rogers says so?

"What if we leave the *Swift Return* behind us? I was a lad when first I ran away from the cursed merchantman to which they had bound me 'prentice. With six brave hearts we borrowed a canoe and stole away to the Grand Camanas, to go on the account. We took a turtling sloop and joined on other bullies until we gained an Irish brigantine. From that we took a Spanish trading sloop of six guns. From that, on the coast of Virginia, a New England brigantine bound for Barbados that yielded us a vessel of ten guns.

"Now there were eighty of us aboard. From the Bahamas to Guinea Coast and back we sailed, to Madagascar and the Arabian Gulf. We traded the brigantine for a galley of twenty-four guns and at the last we took a three-decker of Portugal, outbound from Brazil. Thirty-six guns she mounted but we took her, a hundred and eighty of us hearties, ripping off her upper deck, deep-waisting her by cutting down the gunwale and so made her the *Swift Return*. Shall we not start again in a sloop?

"I tell you, my bullies, that my star rises. Shall I screen it with the king's parchment? Set me adrift with three logs, a palmetto sail

and six good companions and within the year ye shall see me scattering gold in Puerto Rico and treading the deck of a ship that can fight and sail with any on the seas!

"Get out the pannikins and broach a keg of rum, boys. We have work before us."

While the cabin-lads, dusky Bermudian natives, set out the liquor, Bane pressed home his arguments, made more potent by the effects of the strong, raw spirits.

"We will transfer into the sloop and be through the East Passage at daybreak and leaving these whining curs to await the governor's pleasure. Follow me and I will undertake to shape a course that shall lead you to ease and plenty. Let the others lay down, they leave us the greater pickings. What is it, lads? The freedom of the seas—or will ye turn farmers?"

A red-headed ruffian, lacking one ear, cleft by a cutlass, roared out his answer as he drained his pannikin and passed it for more. The rest joined in his resolution.

"Aye, we'll stand by you. A gold chain or a wooden leg!"

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE EAST PASSAGE

IT WAS within an hour of daybreak when the crew of the *Swift Return* sweating with their labor and the liquor freely served to them, had transferred themselves to the little sloop of fifty tons, carrying with them the possessions they most valued, and stores, with all the ammunition they could stow aboard.

The guns of the *Swift Return* were charged with double, round and partridge and the vessel set afire. The sloop dropped slowly down towards the East Passage, the crooked, shallow channel of which could not be attempted before dawn.

The broader harbor mouth was still blocked by the fleet though there was now sufficient water for the deepest-drafted ship to cross and it was Bane's hope that the vice-admiral would send in some ships or boats to investigate the blaze.

"If luck holds she will burn down to them," he said, "and scatter a few of them to hell. Since we can not use her, we'll sink her."

Faint shouts came from Nassau where the thousand pirates were celebrating the advent of the king's pardon. The low-lying island of Providence was a blur against the skyline. A faint breeze wafted the sloop closer to the tortuous passage that formed the backdoor of the harbor, through which Bane meant to achieve his freedom.

He had ordered lights out and silence, for fear they might be boarded, and the crew sprawled on the over-crowded decks talking in whispers, fired with excitement and Jamaica rum. Bane stood near the tiller, gazing back at the flaming *Swift Return.*

A cutter put out from the *Rose* man-of-war and was rowed swiftly toward the land with instructions to investigate the cause of the red glow that pulsed behind the headland fringed with palmetto that hid the *Swift Return* from the view of the fleet. The fire had reached the gun-deck and the starboard and larboard batteries were scattering shot across an area brilliantly illumined by the blaze.

Bane swore through his beard at the failure of his plan. Then he saw the cutter come into the radiance, pause and swerve widely about the *Swift Return* in a course that would bring them close to the sloop.

He gave a swift order and two boats bristling with men were soon in the water, making with swift, choppy, noiseless oar-strokes toward the cutter.

"We need a messenger," said Bane, with a chuckle. "We'll take the king's officer and send him back to the fleet after we clear the passage."

The cutter, making for the shore, was intercepted by the two boats that swept up, one on either side, from the darkness. The odds were fifty to ten. The lieutenant, seeing the gunwales gripped by twenty pairs of hands while a voice to right and left hoarsely demanded his surrender, disgustedly gave the word and the freebooters returned aboard triumphantly as the sky began to gray and showed the sullen rollers slapping on the sand spits and coral bars that guarded the passage.

The breeze strengthened and the sloop, close-hauled, nosed her way through the winding channel. The sun rolled up, leaping clear from the rim of the sea and showing the fleet driving under half-sail across the bar into the harbor, nearly a mile away.

"Up with the Roger and fire a gun," shouted Bane. A black flag slipped up to the masthead and broke out its sable defiance as a twelve-pounder roared, scaring

the breakfast-hunting birds. The cutter trailed at the stern.

"Into her and back to the fleet with you," said the buccaneer to the sulky lieutenant. "Tell your commander and Rogers, the king's jackal, that Bane and his lads are away. If they want to test the speed of our heels or the gage of our guns, let them come after us. It is a fair wind for a race and clear weather for sighting. Cast off there, or we'll cut you loose!"

The king's men were in their craft, dragged with lifting stem behind the sloop.

"Give us our oars," called the lieutenant.

"Scramble for them and be —— to ye," cried Bane.

A cutlas-stroke severed the line as the oars were tossed into the sea and the pirates swarmed to the rail, mocking the crew of the cutter as they recovered, one at a time, their means of progress and, at last, setting a quick stroke, rowed back for the passage.

"Now lads, it's ho, for Hispaniola!" cried Bane. "It will be an hour before those lubbers get after us. With the wind abeam and the good start we can laugh at them. It will not be long before we'll take a better ship and then we'll carry out what has long been in my mind.

"Now that those curs ashore have surrendered we'll have the trade to ourselves. We'll find some place among the Keys where we'll set up a fort, some spot among the reefs that has a score of exits and but one entrance. That shall be our capital where we'll all live as kings in our own principality and be in debt to no man."

CHEER after cheer went up as the course was changed and the sloop, reaching faster and faster, headed for the Spanish Main. The gage was cast. They were outlaws now beyond redemption. Bane had voiced their prime ambition, to set up a kingdom to which they could go between raids, with loot and women, forced from prizes or picked up in Puerto Rico, hoydens as reckless as themselves.

There were plenty of towns where they would be made welcome when the coast was clear, to go swaggering, hip-booted, clad in silks and velvets, roaring out their songs, stampeding the citizens, boarding the taverns, paying freely for unlicensed privilege with broad pieces of eight, looting a quiet plantation, perhaps, and marching away to the crackling of the gutted buildings and the shrieks of women borne off across their shoulders. A gay life, a devil-may-care existence with hell for the hind-most!

A short life and merry one until they danced the last jig with the hangman's knot behind their ear or went down fighting on slippery decks. There would be an end to it, of course, but, while it lasted, they would crowd it with excitement and Bane was a lucky leader and a brave one. A man of good family, it was whispered, though none dared question him. They bowed to his superior education. It was good to have a captain who could sling the lingo as he did and who was the first across the rail when they laid alongside.

The old ruffian who had prated of Kidd had come on deck, his head bound in a bloody rag, maudlin with the rum that Bane sent him as a salve for his cracked pate. He was a favorite aboard for his tales of earlier raids and he was greeted with rough jests as he made his way aft to where Bane stood at the taffrail watching for signs of pursuit. The captain greeted him evenly.

"Well, old dog, can your tongue still wag?" The man's one bloodshot eye gleamed without resentment.

"Waste no more good liquor on the outside of my head, Captain," he said.

"I sent you a pannikin. So then, there's no ill-will. You had these fainthearts wavering with your prate of Kidd in chains. Blood and fury, man, must you conjure up a croaking vision to spoil good sport in the making?"

"I am nigher the end than you, maybe, though 'tis likely to be a short shrift for boy and graybeard in this calling, Captain. So we are to sea again, with yon poltroons in Providence on their marrows before Rogers. The sea is ours. There is but one life, look ye, and that's the life of a rover. No ill-will, Captain, that another pannikin will not soak up."

He rolled forward, growling in a husky bass a song that his fellows took up in chorus.

The Roger to the peak and the ocean to our lee.
A-sailing down the coast of the High Barbaree.
And it's ho, for the life of a rover.
The landsman lies a dying with the parson by his side.
The freeman goes a sailing at the turning of the tide.
Give me a sheet that's trailing, a breeze that follows fleet.
A cutlas in my good right hand, my boots upon my feet.

For that's the way to die, sirs, not with a canting sigh, sirs.
The Roger flaunting at the peak, the ocean to the lee;
A-sailing down the coast of the High Barbaree.
Yo ho, for the life of a rover!

The sloop heeled to the strengthening wind with a rush of foam along her sides that seethed in at the scuppers. The low land was but a line behind them. Clouds had come scurrying up with the dawn and the sun seemed to rush through the masses of scud that promised dirty weather ahead.

A shaft shot through a rift and picked out the triangle of sail that was making its way out of the East Passage. The pursuit was on. Bane called for his glass and pulled out the long telescope.

"It's but a sloop," he announced. "She sails fast and she's a gut of men aboard. Fight or run, there's a storm brewing. Break out a keg, bullies all. The sloop's stanch, no need for a reef. Double-shot the guns in case we need 'em. Take the tarpaulin off the stern-chaser!"

A furious blast swooped down and tore the woolen cap from his head as he stood by the rail, clinging to the stays.

"Hell's loose, lads. May the devil serve us!"

CHAPTER III

"FROM THE SEAS!"

DULL, sunless noon found the pirates' sloop in a welter of gray sea that matched the leaden scurry of the sky above them. They had long since dropped the chase and had made shift to double-reef the mainsail but they were in sorry case. The cabin accommodations were scanty and sixty of them were forced to make shift for themselves upon the spume-swept deck. The water was fairly warm but they were drenched and endeavored to offset their misery by copious drafts of rum.

As the afternoon wore on darkness came rapidly with an increasing gale and it was all they could do with tackles to the gooseneck of the tiller, two men at the wheel and two in the combination gunroom and cabin, to keep the ship's head to the sea. The waves ran riot, charging in a maelstrom. The sky turned slaty-black, illumined with sheets of lightning that lit up the seething yeast of the tortured ocean and the claps of thunder kept up an incessant peal.

On deck the men answered the storm with blasphemies that were swept aft in a jumble of imprecation. The sloop staggered under the blows of wind and water. In the cabin the billows pounded at her stem as if a giant beat upon a mighty drum.

The place was reeking with foul air and the lamp shone dimly through trailing tobacco smoke. At the head of the table Bane held place, having given over the deck to the quartermaster, "Scarry-Dick" Denton. His eyes were set and his beard was soaked with liquor spilled by the tossing of the sloop as he tried to quaff it.

"Sink or swim," he shouted, "we'll go through bravely. Blood and fire, listen to the thunder!"

He rose, swaying, as the cabin glared blue in the lightning that poured in through portholes and skylight, and held to the breech of a gun, securely lashed behind its closed port.

"The gods are drunk with us in their tipple and have gone together by the ears. Death and fury, an' we could, I'd run out the guns and return 'em a salute. The king's men have run for cover but we are bound for the open. Blow,—— ye, blow. The wind's from all quarters. I'm for the deck."

He made his way over the sodden bodies of some of the crew and reached the deck as one of the short and furious seas broke upon the poop, tore away the taffrail and swept the two men from the wheel, driving them into the boarding netting that had been stretched above the coaming for safety-lines. Bane jumped to the tiller and put his strength to it while the men on the watch-tackles heaved with him.

A maddened gust of wind roared at the sloop and seemed for the moment to lift her clear of the seething water. Her stem crashed down, the reefed staysail broke clear and whipped out of sight like a storm-herded gull. Scarry-Dick, clinging to the netting, fought his way forward and, with three men, worked at the furl of the thrashing jib. A tiny lull saved them from the trough and the pirates managed to set enough headsail to keep the sloop from broaching to.

The carpenter clawed his way out of the cabin and clung to Bane, shouting in his ear. Water was working in, already above the line of bilge. As the quartermaster came back Bane signaled for him to take the helm and dived below, kicking the drunken men in the cabin into sensibility and buffeting them before him.

It was impossible to open the forehatch but they dragged a spare spar aft and rigged it with a funnel of canvas, striving like demons until they had got it clear of the bowsprit and dropped it into the sea as the mainsail came down on the run and was smothered by twenty men. The sea-anchor filled, the sloop swung head on, bare-poled, backing before the storm, but riding it, while the carpenter and his assistants strove to stanch the leak where the oakum had worked out of a seam.

It was the last flurry of the storm. The wind died away with howls of baffled rage, the sullen seas slowly subsided and, in the west, the sky lifted to a pale streak of chrome. Upon the luminous background showed the lifting topmasts of a big ship, apparently a merchantman.

"There's our next craft, lads," cried Bane. "In with the sea-anchor and up sail again. She heads this way. 'Tis two glasses yet to sunset. We'll sleep aboard of her to-night."

The merchantman came slowly on while the clouds still lifted, trailing skirts of the fast disappearing hurricane. The air was sweet, the sea, still rough and covered with catspaws, a brilliant indigo. The sloop sailed on to meet her, the crew crowding the cabin and lying flat upon the decks, covered with spare canvas. Pistols were stuck in sashes, there was a cutlas for every right hand, a keen knife ready for each left.

Bane had hauled down the shreds of his black ensign and now flew a jack at the peak, upside down in signal of distress. With her torn taffrail, the decks apparently cumbered with dismantled canvas, only three or four men visible, the sloop, going sluggishly, streams of water issuing from her pumps, gained the sympathy of the commander of the merchantman.

The pirates could see him on the poop, speaking-trumpet in hand, and Bane caught the bellow of his voice, borne down wind, shouting for the smaller vessel to come-up and stand-by for a boat.

"She's no beauty," said Bane, "but she will serve. She's gulled! She sees the jack! Not a man of ye moves till I give the word. Then aboard! We'll need no guns. Keep them hidden behind the ports."

The two craft drew nearer, the sloop, close-hauled, held too close for her point of best speed by Bane; the ship surging along with yards squared to the following breeze, her forefoot dripping with brine, rising and falling heavily to the swash.

Bane grinned as he spun the wheel, timing his maneuver so that the sloop hung clumsily in the eye of the wind, almost missed stays and came about on the crest of a long roller, forging down under the side of the merchantman, apparently in imminent danger of being crushed like an eggshell. Bane knew that the backwash from the ship would hold him off long enough to execute his plan.

"Easy, you lubbers," shouted the merchant-captain. "What sloop is that?"

"The *Ranger*. From the seas!" answered Bane in the slogan of the freebooters.

At the phrase the cabin of the sloop vomited men. The loose canvas was hurled aside and sixty pirates sprang to the rail. A volley of oaths accenting his swift orders sounded through the speaking-trumpet of the ship's captain. A gun-port swung slowly open, then another, and the muzzles of carronades showed in the opening.

"Boarders away!" yelled Bane, leading his men in a spring for the rail of the merchantman as a wave lifted them to its level.

Grappling hooks were thrown and tangled in the standing-rigging, pirates swarmed through the open gun-ports and chased the panic-stricken servers. Bane's pistol fire caught the captain in his shoulder. There were a few scattering shots, a clashing grind of steel on steel, a half-hearted resistance from half-armed men and the ship was a prize. Scarry-Dick took deck-command with a dozen men while the rest of the pirates swarmed through the ship.

THE wounded captain was brought before Bane, lording it in the usurped cabin, gulping port from a decanter. His men had broached some of the cargo and, in freebooting independence, stamped into the cabin, swathed in silks, laced hats upon their headkerchiefs, a bottle in each hand, boastful, anticking like masquerading schoolboys.

Bane glanced over the manifest that a trembling purser handed him.

"The *Neptune*, from Bristol, England, laden with bale goods and general merchandise," he said. 'Tis a clumsy hooker, but 'twill serve our turn until a better-lined vessel comes along." He scowled at the captain, pale from loss of blood, his hands

bound behind him, faint but resolute. The brave look in his eyes provoked Bane's unruly spirit to a gale of unreasoning fury.

"Well, you dog," he demanded. "Why don't you beg for your life?"

The captain smiled.

"You have already tried to take it, you murdering pirate. I ask nothing from your kind of cattle."

Bane's brows closed in a black smear of wrath.

"You swim for that, you —— rogue," he cried.

"You have long since been damned," said the other evenly. "And, as surely as I swim, so some day you will swing from the mast that knows no deck."

Bane's gaze could not hold the dauntless look of the prisoner. He hurled the decanter at him. It smashed against the wall as the captain swiftly moved his head and the rich perfume of the wine filled the room. Bane drew his pistol from his sash, his face convulsed with rage.

"Damned, am I? Then I will send you first to hell to greet me when I come!"

He fired pointblank in the other's face so that the powder gas scorched it and the grains blackened it about the cruel hole between the eyes. The captain spun about and fell. Bane took a step and spurned the body with his foot.

"Over with that carrion," he ordered. "It grows dark. Strip the sloop. Set those cravens aboard." He nodded toward a group of shaking passengers. "Bring in the crew."

The sailors of the *Neptune* were herded before him.

"Look ye," said Bane. "I want no forced men aboard my craft. Free men and equal are we all. Join, and, as ye prove, ye get a full share. That—or aboard the sloop with ye."

The men interchanged looks and shifted on their feet. Then one stepped forward and another until but a dozen remained, including the officers of the captured vessel.

"Good," declared Bane. "Set these stubborn fools aboard. Send me the quartermaster."

Night found the *Neptune* heading under the stars for Green Turtle Bay, the sea-scooped crescent of one of the smaller Bahamas, the leaking sloop far astern, the old buccaneer crooning at the wheel.

His ribs shall make a cage for fish,
His flesh a sea-snake's meal,
His eyes a mermaid's dainty dish,
His——

His voice broke off in a croak as he gazed upward. A star had fallen athwart the heavens.

"'Tis a bad omen," he muttered. "A bad omen. To kill in fight, aye, that's one thing. But to murder in cold blood spells evil. 'Twas not so in Kidd's time. A falling star is a summoned soul!"

His superstition-ridden imagination saw in the meteor the spirit of the dead captain speeding for judgment.

"Tend your course, there, you one-eyed crab!" shouted Scarry-Dick as the *Neptune* swung off and the clews of the topsails shivered.

"Aye, aye, sir! Crab, am I?" he said beneath his breath as the quartermaster followed up his reprimand with a string of oaths. "Yet have I claws that can nip."

He shifted the spokes, peering at the binnacle. He was the best helmsman aboard and he resented the rebuke. The shadowy sails rustled softly above him, he could hear the hiss of the wake above the songs and shouts of the carousing pirates below and presently he took up his own song again.

The broken blade that spilled his life,
Lies rusting in the ooze;
The maid that hoped he'd call her wife,
Another love must choose;
Yo-ho! Another love must choose.

Yet while he lived, his life was full,
A merry wight was he.
With ne'er a moment that was dull,
A-sailing on the sea,
Yo-ho! A-sailing on the sea!

CHAPTER IV

TODD THE TURTLER

TOM TODD lived on Green Key. Most of the turtlers only existed but Tom lived, for he was not alone. A maid from the Carolinas loved him well enough to consider that with Todd the lonely islet would be Paradise enow and their honeymoon on their sea-girt Eden was only three weeks old.

Todd dried the turtle flesh and stripped the shell and sometimes took a sloop-load of live *tortugas* to Puerto Rico or even to Jamaica for trade. The Green Key, rank

with wild cabbage and palmetto, with here and there pines lifting graceful crests above the lower growth, was worthy of its name. The bill of fare of the married lovers, besides turtle steaks and fins and eggs, was varied.

There were *agoutis*, wild-hogs and opossum in plenty, besides the pigeons and seafood. Humming-birds and parrots supplied their aviary. The climate was equable, save in July and the rainy season, when Todd planned to take his bride back to Carolina. She was tiny and tawny-haired, golden of skin from the sun, curvingly lithesome and sweet and Todd was tall and lean, sun-dried almost to the texture and color of his strips of turtle-flesh. And they were very much in love.

The turtles only came with the tides, and, betweenwhiles, they paddled or bathed or lay in grass hammocks beneath a palmetto shelter. They lived out-of-doors night and day and were seldom out of sight of each other. She—her name was Mary—adored Todd and Tom worshiped Mary. He loved to pick her up in his arms and go striding off with her, laughing at her talk of weight.

Todd was thirty-five and Mary twenty-two. Todd knew the Bahamas as a woodsman knows his forest and Mary knew only Todd. He had given up his pilotage to turn turtler again so that he might be always with her and, in the rains, they were going to upbuild a tiny farm in Carolina for—some day. Life was all ahead of them and very pleasant.

The Key was three miles long and about half that width. Close to it were two smaller keys that could be reached by wading at the ebb. The nearer, densely wooded, was as thick with *agoutis* as a dog's hide with fleas and Mary made wonderful stews out of the rabbit-like flesh.

On the twenty-second day of their honeymoon—they still reckoned it diurnally—they had their first quarrel. Mary pouted and Tom sulked and, by the time the quarrel was ripe, neither could remember how it started. Yet Mary held it for the joy of bringing Todd back to her repentant and he left her still pouting when he strode off, gun on shoulder, to get *agoutis* as a peace offering.

He did not see the kiss she blew him when she was sure he was out of sight among the palmettos and she did not hear the sigh he gave but both sensed in their hearts that the breach was only serious enough to serve for a yet stronger cementing.

Todd's stubborn mood held hard enough for him to brave the current between the two keys, already surging to the swift flood, and he waded it hip-deep between the weeded rocks and plunged into the thick scrub. Mary took their simple duck garments to the tiny spring and beat at them on a coral slab with a wooden paddle, venting her displeasure—mostly for herself—in the blows.

Up from the sea in the early afternoon came a rakish brigantine of thirty guns, outside of fore and stern chasers, and one hundred and forty men. Her hull was painted black with a narrow red streak that accented the sweetness of her lines, her masts that seemed too lofty for her build, slanted aft, her canvas, from studding-sail to main, showed snowy white, yet marred here and there with unpatched holes where round shot had torn through. She sailed fast, low of freeboard but buoyant, and her topsails rose swiftly against the sky.

Bane's luck had held. The *Neptune* had given place to a better ship and playing the part of merchantman, he had come close enough to a Spanish brigantine to board and take her after a desperate skirmish in which he lost nine men and the Spaniards seventeen. He had rechristened her the *Venture* and found her the fastest keel of his knowledge.

At fifteen knots he had outrun two sail of the vice-admiral's flotilla, especially commissioned to his capture since his escape from Providence Harbor. They had caught him between them as he had come out of an inlet and he had run their gantlet, broadside for broadside, bringing down the topmast of one and standing off the other in a running fight.

Now he was in a hurry, for the men-of-war had interrupted his taking on wood and water after careening. The wood might go, water he must have, and Scarry-Dick had promised them they would find a spring on Green Key near which the chase had led them.

"A turtler lives there, or did," said Denton. "A splint-bone by the name of Todd. I landed there three years ago and he shot pigs for us. We were lootfull and we paid him with cloth, so he will hunt for us again with a good will."

"Aye, or a bad one, for that matter," said

Bane. A bullet had bitten his forearm and he was in an ugly temper. "We have little time to spare. The king's ship may have guessed our tack. Get the water-breakers ready for a landing. I'll go ashore. For once spring-water sounds better to me than brandy. That cursed crease burns like fire."

MARY TODD, looking up from her laundrying, gazed with delight at the picture of the brigantine, brilliantly enameled by the sunshine against the blue sky and bluer sea, rising and falling on the long billow with a grace that was all her own. Even when it was evident that the ship was heading directly for the Key she felt no alarm save a vague wish that Tom would come back before they landed.

Other ships had called there for water, Tom had told her. She held no thought of pirates. They had heard from another turtler, passing on the news, that the free-booters had all surrendered, or were about to surrender, at the Island of Old Providence. The brigantine came up into the wind, held there while two boats put off and rowed swiftly toward shore, and then cruised off-and-on, awaiting their return.

The girl supposed that the men would know where to look for the spring. They could easily find it. Her newly-wedded shyness dominated her curiosity. She did not wish to meet them without Tom beside her. If she stayed they might give something in exchange for the water, a bolt of print-stuff, perhaps, and there might be news. She might send home her half-completed letter.

But she was Tom's wife and a delicacy she could not express held her back. She slipped off into the palmettos, unaware of the mark her lightly going figure made in its white gown against the vivid green. The boats divided, one coming straight for a landing near the spring, the other with quickened stroke, racing toward a little cape, Bane urging on the rowers.

"A partridge and a sweet one," he said to his second in command. "Ye should have seen her through the glass, man, bending over the clothes she was washing. Slender and supple as a bow. A young one and alone. 'Tis not often we see the likes of her. She'll be the turtler's woman."

He spoke the last sentence softly and his companion looked at him curiously. There was an unspoken rule against women aboard Bane's ships. "They raised the devil among the men," he said. But a commander could break his own rules and there was a gleam in Bane's eyes and a flush in his face that showed passion long repressed by force of circumstance, suddenly aroused.

It was none of his business if the captain sought a plaything. He would break it and cast it aside presently. A discarded woman among seven score conscienceless devils would have a hard time of it but his own soul was cankered with the rest. Decency as a pirate's attribute was a thing to be mocked at.

The first boat, towing a long string of empty water-casks, touched the beach and the men sprang ashore, eager to fill and get back to the ship before the slower but heavier-metaled king's ship should appear and cut them off. The shot-holes in the sails were not the only ones the *Venture* had suffered. There were a dozen or more cursing, wounded men aboard, swearing at the rude surgery, and five had "given up the keys to their lockers."

Bane's boat touched sand. He jumped into the shallows, followed by all but two of the men, who paddled the boat back to join the watermen. The pirates ran through the palmettos at an angle, eager to herd the "white doe" of the skipper's fancy. Bane was in the lead when Mary Todd caught sight of the line and sensed the nature of their quest.

Her face paled and her heart began to beat in a wild tattoo of alarm that suddenly gripped and possessed her. She turned to run deeper into the woods, seeking Tom, calling his name as she fled. A grinning ruffian rose from back of a bush, his arms outspread, giving the *view-halloa!* Others were closing in from right and left. Bane, his teeth showing through his beard, sprang forward to grasp her.

She doubled, frantic with fear. Where was Tom? Again she called his name, though it taxed her scanty breath, and the pirates took up the cry.

"Tom! Tom!" they yelled derisively after her until her fear included his danger. These men were pirates! There was a pistol in their little thatched hut, hidden in the trees. Perhaps she could reach it before those others by the shore noticed it.

The men ran whooping behind her,

crashing through the undergrowth. She plunged into the thicket and sped through the flimsy door of their tiny house. There was no effective fastening. In one corner was her trunk that she had brought from home in Tom's sloop. The pistol was in it. She had asked Tom for it—he had a pair of them—and he had shown her how to oil and load it for their target practise at floating bottles in their playtimes.

She tossed back the lid, kneeling at the trunk, found the weapon and turned, desperate, as Bane flung back the door and entered, the leering faces of his fellows close behind him.

"No partridge, but a hawk," said Bane, panting with his run. "Nay, pretty, put up that pistol. Hell and fury——!"

The pistol roared, the tiny room was filled with the acrid gas of the discharge and Bane staggered back, a bullet in his upper arm, while the girl stood at bay against the wall. The pirate captain lurched forward, his eyes relentless and Mary Todd struck at him wildly as he beat aside her arms with bruising blows and swept her off her feet.

"I'll tame you, my beauty," he cried. "Aye, and trim you to my liking before I'm through with you."

He heard the guffaws of his men as he roughly handled her. Her clutching hand caught his arm where she had wounded it and he swore as the imbedded bullet grated against the bone. The next second he flung her from him. She had found the knife in his belt and struck at him, the blade glancing off a rib.

She crouched in the angle of the wall, her eyes filled with the blaze of madness, her torn dress showing her heaving bosom, the knife still in her hand. As Bane, blind with pain and fury, strode toward her and the rest closed in, she clutched the handle with both hands and drove the steel into her own flesh. A gush of blood stained her gown, she gasped and wilted into a pitiful, crumpled heap.

There was a shout from outside. A man blocked the sunshine in the open doorway.

"The king's ship is in the offing," he cried.

With an oath Bane swung out of the hut. The men were gathering about the boats, rolling the filled and empty breakers. The man-of-war was coming up rapidly under press of sail. Already her topgallants and royals showed. The dull boom of a gun came faintly as she signaled to her consort that the chase was sighted. The oars of the pirate's boats bent as they raced back to the brigantine. In ten minutes they were aboard and the vessel sliding through the water, striving to gain the windward gage of the pursuit.

A few relinquished casks dotted the beach and bobbed in the shallows. An hour passed before Tom Todd came back, unconscious of what awaited him, half a dozen *agoutis* in one hand, his gun in another.

He stopped for a moment in a clearing, watching a brigantine that slashed through the seas at a long angle, puffs of smoke coming from the Long Tom at her stern and the after guns of her larboard battery, while a ship, smothered in canvas, replied, heading in to intercept the other. The topsails of another vessel showed on the horizon.

"Pirates," commented Tom aloud. "I thought they had all surrendered. She sails like a witch. She'll clear if nothing carries. Mary! Oh, Mary lass. Come up to me and see the fight."

There was no answer. He caught sight of the casks and trouble leaped to his eyes as he rushed down toward the hut.

Midnight found him piling the last coral slab above a mound in the clearing. The cairn was high to thwart the land-crabs and rooting beasts.

Dawn saw the turtler's sloop making across the Bahama Channel toward Cuba, Todd at the tiller with rigid face and eyes that held an introspective gaze. Once he looked back toward Green Key, an Eden no longer. Then he hauled in the sheet and brought the sloop a point closer to the wind.

CHAPTER V

THE INN OF THE GOLDEN GALLEON

A thirsty throat, a speedy boat,
A skipper that's a-daring;
A parting glass, a loving lass,
And off we go sea-fa-a-ring,
And off we go sea-faring!

A sail in sight, a chase, a fight,
A hold with riches laden;
A speedy tack and we come back
Each to his waiting ma-a-i-den,
Each to his waiting maiden!

THE big room of the Golden Galleon at Santo Domingo, the principal port on the southern coast of the island of the same name, rang with the repeated last line of the

piratical ditty. Bane's men were ashore with gold to spend and ardent appetites to be appeased. That morning they had sighted a man-of-war sailing north through the Windward Passage between Santo Domingo and Cuba, scouring the Caribbean on false information, and they were secure in their revels.

Women cajoled the freebooters, returning rough caresses with rude blows of affected coyness, there was a constant call to the uneasy landlord and his staff for more liquor, the place was foul with the reek of rum and tobacco and, as the song ceased, a discordant babble of screams and laughter, rough entreaties and shrill protestations took its place.

A fiddler was dragged forward and set in a chair upon a table. A clear space was made for unwieldy dancers. The fiddler scraped until his last string snapped and some one plucked the chair from under him, sending him toppling to the floor amid shrieks and guffaws as he scrambled for the broad pieces that were flung to him.

At a table by the open staircase that led to the upper story sat the one-eyed buccaneer, tankard in hand, spinning his tedious yarn to a tall fellow whose dress held none of the splashes of finery distinguishing the buccaneers from the half-fearful, curious natives.

"Aye, 'tis the only life," said the freebooter. "Never have I seen the time when I could not rub one gold piece against another, and that, mark you, means everything. Show me a wench here that I can not cajole, ugly and old and lop-eyed though I be. That for the land. As for the sea, an ye are a seaman and no qualmy-stomached landsman, show me a better sport.

"Ye seem a man of mettle. Look ye, the captain runs the ship, 'tis true, but the quartermaster, Scarry-Dick Denton, he is our tribune. The captain can undertake nothing that we, through Denton, do not approve. Thirty shares for Bane, the rest for us, divided man for man with an extra share for Scarry-Dick. Why, lad, 'tis the life!

"I was with Kidd in the *Adventure Galley*, thirty guns and eighty men, when he sailed out of Plymouth in May, sixteen-ninety-six. Soon we were a hundred and fifty-five. To New York we sailed, then to Madeira and Cape Verd and so to Madagascar, Malabar and Johanna.

"Two hundred pounds apiece we got out of the *Queda Merchant* alone. I left him at Amboyna and so saved my neck, I grant ye, for they took him at New York and sent him back to England with his lads. But a man must take a chance and I am sixty. Aye, 'tis the life. Easy come and easy go. The lasses love ye and the rest, blast them, toady to ye. Boy! Bring more o' that rum!"

"I pay for this shot," said the other. "Nay, man, I insist. I am half-seas over now with your bounty. I like your talk." His eyes narrowed and he nudged the pirate's elbow. "Ye spoke of women, now. Do ye meet with any that are young—not these painted bawds—but fresh and dainty. Eh, tell me that?"

The one-eyed buccaneer slapped him on the back.

"Aye, 'twill be the girls for you and the gold for me. Yet one is gone as soon as the other. But with Bane 'tis business at sea and lasses left for shore. Fresh and dainty, ask ye? They come not willingly to our net which makes them the greater prizes if ye gill them.

"There was one lass on Green Key who took her own life, mark ye, rather than join and share the captain's cabin. She had a husband, she said. She could have had her choice of a dozen out of all the crew. A plucked one she was, with red-gold curls and a skin as white as foam."

He checked his drunken maundering at the quickly arrested exclamation of the other.

"What ails ye, man? Is the rum not to your liking?"

"Nay, it tastes well enough. Green Key, said ye? I know the place. I have piloted and turtled amid the Bahamas from Little Abaco to Turks Islands. I know them all. I could tell your skipper of a passage through the Jumento Cays, a passage from the northwest to a lagoon with an islet in the center. 'Twas shown to me by a Carib Indian for a turtling ground. I dare swear 'tis known to no white man but me. And, to the south and east, an outlet."

"A passage through the Jumentos from the northwest! Now, you are the lad for us! Bane drinks above with Denton and the mates. They are set in gambling but they will listen to such a tale. Will ye go, cully? Will ye join us. Will ye go on the account?"

The tall man finished his rummer and tossed the reckoning on the table.

"'On the account', say ye? 'Tis a good phrase. Take me to Bane."

THE pirate captain lifted the leather cylinder from the dice and swept a dozen gleaming coins toward the heap in front of him before he looked up.

"Nine—and the main!" he called triumphantly. "The third nick running."

"The devil's own luck is with you tonight," grumbled Scarry-Dick. "I've thrown out every time I held the box."

He turned and stared at the intruders.

"A recruit, Cap'n," hiccuped the man who had sailed with Kidd. "One who knows the Bank from end to end and can tell of secret havens. He can show ye a passage through the Jumentos and he's keen to join us."

Bane's eyes challenged the stranger, appraising him. The man's face was burned to coffee color and deeply lined. A short, thick growth of beard stretched from his Adam's apple to his high cheek-bones and his untrimmed hair trailed on his shoulders. His eyes were bleak, almost sinister, with cold lights in them.

"What's this talk of a passage through the Jumentos?" asked Bane.

Southeast of Florida, through Florida Strait, sometimes called the New Bahama Channel, down Santaren Channel and the Old Bahama Channel, ran the broad highway between Cuba and Santo Domingo of the Greater Antilles and the Bahama Islands. It was the main road of sea commerce from the Atlantic States to the West Indies. From it, through the Windward Passage, the way led to the Caribbean, to Puerto Rico, the Leeward and Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, to Venezuela, to Central America and the Isthmus.

West of the scattered islands of the long chain of the Bahamas lie the reefs of the Great Bahama Bank, curbing the Santaren and Old Bahama Channels. The currents swirl perilously about the tide-washed reefs. Midway, Jumentos Cays threw a crescent to the northwest. Bane was the lone sea-highwayman of this stretch, cruising amid the smaller islands and darting out upon the merchantmen. Vice-Admiral Rogers had sworn to chase him from the seas and it was rumored that a fast corvette, or sloop-of-war, was to be specially commissioned for this purpose.

A hidden passage through the Jumentos would provide the buccaneer with a powerful reinforcement. The cord of the bow was sixty miles or more. A channel would enable him to play the arrow, flying out on his prey and slipping back to safety, if needs be, under the very nose of any king's ship. Such a game was to the supreme taste of Bane. To harry commerce and laugh at the Government, why, that was the ideal sport.

He watched the newcomer closely as he took up a tankard set aside on a smaller table, poured the dregs on the smooth mahogany and drew a map with wetted forefinger, outlining the Jumentos Crescent, the scattering Bahamas and the mainland of Cuba as he talked.

"Seventy-five-eighty west, twenty-three-ten north," he concluded, giving the approximate position of the channel. "And the bearings by the three palms, as I shall show ye."

Bane nodded approvingly.

"If ye show us aright," he said, "there shall be special reward for ye. Eh, Denton, what think ye? It suits. In the very midrib of the Bank, a rare hideout! And an isle to boot, for fort and magazine. Sixteen feet will see us clear with our shallow draft. The king's ships draw no less than twenty, even if they dared to follow without knowing the bearings. Your name, man?"

"They call me Turtler Tom."

Bane nodded. The lack of surnames was not uncommon with those who did not pretend to worry about the laws.

"So then, Tom the Turtler, you go on the account? Good! We sail at noon tomorrow, when our heads are clear. Report to Denton here. And there's a piece-of-eight to drink to the new venture."

Tom took the coin and pocketed it. His sponsor clapped him on the back once more as they went down to the common room.

"So ye are one of us. Now for a health. I warrant ye that was one of Denton's pieces the skipper tossed ye. Did ye note the glum look he cast after it?"

Above-stairs Bane looked at the evaporating map.

"A good stroke, Denton," he said. "We'll play the fox with them all with this runway. And a good man gained. A bold eye, Dickon, and a strong arm."

"A likely man enough, though I cared not for his eyes. They look too like a shark's for my taste. And I have a fancy that I have seen him before. 'Tis your nick again. Take up the box."

"I call a five," said Bane, rattling the dice. "Shell out. I shall win all your stakes yet. This is my lucky night."

Tom the Turtler glanced up at the lighted window as he left the tavern. The last round had put the old buccaneer to sleep. He walked down to the beach where the boats of the pirate lay. The brigantine was anchored in the bay.

He walked moodily along the edge of the tide, his hands deep in his pockets. Presently his fingers sought and found a coin, the piece-of-eight that Bane had given him as earnest-money. With a swift jerk he sent it skittering across the placid water, sending up tiny splashes of phosphorescence as it skipped.

"'On the account.' 'Tis an apt phrase," he mused. "And the reckoning is a long one. But it shall be paid, to the full."

He seated himself on a rock and looked at the trim hull of the *Venture* for a long time, motionless. But his eyes saw no vessel, but the vision of Green Key and the coral slabs above a lonely grave where the jungle vines had laid pitying fingers.

CHAPTER VI

THE KISSING PALMS

FAR down the wind a ship blazed furiously, the flames, pale in the afternoon sun, fanned by the mounting breeze. Three miles to the south sped the *Venture*, her decks yet cumbered with the spoils of the prize. And, after her in swift pursuit, with all the sail that her slender spars could bear, raced H. M. Corvette *Juno*, overhauling the pirate fathom by fathom.

Captain Sawtrell, commander of the king's ship, walked his deck and whistled softly for a continuance of the wind. His first lieutenant saw the puckered lips and guessed their meaning with a smile. It was yet three glasses to darkness. The chart showed that the chase was heading straight for the Jumentos, less than seven sea-leagues distant. If the *Juno* could get within gunshot before sunset, as seemed inevitable, he had metal enough aboard—new guns out from England—to blow the brigantine out of the water.

The corvette was flush-decked and schooner rigged. She had but one tier of guns but they were handled by a picked crew. The vice-admiral had grown tired of chasing Bane with craft slower than the brigantine and he had requisitioned Sawtrell and the *Juno* to rid the seas of the *Venture*. As long as Bane was free to ravage, others were likely to emulate his example.

There were plenty of men among those recently pardoned at Providence who itched for the old life and made a hero out of Bane, laughing in their sleeves at Rogers for letting him escape from Nassau. Sawtrell's orders were explicit, he was not to return until Bane was captured, and already the end of the cruise seemed in sight.

"What's wrong with the fool?" Sawtrell asked his officer. "There's no passage through those cays?"

"None marked. The water shallows to six fathoms a league from the line of breakers. I've sailed along their front and seen naught but spouting reefs. Maybe he plans to beach her, since we have the heels of him."

"We'll pound him to pieces before he can get his men out of her, if he does. We can try a shot soon. We must have caught him napping, too busy looting to keep a lookout. Better get the bow-guns ready, Hardy; we'll try for his spars. He keeps his course, the rogue."

Aboard the *Venture*, Bane measured the decreasing distance with an anxious eye. The brigantine was foul-bottomed and the corvette was entirely too fast to his liking. The merchantman had been richly laden and all hands had worked to transfer the cargo. The lookout had taken the corvette for a trading-schooner until she was close enough to show her white gun-ports and a tack had revealed the red ensign.

The brigantine, according to British nomenclature, was the same type as an hermaphrodite brig, square-rigged forward and schooner-rigged aft. With the wind as it was, slightly forward of the beam, sailing on a broad reach, the corvette with her fore-and-aft rig had the better of the *Venture*. Before the wind the craft would be on fairly equal terms; close-hauled, the corvette would still hold the advantage.

The wind was westerly. To run would bring the brigantine into the angle where the Jumentos joined Long Island on a course between the reefs and the guns of

the corvette. So Bane kept on the steady line for the center of the Jumentos. He was taking a chance on Tom the Turtler, who now stood at the wheel.

They had been out from San Domingo a week. Todd had performed his duty with thoroughness. But he was not popular aboard. Bane welcomed him as a perfect helmsman as well as special pilot, a man who could get the last fraction of a knot of speed and keep his course high-pointed by the trim of the sails and the feel of the wheel. But, with the pirates, Hampton, the man who had sailed with Kidd and sponsored him, was practically his only associate.

Todd had tried to mix with the rest, pending the development of his hazy plans of revenge, but the grim determination that invested him looked out of the eyes that Denton had said were like those of a shark and the reckless pirates seemed to sense him as one even more desperate than themselves but not one of them.

There were whispers of his being a Jonah. The practical jokes that were played upon a newcomer fell flat before perpetration, checked by Todd's steady gaze. Sometimes a pirate crossed himself and muttered about the "evil-eye" when Todd looked at him.

Scarry-Dick Denton watched him with suspicion, he knew that. Any day that danger might break and the quartermaster remember him as the Turtler of Green Key who had shot hogs. Todd's vengeance had not assumed a definite plan. Circumstances perforce guided him. He found it hard to mask the hatred in his eyes when he spoke to Bane and his fingers itched to close about the pirate's throat.

Mary had not been quite dead when he reached her. She had spoken a few words, enough to let him know that Bane had been the chief aggressor but to Todd's fanatic mind, crazed with grief, the whole crew were guilty and were to be brought to the account. He could easily have killed Bane first, and after him, two or three more perhaps before they stopped him, but that was not enough to pay for the murder of his Mary, herded by the butchers to kill herself and save her honor.

He thought of blowing up the magazine at first but Bane knew his business and not only was it guarded, night and day, and during a fight, but, whenever Todd showed a disposition to go anywhere about the ship by himself, he found a pirate close beside him. He shrewdly suspected that, once he had shown the passage through the Jumentos, they would gladly rid themselves of him, by fair means or foul.

The suggestion of Jonah aboard such a ship was one that would not down. And he could not change his eyes. He tried to glaze them with indifference but his hatred showed. He caught sight of himself once in a triangle of looking-glass and almost started at the malignant countenance he saw, grim, relentless.

There was one man aboard who had tried to pick a quarrel with him, a half-breed, part Carib, part Spaniard; known as "Spanish" Jack, noted for his knife-play. Denton had interfered, threatening the man with irons and Spanish Jack had slunk away. Todd guessed that the quartermaster had interfered only to preserve the holder of the reef entrance and that sooner or later he would have to deal with Spanish Jack.

NOW he held them all in the hollow of his hand. He could wreck them and the sea would do the rest. But even then he was not sure of his vengeance and physically he ached to be an active instrument, to come to grips with Bane, at least, and let the life out of him in a red tide.

"One scrape of her keel and I blow off the top of your head!"

Scarry-Dick was beside him, openly suspicious, a pistol in his hand.

Todd smiled and glanced once at the quartermaster. It was the glance of a man without fear, thought the quartermaster. The look of one who did not value his life at a groat, a menacing look that seemed to hold the smoldering flame of a threat against all the world. Something had seared all the humanity out of it. It sneered, it seemed to read his mind, to seek out the dirty corners of his soul and regard its foulness with a scantily veiled contempt. It was the gaze of a man without a soul. The gaze of a devil.

Denton's grip tightened on his pistol-butt. For perhaps the first time in his blustering life the quartermaster was afraid.

The skipper is a fool, he thought, glancing over his shoulder at the corvette. There was a puff of white smoke from her bows that formed itself into a ring and blew away in rags to leeward. A round shot plumped into the sea, geysering up half a mile astern. The chase was closing.

Bane came up and sent a keen eye to the set of the sails, to the even wake that streamed greenish-white, like marble, behind them. The steering was perfect. The brigantine was at the limit of its speed.

"Once clear of this," he said to Denton, "and we'll careen. If we were not foul we could hold her. As it is——"

"Land ahead," came from the foremast where a man balanced himself in the topmast crosstrees. Another shot came from the corvette.

"Try her with the stern-chaser," ordered Bane. "The water should begin to shallow soon. We'll lead her on since we can not shake her off."

The missile fell short. A third shot from the king's ship, fired at extreme elevation, dropped within two hundred yards, fair in the tail of the wake.

"Zounds!" cried Bane, frowning. "They have good marksmen aboard. It's touch and go. If she can once cripple us she can hold off and hammer us with those cursed guns of hers. Try her again, gunner."

He looked doubtfully at Todd as the cannon roared out defiance.

"How close are we heading for that entrance of yours?" he asked.

"I can not tell yet. The course should bring us fairly close. There are few landmarks on this lowland and we must raise the palms before I dare shift."

"We can not risk a tack," muttered Bane. "Make no mistake, if you set any value on your life. Does the lookout know your bearings?"

"Aye. There are three palms, as I told ye. One each side of the channel with their branches bowed toward each other. The Kissing Palms, I named them. Another on the islet. We take the channel with the two in line at first. Then let them open and, when the islet palm shows even between the two, we make the final fairway."

He stood confident, his lean brown hands deftly handling the wheel, his steering hung between three spokes, easing a little to the gusts that threatened a swiftly coming gale, his feet firm to the deck as the vessel heeled, apparently unconscious of Scarry-Dick's menacing attitude.

Bane strode forward. The corvette was yawing a trifle to use her bow guns. The pyramids of water from her shot came ever closer to the counter of the brigantine. At the pirate's command a man crept barefooted, out over the jib-boom to the flying jib-boom spar, locked his legs in the stirrup-ropes and cast his lead. Bane watched the colored rags of the marks as the line cut the water and was swept back into the hissing rush from the cutwater, listening to the drone of the leadsman.

"Eight—by the mark—eight! Seven and —a half—a quarter! Seven! She shoals! Seven it is! Seven! By the mark six and a half. It holds!"

The lookout shouted. Bane went aft to where he could catch the back-swept syllables. Palms were in sight. He took his telescope back to the bows. Presently spidery lines, tufted at the top, came into the field above a havoc of white surf-line. The brigantine fell off a little. Tom the Turtler had judged his course to a nicety. They were above the passage. There was no tack necessary.

"Six fathom," called the leadsman.

The seas were choppy. The brigantine, curbed by the exquisite humoring of the rudder by the steersman, fought with wind and wave to gain its head. A shot tore through the fore topsail, barely missing the boom, and dropped ahead. The *Venture* replied, almost in range. The wind increased and the masts bent like whips.

Bane snapped to his spy-glass. He had seen the bowed fronds of the Kissing Palms. If their pilot was true they would beat the corvette. Her captain could not risk his ship much longer in the shoaling sea.

THERE was a thudding crash. A shot had struck fair, just below the taffrail. The next tore through the planking of the deck within five feet of the wheel. Todd paid no attention to it. Denton's pistol was within an inch of his skull as he set his strength to the stubborn spokes.

Ahead they could catch the roar of the breakers. There seemed no break in the leaping tumult that hid the low shore, above which the palm tops barely showed. They were in five fathoms now, only twice the draft of the brigantine.

The corvette had come up into the wind, firing a full broadside as she hung in stays. They had given up the chase. The king's ship was deeper-keeled. Eighteen feet was her limit.

The balls hurtled over the *Venture*. Ropes were clipped, the topmast on the main faltered and broke, the topsail hanging

as it flapped in a tangle of lines. The brigantine wavered but Todd straightened her and they rushed on toward the spouting reef.

It opened ahead, a mere break in a wall of spume and they sped down a lane of wild water, less than a fathom of freeway on either hand, urged on by great billows that mounted behind them in the narrow channel. The two palms came slowly into line and still they glided on, high-tossing seas raging over the rocks to right and left in streaming cataracts, Denton's finger on the last ounce of trigger-pull.

The palms opened again. Todd gave orders to Denton who repeated them with a roar to the expectant men. A dozen leaped for every brace and sheet and the *Venture* shot up into the wind. The following breakers lost their crests and volume.

Ahead, a green hummock of an island showed, one lone palm crowning it that slowly shifted until it held the center of the frame formed by the Kissing Palms while the brigantine fell slowly off and passed at last between reefs half submerged and hissing with rapids into a central lagoon of which the tiny island was the hub to a rim of strips of land, reef-tops fringed here and there with palms and scrub. Todd brought the *Venture* to an anchorage off a tiny cove and the chain rattled out to sand in four fathoms.

Bane smote him between the shoulders.

"Well found, lad," he cried. "Now let the king's ship play patrol, an she will. We'll stay inside till we are ready to leave, with two doors to our stable. Come below and prick it on the chart. There's a tot for ye and for all hands besides. Give the order, Denton, and join us."

Scarry-Dick cast a sour look at Todd. The man had saved them but he liked him none the better. He beckoned to Spanish Jack.

"What was your quarrel with him?" he asked, jerking his thumb at Todd.

The half-breed spilled a mouthful of ready oaths.

"A score of reasons. The man has the eyes of *voodoo*."

"Caught you cogging the dice, eh? Nay, frown not, man, I have no love for him. But ye know the rules. All quarrels must be settled on land. We stay here until tomorrow."

A crooked smile distorted the face of Spanish Jack. He tapped the hilt of the long, thin knife that he wore in his sash.

"There are other games that I can play besides dice," he said.

Denton nodded and went below. They wanted no kill-joys aboard, he told himself. The skipper had promised Todd an extra share for successful pilotage. There was none too much for sharing with the big crew.

I would that I could place the man, he thought. It is no pleasant memory he brings up, of that I'll be sworn. The man hates himself and all the world. He'll have the crew by the ears with that skull-face of his. Beshrew me, but those eyes of his hold the look of a hangman."

CHAPTER VII

KNIFE-PLAY

THE pirates sat and squatted in a big circle where hummocks and dunes of sand formed the seats of a natural arena on the shore of the islet. The morning meal was over and the sun was well up. A man had hitched up the slender trunk of the palm and reported the topsails of the corvette showing on the horizon in the hope that the pirate would come out of his hide-out. What with the channel and the shallows they were in no fear of his guns.

For safety's sake the sails of the brigantine were close furled and the spars decked cleverly with fronds of palmetto. They could wait until the coast was clear, or, if the king's ship proved too persistent, slip out to southward. This last Bane did not want to do unless he were pressed. He had to careen and the fresh-water creek he preferred for the cleansing of the weeds and barnacles from the bottom of the brigantine was to the north and east on Great Exuma Isle.

To go south would lose him valuable time and this was the best season for his piracies. The merchantman they had just captured and fired, after putting its crew into their own longboat, had carried several butts of wine and a day's debauch was ahead. After the division of the spoils there was rare sport forward. Spanish Jack had given the new man the lie.

To refuse a challenge meant that the flincher would lead the life of the ship's cur and the recruit had taken it up. Wagers

were freely offered on Spanish Jack and there were no takers. Knives were the weapons set aside for settling such affairs as providing the best spectacle and the longest fight and all knew the half-breed's especial skill.

Spanish Jack was a cheat and a bully but the other was one who held as little in common with them as oil with water, and the ship, now that he had shown them the passage, would be the happier without him. Only Hampton, the one-eyed, stood beside him.

"Look ye, lad," said Hampton. "'Ware the sun. He will work you to it. Watch his shadow. Or he will dazzle you with his blade. 'Tis an old trick of his. He cheated me out of eleven guineas the other night. I have no love for him. If ye win, belike it will make ye more popular. Ye should spruce up, man. That face of yours is a spoil-sport. 'Tis a gay life we aim to lead.

"Let me see your knife. Take mine. It has a grip of sharkskin and the blade is long. He can shift to either hand or throw straight to an inch of his mark. He'll try to gut ye or slash the tendons of your wrist. Crouch and thrust. Don't slash—it shortens your reach.

"Take off your shirt, ye are to fight naked in your drawers. 'Tis the rule. The bullies like to watch the red score on the naked flesh. Soak your headkerchief, the sun will else addle your brains—and wrap your forearm in your sash. That yellow mongrel has arms like a squid but yours are full as long. I mind me when I sailed with Kidd——"

Bane, sitting with his officers upon a turf-crowned knoll, gave the word. The two advanced, crossing their blades at arms' length, right foot advanced to right foot.

Todd's lean, brown body sloped from square shoulders to narrow hips, his ribs showing clean above his muscle-ridged stomach. He was confident of the issue. A plan had come into his head. His cause was righteous and he felt that Spanish Jack was not to be the one to defeat it. That the duel was forced upon him he felt sure but he meant to use the enmity that lay back of it to his own ends.

The Spaniard was fat in comparison but he seemed made of gutta percha as he thrust swiftly and bounded back, his eyes glittering as he saw the scarlet line break out across Todd's shoulder. He circled, puma-footed, backing toward the sun. Todd saw his shadow swinging longer toward him.

The sunglare caught his eyes and he leaped to one side, drawing his belly inward to avoid the sweeping lunge and clutching for the other's knife-hand with his left. In the second they were locked, swaying. Spanish Jack saw the turtler's eyes glaring at him, malignant, assured. He suddenly dropped to his knees, pulling Todd forward, downward, with all his strength while the eager circle yelled.

Taken unawares, Todd lunged over the breed's shoulder, pitching heavily to the sand but whirling like a cat to regain his feet. Spanish Jack spun round on his buttocks, slashing as he came, and once more scoring. The point caught Todd on his hip with a squeak and the blood spurted as the blade glanced off. Spanish Jack rose effortless to his feet and flung a handful of fine sand, rushing in as Todd lowered his head to avoid the grit.

ONCE more they came to handgrips. Todd put forth all his strength, grinding the small bones of the pirate's wrist until the sweat of agony started from Spanish Jack's eyes and he tore free. The firm sand was printed with their foot-marks as they swerved and feinted, the perspiration already streaming down them, their breath coming short and hard while the pirates leaned forward wordless and motionless from their vantage-seats and a gull screamed overhead.

Todd watched the eyes of his man. He caught a telegraphed lunge to the stomach on his own curving blade, thankful for the sickle shape of the blade and the pebbly grip of the shagreen handle. It was not the first time he had fought with knives though never before in deliberate duel, and his co-ordinating eye and wrist time after time successfully parried the blows in mid-air. He was better winded than the sleek pirate whose indulged paunch showed signs of distress. And he was watchful for more tricks.

One came at last. They had grappled and Spanish Jack swung a savage side-kick at his ankle that almost overcame Todd's balance. He stumbled forward, throwing up the pirate's forearm with a jarring swing of his own crossed right and countered with an overhand buffet that caught the breed a blow on the side of the head and sent him

staggering back, the sun full in his eyes for a second as Todd regained his balanced footing and leaped in.

Spanish Jack dropped to one knee, shaded his eyes with his left hand for an all-important heart-beat and, with a sharp snap, threw his blade, beautifully balanced for the purpose, straight to the heart. Todd caught the flash of it and shrunk sideways in mid-spring. The keen steel flayed the scant flesh of his outer ribs as he swerved and a great roar came from the crowd.

Spanish Jack had missed!

The pirate turned, dug fingers and toes in the sand and flung himself forward in a sprint with Todd at his heels. The turtler caught him at the slope and drove his knife to the guard between the shoulders. Spanish Jack plunged coughing to the ground, wrenching his body from the dripping blade to lie twitching at the feet of his comrades.

There was a sullen silence. Todd felt its omen as he turned toward Bane. If he could gain what he wished for, his plan was well forwarded. Bane beckoned to him and led him apart.

"My bullies take the loss of that runaway amiss," he said. "Yet I have but lost a coward and kept a better man. And I have need for ye. Look, ye, 'twill not be pleasant aboard for ye ere this dies down. 'Tis in my mind to build a stockade and magazine on this islet. The *Venture* is as foul as the beard of Poseidon. Once clean I can lead the corvette or any other keel the king sends out a merry chase. We shall sail tonight at dusk and clear him in the dark. In two weeks we will return, to come in by dawn.

"There is wood enough. If ye can swing an ax I'll leave ye here with tools and the shallop for towing. 'Tis leaky but 'twill serve. By the time we return the matter will have died down. What say ye?"

Todd's eyes held a gleam that Bane mistook for gratitude. He had gained what he had meant to ask.

"Where do ye careen?" he asked.

Bane frowned.

"I set my own courses," he said.

"I but meant to tell ye of a good place."

"I know of a dozen. So then, 'tis settled. Ye can pilot us out as the sun drops and return in the shallop. They will never see us in the shore haze until the dark covers us. There is no moon until long after midnight. And, a word in your ear.

"Cultivate a more cheerful look on that black face of yours. The men will have it ye are a Jonah. Your face would sour the water casks. Learn to smile against we get back. A good jest is the best purge for sorrow. If 'tis the matter of a faithless lass, forget it. Look not so sullen, man."

"I shall be smiling when we meet next time," said Todd.

Bane turned away then wheeled.

"Keep a good fire going tonight and a smudge by day. 'Twill serve to keep the corvette certain that we are still within. Two days from now let it die down. That should leave the coast clear for us to put back. I have no mind to sail around the whole Jumentos."

Todd nodded. He had got the information he most wanted after all. The *Venture* was going north, probably to one of the Exuma group.

Just as the sun dipped and spread a sudden curtain between day and night the brigantine cleared the channel and, steering northeast, was swallowed up in the dusk. Todd, still with the gleam in his eyes that Bane had thought gratitude, rowed back to the islet with his tools and provisions and started a fire. He seemed in a hurry to commence his labors, taking up his pick after a hasty meal and commencing to dig.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ACCOUNT IS CLOSED

BANE had guessed right as to the actions of the corvette. Captain Sawtrell, loath to give up the so nearly captured pirate held his ship off the Jumentos where the red glow of a fire seemed to proclaim Bane and his men reveling in their retreat behind the protecting reefs. Sawtrell thought it probable that there were other openings to the south and roundly cursed the faulty Government charts. The look-out failed to see the brigantine creeping out through the murk at sunset and the corvette held off and on till morning.

At dawn the course was set shoreward where a column of smoke showed faintly brown against the clear sky.

"We'll not round the Jumentos," declared Sawtrell. "If we do he'll come out by this entrance and at least we can keep him off the line of commerce. Hang him for a crafty dog that has a dozen kennels.

But we'll take him yet. We have the speed and range of him. Next time——"

A man came aft with the news of a small shallop heading up for the corvette.

"A Carib likely," commented the captain. "We'll have him aboard if he comes near us. Perchance he may know the key to this front-door of Bane's. We'll stand as we are, Hardy, as long as the boat comes to us. No use in showing our topsails unless we have to. We were too close in last night."

An hour later Todd stood before the captain and told his tale.

"How am I to know whether this it not a trap," asked the king's officer sternly. "Ye say ye piloted them in. Ye may be a renegade."

"It is a trap," said Todd, "but it is not set for you. My God, man, do ye not believe me? Ye run no risk more than ye did the last time."

His eyes blazed with fierce exultation, his lean face lit with the prospect of revenge.

"That is true," said Sawtrell. "And ye have good cause for getting even. It is bad that ye know not for certain where he went to careen but we will cruise the line between the Exumas and the eastern horn of the Jumentos. If he sailed northeast he will cross us. Nights, we'll range closer in. Mayhap we'll catch her within range. If not we'll try your advice. And, if we turn the trick ye can name any fair and fit reward."

"Loan me shears and a razor. Give me a cutlas and pistols and appoint me with the boarding party. I have a fancy to be present in person when the account is paid."

ON THE morning of the thirteenth day Bane came on deck at a few minutes before eight bells. A crescent moon held the morning star in its embrace. The sea was motionless save for the hardly perceptible heave of the groundswell, lifting the unruffled expanse in soundless sighs.

A slight mist, which would vanish with the sun, dimmed the moon and all the stars, gradually lifting from the water, its lower edge even with the rail of the brigantine. The canvas hung limp, the *Venture* rolled slightly, without steerage way.

Bane cursed the calm that held him adrift ten miles from the entrance to the channel. He was anxious to get back to the islet, finish up his stockade and magazine and be off upon the Bank once more for plunder.

He did not fear the corvette. With a clean bottom the *Venture* sailed like a witch. The king's men would long since have sickened of waiting and concluded that he had slipped through to the south. Perhaps they had gone in search of him.

Through the mist came the sound of a ship's bell, smartly tapped and answered, eight ringing strokes from the fog. Scarry-Dick came up as Bane started at the sound.

"There's something waiting for us, Denton. If only this cursed fog would lift. Some distance off, though it's hard to guess with the mist. Get me my spyglass, will ye?"

Slowly the filmy curtain rose, the space between it and the sea clear as crystal. Bane stooped to the rail and leveled his glass, sweeping the northwestern horizon where the stars were begining to flicker. He turned to the quartermaster with a low exclamation.

"It's that —— corvette. Take the glass man. Look, there where the Big Bear swings to the sea. Now for a breeze. The sun will be up in a few minutes. We are well inshore. If the wind's easterly we'll have the weather of him and we'll play him the same trick over again. I've no fancy to get within range of those guns of his."

A quadrant of the sun suddenly appeared above the low line of Long Island. The mist seemed to dissolve and sop up the stars as it disappeared. Suddenly it was day. The corvette *Juno* stood up sharply less than two miles away. The wind had come from the eye of the sun, the placid sea was ruffled with flaws that picked up the level rays with flashes of orange and crimson.

Bane volleyed his orders and extra canvas rose smartly to the tapering spars. The *Venture* began to glide smooth and fast through the water. The corvette, topsails mounted, came about and stood on an inshore tack on a parallel course with the brigantine, beyond gun range and to leeward.

"We can almost make the channel on this slant," said Bane. "—— her, if we could run the corvette ashore we'd pick her clean of those guns. We'll run in, finish our work and get through to the south. As long as she stays in these waters our sport is spoiled. She sticks like a limpet. 'Tis a good breeze. Watch us walk, the beauty."

The two ships were evenly matched. The water creamed from the corvette's forefoot. Through the spyglass Bane could see the men swarming on her decks, working on the sheets to get another foot of speed out of her. Mile after mile they raced toward the shore, the leeway of wind and current gradually setting the king's ship down the cays while the brigantine, with Hampton at the wheel, clawed up into the breeze to make the tack for entrance into the channel as short as possible. Four miles off shore the corvette tacked and came toward them.

"She'll pass two miles astern of us," chuckled Bane. "She's not gained a foot." The king's ship came on, close-hauled, surging through the blue water while the *Venture* held on for the shore. Then the corvette tacked once more but kept her fore and main sheeted in until she heeled perilously, losing the speed of the full drive of her canvas from the quartering wind.

Bane swore through his beard. It was a smart maneuver, calculated to bring the corvette within gun range and broadside to the brigantine when the latter made its inevitable tack at the channel entrance.

"They got the position down fine," he muttered. "We'll have to run the risk of a raking. Since that's the case we'll play the same game." He gave his orders and the *Venture* swung to a course parallel with the corvette and the cays, a little less than a mile inshore of the king's ship. They had passed from blue water to the vivid green of the shoals. The corvette could not risk approaching the land much closer. Already the leadsman was in her bows.

On the *Venture* the guns were loaded and run out from the open ports. The muzzles of the *Juno* were already peeping from her sides. Once more she smartly came about, slanting up to meet the pirate. Both broadsides roared. Clouds of white powder smoke rolled up between them. Splinters flew from the hull of the brigantine.

A round shot smote old Hampton fairly in the ribs, showering Bane with his blood, shattering the rim of the wheel and plunging through the rail. The pirate who had sailed with Kidd rolled into the scuppers, almost torn in two. Bane sprang to the shattered wheel. The rudder still answered. The helm was broken but not destroyed. The smoke cleared. White flecks on the corvette's side showed where the pirates had scored. She was firing from her stern-chaser and Bane replied.

'Round came the corvette again and the duel continued from their fore and aft guns. A lucky shot from the *Venture* smashed the *Juno's* bowsprit, carrying away her jibs, the staysail still keeping her steady as she dropped behind. A scattering shower of partridge scoured the length of the brigantine, the bomb of the charge exploding amidships, leaving a half-score of writhing men upon her decks.

They were off the channel. The main-sheet came home, the fore-yards were hauled and the *Venture* squared off for the entrance, Denton in the bows, picking out the Kissing Palms. More partridge sprayed them as they sped, Bane at the wheel, holding the palms in line as they neared the reef. He scowled as he looked at the corpse of Hampton and the dead and wounded on the smeared planks.

One parting missile jarred the brigantine as the corvette put about from the danger-line of shallows. The shot had struck fair on the waterline. A few more of that kind and the *Venture* would have been out of commission.

They entered the passage, with the Kissing Palms merged in one. Bane let them slowly open, watching for the islet palm to show. He was furious at the encounter which had plainly proved him no match for the metal or marksmanship of the *Juno*. He would go south to the Carribbean and leave these waters. They might go to Madagascar, the old cruising ground of Kidd. At all events he would get away, thanks to the secret of Tom the Turtler.

The islet palm seemed slow to appear, the surf was dangerously near his larboard quarter. It showed at last, shifting slowly to the middle of the two trunks and he breathed a sigh of relief as the *Venture* answered his hands.

There was a slurring, grinding jar. The bows of the brigantine lifted as she slid forward and upward. The deck planks lifted, her timbers creaked and the foremast broke off at the deck, yards and canvas falling with swinging blocks and stays torn loose from their boltings in confusion, smothering part of the startled crew who fought their way free or lay pinned and groaning under the ruin.

Bane, clinging to the wheel, stared in amazement. The islet palm was still fair

between the two other stems, as he had watched it when they had passed through under Tom the Turtler's pilotage. They were hard and fast, seas were breaking above the wreck of the foremast. Denton came to him, his head bloody from a falling spar.

"'Tis some trick," he gasped. "Some trick of that cursed, shark-eyed turtler."

"Hell's furies," cried Bane. "Up the mainmast, one of ye! If they've seen us strike they'll be after us with boarding crews. Up!"

A man sprang into the main rigging and mounted.

"They are putting off from the corvette," he shouted. "Three boats—four!"

Bane jumped into action.

"Up with the boarding-nettings," he yelled. "Clear away some of that mess for'ard. Serve out pikes and cutlases. Train the stern-chaser on the channel. Do they seem to know the passage, aloft there?"

"Making straight for it."

Bane dived below and chose his sidearms and his sword, an Arabian weapon, curved like a scimitar, of matchless steel. On deck again he brought a semblance of order out of confusion. The *Venture* had swung sideways with the tide, blocking the channel. The stern-chaser had burst its tackles and broken through the taffrail.

A group of pirates worked to get it into position before the king's men appeared. One trunnion had slipped its socket and the gun lay athwart its carriage. A heavy netting of rope was raised above the rail. Muskets were piled with stacks of boarding pikes and the cornered crew prepared to resist.

THE leading cutter appeared, spray flying from the spurting blades. Another followed it, the men huzzaing as they caught sight of the trapped pirate. Haul and heave as they might, Bane's men could not get the stern gun into position. All four of the king's boats, crowded with men, were now racing down the lane that was pitted with musket balls. Here and there a rower slumped but the boarding was a matter of only a hundred yards dash from the turn in the channel.

With a cheer, the cutters swept under the counter and alongside, jumping for the low freeboard, clinging to the netting while they slashed at it with cutlas and knife, tearing it loose with a grappling iron and swarming across the rail, parrying pike and blade, leaping to the decks and breaking up into a series of hand-to-hand combats, little swirls of men that engaged and broke apart leaving here and there one prone, sliced with a keen edge or shot by a pistol that singed the flesh at close quarters.

The hot sun shone down on the mêlée. There was the stamp of feet, the sound of oaths, of shots, the smell of blood that stained the decks, lay in sluggish puddles or joined the dark stream in the scuppers; the taste and scent of powder gas, films of smoke above the struggling masses as the men from the *Juno* drove the pirates forward to where the fallen foremast partly blocked the deck; man to man, cursing as bullet or blade went home, gasping their diminishing breath as the others trampled upon them, sliding on the canted deck, soon slippery with gore.

Todd was the second man aboard. Captain Sawtrell beat him by a split-second. A pirate thrust at him with a pike as he stood on the rail but the point wavered and fell as Todd fired full in the man's face and leaped to the deck. He had caught sight of Bane, his sword flashing as it rose and fell, his voice rising above the general uproar in defiant curses.

Sawtrell pressed toward him and Todd followed, eager to reach the buccaneer captain and settle his score. Two men closed in upon them and Sawtrell turned to engage one of them, dexterously parrying the forceful but clumsy swing of the cutlas and running his opponent through with his sword as a cook would spit a joint.

Todd broke through the other's guard and sliced the man's upper arm. His strength seemed doubled and he strode over the fallen man in exultant fury, pressing ahead of the *Juno's* commander to where Bane's sword, red now, whistled above his head as he charged through the knot of sailors who surrounded him, and led a group of pirates to the rescue of Scarry-Dick, hard-pressed by the rail.

A jumble of men, cutting and thrusting, swept Todd aside for the moment. He dropped a burly giant with the bullet from his second pistol and felled another with the butt. The fighting mob divided and he sprang through the opening. Scarry-Dick seemed to spring up through the deck be-

fore him, cutlas aloft. As the blades grated for a second he saw Denton's puzzled eyes staring at him in amazement. The quartermaster had recognized the turtler from Green Key, though, shaven clean and clipped, he did not know him for the pilot they had recruited at San Domingo until Todd shouted as he lunged.

"Ah, Shark-eyes," answered the pirate. "Have at ye, trickster!"

His arm shot up as he avoided the lunge but never descended. A shot from Hardy, first officer of the corvette, pierced his neck and he fell, grasping futilely at Todd's legs as the turtler passed over him.

The sailor in front of Bane dropped to his knees, his skull gaping, and Todd jumped in, parrying the smashing blow the pirate swung at him. The tempered Arabian blade shore through the coarser steel and Todd found himself with a shattered weapon clutching a hilt that held only a few inches of jagged blade. Bane laughed, swinging his sword in a hissing circle.

"Come on, bullies," he cried. "Drive 'em, the dogs. Drive——"

The word died in his throat as Todd leaped, heedless of the keen edge that bit into his shoulder, sending his broken spike of steel into Bane's face, full into the bush of black beard, smashing the grinning teeth and, as Bane staggered, clutching the throat his fingers had so long itched to reach.

The pirate's eyes rolled upward, projecting from their sockets as his sword clattered to the deck and he strove to tear loose the iron claws that were compressing his windpipe. Back to the rail Todd bore him, back until he bent Bane's spine across the edge and the buccaneer's tongue protruded from his cut and swollen lips.

Todd's strength was rapidly ebbing with the stream of blood that poured from his shoulder but he knew nothing but the glut of his revenge, the sight of Bane's protuding eyes, the purpling of his face, the laxness of the body that sagged, dragging Todd with it, his fingers still sunk into the flesh and muscles about the throttled gullet.

The cheering of the king's men as they drove the pirates below, overboard, or begging quarter in herded groups, sounded to Todd like the roaring of deep seas as he sank beneath them to unconsciousness.

THE Honorable William Dummer, Esq., Lieutenant-Governor and commander-in-chief of the province of Massachusetts Bay, President of the Special Court of the Admiralty, at the courthouse of Boston, assisted by eighteen gentlemen of the council, found Bane and the survivors of his crew guilty of murder and piracy.

"Before I sentence ye to be executed and hung in chains in Boston Harbor, regretting that such a villain has but one life to make atonement for the barbarity of which you have been found guilty," said the governor, "you are permitted to speak and say why sentence should not be passed upon ye."

"Hang me and be —— to ye all," said Bane. "I will meet many of ye sleek gentlemen in hell where I shall have the advantage of my quicker turning off. Yet I would ask one question of this witness."

He turned his baleful eyes upon Tom Todd, who had testified in secret session to the death of Mary Todd and his own adventures aboard the *Venture*, for which he had received full remission from the court and the promise of a substantial reward.

"Before I swing," said Bane, as the governor nodded and Todd, his eyes still holding hatred, stepped forward, "tell me the trick ye played on us in the Jumentos passage."

Todd's eyes gleamed.

"'Twas easy to gull ye," he said. "Ye left me tools and a shallop. Before I put off to the *Juno* I shifted the palm on the islet five paces to the west."

The bailiffs stopped the curses of the hoodwinked pirate and Todd turned to the presiding officer.

"My lord," he said. "Ye have made mention of some reward. I ask for one favor that shall cancel all the rest."

"'Tis granted, within reason."

"There is wide reason in the request, my lord. Grant me the hangman's office."

The Camp-Fire

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

A LETTER from our comrade, M. Logie, with the Saloniki forces, a letter considerably the worse for wear because of the censor's blue pencil and black crayon which cut out a page or so in which, presumably, too much was said about the writer's geographical location:

Received your welcome note of February 26, 1917, always glad to hear from civilization and "God's Country." Am certainly glad to hear that the U. S. has finally decided to come in this affair, better late than never.

WE ALL know that she has been given plenty reason for doing the thing proper; we have the press news occasionally up here amongst the hills of Macedonia. Am more than pleased to hear that Joffre and Balfour have arrived in the States for a conference regarding munitions and troops. Also the cooperation of the U. S. N., with the Allied fleets which will be a great help, if the Sausage Eaters ever come out of their "hole" at Kiel, etc. I wish to say that I have applied for transfer back to the U. S. N. where I'll be of more use, there being such a shortage of trained personnel in that branch of the American service. Undoubtedly you remember I was serving in that outfit before taking this leap. *Some leap* and a "bob a day *wallah*" (buck private and a whole two-bit piece per day.) Nevertheless, all for a good cause, I guess. Have received several editions of the N. Y. *Times* from my folks in Fordham, N. Y.

And I notice that old Teddy still has a good punch left, more power to him. No doubt he will have success raising his *division* for Flanders. Haven't forgot his speech at Montreal to the Canucks regarding his views, etc. Well! Mr. Hoffman I am . . . . . .

Am thinking I'll be the first Yank to back up against "Johnny Bulgar." Since the breaking off of relations am intending to wear a small "Old Glory" on my tunic. So stand clear! Am a Brigade Bomber, so no doubt I'll see something lively, etc.

Will try and write you again in the near future providing all pans out well with me in this coming event.—PTE. M. LOGIE.

P. S.—Hope to be strolling up Broadway soon. Will be a big day for me.

A WORD from William Dudley Pelley on his story in this issue:

Incidentally I'm sending you another Hooty story. I'm sending it on the chance you won't think this one the better of the two (the one on Vermont's water-power which you are now considering) and fire back the other. The plot for this "A Case at Law" story actually took place at ———, a few years ago. A young fellow pulled himself out of the gutter, got nicely going and then the barkeep, who thought he wasn't spending enough money for booze—*got* him. The thing, just as I have depicted it, was fought out in real life and just as I have ended it—except that I have made it into a Western story. If you should happen to take this yarn and mention this anecdote in the Camp-Fire don't give the name —— because the fellow I've called *Sanders* I believe still lives there and I don't know that he would take it kindly to be located for the Nation's benefit.

THE old-timers among you will remember a former Camp-Fire discussion concerning the Hector Macdonald mystery. The following from the Detroit *Free Press* of June 9th discusses the rumor that the Russian General Brussiloff is Macdonald. The *Free Press*, after what is given here, quotes from Ludovic Naudeau writing about Brussiloff in the London *Daily Telegraph* and states that Naudeau's description of the Russian's personal appearance and account of his life make "nonsense of the Macdonald identification yarn."

But the rumor that General Sir Hector Macdonald is still alive under some other name will not die down. Again and again it arises in various and contradictory forms. Never is it proved. And yet I frankly confess I am among the credulous, though heaven knows I can't back up my childlike and trusting opinion. I've got a hunch, but I'd hate to bet on it.

The *Free Press* article was sent to us by

several of our comrades. Our thanks to them.

General Brussiloff, who is reported to have succeeded General Alexieff in supreme command of Russian land forces, is something of a mystery. Sketches of his career sent out from Russian and English sources are reticent as to his origin. London *Ideas* prints a sensational story identifying him as General Hector Macdonald, the noted English army officer supposed to have committed suicide in disgrace in Paris in 1903. In this story, Mrs. Taylor, a kinswoman of Macdonald, is quoted as saying:

"Sir Hector was a small man, stockily built.

"General Brussiloff is of the same figure.

"It is odd that a man in supreme command of the greatest offensive of the war should be of a previous history totally unknown.

"Brussiloff is not a real Russian name.

"And the photographs of the general show that he is not like a Russian.

"Thus, is Brussiloff, Sir Hector Macdonald?"

EXPLAINING the suicide story the London *Ideas* article says:

"A suicide did take place in the hotel where Macdonald stayed, the story goes, and the famous general was the first to discover what had taken place. He was quick to grasp the situation.

"He quickly exchanged clothes with the dead man, and went forth in his new identity, with his past, whatever it may have been, entirely obliterated, and his future all before him.

"Then came the story of his reappearance at the siege of Port Arthur. He was a Japanese general of great ability, but of the most retiring habits, the tale said, but was seen and recognized by British soldiers who were there.

"HIS alleged history goes on in China, where he is reported to have played a part, and a most important one, in the reorganization of the Chinese army, which became a comparatively efficient force within the last ten years.

"From that time until recent days nothing much has been heard about this living presentment of Sir Hector Macdonald. But now he comes to light again.

"It is affirmed that he is identical with the great Russian General Brussiloff, and a comparison of the photographs of the two men certainly reveals a striking resemblance."

HERE'S something from J. Allan Dunn about his pirate story in this issue, and with it the copy of an old document concerning that quite famous old rascal, Captain Kidd. Mr. Dunn did give me a look at the quaint and ancient volume he had found in the attic of the old house he has taken in Massachusetts and very interesting it was.

Its main bases are absolutely authentic, which may or may not add value. But the names of the governors, King's captains and the pirates generally are real, as are the dates, the issuance of the pardon at Old Providence, the escape of one determined pirate as described. I have tried not to make them have any bearing on the story—as a story—save to help assurance that the color of the yarn is correct.

I note that you once ran an article on Ann Bonny. As that energetic lady was the paramour of "Calico-Jack Rackham" in events later than I have chronicled, you will notice that I have gone through my manuscript and changed Rackham's name, although the shot that went through his throat did not necessarily kill him. The dope about Kidd is authentic. For the Camp-Fire I am enclosing an actual copy of Kidd's commission from the king, taken from this old book I told you I discovered in the attic of this house. When I come up to town I'll bring the little volume with me.

What I tried to do in "On the account" was to make an action yarn that would give a true picture of pirate life around 1650-1750. While there were many turtlers who were used by, of use to, abused by and abusing the pirates, *Todd* is, of course, pure fiction.

CAPTAIN ROBERT KIDD was recommended by Lord Bellamont, Governor of Barbados, and by other persons in touch with the Government of King William the Third, as a person very fit to be entrusted with the command of a Government ship to be employed in cruising upon the pirates, "as knowing those seas perfectly well, and being acquainted with all their lurking places," but, this first proposal meeting with no encouragement the Lord Bellamont and some others who knew what great captures had been made by the pirates and what a prodigious wealth must be in their possession, were tempted to fit out a ship at their own private charge. To give the thing a better reputation, as well as to keep their seamen under the better command, they procured the King's commission for the said Captain Kidd, of which the following is an exact copy:

"WILLIAM THE THIRD, by the grace of
"God, King of England, Scotland, France and
"Ireland, defender of the faith &c. To our
"trusty and well beloved Capt. ROBERT
"KIDD, commander of the ship the Adventure
"galley, or to any other commander of the same
"for the time being,
"GREETING: Whereas we are informed,
"that Capt. Thomas Too*, John Ireland, Capt.
"Thomas Wake, and Capt. William Maze, or
"Mace, and other subjects, natives or inhabi-
"tants of New York, and elsewhere, in our
"plantations in America, have associated them-
"selves, with divers others, wicked and ill-dis-
"posed persons, and do, against the law of
"nations, commit many and great piracies,
"robberies and depredations on the seas upon
"the parts of America, and in other parts, to
"the great hindrance and discouragement of
"trade and navigation, and to the great danger
"and hurt of our loving subjects, our allies,
"and all others, navigating the seas upon their
"lawful occasions.
"NOW KNOW YE, that we being desirous to
"prevent the aforesaid mischiefs, and as much
"as in us lies, to bring the said pirates, free-
"booters and sea-rovers to justice, have thought
"fit and do hereby give and grant to the said
"ROBERT KIDD (to whom our commission-
"ers for exercising the office of Lord High Ad-
"miral of England, have granted a commission
"as a private man of war, bearing date the 11th

"day of December, 1695) and unto the com-
"mander of the said ship for the time being,
"and unto the officers, mariners and others
"which shall be under your command, full
"power and authority to apprehend, seize, and
"take into your custody as well the said Capt.
"Thomas Too*, John Ireland, Capt. Thomas
"Wake, and Capt. William Maze, or Mace, as
"all such pirates, freebooters, and sea-rovers,
"being either our subjects, or of other nations
"associated with them, which you shall meet
"with upon the seas or coasts of America, or
"upon any other seas or coasts, with all their
"ships and vessels, and all such merchandizes,
"money, goods and wares as shall be found on
"board, or with them, in case they shall will-
"ingly yield themselves; but if they will not
"yield without fighting, then you are by force
"to compel them to yield. And we also require
"you to bring, or cause to be brought, such
"pirates, freebooters, or sea-rovers, as you shall
"seize, to a legal trial, to the end that they may
"be proceeded against according to the law in
"such cases. And we do hereby command all
"our officers, ministers, and other our loving
"subjects whatsoever, to be aiding and assisting
"you in the premises. And we do hereby en-
"join you to keep an exact journal of your pro-
"ceedings in the execution of the premises, and
"set down the names of such pirates, and of
"their officers and company, and the names
"of such ships and vessels as you by virtue of
"these presents take and seize, and the quanti-
"ties of arms, ammunition, provision and lading
"of such ships, and the true value of the same,
"as near as you judge. And we do hereby
"strictly charge and command you, as you will
"answer the contrary at your peril, you do not,
"in any manner, offend or molest our friends
"and allies, their ships, or subjects, by color or
"pretense of these presents, or the authority
"thereby granted. *In witness thereof* we have
"caused our great seal of England to be affixed
"to these presents. Given at our court of
"Kensington, the 26th day of January, 1695,
"in the seventh year of our reign."

*Probably Captain Tew.

KIDD also held a "commission of reprisals," it being then a time of war, to justify him in the taking of French merchant ships.

He sailed out of Plymouth in May, 1696, in the *Adventure* galley of 30 guns and 80 men, apparently intending to act in good faith. His own share was in the proportion of forty to one for each man and he soon increased his complement to 155 men, sailing to Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands and to Madagascar. In the Red Sea he first expressed his change of heart and spoke to his ship's company concerning the Mocha fleet in these terms.

"*We have been unsuccessful hitherto; but courage, my boys, we'll make our fortunes out of this fleet:*" He had a penitential fit concerning the taking of a Dutch ship and found a mutiny on his hands, during which he quarreled with his gunner, Moor, and, calling him "dog," broke his skull with a bucket, killing him. The *Adventure* was adjudged too old and leaky and they changed to a prize, the *Queda Marchant*. At Amboy he was informed that he had been declared a pirate.

BUT he went back to New York. He had found a French pass or two on some of the ships he took and perhaps he thought these would bear him out or that he could purchase new friends with his booty. At New York, on the warrant of his patron, Lord Bellamont, he was arrested. Many of his crew had left him at Madagascar but later surrendered themselves, hoping for amnesty under the King's proclamation of pardon to pirates. They were admitted at first to bail but finally taken to England with Kidd.

An admiralty sessions at the Old Baily in May, 1701, Captain Kidd, Nicholas Churchill, James How, Robert Lumley, William Jenkins, Gabriel Loff, Hugh Parrot, Richard Barlicorn, Abel Owens and Darby Mullins were arraigned for piracy and murder on the high seas and found guilty, except Lumley, Jenkins and Barlicorn, who were acquitted upon producing their indentures as apprentices to some of the officers of the pirate ship.

THERE seems little question concerning Kidd's bravery in action. One Colonel Hewson gave him an extraordinary character and declared that he had served under his command and been in two engagements with him against the French, in which Kidd had fought "as well as any man he ever saw" in a fight where there were only Kidd's ship and Hewson's against a squadron of six sail under Monsieur de Cass, whom they worsted. All this was before the period mentioned in the indictment, however, and did Kidd no good.

Kidd protested in his own innocence and swore that he had no occasion to go a-pirating for gain, that his men often mutinied and did as they pleased, that he was threatened to be shot in his cabin, that ninety-five left him at one time and set fire to his boat, preventing him from bringing home either his ship or the prizes. And, at the last, he answered:

"*I have nothing to say, but that I have been sworn against by perjured, wicked people.*" When sentence was pronounced he said. "*My Lord, it is a very hard sentence. For my part, I am the most innocent of them all, only I have been sworn against by perjured persons.*"

And, as the chronicler says,

"Wherefore, about a week after, Captain Kidd, Nicholas Churchill, James How, Gabriel Loff, Hugh Parrot, Abel Owen, and Darby Mullins were executed at Execution Dock, and afterward hung up in chains, at some distance from each other, down the river, where their bodies hung exposed for many years."

KIDD, as pirate, reigned five years. His trial and execution rendered him a popular subject for the ballad chanters and sellers of those days and many of the adventures credited to him, including much of the stories of buried treasure, were, no doubt, born of the imagination of the versifiers. He first acquired his reputation in the beginning of King William's war as commander of a privateer in the West Indies and by several adventurous actions acquired the reputation of a brave man and experienced seaman. By his own confession he was a man of means when he accepted the King's commission and doubtless much of his estate was acquired from booty. He was the Diamond Dick of those days when fame was sung and pictured in the penny ballads, headed by a crude woodcut, that

took the place of the modern dime novel for the youth, as well as the grown-ups, of that generation.

I DO not think the full text of any letters of *marque*, such as Kidd's royal commission, has before been published. I discovered them in a small volume, yellow and brown spotted with age, bound in leather with the mystic word *Pirates* on the back, in the attic of the old Colonial house that I am leasing. It is an English publication and the front pages are missing.

On the first blank back of the cover is written.

F. Francis Begley, his handwrite dated this 22th (sic) *day of January* 1823.

The Grass is green the leaves are red this will Be Here when I am Dead. When I am Dead and in my Grave and all my Bones are Rotten Perchance this Book will Still be Read when I am Fair Forgotten.

Now I wonder what good scout of an uncle gave Francis Begley this ungodly example of a book and what visions the reading of it conjured up to Francis, smuggling it to bed with a candle's end in 1823? Two hundred and eighty-eight pages of piracy are in it with a corroboration of certain parts from Brooke's London *Gazetteer* of 1812.—J. ALLAN DUNN.

AS YOU know, Patrick and Terence Casey have enlisted in the Naval Reserve—second-class seamen in the Motor-Boat Auxiliary. The former writes:

We are to be members of a crew of fourteen, handling a 110-foot boat, fitted out with three motors, an anti-aircraft gun, a three-pounder, etc., and capable of making some thirty-odd knots an hour. We are to engage in patrol work, mine-laying and submarine chasing. We look for a grand adventure. Also, we hope to aid a mite.—PATRICK CASEY.

AN OLD acquaintance of our Camp-Fire is John Winthrop Sargent. He's been taking a little walk across South America and here's a letter, dated April 14th, at Calama, Chile, telling us something about it:

Just a line to give you my new address. For the next four months it will be in care of the American Legation at Quito, Ecquador.

I left Chuquicamata yesterday with a send-off that made a lump come in my throat. A big crowd of fellows, including my good friend, Seabrooke, came to the depot, stopping all work, to see me off and wish me Godspeed. I am leaving it up to Seabrooke to tell you about it.

I am finishing my trip with my brother, at least I hope I am, but if my country really needs me, I shall, of course, as a Medal of Honor man (Army), serve her. . . .

I HAVE not told you very much about our trip, but when the backers of our ranch went bad, my brother and I took our cameras (I, a 3A graflex and a small V. P. and my brother a 3A special) a pair of 12X Goerz binoculars, a thermos canteen, a .45 Colt automatic and a small grip apiece and started off. We hiked down through the Pampa into Patagonia, then over the Andes up into Valparaiso, up through the nitrate country to Antafogasta where we took the train for "Chuqui." We remained there six weeks. Two weeks ago my brother, Seabrooke, Parker and I with twenty-three others went over to Chiuchiu where we found one of the most wonderful ruins in Inca Land. They knock Machu Pichu sky high. Seabrooke has promised to send you a set of his pictures, and when I am in New York you shall have your pick of mine.

FROM Conception, Chile, Roy—my brother—and I have followed the main Inca Highway which runs north to Quito. This highway is thirty feet wide and paved with stone. There is a tradition that the Old Toltec and Aztec road we find running from Panama to Mexico City is part of it. I have hiked for hundreds of miles in Central America over it and want to follow this part as far as I can. I intend following this itinerary:

From here to La Paz, Bolivia; across Lake Titicaca to Puno; then to Cuzco, where I shall see the great Indian fiesta of the marriage of the Sun Maiden; then to Luna; then to Cerro de Pasco, where I shall see the great ruins; then down to Iquitos on the Amazon; then back to Quito; then to Bogota; then to Caracas, then Colon, and then? *Salvez*, Home!

I AM making notes, gathering photograph records of folk-lore, legends and traditions. Being a doctor (M.D. as well as Ph.D.) I am giving the medical side of life down here more than a passing glance. My botany and geology come in good stead and as ornithology is my hobby I find much to interest me. Also, I speak, read and write Spanish far better than I do English, so can get down among the people. I had a funny experience today. We were told yesterday that there was a special train for Bolivia leaving Calama this morning and we got permission to ride on it. When morning came we found the train to be a freight—and we were on the manifest as two burros! We backed out when we found we would have to ride on top of the cars as there was no caboose. The regular weekly train goes tomorrow so we are waiting for that.

I LEFT a wonderful stone-hammer with handle and leather thong for you with Seabrooke. He will see that you get it. Think of me when you do and accept it with my best wishes.

All about us, seemingly near, but many miles away, are lofty snow-capped volcanoes, while between us lie the hundreds of kilometers of pampa without a single growing thing, either of flora or fauna. Wish you were with us on our trip, but as you have to be *trabajando* for us wanderers, I am going to see if I can't share the trip with you via post-cards.—JOHN WINTHROP SARGENT.

HUGH S. MILLER, an Australian member of our Camp-Fire, follows custom and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Born in Mudgee, New South Wales, thirty-one years ago. Spent boyhood in New South Wales and Victoria, four years of it in Broken Hill, famous for its silver mines. Attended Hobart College. Member football and lacrosse teams. Visited for a year in the United States. Returning to Australia, went into the gold-fields of Western Australia on

the heels of the first rush and remained there for three years. Came to the United States again, by way of Europe, in 1898.

Took up newspaper work in Denver, Colorado, in 1904. Associated with newspapers in Denver, Seattle and New Orleans. Traveled on Pacific Coast, in Hawaiian Islands, Mexico, Panama, West Indies and Canada. Washington correspondent of Chicago *Examiner* 1911-15; manager Washington Bureau of the New York *American* 1915-16.

Especially interested in stories of the sea and the bush. Fond of travel. Have been twice around the world, and am still going. At present pausing in New York.

TODAY I received a letter from a National Guardsman protesting bitterly because I had called the Guard half-baked and inefficient and asking how I could abuse men who were offering and doing so much for their country.

If the writer of the letter had read a still earlier Camp-Fire expression of mine he would not, I think, have felt any need to complain. To avoid any further misunderstandings let me repeat in substance what I said then.

My quarrel is with the system, not with the men. Except such officers as have let personal interest or desire for advancement interfere with their real duty, I have only praise for the men who are, through the militia, giving their services to their country. More than that, I have for them an extra amount of admiration because they are so eager to serve their country that they are willing to do so under such an inefficient system as the National Guard.

THE fact that the National Guard, by reason of its Mexican Border experience and the concentrated training forced upon it by our war with Germany, is now being developed into a really efficient body does *not* prove that the system is efficient. In fact, it proves just the opposite. If the system were efficient, the Guard would have been almost as ready for service as was the Regular Army and would not have needed the extra training it did have to have. The test of troops is their efficiency when an emergency arises, not several months or a year *after* the emergency has need of them.

The fundamental and everlasting trouble with the National Guard is that it is not a thoroughly absorbed part of the national army. Recently it has come more under Federal control than formerly, but the separate States still exercise some individual control, whereas they should have none whatever. Plain horse-sense dictates that a nation's fightingforces should all be united into a single body, with all control of it centralized in one place. We need an *army*, not a federation of a lot of small groups of troops more or less loosely bound together, varying in degree of training and officered by different methods.

THE National Guard system is foolish. The crisis of actual war has patched it up, but we need a system that *does not need patching!* When the crisis is over it will sink back again into the "patches needed" condition unless all of us who see clearly unite our efforts against it.

The case against the National Guard system is not one of theory only, but of actual, established facts, a matter of official record. And the chief point against it is that it is, always has been and always will be an obstacle in the path of the only system that can mean real efficiency and real safety—*permanent* universal compulsory military training.

CONCERNING the facts back of his story in this issue Edgar Young gives us the following:

The second time I worked in Panama a party of us got together an outfit and were to make the trip as outlined in this story. A few days before we were to start, one of our party, Melvin W. Matthis, got into a fracas with a gambler named Thos. Christman, in Balderac's saloon on Front Street, Colon, and struck him over the head with a forty-four which he was carrying in a breast holster. Christman had what is known to the medical profession as a "paper skull" and it smashed like an egg-shell. He died in eight minutes. Melvin (also called "Kid") was tried in the Panamanian courts and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Chiriqui penitentiary in Panama City.

This caused us to abandon the trip. Two of the party started for Manaos with the intention of traveling up the Madeira and prospecting across to Cerro de Pasco. My partner and I went over into the West Indies and later to Rio on a Russian freighter.

A COUPLE of years later I was in Cerro de Pasco. The storekeeper, Mr. C. E. Powers, had come from Porto Velho, on the Madeira-Mamore road, via Panama a few months before. He had seen these two men that would have been our companions as they passed up the river. As they never arrived at Cerro de Pasco it is to be presumed that they perished, for they were not of the kind that would return once they had their heads set upon anything.

I left Cerro and went to Ecuador. I loafed around Huigra for a week or so, trying to catch on as collector on the railroad. One afternoon I walked up

the track about a quarter of a mile and I came upon a small graveyard on the right-of-way of the road. I looked at the headstones and noticed that they were all Americans. You will imagine my surprise when I noticed on the newest wooden head-piece the following:

MELVIN WESLEY MATTHIS
Died Oct. —, 1910

I made inquiry from a Mr. Maury and he told me that Matthis had worked there as conductor less than a month when he was killed by a Jamaica negro brakeman with a pick-handle. Mr. Maury was paymaster when they built the G. & Q. (incidentally Henry Burnett, who lives at an address on 166th Street, was auditor).

SPEAKING of Matthis caused me to speak of the expedition that he had been the cause of our abandoning. Maury told me of many expeditions that had gone in and across. He had seen and talked to most of them. Some had returned empty-handed and some had never been heard of. A lone man of an expedition that consisted of several white men and one negro arrived in Pará. He had made his way down the rivers. He had a bag of large nuggets and told a story of how they had found a bonanza and been attacked by the Jíveros. Later he went insane somewhere in the States, but a year or so afterward another party arrived and had a map that they claimed had been given them by this man. This party returned and was short a man or two from fighting with the Indians.

MAURY had four or five dozen dried heads as I have described them. I don't know whether you have ever heard of these dried heads or not but I haven't drawn the long bow about them. The magazine "Peru Today," an English magazine, published in Lima, Peru, published an article about these heads back about 1910 and gave several pages of photos of them. There are several of them here in the States. Jack London bought two and brought them up with him. He had trouble getting them in and had to turn them over to some museum or other. No white man knows how they dry and shrink these heads, but they do it.

I forgot to state that a gambler that "Kid" Matthis gave $12 to at Rincon Antonio, Mex., when he was broke, raised $2,500 and bought him out of Chiriqui.

Mr. Maury had a concession to build a railroad to Cuenca from Huigra. He claimed there was coal at Cuenca and was trying to interest some American capitalists in his project.

I have often thought of this lone man working his way down to Pará and this, in connection with all the other incidents stated, has caused me to write this tale.—EDGAR YOUNG.

DON'T forget that at the end of the year we'll have another vote by readers to select the ten best stories, short or long, published in *Adventure* during 1917. It's the best means I know of learning what kinds of story and which writers you, as readers of the magazine, like most. My job, of course, is to find the stories you like best, and the simple, common-sense way to find out what you like is to ask you. So it is up to you.

Also I like to feel that we're all working together, not only in name and spirit, but in actual fact. We all gain by making *Adventure* better and better, so why shouldn't we all help to make it so by giving our individual opinions and shaping the magazine to suit the tastes of the majority of us all? Don't forget that if you fail to hand in your opinion and the fellow whose opinion differs from yours does hand his in, by just that much do you help in making the magazine suit his tastes instead of your own.

WHENEVER a story in *Adventure* particularly strikes your fancy note down its title and author and at the end of the year send in the list of the ten you like best of all. The votes will be carefully counted and the results published in "Camp-Fire" as they were for the year 1916. The 1916 vote has been of great help in guiding us in the selection of stories for this year and this year's vote should help us even more for 1918.

Note the short stories particularly. Because of their smaller size they are, in a vote of this kind, at a disadvantage in comparison with the serials, novels and novelettes, yet they make up a large part of each issue and are often better than the longer tales.

A LETTER from our comrade Dr. William C. Robertson of Honduras:

Noted Camp-Fire note about Indian runners and can well believe it. I have had, here in Honduras, several *mozos* who could easily do their twenty leagues a day and not be very tired. I used such for special *correos*. They are not the rule, true, but there are many. Remember these are Mestizos—Indian and white—not pure Indian, and a lazy race without incitement to great exertion, as here the soil is so productive they can live almost without labor. They work—and run—mostly for their vices, and even then their efforts are intermittent.

ONE time I had great need of a quick answer to prayer, so sent Eusebio, my then athlete, from Juticalpa to Concordia with orders to get to me certain documents within eighteen hours. The distance between points is eighteen leagues, and Olanchana leagues at that, measured long in the bygone with a rawhide lasso and mostly, I think, in wet weather. Well, he did it and to spare, arriving within seventeen hours, to my lasting benefit.

I expect no one to believe this; but 'tis true, yet I'm almost afraid to tell the rest—whisper—while there he stopped off . . . *Cuanto tiempo? Dios solo sabe.*

For this I have no evidence, as Eusebio has flickered and the only other I could cite was poor old Fred Mills, the surveyor, who passed along in a revolution. They shot him through both thighs. Then stood him up, a crotch beneath both arms, roped him to a tree, knocked out the gold filling of his teeth with a rock and left him to his fate. God! man, foul things do happen.

WHILE I'm at it I'll tell you another. Last week while in Juticalpa on biz. I lost a cuff-button endeared by memories of a dead friend. I was romping *por la tarde* with a little girl friend (not at all, she's only twelve years old) in the *calle* and in the shuffle *se fue mi mancuernilla.* High and low I looked and offered a small reward; no use, nothing doing. Well, I gave it up for lost and grieved accordingly.

Next morning about seven o'clock, having need of a new collar, and trusting no *mozo* to buy that, I went out to get it and lo! there in the middle of the street it lay, a great big gold circle, shamefully big, with a huge R in bas relief. A noteworthy trifle, gifted by an old miner, gleaming like the unwinking eye of Olus.

The city has a population of some 3,000 and that *calle* is the most *traficado* in the lot, yet none had "given with it" till its *dueño* came along. Yea, truth discounts fiction.

THAT stud is so big I'm ashamed of it, but for the love I bore to the great-souled man who gave it to me I often wear it. I've always been a bit superstitious about it anyway and now—how much more? He lay in my arms, breathing his last, bathed in his spouting life-blood, and said to me in that last hesitating husky whisper so faint as to be almost inaudible, "Billy, take my studs, never lose them, and while they're yours I'll watch for you." He passed and I have guarded those mementos as my dearest possession since. Maybe he's watching; anyway my luck's been great. Who knows?

There be many things, Horatio, not dreamed of in our philosophy.—WM. C. ROBERTSON, M. D.

EVERY once in a while some one gets the idea he can't speak at our Camp-Fire because he's never written a story for the magazine. Wrong idea. Open to all. It's just a question of space and of picking out those whose talks seem most suitable and interesting for a bunch like us. Anybody who wishes, and has in him the general spirit of adventure, is not only welcome at our Camp-Fire but is one of us.

NATURALLY I'm hoping you like this the first mid-month issue of our magazine, but most of all I'm hoping twenty-four numbers a year will bring us twice as many good friends and comrades as the magazine has brought us in the past. I'm talking about friends, not circulation.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

For All Interested in Military or Naval Affairs

WE GIVE you below, in addition to those mentioned in the last issue, a list of books which we believe will prove of special value and aid both to enlisted men and officers and to those who will make up our great army this Fall.

Wagon Convoys, by Captain R. M. Parker. A manual of Army regulations, military laws, small-arms firing, field-service regulations, topography, and infantry and cavalry drill regulations.—George V. Harvey, 109 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y. $2.00.

Technic of Modern Tactics, by P. S. Bond and M. J. McDonough. A study of troop-leading methods in the operations of detachments of all arms. Revised edition. Contains in compact form a complete exposition of the principles of the Military Art and the troop-leading methods of forces of all sizes, including a division. 1917.—George Banta Pub. Co., Menasha, Wis. 440 pages. $2.65.

Easy Lessons in Wireless, by A. F. Collins. Practical course of instruction on the principles, construction and the workings of wireless apparatus; for the use of students, experimenters and operators. 1917. For sale Brentano's, 5th Ave. and 27th St., New York, N. Y. 50 cents.

Frontier Atlas of the World War. Large scale maps of all the battle-fronts of Europe and Asia, together with a military and naval map of the United States. Elevations shown in colors.—C. S. Hammond & Co., 30 Church St., New York, N. Y. 25 cents.

Large Scale Strategical War Maps. Carefully engraved, showing the relief of land, forests, fortified towns, places of strategical importance, airship depots, wireless stations, roads and railroads. Size of each, except No. 5, is 48 x 37 inches; No. 5 is 36 x 27 inches.

No. 1 Western Area (Franco-Belgian Frontier) indexed. Scale 10 miles to inch.

No. 2. Eastern Area (Russo-German Frontier) indexed. Scale 18 miles to inch.

No. 3. Southern Area (Austro-Italian Frontier) indexed. Scale 18 miles to inch.—C. S. Hammond & Co., 30 Church St., New York. $1.50 each.

The Valor of Ignorance, by Homer Lea, with introduction by Lieut.-Gen. Adna R. Chaffee, retired. Dealing first with our wealth and unpreparedness; secondly, discusses with cool and constant logic a plan by which the Japanese might seize and hold our Pacific Islands, Alaska, and the Pacific Coast States.—Harper & Brothers, New York City. $1.20.

The United States Navy. Illustrated. Photographs of every type ship. Complete naval lists of all vessels in our Navy, both in commission, in reserve, and under construction.—C. S. Hammond & Co., 30 Church St., New York City. 25 cents.

Aircraft of all Nations. Photographic reproductions of all types of aircraft; sea-planes, hydroplanes, battle-planes, torpedo-planes, flying boats, military-kite balloons, Zeppelins, dirigibles and "Blimps."—C. S. Hammond & Co., 30 Church St., New York City. 25 cents.

French Phrase Book. French terms that English-speaking soldiers are likely to meet with. Contains tables of moneys and measures and abbreviations and conventional signs to be found on maps. Equivalents for the English phrases calling for surrender and examination of prisoners are given in German. Pocket edition. For sale Brentano's, New York City. $1.00.

A Citizens' Army. The Swiss Military System, by Julian Grande. Tells how preparedness can be attained without the dangers of militarism. Robert M. Bride & Co., Union Square, New York City. $1.25.

Grapes of Wrath, by Boyd Cable. Twenty-four hours in the life of four privates on the British front. 1917—E. P. Dutton & Co., New York City. $1.50.

Camp Cookery, by H. Kephart. Illustrated with drawings of camp utensils, outfits, etc. 1910—Outing Publishing Co., New York City. $1.00.

Life at the U. S. Naval Academy, by Commander Ralph Earle. The making of an American Navy officer. Gives the duties of a midshipman in the Naval Academy. Also a historical sketch and pointers for candidate for admission. 1917—G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York City. $2.00.

Periodicals

Army and Navy Journal. Weekly. $6.00. 20 Vesey St., New York, N. Y.

Army and Navy News. Monthly. $1.00. Chronicle Bldg., San Francisco, Calif.

Army and Navy Magazine. Monthly. $3.00. 606 F St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Army and Navy Register. Weekly. $3.00. 511 Eleventh St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Infantry Journal. Bi-monthly. $3.00. Union Trust Bldg., Washington, D. C.

Journal of the U. S. Cavalry Association. Quarterly. $2.50. Fort Leavenworth, Kans.

Journal of the U. S. Artillery. Bi-monthly. $2.50. Fortress Monroe, Va.

Field Artillery Journal. Quarterly. $3.00. Room 495, War Department, Washington, D. C.

Journal of the Military Service Institute. Bi-monthly. $3.00. Governors Island, N. Y.

Marine Corps Gazette. Quarterly. $1.00. 24 E. Twenty-Third St., New York, N. Y.

THE above list, together with the one printed last month, has been selected from many books and periodicals and represents what seems the best information obtainable. In our next issue, out Sept. 3, others will be added.—HARRY ERWIN WADE.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We as ume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

A free department for the benefit of those readers who wish to buy or sell back copies of this magazine.

Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Will sell: 1915, Aug.; Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.; 1916, April, July; 50 cents plus freight.—CHRISTOPHER G. ERMIS, 344 Willow St., Waterbury, Conn.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use only a very few fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of every six or seven inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization coöperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address EVERYBODY'S, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue or the one—or possibly two—following it.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to laws, customs and conditions local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Wallace.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada ★ Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. ★ Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, g des, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 805 Jackson St., Santa Clara, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras,

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

17. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ The South Seas Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

24. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

East of Suez

Question:—"I am twenty-three years of age and, having a tang of roving blood in my veins, would like to answer the Call of the Red Gods. Left home (in Scotland) four years ago and now feel like seeing the East. Put me 'somewheres east of Suez,' for which feeling blame Kipling, Conrad, and Beatrice Grimshaw.

"Have had a few years' clerical experience and four years' practical landscape-gardening experience. Are there any opportunities for such as I, in, say, Burma or Borneo, on tea, rice, teak-wood, or rubber plantations?"—LESLIE MURRAY, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—Your inquiry calls for another—How much capital have you to keep yourself going while you look for a job? Because you'll need every bit of it. In my opinion the British possessions in the Far East—and the Dutch and French, too, for that matter—are the hardest countries in the world for a stranger to land a job.

And I'll tell you why. The same condition governs them all. You have immense native populations governed by handfuls of whites. Race prejudice is, therefore, very strong. Well, what has race prejudice to do with you? you say; you are white. Here's the trouble. In all these countries there has grown up a large population of "Eurasians," people with a touch of the tar-brush, and native-born whites. These latter are of pure white blood, but have been too poor to go to Europe for their education. The prejudice against these unfortunates is inconceivable; not because there are no decent seats of learning in those countries, for there are; but because there has grown up an idea, which is possibly true, that the native-born white without a "home" education is not so reliable or so honest as the "home"-grown article. The result has been that every business house will rather go to the expense of importing its assistants than take in a native-born. This feeling has grown so solid that I can state without hesitation that every job worth having is recruited from home. I don't say that a white man can't get a job in the country, because he can; but he will always be in a subordinate position and draw less pay than the imported article holding the same job. I could give you dozens of examples of this in banks and business houses generally.

There *are* exceptions sometimes—under exceptional circumstances. If your capital can hold out for five or six months (and it costs a white man at least a hundred dollars a month to live) you *may*, if you are lucky, land something. On the other hand, you very much may not. Personally I would hate to do it again. I've been through it once, and I don't care to repeat. It isn't nice to *have* to take a job which bars you from the intercourse of your equals and puts you in a position where they look down on you. Personal merit or manners or education count for nothing, I tell you. You are rated strictly according to the position you hold—and there are not many positions which a "gentleman" may hold. If you are not a gentleman in the East, you might as well be dead; and remember, if you work in a shop, for instance, you are not a gentleman. The social snobbery and caste in the East are unbelievable.

Now, as to the suggestions you make yourself. I've been in tea, and I've been in teak, and I've been in rubber; so I can tell you just how these jobs are obtained. These industries are handled pretty well exclusively from head offices in Calcutta and Rangoon, and they import their young men from home. *Sometimes* there is need for an immediate man, and if your God is good, you may land the job. Suppose you do land it, the life in all these lines is full of appeal to a young man who is fond of the outdoors. There are plenty of opportunities for

shooting and exploring; and if you are of a scientific turn of mind, you can make money on the side by collecting birds, butterflies, orchids, anything. I know one man who was in tea. He went in for butterflies, studied them scientifically. When he took leave and went home, he got in with the British Museum as a collector. However, we can't all do that sort of thing.

The life, I say, is charming; but there is not much money in it. In tea you would get about a hundred rupees a month ($33.00) and a bungalow to live in, which just makes it possible to exist. After six or seven years you would perhaps get a managership and rise to the giddy height of four or five hundred rupees. Rubber is about the same. Teak offers slightly better pay, say a hundred and fifty or two hundred, plus a commission on output; but the life is very lonely and frequently unhealthy; that's why the princely pay. Rice offers nothing to the young man who wants outdoor employment. The only white men employed are in the factories, and, of course, the offices are in the cities.

Taking it all in all, it's "kinder" disappointing, isn't it? Personally, I don't consider it is any life for a young man to consider as his life's work. Some men, however, those who are fond of society usually, like the East and finally settle down in the cities. But I have never met one yet who has not groaned perpetually about his "exile" and who has not lived entirely for the brief periods of leave which he can snatch for the purpose of rushing "home" and renewing his acquaintance with all that made life worth living in the old country. They all swear that they'll hunt up a job at home and stay; but they all come back. Not because they want to; but because in the East they have fallen behind the times and are not up to the swifter pace of a home office of any other business. The East is the hardest place to break away from in the world. You know what Kipling says:

"If a year of life be lent her, if her portal gates we enter,
The door is shut, we may not look behind."

And you will have noticed that Kipling himself, in spite of "the East a-calling," has never gone back there to live.

However, if you *must* take a crack at it, I should advise trying Burma. The conditions are better and the chances of landing something are easier. Steel Brothers in Rangoon are every now and then wanting somebody to replace some man of theirs who has succumbed to the jungle.

I have written rather longer than I intended, but your question was one that interested me.

Studying Navigation

Question:—"Please tell me how a young fellow who has studied trigonometry can read up on seamanship and navigation so he could take the Government examination?"

Answer, by Mr. Wallace:—Your knowledge of trigonometry greatly simplifies the study of navigation, but actual sea experience is necessary both in seamanship and navigation before you could take a Government examination. Seamanship can not be learned out of a book. Experience at sea is the only teacher, though text-books on seamanship will help you. The science of navigation *could* be learned ashore, but you would require time at sea to put the science into actual practise. The Outing Publishing Co. and the Rudder Publishing Co., both of New York, publish several text-books on seamanship and navigation. Write them for information as to titles and cost. (By "sea" experience, I also include service on the Great Lakes for inland waters certificates.)

Fishing Tackle

Question:—"I intend going to Winnipeg and would like to know what prospect for sport Lakes Winnipeg and Winnipegosis have to offer. What kind of fish are to be found and what kind of tackle used? Also, is the locality good duck ground in the Fall? What other game is to be found in the locality?—F. B. Cheadle, Jr., Brookline, Mass."

Answer, by Mr. Gilman:—With regard to hunting would say that ducks, geese, partridge and prairie chicken are to be had within short distance of Winnipeg, and deer, moose and caribou by moderate trips. Since you are to be on the ground you will have ample chance to pick up later information than I could give you before the hunting season opens. Winnipeg has several excellent sporting goods stores, where you will find very friendly cooperation in your hunting plans.

As to fish, it is my impression that the hook and line fishing in the lakes you name is mostly for pike, sometimes called northern pike and known as pickerel in some parts of the United States. I believe what bass fishing the region affords is found in smaller lakes. Pike are usually taken trolling with a hand line and a spoon hook; tackle you can get anywhere. It would pay you, however, to take from the States a good, and rather heavy, bait-casting outfit such as is used for bass in the Middle West.

For knock-about work, where fish of ten or more pounds are on the list of possibilities, I have found a steel bait-casting rod five feet long, of the best procurable quality, a good quadruple multiplying reel, at least two fifty-yard silk lines, one twelve-pound test for casting for bass, and one twenty-six-pound test for casting and trolling for pike, and at least half a dozen artificial wooden minnows and spinners the most serviceable equipment.

It is always dangerous to be specific on a subject over which there is such a wide divergence of opinion as that of fishing tackle. But for your information I will list the actual contents of my cruising tackle box, as now stocked. If I were going to Winnipeg at the present time it is what I would take with me. In fairness to myself let me make the reservation that I am free to change my mind on this subject at a moment's notice—that's part of the fisherman's license.

Three Jamison winged mascot baits, red and white, frog-color, and rainbow. As these are convertible from underwater wabblers to surface splatter baits they are the equivalent of six plugs. One red, white and blue Dowagiac expert, a surface bait and my "old reliable." One Stanley weedless weighted ibis fly, with spinner in ice-weed guards, for trolling or casting. One red-and-white Charmer minnow, a good pike lure. One single-hook Hilderbrandt muskalonge lure, hook tied with white-deer hair and with silver leaf and gold oval spinners. One No. 5 skin or spoon hook. These last two for use with hand-trolling line only. One dozen snap swivels, to facilitate changing baits. One nine-inch

brass-wire leader with snap and swivel for use where big pike are found. Rod, No. 33 Bristol. Reel, any standard quadruple multiplier retailing at five dollars or more. The Meek reel is a good suggestion. Cheap reels don't last. Line, as noted. Also one hundred and fifty feet of braided linen medium trolling line. Marble's clincher gaff. I like to have along a small revolver or .22 pistol for shooting large fish before taking them into a canoe.

Guatemala and Honduras

Question:—"I am writing you under the rules of 'Ask Adventure,' for information regarding Central America. I am expecting to go to either Guatemala or Honduras for an importing firm handling mahogany and dye woods. I would be particularly interested in securing details of travel, customs, language, local conditions, and trading. Also any general information on references would be appreciated."—THOMAS WINKLER, Munising, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Guatemala is the most northern of the Central American republics. It may be reached from either the Atlantic or Pacific coast and has ports on each. On the Atlantic side are Puerto Barrios and Livingston. These may be reached by several lines of steamers from New York, New Orleans, Mobile and Boston. On the Pacific side are the ports of Champerico, San José, and Ocos. Several of the steamers plying the West Coast from San Francisco to Panama call at these ports. If you are going to Guatemala the best is via New Orleans to Puerto Barrios and thence 225 miles by rail to Guatemala City. This railroad trip is very beautiful and interesting. The train leaves Barrios in the early morning and passes through many miles of tropic country. In the afternoon comes the ascent to the capital, a rise of 5,000 feet with corresponding changes in formation and vegetation.

Guatemala City has a population of about 125,000 and is fairly modern. Living is cheap and good, especially for Central America. Two very good places to stop are the United States Hotel and the Royal Café.

The population of Guatemala is over 2,000,000 and the greater number of these live on the western slope of the mountains. Coffee is the principal industry in the higher districts and bananas and sugar in the low. The capital is about equidistant from the two coasts and a railroad similar to the one up from Puerto Barrios proceeds down the Pacific slope. Both of these lines now belong to the United Fruit Company.

Besides furniture woods the principal other forest industries are chicle and rubber.

The theoretical monetary unit is the silver peso worth about forty-two cents, U. S. money. The ordinary medium of exchange, however, is the paper peso, or *billete* money. This paper money fluctuates in value and always at a great discount, usually being worth about five cents of our money. The language is Spanish of the American variety.

The mahogany business is pretty thoroughly organized in this country. Large tracts covered with the timber are found in the Chocon forests, on the smaller tributaries of the Polochic, and in the Montagua Valley. The government claims to have other valuable areas of mahogany available for exploitation.

Guatemala is now connected with Mexico by rail.

Guatemala as a rule has good roads. Most parts of the country may be reached by mule and several auto roads have been lately completed.

Honduras: population about 600,000, language Spanish of the American variety, capital Tegucigalpa, 40,000.

Honduras is mountainous like Guatemala. The extreme east is low-lying and swampy but in general the coast-lines lie high. Honduras is heavily forested but there are open savannas in many parts suitable for grazing, especially in the highlands. Like Guatemala most of the population may be found in the western half. The climate in the uplands is agreeable but in the lowlands it is very hot and oppressive. There are only about 150 miles of railroad in operation in this republic, extending from the coast inland. It may be reached by steamer lines that also call at the Guatemalan ports. The principal port is Amapala on the Pacific side. On the Atlantic are Puerto Cortez, La Ceiba and Trujillo. The standard monetary unit of Honduras is the silver peso worth about forty-two cents U. S. money. This is also the ordinary medium of exchange.

The following rivers are more or less navigable: Chamelecon, Humuya, or Comayagua, Ulua, or Venta Leon, Aguan, Tinto, Patuco, Wanks or Segovia, Choluteca, Nacaome, and Goascoran.

A regular line of steamers plies on the Ulua River for a distance of one hundred and twenty-five miles, from its mouth to Progresso. The Agua Negra, Patuco, and Segovia are navigated by vessels of light draft for short distances.

The principal lake of Honduras is the Yojoa, which is twenty-five miles long by six miles wide, and is navigable for steamers. It communicates with the Ulua River by means of its tributary, the Blanco, thus giving water communication between the coast and the interior. The mouth of the Ulua River is near Puerto Cortez.

Logging for mahogany is carried on in the old primitive fashion that has prevailed for centuries. As there is no such things as a forest of these trees a native is sent climbing into the tops of other tall trees to spy out the location of the *mahogani*. A path is then slashed to it through the jungle and it is marked for cutting. The trees are not cut, however, until the rainy season, by the light of the waning moon, it being popularly believed that the tree is then freer from sap and of a better color at that period. The trees are hewed square and dragged to some river or stream where they are rafted down to the coast.

Honduras has always been one of the most backward countries of Central America, and Central America as a whole has been backward, but of course it is jouncing ahead slowly. However, you must not be surprised to find the people living in a state of civilization scarcely more advanced than the ancient dwellers of old Jerusalem in Bible times. You will see wooden-wheeled bull-carts, naked children, men plowing with crooked sticks and cultivating corn with a brush-knife, and doing things as a rule in a style much more primitive than that used by any of our foreparents in this country. The people are inclined to be lacking in energy and no vocabulary of swear-words in either Spanish or English can make them hasten. They are harmless and a man may travel in any part without fear of molestation.

I have just noted in a recent issue of the *Nuevo*

Tiempo, a paper published in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, that the Department of the Treasury and Public Credit has awarded a concession to W. U. Zuber to cut and export precious woods, guaranteeing him 5,000 logs and such other usable timber that may be encountered on the public lands included within the terms of the concession, such, for instance, as Pires, Pepeloteca, Tomala, Silui Martinez, Piedra, Playa de la Laguna, Casa Blanca, Parras el Coco. He agrees to pay the Government for each tree cut the following rates in American gold: Mahogany, cedar, ebony, and walnut, $8.40 each; granadillo (red-ebony) and rosewood, $5.00 each; the woods known as Santa Maria, Paleta, cortes, maiscaran, ocotillo, guanacaste, San Juan, toncoth, varilla, laurel, aguacatillo, supa y yopa, $3.00 each; and for pine $1.00 each. These prices do not include export duties which may now be in force in any of the ports of the Republic through which these logs may be exported.

Should you desire to communicate with Mr. Zuber you could no doubt obtain his address by communicating with Dr. Julian Lopez Pineda, who has recently started an information bureau concerning Honduras, and whose address is Tegucigalpa, Republica de Honduras.

West Africa

Question:—"Have been thinking for over a year of taking employment in some of the tropical countries, and I would appreciate it very much if you could furnish me with such information as might enable me to obtain a position in Africa or some other country with which you are familiar. I understand, of course, that it would hardly be probable that you would know of any vacancies, but thought you might be able to give me the names of some parties who might have a position to offer a man down in that part of the world."—R. M. NICHOLSON, Houston, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—You feel the call of the tropics, and there's where you have my sympathy, for I have felt and responded to that call, and after years of it the spell is still on me. But to get down to brass tacks.

West Africa is not a place for a keen and actively ambitious man. There is little opening for individual effort, and though the large companies that offer employment are very generous in the freedom in all ways they allow their employees, it is rather a lackadasical life—nice young Englishmen who fool through work hours and then play.

It is not hard, I think, to get into the Niger Company, Victoria Embankment, London, or John Holt Company, Liverpool.

The climate is unhealthy and is constantly making gaps in the whites. Any fellow under thirty with a decent record would, I think, be accepted. The work in the trading stations is managing a barter store with a staff of black clerks, or buying ivory, rubber and palm kernels of the natives, though this latter work calls for a certain amount of experience. Then there are the river stern-wheelers with colored crews which generally have one white in authority, and other whites are in use in the machine shops and overhauling yards, and again a man with any knowledge of timber is useful in the mahogany trade. You get the idea? The companies work with raw negro labor, with the clerking done by mission blacks from the Gold Coast (I am writing chiefly of the Niger), and with whites superintending.

You might write to Elder Dempster Steamship Line, Liverpool, stating in brief your experience and that you are looking for employment in the tropics. Your coming from the South, and thus being acquainted with negro idiosyncrasies, would go far in your favor.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS.

DAVIS, JOHN B., known as "Jack." Last seen in St. Louis 12 years ago, at which time he made the statement that he would not come home until he made good. A year later he was heard from in Kansas City. Six years ago it was rumored that he was employed by McFadden Cotton Co. of New Orleans. Fond of horses. Born Jersey City, October 10, 1886. 5 ft. 9 in., dark brown curly hair, blue eyes, good looking.—Address MARY T. DAVIS, 482 Central Park West, New York City.

TRASHER, CEPHAS DAY; called "Dick." Last heard of him September, 1907. He then was 26 years. Was in the revenue cutter service at Whitestone, N. Y., sailing to New London, Ct. He was aboard the cutter *Dexter*. His sister inquires.—Address MRS. MABEL FLIEGGE, Caswell Bldg., News Stand Lobby, Milwaukee, Wisc.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JONES, HARRY BAINTON, last seen in Detroit, Mich., in Autumn of 1905. At that time he had son named either Roy or Roy Bainton, aged about 19, ing in Detroit at letter sign painting. The father met in 1901 in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. In the years f from him from Calgary, Alberta, where he wor wright and wagon maker. Harry had a mari don't recall name—residing at Galt, Ont., Can.— FRANK J. REINBOTH, Reinboth Orchestra, Bisbee, Ariz.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MCDONALD, GEO. A., son of A. J. McDonald, Marine Photographer of San Francisco, 1894. Last heard of as Master-at-Arms, *U. S. S. Mohican*, 1899. His wife Kitty or his child now about 18 years would like to hear from him —Address J. A. L., Box 291, Fresno, Calif.

THAYER, LOUIS MERTON, last heard of by his wife, "Alta" at St. Paul, Minn., Feb., 1916. Any information appreciated. Was Spanish-American War Veteran of Co. F., 7th Inf.—Address MRS. ALTA THAYER, Box 95, Meeker, Colo.

CORESUELL, ATHOL G. (Duke McSluhe). Left him in San Francisco, April 23, 1916. Your old pal wants to hear from you.—Address ROY MACLEAN, (Chi-B) 1744-48 North Kolmar Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

JAFFEMAN, NOELIN lived at 33 Valley St., San Francisco, Calif., before the fire. Any one knowing of whereabouts please communicate.—Address Box 291, Fresno, Calif.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the August or First-September issues of *Adventure*. You can get name of inquirer from this magazine;

ACKLEY, JOHN A.; Aldrick, R. B.; Barber, Robert Willis; Bechtel, George (Longshoreman); Bromley, Arthur; Crofft, Marie Gonzalez; Douglas, L. D. (Spig); Durst, Lloyd; Frankie, "Bottles"; Garrison, Chas.; Glover, Martin; Gormley, Harry J.; Hickman, George D.; Hill, R. E.; Howard, Will or Jack; Hunt, Arthur; Jackson, Claude; Jolliffe, Arthur; Jones, Charles Augustus; Mackie, Jacob O.; Martin, Florence; Maxiam, Marcotte; Miller, Thomas Lion; Montgomery, Samuel B.; Morey, Sylvester; Saaranen, Julius; Sammons, Wm. H.; Schoenfeld, Ed. O.; Smith, Geo. L.; Smith, John; Smith, Ruth B.; Thurston, Frank A.; Van Horne, Walter W.; Walker, Hugh Victor; Walling, Lew; West, Rolla; Westcott, George; Wilbur, Walter; Wright, Granville.

MISCELLANEOUS—Boys that were to sail with The *Adventure* Expedition, from New York on the last of Sept., or the first of Oct.; H. E. F.; Boys of Co. T., P. S. of T.; Fred.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, W. E. Felts, Jan Spaander, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

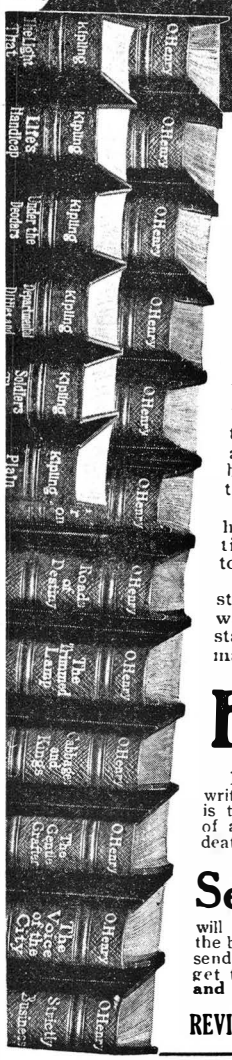
NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY EDWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

He had come to rob. He even dared commit murder to do it—yet in that room where death hovered—in a flash he saw the story of two lives—so strange, so wild, that it changed everything.

Read this story of what happened while the rest of the world slept. It could have been written only by

O. HENRY



Across the dark war clouds that hover over the world today, there is one ray of light that cheers and heartens—it is O. HENRY.

England is reading him and loving him as she never did before. France is turning to him to lighten her sorrow. **He is the supreme war-time writer.**

We of America have known him and loved him for years. But now he is dearer than ever. He has stood the greatest of all tests—he is the writer whom we love best of all to read, and have near us in times of tragedy and darkness.

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With swift, sure strokes he drives his story home every time. Never a word is wasted. From the first word the interest starts and you are carried on in the sure magic of his vivid sentences to a climax so unexpected that it draws you up sharply.

England, France—all war-torn Europe—is reading O. Henry to remember that human nature is not really wicked and depraved—that life may be glad and sweet.

Now that America has gone into this great war for right—we, too, read him more than ever. He must be clearer to us than to anyone else, for he is writing about our own people and the country we love. He is one of us.

Don't get him to read once. You will read him a hundred times—and find him each time as fresh and unexpected as the first. And each time you will say, "Why do I love him so much?"—and neither you nor anyone else can answer, for that is the mystery of O. Henry—his power beyond understanding.

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Adv. 9-17

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"THEN we came to a heavily timbered doorway that seemingly opened into the hillside, and beyond this yawning doorway I saw a thick, greenish-yellowish mist---and then we were in it. . . ."

The thick mist was poison gas, and it was Jeffery Farnol who was in it.

The place was one of those great training camps somewhere "out there," where perhaps some of our own boys are getting their final discipline---a foretaste of the real red thing. Step by step the brilliant English novelist put himself through these grilling tests: went through poison gas; wept in the stinging vapor of the "lachrymatory;" choked in the smoke from liquid-fire bombs; and all the rest of it. He tells the whole vivid story in the

SEPTEMBER

Everybody's

On the News-stands August 23

There's a war story in this number, too---about "The Man Who Was Afraid"---and what he did about it. All that it's fair to tell is that he was a rather rich young man who went out to drive an ambulance. By way of contrast, there's a golf story with a real punch in it---"A Matter of Quality," by Walter Ferris. And a business story, in which the matter of lending money, and the high cost of paper, and a love-affair are very deftly blended by that popular short-story writer, Holworthy Hall.

As an advance news item, let us tell you this:

In the October *Everybody's* a new serial starts. It's "Judith of Blue Lake Ranch," by Jackson Gregory, author of "Silver Slippers," and it's a ripping outdoors Western story---chock-full of adventure and thrills.